

Ministry[®]

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THREE
Angels.
ONE
Gospel

Three Angels' Messages Collection 2021



**"Fear God and
give Him glory..."**



The final inspection

A few years ago, while I was pastoring in Kentucky, United States, my wife, Daniela, was owner and director of a small nursing home for veterans of war. The social workers in charge of that district came monthly to see how well she cared for the veterans. The social workers would always call and announce their inspection. But each year, there was an annual inspection—and that visit was never announced.

About five people from the state came. They inspected everything related to the care of the veterans: the quality of food and medication charts, the house and water temperatures, and the fire extinguishers and smoke detectors. Business owners were afraid of this inspection because invariably the state inspectors found something to be corrected. Large errors would result in a fine or even closure of the facility.

Every time they came to inspect my wife's business, the process was the same—and so was the result. After checking every detail thoroughly, they would express appreciation for her work. For many consecutive years, she received certification and recognition for running the best state facility in its class. They would remark, "We don't understand how you do things so well. Weren't you anxious about the inspection?"

"No," Daniela would reply, "because I make sure I prepare for it."

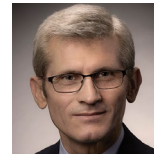
They would ask, "How do you prepare for the inspection, since you don't know when we are coming?"

She would respond, "I prepare as if every day is the day of inspection. We treat our veterans with love and respect."

Eternal gospel

When I read the first of the three angels' messages comprising the eternal gospel, I can understand why some may be anxious about an inspection. "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'" (Rev. 14:6, 7, NKJV).¹

Pavel Goia,
DMin, is
editor of
Ministry.



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This passage mentions preaching, but it is not limited to preaching. "Much more than mere sermonizing is included in preaching the gospel." "You are with one hand to reach up and by faith take hold of the mighty arm which brings salvation, while with the other hand of love you reach the oppressed and relieve them."²

***"He will sit on the throne of His glory.
All the nations will be gathered before
Him, and He will separate them one from
another, as a shepherd divides his sheep
from the goats." Matt. 25:31,32, NKJV***

Eternal life

Revelation 14 also mentions a judgment, but it is based on an inspection taking place now. "When the nations are gathered before Him [Christ], there will be but two classes, and their eternal destiny will be determined by what they have done or have neglected to do for Him in the person of the poor and the suffering."³

So I understand why Jesus' words may cause fear: "'Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect'" (Matt. 24:44, NKJV). But I also understand why John's words may bring hope: "There is no room in love for fear. . . . Fear of death, fear of judgment" (1 John 4:18, *The Message*).

Love and care for the vulnerable have always been a priority for God. They are key to what it means to worship Him—and key to passing the final inspection.



1 See p. 28, Dateline, "Renewed Emphasis on the Three Angels' Messages."

2 Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32, 31.

3 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), 637. Matt. 25:31-46.



A rescue plan

At the precise time in the heavenly chronometer, a message is proclaimed with such fervor that it becomes a crescendo resonating throughout the world, “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’ ” (Rev. 14:7, NKJV).

It is the first of the three most solemn messages ever given to mortals. It is a call to worship the One who created everything in six days and rested on the seventh. It is an invitation to rest in Christ’s finished work, both in Creation and on the cross.

It’s a solemn message, but it’s a love message, for as soon as we fell into sin, God activated His rescue plan. An emergency hospital—the heavenly sanctuary—was established as the center of operations for the universe. There our sins would be forgiven, our wounds would be bound, and our hurts would be healed. When would this happen?

For centuries, it was announced through the ceremonies of the earthly sanctuary. With pinpoint precision, prophets such as Daniel outlined the sanctuary’s salvific celebrations. The good news announced at the gates of Eden came true in Bethlehem: “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4, KJV). The good news reached its climax on Golgotha’s hill and in an empty tomb. But that’s not how the story ends.

Somewhere beyond the stars and out of the reach of human vision, something was about to happen in heaven, something “as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross.”¹ According to Daniel 8:14, the Bible’s longest time prophecy expired the autumn of 1844. The time for God’s judgment had come. Now the heavenly sanctuary was being cleansed which meant the world had to know that we have a High Priest who is “able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25, NKJV).

In these last days, God calls people out of traditionalism and formalism. “In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. . . . They have been given a work of the most solemn

Robert Costa is an associate secretary of the General Conference Ministerial Association.



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import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. There is no other work of so great importance.”²

The Bible calls these messages “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6). Why good news? In part, because the message of the first angel gives hope and certainty that judgment will be made

The good news reached its climax on Golgotha’s hill and in an empty tomb. But that’s not how the story ends.

in favor of the saints. It is good news for all of God’s oppressed people. Nicholas Miller declares, “If you go back to our pioneers and their emphasis on the first angel’s message, which focuses on ministering to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that is a fundamental foundation for racial and ethnic equality. If we’re trying to reach everyone, and we’re not opposing inequality, then what kind of gospel do we have?”³

Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15, NKJV). Law and love went hand in hand with Jesus—they must go hand in hand with us. “With the work of advocating the commandments of God and repairing the breach that has been made in the law of God, we are to mingle compassion for suffering humanity.”⁴ That’s God’s rescue plan.



- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 489.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 19.
- 3 Nicholas P. Miller, in “Biblical Justice in a World of Social Unrest,” *Adventist Review*, November 16, 2020.
- 4 Ellen White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32.



Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is associate editor of *Ministry*.



Evangelism is canceled

The popularity of the British prime minister was gravely jeopardized by the statement “Christmas is canceled.”¹ The persistence of the COVID-19 virus was strengthened by the presence of a new variant. But would Christmas really be canceled? Or could it be that the heart of Christmas—to share with someone you love and help someone in need—might actually be given a chance to shine?

The popularity of any pastor or church administrator would be severely jeopardized if he or she declared, “Evangelism is canceled.” But what if what is often called evangelism—augmenting numbers rather than addressing needs—was canceled? Could it be that the real heart of Jesus might get a chance to shine? Perhaps our current crises afford us the opportunity to restore God’s original intent for evangelism—to love our neighbor as ourselves.

How do we want history to remember the church’s response to COVID-19? Some say nothing must distract us from the gospel—yet pandemic viruses, economic crises, and racial injustices are opportunities for the gospel. Some are victims of oppression, and others are victims of abuse. Some have fallen on hard times, and others have fallen ill. But fallen people are our mission.

Fallen people and fallen systems are nothing new to God. Centuries ago, Jeremiah declared, “Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed” (Jer. 51:8, NKJV). Somebody said that the Old Testament speaks, and the New Testament says amen. So, John echoes, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev. 14:8, NKJV). Look at the false teachings and oppressive practices of church and state throughout the centuries, and you will recognize Babylon. People have fallen down in religious and secular systems that are destructive, but before they can get out, they must be helped up.

In Isaiah, God had a message for an ancient, despairing world. He asked, “Whom shall I send,

and who will go for Us?” A young Isaiah replied, “Here am I! Send me” (Isa. 6:8, NKJV). Isaiah told church people that while fasting down on their knees was beneficial, helping people up onto their feet was essential. While keeping Sabbath was biblical, ending oppression was critical (Isa. 58:6, 13).

In Revelation, God has a message for a contemporary, despairing world. It parallels Isaiah’s message and is called the eternal gospel—because the Old Testament speaks, and the New Testament says amen. Hans LaRondelle states, “The basic motive of the threefold message of Revelation 14 is that of restoration! It serves the same purpose as Isaiah’s call to a backsliding Israel [in] Isaiah 58:1.”² This everlasting gospel is both spiritual and practical.

My wife, Pattiejean, sent her hairdresser, Arelis, a gift of fifty dollars. Arelis was very appreciative because her business was hit hard by COVID-19. Pattiejean followed up by informing her that our church offered free COVID testing on Sunday mornings, as well as a grocery giveaway. If, through such helping, people embrace the Christ we worship, praise God. But our helping, as George Webber says, “will not be for the sake of getting new members or winning converts or taking scalps for Christ. Simply, we live in the style of our Lord: where there is hunger—seeking to feed, where there is sickness—seeking to heal, where there is loneliness—offering our love without any ulterior motive.”³

Evangelism shouldn’t be canceled—it should be restored.



- 1 BBC News Staff, “Newspaper Headlines: ‘Christmas Cancelled’ and ‘Surging Mutant Virus,’” BBC News, December 20, 2020, [bbc.com/news/blogs-the-papers-55382075](https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-the-papers-55382075).
- 2 Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: A Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 358.
- 3 George W. Webber, *Today’s Church: A Community of Exiles and Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1979), 94.



Focus, Pastor!

Looking out of my home office window, I often see red-tailed hawks swooping down from the huge 300-hundred-foot-tall electrical towers to the field below. I watch them catch rodents or snakes for a meal. They look down intensely while perching or flying. They peer down eagerly for movement of any kind. They swoop down purposefully for a successful mission.

Such an operation requires keen eyesight and unblurred vision. If the hawk cannot hunt, it won't eat. If the hawk loses its focus, it will die. A raptor's focus is a matter of life and death—and so is ours. If any profession requires unflinching focus, it is pastoral ministry. Richard Krejcir, from the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, states, "We [pastors] are perhaps the single most stressful and frustrating working profession, more than medical doctors, lawyers, or politicians."¹

Focus is the ability to view goals or purposes with a single eye. Ministry is full of disruptions, distractions, and detours that cause us to lose our

focus. Amid so many choices and voices, the loss of leadership focus can be perilous for pastors and members. It can be detrimental to spiritual momentum for congregations to wander aimlessly on a journey without a focused goal or a focused leader.

Elijah teaches us that pastors can lose their focus. When fatigue, isolation, and fear are compounded by the pandemic, ministry can lose its focus. Our struggles are the same. It was Jezebel yesterday; it is Babylon today. Jezebel was powerful in her day, but she would fall; so would Babylon. "Babylon the Great has fallen! . . . Come out of her, My people" (Rev. 18:2, 4, HCSB). Theologians affirm, "It seems fairly obvious that the text invites the readers to consider 'Jezebel' in connection with 'Babylon' in the Apocalypse."²

While Babylon embodies false teachings and worldly practices that can cause us to avert our gaze and abandon our mission, God's shepherds are called to remain focused on delivering God's eternal gospel.³ Here are some suggestions for staying focused:

Ivan L. Williams Sr., DMin, serves as the ministerial secretary for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Columbia, Maryland, United States.



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1. Pray for God's intervention

"And he [Elijah] prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough'" (1 Kings 19:4, NKJV). Be honest with God. Prayer is the key component for staying focused. Much prayer can awaken our God-given sense of urgency for His biddings and keep us in tune with God's will and purpose. No loss of focus can last against the continual onslaught of prayer.

2. Develop a clear plan of action

"Suddenly, a voice came to him, and said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" (1 Kings 19:13, NKJV). A pastor's focus can be blurred without the investment of preparation and planning for the task at hand. The great yield of accomplishment is only realized when the deposit of time and effort are spent in the planning stage.

3. Remove the clutter and distractions

"I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts'" (1 Kings 19:14, NKJV). Focus is lost when

the busyness of life drowns out the passion for servant leadership. To remain focused in this unfocused world, pastors should learn the value of setting boundaries and removing the clutter that causes distractions. It may mean getting up earlier or turning off the phone, but whatever it takes, protect your focus.

Be encouraged—you can stay focused in a blurry, unfocused world. When it comes to the tasks of ministry, our vision can be renewed. Unlike the hawk, a pastor's focus, if lost, can be restored.



- 1 Richard J. Krejcir, "What Is Going on With the Pastors in America?" Schaeffer Institute, 2007, <http://intothyword.org/apps/articles/?articleid=36562&columnid=3958>.
- 2 Peter Leithart, "Jezebel and Babylon," *Theopolis*, November 11, 2016, https://theopolisinstitute.com/leithart_post/jezebel-and-babylon/.
- 3 See Glenn Townend, "Three Angels' Messages," *Adventist Record*, February 13, 2020.



Receiving hate, giving love

Many years ago, during Communism in Romania, my wife, Daniela, and I wanted to start a small clothing factory. The single person who could approve it was the president over all businesses in that county. We scheduled an appointment with him and presented our desire. Although we had all of the proper documents and passed all of the needed inspections, he refused to approve us. When I inquired why, he answered, “I hate you Christians. I cannot agree with you. You all should be destroyed.”

For months, whatever we did was not sufficient, but eventually we were approved and started our business. When the revolution was over, there was no longer a Communist party. The man lost his position and went in desperate search of work. Most people hated the former Communist leaders, so few would open their doors, let alone hire him. One day, he came to our house.

As I opened the door, the man recognized me. He started to plead for a job, with no hope that

he would get hired. The hurt and his hate were still fresh in our minds. Daniela and I looked at each other, then offered him a job on the spot. Our former antagonist was amazed. “Why would you help me when I hated you?” he asked incredulously.

“I cannot agree with your views,” I answered. “But I do not hate you. In fact, I care for you.”

You don’t have to agree

In Matthew 18, Peter tries to impress Jesus. “Should I forgive people seven times?” Jesus responds, “‘Seventy times seven’” (v. 22). That seems a little eccentric. Then Jesus tells of a servant who owed the king ten thousand talents. “Forgive me,” he says; “I’ll pay it back.” Right there, he missed it—the depth of his sin and the breadth of God’s grace. One talent was about 67 pounds of gold, about 16 years of wages.

One would need to live about two thousand lives to pay that amount of debt. On the other hand, the servant is consumed with anger and unable to forgive someone who owed him a



hundred denarii—just three months' salary. The bad news is you can never pay your debt. The good news is you don't have to. Jesus paid it all.

Those who value Jesus' blood have no problem forgiving, loving, and showing grace. Turning one's back on this love and grace results in self-inflicted consequences. The third angel's message states, "And they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name" (Rev. 14:11, NKJV). How should we react when we encounter persons who think or act differently from us?

Mark Finley states, "If your understanding of the mark of the beast makes you angry. . . . [If it makes you] angry at the people who don't preach it like you think they ought to, then you need to reexamine your heart. Your understanding of the mark of the beast should give you a passion for reaching lost people with the gospel of Christ. . . . If my understanding of prophecy doesn't make me a more loving, kind, compassionate Christian—then I should reevaluate my understanding."¹

You do have to love

In a society where division and even hate have become more and more the norm, the third angel's message is ultimately a message of love. Even children may be taught that the proof of God's presence in one's life is the love of God manifested toward those who don't deserve it. Shama Stock states, "God's message of warning is a loud message of love. He wants to come into your heart and change you into his image."²

Jesus commands us to love one another to the same degree that He loves us (John 13:34). God is calling us to experience His love and reflect it to those around us—to the same degree that He has loved us. You cannot give what you don't have.



- 1 Mark A. Finley, "The Mark of the Beast: Has the Message Changed?" *Adventist Review*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.adventistreview.org/1806-36>.
- 2 Shama Stock, "The Third Angel: A Loud Message of Love," www.revelationforkids.com/the-third-angels-loud-warning.



The bridge we build

A *mazing. Uplifting. Timely.* These are the words that crashed social media at the conclusion of her message. The inauguration of the 46th president of the United States saw 22-year-old African American youth poet laureate Amanda Gorman deliver her Scripture-laced poem, “The Hill We Climb,” with precision and poise.

The poem excited people of faith and inspired people with hope. It enthralled seasoned writers and electrified popular rappers. It thrilled school-children and challenged university professors. Some believed the author meant one thing; others asserted something else. One art critic helpfully suggests, “Works of literature, such as poems and plays, allow readers the opportunity to find multiple distinct meanings in a single line. This process is not only accepted—it’s a crucial part of what makes literature so pleasurable. Indeed, one reason to revisit a literary text is to discover how its meanings have changed over time, since each reading brings new experiences and perspectives.”¹

There’s another message that’s amazing, uplifting, and timely. It’s an old message, but “each

reading brings new experiences and perspectives.” It’s called the everlasting gospel, epitomized by three angels (Rev. 14:6–13). Many interpretations have been offered regarding this message. Its genius, however, is that it is unfolding, compassionate, and adaptable.

Unfolding: “The third angel’s message reveals the great saving truth for this time. Its truths are constantly unfolding, and it is God’s design that even the children and youth shall understand intelligently what God requires.”²

Compassionate: “The work of beneficence enjoined in this chapter [Isaiah 58] is the work that God requires His people to do at this time. . . . With the work of advocating the commandments of God and repairing the breach that has been made in the law of God, we are to mingle compassion for suffering humanity. . . . The third angel’s message is not to be given a second place in this work, but is to be one with it. . . . This work is to be to the message what the hand is to the body.”³

Adaptable: “Every feature of the third angel’s message is to be proclaimed in all parts of the world. . . . Received into honest hearts, it will



Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is the associate editor of *Ministry*.



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prove an antidote for all the world's sins and sorrows. No conditions of climate, of poverty, or ignorance, or of prejudice can hinder its efficiency, or lessen its adaptability to the needs of mankind."⁴

So, we are embroiled in a coronavirus pandemic, economic poverty, political turmoil, and racial unrest. Thank God for an antidote! Thank God for an eternal gospel that adapts itself to human needs. It is not fixed, static, and inflexible. It is dynamic, contemporary, and relevant. It belongs to theologians and millennials, to historians and Generation Z, to the developed world and the developing world. Love the Lord your God and your neighbor as yourself. Presented aright, our message will appeal to young people who have a passion for God and compassion for the vulnerable. The love of Christ constrains us to repair the breach, restore the paths, and build a bridge. So let's amaze the world with this message.

It is a radical message of love and compassion that bridges earth and heaven and human and human. It is a revolutionary message of healing and deliverance that connects body and

soul and church and community. It is a reconciling message of restoration and redemption that unites parents and children, husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles, races and ethnicities, young and old, clergy and laity, and men and women, to fulfill the eternal prayer of Jesus, "that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23, KJV). When Jesus sees a people like this, He'll come to take them to be where He is. By our actions, we can delay that day—or we can hasten it.

Amazing. Uplifting. Timely. That's our message. It's the bridge we build.



- 1 "Grades 11–12 Playlist: Multiple Interpretations," Wisewire, accessed April 29, 2021, http://www.wisewire.com/wp-content/uploads/items/4854/Demo_pdf_WN_ELA_0012.pdf.
- 2 Ellen G. White, vol. 9, *Manuscript Releases*, (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 292.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), 32, 33.
- 4 Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 292.

THREE Angels, ONE Gospel



Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, ThD, is a part-time associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.



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I begin with a simple yet perhaps rhetorical question: What are you proclaiming from the pulpit every week? The answer should be obvious: The gospel of salvation through faith in Christ's sacrificial death. His saving work should color and determine the content of any sermon.

An Adventist preacher does not have any other option because at the very core of the biblical passage that summarizes our mission and message is the gospel, namely Revelation 14:6–13—the three angels' messages. I am suggesting that the passage be interpreted from a Christological perspective.¹

Message of the first angel

The three angels "represent those who receive the truth, and with power open the gospel to the world."² The exegetical foundation for this claim is found in Revelation 14:6–13. The first angel proclaims God's eternal gospel to the human race at the close of the cosmic conflict (v. 6). The passage closes with the blessing of the Holy Spirit on those who have held the law of God and the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ's saving work together (vv. 12, 13). The second angel proclaims the collapse of the false gospel of Babylon (v. 8), and at the heart of the third message is a wonderful reference to the Lamb of God (v. 10).

The angel does not describe the content of the gospel but calls it "an eternal gospel" (v. 6).³ There is no other eternal gospel than the one announcing to the world that salvation comes through Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:14). This gospel is introduced in Revelation 1:5, when John refers to Jesus as the One who "loves us and released us from our sins by His blood."

The love of God was visibly manifested in the sacrificial death of Jesus. This soteriological language is conveyed throughout the book using

the image of the Lamb that was slain. Heavenly beings proclaim that the Lamb is worthy of worship because " 'You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' " (Rev. 5:9). It is Christ as the Lamb who was exalted to the throne of God (Rev. 22:3), who, as a Warrior, defeats the enemy through His sacrificial death (Rev. 17:14) and shares that victory with His people (Rev. 12:11). The figure of the Lamb is an expression of the sacrificial love of God through which we are redeemed.

The proclamation of the gospel is followed by a call to the inhabitants of the earth to fear God (Rev. 14:7). The concept of the fear of God assumes that God is a transcendental and majestic Being who manifests Himself to humans engulfed in radiant and impenetrable light and who causes the earth to tremble (e.g., Exod. 19:16, 18, 19). This majestic Being, the Uncreated One, offers to humans, in an act of love, the privilege of His becoming their God (Deut. 4:20; 5:26, 27; 7:6). Those who acknowledge that He is a loving God show their fear of Him in submission to Him and His will. The first angel summons humans to choose this glorious God as their God.

The phrase *give glory to God* is used in the Bible to express sinners' willingness to acknowledge that they are guilty as charged and that God is righteous in condemning them (Josh. 7:19; 1 Sam. 6:5; John 9:24; cf. Ps. 51:4). It is at times an expression of contrition and repentance that acknowledges the justice of God (Jer. 13:16; Rev. 11:13). The angel is inviting all, based on God's work of redemption, to repent and admit that God is a loving and righteous God.

The call is urgent because the hour of God's judgment is already here; the final judgment is in progress. In the Bible, the Day of Atonement was a type of the day of judgment. In Revelation 11:19,

John is taken in vision into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary in anticipation of the antitypical day of atonement. Now in Revelation 14:7, we are told the prophetic moment, or “hour,” of the antitypical day of atonement has arrived. One must choose God and repent (cf. Dan. 8:14).

The angelic call invites sinners to worship the Creator (Rev. 14:7), echoing the language of the Sabbath commandment, the sign and seal of God’s sanctifying power. The Sabbath reminds humans of God the Creator and Redeemer and invites us to bow down before the One who created and who, through the Lamb, redeemed us. Worship is a bone of contention in the cosmic conflict, and humans are urged to worship God and not the fallen cherub and his allies (Rev. 14:9). At the time when the Creator and the Sabbath have been rejected or ignored, God insists that all should bow down before their Source of life.

Message of the second angel

The second angel announces the collapse of Babylon, a symbol of human independence from God and the search for self-preservation through human accomplishments (cf. Genesis 11). The descriptions of the intentions of both the fallen cherub and the king of ancient Babylon coincided—they both wanted to occupy the place of God on earth (Isa. 14:3–23)—but the literal Babylon collapsed. At the time of the end,

the dragon will create a mystical Babylon through which he will attempt to occupy the place of God and

receive worship that is due only to God. Babylon is constituted by a false trinity: the beast from the sea (Rev. 13:1)—apostate Christianity during the Middle Ages, the beast from the earth (v. 11)—apostate Protestantism as represented by America, and the dragon—Satan’s personal work through spiritualism.

Babylon is the dragon’s attempt to unify apostate Christianity through miraculous events that will aid his endeavor to legitimize his claim to be of divine origin. Babylon offers to the world her corrupted gospel, called her “wine” (Rev. 14:8). Jesus gave wine to His disciples as a symbol of His sacrificial death (Matt. 26:27, 28), and now Babylon offers to humans her own wine—or a way of salvation through submission to the fallen cherub. In these last days, the dragon will change in many ways the religious, political, philosophical, and economic map of the world through the performance of miracles that will persuade many that he is, indeed, God. We should anticipate radical changes in the world, whose magnitude is difficult to imagine.

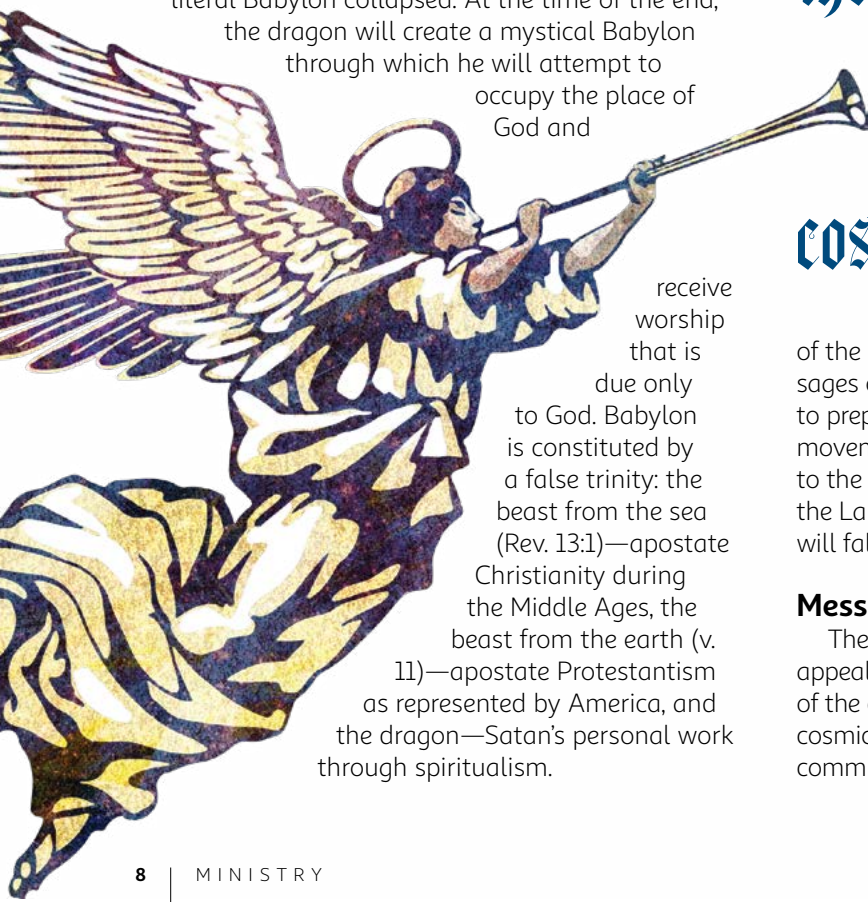
The mystical Babylon is still unfolding. The three demonic spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet will go to the world to unite them for the battle of the day

The three messages are embedded in one message—the eternal gospel—which is powerful enough to save us and to bring the cosmic conflict to an end.

of the Lord (Rev. 16:13, 14). Meanwhile the messages of the three angels are going to the world to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. The two movements will polarize the earth in faithfulness to the Lamb or to the dragon. But the victory of the Lamb, the true gospel, is assured, and Babylon will fall to rise no more (Rev. 16:19; 17:14; 19:20).

Message of the third angel

The message of the third angel is God’s last appeal, in the form of a warning, to the dwellers of the earth to choose the side of the Lamb in the cosmic conflict. It is about loyalties and ultimate commitments. While the dragon announces that



those who will not worship him and who reject the name and the mark of the beast will be exterminated (Rev. 13:15–17), the third angel announces that those who take the side of the dragon will face God's wrath in the final judgment (Rev. 14:9–11).

Loyalty to the dragon and his allies requires taking the name and the mark of the beast. The wicked will identify themselves with the character and aspirations of the false trinity. Loyalty expresses itself in actions that manifest the nature of the object of loyalty. Appropriating the name and the mark of the beast means that they belong to and supposedly are going to be protected by the dragon. By submitting to the authority of the false trinity, God's will is irrelevant for the wicked.

The mark of the beast is the counterfeit of God's seal, the Sabbath. Sunday becomes the symbol of the authority of the dragon over those who follow him—his authority to change God's law—and that facilitates worshiping him. We worship the Creator on the seventh-day Sabbath, and at the close of the cosmic conflict, the wicked worship the creature through their obedience to Sunday.

The third angel announces that those loyal to the dragon will experience the wrath of God (cf. Rev. 6:16, 17). Then the angel proceeds to explain what God's wrath is like using the language of wine and of fire and brimstone. According to the angel, divine wrath is like wine that has not been mixed with water but whose intoxicating power has been increased through the addition of certain spices. The point of the metaphor is that God's eschatological wrath will not be mixed with mercy—there will not be room for repentance. The wicked will fall and will not rise again.

The second metaphor is taken from the experience of a person who has been directly exposed to burning sulfur. The wrath of God is compared to the intense pain that a person feels when burning sulfur falls on their skin; it is extremely painful. There is a second point to this metaphor, namely, that what is burned perishes forever. The wrath of God will result in the eternal death of the wicked.

The intensity of the pain of the wicked in the final judgment is described as a torment—a pain over which the person has no control and that each person will experience over a period of unspecified time (Rev. 14:11). This most painful experience occurs before “the angels and the Lamb.” Scholars have suggested different ways of interpreting this phrase, overlooking the obvious one. The imagery is taken from the coming of Christ with His angels at the parousia. It is the language of a Christophany used here to indicate

that Christ will appear to the wicked during the final judgment. They will stand before the Lamb that was slain! They will be looking at the cross of Jesus where God's magnificent love was revealed to the cosmos and rejected by them.

This is the best and only evidence that God brings to His cosmic court of law to demonstrate that the fallen angel was wrong and that He is unquestionably a loving and righteous God. In the presence of the Lamb, the wicked see themselves as they really are, miserable sinners with a deep sense of guilt, realizing that they will be eternally separated from this most loving God. The realization of such eternal separation is indeed most painful; a torment. On the cross, Jesus experienced the excruciating pain of separation from the Father so that no one else would have to experience it. However, the wicked disregarded the saving blood of the Lamb that was slain, and they will be tormented by the love they chose to ignore. Paradoxically, the love of God, constituting the joy of the unfallen worlds and awakening the deepest gratitude within the hearts of those redeemed by the Lamb, is a torment for the wicked and Satan and his demons.

The cosmic conflict closes peacefully with the universal recognition and declaration that God is a God of love—the persuasive power of the sacrifice of the Lamb defeats the forces of evil. John anticipated this moment when he wrote: “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever’ ” (Rev. 5:13).

The three messages are embedded in one message—the eternal gospel—which is powerful enough to save us and to bring the cosmic conflict to an end. Perhaps it would be good to ask again, what are you taking to the pulpit next week? Take the Lamb!



- 1 An expansion of this article will appear in “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels’ Messages,” to be published in Artur Steele, ed., *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching*, vol. 2 (2021). It includes bibliographical references.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *The Truth About Angels* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1996), 247.
- 3 Scripture is from the 1995 edition of the New American Standard Bible.

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