

the
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**AT THE
CROSSROADS**

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Volume 62, Number 1

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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold."—Education, p. 57.

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A DECISIVE HOUR

Many would agree that 2020 was an unprecedented year of monumental crisis, chaos, and confusion—at least in the life of most of us.

Is 2021 turning out to be different? In some ways, yes. But ultimately, not necessarily much easier. This year, we're living in a time of decision. The venal crimes of the world have become so appalling to thinking people that many who fear God are inclined simply to feel numb and stand still in horror. Others are stirred up with concern. But the most important thing is for us to wake up to this glaring reality:

The world really does not have much to offer us now. More than ever, we need to focus very intently on preparing for the return of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. There's a great awakening underway. Honest people are far more inquisitive and aware than they have been for decades. Sincere seekers for truth are needing guidance and real answers. Are we up to the task? There's not much time left in which to give a helping hand.

AM I WORTHY?

No one is! But we can be **made** worthy through the blood of the Lamb of God. He is more than willing to wash away our sins in His pure, holy blood and purify us for the challenge of the hour. We need only to ask in the name of Jesus and we shall receive. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

AM I CAPABLE?

Probably not. . . . Despite what the puffed-up and arrogant might think, nobody really is. But let's see how we can be equipped:

"In the common walks of life there is many a toiler patiently treading the round of his daily tasks, unconscious of latent powers that, roused to action, would place him among the world's great leaders. Such were the men who were called by the Saviour to be His colaborers. And they had the advantage of three years' training by the greatest educator this world has ever known.

"In these first disciples was presented a marked diversity. They were to be the world's teachers, and they represented widely varied types of character. There were Levi Matthew the publican, called from a life of business activity, and subservience to Rome; the zealot Simon, the uncompromising foe of the imperial authority; the impulsive, self-sufficient, warmhearted Peter, with Andrew his brother; Judas the Judean, polished, capable, and mean-spirited; Philip and Thomas, faithful and earnest, yet slow of heart to believe; James the less and Jude, of less prominence among the brethren, but men of force, positive both in their faults and in their virtues; Nathanael, a child in sincerity and trust; and the ambitious, loving-hearted sons of Zebedee.

"In order successfully to carry forward the work to which they had

been called, these disciples, differing so widely in natural characteristics, in training, and in habits of life, needed to come into unity of feeling, thought, and action. This unity it was Christ's object to secure. To this end He sought to bring them into unity with Himself."¹

Unity with Himself! One with Christ! As in wide-eyed amazement we behold the final events rapidly unfolding, do we want to be on His winning team? To have the greatest privilege ever known in the history of the world? It's not impossible! The Master of the universe is simply inviting us to be His witnesses—to tell what we have seen, heard, and learned of His saving grace and His present truth. Let's not lose this tremendous opportunity! *R*

References

¹ *Education*, p. 85.



The Wine of Babylon

THE MASTER DECEPTION AND GLOBAL DOMINANCE

"Take heed that no man deceive you," are the first words that Jesus uttered in response to His disciples' question, "what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Christ proceeded to say: "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4, 5). Throughout history and particularly in the end times, Satan's master deception has been and shall continue to be the appearance of individuals who will falsely identify themselves either as Jesus Christ Himself or as Christ's legitimate representatives. These false Christs or impostors will act with such skill and craftiness that "many" — meaning the majority of the world's population — shall be deceived and led astray.

Using symbolic language, Revelation chapter 18 contains an amazing description of God's judgments that shall be visited upon a wicked and immoral woman that is called "Babylon the great." This woman wields tremendous global power in the days immediately preceding Christ's second coming. She has succeeded in creating an unlawful alliance with the most powerful political, economic, and military leaders of the world. However, God's judgments will suddenly fall upon "the great prostitute" and cause her utter destruction. Upon seeing Babylon's terrible end, her many lovers will be inconsolable. Standing afar, they will lament the unexpected demise of the "great city" that had made them rich and powerful.

Of particular interest to us is the following short description of Babylon's secret weapon for achieving the world domination: ". . . for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived" (Revelation 18:23, last part). Some other Bible translations use for this word "sorcery" (Greek *pharmakeia*), the words "witchcraft," "enchantment," or "magic spell." It should not escape our attention that earlier in the same chapter we are told that all nations have drunk the wine of Babylon: "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies" (Revelation 18:3). Two inferences follow from this verse: Babylon unquestionably exercises worldwide dominance, and second, this powerful but illicit liaison with the kings and merchants of the world and with the political bodies and commercial alliances they represent, is obtained to a large extent through the intoxicating and bewitching influence of Babylon's wine.



It is precisely because of the deceptive use of her intoxicating wine upon the nations and their leaders which Babylon uses as vehicles for carrying out her ambitious and bloodthirsty agenda, that in the final judgment upon the great prostitute, God issues a command that Babylon be given her own medicine: “Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double” (Revelation 18:6).

In this article we will look more closely into the history and meaning of the name “Babylon” and of the “wine of Babylon.” Further, we will identify the agents that dispense it, the subjects who receive it, and the influence of that wine on those who drink it. We will take note of God’s care for His people in Babylon, and of the only protection available to God’s people against the wine of Babylon.

So, let us embark on this all-important journey of discovering the mysterious wine of Babylon—the greatest deception of all times from which no one on the earth shall escape except God’s little remnant, “that keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12).

THE ORIGINS OF BABYLON

A correct understanding of the apocalyptic prophecies in the books of Daniel and Revelation requires consistent application of certain rules of biblical interpretation. One of the foundational rules of interpretation is that the Bible interprets itself. The New Testament book of Revelation is saturated with figurative language (words, phrases, imagery) that is firmly rooted in the Old Testament. Therefore, to understand the meaning of the key words that are of interest to us (like Babylon, wine, fornication, etc.), we first need to investigate the relevant Old Testament texts to ascertain their meaning.

The history of the name “Babylon” and of the city bearing that name is exceptionally interesting and even intriguing. It

reaches back to the very dawn of the first civilizations that emerged in the wake of the worldwide flood in ancient Mesopotamia, along the rivers Euphrates and Tigris. Babylon is first mentioned in the Bible as a name of the city built by Nimrod, the descendant of Ham, one of the Noah’s three sons. The Bible says of him: “He was a mighty hunter before the Lord. . . . And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:9, 10).

The second notable mention of Babylon we find in the very next chapter of Genesis, in the story of the tower of Babel. Early inhabitants of Mesopotamia, moving from the east, “found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there” (Genesis 11:2). Sadly, they failed to trust in God’s promises and in the covenant which He had made with their ancestor, Noah. God promised to Noah and his descendants: “Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth” (Genesis 9:11). They gave expression to their unbelief in God’s promises by saying: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *is* in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4, NKJV). The Bible informs us that they might have succeeded in their enterprise had God not intervened and confused the one language used by all the builders.

The biblical record of that event and of God’s response to human rebellion reads as follows: “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:7–9).

Shinar is mentioned once more in Genesis chapter 14 in the record of a military operation undertaken by a confederation of several kings against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. As Sodom and Gomorrah suffered defeat, Abraham intervened and pursued the invading kings to rescue his nephew, Lot. The coalition of aggressors appears to be led by king Chedorlaomer, king of Elam. Noteworthy is that the first-named king in the list of the invading monarchs is Amraphel, king of Shinar (Genesis 14:1; the marginal reading for “Shinar” in the NIV Bible is “Babylonia”). Victorious Abraham is met on his way back from the battle with the kings by Melchizedek, the king of Salem, the same city that will later be named Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18–20).

THE ATTRIBUTES OF PRIMEVAL BABYLON

From the historical account in the book of Genesis we can gather several important facts about ancient Babylon. They could be summarized this way:

1. In the biblical record, the name “Babel” appears to be associated with the Hebrew word for “confusion” that emerged once God “confused” the language of the builders (Heb. *balal*, “He confused”). The etymology of the word “Babel” can also be established by looking into the ancient Semitic languages (Assyrian, Arabic, Aramaic, and late Hebrew). In the Assyrian form, *Bab-ili* means the “the gate of god” (*bab* meaning a “gateway,” while the last syllable “-el” is a common word for “god”).¹ It is important to observe that the names “Babel” and “Babylon” refer to the same entity, the same city. “Babylon” is just a transliteration of the Greek form of that name (*Babylonos*).
2. The location of the ancient city of Babylon or Babel—the one built by Nimrod and the one built by the builders of the tower of Babel—is “in



the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:10; 11:2). Bible scholars and historians are of the opinion that the name “Shinar” is cognate with Sumer, the first and most fascinating major civilization in the annals of human history. Sumerian civilization flourished in the Fertile Crescent in the fourth and third millennium B.C. and became renowned for its innovations in language, governance, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, and more. The ruins of the ancient Babylon are located about 53 miles (85 km) south of Baghdad, Iraq.

3. Nimrod, the founder of Babel, is portrayed in the Bible as “a mighty hunter before the Lord,” in other words, a powerful man skilled in hunting and in the use of force. As such, Nimrod could be viewed also as violent and aggressive, capable of placing

people under his control. He builds a kingdom consisting of several important ancient cities, the principal of which is Babel.

4. Successors of Nimrod carry on Nimrod’s work by expanding the city of Babel and by building an exceedingly tall tower. They act in defiance of God’s promise that there would not be another worldwide flood. Further, they strive to “make a name for themselves,” that is, to be established on their own, independently from God, by which they hope to prevent scattering in different parts of the world. These actions indicate human pride and rebellion, but also an intent to centralize the world government and to concentrate the world population in one location or one region. God frustrates this globalist agenda, confuses their common language, and disperses the city dwellers and builders all over the world.

5. The king of Shinar or Babylonia is part of an aggressive military expedition undertaken by several kings to deprive even some of God’s representatives of their freedom, their possessions, and their land. Abraham opposes this invasion and the aggressive conduct of the king of Shinar/ Babylonia and of his allies. Abraham receives blessings from the priest of God Most High who is also the king of another major biblical city, the city of Salem. This is the first place in the Scripture where we find in an embryonic form the contrast between two major cities—Babylon and Jerusalem (Salem), and between two major classes of people—the followers of Nimrod, a mighty man who relies on his human prowess and ingenuity, in contrast to the followers of Abraham, a man who responds to God’s call by faith. Abraham, together with the promised descendants, represents the kingdom of God on earth. As we will see, Babylon and Jerusalem will remain in constant conflict until the end of this world.

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE, ISRAEL, AND GOD

From an independent city-state, Babylon will rise to the world fame under the First Babylonian dynasty in the 19th century B.C. The most notable ruler during that period was the Amorite king, Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.), who established the Old Babylonian Empire. In

the centuries to follow, that early Empire will wane and pass through the Assyrian, Kassite, and Elamite domination. Babylon will restore its old glory and even surpass it when it became the capital of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (609/605–539 B.C.). This kingdom was founded by Nabopolassar (626–605 B.C.) but reached its zenith under his son and the well-known biblical character, Nebuchadnezzar II (605–561 B.C.).

Although the Neo-Babylonian Empire and its rulers were used as a tool in God’s hands to punish other nations, including God’s own people (Jeremiah 25:8, 9), Babylon in the Old Testament represents the religious-political system that stands in opposition to the religion of the true God. Babylon’s chief aim is world domination and the establishment of a global order that is antithetical to the principles of God’s government. Babylon is therefore consistently portrayed as a great enemy of God’s people. The name is mentioned in the Bible about 280 times, second only to Jerusalem, clearly indicating that Babylon is Jerusalem’s chief rival. The pride, arrogance, and attitude of Babylon and its emperors toward God and His people (Daniel 4:30; 5:3, 4) are used by the prophet Isaiah as a personification of the boastful claims of Lucifer and of his rebellion in heaven (Isaiah 14:12–14).

It is no wonder then that God administers divine justice by punishing Babylon for her pride, defiance of God, idolatry, lawlessness, and particularly for the oppression of His people. The prophets Jeremiah (chapters 25,

50, and 51) and Isaiah (chapters 13, 44, 47) announced God’s judgment upon Babylon and her final doom. The language of the Old Testament prophets portraying the disposition and the evil deeds of Babylon and God’s judgment of Babylon’s rebellion, idolatry, and lawlessness, is closely followed by the New Testament authors, particularly by the apostle John in the book of Revelation. Although the ancient city of Babylon became an uninhabitable heap of ruins by the end of the first century A.D., Babylon remains a symbol of a power antagonistic to God and His people. Among both Jews and Christians, the cryptic name of Babylon was used with reference to Rome (see 1 Peter 5:13).

THE WINE OF THE ANCIENT BABYLON

Babylon’s intoxicating wine and the cup containing that wine are brought out to light by the prophet Jeremiah in his oracle against Babylon: “Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad” (Jeremiah 51:7). Babylon is the “cup of the wine of wrath” in God’s hand that is urged upon the nations because nations are guilty before God: “For thus saith the Lord God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it” (Jeremiah 25:15). It clearly follows from these verses that the Babylon’s wine is an intoxicating or mind-altering substance that is dispensed in a costly and appealing vessel. Further, drinking of Babylon’s wine leads to God’s judgments.

The Old Testament prophecies about the ancient Babylon provide us with another important imagery which the apostle John will use in the Revelation. That is the image of Babylon as a woman that is both powerful and attractive, but also cunning, immoral, and exceptionally seductive. The prophet Isaiah says this of God’s



judgment upon the “daughter of Babylon . . . daughter of Chaldeans.”

“Thy nakedness shall be uncovered, yea, thy shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and I will not meet thee as a man. . . . Sit thou silent, and get thee into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called, The lady [or queen] of kingdoms. . . . Therefore hear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children: but these two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood: they shall come upon thee in their perfection for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments. . . . Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. . . . Thus shall they be unto thee with whom thou hast laboured, even thy merchants, from thy youth: they shall wander every one to his quarter; none shall save thee” (Isaiah 47:3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 15).

This is an amazing prophetic description of ancient Babylon! Babylon is an arrogant and wicked but immensely powerful and intelligent woman who is in an illicit relationship with the influential and wealthy people (“merchants”). Yet one quality of this woman stands out: Speaking to her, God says that Babylon’s fall from grace will come “for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thy enchantments.” Unquestionably, this woman is exceptionally seductive. And further, she is very resourceful: for staying in power and for controlling her subjects, she relies on the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators. . . . But confronted and judged by the God of Israel, none of her expert advisers shall be of any avail to her. Her partners and suitors will abandon her; suddenly Babylon becomes childless and widowed.

BABYLON – A FOUNTAINHEAD OF FALSE RELIGION

It is widely recognized by Bible scholars and historians of religion that the most influential heathen deities and religious practices in the Old Testament times have their origin in the lands of ancient Babylon (Sumer and Akkad). The main female deity of the Ancient Near East was Ishtar, the Akkadian goddess of war, sexual love, and fertility (Sumerian Inanna).²

Ishtar was the wife of Tammuz (Akkadian Tammuzi, Sumerian Dumuzi), the patron god of shepherds, later of agricultural workers. Tammuz was “god of fertility embodying the powers for new life in nature in the spring. . . . The cult of Tammuz centred around two yearly festivals—one celebrating his marriage to the goddess Inanna, the other lamenting his death at the hands of demons from the netherworld.”³ This cult was widespread in the Ancient Near East.

Ishtar and Tammuz had many counterpart deities among the West Semites (Canaan and Phoenicia). One of such Babylonian deities was the Canaanite goddess Ashtaroth (singular Ashtoreth, Greek Astarte; see “Ashtoreth” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).⁴ Ashtaroth was also portrayed as a wife of Baal, the storm and weather god, whose worship deeply penetrated the nation of Israel, causing great spiritual harm to God’s chosen people.

Sadly, the immoral cult of Ashtaroth spread among the nation of Israel (1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13). This originally Babylonian deity was also known in the Bible as “**the queen of heaven.**” The prophet Jeremiah sternly rebuked Israelites who engaged in this idol worship (Jeremiah 7:18; 44:17). The worship of Ashtaroth included burning incense and pouring out drink offerings. The female members of the Jewish society took the leading role in this idol worship but not without the assistance of their husbands and children. A direct consequence of this idol worship was the punishment of the foreign

invaders by sword and removal from the Promised Land.

We should also take note of the great abomination which God revealed to the prophet Ezekiel as taking place in Jerusalem. These idolatrous practices would be the cause for the withdrawal of God’s presence from the sanctuary, the destruction of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem, for the Babylonian invasion and the subsequent captivity. The sins practiced within the sacred precincts by both the common people and the elders in Judah were without exception idolatrous practices—worship of pagan deities. Two of these practices should be brought to our attention:

“Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord’s house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women **weeping for Tammuz**. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord’s house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, **with their backs toward the temple of the Lord**, and their faces toward the east; and **they worshipped the sun** toward the east” (Ezekiel 8:14–16). [Emphasis added.]

THE WINE OF BABYLON— HEATHEN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: BEWARE OF THEM!

Jewish women were weeping for the seasonal dying of the Babylonian god Tammuz and his descent into Hades. This religious belief and practice clearly presupposed the false belief in immortality of soul, spiritualism, and communication with demons. The second religious practice involving the prominent men in the house of Judah was clearly one of the worst forms of idolatry—worship of the sun god—worship of a created object instead of the Creator. The cup of iniquity was full, and the God of Israel did not have any other choice but to deliver His people into the hands of the nation

“Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive.”



whose religion Judah has chosen: “Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them” (Ezekiel 8:18).

The apostate Jewish nation drank abundantly from the golden cup of Babylon’s religious fornication. The nation’s leaders and the common people became spiritually intoxicated with the wine of Babylon. They transgressed the law of God, desecrating the seventh-day Sabbath which was given to them as a sign to remember the only true God, God the Creator. They instead worshiped the sun. As a result of their covenant unfaithfulness, the land became polluted and needed to rest for seventy years (2 Chronicles 36:21). Moreover, by forgetting the true God, the Jewish people began to communicate with false gods, the supposed spirits of the dead—in reality, with demons. Therefore, they were to be resettled to the very seat of demon worship and thus be given the opportunity to fully taste the fruits of Babylon’s religion.

In Babylon, they also obtain a firsthand experience of a society that is molded in the image and character of its immoral and vengeful deities, a society that does not respect the freedom of conscience and religious liberty, a state where religion is imposed by the force of arms. But God has never been without His faithful witnesses. The three brave Hebrews refuse to bow down to the golden image, the state-imposed religion, even when threatened to be thrown into a fiery furnace (see Daniel 3). God is being honored and He in turn honors the young heroes of faith not only by saving them from the deadly inferno, but by joining them in the middle of the fire!

FLEE OUT OF BABYLON!

When the time for Jewish captivity was about to be completed, the faithful Jews understood from Jeremiah’s prophetic word that God would soon deliver His people from Babylon (Daniel 9:2). The time had come to leave Babylon because God will judge this idolatrous, proud, and oppressive system. “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord’s vengeance; he will render unto her a recompense” (Jeremiah 51:6). Babylon and her false system of worship would be utterly destroyed: “Babylon will become a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and hissing, without inhabitants. . . . And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall” (Jeremiah 51:37, 44, KJB).

The Old Testament Babylon disappeared from the face of the world long time ago. But the Babylon of the book of Revelation is still alive. It is a powerful force for evil that opposes God and His people. We call this Babylon “spiritual Babylon” because she is symbolically portrayed as a wicked woman. Since a woman in Bible prophecy represents a religious body (Jeremiah 6:2), we know that this evil woman represents an apostate church. John has seen her in a vision, and described her this way:

“And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abomina-

tions and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration” (Revelation 17:4–6). This woman, “Mystery, Babylon the Great,” exhibits the same or remarkably similar spiritual qualities as ancient Babylon. When John discovered the woman’s identity, he was in disbelief and awe. At one point in time that woman was a church of Christ! However, by desiring to become more popular, she gradually began adopting the beliefs and practices of the world. From a beauty she turned into a beast.

“The great sin charged against Babylon is that she ‘made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’ This cup of intoxication which she presents to the world represents the false doctrines that she has accepted as the result of her unlawful connection with the great ones of the earth.”⁵

A Bible student who has carefully studied the story of Babylon in the Old Testament will not have difficulty understanding who is “Mystery, Babylon the Great” in the New Testament. Different historical actors have played the role of the ancient and of the modern Babylon, but the mind and heart of Babylon have not changed. If one understands what the wine of the ancient Babylon is, the same will quickly identify both the wine of the modern Babylon and those who dispense it.

In this article we have not fully unraveled the story of the modern Babylon, but have laid foundations

for this work. We invite you, therefore, to study God's word. Your only defense against the wine of Babylon, dear reader, is a prayerful study of the Holy Scriptures. "Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive. By the Bible testimony these will detect the deceiver in his disguise."⁶

God's last message to be given to this world is the message that calls God's people out of Babylon. This message is urgent and needs to be given right now:

"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:2-4).

HOW DO WE FLEE?

"The Revelator says, 'I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with His glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen' (Revelation 18:1, 2). This is the same message that was given by the second angel—**Babylon is fallen, 'because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'**

(Revelation 14:8). What is that wine?—Her false doctrines. She has given to the world a false sabbath instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and has repeated the lie Satan first told to Eve in Eden—the natural immortality of the soul. Many kindred errors she has spread far and wide, 'teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.'

"When Jesus began His public ministry, He cleansed the temple from its sacrilegious profanation. Almost the last act of His ministry was to cleanse the temple again. So in the last work for the warning of the world, two distinct calls are made to the churches; the second angel's message, and the voice heard in heaven, 'Come out of her, my people, . . . For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities' (Revelation 18:4, 5).

"As God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, that they might keep His Sabbath, so He calls His people out of Babylon, that they may not worship the beast nor his image. The man of sin, who thought to change times and laws, has exalted himself above God, by presenting this spurious sabbath to the world; the Christian world has accepted this child of the Papacy, and cradled and nourished it, thus defying God by removing His memorial and setting up a rival sabbath.

"After the truth has been proclaimed as a witness to all nations, at a time when every conceivable power of evil is set in operation, when minds are confused by the many voices crying, 'Lo, here is Christ.' 'Lo, He is there;' 'this is truth.' 'I have the message from God;' 'He has sent me with great light;' and there is a removing of the landmarks, and an attempt to tear down the pillars

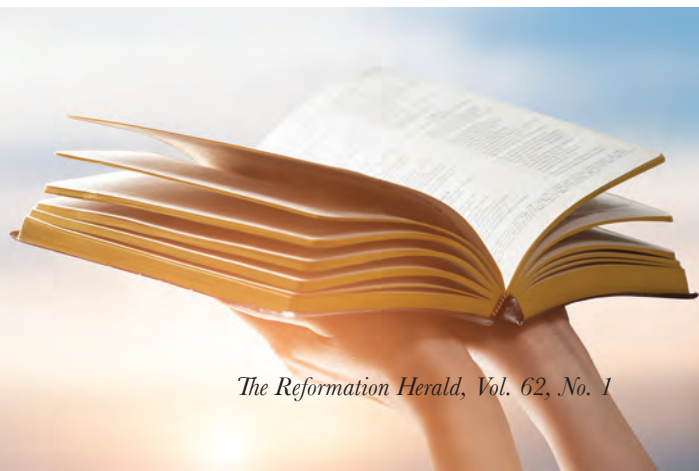
of our faith—then a more decided effort is made to exalt the false sabbath, and to cast contempt upon God himself by supplanting the day He has blessed and sanctified. This false sabbath is to be enforced by an oppressive law. Satan and his angels are wide awake and intensely active, working with energy and perseverance through human instrumentalities to bring about his purpose of obliterating the knowledge of God. While Satan is working with his lying wonders, the time has come foretold in the Revelation, when the mighty angel that shall lighten the earth with his glory will proclaim the fall of Babylon and call upon God's people to forsake her."⁶⁷

To come out of Babylon means to come out of confusion—to rightly discern the Scriptures in their clarity and perfection. If we come out of darkness into the marvelous light of God's word, we won't be drunk with the wine of Babylon. Instead, under the control of God, we will cheerfully comply with the inspired appeal of the apostle: "**Be not drunk with wine**, wherein is excess; **but be filled with the Spirit**; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:18-20). Amen! *R*

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- ⁴ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, "Ashtoreth." Grand Rapids, MI. W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1986.
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- ⁷ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, pp. 725, 726. [Emphasis added.]

Your only defense against the wine of Babylon, dear reader, is a prayerful study of the Holy Scriptures.





KEEP YOUR CANDLE *LIT!*

Oil is precious. In December 2019, it was estimated that at the current rate of usage, the crude oil reserves on planet Earth could last only around 33 more years (assuming, of course, that the planet itself might last that long before the imminent return of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven). Estimates such as this vary, but there is no question that this valuable resource does indeed have a limit.

Those who lived through the oil embargo of 1973 remember well the various hardships felt when oil supplies were severely curtailed. That crisis was due to lack of oil in the material sense—but what happens when we lack oil in the spiritual sense?

Let us look at a beautiful illustration shown to the prophet Zechariah:

In vision he was shown “a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof” (Zechariah 4:2, 3). The explanation was given to the prophet that “these are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:14).

The New Testament also refers to these two anointed ones as two witnesses to whom power would be given to “prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth” (Revelation 11:3, 4).

Looking back over the events that have occurred since the book of Revelation was penned in the 1st

century, we find a historic period of 1,260 years, also cited elsewhere in Scripture (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2; 12:6). Using the biblical principle of prophetic interpretation whereby a day equals a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6), we recall that the Old and New Testaments indeed gave their undying flicker of light to a world enveloped in deep darkness during the years 538–1798 A.D.

Little appreciated at first—being clothed as it were, in sackcloth—the precious rays of light emanating from these two witnesses grew increasingly brilliant through the courageous labors of great Reformers who faithfully taught from their sacred pages—many at the risk of their lives.

WHAT DOES OIL DO?

In the physical sense, various types of oil lubricate; they smooth

the pathway. As an emollient for the skin, oil has a softening effect. As a source of fuel, oil supplies energy to motors. Some types of oil are even used as cleansing agents.

And in the scriptures, oil is used as a symbol of God's Holy Spirit—a divine agency that does all the above things in a spiritual sense, plus more.

Many of us are familiar with the parable of Jesus about the ten virgins, as found in Matthew chapter 25:

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door

was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:1–13).

How tragic it was when half of them bemoaned their predicament in the darkness of night as they realized that their lamps had flickered out! Why did this happen? It was simply because they had neglected to supply themselves with sufficient oil in case of delay. Their failure to have a surplus revealed an attitude that was too casual, too relaxed in their preparation for the Bridegroom's arrival.

Can this happen to us, too? Oil lamps are not the main source of light today; modern technology has brought more sophisticated sources of power. But the parable is spiritual, and the principle is timeless. Yes, we likewise could be caught off guard and unprepared to meet Jesus Christ, the true Bridegroom of whom the parable is speaking.

So, we are urged:

"Let every soul note the importance of having a supply of oil. Fill your lamps with holy oil from the two olive trees. This oil is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, which is poured into the minds of believers, that they may be coworkers with

heavenly agencies. The wise virgins, the waiting ones, had their faith and love and patience nourished by the oil of the Spirit of God. Thus it must be with each one who is saved. It is by the Spirit, the gracious agency of heaven, that the lamp is kept from flickering."¹

OUR CHARACTER IS TESTED IN TIMES OF CRISIS

In the parable, all the virgins were asleep and, with the announcement of the Bridegroom's arrival, all woke up at midnight. In the crisis, half were prepared and half were not. So it is today. Have you ever honestly found yourself face-to-face with death? Or at least you honestly felt as if you were in such imminent danger? It is moments like these that reveal whether or not we really have faith in the promises of God. It shows whether or not we are genuinely sustained by His grace or whether we have a lax attitude about life.

Interestingly, "the class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but **they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not** fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus,

In the parable, all the virgins were asleep and, with the announcement of the Bridegroom's arrival, all woke up at midnight. In the crisis, half were prepared and half were not. So is today.



and **permitted their old nature to be broken up**. This class are represented also by the stony-ground hearers. **They receive the word with readiness, but they fail of assimilating its principles**. Its influence is not abiding. The Spirit works upon man's heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form."²

The Lord describes to the prophet Ezekiel the attitude of this kind of people: "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (Ezekiel 33:31). This casual attitude will be rampant just before Christ's coming: "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof" (2 Timothy 3:1-5). Denying what power? The power to create in us a clean, new heart and renew a right spirit in us. The power to strengthen us to overcome sin. The power to tell others of Christ and Him crucified—and so much more! Let us not miss out on that power! "As many as received [the Word made flesh], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). When we "believe on his name," we believe in His character. We believe in His power to change us from the heart, from the inside out—even changing our very motives (see Hebrews 4:12). More than **what** we do, God cares about the reason **why** we do it. He doesn't like to have phonies in His service. So, do you want the spiritual power He offers? Now is the time to grasp it with all you've got!

The final test will come when it is too late for those who've taken these matters in too relaxed a manner. Just as in the parable, many won't be ready. Jesus states plainly, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

What a shock that will be to many who profess the name of Christ! They will have claimed to be followers of Jesus, but their experience has been just some shallow talk **about** Him instead of actually reflecting the beauty of an abiding relationship **with** Him.

Unfortunately, despite their talk, these have missed out on the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The work of the Spirit on our hearts is what changes us. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Christ's final declaration, "I know you not" are the saddest words that could ever fall on mortal ear. Can you imagine the tragedy and frustration of missing out on the glorious feast of Christ with His precious ones whom He will ransom from the earth?

RIPE FOR THE RUSE?

We are warned in Scripture that misinformation—in fact, even malicious **disinformation**—is going to plague this planet more than ever before. We read of "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be

according to their works" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

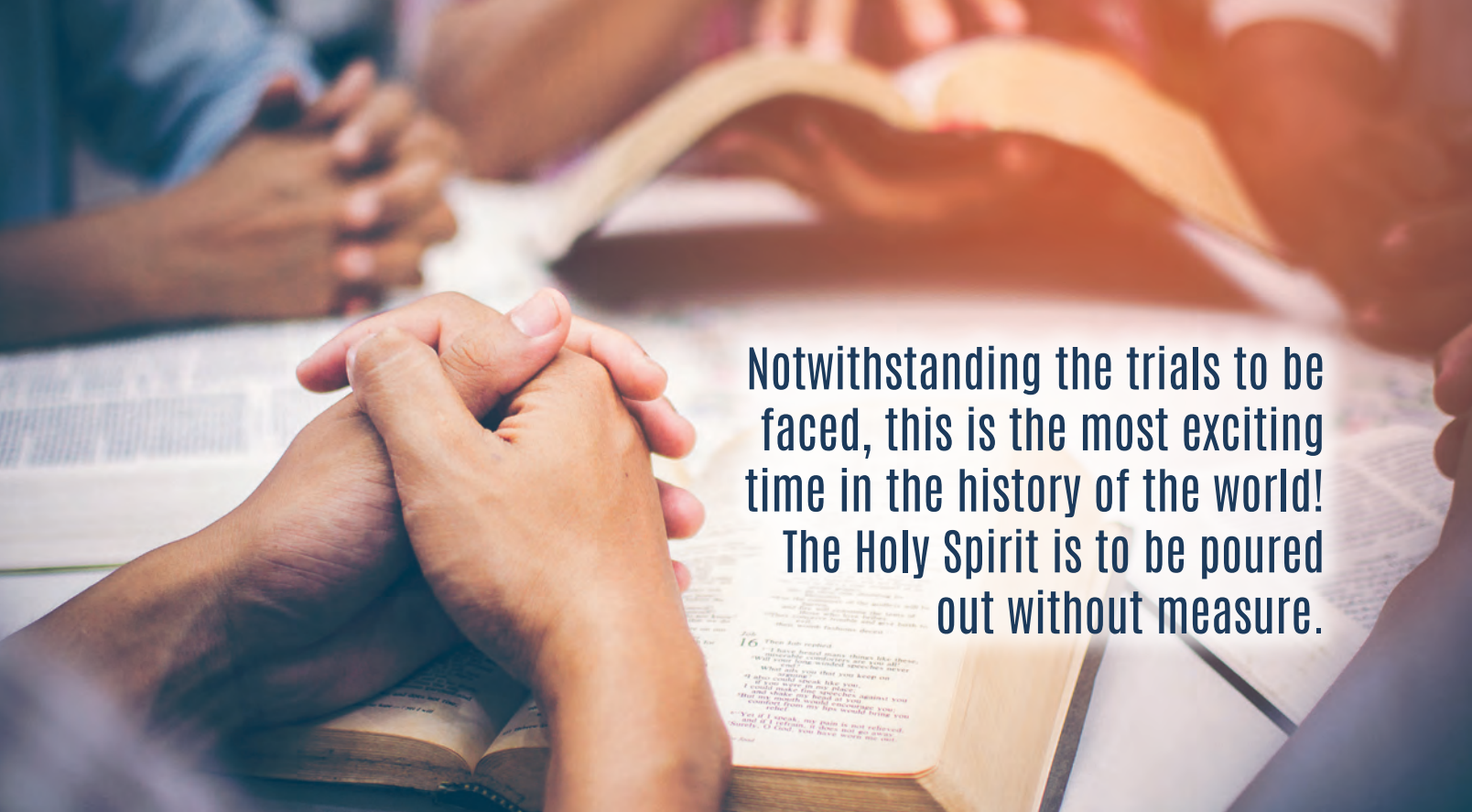
Who falls for such terrible deception? The apostle has told us in advance that even in his day, "the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let [continue to hold it back] until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:7-9).

Of whom is the apostle speaking? If we look earlier in the chapter, we see that verses 2 and 3 bid us not to be shaken in mind or deceived by the man of sin who will be revealed, "the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God" (verse 4).

Who, then, will be deceived by this antichrist power? Many tend to think that it will be something obvious and easy to recognize. But the reality is that this issue won't be that simple! "Seeing" should **not** be "believing" for the faithful at that point. Even now, there are many illusions and deceptions already taking place—false miracles, twisted doctrines, and more. The problem of misinformation is widely acknowledged nowadays and it will only get worse—and the religious world is certainly not exempt from this onslaught of perilous darkness of "spiritual wicked in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

WHAT CAN BE EXPECTED?

"The coming of the bridegroom was at midnight—the darkest hour. So the coming of Christ will take place in the darkest period of this earth's history. The days of Noah and Lot pictured the condition of the world just before the coming of the Son of man. The Scriptures pointing forward to this time declare that Satan will work with all power and 'with all deceivableness



Notwithstanding the trials to be faced, this is the most exciting time in the history of the world! The Holy Spirit is to be poured out without measure.

of unrighteousness' (2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10). His working is plainly revealed by the rapidly increasing darkness, the multitudinous errors, heresies, and delusions of these last days. Not only is Satan leading the world captive, but his deceptions are leavening the professed churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The great apostasy will develop into darkness deep as midnight, impenetrable as sackcloth of hair. To God's people it will be a night of trial, a night of weeping, a night of persecution for the truth's sake. But out of that night of darkness God's light will shine. . . .

"It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth. . . .

"Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the

people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness."³

WHAT DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT DO FOR US?

The Holy Spirit convinces us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (John 16:8). The Spirit makes us feel sorrow when we have done something wrong—and that's a good thing. For if we're not sorry, what will cause us to not repeat the same wrong? The apostle Paul speaks about this in 2 Corinthians 7:10. So, we should yearn for the Holy Spirit to go ahead and show us what we need to repent of—and it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). How wonderful it is to realize that not only are we awakened to

our wrongs, but we are also given strength to overcome them:

"At the cost of infinite sacrifice and suffering, Christ has provided for us every essential to success in the Christian warfare. **The Holy Spirit brings power that enables man to overcome. It is through the agency of the Spirit that the government of Satan is to be subdued. It is the Spirit that convinces of sin, and, with the consent of the human being, expels sin from the heart.**

The mind is then brought under a new law—the royal law of liberty."⁴

"Take heed today to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Thank God it is not too late for wrongs to be righted. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."⁵

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS WORKING RIGHT NOW!

Have you noticed that strangers now seem to be more open to conversations on spiritual matters than before the pandemic hit? All the unprecedented variables about the current crisis seems to have gotten people to thinking. This is happening through the power of the

Holy Spirit. There is an awakening taking place.

“It is through the mighty agency of the Holy Spirit that the government of Satan is to be subdued and subjected. It is the Holy Spirit that convinces of sin and expels it from the soul by the consent of the human agent. . . . Jesus reached to the very depth of human woe and misery, and His love attracts man to Himself. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, He lifts the mind up from its degradation, and fastens it upon the eternal reality. Through the merits of Christ man may be able to exercise the noblest powers of his being and expel sin from the soul.”⁶

And we have been entrusted with the noble responsibility of reaching out to these searching ones—even when it is not always convenient at times. Yet “there is no help for man, woman, or child who will not hear and obey the voice of duty, for the voice of duty is the voice of God.”⁷

AS THE SAYING GOES, THE BEST IS YET TO COME

The good news is that “the great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are ‘the times of refreshing’ to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said: ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and He shall send Jesus’ (Acts 3:19, 20).”⁸

Do you want to be part of the action in the last days? Notwithstanding the trials to be faced, this is the most exciting time in the history of the world! The Holy Spirit is to be poured out without measure. Shall we not crave, seek, and yearn for that “surplus” of it rather than spending a mere miserly investment of time with God? Now is the time to plead with the Lord for a rich, abundant outpouring of His Spirit.

Jesus declares: “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit)” (John 7:38, 39). “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us” (Psalm 62:8). The result: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and **be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience;** that, whereas they speak evil of you, as evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:15, 16). [Emphasis added.]

PICTURE THE SOON-COMING SCENE!

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works, with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. Revelation 13:13. Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.”⁹

WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING MOMENT WE CAN EVER IMAGINE?

“Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:12, 13).

Just think:

When we act by faith, in hope—unselfish actions will bring the greatest reward in eternity.

“The redeemed will meet and recognize those whose attention they have directed to the uplifted Saviour. What blessed converse they will have with these souls! ‘I was a sinner,’ it will be said, ‘without God and without hope in the world; and you came to me, and drew my attention to the precious Saviour as my only hope. And I believed in Him. I repented of my sins, and was made to sit together with His saints in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.’ Others will say: ‘I was a heathen in heathen lands. You left your friends and comfortable home, and came to teach me how to find Jesus, and believe in Him as the only true God. I demolished my idols, and worshiped God, and now I see Him face to face. I am saved, eternally saved, ever to behold Him whom I love. I then saw Him only with the eye of faith, but now I see Him as He is. I can now express my gratitude for His redeeming mercy to Him who loved me, and washed me from my sins in His own blood.’”¹⁰

This makes life worth living! So, let us prayerful consider the wonderful magnitude of the glorious opportunity before us. Shall we not eagerly fill our lamps with the Holy Spirit so freely offered—and fervently keep our candle lit? *R*

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BY Eli Tenorio



SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

Separation of church and state is a matter misunderstood by many. As religion and politics affect the lives of all of us, it is important for us to understand the necessary separation between the church and the civil government.

Some people completely rebel against all forms of government. Others even misuse the Bible to wrongly defend their reasons for not paying taxes and for disobeying authorities.

THE BIBLE IS NOT ANTI-GOVERNMENT

The Bible states that God is above any earthly authority and therefore, if we are required by governments to disobey God, we would not be able to submit to such requirement.

For example, when the early apostles were ordered not to teach the gospel to the people: “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

“When its [human government’s] claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state.’ The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.”¹

The Bible is not anti-government. On the contrary, it tells us that rulers are ministers of God for good and we are supposed to submit to kings and governors as long as this submission does not require for us to disobey God:

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well” (1 Peter 2:13, 14).

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the

power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:3, 4).

One of the circumstances in which Christ showed respect to the state was when He made it clear that we as His followers are supposed to faithfully pay our taxes to the government.

Jesus responded to His challengers: “Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:17, 19–21).

THE PURPOSE OF THE STATE

According to the Bible, the state is ordained of God: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). Government is ordained of God for the purpose of keeping order and granting peace to its citizens. The apostle Paul makes the appeal: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2:1, 2).

To fulfill God's purpose, the state must give its citizens freedom to worship God and to exercise their faith without governmental interference.

Worldly governments deal with the temporal affairs without tampering with the God-given rights of its citizens to worship the Creator according to their faith—or not to worship Him at all if they so choose. God does not force anyone to worship Him and He does not give authority to anyone to force the conscience of others.

Government on earth is established to fulfill God's purposes and any government will last only as long as the Omnipotent One allows it to. "He changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Daniel 2:21).

IS THE CHURCH ALLOWED TO RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FROM THE GOVERNMENT?

The Bible gives quite a few examples where God's church in the past benefited from assistance provided by worldly governments, who were moved by God Himself in order to assist His people. The Spirit of Prophecy comments on some of these circumstances, explaining that the church is supposed to impart to the world the truth God has entrusted to it—and in its turn, the church is also supposed to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do in behalf of His church to advance God's cause:


"O that Christians might realize more and still more fully that it is their privilege and their duty, while cherishing right principles, to take advantage of every heaven-sent opportunity for advancing God's kingdom in this world."²

"Just as long as we are in this world, and the Spirit of God is striving with the world, we are to receive as well as to impart favors. We are to give to the world the light of truth as presented in the Sacred Scriptures, and we are to receive from the world that which God moves upon them to do in behalf of His cause. The Lord still moves upon the hearts of kings and rulers in behalf of His people, and it becomes those who are so deeply interested in the religious liberty question not to cut off any favors, or withdraw themselves from the help that God has moved men to give, for the advancement of His cause.

"We find examples in the word of God concerning this very matter. Cyrus, king of Persia, made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it into writing, saying: 'Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He hath charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel.' A second commandment was issued by Darius for the building of the house of the Lord, and is recorded in the sixth chapter of Ezra.

"The Lord God of Israel has placed His goods in the hands of unbelievers, but they are to be used in favor of doing the works that must be done for a fallen world. The agents through whom these gifts come, may open up avenues through which the truth may go. They may have no sympathy with the work, and no faith in Christ, and no practice in His words; but their gifts are not to be refused on that account."³

"I have repeatedly been shown that we might receive far more favors than we do in many ways if we would approach men in wisdom, acquaint them with our work, and give them an opportunity of doing those things which it is our privilege to induce them to do for the advancement of the work of God."⁴



Government on earth is established to fulfill God's purposes and any government will last only as long as the Omnipotent One allows it to.



THE EXAMPLE OF NEHEMIAH

“Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty. The means that he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give. These gifts may open ways by which the light of truth shall go to many benighted lands. The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused.”⁵

RECEIVING GIFTS FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES

“You inquire with respect to the propriety of receiving gifts from Gentiles or the heathen. The question is not strange; but I would ask you, Who is it that owns our world? Who are the real owners of houses and lands? Is it not God? He has an abundance in our world which He has placed in the hands of men, by which the hungry might be supplied with food, the naked with clothing, the homeless with homes. The Lord would move upon worldly men, even idolaters, to give of their abundance for the support of the work, if we would approach them wisely,

and give them an opportunity of doing those things which it is their privilege to do. What they would give we should be privileged to receive.

“We should become acquainted with men in high places and, by exercising the wisdom of the serpent, and the harmlessness of the dove, we might obtain advantage from them, for God would move upon their minds to do many things in behalf of His people. If proper persons would set before those who have means and influence the needs of the work of God in a proper light, these men might do much to advance the cause of God in our world. We have put away from us privileges and advantages that we might have had the benefit of, because we chose to stand independent of the world. But we need not sacrifice one principle of truth while taking advantage of every opportunity to advance the cause of God.”⁶

According to the Bible examples and the inspired statements above, we understand that the church can accept assistance from anyone as far as no conditions are imposed to compromise our beliefs—and if by so doing the church is not infringing upon the necessary separation that must exist between the church and the state. Keep in mind that all that is in this world belongs to our Creator. “For every beast of the for-

est is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof” (Psalm 50:10–12).

WHY IS THE SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE NECESSARY?

Since religion and politics must be separate from each other, the church and its members cannot get involved with politics:

“Those who teach the Bible in our churches and our schools are not at liberty to unite in making apparent their prejudices for or against political men or measures, because by so doing they stir up the minds of others, leading each to advocate his favorite theory. . . .

“The Lord would have His people bury political questions. On these themes silence is eloquence. Christ calls upon His followers to come into unity on the pure gospel principles which are plainly revealed in the word of God. We cannot with safety vote for political parties; for we do not know whom we are voting for. We cannot with safety take part in any political scheme. . . .

“What are we to do, then?—Let political questions alone.”⁷

The state with its politics is supposed to take care of the temporal affairs of its citizen, including granting them religious freedom. To the church is given the task to preach the Bible Gospel, thus providing for the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of this world. Even the welfare ministry given to church, to provide for the temporal needs of less fortunate, relieving their suffering, is a spiritual connotation as it has also the goal of revealing God’s love and presenting His kingdom to humanity.

“In the name of the Lord I would say to the teachers in our schools, Attend to your appointed work. You are not called upon by God to engage in politics. ‘All ye are brethren,’ Christ declares, ‘and as one you are to stand under the banner of Prince Emmanuel.’ ‘What doth the Lord

thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?"⁸

Keep in mind that there were many abuses by the government in the time of Jesus. His solution was not political but spiritual. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

"The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart."⁹

UNITING THE CHURCH WITH THE STATE BECOMES A PROBLEM

When religion is used for political purposes or when the state interferes with the way people worship God, they lose their God-given purpose and become illegitimate agents of wrongly acquired power. "[King] David's power had been given him by God, but to be exercised only in harmony with the divine law. When he commanded that which was contrary to God's law, it became sin to obey."¹⁰

It is contrary to the will of God when church and state unite to compel people by force to attend or support any religion or cause them to be punished for their religious opinions or beliefs. This is exactly how the leopardlike beast of Revelation 13 began its existence. "It was by departure from the Lord, and alliance with the heathen, that the Jewish church became a harlot; and Rome, corrupting herself in like manner by seeking the support of worldly powers, receives a like condemnation."¹¹

In the past, when a fallen church controlled the state, it used both religious and state power to impose

its false doctrines. And it is going to happen again:

"And let it be remembered, it is the boast of Rome that she never changes. The principles of Gregory VII and Innocent III are still the principles of the Romish Church. And had she but the power, she would put them in practice with as much vigor now as in past centuries. Let the principle once be established in the United States, that the church may employ or control the power of the State; that religious observances may be enforced by secular laws; in short, that the authority of church and State is to dominate the conscience, and the triumph of Rome in this country is assured."¹²

"The dignitaries of church and State will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday. The lack of divine authority will be supplied by oppressive enactments. Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respect-

"The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Saviour attempted no civil reforms. . . . Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures."



“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown and now it will spring up and bear fruit.”

ed. In the soon-coming conflict we shall see exemplified the prophet's words: 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' [Revelation 12:17.]¹³

“Heretofore those who presented the truths of the third angel's message have often been regarded as mere alarmists. Their predictions that religious intolerance would gain control in the United States, that church and State would unite to persecute those who keep the commandments of God, have been pronounced groundless and absurd. It has been confidently declared that this land could never become other than what it has been, the defender of religious freedom. But as the question of enforcing Sunday observance is widely agitated, the event so long doubted and disbelieved is seen to be approaching, and the third message will produce an effect which it could not have had before.”¹⁴

FALSE RELIGION USES CIVIL POWER, BUT SINCERE SOULS WILL ACCEPT THE TRUTH

Despite the difficulties faced by the faithful believers who will be falsely accused, fined, persecuted, and imprisoned, God's people will remain faithful and the truth will reach sincere souls who will take their stand to keep all the commandments of God. Thus the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ will triumph:

“As the controversy extends into new fields, and the minds of the people are called to God's down-trodden law, Satan is astir. The power attending the message will only

madden those who oppose it. The clergy will put forth almost superhuman efforts to shut away the light, lest it should shine upon their flocks. By every means at their command they will endeavor to suppress the discussion of these vital questions. The church appeals to the strong arm of civil power, and in this work, papists and Protestants unite. As the movement for Sunday enforcement becomes more bold and decided, the law will be invoked against commandment-keepers. They will be threatened with fines and imprisonment, and some will be offered positions of influence, and other rewards and advantages, as inducements to renounce their faith. But their steadfast answer is, 'Show us from the Word of God our error,'—the same plea that was made by Luther under similar circumstances. Those who are arraigned before the courts make a strong vindication of the truth, and some who hear them are led to take their stand to keep all the commandments of God. Thus light will be brought before thousands who otherwise would know nothing of these truths.”¹⁵

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from Heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers. Satan also works with lying wonders, even bringing down fire from heaven in the sight of men. [Revelation 13:13.] Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand.

“The message will be carried not so much by argument as by

the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. The seed has been sown, and now it will spring up and bear fruit. The publications distributed by missionary workers have exerted their influence, yet many whose minds were impressed have been prevented from fully comprehending the truth or from yielding obedience. Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which have held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side.”¹⁶

Praised and blessed be the Lord our God for always providing for all the needs of His church, for sustaining it with His power and keeping His people separated from politics.

And may the Lord in His mercy give each one of us wisdom and strength to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). *R*

References

- ¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 68.
- ² *Christian Service*, p. 168.
- ³ *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 183.
- ⁴ *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 202, 203.
- ⁵ *Prophets and Kings*, p. 634.
- ⁶ *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 197, 198.
- ⁷ *Gospel Workers*, pp. 391, 392.
- ⁸ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 477.
- ⁹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 509.
- ¹⁰ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 719.
- ¹¹ *The Great Controversy* (1888), p. 581.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 580, 581.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 581.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 592.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 605.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 607.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 612.

FACING THE *Fury* OF THE DRAGON



In the book of Revelation, the Bible speaks of a dragon-like beast whom we generally know by a different name. “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Revelation 12:9). He was not some base creature that developed in some dark passages of earth’s castaways—but rather originated in the high heavenly plane until he warred against the Majesty of the heavenly courts. “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (Revelation 12:7, 8).

Once this dragon-like beast found himself on this earth, he continued his warfare against the King of kings even when He came to this world a helpless babe. “And

his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:4).

Why was he so antagonistic against Christ? What was it that irritated him so much that he was waiting at the birth of Jesus to snatch Him away from His earthly mother in a blink of an eyelid? “Satan wished to change the government of God, to fix his own seal to the rules of God’s kingdom. Christ would not be brought into this desire, and here the warfare against Christ commenced and waxed strong.”¹

This warfare did not end when Jesus went back to the heavenly courts. Satan continues it against anyone who dare reject his satanic authority and pledge allegiance to the Sovereign of the universe. “And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of

iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Revelation 12:5, 6).

The constant work of the archenemy is to persecute those who are loyal to the government of God and this he does by continually finding some way to condemn the people of God. John the Revelator describes: “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

The accuser of the brethren does not always do this work personally. He uses those who are imbued with the same spirit that envelops him—not only individuals but also nations. When a nation acts like



their satanic majesty, they become a dragon. I will list just two examples here. “Speak, and say, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself” (Ezekiel 29:3). When Jesus was born, it was the Roman power that had the same spirit:

“The dragon is said to be Satan (Revelation 12:9); he it was that moved upon Herod to put the Saviour to death. But the chief agent of Satan in making war upon Christ and His people during the first centuries of the Christian Era was the Roman Empire, in which paganism was the prevailing religion. Thus while the dragon, primarily, represents Satan, it is, in a secondary sense, a symbol of pagan Rome.”²

PRACTICING FOR THE FUTURE

From the study of prophecy, we know that beasts represent nations in their various forms. (Daniel 7:17, 23.) So when we see an animal coming up after 1798, we know that it is another nation that comes into existence. “And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a

lamb, and he spake as a dragon” (Revelation 13:11).

In our study of Revelation, we find that the previous beast that looked like a leopard symbolized the combined authority of the civil and religious powers of the papal kingdom. This kingdom received its power from imperial Rome (Revelation 13:2) and came to its end—or as the verses state, receive a “deadly wound” in 1798 (Revelation 13:3, 10). It was during this time that that lamblike beast comes on the scene of action. At that time it is “coming up out of the earth,” revealing that it just recently came on the scene rather than being born right then. As far as nations are concerned, 10 years is a really young nation. It was on June 21, 1788 that the United States was born when the colonies ratified the Constitution that formed this country. Clearly this second beast represents the United States of America.

It may seem like a good beginning for such a nation; but once a country has a taste for power, it is not so easily quenched. “And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him” (Revelation 13:12). And what was it that this first beast accomplished? “And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to con-

tinue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:5–8).

What a terrible description of the work of a country that began with such ideals of freedom and peace! Why then does this second beast do all that? What is he trying to accomplish? “. . . [A]nd causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed” (Revelation 13:12). And what does it mean to worship that first beast, to bow in homage to the papal power?

“The prediction that it will speak ‘as a dragon’ and exercise ‘all the power of the first beast’ plainly foretells a development of the spirit of intolerance and persecution that was manifested by the nations represented by the dragon and the leopardlike beast. And the statement that the beast with two horns ‘causeth the earth and them which

dwell therein to worship the first beast' indicates that the authority of this nation is to be exercised in enforcing some observance which shall be an act of homage to the papacy."³

How does one convince freedom-loving Americans to give up their liberties and then do the work of persecution? "And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live" (Revelation 13:14).

To make an American do such a thing must have an originating cause. What causes people to be willing to subject themselves into some kind of slavery contrary to their normal way of thinking? "And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:15). Something must make them so fearful of dying that they are willing to do anything in order to receive the miracle that will let them live a few years longer.

So, how will they replicate this first beast in Protestant America?

"When the early church became corrupted by departing from the simplicity of the gospel and accepting heathen rites and customs, she lost the Spirit and power of God; and in order to control the consciences of the people, she sought the support of the secular power. The result was the papacy, a church that controlled the power of the state and employed it to further her

own ends, especially for the punishment of 'heresy.' In order for the United States to form an image of the beast, the religious power must so control the civil government that the authority of the state will also be employed by the church to accomplish her own ends."⁴

And what will be the disastrous result? "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name" (Revelation 13:15-17).

MIRACLES

What kind of miracles are people constantly seeking? It has to do with their health. Even today, as a pandemic is raging across the world (whether it just happened or was manufactured to have specific effects on the population), instead of evaluating how the laws of health both physical and mental are being upheld, multitudes just look for some miracle vaccine to solve all their problems. It is at this time that we can expect Satan to work both in creating disease as well as providing some miracle cure.

"While appearing to the children of men as a great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring disease and disaster, until

populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great conflagrations, in fierce tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes, in every place and in a thousand forms, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous. Destruction will be upon both man and beast."⁵ This is just a taste of what will happen in the future.

How do people give up their liberties? "Edwin Burke, speaking before the House of Commons in 1784, declared, 'People never give up their liberties but under some delusion.'"⁶

The following electronic message was forwarded to me from Australia. The name credited to it is Miguel Michael Angel: "We are seeing the most draconian measures enforced at all levels of government that we've ever seen in our lifetimes, and yet rather than being alarmed by the things going on, so many of you applaud.

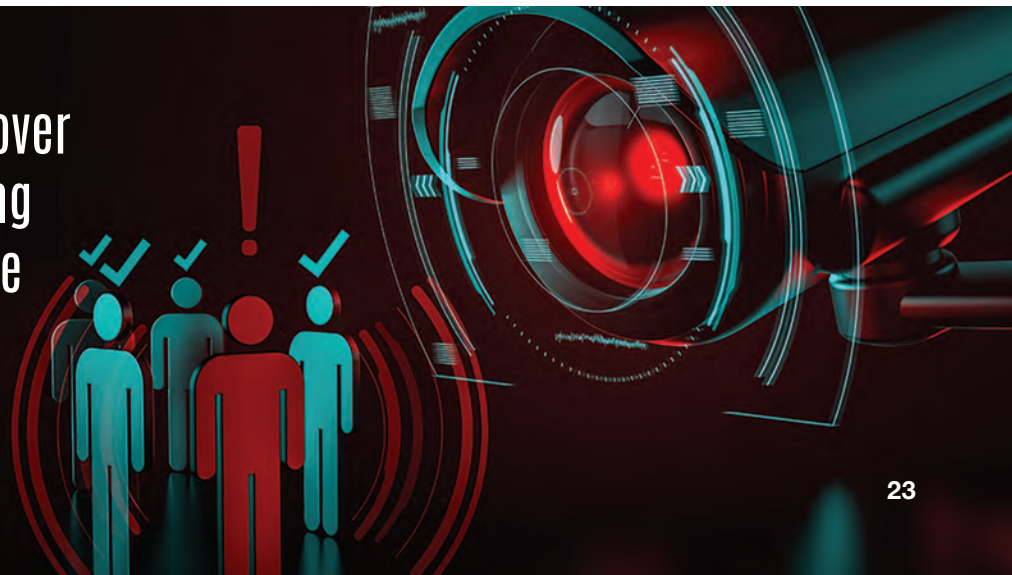
"People are being arrested for spending too much time outside, and you applaud.

"Pastors are being arrested for daring to hold church services, and you applaud.

"A child's birthday party is raided by police, and you applaud. . . .

"A young woman is ticketed for going on a leisurely drive alone

Today governments all over the world are just flexing their muscles before the real drama unfolds.



How do we prepare for the final events so that we are found faithful? “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8).

because it's deemed 'non-essential travel,' and you applaud.

"A lone paddleboarder in the ocean on a beach without any other people around is arrested because he's violating quarantine orders, and you applaud.

"People are being denied life saving medical treatments because they're not a priority right now (not 'essential' as deemed by the government) as the entirety of our medical system is focused on one thing, and you applaud. . . .

"Businesses are being forcibly closed and padlocked and owners arrested for refusing to shut down, and you applaud.

"You're being told to use hotlines and online forms provided by your local governments to report your neighbors who don't obey, and you comply.

"You scold people day after day for not obeying government edicts, and if any of us dare to question what's happening, you lecture about how we're a danger to society and we just don't care about people dying.

"You've somehow managed to convince yourselves that the people whose lives are affected by a virus are MUCH more important than the people whose lives are being destroyed (and in many cases, leading to death) by the effects of a worldwide economic shutdown and impending worldwide depression the likes of which no one has ever seen before.

"At what point will you start QUESTIONING what's going on? How far does the government have to push before you're jolted awaked from your slumber? How far are you willing to go with this?"

Another interesting post:

"The coronavirus will come and go but the government will never forget how easy it was to take control of your life. To control every sporting event, classroom, restaurant table, and church pew. And even if you are

allowed to leave your house." This was seen on Facebook.

Today governments all over the world are just flexing their muscles before the real drama unfolds. "And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon" (Revelation 13:11). What happens when he no longer just speaks but begins to act like that dragon?

If all work can be stopped for a month or two, how much easier it will be to stop it once a week on Sundays?

CAUSE

Are people really looking at the cause of all these diseases and catastrophes? We blame everything else except the real issues that began all this rebellion in heaven. "The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left" (Isaiah 24:4-6).

And what will be the ultimate result? "And then the great deceiver will persuade men that those who serve God are causing these evils. The class that have provoked the displeasure of Heaven will charge all their troubles upon those whose obedience to God's commandments is a perpetual reproof to transgressors. It will be declared that men are offending God by the violation of the Sunday sabbath; that this sin has brought calamities which will not cease until Sunday observance shall be strictly enforced; and that those who present the claims of the fourth

commandment, thus destroying reverence for Sunday, are troublers of the people, preventing their restoration to divine favor and temporal prosperity."⁷

SELF-EXAMINATION

Often when we compare these last-day events, we think that God's people are faithful no matter what. But God shows our real character. "Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel" (Zechariah 3:3). Yes, we can see that we are actually sinners in need of a Saviour. How do we prepare for the final events so that we are found faithful?

"[I]t is not God's will that you should be distrustful and torture your soul with the fear that God will not accept you because you are sinful and unworthy. 'Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you' (James 4:8). Present your case before Him, pleading the merits of the blood shed for you upon Calvary's cross. Satan will accuse you of being a great sinner, and you must admit this, but you can say: 'I know I am a sinner, and that is the reason I need a Saviour. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin' (1 John 1:7). 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (verse 9). I have no merit or goodness whereby I may claim salvation, but I present before God the all-atoning blood of the spotless Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is my only plea."⁸ *R*

References

¹ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, p. 180.

² *The Great Controversy*, p. 438.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 442.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 589, 590.

⁶ Roy Allan Anderson: *Unfolding the Revelation*, pp. 140, 141; Pacific Press Publ. Assoc., Mountain View, C.A.

⁷ *The Great Controversy*, p. 590.

⁸ *Faith and Works*, pp. 105, 106.

ALL FACES ARE PALE

[Emphasis added throughout.]

[Emphasis added throughout, with excerpts from the book *The Great Controversy*.]

The perfectly unique environment that God created for the plant, animal, and human life on our wonderful “blue planet” is optimally situated in the infinite universe. And what magnificent, unmatched wisdom and craftsmanship are manifested in the unsurpassably ingenious systems interacting in our bodies! These realities cannot but leave the sensitive observer in a profound state of amazement and reverence before the unequalled majesty of the Creator.

CONSIDERING THE VAST CREATION

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world” (Psalm 19:1–4).

“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; **he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited**: I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:18).

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

The psalmist brilliantly acknowledges to God: “For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them” (Psalm 139:13–17)!

These are undeniable proofs that “the LORD he is God: **it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves**” (Psalm 100:3)—creation bearing a faithful and undeniable testimony about its Author: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. For **the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse**” (Romans 1:19, 20).

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

BREATHTAKING WISDOM

There is such unfathomable wisdom and stunning genius in everything God has made, it can only inspire us with deep, inexpressible awe:

“O LORD, how manifold are thy works! **in wisdom hast thou made them all**: the earth is full of thy riches” (Psalm 104:24).

“He hath made the earth by his power, **he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding**” (Jeremiah 51:15).

At every step and in each detail of creation, one can recognize the infinite love pervading the whole creation, as the motive underlying each and every one of the Creator’s actions.

“Every flower, every shrub, every tree, answered the purpose of its Creator. **Everything upon which the eye rested was lovely and filled the mind with thoughts of the love of God.** . . . Not a drop of rain falls, not a ray of light is shed on our unthankful world, but it testifies to the forbearance and love of God.”¹

“The lofty trees, the lovely birds caroling forth their happy songs to their Creator, speak to their senses of the goodness, mercy, and benevolence of God. **Every leaf and flower with their varied tints, perfuming the air, teach them that God is love. All that is good and lovely and beautiful in this world speaks to them of the love of our heavenly Father.** The character of God they may discern in His created works.”²

There can hardly be anything more wonderful and awe-inspiring than the perfect combination of God’s wisdom and love displayed in His creation. This we are to perceive clearly for ourselves, and also teach others “to see the wisdom and love of God in His created works.”³ Therein we can recognize the Creator as the omnipotent and absolute Sovereign of the universe, fully worthy not only of our admiration but also of our permanent, lifelong worship.

To impress this reality in our minds and souls, God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath day, setting it apart as a day of rest and communion of man with God, appointed to keep vivid for the human race the remembrance of the identity and magnificence of the Creator, as reflected in the marvelous work of creation. Later on, the fourth commandment brought additional details about the purpose and the right manner of keeping the Sabbath.

FLAWLESS PERFECTION TAINTED

By dragging our first parents into disobedience, Satan managed to divert the human race from the worship we all owe to our Creator to such an extent, that God had to notice the sad reality “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

The widespread prevalence of the evil seemed to announce the universal victory of evil over righteousness and the full allegiance of man to the archenemy in his rebellion against the Almighty Creator of the universe. Nonetheless, even though the circumstances seemed

utterly desperate and without any hope, God had not yet uttered His last word. His cause seemed to be defeated in this world and there was hardly anyone left to stand truly on the side of obedience towards Him.

OUR ONLY HOPE

Thankfully, God’s decision was not to give up on us, but rather to reveal His infinite love for us by the most supreme sacrifice He could have ever made: Giving His only begotten Son to redeem us. And at Golgatha, the universe witnessed the highest and most glorious love declaration ever conceived.

When “the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people” (Isaiah 60:2) “the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isaiah 9:2). This light meant the one who introduced Himself by saying: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). This light pierced the gross darkness “and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). And this was the light of the knowledge of the love of God revealed in the incomprehensible sacrifice He made for our redemption: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

By the crucifixion of Jesus, which appeared to be the utter defeat of the plan of redemption and the destruction of His disciples’ hopes, God has actually achieved the ultimate crushing of the head of the serpent, and the shameful death of Jesus on the cross was followed by the glorious resurrection and ascension with the promise of His return to take all the faithful home to their heavenly-prepared mansions.

History has proven that God is a real master at overturning hopeless situations and making a glorious victory out of what seemed to be the utter defeat! And, based on the frequency of this pattern, it seems

that He is not only able to do it, but that He really enjoys doing it! He would leave situations to develop until every glimmer of hope seems to have perished, and when least expected, He intervenes with His Almighty hand, turning everything into a brilliant, resounding victory of His cause!

AMAZING EXAMPLES

- Jacob facing Laban and Esau and his men (Genesis chapters 31 and 33).
- Joseph’s ascension from slavery to the position of the governor of Egypt (Genesis chapter 41).
- The delivery of the people of Israel out of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus chapter 14).
- Elisha and his servant surrounded in Samaria (2 Kings chapter 6).
- David and Goliath (1 Samuel chapter 17).
- Esther and Mordecai (Esther chapters 8, 9).
- Daniel and his 3 friends facing the destruction order of the king (Daniel chapter 2).
- Daniel’s 3 companions in the fiery furnace (Daniel chapter 3).
- Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel chapter 6).

All these instances, however glorious in themselves, are but small examples of the ultimate, supreme overturn through God’s Providence, culminating world’s history and imminently preceding the second coming of Jesus.

WHAT’S HAPPENING NOW?

According to Bible prophecy, everything is going to get worse before it gets better — and even perfect — again.

Revelation 13 announces the coming of a beastlike power which

will force humanity to universal worship of another power, called “the first beast.” It will also bring about the establishment of “the image of the beast” which will eventually enforce the death penalty upon those who will refuse to worship it.

But prior to that, by abolishing democratic freedoms and human rights, this beastlike power will establish a worldwide dictatorial system, which will impose its mark upon the right hand or the foreheads of all inhabitants of the earth, “both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond.” By means of economic sanctions, the society will prohibit those whom they falsely deem as disobedient from engaging in any commercial transactions, so that “no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name” (Revelation 13:17). The reality is that these persecuted ones will be obeying the Creator and His word, not their persecutors.

There are quite a few elements involved in this final crisis:

1. Since it’s about worship, it definitely has a religious component, having to do with obedience either towards God as the Creator, or the created beast.
2. Since “all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond” will be required to get the “mark of the beast,” there needs to be a kind of global form of government with worldwide jurisdiction.
3. In order for those events to happen—for whatever reason—people need to be deprived of their civil rights and the democratic systems need to be abolished and replaced with oppressive ones.
4. The technical conditions need to be given in order that the prohibition from buying or selling may be enforced; a cashless society seeming to be the optimal environment for that.
5. Obedience to the beast stands in direct opposition to obedience



to God and the worship of the Almighty Creator, so people will have to choose between the two and to accept the consequences, which can go progressively from losing basic civil rights and liberties to being deprived of the right to perform commercial transactions, and ultimately to life itself in the form of a death penalty.

And, during this past year, it has been the first time in world history for such conditions to be realistically in sight and the entire socio-political and economical setting to be configured to make it possible. In the book, *The Great Controversy*, the inspired author provides a glimpse into the terrifying scenes which are to happen soon:

“Those who honor the Bible Sabbath will be denounced as enemies of law and order, as breaking down the moral restraints of society, causing anarchy and corruption, and calling down the judgments of God upon the earth. Their conscientious scruples will be pronounced obstinacy, stubbornness, and contempt of authority. They will be accused of disaffection toward the government. Ministers who deny the obligation of the divine law will present from the pulpit the duty of yielding obedience to the civil authorities as ordained of God. . . .

“Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for

truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected.”⁴

THE FAST-APPROACHING SCENES

“When [Christ] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. . . . The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. . . . Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.

“Those who honor the law of God have been accused of bringing judgments upon the world, and they will be regarded as the cause of the fearful convulsions of nature and the strife and bloodshed among men that are filling the earth with woe. . . . Satan will excite to still greater intensity the spirit of hatred and persecution. . . .

“The persistent refusal of a small minority to yield to the popu-

lar demand will make them objects of universal execration. It will be urged that the few who stand in opposition to an institution of the church and a law of the state ought not to be tolerated; that it is better for them to suffer than for whole nations to be thrown into confusion and lawlessness. . . . A decree will finally be issued against those who hallow the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, denouncing them as deserving of the severest punishment and giving the people liberty, after a certain time, to put them to death. . . .

“The people of God will then be plunged into those scenes of affliction and distress described by the prophet as the time of Jacob’s trouble. ‘Thus saith the Lord: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. . . . **All faces are turned into paleness.**”⁵

“As the decree issued by the various rulers of Christendom against commandment keepers shall withdraw the protection of government and abandon them to those who desire their destruction, the people of God will flee from the cities and villages and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places. Many will find refuge in the strongholds of the mountains. . . . The beloved of God pass weary days, bound in chains, shut in by prison bars, sentenced to be slain, some apparently left to die of starvation in dark and loathsome dungeons. No human ear is open to hear their moans; no human hand is ready to lend them help.”⁶

“When the protection of human laws shall be withdrawn from those who honor the law of God, there will be, in different lands, a simultaneous movement for their destruction. . . .

“The people of God—some in prison cells, some hidden in solitary retreats in the forests and the mountains—still plead for divine protection, while in every quarter companies of armed men, urged on by hosts of evil angels, are preparing for the work of death. It is now, in the hour of utmost extremity, that the God of Israel will interpose for the deliverance of His chosen. . . .

“With shouts of triumph, jeering, and imprecation, throngs of evil men are about to rush upon their prey, when, lo, a dense blackness, deeper than the darkness of the night, falls upon the earth. Then a rainbow, shining with the glory from the throne of God, spans the heavens and seems to encircle each praying company. The angry multitudes are suddenly arrested. Their mocking cries die away. The objects of their murderous rage are forgotten. With fearful forebodings they gaze upon the symbol of God’s covenant and long to be shielded from its overpowering brightness.

“By the people of God a voice, clear and melodious, is heard, saying, ‘Look up,’ and lifting their eyes to the heavens, they behold the bow of promise. The black, angry clouds that covered the firmament are parted, and like Stephen they look up steadfastly into heaven and see the glory of God and the Son of man seated upon His throne. . . . Again a voice, musical and triumphant, is heard, saying: ‘They come! they come! holy, harmless, and undefiled. They have kept the word of My patience; they shall walk among the angels;’ **and the pale, quivering lips of those who have held fast their faith utter a shout of victory.**

“It is at midnight that God manifests His power for the deliverance of His people. The sun appears, shining in its strength. Signs and wonders follow in quick succession. The wicked look with terror and amazement upon the scene, while the righteous behold with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Everything in nature seems turned out of its course. The streams cease to flow. Dark, heavy clouds come up and clash against each other. In the midst of the angry heavens is one clear space of indescribable glory, whence comes the voice of God like the sound of many waters, saying: ‘It is done’ (Revelation 16:17).

“That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. There is a mighty earthquake, ‘such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.’ Verses 17, 18. The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from

the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of a hurricane like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness are swallowed up by the angry waters. . . . The proudest cities of the earth are laid low. The lordly palaces, upon which the world’s great men have lavished their wealth in order to glorify themselves, are crumbling to ruin before their eyes. Prison walls are rent asunder, and God’s people, who have been held in bondage for their faith, are set free. . . .

“Thick clouds still cover the sky; yet the sun now and then breaks through, appearing like the avenging eye of Jehovah. Fierce lightnings leap from the heavens, enveloping the earth in a sheet of flame. Above the terrific roar of thunder, voices, mysterious and awful, declare the doom of the wicked. The words spoken are not comprehended by all; but they are distinctly understood by the false teachers. Those who a little before were so reckless, so boastful and defiant, so exultant in their cruelty to God’s commandment-keeping people, are now overwhelmed with consternation and shuddering in fear. Their wails are heard above the sound of the elements. Demons acknowledge the deity of Christ and tremble before His power, while men are supplicating for mercy and groveling in abject terror.”⁷

DELIVERANCE!

“Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign

of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. Not now a 'man of sorrows,' to drink the bitter cup of shame and woe, He comes, victor in heaven and earth, to judge the living and the dead. . . . As the living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head; but a diadem of glory rests on His holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. 'And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, *King of kings, and Lord of lords.*' Revelation 19:16.

"Before His presence 'all faces are turned into paleness;' upon the rejecters of God's mercy falls the terror of eternal despair. 'The heart melteth, and the knees smite together, . . . and the faces of them all gather blackness.' Jeremiah 30:6; Nahum 2:10. The righteous cry with trembling: 'Who shall be able to stand?' The angels' song is hushed, and there is a period of awful silence. Then the voice of Jesus is heard, saying: 'My grace is sufficient for you.' The faces of the righteous are lighted up, and joy fills every heart. And the angels strike a note higher and sing again as they draw still nearer to the earth."⁸

"Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: 'Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!' Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: 'O



**As the living cloud
comes still nearer,
every eye beholds
the Prince of life.**

death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?' 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory. . . .

"All blemishes and deformities are left in the grave. Restored to the tree of life in the long-lost Eden, the redeemed will 'grow up' (Malachi 4:2) to the full stature of the race in its primeval glory. The last lingering traces of the curse of sin will be removed, and Christ's faithful ones will appear in 'the beauty of the Lord our God,' in mind and soul and body reflecting the perfect image of their Lord. Oh, wonderful redemption! long talked of, long hoped for, contemplated with eager anticipation, but never fully understood.

"The living righteous are changed 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' At the voice of God they were glorified; now they are made immortal and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air. Angels 'gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.' Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers' arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the city of God."⁹

The faithful few will have acknowledged God as their Creator, and have worshipped "him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters" (Revelation 14:7) as the only Sovereign of the universe; they have kept themselves away from Babylon and separated from her false doctrines and wicked practices. They have not worshipped the beast nor accepted its mark, but instead have persisted in the patience of the saints, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

They have been faithful unto the end, and it is now time for them to receive the crown of life. Therefore, they will be addressed the words of acceptance, which will see them through into the eternal home of the children of God: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:23). *R*

References

- ¹ *Counsels for the Church*, pp. 264, 265.
- ² *Child Guidance*, p. 54.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ⁴ *The Great Controversy*, p. 592.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 614–616.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 626.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 635–638.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 640, 641.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 644, 645.

England On October 10, 2020, a baptism was held in England at Winchelsea Beach, a village about 100 miles south of London. The two baptism candidates left their old lives in the Atlantic Ocean and were raised up to new life in Jesus Christ. May the Lord keep them tenderly in His care!



Philippines October 24, 2020, three precious souls were baptized and fellowshipped into the SDARM Church in Pugawan, San Francisco, Quezon Province. We praise the Lord for the decision of these souls. May God continue guiding and blessing them!



U.S.A.

Sabbath, October 3, 2020, marked a very special moment for our local SDARM Church in Nashville, Tennessee. Heaven rejoiced with the church on earth upon the occasion of a newly baptized brother in Christ.



Brazil

On November 21, 2020, we had a great spiritual celebration in the Sorocaba region in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. Ten souls, most of them young people, made their public commitment to God through baptism. This joyous event was held at the South Brazilian Union headquarters in Itú, São Paulo. We invite you to keep our new brothers and sisters in your prayers!



Peru

On December 19, 2020, eight souls in Lima, Peru, mostly young people, gave their lives to our heavenly Father. We praise the Lord for this event held at the facilities of the Puente Piedra Church, headquarters of the Peruvian Union.



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MOVING? Please let us know.

Kindness IN GREATNESS

We read in the Bible of great men who were really nice to others. They were unselfish—they thought of what was best for others rather than themselves. Can you name some of these men?

One of them is **Abraham**. When the wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was so very bad, God saw the need to destroy those cities. Why? Wickedness, sin, evil, all hurt people. So, when crimes and really evil things were being done there, God wanted to stop the suffering. If the Sodom and Gomorrah would keep going the way they were, many more people would be hurt. But before destroying the city, God had a talk with His friend, Abraham. Abraham asked God to not destroy the city if there would be only ten righteous people in it.

That was really nice of Abraham. Why? Those cities were not very far from where he lived, so maybe those bad people might later become a danger to him, too. But Abraham's main thought was not for his own safety; it was to save those people if possible. Since there were not even ten righteous ones there, God had to destroy the cities. But we see that Abraham cared about the people just like God did. Many more cities today are not destroyed only because God, just like in the days of Abraham, truly cares about the people in them.

What about **Moses**? He was so very patient with people who seemed to be so unthankful and

were complaining all the time. But once when they were behaving very badly, God was ready to destroy them because they really deserved it. But Moses asked God to spare them and blot his own name out of the book of life—and save them instead of himself. Just think! If that had happened, the bad people would be saved and Moses would not be! But this faithful man had so much love, he was willing to die to save others who did not deserve it.

How about **Jonathan**? He was the son of a king, so normally he would be the one to get the throne after his father would die. But he knew in his heart that God had chosen David to become the king, not him. Jonathan did not get mad or jealous. He protected David so well, he was even willing to die for his friend. What a great man!

John the Baptist is another unselfish man. He preached about Jesus' coming, but when the time came for people to follow Jesus, John the Baptist stepped out of the way. He knew Jesus was now to be the One everyone was to watch and listen to, not himself anymore.

Of course, these men all learned this kindness through the Spirit of **Jesus**. Some people might be willing to give their life for a good person, but Jesus—the Son of God—gave His pure, holy life to save sinners such as we are.

Are we ready to be unselfish like these were? They had real peace and love in their hearts and the Lord Jesus will greatly reward all His followers in eternity. Let us always be thankful for this! — *BHM*.

