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THE REMNANT AND ITS MISSION

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness.

The great red dragon crouches, ready. Already it has brought about the downfall of one third of heaven's angels (Rev. 12:4,7-9). Now, if it can devour the infant about to be born, it will have won the war.

The woman standing before it is garbed with the sun and has the moon under her feet and wears a crown of twelve stars. The male Child to whom she gives birth is destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron."

The dragon pounces, but its efforts to kill the Child are in vain. Instead, the Child is "caught up to God and to His throne." Enraged, the dragon turns its wrath against the mother, who is miraculously given wings and is taken to a remote place specially prepared by God, where He nourishes her for a time and times and half a time--3 ½ years, or 1260 prophetic days (Rev. 12:1-6,13,14).

In Biblical prophecy, a pure woman represents God's faithful church. A woman depicted as a fornicator or adulteress represents God's people who have apostatized (Ezekiel 16; Isa. 57:8; Jer. 31:4,5; Hosea 1-3; Rev. 17:1-5)

The dragon, the "serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan," was waiting to devour the male Child, the long-expected Messiah, Jesus Christ. Satan, warring against his arch-enemy Jesus, used as his instrument the Roman empire. Nothing, not even death on the cross, could deter Jesus from His mission as Saviour of humanity.

At the cross, Christ defeated Satan. Speaking of the crucifixion, Christ said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out" (John 12:31). Revelation describes heaven's hymn of victory: "'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down....Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!" (Rev. 12:10-12). Satan's expulsion from heaven restricted his works. No longer could Satan accuse God's people before the heavenly beings.

But while heaven rejoices, earth must take warning: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time" (Rev. 12:12).

To vent his anger Satan began persecuting the woman—the church (Rev. 12:13), which, though it suffered greatly, nevertheless survived. Sparsely populated areas of the earth—"the wilderness"—provided refuge for God's faithful during the 1260 prophetic days or 1260 literal years (Rev. 12:14-16).

At the end of this wilderness experience God's people emerge in response to signs of the soon return of Christ. John identifies this faithful group as "the remnant...which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:7, KJV). The devil particularly hates this remnant (Rev. 12:17).

When and where did this persecution take place? How did it come about? When did the remnant begin to appear? What is its mission? The answer to these questions requires a review of both Scripture and history.

The Great Apostasy

The persecution of the Christian church was brought about at first by pagan Rome, then by apostasy within its own ranks. This apostasy was no surprise—John, Paul, and Christ predicted it.

During His last major discourse, Jesus warned His disciples of the coming deception. "Take heed that no one deceives you," He said, "for false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:4,24). His followers would experience a period of "great tribulation," but they would survive (Matt. 24:21,22). Impressive signs in nature would mark the end of this persecution and would reveal the nearness of Christ's return (Matt. 24: 29,32,33).

Paul too warned: "After my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29,30). These "wolves" would lead the church to "the apostasy," or "falling away."

This apostasy must occur before Christ's return, Paul said. It was such a certainty that the fact that it had not yet taken place was a sure sign that Christ's coming was not yet imminent. "Let no one deceive you by any means," he said, "for that Day will not come unless the falling away [apostasy] comes first, and the man of sin [lawlessness] is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple [church] of God, showing himself that He is God" (2 Thess. 2:3,4).

Even during Paul's time this apostasy was already at work in a limited way. His method of operation was satanic, "with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception" (2 Thess. 2:9,10). Before the end of the first century John stated that "many false prophets have gone out into the world." Indeed, he said, "the spirit of the Antichrist" is "already in the world" (1 John 4:1,3).

How did this apostate system come about?

The Ascendancy of the "Man of Sin."

"As the church left its 'first love' (Rev. 2:4), it forfeited its purity of doctrine, its high standards of personal conduct, and the invisible bond of unity provided by the Holy Spirit. In worship, formalism replaced simplicity. Popularity and personal power came more and more to determine the choice of leaders who first assumed increasing authority within the local church, then sought to extend their authority over neighboring churches.

"Administration of the local church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit eventually gave way to ecclesiastical authoritarianism at the hands of a single official, the bishop, to whom every church member was personally subject and through whom alone he had access to salvation. Henceforth leadership thought only of ruling the church instead of serving it, and the 'greatest' was no longer one who considered himself 'servant of all.' Thus, gradually, developed the concept of a priestly hierarchy that interposed between the individual and his Lord."

As the importance of the individual and the local church eroded, the bishop of Rome emerged as the supreme power in Christianity. With the assistance of the emperor this highest bishop, or pope, was recognized as the visible head of the universal church, invested with supreme authority over all church leaders throughout the world.

Under the leadership of the papacy, the Christian church plunged into yet-deeper apostasy. The increasing popularity of the church accelerated its decline. Lowered standards caused the unconverted to feel comfortable in the church. Multitudes knowing very little of genuine Christianity joined the church in name only, bringing their pagan doctrines, images, modes of worship, celebrations, feasts, and symbolism with them.

These compromises between paganism and Christianity led to the formation of the "man of sin"—a gigantic system of false religion, a mixture of truth and error. The prophecy of 2 Thessalonians 2 does not condemn individuals, but exposes the religious system responsible for the great apostasy. Many believers within this system, however, belong to God's universal church because they live according to all the light that they have.

The Suffering Church

With the decline of spirituality, the church of Rome developed a more secular profile with closer ties to the imperial government. Church and state were united in an unholy alliance.

In his classic *The City of God*, Augustine, one of the most influential church Fathers, set forth the Catholic ideal of a universal church in control of a universal state. Augustine's thinking laid the foundation of medieval papal theology.

In A.D. 533, in a letter incorporated in the Code of Justinian, the emperor Justinian declared the bishop of Rome head over all the churches. He also recognized the pope's influence in eliminating heretics.

When Justinian's general Belisarius liberated Rome in A.D. 538, the bishop of Rome was freed from the control of the Ostrogoths, whose Arianism had resulted in their restricting the developing Catholic Church. Now the bishop could exercise the prerogatives Justinian's decree of A.D. 533 had granted him; he could increase the

authority of the "Holy See." Thus began the 1260 years of persecution as Bible prophecy foretold (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 12:6,14; 13:5-7).

Tragically, the church, with the assistance of the state, tried to force its decrees and teachings on all Christians. Many surrendered their beliefs out of fear of persecution, while those faithful to the scriptural teachings experienced severe persecution. The Christian world became a battlefield. Many were imprisoned or executed in the name of God! During the 1260-year persecution millions of faithful believers experienced great suffering while many paid for their loyalty to Christ with death.

Every drop of blood spilled put a stain on the name of God and Jesus Christ. Nothing has done more harm to the cause of Christianity than this ruthless persecution. The grossly distorted view of the character of God given by these actions of the church, and the doctrines of purgatory and eternal torment, led many to reject Christianity altogether.

Long before the Reformation, voices within the Catholic Church protested against its merciless killing of opponents, its arrogant claims and demoralizing corruption. The church's unwillingness to reform gave birth to the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Its success was a great blow to the authority and prestige of the church of Rome. Through the Counter Reformation the papacy carried on a bloody struggle to crush the Reformation, but it gradually lost the battle against the forces striving for civil and religious freedom.

Finally, in 1798, 1260 years after A.D. 538, the Roman Catholic Church received a deadly blow (cf. Rev. 13:3). The spectacular victories of Napoleon's armies in Italy placed the pope at the mercy of the French revolutionary government, which saw the Roman religion as the irreconcilable enemy of the Republic. The French government directed Napoleon to take the pope prisoner. At his orders General Berthier entered Rome and proclaimed the political rule of the papacy at an end. Taking the pope captive, Berthier carried him off to France, where he died in exile.

The overthrow of the papacy was the culmination of a long series of events associated with its progressive decline. That event marks the end of the prophetic period of 1260 years. Many Protestants interpreted this event as a fulfillment of prophecy.

The Reformation

Unscriptural doctrines based on tradition, relentless persecution of dissenters, corruption, and the spiritual declension of many of the clergy were among the major factors that caused people to cry out for reforms within the established church.

The Doctrinal Issues

The following are examples of the un-Biblical doctrines that helped foster the Protestant Reformation and still separate Protestants and Roman Catholics.

1. The head of the church on earth is the vicar of Christ.

This doctrine claims that only the bishop of Rome is the vicar or representative of Christ on earth and the visible head of the church. In contrast to the Biblical view of church leadership (see chapter 11 of this book), this doctrine was based on the assumptions

that Christ made Peter the visible head of the church and that the pope is Peter's successor.

2. The infallibility of the church and its head.

The doctrine that contributed most strongly to the prestige and influence of the church of Rome was that of its infallibility. The church claimed it had never erred, and never would. It based this teaching on the following reasoning, which finds no Biblical support: Because the church is divine, one of its inherent attributes is infallibility. In addition, since God intended, through this divine church, to lead all people of good will to heaven, she must be infallible in teaching faith and morals. Christ, then, will preserve her from all error through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The logical corollary, which denies the basic corruptness of humans, is that the church's leader must also be infallible. Accordingly Catholic literature claimed divine prerogatives for its leader.

3. The eclipse of Christ's high-priestly mediatorial ministry.

As the influence of the church of Rome increased, the attention of believers was shifted away from Christ's continual mediatorial work as High Priest in heaven—the antitype of the continual daily sacrifices of the Old Testament sanctuary services (see chapters 4 and 23 of this book)—to an earthly priesthood with its leader in Rome. Instead of trusting in Christ for forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, believers placed their faith in popes, priests, and prelates. Contradicting the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers, the clergy's ministry of absolution was now believed to be vital for salvation.

Christ's priestly ministry in heaven, where He constantly applies the benefits of His atoning sacrifice to repentant believers, was effectually negated when the church substituted the mass for the Lord's Supper. Unlike the Lord's Supper—a service that Jesus instituted to commemorate His death and to foreshadow His coming kingdom -- the Catholic Church claims the mass to be a human priest's unbloody sacrifice of Christ to God. Because Christ is offered again, as He was at Calvary, the mass was considered to bring special grace to believers and the deceased.

Ignorant of the Scriptures, knowing only the mass conducted by a human priesthood, multitudes lost the blessing of direct access to our Mediator Jesus Christ. Thus the promise and invitation, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16), was obliterated.

4. The meritorious nature of good works.

The prevalent view that by doing good works a person could obtain the merit vital for salvation, that faith could not save, contradicted the New Testament's teaching. The Catholic Church taught that the good works that were the result of grace infused into the sinner's heart were meritorious, which meant that they gave an individual a just claim to salvation. In fact, one could perform more good works than were necessary for salvation—as was the case with the saints—and thus accumulate extra merits. This extra merit could be used for the benefit of others. Because the church held that sinners were justified on the basis of the righteousness infused into their hearts, good works played an important role in a person's justification.

Meritorious works also played an important role in the doctrine of purgatory, which asserts that those who are not perfectly pure must bear a cleansing, temporal punishment for their sins in purgatory before they enter into the joys of heaven. By their prayers and good works, living believers could shorten the duration and the intensity of the suffering of those in purgatory.

5. The doctrine of penance and indulgences.

Penance is the sacrament by which Christians may obtain forgiveness for sins committed after baptism. This forgiveness of sins is accomplished through the absolution of a priest, but before it can be obtained, Christians must examine their consciences, repent for their sins, and resolve to nevermore offend God. Then they must confess their sins to the priest and perform the penance—some task assigned by the priest.

Penance, however, did not completely release sinners. They still had to bear the temporal punishment either in this life or in purgatory. To take care of this punishment the church instituted indulgences, which provided the remission of the temporal punishment that remained due on account of sin after the guilt had been absolved. Indulgences, which could benefit both the living and those in purgatory, were granted on condition of penitence and the performance of prescribed good works, often in the form of payment of money to the church.

It was the extra merits of the martyrs, saints, apostles, and especially Jesus Christ and Mary, that made indulgences possible. Their merits were deposited in a "treasury of merit" and were transferable to those believers whose accounts were deficient. The pope, as the alleged successor of Peter, was in control of the keys of this treasury and could release people from temporal punishment by assigning them credit from the treasury.

6. Ultimate authority resides in the church.

Throughout the centuries the established church adopted many pagan beliefs, holy days, and symbols. When voices cried out against these abominations, the church of Rome assumed the sole right to interpret the Bible. The church, not the Bible, became the final authority (see chapter 1 of this book). The church argued that two sources of divine truth existed: (1) The sacred Scriptures and (2) the Catholic tradition, which consisted of the writings of the Church Fathers, the decrees of church councils, approved creeds, and ceremonies of the church. Whenever church doctrines were supported by tradition but not by Scripture, tradition took precedence. Common believers had no authority to interpret the doctrines God had revealed in Scripture. That authority resided only in the Catholic Church.

The Dawn of a New Day

In the fourteenth century John Wycliffe called for a reformation of the church, not only in England but in all Christendom. During a time when few copies of the Bible existed, he provided the first translation of the whole Bible into English. His teachings of salvation through faith in Christ alone and that only the Scriptures were infallible laid the foundation of the Protestant Reformation. As the morning star of the Reformation, he tried to free Christ's church from the bonds of paganism that chained it in ignorance. He inaugurated a movement that was to liberate individual minds and to free whole nations from the clutches of religious error. Wycliffe's writings touched the souls of Huss, Jerome, Luther, and many others.

Martin Luther—fiery, impulsive, uncompromising—was perhaps the most powerful personality of the Reformation. More than any other man, he led the people back to the Scriptures and the great gospel truth of justification by faith, while he railed against salvation by works.

Declaring that believers should receive no authority other than the Scriptures, Luther turned people's eyes upward, from human works, priests, and penance, to Christ as their only Mediator and Saviour. It was impossible, he said, by human works to lessen the guilt of sinning or to avoid its punishment. Only repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save sinners. Because it is a gift, freely given, His grace cannot be purchased. Humans can have hope, therefore, not because of indulgences, but because of the shed blood of a crucified Redeemer.

Like an archeological expedition finding treasures buried beneath the accumulated discards of the centuries, the Reformation uncovered long-forgotten truths. Justification by faith, the great principle of the gospel, was rediscovered, as was a new appreciation for the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His all-sufficient mediatorial priesthood. Many un-Biblical teachings, such as prayers for the dead, veneration of saints and relics, celebration of the mass, worship of Mary, purgatory, penance, holy water, celibacy of the priesthood, the rosary, the inquisition, transubstantiation, extreme unction, and dependence upon tradition, were repudiated and abandoned.

The Protestant Reformers were nearly unanimous in identifying the papal system as the "man of sin," the "mystery of iniquity," and the "little horn" of Daniel, the entity that was to persecute God's true people during the 1260 years of Revelation 12:6,14, and 13:5, before the Second Coming.

The doctrine of the Bible and the Bible only as the norm of faith and morals became basic to Protestantism. The Reformers considered all human traditions subject to the final and higher authority of the Scriptures. In matters of religious faith no authority—pope, councils, church Fathers, kings, or scholars—was to rule the conscience. Indeed, the Christian world was beginning to awake from its slumber, and eventually, in many lands, religious liberty was proclaimed.

The Stagnated Reformation

The reformation of the Christian church should not have ended in the sixteenth century. The Reformers had accomplished much, but had not rediscovered all the light lost during the apostasy. They had taken Christianity out of utter darkness, but it still stood in the shadows. While they had broken the iron hand of the medieval church, given the Bible to the world, and restored the basic gospel, they had failed to discover other important truths. Baptism by immersion, immortality as a gift bestowed by Christ at the resurrection of the just, the seventh-day as the Bible Sabbath, and other truths were still lost in the shadows.

But instead of advancing the Reformation, their successors consolidated its achievements. They focused their attention on the Reformers' words and opinions instead of on Scripture. A few discovered new truths, but the majority refused to advance beyond what the early Reformers believed. Consequently the Protestant faith degenerated into formalism and scholasticism, and errors that should have been

discarded were enshrined. The flame of the Reformation gradually died out, and Protestant churches themselves became cold, formal, and in need of reform.

The post-Reformation era buzzed with theological activity, but little spiritual progress was made. Frederic W. Farrar wrote that in this period "liberty was exchanged for bondage; universal principles for beggarly elements; truth for dogmatism; independence for tradition; religion for system. A living reverence for Scripture was superseded by a dead theory of inspiration. Genial orthodoxy gave place to iron uniformity and living thought to controversial dialectics." And although the "Reformation had broken the leaden sceptre of the old Scholasticism," the Protestant churches introduced "a new Scholasticism whose rod was of iron." Robert M. Grant called this new scholasticism "as rigid as any medieval theological construction." The Protestants "practically bound themselves by the limits of their current confessions."

Controversies erupted. "There never was an epoch in which men were so much occupied in discovering each other's errors, or in which they called each other by so many opprobrious names." Thus the good news became a war of words. "Scripture no longer speaks to the heart but to the critical intellect." "Dogmas were orthodox, but spirituality was extinguished. Theology was triumphant, but love was quenched."

The Remnant

In spite of the apostasy and tribulation of the 1260 years, some believers continued to reflect the purity of the apostolic church. When the 1260 years of oppression ended in A.D. 1798, the dragon had failed to eradicate entirely God's faithful people. Against these Satan continued to direct his destructive efforts. Said John, "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

What Is the Remnant?

In John's description of the dragon's battle with the woman and her descendants, he used the expression "the rest of her offspring" (Rev. 12:17). That expression means the "remaining ones" or "remnant" (Rev. 12:17,KJV). The Bible portrays the remnant as a small group of God's people who, through calamities, wars, and apostasy, remain loyal to God. This faithful remnant were the rootstock God used to propagate His visible church on earth (2 Chron. 30:6; Ezra 9:14,15; Isa. 10:20-22; Jer. 42:2; Eze. 6:8; 14:22).

God commissioned the remnant to declare His glory and lead His scattered people throughout the world to His "holy mountain Jerusalem," "Mount Zion" (Isa. 37:31,32; 66:20; cf. Rev. 14:1). Of those thus gathered together Scripture states, "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Rev. 14:4).

Revelation 12:17 contains a description of the last remnant in God's chosen line of loyal believers—His loyal witnesses in the last days before Christ's second coming. What are the remnant's characteristics?

The Characteristics of the Remnant

The remnant at the time of the end cannot be easily mistaken. John describes this group in specific terms. Appearing after the 1260 years of persecution, they are made up of

those "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17).

They have the responsibility of proclaiming, just before Christ's return, God's final warning to all the world, the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 (Rev. 14:6-12). These messages themselves contain a description of the remnant, they are "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). Let us consider more closely each of these characteristics.

1. The faith of Jesus.

God's remnant people are characterized by a faith similar to that which Jesus had. They reflect Jesus' unshakable confidence in God and the authority of Scripture. They believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah of prophecy, the Son of God, who came as the world's Saviour. Their faith encompasses all the truths of the Bible—those which Christ believed and taught.

God's remnant, then, will proclaim the everlasting gospel of salvation by faith in Christ. They will warn the world that the hour of God's judgment has arrived and they will prepare others to meet their soon-coming Lord. They will be engaged in a worldwide mission to complete the divine witness to humanity (Rev. 14:6,7; 10:11; Matt. 24:14).

2. The commandments of God.

Genuine faith in Jesus commits the remnant to follow His example. "He who says he abides in Him," John said, "ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6). Since Jesus kept His Father's commandments, they too will obey God's commandments (John 15:10).

Particularly since they are the remnant, their actions must harmonize with their profession—otherwise, it is worthless. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord" shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Through the strength Christ gives them, they obey God's requirements, including all ten of the commandments, God's unchanging moral law (Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 5:17-19; 19:17; Phil. 4:13).

3. The testimony of Jesus.

John defines "the testimony of Jesus" as "the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). The remnant will be guided by the testimony of Jesus conveyed through the gift of prophecy.

This gift of the Spirit was to function continuously throughout the history of the church, until "all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). It is, therefore, one of the major characteristics of the remnant.

Such prophetic guidance makes the remnant a people of prophecy who proclaim a prophetic message. They will understand prophecy and teach it. The revelation of truth that comes to the remnant helps them accomplish their mission of preparing the world for Christ's return.

The Emergence of the Remnant of the Last Days

The Bible indicates that the remnant appears on the world's stage after the time of great persecution (Rev. 12:14-17). The earthshaking events of the French Revolution, which led to the captivity of the pope at the end of the 1260-year period (A.D. 1798), and the fulfillment of the three great cosmic signs—in which earth, sun, moon, and stars testified of the nearness of Christ's return—led to a major revival of the study of prophecy. A widespread expectation of the imminent coming of Jesus arose. Throughout the world many Christians recognized that "the time of the end" had arrived (Dan. 12:4).

The fulfillment of Bible prophecies during the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century brought about a powerful interconfessional movement centered on the Second Advent hope. In every church believers in the imminent return of Christ could be found, all praying, working, and anticipating the climax of the ages.

The Advent hope brought a deep spirit of unity among its adherents, and many joined together to warn the world about Christ's soon return. The Advent movement was a truly Biblical interconfessional movement centered in the Word of God and the Advent hope.

The more they studied the Bible, the more convinced they became that God was calling a remnant to continue the stagnated Reformation of the Christian church. They had themselves experienced the absence of the true spirit of the Reformation in their respective churches and a lack of interest in the study of and preparation for the Second Advent. Their Bible study revealed that the trials and disappointments God had led them through constituted a deeply spiritual, purifying experience that brought them together as God's remnant. God had commissioned them to continue the Reformation that had brought so much joy and power to the church. With gratitude and humility they accepted their mission, realizing that God's commission had not come to them because of any inherent superiority, and that only through Christ's mercy and power could they in any way be successful.

The Mission of the Remnant

The prophecies of the book of Revelation clearly outline the mission of the remnant. The three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12 reveal the proclamation of the remnant that will bring a full and final restoration of the gospel truth. These three messages comprise God's answers to the overwhelming satanic deception that sweeps the world just before Christ's return (Rev. 13:3,8,14-16). Immediately following God's last appeal to the world Christ returns to reap the harvest (Rev. 14:14-20).

The First Angel's Message

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

The first angel symbolizes God's remnant carrying an everlasting gospel to the world. This gospel is the same good news of God's infinite love that the ancient prophets and

apostles proclaimed (Heb. 4:2). The remnant do not present a different gospel—in view of the judgment they reaffirm that everlasting gospel that sinners can be justified by faith and receive Christ's righteousness.

This message calls the world to repentance. It summons all to "fear," or reverence, God and to give "glory," or honor, to Him. We were created for this purpose, and we can give honor or glory to God in our words and actions:

"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8).

John predicts that the movement preparing the world for Christ's return will give a renewed emphasis to the Biblical concern for glorifying God. As never before it will present the New Testament appeal for the sacred stewardship of our lives: "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." We do not have exclusive rights to our physical, moral, and spiritual powers; Christ bought these with His blood at Calvary. "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19,20). "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

The fact that "the hour of His judgment" has arrived adds urgency to the call to repent. In Revelation 14:7, the word judgment translates the Greek krisis, the act of judging, not the sentence of judgment (krima). It refers to the entire process of judgment, including the arraignment of people before the divine judgment bar, the investigation of life records, the verdict of acquittal or conviction, and the bestowal of eternal life or the sentence of death (see Matt. 16:27; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 22:12). The judgment-hour message also proclaims God's judgment on all apostasy (Dan. 7:9-11,26; Revelation 17,18).

The judgment-hour message points particularly to the time when, as the last phase of His high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, Christ entered upon His work of judgment (see chapter 23 of this book).

This message also calls on all to worship the Creator. God's call to worship must be seen in contrast to the summons to worship the beast and his image (Rev. 13:3,8,15). Soon everyone will have to make a choice between true and false worship—between worshiping God on His terms (righteousness by faith) or on our terms (righteousness by works). By commanding us "'to worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Rev. 14:7; cf. Ex. 20:11), this message calls attention to the fourth commandment. It leads people into true worship of the Creator, an experience that involves honoring His memorial of Creation—the seventh-day Sabbath of the Lord, which He instituted at Creation and affirmed in the Ten Commandments (see chapter 19 of this book). The first angel's message, therefore, calls for the restoration of true worship by presenting before the world Christ the Creator and Lord of the Bible Sabbath. This is the sign of God's Creation—a sign neglected by the vast majority of His created beings.

Providentially, the proclamation of this message calling attention to the Creator-God began at the stage of history when the evolutionary philosophy received a major boost from the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species (1859). The preaching of the first angel's message constitutes the greatest bulwark against the progress of the theory of evolution.

Finally, this call implies the restoration of the honor of God's holy law, which has been trampled upon by the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:3, RSV). Only when true worship is restored and believers live the principles of God's kingdom can God be glorified.

The Second Angel's Message

Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication (Rev. 14:8).

From early history, the city of Babylon symbolized defiance of God. Its tower was a monument to apostasy and a center of rebellion (Gen. 11:1-9). Lucifer (Satan) was its invisible king (Isa. 14:4,12-14) and it appears that he wanted to make Babylon the agency of his master plan for ruling the human race. Throughout the Bible the struggle between God's city, Jerusalem, and Satan's city, Babylon, illustrates the conflict between good and evil.

During the early Christian centuries, when the Romans were oppressing both Jews and Christians, Jewish and Christian literature referred to the city of Rome as Babylon. Many believe that Peter used Babylon as a pseudonym for Rome (1 Peter 5:13). Because of its apostasy and persecution, most Protestants of the Reformation and Post-Reformation era referred to the church of Rome as spiritual Babylon (Revelation 17), the enemy of God's people.

In Revelation, Babylon refers to the wicked woman, the mother of harlots, and her impure daughters (Rev. 17:5). It symbolizes all apostate religious organizations and their leadership, though it refers especially to the great apostate religious alliance between the beast and his image that will bring about the final crisis described in Revelation 13:15-17.

The second angel's message brings out the universal nature of the Babylonian apostasy and her coercive power, saying that "she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." The "wine" of Babylon represents her heretical teachings. Babylon will pressure the powers of state to enforce universally her false religious teachings and decrees.

The "fornication" mentioned represents the illicit relationship between Babylon and the nations—between the apostate church and civil powers. The church is supposed to be married to her Lord; in seeking instead the support of the state, she leaves her spouse and commits spiritual fornication (cf. Eze. 16:15; James 4:4).

This illicit relationship results in tragedy. John sees the inhabitants of the earth "drunk" with false teachings, and Babylon herself "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus," who refuse to accept her unscriptural doctrines and submit to her authority (Rev. 17:2,6).

Babylon falls because she rejects the first angel's message—the gospel of righteousness by faith in the Creator. As during the first few centuries the church of Rome apostatized, many Protestants of today have departed from the great Bible truths of the Reformation. This prophecy of Babylon's fall especially finds its fulfillment in the departure of Protestantism at large from the purity and simplicity of the everlasting gospel of righteousness by faith that once so powerfully impelled the Reformation.

The second angel's message will have increasing relevance as the end draws near. It will meet its complete fulfillment with the alliance of the various religious organizations that have rejected the first angel's message. The message of the fall of Babylon is repeated in Revelation 18:2-4, which announces the complete downfall of Babylon and calls on those of God's people who are still in the various religious bodies comprising Babylon to separate from them. Says the angel, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).(*31)

The Third Angel's Message

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:9-12).

The first angel's message proclaims the everlasting gospel and calls for the restoration of the true worship of God as Creator because the judgment hour has arrived. The second angel warns against all humanly originated forms of worship. Finally, the third angel proclaims God's most solemn warning against worshiping the beast and his image—which all who reject the gospel of righteousness by faith ultimately will do.

The beast described in Revelation 13:1-10 is the church-state union that dominated the Christian world for many centuries and was described by Paul as the "man of sin" (2 Thess. 2:2-4) and by Daniel as the "little horn" (Dan. 7:8,20-25; 8:9-12, KJV). The image of the beast represents that form of apostate religion that will be developed when churches, having lost the true spirit of the Reformation, shall unite with the state to enforce their teachings on others. In uniting church and state they will have become a perfect image to the beast—the apostate church that persecuted for 1260 years. Hence the name image of the beast.

The third angel's message proclaims the most solemn and fearful warning in the Bible. It reveals that those who submit to human authority in earth's final crisis will worship the beast and his image rather than God. During this final conflict two distinct classes will develop. One class will advocate a gospel of human devisings and will worship the beast and his image, bringing upon themselves the most grievous judgments. The other class, in marked contrast, will live by the true gospel and "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:9,12). The final issue involves true and false worship, the true and the false gospel. When this issue is clearly brought before the world, those who reject God's memorial of creatorship—the Bible Sabbath—choosing to worship and honor Sunday in the full knowledge that it is not God's appointed day of worship, will receive the "mark of the beast." This mark is a mark of rebellion; the beast claims its change of the day of worship shows its authority even over God's law.

The third message directs the world's attention to the consequence of refusing to accept the everlasting gospel and God's message of the restoration of true worship. It pictures vividly the final result of people's choices regarding worship. The choice is not an easy

one, for whatever one chooses will involve suffering. Those who obey God will experience the wrath of the dragon (Rev. 12:17) and eventually be threatened with death (Rev. 13:15), while those who choose to worship the beast and his image will incur the seven last plagues and finally "the lake of fire" (Rev. 15, 16; 20:14,15).

But while both choices involve suffering, their outcomes differ. The worshipers of the Creator will escape the deadly wrath of the dragon and stand together with the Lamb on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1; 7:2,4). The worshipers of the beast and his image, on the other hand, receive the full wrath of God and die in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb (Rev. 14:9,10; 20:14).

Every person will have to choose whom to worship. Either one's choice of righteousness by faith will be revealed as one participates in a form of worship God has endorsed, or one's effectual choice of righteousness by works will be revealed as one participates in a form of worship God has forbidden but which the beast and his image command, a man-made worship. God cannot accept this latter form of worship, because it gives priorities to the commandments of men and not to those of God. It seeks justification through the works of man and not by faith that comes through a total surrender to God as Creator, Redeemer, and Re-creator. In this sense, then, the message of the third angel is the message of justification by faith.

God has His children in all churches; but through the remnant church He proclaims a message that is to restore His true worship by calling His people out of the apostasy and preparing them for Christ's return. Recognizing that many of God's people have yet to join them, the remnant sense their inadequacies and weaknesses when they try to fulfill this solemn mission. They realize that it is only through God's grace that they can accomplish their momentous task.

In the light of the soon coming of Christ and the need to prepare to meet Him, God's urgent, compassionate call comes home to each of us: "'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities'" (Rev. 18:4,5).