

Up In Smoke

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture 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 ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:9-12).

The kingdom of God expanded today. We used the baptistry this morning; God only knows how many, globally, were buried and rose again today. We say that baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. Then aren't we mixing symbols here? Our proper symbol this morning should be water. But so is the symbol of fire, because in every case where is found the inward reality of change, Satan's kingdom crackles and pops and sizzles; it goes up in smoke.

Gate of the God

Our text today has been neglected. We speak often of Revelation 14:6-8 and verse 12. But this business in verses 9-11 is rarely addressed. Let's consider the parallels between the Second (Revelation 14:8) and Fourth (Revelation 18:1-4) Angel Messages. Each declares the fallenness of Babylon, each constitutes a judgment on Babylonian religion. Babylon, you will recall, comes from the word "Babel," signifying "Gate of the god." ("Bab" means "gate," "El" means "god.") The word for confusion is "balal," and in Genesis 11:9 we see that the design of these rebels was to build a "Gate of the god." Inspiration tells the purposes of the builders:

These Babel builders determined to keep their community united in one body, and to found a monarchy that should eventually embrace the whole earth. Thus their city would become the metropolis of a universal empire And as they would be able to ascend to the region of the clouds, they hoped to ascertain the cause of the flood (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 119).

God Himself confounds their purpose and uses the occasion to introduce differing languages into the world, bringing their project to a halt. But I hope you see what is going on here. God is the King of the universe. These men are manifesting Satan's desire to push God aside and themselves rule, to "ascend above the heights of the clouds" (Isaiah 14:14), to press home their own theories and justifications, and take the place of God. Babel, "Gate of the god" was intended to be the gateway to human godhood.

Babylon in Revelation

In Revelation, John uses the term Babylon to designate the various forms of false or apostate religion to be manifest in the last days. These religious bodies, claiming to be biblically based, are in denial of the light He has sent. After the light of God's First Angel's Message is rejected, He declares the fallenness of Babylon, and after the Third Angel's Message is rejected, He gives the Fourth Angel's Loud Cry, declaring her final doom, calling His people out of her just preceding her final destruction. Babylon is fallen because it rejects God's last message of mercy. The First (and Third) Angel Messages were provided to heal Babylon, but she refused. We see this in the Bible record of the fall of literal Babylon:

Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul: be not cut off in her iniquity . . . Howl for her, take balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed (Jeremiah 51:6, 8, 9).

So the Second and Fourth Angel Messages are parallel, and 18:1-4 restates the original message, but expands and concludes it.

First and Third Angel Messages

The same is true of the First (Revelation 14:6, 7) and Third (Revelation 14:9-12) Angel's Messages. The First message is expanded and concluded in the Third. The First Angel's Message is from God, not man. It is global in extent. It is a positive warning, to honor God in light of the fact of His judgment and His being Creator/Recreator. Under the Third Angel, we are given a negative warning: do not worship the beast or his image. Do not receive his mark in your forehead or hand. This too is a global message.

Whereas the First Angel's Message says that "the hour of His judgment is come," the Third warns against drinking the wine of God's wrath, that is, of coming up short in God's judgment. The ideas are parallel. Whereas the First Angel's Message points us to Sabbath by virtually quoting from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:11 cf. Revelation 14:7), the Third notes that these "have no rest" (Revelation 14:11).

The First Angel's Message calls for God to be worshipped. The Third warns against worship of the beast and his image. Again, we have positive and negative. The expansion and completion of the Third? It is the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Just as Babylon is fallen in 14:8 but utterly bankrupt and ready for destruction in 18:1-4, in Revelation 14:6, 7 God's people are called to consecrated living in light of the opening of the judgment, in 14:9-12 they are called to demonstrate "the patience of the saints," to "keep the commandments of God," to live out to the full "the faith of Jesus." God's people are ripening at 14:6, 7, but at 14:12 the ripening process is ended; the wheat is fully ripe. The same picture is echoed in the last part of chapter 14. The wild grapes are ready for destruction (14:17, 18), and the wheat is ready for harvest (14:16).

Worshippers of the Beast and His Image

We said that with each one who gives her heart to God, who opens the door for Jesus to come in and recreate from the inside out, God wins a bit more and Satan loses a bit more. His kingdom consumes away, it goes up in smoke. This is what we want to see. God's kingdom is to fill the whole earth (Daniel 2:35, 44). But this can only happen one heart at a time. One by one each heart is signing on, confirming itself in making God's ways her own, or making Satan's ways her own. We make our commitments but they are so fragile. Our experience must be continually refreshed or it is no experience with God. It will do us some good to focus now in particular on verses 9-12.

The Beast

First, consider the beast and his image. It is not merely the worship of the beast that is warned against, but "the beast and his image" (Revelation 14:9, 11). Whenever "the image" appears in Revelation, so does "the beast" (see also 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). With all the emphasis we sometimes see given to the pope, you would think that it is all about the beast. The beast, as we know, has particular reference to the first beast of Revelation 13:1-10—the papacy, otherwise known as the Roman Catholic Church. We will not today embark on giving the proofs for that; we will assume it and continue. What is "his image," the image of or to the beast?

The Image to the Beast

What is the image to the beast? We notice after the first beast is identified in Revelation 13:1-10, that a second beast is seen (Revelation 13:11). This beast has two lamb-like horns, yet speaks as a dragon. The period of primacy of the first beast ends in 1798, when we immediately

see the second beast “coming up out of the earth.” What new nation was rising into power then? The United States of America. She comes up in the North American continent, a sparsely populated area. Founded on the ideas of civil and religious liberty, a “nation without a king, and a church without a pope,” she promises freedom of religion. But she is an amalgam, a contradiction. She promises lamb-likeness, but speaks as a dragon. She begins small and grows powerful, becoming at last a world power, nay, *the* world power. And what do we know about power? Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

What is this “speaking”? Revelation 13:14 speaks of her urging the making of an image to the first beast. Verse 15 says that the two-horned beast has power to give life, or breath, to the image of the beast, that it should “speak.” Remember, the two horns of the lamb-like beast represent her commitments to religious freedom and to representative government. The United States has no king; the people are (in theory, at least) sovereign. They elect representatives to legislate—to speak—on their behalf.

Sadly, although in theory the powers of the state were checked by being separated into executive, judicial, and legislative branches, it will not work. Revelation 13 foretells that the principles and guarantees this nation was founded upon will, in the end, be swept aside. A day will come when religious power will control the civil government.

The ‘image to the beast’ represents that form of apostate Protestantism which will be developed when the Protestant churches shall seek the aid of the civil power for the enforcement of their dogmas (*The Great Controversy*, p. 445).

Any who bows to the power of church and state combined and who breaks God’s commandments, will be manifesting worship of the beast and his image. He is signing on with the kingdom of Satan. A day is coming when you will have to disobey the state. You will have to

obey God rather than men. In particular this will all boil down to a requirement by the state that you observe Sunday as the Sabbath or be killed. You may expect that every form of pressure will be employed against you: removal of your means of providing an income, removal of your property, denial of your freedom, even, if the state can lock you away, the removal of your children into state custody “for their own safety.”

In His Forehead or in His Hand

The warning is that we are not to receive his mark in our forehead or in our hand. The forehead denotes character; we are not to receive Satan’s character as ours. But what about the hand? Some feel that they can believe one thing and do another, that they can maintain loyalty inwardly while compromising outwardly; that they can be true to conscience on the inside but manifest a different loyalty outwardly.

No one will be able to buy or sell unless he has the mark or the name or the number of the beast’s name. Buying and selling is accomplished with your hands. You earn your money and you spend your money. The Christian cannot live as others. He must be just; he must be good; he must stand and be counted. He cannot conform outwardly without conforming inwardly. In these verses (14:9-11) our God is warning us that we will be placed in a situation where we will have to manifest our choice. He is telling us both to plan for that day.

Tormented Forever

Satan will use force. He will coerce. Those who cave in to him will be rewarded. They will be able to be employed, earn money, buy, sell, retain custody of possessions and of their children. But with the issues clearly placed under the spotlight of a watching world, their relief

will be only temporary. They will sell their personal friend and Savior Jesus for a bag of greasy fast food. Their faith fails. In the end, they lose all, for God is bringing the Great Controversy War to closure. Very soon, sin and sinners will be no more.

Consider this. A day is fast approaching when Jesus will return; the Second Coming will finally occur! Those who received the mark of the beast in their forehead or in their hand, and who survive until Jesus appears in the sky, will be cut down by the brightness of His coming. The saints will go to heaven and be there with Christ for 1,000 years. Then the New Jerusalem will descend to planet earth and Satan will be loosed from his prison. God will at last call the wicked from their graves. Those who died lost, rise. Satan deceives again:

When the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9).

No Rest Day or Night

This is Gehenna; this is hellfire; this is the drinking of the wine of God's wrath. He did everything in His divine power to save these lost people. They refused His every initiative. Jesus came and died for them, in their place. They rejected it. Now, in the fires of final destruction, they experience of which Paul warned:

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

There is no softening here, no appeal. "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

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).

These have wholly rejected Jesus, and they experience the Second Death in full. They are burned up, they consume away in smoke, “Tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10).

They have denied Jesus, they have turned away time and again from the ministrations of holy angels sent to soften their hearts. Now, here are all these sinless beings with a brightness the wicked cannot withstand. The brightness of one angel slew 185,000 soldiers (Isaiah 37:36). Jesus now has received back to Himself the glory that he had with His father before the world began (John 17:4, 5). There are also the redeemed, who now “shine as the brightness of the firmament” (Daniel 12:3). The wicked had given their worship to the lamb-like beast, they had done their utmost to slay the followers of Jesus. Now, in the presence of Jesus and His angels, they consume away.

Here, superficially, it looks like there is a problem. “The smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever” (Revelation 14:11). It sounds as if the lost are tortured for eternity. We must keep in mind four things. First, that these have intentionally chosen selfishness, Satan-likeness; it has been their choice to rebel and place themselves in harmony only with death. Second, that God alone is immortal, and only He has life within Himself (1 Timothy 6:16; John 5:26); all who reject Jesus are murdering Him, and “no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). Third, forever is simply as long as something lasts (1 Samuel 1:11, 22, 28; Exodus 21:1-6). If you live for eternity, you will live forever. If you live for 30 years you live forever—during those 30 years.

Fourth, not these people but the smoke of their torment ascends. God will wipe away every tear from every eye; there will be no more pain (Revelation 21:4). Part of His setting His universe on a basis of being eternally secure so that sin never rises up again, will be the archives, the record of sin and its consequence. That record will remain. Although they will not continue endlessly to burn, but will be consumed (Malachi 4:1, 3; Ezekiel 28:18, 19), the record of their ruined lives will remain, like Lot's wife on the plain of Sodom, testimony to the incompatibility of good with evil.

There is one more consideration: the change of tense. Verses 9 and 10 are future: "the same shall drink . . . he shall be tormented." But verse 11 and 12 are present: "ascendeth up" "they have no rest" "who worship." The torment of being trapped in sin today, in this life, of having no relief, no rest, no personal Savior to trust in, is real.

The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked (Isaiah 57:20, 21).

The true source of rest, the only source of rest, is Jesus. He pleads with us: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He does not force us to rest. Indeed, since He is the only source, and since He knocks gently at our heart's door (Revelation 3:20, 21), if we do not have Jesus, we do not have His rest. Then we have no rest day or night even now. Both are true. If we do not have Jesus today, then we do not have rest today. But also, if we do not receive His rest today, then in the end we will be consumed; His glory no longer veiled (Exodus 33:20), His brightness at last shining undiminished will be torture. We cannot varnish the truth: "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

Here is the Patience of the Saints

Yes, He is a consuming fire, but not to the righteous—to sin. In 1844 He entered the Most Holy Place of His heavenly sanctuary. He is cleansing the sanctuary. He is a refiner's fire, purifying character, purifying the sons of Levi:

The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness (Malachi 3:1-3).

Satan's kingdom is going up in smoke because people are giving their hearts to Jesus. In contrast to the full cup of wrath waiting Babylon as her wickedness is perfected, God will show what the everlasting gospel can do. Those who cooperate with Jesus will in the end shine like the firmament. God will point to them and be able to say

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists should be dangerous. We should be on the leading edge of God's work in this earth. Our lives should be demonstrations of authentic inward change. We should be pyromaniacal in the sense that we are feeding the fire. Not the fire of sin but of righteousness. We should demonstrate Christ such that Satan's charges are consumed, and come crashing down in charred, smoking heaps. This can be our hour of destiny. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come!" (Revelation 22:17).