

**Friday, 5 June 2015, 9:00 am.**

## **Three Angels Flying in the Midst of Heaven**

**Introduction.** Nowadays a surprising thing happens at some of our churches. Guest speakers are warned, perhaps by a misguided pastor, not to preach about the Three Angels' Messages. This is astounding because we would and could not have come into existence without them, which I want to explain.

### **1. A Fourfold Relationship.**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a fourfold relationship with the Three Angels' Messages of Rev. 14:6-12.

First, it proclaims them and explains their meaning.

Second, we came into existence as a result of this prophecy. To begin with, there were the Millerites and others who preached: "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come." They thought that Jesus would return on October 22, 1844 at the end of the 2300 year-days in an ancient prophecy, which predicted: "Then the sanctuary shall be cleansed" (Dan. 8:14). Unfortunately the Millerites thought the sanctuary was this world and its cleansing would be the Second Coming. But Jesus did not return on October 22, 1844. They were absolutely crushed and most of them gave up, so they faded away; but a few, a remnant, discovered that there is a sanctuary in heaven; and the judgment really is a judgment. Miller's calculations of the 2300 year-days had been correct, but he was wrong in assuming that the sanctuary is this world. The remnant carried on. These were the Seventh-day Adventists. They still believed in the Second Coming, but now they also taught a new, distinctive doctrine: that the Lord's Return is preceded by an Investigative Judgment, which began in heaven on October 22, 1844. They also saw that the legal basis for it was the Decalogue, including the Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment. The Seventh-day Adventist Church came into existence as a result of the sanctuary doctrine.

Third, the Good Book specifically identifies us by saying: "Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12). A parallel passage adds further details: "The dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17). And what does this mean? "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10). Here we have a group of people who would also have the gift of prophecy.

Fourth, this passage comes at the end of Revelation 12, which speaks of the Woman fleeing from Satan, the great Dragon, and being nourished for 1260 year-days. That is, the Remnant will come into focus and be persecuted after 1798. That is to say, we are ourselves a very good example of Historicism. Let me explain this. Rev. 14:6-12 as well as Rev. 12:17 were written almost two thousand years ago. These Scriptures predicted that we would exist, and the facts of history have demonstrated that we do.

We have fierce opponents, both Protestants and Catholics, for all our teachings about the Three Angels' Messages from outside our Church. Sundaykeepers loathe our insistence on observing the seventh-day Sabbath and deride our Sanctuary doctrine. This is only to be expected. Unfortunately, some people within the denomination, including Seventh-day Adventist ministers and scholars, have been influenced by them. Not a few of them have the

## 2 *Three Angels*

Simon Peter complex. That apostle wanted to be well thought of by everybody. This made him a coward. Some modern Simon Peters are ecumenically minded. They seem to prefer the Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* to warning the world against the mark of the Beast.

Let us now look at the Three Angels' Messages one by one, in detail. We first read Rev. 14:6-12. As before, I am again using the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible. This Scripture, which is really not very long, is packed with far more meaning than some could imagine.

**1. The First Angel's Message.** Now let us look closely at the following passage: "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).

**1.1 What is the Everlasting Gospel?** This question is best answered from the Bible, where parallel language is used. In the original Greek, the word *gospel* means *good news*. It centers in the wonderful and true story of Jesus who died for us so that we can by believing in him have everlasting life (John 3:16). For the Church, the Good News includes whatever our Lord has taught us. After he had risen from the dead, he said to his disciples: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18, 19). This is known as the Great Commission. The symbol of the first angel represents an end-time people that would take it very seriously. For them, the "all nations" that Jesus meant was "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" living on the earth at the end of time. Further, they had to teach the whole world to observe all things that Jesus had commanded them. The Lord had also predicted and promised: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14).

Who began to preach the First Angel's Message? The Millerites of North America and others like them elsewhere on this planet. But, frankly, it was an incomplete version of the Gospel. They did stress the need for salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ in preparation for the Second Coming. In fact, the Millerites were great revivalists. But did they stress the need for observing "all things" that Jesus had commanded them? No, they did not. For instance, our Lord and his first disciples were Sabbathkeepers, and the Millerites were not.

**1.2 The Seventh Day in Revelation.** Therefore, they could not fully understand the First Angel's Message. It not only says to the whole planet: "Fear God and give glory to Him." It also links the coming hour of His judgment with the Fourth of the Ten Commandments. Everybody had to "worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Rev. 14:7).

These words call attention to the Creator God, who did his work in six days and rested on the seventh day, which he instituted as a weekly Sabbath. Implicitly the First Angel's Message warns against the Evolutionary hypothesis, which teaches that our planet originated over millions of years, and not six in days. The words "who made heaven and earth, the sea

### 3 *Three Angels*

and springs of water” also refer to the seventh-day Sabbath. They echo passages in Genesis as well as Exodus. We read: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1); “On the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Gen. 2:2, 3). The Fourth Commandment clearly refers us back to this fact: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11)

**1.3 The Apocalypse Links the “hour of his judgment” with the Ten Commandments.** Where and when? The following verses tell us.

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’ And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,

We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,  
The One who is and who was and who is to come,  
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.  
The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,  
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,  
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets  
and the saints,  
And those who fear Your name, small and great,  
And should destroy those who destroy the earth.

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thundering, an earthquake, and great hail.” (Rev. 11:15-19).

For the word *temple*, the Greek original here has *naos*. This means “the innermost shrine,” i.e. the Most Holy Place. In the earthly sanctuary that is where the Ark of the Covenant was found. Inside it, were the tables of stone on which God had with his own finger inscribed the Ten Commandments. So also it is in the heavenly temple. Once a year, ancient Israel observed the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place and sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark, above the Decalogue, the standard of judgment. Just so, on the Yom Kippur of the world, which began on October 22, 1844, Jesus our High Priest began the Investigative Judgment while he still makes a final intercession for those who trust in him for salvation.

Those who do not like this explanation or doctrine declare that God knows everything; therefore, he does not need to let people go through such proceedings. That is true, but the critics miss some important points. One is that for justice to be done, it must be seen to be done. Another is that the observing universe needs to see that God is just and Satan a false accuser.

## 4 *Three Angels*

I could easily have devoted a whole lecture to the First Angel's Message, but time does not permit for lingering over it longer. We must now move on to

**2. The Second Angel's Message.** "And another angel followed, saying, '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). These words have historical as well as contemporary and future dimensions.

**2.1** Like the First Angel's Message, it began with the Millerites. According to the Wikipedia article on the Three Angels' Messages, they originally believed that Babylon in the Revelation referred to the papacy, until the summer of 1843. This was the traditional Protestant view. But at that time the Millerites were expelled from their denominations and disfellowshipped by their churches, for accepting the First Angel's Message. Then Charles Fitch, a beloved preacher who died in 1844, expanded the interpretation of Babylon to include Protestants as well as Catholics who had rejected the Adventist teaching. Soon other Millerites, first lay people and then ministers, followed suit.

Fitch dramatically linked Rev. 14:8 with Rev. 18:2, 4: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! . . . And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.'" This had also been the message of Martin Luther three hundred years earlier, when he separated from the Roman Church. And now a Millerite was saying the same about Protestants!

The main point is that when additional truth is revealed to us the Lord expects us to accept it. The Reformation of Luther, Calvin, and even Wesley had been a marvelous advance away from Catholicism. But Protestants still believed various false doctrines which had originated in the great apostasy.

**2.2** Nowadays Seventh-Adventists are no longer a company of people disfellowshipped from various Protestant churches, though that is how we began. Instead we are a distinct and well organized denomination. Our world membership is not far from twenty million, probably more of us than Southern Baptists. They are the largest Protestant church in the United States, and numerically they are in decline.

We still teach what the Millerites believed, though we have expanded it. Catholics and Protestants who reject the Three Angels' Message are Babylon. But we must be careful in how we say this. Many people in the other churches are still the Lord's children. It is very likely that most of his children are still there. So we must be patient and not simply assume that somebody who does not accept our presentations is lost.

Back in South Africa, where I come from, our church has a mighty preacher and evangelist, Ernie Rex, who was for many years a Dutch Reformed minister. He is now in his late sixties or perhaps seventy years of age. I was touched by his testimony in Afrikaans which I heard over the Internet. It took him a long time to understand us properly. But what a mighty and persuasive voice for the Lord! Our Saviour has them out there, not only ordinary individuals, but also powerful preachers and theologians who must help us finish this work.

**2.3** And then there is this future dimension. Fitch was right to link the words of the Second Angel's Message to Rev. 18. But the latter is really a fourth angel's message. Some of its details and its full import lay beyond what the Millerites could understand. And few, if

## 5 *Three Angels*

any, of us can as yet fully grasp it; for the Fourth Angel's Message repeats what the second angel said, but with more emphasis and greater power.

**2.4** But Satan fears these messages and is diligently at work to undermine them, from within. The same Wikipedia article to which I previously referred, asserts that our "more liberal wing, Progressive Adventists, typically reject the claim that the three angels' messages find unique fulfillment in the Seventh-day Adventist Church." They teach that our concept of the Remnant is wrong. Even worse, "the traditional Adventist interpretation of the mark of the beast (i.e. Sunday worship) is also rejected by many progressive Adventists." They prefer "a reinterpretation of the second and third angels' message." This, of course, "removes the impetus to call Christians out of Babylon and warn them against worshiping on Sunday."

Quite so. They are certainly liberal Adventists, but progressive they are not. They are *regressive*. A very charming pope is holding out his arms and saying in sweet, sweet voice: "Come back to Papa!" The ecumenical movement is luring Protestants back into his embrace. I greatly fear that this is where many regressive Adventists may end up.

No, we have a world to warn and many of the Lord's people to call out of Babylon.

**2.5** Therefore, before we turn to the Third Angel's Message, let us look more closely at the Fourth Angel's Message and how it will reinforce the second one. I say *will* reinforce, for this still lies in the future. Fitch focused on only two verses of Revelation 18. Let us, however, read and ponder them all:

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.' And I heard another voice from heaven saying, '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.18:1-4)

This is so rich in meaning that, again, I could do an entire lecture on this prophecy, but I must confine myself to a few points.

**(a)** This angel will not, like the three angels of chapter 14, *fly* in the midst of heaven. No, he will *come down* from heaven, an emissary from the Lord himself. Also, he will be so unmistakable that he lights up the earth with his glory. He cries out mightily with a loud voice. He represents us, not as we are now but as we will yet be, if we yield to God's bidding. This angel does not hold back but speaks the truth as it must be spoken. He is not a coward, nor does he have ecumenical doubts.

**(b)** Babylon is a woman, symbolizing apostate Christianity. When the second angel warned against her, he said that she had fornicated and fallen. But a hundred and seventy years ago she was not yet so depraved. Rev. 18:2, which I think refers to the twenty-first century, shows a terrible state of degeneracy. Through this angel, the Lord says she "has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!" One of the things that Christian churches will no doubt harbor will be Spiritualism, which is demonic. The foul and hateful birds may symbolize not only nasty

## 6 *Three Angels*

doctrines but carnal practices that heaven emphatically condemns. And this state of affairs will be repugnant to the children of God who are still in the apostate churches.

(c) The voice that says, “Come out of her, my people,” is also—like the angel himself—from heaven. This is not another human agency here below.

I find it wonderful to realize that very large numbers of Christians will heed the voice of the Lord when he says: “Come out of her, my people!” They will not remain there but obey.

And now we turn to

**3. The Third Angel’s Message.** “Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘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. 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.’” (Rev. 14:9-11)

To understand these verses properly, we need to go back to the antecedent Chapter 13 as well as other Scriptures. The Beast is the papal antichrist. The mark of the Beast will be legislation to enforce Sunday observance. Not to rest on the first day of the week will be made a criminal offense. The mark of the Beast will be a Sunday law with penalties inflicted on Sabbathkeepers and others who disobey or speak against it. The image of the Beast will be an international organization resembling Catholic structures. This is going to be created because the United States, represented by the two-horned Beast, will pressurize the world to do so. One measure that will be used to enforce Sundaykeeping will be a kind of economic boycott. Americans have often resorted to such a practice. Eventually a death decree will be issued against the disobedient. Most people will accept the mark. Another way of complying with the law would be to acknowledge the pope as the *vicarius Filii Dei* (the Vicar of the Son of God), symbolized by the number 666 according to Rev. 13:18.

The Third Angel’s Message is the Lord’s response to those who reject his holy Law, including the Sabbath commandment, and persecute his children. It says that those who for any reason obey the Sunday law, either because they believe or just because they go along with it, will burn horribly in hell. Also, that the very memory of them will be held in contempt. That is, “the smoke of their torment” will go up unceasingly. This punishment will result not only for their disobedience to God but for ill-treating his children.

About all of this, however, certain things must be borne in mind. First, there is as yet no international Sunday law or death decree for those who break it. This still lies in the future. Nevertheless, the Lord requires us to warn against any legislation aimed at forcing anybody to rest on the first day of the week. Second, we have no right to judge any individual and say that he or she has the mark of the beast. Third, we must proclaim the Third Angel’s Message wisely and with compassion, especially toward Roman Catholics and Protestants who sincerely do not know that Sundaykeeping is contrary to God’s law. They must be enlightened and called out of Babylon. The Saviour died for them and loves them, and we must love them too.

Also, we must not doubt our credentials and duty to proclaim the Three Angels’ Messages. Let us therefore finally ask:

## *7 Three Angels*

**4. Who is the Third Angel?** We are. As we have said before, the Good Book tells us: “Here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

**Conclusion.** I could say much more about the Three Angels’ Message and fill up a book about them. But this is enough about our mission and even why we exist. We have a grave responsibility to proclaim the everlasting gospel to every nation, tribe, kindred, tongue, and people. Belonging to the Remnant Church is a tremendous privilege. We must tell the world that very soon Jesus will come, and greatly prefers not to punish but to save us all. To tell the world is the Saviour’s great commission to us. We dare not keep quiet about it. If we do, people who could have been saved will be lost, and then the Lord will require their blood of our hand. Please recommit yourself to his service. Do you want to stand and do so now?