

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT

Dear Friend:

Last messages! Last calls! Last appeals! The last message of a dying father to his children! The last warning to evacuate a threatened city! The last appeal to jump from a burning building into the fire net! There is something strangely fascinating--and sobering--about last words, something that rivets our thoughts and attention like nothing else.

In dealing with the human race, God has never failed to warn of impending judgments, and His promise is that He never will. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). He does not handle human lives in an irresponsible manner. He does not trifle when eternal destinies are at stake. No one will ever be able to point the accusing finger at God and say He failed to give adequate warning.

Consider, for example, the 120 long years that Noah's contemporaries had to prepare for the flood which wiped them out of existence. What a moment it must have been when Noah finally made his last appeal to enter the ark and be saved before God shut that massive door which no man could open until the flood had done its appointed work.

Nearly 600 years before the birth of Christ, Daniel was given a special prophecy to help Israel prepare for her Saviour. He clearly stated that their days as God's chosen people were numbered unless they began to fulfill God's purposes for them.

Days passed into years and years into decades and decades into centuries, and the Christ-child arrived, but not unheralded. Not in obscurity. Zacharias' loss of speech and its subsequent restoration at John the Baptist's birth "were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea" (Luke 1:65). God's people knew His mission was to prepare the way for their Messiah.

When His own Son was born of a virgin and wrapped in swaddling clothes, God sent heaven's choir down to honor this greatest of all events. Through the shepherds the word spread like wildfire. They could no more be silenced than the sun could be stopped from shining, or the wind from blowing. And as if that were not enough, imagine the rumors and talk that must have circulated throughout the land when the dignitaries from the East appeared seeking Israel's King!

The work and ministry of Jesus were God's final appeals to the Jewish nation. By the time the crucifixion week had rolled around, the name of this great teacher and healer from Nazareth was on every lip, His miracles and words the center of every conversation.

Today we live in the climax of this earth's history. Solemn indeed is the last message God sends to the generation that slowly and unperceptively inches forward toward its last decisive moments. To this awesome message we turn our attention today. May the Holy Spirit help us grasp its significance and urgency, is my prayer.

Very sincerely yours,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 28: LAST WARNING TO PLANET EARTH

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 14; DANIEL 5

In ancient Israel the Day of Atonement was heralded by the blowing of a ram's horn and a public announcement that the solemn day was at hand. Every man, woman and child was to contemplate God's holy temple and the sacred work being performed there for them. This was a day of judgment for Israel, and it prefigured the final phase of Christ's atoning work for His people (see Lesson 21). The Bible teaches that before "the great and terrible day of the Lord," the announcement will go forth: "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand" (Joel 2:1).

1. What was the book of Revelation to reveal? Revelation 1:1 _____

2. Why is its message so important? (verse 3, last part) _____

The book of Revelation is about last things for those who live in the last days.

3. Upon whom is a special blessing pronounced? (verse 3) _____

Unlike the book of Daniel, which was to be sealed until the time of the end (Daniel 12:4), Revelation was not to be sealed, "for the time is at hand" (Revelation 22:10). What time? The time to which the righteous have looked forward for 6000 years when all that was lost in Eden will be restored; when evil will be fully unmasked and brought to its inglorious end and God's character and law will be vindicated-the coming of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Part 1-- THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

Embedded in the very heart of Revelation is heaven's word for those who live in earth's closing hours. What is God trying to tell us? No one should be ignorant of this message.

First, note its setting. Immediately following these messages, John views the coming of Jesus in the clouds of heaven (Revelation 12:14-16). Therefore, they must be given immediately before Christ's second coming. They cannot be given until the judgment time is near, for otherwise it could not be said that the judgment hour is come (verse 7). In Lesson 21 we learned that God scheduled the judgment to begin in 1844. May we not conclude then, that with each passing year since 1844 until Jesus comes, these messages become increasingly important and meaningful?

The First Angel's Message - The Everlasting Gospel

1. Under the first angel, what is preached? (verse 6) _____
To whom? _____

The word "angel" means "messenger." God does not send literal angels to preach His gospel from house to house and from church to church, on the radio or television. He uses people. The message is not whispered-it goes with a "loud voice." It is to be heard I To be proclaimed to earth's remotest bounds. It is a Christ-centered message, focusing on the gospel.

2. What is the gospel? 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 "I declare unto you the gospel... how that _____ for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was _____, and that he _____ again the third day."

Thought question: Why is this message called the "everlasting gospel"? _____

From God's first promise to Adam after he sinned (Genesis 3:15), to Jesus' second coming, *all* men were, and always will be, saved by believing in the gospel of Christ, It was preached by types and ceremonies to the patriarchs and, through the temple services, to Israel of old. It was proclaimed by Christ and His apostles. The "everlasting gospel" is not new; it is God's original gospel, His true gospel, the only gospel. However, it will be given in a new setting and with new power, for in the last days it will accompany the solemn announcement that the hour of God's judgment has arrived.

3. What three things does this message require of us? (verse7) "_____,
and give _____; for the hour of his judgment is come: and _____
_____ that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

A common thread runs through these admonitions-a warning against self-worship! Fear (give reverence to) God, not self! Give glory to God, not self! Worship God, not self ! It invites us to a deeper spiritual relationship with God, to a life of faith instead of works. In this age of self-sufficiency, when man has sent his space ships soaring to distant planets, and human footprints impress the surface of the moon, God reminds us that the highest of all goals-eternal life-is not the product of human abilities. How much can man do for his own salvation? Jesus said, "Without me ye can *do nothing*" (John 15:5). One writer has aptly said that justification by faith is the work of God in laying man's glory in the dust, and doing for man that which he cannot do for himself !

"Give glory to him." If I could save myself, who would get the glory? "If Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory," but "he staggered not at the promise of God . . . ; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Romans 4:2, 20). "The glory of man in the work of the gospel goes to dust. To the dust! That's why they didn't like Jesus....Whenever the glory of God is absent, the glory of man rises to the top. And whenever the glory of God rises to the top, the glory of man goes to the dust !" (Morris Venden, *Righteousness by Faith and the Three Angels' Messages*, pp. 11,12.)

4. How may we give glory to God? Joshua 7:19 _____
2Corinthians 4:15 _____
Philippians 2:11 _____
Philippians 1:11 _____
1 Corinthians 10:31 _____

How comprehensive is the life that brings glory to God! It involves the total man-the health and well-being of his body, mind and spirit, producing the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

"Worship Him!" If I do not know the experience of daily faith and trust in God, I'm not worshipping Him. If I go to church and think I am worshipping Him, but don't live for Him through the week, then six days I am worshipping self, and the seventh day I can seriously question whether I am really worshipping God.

"Worship Him that *made....*" Is it coincidence that this message began to go forth at the same time that a man by the name of Darwin was writing a book that revolutionized the course of science? Is it an accident that this injunction rings out at a time when nearly three-fourths of all Christian ministers believe that man evolved, thereby disbelieving God's claim to be the Creator?

Thought question: Do you think true worship of the Creator can take place apart from the day that memorializes His creative work-the seventh-day Sabbath? _____
Why ? _____

The Second Angel's Message - Babylon is Fallen

1. What is the message of the second angel? Revelation 14:8 _____

In order for all nations to drink of the wine of Babylon, including non-Christian nations, there must be some false principle universally known and followed that is here being warned

against. This again points to some deep, underlying thread common to all three messages.

Ancient Babylon rose on the site of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Those who built this tower were saying in effect, "We have no faith in God's promise not to send another flood; we must do something to save ourselves." Consequently, this ill-fated tower became a citadel of rebellion, a monument to apostasy, and a synonym for any man-made way to heaven. When the rebellion was at its peak God brought it to a halt by confusing the languages, and the results have been with us ever since. In fact, the very word "Babylon" means "confusion."

Under Nebuchadnezzar Babylon was known as the golden city (Isaiah 14:4), and dominated the civilized world. Babylon took God's people captive, threatened their lives, destroyed their system of worship, assaulted their faith. So wicked was it that God equated it with Satan. Indeed, as the center of paganism, it became the capital of the dragon--a fitting symbol of any religious system offering a substitute way of salvation.

"The only thing necessary to be a captive of Babylon is to be a slave to the idea that I can . . . do it myself in terms of living the Christian life or of getting to heaven" (Ibid., p. 18). Not only is this principle the foundation of non-Christian systems of worship, but it has also crept into Christian thinking. So cleverly does Satan disguise this ego-satisfying concept that we can easily be caught in Babylon's net before we are aware of it.

Recently a pastor gave a three-question quiz to the members of his large church: (1) "Have you come to the place in your spiritual life where if you were to die tonight you would know for certain that you would have eternal life? (2) Why? and (3) As you understand it, on what conditions does God give eternal life?" The answers revealed that four out of five Christians were relying on something they could do--"works"--for their justification before God. Many believed they would be saved because they tried to do what was right and keep the commandments as best they could. Others were uncertain of their status before God because they fell so far short of reaching the high standards of the Bible. Very few rested their assurance of eternal life completely on the righteousness of Christ, His pardon of their sins, and their acceptance of Him as their Saviour. Oh, how many are caught up in the righteousness-by-works syndrome, and are drinking the wine of Babylon.

2. Of what is Babylon the mother? Revelation 17:5

Remember that in symbolic prophecy a woman is a church or a religious power. In this chapter we can readily see that Babylon is none other than the beast of Revelation 13. Verse 5 states that she has "daughter churches," who, like their mother, drink the wine of tradition and man-made doctrines. How sad that the churches which emerged from the Reformation failed to continue to walk in God's Word as additional errors and traditions were uncovered. During the great religious awakening of the 1830's and 40's, God gave all these churches a golden opportunity to unite and move forward on the common platform of Christ's imminent return. For a brief moment some of them almost did. Then one by one they began to turn away those whose study of the prophecies convinced them Jesus would come in 1844. Since then compromise has weakened these churches even more.

God does not use the symbol of Babylon until the very last stages of history, the time just prior to its downfall. By reviewing the fall of ancient Babylon we may discover one possible reason why. You will enjoy the entire chapter of Daniel 5.

3. What was the "last straw" in Babylon's downfall? Daniel 5:1-5;22-28.

These vessels had been anointed and set apart for holy use only (Exodus 30:26-29; 40:9-11). "Thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy."

4. How did God feel when Israel failed to distinguish between the common and holy, and desecrated holy things? Ezekiel 22:26 "I am _____."

By deliberately using the sacred vessels of the temple for a secular purpose, Belshazzar was openly profaning and defying God. His cup of iniquity was full. Do you see the parallel between this and God's holy Sabbath? God says, "Remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy." It has never been anything other than holy, for on the first seventh day of this

world, God rested from His work, "blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it" (set it apart, or made it holy) (Genesis 2:3).

Through the dark centuries man has largely ignored this sacred day. God has been longsuffering, for men and women were kept in ignorance of His Word. But when the issue is brought into the open, when the seventh-day Sabbath becomes a life-and-death matter, every person's loyalty will be tested. Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). "He that is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30). Those who stand with the Lord will be loyal to His holy day; those who willfully use His holy time for common and secular purposes, thereby profaning and defying God, will demonstrate that he is on the side of God's enemy.

The Third Angel's Message - The Mark of the Beast

1. What does the third angel warn against? Revelation 14:9-11 _____

Lessons 26 and 27 covered in detail the beast and his image, the seal and the mark. In Eden, Satan met Eve at the tree with three points of deception: (1) You don't have to keep God's commandments. God said, Don't eat of the tree, but you don't have to obey that! (2) If you eat, you won't die. (3) If you eat it, you'll become as God.

Here are three commonly held beliefs, all of which are contrary to God's Word: (1) the breakdown of the ten commandments (especially the Sabbath commandment); (2) the widespread belief that the soul is immortal; and (3) salvation by works. May God help us to fortify ourselves against these three great deceptions of Satan.

Part 2-- COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE

1. As God winds up His indictment against Babylon, what last appeal does He make to those who still cling to her false doctrines? Revelation 18:4 _____

2. What parallel message was given to Lot and his family in Sodom and Gomorrah? Genesis 19:12, last phrase _____

Before destroying these two cities, God called out His followers. Some, however, could see no immediate danger, and refused to leave (verse 14). By this choice they identified themselves with the sins of Sodom and were consumed by the flames that destroyed it.

Jesus said, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold: ... they shall hear my voice; and . . . they follow me" (John 10:16, 27). They hear His voice saying, "Come out of her [Babylon], *my people* [my sheep], that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." The compassionate Saviour, who is "not willing that any should perish," calls you to separate from all error, all tradition, and to identify with those who "love the truth" and are willing to follow it to the end.

The choice is yours. Will you choose in favor of Jesus, "the way, the truth, and the life"?