

The issue, you see, is much more than a mere matter of time – of two days. The underlying issue is one of fundamental loyalty to God. Men must choose whether they will obey the Creator of Heaven and earth or whether their obedience will go to the opponents of God. That's why God sends an angel with the most solemn message ever proclaimed. God doesn't want a single person to be lost; He doesn't want anyone to miss the joy of eternal life with Him. He longs for your obedience, your love.

### **Today, the choice is yours**

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve; ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Joshua 24:15)

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use the eagle to stand for the United States system. On the basis of the clear description which John gives of this beast power, Bible students down through the years have identified the first beast of Revelation 13 as the Roman Catholic Church. No other power so precisely fits the specification of the prophecy.

Revelation 13 indicates that just before Jesus returns there will be a worldwide federation of religion united in a common cause. The power of the civil authority will be utilized to sentence to death those who refuse to worship the beast and its image (see Revelation 13:15). A crisis is coming in which everyone must choose either to worship the beast and its image, thus exposing himself to the punishment of God, or to worship the Creator and risk the death decree of men. What is the act of worship which will be required to avoid the death sentence? What will the issue be?

The mark of the beast will be the special point of controversy (see Revelation 13:16, 17).

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Have you ever had someone deliver a very important, life or death, message to you? If so, how did you respond to it? In the Book of Revelation, John sees in vision that there are three angels who each have an important, life or death, message for planet earth. Let's take a brief look at each of these very important messages.

In chapter 14, John describes three angels that he sees flying through the air. He doesn't say what they looked like, because the important thing was not their appearance but their messages. John is very careful to record what he heard the angels proclaim as they flew across the sky.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Angel's Message**

This is what he wrote concerning the first of these three angels: "*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and*

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*Listen to what God says: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."* (Exodus 20:8-11)

It seems as if the angel had this commandment in mind as he flew through the air calling out, "...worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

God Himself points to Creation as the significance of the Sabbath commandment. By keeping the seventh day holy, His people show their loyalty to Him as their Creator. The Bible record of Creation tells us: "*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had*

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*labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."* (Exodus 20:8-11)

Rome has substituted Sunday, the first day of the week, for the seventh-day Sabbath. Rome, in fact, admits the change to be her work – the **mark** of her authority.

In a letter written for Cardinal James Gibbons by his chancellor, November 11, 1895, we read: "*Of course the Catholic Church claims that the change [of the Sabbath to Sunday] was her act. It could not have been otherwise as none in those days would have dreamed of doing anything in matters of spiritual and ecclesiastical and religious without her. And the act is a mark of her*

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The crowning act which finalizes her moral downfall and brings about her physical destruction is her persecution to the death of God's faithful followers. The decree will go forth that those who persist in "stubbornly" obeying God's commandments (particularly the fourth) deserve to die. By this act Babylon will cut herself off from God and ensure her final ruin.

John heard a voice from heaven appealing to the loyal minority of earth to separate themselves from this renegade religious union: "*And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."* (Revelation 18:4)

God's appeal today is: "Come out of falsehood and take your stand on the side of right. Babylon is falling from the weight of her sins; come out of her while you still can!"

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when Jesus comes – those who worship God and those who worship, or give their loyalty to, the beast (see Revelation 13:8). The first angel's message is a plea by the people of God for faithfulness in the face of mounting persecution and apostasy, a call to maintain faith in the same gospel handed down from century to century.

The angel ends his appeal with the command: "*...worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."* (Rev. 14: 7)

The purpose and end result of the eternal gospel is the worship of God the Creator.

How do we worship God? If we go to church once a week and pray three times a day, have we worshiped Him? If we speak of our love for Him, have we worshiped Him?

In the marriage of a man and woman, the bride and groom promise to love, honor, and cherish each other. How do they do it in actual practice? Is carrying out the garbage fulfilling the marriage vow? Has a wife kept her promise when she has cooked three meals a day for six whole weeks?

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### **2<sup>nd</sup> Angel's Message**

After the first angel delivered his message, John heard the voice of the second angel roll across the sky.

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." (Revelation 14:8)

That's all the angel said, but to John the words carried a world of meaning. To us "Babylon" doesn't seem to mean much. If anything, it recalls a vague impression of ancient history we picked up in school somewhere along the way. Well, Babylon is ancient history, but that doesn't mean it isn't interesting – and important.

To John the term "Babylon" meant a great deal. He was a Hebrew, remember, and thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. Immediately his mind must have gone back to Babylon's role there.

In the Old Testament story, Babylon appears as one of the main enemies of God's people. Other

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Has the husband cherished his wife by bringing home his paycheck faithfully? Marriage includes these things, but it is more than any one of them – much more. Marriage is a total giving of one's self to their spouse, and loving every minute of it. Likewise, worshipping God involves more than any single act we can do. Worship is a total giving of one's self to God. It's a way of life, a fundamental loyalty. Worship is complete obedience to our Creator, and loving every minute of it.

Jesus said: *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15)

The apostle John wrote, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."* (1 John 5:3) We cannot worship God while willfully disobeying Him. It is an amazing tribute to the cunning and skill of Satan that he has been able to persuade millions of Christians to disregard, either willfully or ignorantly, the one commandment God has given which points directly to Him as the Creator.

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nations attacked and harassed Israel, but it was Babylon who subjugated God's people completely and carried practically the entire population into captivity.

You see, Babylon was Satan's Old Testament counterpart for God's people. He knew that God intended to use the Israelites as His special representatives on earth. So Satan determined to have a particular group of people through whom he could work. Babylon stands throughout the Bible as the symbol of the forces of Satan which oppose God and His people.

John realized that God was using Babylon as a symbol of the wicked forces which would be in opposition to God's people in the last days, just as ancient Babylon had tried to destroy God's people in Old Testament times. And these forces of evil would be *religious* forces.

So Babylon, who had caused the nations to drink the wine of her fornication/impure passion (that is, to unite with her in apostasy), must be a symbol of false religion which draws men away from God.

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The beast and its image through decrees try to force everyone to accept this mark. The third angel of Revelation 14 warns of the dire consequences from God to those who worship the beast and its image or who receive the mark of the beast.

What is the mark? How do we receive it?

The angel draws a sharp contrast between those who receive the mark of the beast and those who keep the commandments of God. Evidently a person who receives the mark of the beast cannot also keep God's commandments. The mark, then, must deal with a command that distinguishes the authority of the Roman Church in contrast to the authority of God.

Daniel 7:25, in describing this same power, says it shall *"...think to change times and laws..."* Only one of God's Ten Commandments deals with "time." Has the Roman Church attempted to change this commandment? Yes.

God's commandment reads: *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou*

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Since these angels deliver their messages in the days just prior to the return of Jesus, Babylon must represent the apostate, false religious forces which will oppose God and His faithful people just before the Second Coming.

The second angel announces the fall of Babylon. What is the meaning of this? How does she fall? Babylon fell as a literal kingdom when Cyrus, a Medo-Persian ruler, overthrew the city. But the fall of spiritual Babylon is a moral fall as well as a physical collapse. The physical fall of Babylon takes place in connection with the second coming of Jesus (see 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 16: 17-21; 18:8-24). God's justice will destroy those who have willfully rebelled against Him. At this time the forces of religious apostasy will receive their just reward from Heaven. But the reason for Babylon's physical destruction lies in her moral fall.

The moral fall of Babylon consists in her alliance with civil authority and economic influences against truth and in her consistent opposition to God and His people.

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*give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."* (Rev. 14:6, 7)

What a message of encouragement and hope! You see, in chapters 12 & 13 John has, under divine inspiration, been outlining important events in the great struggle between God and Satan. He shows how that ever since Satan rebelled in heaven, this warfare between good and evil has raged back and forth. In these two chapters he makes it very clear that each person must choose to be on one side or the other – either for Satan or for God. How unfortunate it is that many align themselves with Satan. John pictures Satan as a dragon fighting against God and God's people. He also describes two strange animals (or beasts, as John calls them), one like a leopard and the other like a lamb, representing political and religious powers which are Satan's agents in persecuting God's people.

According to John, there will be only two groups

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*made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."* (Genesis 2:1-3)

The first angel, by pleading with men to worship God as the Creator, draws attention to the Sabbath, which is God's seal of creative power. Those who, by faith in the Creator, obey and keep the seventh day Sabbath receive God's seal and demonstrate their loyalty to Him. By contrast, those who reject God's control and choose to follow the beast power receive its mark of authority (see Revelation 13: 16, 17).

The contrast is clear. The first angel appeals to men to worship the Creator and receive His seal. The third angel gives a dire warning against receiving the mark of the beast power (see Revelation 14:9-11).

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ecclesiastical authority in religious things." God says the Sabbath is a mark of loyalty to Him, which identifies His people.

"Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them." (Ezekiel 20:12)

But notice one important point. Sunday-keeping is not **yet** the mark of the beast. No one today has received this mark. The mark of the beast can come only when the image of the beast has been formed and when it enforces the observance of Sunday on pain of death. Revelation 13:15-17 predicts that this will happen. The great confederacy of religion and civil authority will combine to enforce obedience to the beast and its image by law. When the issue is thus clearly drawn, and men weigh the claims of God against the claims of men, only then can a person choose to receive the mark of the beast.

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### 3<sup>rd</sup> Angel's Messages

*The third angel followed the first two, and John heard him say, "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."* (Revelation 14:9-11)

In this same Book of Revelation, in the chapter just preceding the one which contains this message of the third angel, we find the beast, its image, and its mark plainly brought to view.

In Bible prophecy an animal or beast represents a kingdom, an institution, or a power – just as we

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