

DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

26

Revelation

Vision of the Son of Man

⁹I, John, am your brother and your partner in suffering and in God's Kingdom and in the patient endurance to which Jesus calls us. I was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for my testimony about Jesus. ¹⁰It was the Lord's Day, and I was worshipping in the temple. Suddenly, I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet blast. ¹¹It said, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea." I turned to see, who was speaking to me. I fell at his feet to worship him. ¹²He said, "Do not do that. I am your fellow servant and your brother who share with you and your fellow servants the worship of Jesus. Give glory to him who alone is worthy of such glory."

Does God Have a Special Message for Our Day?



WAYNE'S JOB was painting the outside of the retirement center where he worked. His supervisor said, "I don't care if you spray or brush the siding, as long as the job looks professional and is completed by August. There is more than one way to accomplish a task. I just want it done." Wayne's grandpa used to tell him much the same thing, saying, "All roads lead to Rome."

Maybe you have heard someone using that same phrase, "All roads lead to Rome," meaning that there is more than one way to accomplish a task or reach a goal. That may be true when it comes to painting or some other job, but the question for you and me is this: Is there more than one "truth" of Scripture? Do all religious approaches lead to truth? For example, does the Bible have more than one teaching regarding what happens to a person when he or she dies? Or the method of baptism—sprinkling, immersion, or pouring? Or which day is the Sabbath day? This list could go on and on.

It can be confusing to a person searching for biblical truth. Where do you begin your search? Which church or group should you choose?

Christianity, the predominant religion in America, is made up of numerous denominations, such as Protestants and

Catholics—in addition to subdivisions such as evangelicals, fundamentalists, Congregationalists, etc.

In all this maze, how can someone who is searching discover truth? There is one way to find truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). If we want to know the truth as it is in Jesus, if we want to cut through all the confusion of competing religious claims today, we need to go to the Bible. Let’s discover together what God says in His Word.

1 | Which Religion Saves?

Ramon Umashankar was born a Brahmin. However as a teenager, Ramon began to wonder if he could really find God through the various idols worshipped in Hindu temples.

Later, Ramon moved to the United States and began examining the Bible and the claims of Christ. He had always respected Jesus for His humility, but now Ramon heard that this Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God. He noticed that many Christians seemed to have a peace that he had not found in his years of meditation.

Then Ramon saw a film on the life of Christ. For the first time he realized that Jesus had experienced suffering and fear as a human being. Prior to this, Ramon had thought Jesus somehow used His supernatural powers to escape the pain of crucifixion. He wondered, “How did this Jesus go through such an ordeal—for sinful men?”

As Ramon continued to think about Christ’s death, he was overwhelmed by His demonstration of love. He decided to turn his life over to Jesus, the Savior. In comparison with Christ’s sacrificial love, Ramon later said, “Everything else just fell to pieces.”

This young Brahmin discovered the central truth of Christianity: Jesus is the Savior of the world. He is the Way—the only Way—of salvation.

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The Bible clearly teaches that we are lost in sin and thus subject to sin’s penalty: death (Romans 6:23). All have sinned (Romans 3:23), so all face death. All of us need to be rescued from sin’s condemnation. Jesus is the One—the only One—who can provide that rescue (1 Corinthians 15:2-4).

We are not saved by a religion, nor are we saved by a church. We are saved by Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone. “Everyone



who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). However, God does have a church, made up of people who follow Him as Lord and Savior of their lives.

The Apostle Peter said to Jesus: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus responded to this confession of faith by saying: “On this rock I will build My church” (verse 18).

Belief in Jesus Christ is the foundation of genuine religion, the “rock” on which the true church is built. Just as there is only “one God, the Father” and “one Lord Jesus Christ” our Savior (1 Corinthians 8:6), so there is only one true religion:

“One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5).

“There will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Christianity teaches the truth as revealed in the Word of God. Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). Jesus, praying to the Father before His death on the cross, said, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The true church will teach the Word of God—the Bible only—as its rule of faith and practice, and it will be guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit, Christ’s representative in the church.

2 | Does God Have a Special Message for Our Day?

Yes, God does have a special message for last-day Christians. This message is to be shared with the world and will reach its climax with the second coming of Jesus. This threefold message appears in Revelation 14:6-16. According to verses 14-16, after these three messages have been spread throughout the world, Jesus will come to “harvest” the saved:

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe!’ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped” (Revelation 14:14-16).

Though Scripture symbolically portrays these messages as being proclaimed by three angels, it is actually God’s people—His last-day church—who deliver them to the world. Let’s take a careful look at each of the three divine messages.

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



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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’” (Revelation 14:6, 7).

God’s people do not proclaim a *new* gospel to the world—they share the gospel message of salvation which has never changed. That is why it is called “the everlasting gospel.” Even though God may have a special message in the last days, we must always be careful never to de-emphasize or distort the “everlasting gospel” of Jesus Christ. It is the same message of salvation that people in Old Testament times accepted by faith (Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:2; 11:1-40); the same teaching that Jesus Himself proclaimed; the same gospel the disciples preached to conquer the world for Christ; the same gospel that has thundered down through the centuries of the Christian era. And God’s people preach it around the world today.

The first angel proclaims this same simple, saving gospel message but puts it in a new setting—a worldwide one—focused on people who are living in the last days just before Jesus returns. This last-day message calls on people to “fear [reverence] God and give glory to Him [reflect His character].”

Those who are part of God’s church in the days before His Second Coming will demonstrate God’s character of love to the world—not only by their words but also by their lives of dynamic witness. They offer a thrilling revelation of what God can do through human beings filled with the Spirit of Christ (John 15:8).

When were these Three Angels’ Messages to be proclaimed throughout the world? When the hour of God’s “judgment has come.” In Guide 13, we learned that Jesus began the work of His pre-Advent judgment in 1844, the year when Jesus inspired people all over the world to begin preaching the messages of Revelation 14.

This message calls for us to “worship Him who made heaven and earth” (Revelation 14:7). God asks us to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” because “in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth” (Exodus 20:8, 11). In 1844, when Darwin was propounding the theory of evolution, God was calling people back to worship Him as the Creator. At the very time evolution tried to threaten the authority of the Bible, God’s people discovered the seventh-day Sabbath of God’s Word and began to keep it in honor of the Creator of heaven and earth. The seventh-day Sabbath is an integral part of the First Angel’s Message.

THE SECOND ANGEL’S MESSAGE

“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’” (Revelation 14:8).

Following the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel, the name “Babylon” became connected with the Hebrew word *balal*, “to confound.” In Bible prophecy, Babylon is a vivid symbol of religious confusion—which is seen when professed Christians do not teach according to the Bible. So therefore, “Babylon” refers to

Christians or churches that have teachings and doctrines that are not based in God's Word, the Scriptures.

The second of God's messages strongly opposes a religion of compromise. Revelation 17 depicts spiritual Babylon—apostate Christianity—as an immoral woman (verses 1-5). She stands in contrast to the pure woman of Revelation 12 who represents the true Christian church.

The second angel warns, "Babylon is fallen." The woman who represents Babylon is a fallen woman who "has made all nations

drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." The "wine" represents false teachings that do not follow the Bible. The "fornication" represents the Christian church forming beliefs and philosophies based on human ideas and traditions rather than on God's Word. It attempts to force these false teachings upon others through an alliance of the secular government and the church. The message of the second angel calls God's

people to belong only to a church whose teachings and beliefs are founded on the Word of God and to resist the false teachings of an apostate Christianity that obscure the truths of the Bible.

God calls people to "come out" of Babylon (Revelation 18:4) and into wholehearted devotion to Christ. He wants a people who serve as examples of the power of obedient faith—genuine disciples who depend on Christ and follow His teachings in the Scriptures. He asks us to "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Many today are choosing a form of "lite" Christianity, saying, in effect: "Just give me a few greeting card sayings and send me on my way. Don't cramp my style with any of those nonnegotiable commandments from Mt. Sinai."



Babylon falls because she chooses to compromise God's Word and to reject certain truths of the Bible. During the first few centuries after Jesus' resurrection, the Church introduced certain theological teachings that led to protests from clergy and members and gave birth to the Protestant Reformation. Even in our modern day, some Christians have chosen to depart from the great Bible truths of the Reformation. If we choose not to follow *all* of the teachings of the Bible, we are part of Babylon. Those who "come out" of Babylon will reject unbiblical teachings and worship God as He is revealed in His Word.

THE THIRD ANGEL'S MESSAGE

"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. . . . 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" (Revelation 14:9-12).

The Third Angel's Message demands a decision. It divides the entire world into two groups. On one side stand apostate Christians who worship "the beast and his image" and receive "his mark on his forehead or on his hand." On the other side stand those who reject the authority of the beast; these are the saints "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus."

Note the contrast between the two opposing groups. Those who receive the "mark of the beast" follow convenient, man-made ideas and practices. They are professed Christians who choose not to follow the Bible and the Bible alone. God's faithful Christians, called "saints" in these verses, have as their

distinguishing traits: patience, obedience to God’s commands, and the faith of Jesus.

The deciding factor is worship. Will you worship God as described in Exodus 20:8-11 on His Sabbath? Or worship the beast and its proclaimed day of worship?

Our advanced *Focus on Prophecy* Bible course presents an in-depth study of the identity of Babylon and also of the beast, his image, and his mark. In this guide we can examine only briefly the vital importance of this third message.

In summary, the first angel 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 and beliefs that are not based completely on God’s Word. Finally, the third angel proclaims God’s solemn warning against worshipping the beast and his image. Two groups emerge—those who choose to follow God’s Word completely and those who choose to mix biblical teachings with human traditions.

3 | Christ’s Last-Day Church

Have you ever admired a strong, stable Christian—marveled at his or her devotion, patience, and faith, and longed for a similar spiritual experience? God gave His special message for our day in Revelation 14 because it can produce just such an experience.

As discussed in Guide 25, Revelation 12:17 identifies last-day Christians as those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 14:12 describes this same group as saints who “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

Let’s summarize the characteristics of last-day Christians.

1. They “have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17). Even when Satan vents His anger against them, they remain faithful to Jesus. Before Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. He also promised to live continually in the hearts of Christians through faith. Our Savior wants His light, love, and power to shine out to the world in a special way through God’s last-day church. Their faith is not of their own making; it’s a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). They see Christ more and more clearly in His true character, and by grace, through faith, they become living monuments to the power of an indwelling Christ.

Furthermore, Revelation 19:10 identifies the “testimony of Jesus” as the “spirit of prophecy.” God, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will provide special messages to His last-day Christians. The last-day church is a church of prophecy and will possess the prophetic gift.

2. They “keep . . . the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Last-day Christians need to trust God as Jesus trusted His Father. The faith that Jesus had, the faith that He taught, the faith that He lived, must now fill their hearts. Believers in the last days not only have the truth, they “keep” the truth—they follow it. To them, religion is life, belief is connected with practice, and faith is coupled with obedience. Each one lives out “the faith of Jesus” in his or her life. Theirs is an experience of *obedient living through faith*. They have discovered the truth that 18th-century author Samuel Johnson observed: “He who hopes to find peace by trusting God must obey Him.”

3. They “keep the faith of Jesus,” because they have discovered that the great teachings of the Bible, when applied to daily living, produce a dynamic Christian life. They have found that these great Bible truths awaken a love and

devotion to Christ who satisfies every need and longing of the human heart.

4. They “keep the commandments of God”—the Ten Commandments, the moral law of God. Because they love God with all their hearts, they want above all else to obey God’s every command. They show their love to God and other people by following all the commandments of God, including the fourth commandment that directs us to worship our Creator by honoring Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath.

5. They share the message of “the everlasting gospel” throughout the world (Revelation 14:6). The gospel declares that sin separates people from God, but that Jesus died for our sins so that we can experience a saving relationship with Him. Since 1844, when the pre-Advent judgment began in heaven, Christ’s last-day church has been calling people everywhere to come out of religious confusion and form a relationship with Jesus based solely on Bible truth.

6. They are driven by a sense of urgency, “for the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:15). The long night of sin and spiritual darkness is almost over; the end of the world is near, and millions still haven’t found Christ. This accounts for their acute sense of urgency that Jesus is coming soon!

7. They are consumed by their God-given mission. They don’t want to keep their wonderful relationship with Christ to themselves. Because “Babylon is fallen,” they plead with those still living in religious confusion, “Come out of her, my people” (Revelation 18:4). They have a healthy, fruitful fellowship that unites them to Christ, and they long to share this experience with everyone living in a decaying world. Their life of joy leads them to join the apostle John in extending this invitation to you:

“That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:3, 4).

Through His Spirit and His church, Jesus invites you also to come and surrender everything to Him:

“The Spirit and the bride [the church] say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

4 | The Two Harvests

The Three Angels’ Messages culminate when Jesus returns to earth to harvest the saved of all time (Revelation 14:14-16) and take them to heaven (John 14:1-3). He forever abolishes sin, sickness, misery, and death. The saints begin glorious new lives with Him, each day more exciting than the last, throughout eternity (Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus will also “harvest” the wicked at His coming.

“Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel . . . cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress” (Revelation 14:17-20).



This will be a tragic time of final destruction. It's an especially sorrowful event for Christ, because He must destroy those who refuse to be saved. Jesus "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Unfortunately some still turn away from Him.

Now is the time to decide. Now is the time to discover the day of salvation.

"We then, as workers together with Him [God] also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:1, 2).

The issue is clearly set. On the one side, Jesus stands with outstretched nail-pierced hands, urging you to take your stand with the saints "who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12). On the other side are the voices of mere human beings, urging that obedience to the entire Bible and to all the commandments of God is not important.

The crowd in Pilate's judgment hall once faced a strikingly similar issue. On one hand was Jesus, the Son of God. On the other hand was Barabbas, a criminal in the Roman justice system. In a commanding voice, Pilate asked, "Which of the two shall I release to you?" The crowd shouted, "Barabbas!" Pilate responded, "What then shall I do with Jesus?" With one voice the crowd proclaimed, "Let Him be crucified!" And so Jesus, the innocent One, was crucified, and Barabbas, the guilty one, went free (see Matthew 27:20-26).

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What should be our motive for obeying Jesus' commandments?
(John 14:15, 21)

2. What promise does Jesus give to His faithful people that will sustain them through the difficulties of the last days?
(Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5, 6)

3. What does Jesus say about following human traditions and rules rather than God's Word? (Matthew 15:9)

4. If we belong to Jesus, can anything separate us from God's loving, protective care? (Romans 8:38, 39; John 10:27-20)

5. Will heaven be worth any sacrifice we might be called upon to make? (Romans 8:18)



Which side do you choose today? Do you choose to follow man-made ideas and teachings that are contrary to the commandments of God and contrary to the everlasting gospel of Jesus? Or do you want to “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus”? Remember, He is the One who promises to send His Holy Spirit to solve your every perplexity, heal your every heartache, and satisfy your every longing. His love will never fail you.

My Decision

- I want to be among God's faithful remnant people in these last days. I choose to follow Him and be obedient to all His commandments.
- Please pray for me as I continue to study God's Word and consider His will for my life.

My Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father: I choose to follow You daily in my life. I choose to follow Your will as revealed in the Bible. Please help me through the power of the Holy Spirit to be obedient to Your will for my life. Please meet my every need as I plan to live with You in heaven. I ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen.

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