

Sabbath School Lesson #3 – Jesus and the Book of Revelation – 14-20 April 2018

Christ has promised: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne” (Revelation 3:21). In this week’s Lesson, our study is derived from: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Ephesians 1:20; and Revelation 1:10-18; 11:19; 12:1-17; 19:11-15. We focus on revelation of the coming of the Lord.

The fourteenth chapter of Revelation contains a summary of the messages that are designed to prepare men for the great advent of the ages, – the thing that was promised before man was driven out of Eden, and to which all prophecy and history point, – the coming of the Lord. Those messages are the entire Gospel concentrated into few words, and close upon the proclamation of them is the revelation of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven. This is what John, with his eyes enlightened so that he could see to the end of all things, saw as though it had already taken place:

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud One sat like unto 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 that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for Thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Revelations 14:14-16).

We further read: “And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a harp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden, without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs” (verses 17-20).

That presents to us a complete picture of the end of this present evil world, for “the harvest is the end of the world” (Matthew 13:39). Those who accept Christ as their Lord, and who live by His Word, shall be gathered into the heavenly garner, while those who will not have this Man to reign over them, – the chaff, the tares, and the thorns, – shall be burned up with unquenchable fire.

Now the question is, how much warning of this fearful, terrible, glorious, joyous, consummation has God given the world? Men are saying, more than ever before, “Where is the promise of His coming?” it is only because they are blindly ignorant of that with which they continually have to do.

When God made the sun, moon, and stars, He said, “Let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years” (Genesis 1:14); and after the wicked world had been destroyed by a flood of water, He said: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). Men do not know it simply because they do not heed God’s Word, but the truth is that every year with its changing seasons is a prophecy of the coming of the Lord, and a testimony to the truthfulness of all the prophecies of the Bible which foretell that event. The people of the earth are plants, springing from the earth even as the grass, the corn, and the vine. Read the first chapter of Genesis and you will see that the earth is the mother of all things on it. “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant” (Isaiah 5:7); but He says: “I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?” (Jeremiah 2:21). The gathering of the fruit and the corn at the proper season of the year is no more “the harvest of the earth” than will be the gathering of God’s people at the end of this present world, and the utter destruction of those who are but useless cumberers of the ground.

The revelation of the coming of the Lord is to us as it was to the Antediluvians. In the days of Noah God looked upon the earth in its wickedness and said, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years” (Genesis 6:3). Noah preached a final message to the antediluvians. The flood came, and “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6); and those who heeded not the message perished with it. What of the present world? Can we now expect that God’s Spirit will always strive with man? His Word tells us: “The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). A final message is given today, – a message of warning, as in the days before the flood.

God has not left the world to speculate upon the coming of the Lord. That men do speculate and indulge in fanciful conjectures concerning things to come, is not the fault of the Lord, but is due to the fact that men are more ready to trust in their own wisdom than in His. The Word of God has much to say about “the last days.” It tells us what the nature of those days will be, what signs will

appear in them, and what final efforts will be made by the great enemy of mankind to secure the homage of all men to himself. It is our fault if we do not read it, and be made wise thereby.

The end of human probation will be signalled by the terrible visitation of the "seven last plagues," in which is filled up the wrath of God (Revelation 15:1). But there is a message sent to save men from the fate of being made to drink "the wine of the wrath of God." In the fourteenth chapter of Revelation we read: "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" (verses 9-11). These are words of most solemn and awful import. Noah's message proclaimed a coming flood, which would engulf the unbelievers; but here is threatened the wrath of God "without mixture," "filled up" in the seven last plague. To whom are such words spoken? If they concern us, it is time that we knew the fact and understood by what means we avoid being worshippers of "the beast and his image," and escape so awful a fate.

Do not say it cannot be understood. God's words are not idle talk, and He does not send men messages they cannot understand. Do not treat it as a matter of indifference. Consider what will be the result to those who hear this message and do not heed it. They will drink of the wine of the wrath of God poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation. This settles the question for them, and for us as well. They *must* understand it. When ignorance means destruction, there is but one path to safety, and that is God's path of wisdom. And we may be sure that when God sends the world such a message as this which warns against the worship of the beast and his image, it will be only wilful ignorance that will keep any person from being enlightened by it.

God does not hold men responsible for what they cannot avoid, nor does He send them messages which they cannot comprehend. But He does not force people to see the truth. There is a wilful ignorance which arises from a heart of unbelief, – from a careless and indifferent attitude toward sacred truth as revealed in the Word of God. Such ignorance is sinful, and avails nothing.

There was much wilful ignorance in the days of Noah, but it afforded no protection against the flood. Although Noah preached faithfully, the people "knew not until the flood came, and took them all away" (Matthew 24:39). And "there shall come in the last days scoffers," saying "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water; whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:3-7). Such will go into perdition if they continue to be willingly ignorant. When God has spoken, wilful ignorance of His Word is a short sure path to destruction.

It is certain, therefore, that men will not be incapable of understanding that warning that God sends them against the worship of "the beast and his image," and the reception of his "mark." It is certain that God, who has made an infinite sacrifice to save men, will not make them drink of the wine of His unmixed wrath without having given them a full opportunity to escape the threatened doom. It is certain that He would not condemn them for not making a right 'guess' concerning something which was at best but a matter of conjecture, and for not seeing clearly into a misty field of speculation. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It is as certain that He will do right, that His Word does not present to men a field of speculation at all, but one of positive knowledge.

God has given His Spirit to be a Divine Teacher (John 16:13); and "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbaideth not, and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). With all confidence, therefore, – not in ourselves, nor in the wisdom of man, but in the wisdom and liberality of God, – we may study this most momentous and solemn message of warning against the worship of "the beast" and his "image," and the reception of his "mark." The field of investigation is God's Word. The truth is that therein is the wisdom of God, which is able to make us "wise unto salvation," and "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

All that we need to know is already revealed to us. God's word to man is not a sealed mystery, but a revelation. The message we have considered is a part of "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1). If we will treat it as a revelation, we shall find that God has spoken the truth, and that "His servants," may indeed learn therefrom things which must come to pass, and which are of vital interest and concern to all the world. "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not."