

Discover Bible Studies

#26: Does God Have a Special Message for Our Day?

Ramon Umashankar was born a Brahmin. His elders taught him at an early age that he was a god, and that to realize his divinity he must practice yoga and meditation. But as a teenager, Ramon began to wonder if He could really find God through the various idols worshipped in Hindu temples.

Ramon 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. And he noticed that many Christians seemed to have a peace that years of meditation failed to produce. Still, Ramon was determined to find truth in his own Hindu religion.

But then he 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. Previous to this he thought Jesus had somehow used His supernatural powers to escape the pain of crucifixion. But now, he couldn't explain the cross. He wondered: How did this Jesus go through such an ordeal-for sinful men?

As Ramon continued to meditate on Christ's death, he was overwhelmed by such a demonstration of love. He decided to give up his coveted Brahmin status and turn his life over to Jesus, the Savior. In comparison with Christ's sacrificial love, Ramon said, "Everything else just fell to pieces."

This young Brahmin discovered the central truth of Christianity: Jesus, the Savior of the world.

1. WHICH RELIGION SAVES?

Jesus is the Way-the only way-of salvation.

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." -Acts 4:12. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

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. And Jesus is the One-the only One-who can rescue us from sin's condemnation.

"Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." -John 6:40.

There is only one true religion:

"One Lord, ONE FAITH, one baptism." -Ephesians 4:5.

2. DOES GOD HAVE A SPECIAL MESSAGE FOR LAST-DAY CHRISTIANS?

Yes. This threefold message appears in Revelation 14:6-16. The proclamation of messages given by these three angels climaxes with the second coming of Christ (Verses 14-16)

(1) The First Angel's Message.

"Then I saw another angel [messenger] flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'" -Revelation 14:6, 7.

Though Scripture dramatically portrays these three messages through the symbol of three angels, God's people are the messengers who actually deliver them to the world. They do not proclaim a new gospel, but "the eternal gospel" to the entire world-"to every nation, tribe, language and people." "The eternal gospel" of Jesus 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.

The simple, saving gospel of Jesus Christ almost vanished from the church for more than a thousand years during the Dark Ages, but the Reformation revived it, and God's people preach it around the world today. The first angel proclaims this same gospel message, but it is given in a new setting-a worldwide one-for people living just before Jesus comes a second time.

Those who accept this message find themselves called to "fear God and give him glory [reflect His character]." They show the world God's character of love, not only by their words, but also by their lives of dynamic witness. They offer a thrilling revelation of what God can do through people filled with the Spirit of Christ.

When are these three angels' messages to be proclaimed throughout the world? When the hour of God's "judgment has come." Guide 13 explains that Jesus began the work of His pre-advent judgment in 1844. In that very year, 1844, Jesus inspired people all over the world to begin preaching the message of Revelation 14.

This message calls for us to "worship him who made the heavens, [and] the earth" (Revelation

14:7). God asks us to "remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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 this very time, those preaching the three angels' messages discovered the seventh-day Sabbath of God's Word and began to keep it in honor of the Creator of heaven and earth.

(2) The Second Angel's Message.

"A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'" -Revelation 14:8.

The second angel warns, "fallen is Babylon the Great." Revelation 17 depicts spiritual "Babylon" apostate Christianity-as an immoral woman (Verse 5). She stands in contrast to the pure woman of Revelation 12 who represents the true Christian church. The woman who represents Babylon is a fallen woman who "made all nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries." The wine of false doctrine has permeated these adulterated forms of Christianity. The message of the second angel calls God's people to resist the false teachings of an apostate Christianity.

Babylon represents a mixture of many forms of apostate Christianity. She is so dangerous because she distorts the picture of God into caricatures: God as vengeful and demanding, or God as a sentimental grandparent who's too sweet to bother anyone about sin. A healthy church will present a balanced picture of all God's attributes and show how His justice and mercy combine in the truth that God is love.

God calls people to "come out" of Babylon (Revelation 18:4), to reject unbiblical teachings, and follow Christ's teachings.

(3) The Third Angel's Message.

"A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. . . . There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.' This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." -Revelation 14:9-12.

The third angel's message divides the entire world into two groups. On one side stand the apostate Christians who "worship the beast and his image and receive his mark on the forehead or on the hand." On the other side stand those who reject the authority of the beast, "the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus."

Note the contrast between the two opposing groups. Those who receive the mark of the beast are compromising worshipers who follow convenient man-made ideas and

practices. The "saints" have as their distinguishing traits: "patient endurance," obedience to "God's commandments," and they "remain faithful to Jesus."

After these threefold messages have been spread throughout the world, Jesus will come to "harvest" the saved:

"I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one 'like a son of man' with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested." -Revelation 14:14-16.

3. CHRIST'S LAST-DAY CHURCH

Have you 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 obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus." Revelation 14:12 describes this same group as "saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus."

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

- (1) They "hold to the testimony of Jesus." Even when Satan vents His anger against them, they "remain faithful to Jesus." Their faith is not of their own making, it's a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8). God's last-day church 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.
- (2) They "keep . . . the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12, KJV). The faith that Jesus had, the faith that He taught, the faith that He lived, now fills their hearts. They not only have the truth, they "keep" the truth-they follow it. To them religion is life, belief is correlated with practice, and faith is coupled with obedience. They live out "the faith of Jesus." 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 that satisfies every need and longing of the human heart.
- (3) They "obey God's commandments"-the Ten Commandments, the moral law of God. They want above all else to obey God's every wish, His every command. They show their love to God and love to 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.

- (4) They share the message of "the eternal gospel" throughout the world (Revelation 14:6). The gospel declares that Jesus died for our sins, then rose from the grave so we can experience a saving relationship with Him. 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.
- (5) They are driven by a sense of urgency because "the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Revelation 14:15), and millions still haven't found Christ.
- (6) They are consumed by their God-given mission. Because "Babylon the Great" is fallen, they plead with those still living in religious confusion, "Come out of her, my people" (Revelation 18:4).

They desire to share their wonderful relationship with Christ and their happiness with everyone else.

All this and more unites the hearts of the millions of last-day Christians called out by the three angels' messages. Their life of joy leads them to join the apostle John in extending this invitation to you:

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete." -1 John 1:3, 4, margin.

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

"The Spirit and the bride [church] say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." -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). Jesus gathers all the saved and transports them to His "many mansions" in heaven (John 14:1-3, KJV). He abolishes for all time sin, sickness, misery, and death. The saints begin glorious new lives with Him throughout eternity (Revelation 21:1-4).

Jesus will also "harvest" the wicked at His coming.

"Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel . . . called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are

ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press." -Revelation 14:17-20.

This will be a tragic time of final destruction, a very sorrowful event for Christ because He must destroy those who refuse to be saved. Jesus "is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

When Jesus comes to reap the harvest of earth, in which harvest will you be? Will you stand among the ripened grain with the redeemed of all ages (Revelation 14:13-16)? Or will you be among ripened grapes of wrath with the lost (verses 17-20)?

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 obey God's commandments and keep the faith of Jesus" (verse 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 the one hand was Jesus, the divine-human God-man. On the other hand was Barabbas, a helpless man, unable to help himself or those in the crowd who witnessed that tragic scene. And yet when the commanding words of Pilate rang through the motley crowd, "Which of the two shall I release unto you?" the multitude of voices thundered back in angry tones, "Barabbas!"

"What then," asked Pilate, "shall I do with Jesus, the so-called Christ?"

With one voice the crowd shouted, "Let Him be crucified!"

And so Jesus, the innocent One, was crucified; and Barabbas, the guilty one, went free. (See Matthew 27:20-26.)

Whom do you choose today, Barabbas or Jesus? Do you choose to follow man-made ideas and teachings that are contrary to the commandments of God and contrary to the eternal gospel of Jesus? Or do you desire to "obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus"? Remember, Jesus is the One who promises to send His Holy Spirit to solve your every perplexity, to heal your every heartache, and to satisfy your every longing.

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