

CREATION AND THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

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CREATION AND THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

Kwabena Donkor, Laszlo Gallusz, and Ekkehardt Mueller

The three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6–12 acquired great significance for early Adventists after the Disappointment of 1844, but the theological implications of the messages developed over time and continue to exert an important influence on Adventist thinking and mission to this day. Early reflection (up to 1849) focused on the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. After 1849, reflection on the messages broadened to include a complete understanding of its various aspects, including the Sabbath and its connection to the doctrine of creation. Ellen G. White understood the messages to be an integral part of Adventists' landmark beliefs.

The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels' messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, "The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." One of the landmarks under this messages was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God's law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks.¹

Today, Adventists continue to affirm the allusions to creation and the Sabbath in the three angels' messages and, more specifically, the connection of the doctrine of the Sabbath to the doctrines of God as Creator, Redeemer, Covenant Maker, Giver of good gifts, and Sustainer of His creation.² Perhaps more than ever, contemporary challenges to the biblical doctrine of creation have sharpened the focus of Adventist thought on creation theology. The present study represents an effort

¹Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1946), 30–31.

²See Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, SDA Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 493–513, electronic ed.

to unfold the significance of creation in the three angels' messages. It is aimed at focusing more closely on the exegetical and theological connection between the doctrine of creation within the three angels' messages and the messages' other themes.

The following discussion will comprise two main parts. In the first part, since creation provides the theological foundation for related themes in the three angels' messages, the theme of creation in the book of Revelation as a whole and the three angels' messages in particular will be outlined. The second part of the discussion will seek to elaborate on the interrelationships among the themes in the messages. However, before setting out the creation theme in the three angels' messages, it would be helpful to place the messages in its proper setting—namely, the circumstances surrounding the proclamation of the messages.

The Setting of the Three Angels' Messages

Revelation 11:19–14:20 portrays the long conflict between good and evil on earth and its outcome.³ After introducing the characters of a woman, the true church of God, and the dragon, Satan, Revelation 12 draws attention to Jesus' incarnation and the conflict He had to endure during His time on earth. He is depicted as the ruler of the nations and "caught up to God and His throne" (Rev 12:4–5). Clearly, with its reference to a woman, a serpent, the woman's seed, and enmity, Revelation 12 is based on the protogospel of Genesis 3:15. Here we have the promise of the Redeemer and redemption after humanity's fall into sin in the garden of Eden and the terrible consequences ensuing from this situation. In the vision, Satan's attack on Jesus is followed by his war against the church, God's people throughout New Testament times—that is, church history (Rev 12:6, 13–16). But Revelation 12 also pulls away the curtain that separates heavenly realities from the earthly, portraying behind the scenes a deadly heavenly struggle between Michael and the dragon—that is, between the Son of God and Satan (Rev 12:7–10). That struggle ends with Satan's defeat but not his annihilation. Consequently, the last verse of Revelation 12 focuses on the massive conflict at the end of earth's history, in which Satan attempts to destroy Christ's faithful remnant (Rev 12:17; 13:1–18).

³ For an overall analysis of the book of Revelation in terms of its structure and thematic relations, see Kenneth Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions," in *Symposium on Revelation: Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 35–72.

From Revelation 13 we learn that this war is a proxy war since the dragon uses the sea beast to make war against the saints.⁴ Unfortunately, the believers, who have “overcome” Satan “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11),⁵ are now “overcome” by the sea beast (Rev 13:7) —at least temporarily and quite likely in another sense. They have gained spiritual victory but have not been able to escape persecution. Satan also uses a second, extremely deceptive beast, the land beast —later called the false prophet—which came out of the earth. This second beast is so opposed to God’s true people that it prevents believers from buying and selling (Rev 13:17) and thereby threatens their existence. In addition, it creates an image of the first beast and brings it to life. This image, after being brought alive, sees to it that non-worshippers of the beast are killed (Rev 13:15). The end of chapter 13 leaves the audience with the impression that God’s faithful people have no chance of surviving the evil onslaught.

Given this background, Revelation 14 becomes all the more important. Yes, there are survivors, and they are depicted as already standing triumphantly with Jesus on Mount Zion. The vision ends with a description of the 144,000 (Rev 14:1–5), their messages (Rev 14:6–12), and the second coming of Christ, which is a kind of judgment for unbelievers (Rev 14:14–20).⁶ Also significant is that the second coming is not only a negative event as a kind of judgment for the wicked, but also a positive experience of judgment when the possibility of “two harvests” is acknowledged in Revelation 14:14–20, depicting judgment for believers in verses 14–16.⁷

This central vision is known by various names: for instance, “the vision about the Satanic trinity,” “the vision of the woman and the evil powers,” “the Great Controversy vision,” and “the vision of the great war.” It is difficult to summarize the vision in a heading because it

⁴ The dragon went *poiēsai polemon meta tōn loipōn* (“to make war with the remnant,” Rev 12:17). The sea beast is given power to *poiēsai polemon meta tōn hagiōn* (“to make war with the saints) and to overcome them (Rev 13:7).

⁵ All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ For a more detailed outline of these chapters and the connection between them, as well as the conflict between the remnant and the evil powers, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “The End Time Remnant in Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, nos. 1–2 (2000): 188–204. This article also explains the time frame of the vision.

⁷ See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 551, who suggests that “the judgment in 14:14–16 is of believers and thus centers on mercy, while in 14:17–20 it is of unbelievers and centers on justice.”

has many different aspects. Thus, one could also focus more on the positive side of the story rather than the negative and call it the “vision of the triumph of the Lamb and His people.”

In the central vision of Revelation, the messages of the three angels are the final and universal messages addressed to all people in the last time of earth’s history. It comes towards the end of the historical part of Revelation (chaps. 1–14) but is also linked to the eschatological part of the Apocalypse (chaps. 15–22). From Revelation 15 onward, the last moments of this drama are revealed. God’s intervention in favor of His saints happens in the form of the seven bowls or plagues. These plagues are the last in human history. They are poured out on those who have accepted the mark of the beast and have worshipped his image (Rev 16:2). The sixth and seventh plagues depict the collapse of Babylon in the battle of Armageddon. Revelation 17 and 18 describe in more detail this fall of end-time Babylon—already mentioned in the second messages of the three angels (Rev 14:8)—and Revelation 19 pictures the intervention of Jesus as the rider on the white horse with His army. So, the vision following Revelation 12–14 returns to the time just prior to the second advent (Rev 15–18) to move again to the parousia (Rev 19). Revelation 20 describes the time after Christ’s second advent, the millennium (Rev 20), followed by the new Jerusalem on the new earth (Rev 21–22).

This short review of the central vision of Revelation (chaps. 12–14) is crucial to understanding the timing and content of the three angels’ messages. It is a message to humanity in the last period of human history just prior to the parousia.⁸ Additionally, the entire book of Revelation contributes to the interpretation and relevance of the three angels’ messages.

Focusing on the three angels’ messages, however—and the themes of the gospel, worship, and judgment in particular—we argue that the doctrine of creation undergirds all the other themes. Hence, it is important to demonstrate this fact broadly before we proceed to look at the themes individually to see their connections to the doctrine of creation.

⁸ For historical and chronological interpretations of the details of this central vision of the book of Revelation, see William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 3–40.

Creation in the Book of Revelation and the Three Angels' Messages

While the gospel is mentioned before creation in the three angels' messages, it does not take precedence chronologically and theologically. Creation precedes salvation but the two are linked. Without the doctrine of creation, many of the theological themes in the book of Revelation—including the three angels' messages—would lack context. Thus, it is important at the outset to outline the doctrine of creation as expressed in the book. As noted, in the first angel's message the good news of salvation is based on worship of the Creator.

Revelation has more direct and indirect references to creation than would be expected at first glance.⁹ Much of this creation language points forward to the Creator in Revelation 14:7.

1

The first direct reference to creation is found in Revelation 3:14 where Jesus is presented as the beginner or the originator (*archē*, NET) of God's creation.¹⁰ This verse belongs to the seven letters in Revelation 1–3. Consequently, when we talk about the Creator in Revelation, Jesus has to be included.

⁹ We will briefly discuss direct creation statements, but the indirect references also have to be taken into account. Allusions to the Genesis creation are the references to 1) heaven, sea, and earth; 2) the presence of God; 3) life; 4) precious stones and gold; 5) the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars); 6) day and night; and 7) the ruling of humanity. Further allusions are the phrases “from the foundation of the world” and “it is done,” the silence in heaven, and the beasts coming from the sea and out of the earth. Creation themes occur with the divine designations, the verb *poieō* (to make), the undoing of creation in the trumpet vision, the abyss, and humans as souls.

¹⁰ The NKJV calls Jesus “the Beginning of the creation of God.” But such a translation can be misunderstood as Jesus being the first being created by God, not the Creator Himself. In Revelation “beginning” (*archē*) applies to Jesus and God must be understood actively, as we do when saying that Jesus is “the Beginning and the End” (Rev 22:13). This phrase is also used verbatim for God the Father, who is likewise “the Beginning (*archē*) and the end” (Rev 21:6). Some English translations prefer “ruler” as the translation of *archē* (e.g., the NIV). However, this does not seem to be likely due to John's use of the term. The meaning “ruler” or “powers” is mostly found with Paul (e.g., Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 15:24, Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:10, 15; Titus 3:11) but not, however, in Hebrews (e.g., Heb 1:10; 2:3; 3:14; 5:12; 7:3). In addition, John seems to distinguish between *archē* and *archōn* (“ruler, authority”) in Revelation.

2

In the seal vision, Revelation 4:11 refers to the Creator: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (ESV). This hymn is preceded by another one: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev 4:8, ESV). Revelation 4 focuses on the worship of God the Father, on His magnificence and power, and on His activities. Twice in Revelation 4:11 the verb *ktizō* (“to create/to make”) is used. This statement contains a number of important points: a) The “you” is emphatic. It stresses and highlights God as the Creator in the sense that “creation is a fundamental component of who God is.”¹¹ b) God created all things. This includes all living beings and all inanimate things. But God is not part of creation. c) Creation by God is expressed twice in Revelation 4:11, once in the indicative mood—“God created”—and once in the passive—“they were created.” The passive is a divine passive. No being can claim that it does not exist as a result of divine creation. d) Creation is not an accident or a mere coincidence. Creation is rooted in the will of God. e) The order of the verbs “created,” “existed,” and “were created” may stress God as Sustainer of creation.¹² f) To recognize God as Creator has repercussions on humanity. Just as the twenty-four elders prostrate before God, recognizing Him as the supreme authority of the universe, humans on earth ought to do likewise. The elders’ symbolic act of casting their crowns before the throne underlines their complete commitment to the Almighty. They acknowledge their dependence on the Creator,¹³ and humans must similarly express their dependence on the Creator.

¹¹ Gregory Stevenson, “The Theology of Creation in the Book of Revelation,” *Leaven* 21, no. 3 (2013): 140.

¹² The strange order of verbs has triggered a number of suggestions, among them that God planned creation in His mind before executing it. See, e.g., Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 127. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 335, proposes that the meaning of lines 2 and 3 is that “they continually exist and have come into being.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, Word Biblical Commentary 52A (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 312, talks about “an instance of *hysteron-proteron*, i.e., the inversion of events, which sometimes occurs in Revelation.” On the other hand, Osborne, 242, suggests an ABA pattern, a chiasmic pattern, in which creation is restated without implying a chronological order.

¹³ See Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 181; and Mounce, 126.

The two hymns of Revelation 4 occur in the same immediate context of worship. It is the holy God who sits on the throne, the Lord God Almighty, the one who was and is and is to come, who is the Creator God. In other words, the divine designations in Revelation 4:8 and similar ones in Revelation 1:8 have to be understood as descriptions of the Creator God. At least from chapter 4 onward, the divine names and titles carry with them the notion that God is to be understood as the Creator.¹⁴

3

In Revelation 5:13 creation language occurs again: “I heard every creature [*ktisma*] in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” (Rev 5:13, ESV). The noun *ktisma* refers to “creatures” and “everything created.”¹⁵ Creation worships the Creator because He is worthy of it. Therefore, the first angel of Revelation 14:4–7 can demand worship.

4

Revelation 10:6 occurs in the expansion of the sixth trumpet of the vision of the seven trumpets. Most likely, the strong angel of Revelation 10:1–7 should be understood as Jesus. He swears “by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it” (Rev 10:6, ESV). Important is the mention of the areas of creation: heaven, earth, sea, and what is in them. The angel’s reference to the Creator and the scope of creation reminds Bible students of Genesis 14:19, 22 (LXX); Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 146:6; Acts 4:24; 14:15; and the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:11, emphasizing God’s universal creatorship and therefore His universal authority. The threefold repetition of the phrase “and the things in it” heightens the emphasis on the Creator’s omnipotence and sovereignty. The Sabbath commandment is of special importance not only because it has a literary connection

¹⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 265, understands the title “One who was, is, and will come” as “affirming God’s present, past, and future . . . role as Creator.” Referring to Alpha and Omega, he states, “As the Alpha God is the Creator, the beginning of all things (4:11); as the Omega, he brings all things to completion in the new creation (21:1)” (*ibid.*, 230).

¹⁵ *Ktisma* occurs also in Revelation 8:9, the second trumpet, where a third of the sea creatures die. In Revelation 5:13, however, God’s creatures include “every creature in the universe.”

to creation, but because the seventh day *is* an element of creation. The Creator and Lord of the Sabbath “precedes all things, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word in creation. He has the last word in the new creation.”¹⁶ The contribution of Revelation 10:6 to Revelation’s creation theology is that it links protology to eschatology.¹⁷ It is the Creator God who controls the events on earth and ushers in the end in the form of judgment and new creation. As already pointed out in the discussion of the gospel, Revelation 10 ends with the commission to prophetic ministry in the context of peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. It prepares for the three angels’ messages.

5

Revelation 14:7 is built on three imperatives. The first calls people to fear God, the second to give Him glory (the hour of judgment is mentioned as a reason), and the third to worship Him because He is the Creator. “Worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev 14:7). These imperatives appear to build one on the other and may be parallel to some extent. The significance of this point will be explored when we consider the connection between creation and worship.

6

So far, the readers and hearers of Revelation have encountered the original creation of Genesis 1 and 2. In Revelation 21 and 22 they are confronted with a new, yet future creation. Revelation 21:1–2 introduces a new heaven and new earth, in addition to the holy city. The description of the city dominates the second part of Revelation 21. The first part of chapter 22 adds to the garden imagery elements, such as the river with the water of life and the tree of life. John portrays the new Jerusalem as bride, city, and garden. Obviously, it is a garden-city.¹⁸

¹⁶ Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “Creation and Apocalypse,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (2004): 127. Cf. John Sweet, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 178.

¹⁷ See Gerald L. Stevens, *Revelation: The Past and Future of John’s Apocalypse* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 386.

¹⁸ Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb Into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 164, concludes, “Thus this paradise is not just a garden but an urban garden, or even better, a garden-city.”

All of this is couched in sanctuary language. However, most important is the unmitigated presence of God with saved humanity. God will tabernacle with His people as He did in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve (Gen 2).¹⁹ The wonderful result of His presence is described with the positive affirmation that God, in fatherly love, will take care of all the tears of His children. Personally and in tenderness, He will remove what creates hurt and injury. This is followed by the undoing of four detrimental aspects of present life that were not found in the first creation: death, mourning, crying, and pain. Jonathan Moo notes that with these positive effects the curse of the Genesis 3 fall is undone.²⁰ The truly new aspect in the new creation and in the eschatological sanctuary, however, is salvation. Here we will not continue to explore the new creation because it is not directly in view in the three angels' messages.²¹ The description of God's creative activity in Revelation 14:7 is restricted to the past. Only the third message proceeds to the use of future tenses, creating a chronological sequence within the three messages.

In Revelation creation is assumed as a given. God created all things. This includes everything not only in our solar system, but also in the universe. God is the source of life and not part of creation. Therefore, there is, and always will be, a marked difference between Creator and creation/creature. But once created, God wanted to be close to His creatures, including humanity. The transcendent God drew close and met with His created beings. This is His immanence. From this uniqueness as Creator derives God's ownership of and authority over all creation. He can create, un-create, and recreate. He is the Almighty, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. He is to be praised and worshipped all the more so because the biblical Creator God is not a deist God, winding up a clock and leaving it to itself. He sustains creation and cares for it. Revelation teaches that not only is God the Father Creator, but so is Jesus Christ. This highlights even more His love and care for humanity.

Creation not only informs us about God's nature, but also helps us better understand humanity. Humans are not an accident of nature.

¹⁹ In Jesus God "tabernacled" also among humans, though in a more hidden way (John 1:14).

²⁰ Jonathan Moo, "The Sea That Is No More: Rev 21:1 and the Function of Sea Imagery in the Apocalypse of John," *Novum Testamentum* 51 (2009): 165.

²¹ Revelation 14:7, with the addition of the springs of water to the threefold sphere of creation as heaven, earth, and sea, may have in mind the eschatological water of life that is available at no cost (Rev 21:6; 22:17). But still creation is expressed in the first angel's message with an aorist and in the context of the Genesis creation account.

We are part of God's creation and yet can think beyond creation. Being moral beings with our own will and freedom of choice, we can distinguish between good and evil and can choose right or wrong, life or death, and whether to follow God or oppose Him (Rev 14:6–12). To know what creation means and how it closely links humanity to God allows people to find meaning in life.

Gospel, Worship, and Judgment in the Three Angels' Messages

The preceding discussion on creation theology in Revelation and the three angels' messages makes it clear that the themes of the gospel, worship, and judgment are inextricably linked—not only within the three angels' messages, but also in the Apocalypse as a whole. In the second part of this discussion, we examine these connections more closely.

Creation and the Gospel

The first angel with his worldwide message has to *euangelizein* (“to announce/bring good news/proclaim the gospel”) *euangelion* (“good news/gospel”). This may seem redundant because the good news of the gospel is contained in both verb and noun. Typically, the “gospel” (*euangelion*) designates the good news of salvation through Christ. The term is used only once in all of John's writings. The verb *euangelizō* appears only twice, both times in Revelation (10:7; 14:6).²² But there is no question that John knows the concept of the good news of the gospel. Probably his best-known verse is John 3:16, which describes those who believe the gospel as not perishing but having eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. The next verse mentions salvation: Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but came for its salvation (John 3:16).

However, the question is often raised as to whether the “eternal gospel” in Revelation 14:6 must be defined through its immediate context only, in which case it would be punitive judgment. Various well-known scholars, including Evangelical interpreters, have pointed

²² While John uses the terms only sparingly, Paul seems to be fond of them. Out of the seventy-six occurrences of the term “gospel” in the New Testament, sixty are found in Paul's writings; of the fifty-four usages of the phrase “proclaiming the gospel” in the New Testament, twenty-three are from Paul.

out that here the term “gospel” has to be understood in a restricted sense, pointing primarily to judgment in a negative sense.²³

Apart from drawing attention to the context in which the everlasting gospel appears, others have noted that it occurs without the article. Therefore, some translations render the phrase as “*the* everlasting/eternal gospel” (e.g., KJV, NKJV, NIV), while others translate “*an* eternal gospel” (e.g., ESV, NASB, NET, NRSV) and still others avoid an article completely—for instance, “eternal/everlasting good tidings/news” (ASV, CEB, NAB). It is argued that in the New Testament the gospel in the positive sense (i.e., not defined in the context of negative judgment) is identified with the article (Greek has only a definite article or no article, but not an indefinite article), and that a lack of the Greek article points to another gospel. Sigve K. Tonstad claims, “The word *euangelion* does not have the article and should not be confused with the ‘gospel’ in NT usage elsewhere. . . . A traditional conception for the ‘good news’ will thus miss the mark.”²⁴ And G. K. Beale notes, “The wrathful nature of this angel and his ‘gospel’ is suggested by the similarity to the messenger of the three woes in 8:13.”²⁵ However, he admits that “the absence of the article before εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”) could reflect only stylistic variation.”²⁶

It seems, however, that distinguishing the “gospel” in the New Testament on the basis of the presence or absence of the article is unnecessary. In the New Testament *euangelion* is the good news of the kingdom of God (Matt 4:23). It is the good news of the kingdom, the content of which is spelled out by Jesus Himself (Mark 1:14–15). The content of the gospel, as Jesus outlines it here, becomes “the reference point for all subsequent mentions of the proclamation initiated by Jesus and entrusted by him to his followers.”²⁷ According to Matthew, before the end comes, that good news will be preached in all the world to all the nations (Matt 24:14). In Paul’s understanding, the gospel is associated with Christ (2 Cor 10:14), and it is “the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16, ESV), the gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24), the “gospel of your salvation” (Eph

²³ E.g., Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2001), 407; Mounce, 270–271; and Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 361.

²⁴ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 203.

²⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 748.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 90.

1:13, ESV), and the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15). It is also associated with truth (Col 1:5) and hope (Col 1:23). “Our Savior Jesus Christ . . . has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10, NKJV). G. B. Caird argues, “The word *euangelion* can only mean “good news”, and it is improbable that John should have thought of using it in a cynical sense. . . . it is an eternal gospel, a gospel rooted and grounded in the changeless character and purpose of God. If the angel carried a gospel which was eternal good news to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, it is hard to see how this could differ from *the gospel*.”²⁸

Indeed, Jesus’ definition of the content of the gospel in Mark 1:14–15 as the reference point for His followers provides a parallel to the first angel’s message. His three-part gospel message in Mark 1:15 includes a time prophecy (the time fulfilled), a covenant promise (the kingdom near), and a call to discipleship (repent and believe). Interestingly, Revelation 14:6–7 has the same concepts: a time prophecy (judgment has come), a covenant promise (judgment, in the context of Daniel 7:22 where the saints receive the kingdom), and a call to discipleship (a command to fear, glorify, and worship God). Reaching even further back into the Old Testament, it has been argued that the four key words of the first angel—“fear,” “glory,” “judgment,” and “worship”—can be traced back to David’s psalm of thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 16:8–36.²⁹ This passage, it is argued, “has parallels in three psalms of the Psalter, which either have drawn upon it or provide the source from which it is constituted: Pss 96 (1 Chr 16:23–33); 105:1–15 (1 Chr 16:8–22); and 106:1, 47–48 (1 Chr 16:34–36).”³⁰

²⁸ G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 182. Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of Old and New Testaments (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 94–95, maintains, “God’s kingdom comes through judgment, and judgment is good news because it means that God is at long last going to deal with the wicked. . . . Why would this *not* be the gospel itself, the announcement that the Creator is taking over as Lord of all nations, that he has overthrown ‘Babylon.’ And that he will reward his loyal followers as he judges his adversaries?”

²⁹ Willem Altink, “1 Chronicles 16:8–36 as Literary Source for Revelation 14:6–7,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 22, no. 2 (1984), 187.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Although Altink recognizes that the book of Revelation may often have multiple sources for a single passage, he observes that “among these various sections in the Psalter, only Ps 96 contains the four key expressions of Rev 14:7. However, in one case a different Greek word is used in Ps 96 (LXX, Ps 95); and the broader contextual parallels between 1 Chr 16 and Rev 14 are also lacking in Ps 96. For such reasons, 1 Chr 16:8–36 gives the best evidence for being the basic biblical literary background for Rev 14:6–7” (*ibid.*, 188).

Still, it may be better not to look primarily for the usage of the term “gospel” elsewhere in the New Testament, but rather first investigate how Revelation understands the concept of salvation and consequently the terms “gospel” and “to preach the gospel.”

In the Apocalypse the gospel is found in the passages that directly or indirectly mention salvation and redemption: in the invitations to make a decision for God, such as accepting the water of life without pay (Rev 22:17); in the apostolic wish for the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse to receive grace (Rev 1:4; 22:21); and in the eschatological promise of God’s presence among His people (Rev 21:3–7; 22:1–5) and access to the tree of life (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14). The prologue of the Apocalypse contains a clear description of the gospel. Jesus—the faithful witness, the firstborn from death, and the ruler of the kings of the earth—loves us and has redeemed us through His substitutionary death (Rev 1:5). In Revelation 3:9, 19 John’s audience hears again about Jesus’ love. The major title used for Jesus in the Apocalypse is “Lamb.” Because Jesus was crucified (Rev 11:8), slaughtered as Lamb (Rev 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), and shed His blood (Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11), but was also raised from the dead (Rev 1:5, 17–18), He is able to save humans (Rev 7:10). Salvation is described in Revelation 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 14:3–4; 21:27; 22:14; and elsewhere with imagery such as being purchased, having washed one’s robes, and having one’s name written in the book of life.

The immediate context to Revelation 14:6, the Apocalypse’s central vision, is also enlightening (Rev 11:19–14:20). The ark of the covenant in Revelation 11:19—the introductory scene to this great war vision—with the implied mercy seat and the Decalogue stresses the gospel message. Revelation 12 is the fulfillment of the divinely proclaimed post-fall prediction of the protogospel in Genesis 3:15 regarding the Messiah who would defeat Satan. A woman, the seed—the male child—a serpent, and a life-and-death struggle appear in both passages. Jesus’ incarnation heightened the conflict with Satan and brought Him to the cross. But at the same time, He overcame Satan. Therefore, a loud voice can triumphantly shout, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down. . . . And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev 12:10–11, ESV). The shedding of Jesus’ blood for humanity, an act of substitutionary atonement, guarantees salvation to those who accept Jesus’ sacrifice and commit themselves to Him.

In the tantalizing conflict of the saints with the sea beast, the book of life is mentioned (Rev 13:8). The inhabitants of the earth,

followers of the beast, are not written in this book,³¹ but true believers in the church of Sardis will not be blotted out from the book of life (Rev 3:5). The book of life is also the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21:27), in which the names of true believers are recorded. Clearly, salvation is not a timeless, irrevocable act of God, since it is dependent on one's relationship with Christ. The phrase "book of life" has positive connotations of eternal life and is another image to describe the potential effect of the gospel, dependent on the individual's decision.

Later in the same vision, the readers and hearers encounter the 144,000 with Jesus on Mount Zion. They are safe and secure because they have been purchased (*agorazō*, Rev 13:4)—purchased "from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb" (Rev 14:4, ESV). Those who were no longer able to buy (literally "purchase") and sell (Rev 13:17) have become the property of God and the Lamb. The concept of redemption through a "purchase" appears for the first time in Revelation 5:9: "By your blood you [the Lamb] ransomed [purchased] people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (ESV). Interestingly and remarkably, this verse is connected to Revelation 14:6 through the mention of the same four groups, although in a different order: nations, tribes, languages, and people. Revelation 5:9 is the first of the seven texts in which the four groups of humanity appear.³² While it does not seem that the four groups themselves as a whole are saved, members of these groups are redeemed. The great multitude of the saved includes persons from the four groups (Rev 7:9). Other members of the four groups, however, are under the influence of the sea beast (Rev 13:7), constituting the waters where Babylon the prostitute sits (Rev 17:5). Nevertheless, members of the four groups have heard the gospel and have been saved. The angel of Revelation 14:6 intends to reach these groups with the true gospel, and Revelation 7:9–10, which on a timeline follows the proclamation of the three angels' messages, declares that the effort will be successful and that a great multitude from the nations, tribes, peoples, and languages will be saved when confronted with the gospel.

Still there are more indicators in the immediate context suggesting that the gospel is not different from that in the other parts of the New Testament canon. In the third angel's message, the group of

³¹ The book of life occurs in Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; and 21:7. In half of the cases, Revelation mentions those not being written in that book (Rev 13:8, 17:8; 20:15).

³² These four groups appear seven times in Revelation (Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). In two cases, one of the four terms is replaced by another similar term (Rev 10:11; 17:5).

worshippers of the beast and its image and the bearers of the mark of the beast are contrasted with the “saints.” One of the characteristics of the saints is that they keep *tēn pistin lēsou*. This phrase is ambiguous; it can mean “faith in Jesus,” “the faith of Jesus,” “faithfulness to Jesus,” and “the faithfulness of Jesus.”³³ Nevertheless, it is Jesus in whom the saints believe and His faithfulness in which they trust. And this has to do with the gospel. R. D. Philipps suggests,

When John urges us to continue in “faith in Jesus,” he means that we must continue to look up to that gospel carried by the angel in heaven. It tells us that through faith we are forgiven by Christ’s blood and reconciled to God. It bears good news that our Savior has conquered the evil power under which we have suffered.³⁴

Finally, in Revelation 14:13 a voice from heaven pronounces blessed those “who die in the Lord from now on” (ESV). They are assured of being able to rest (*anapauō*) “from their labors.” While the worshippers of the beast and its image have “no rest [*anapausis*], day and night” (Rev 14:11), the followers of Jesus do. The verb *anapauō* has already occurred with the martyrs in Revelation 6:11. These martyrs, wondering how long it would take for God to bring about justice, are given eschatological white garments but need to rest a little longer. Obviously, the rest of those dead in the Lord implies an awakening from that rest in the resurrection. This is extremely good news.

John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia describe salvation in Revelation in the following way: 1) Salvation is linked to creation. 2) “Salvation is . . . focused on the Lamb, who is slaughtered, for the redemption of the world.” 3) Salvation is not only to be understood as redemption or ransom, but also as liberation. 4) Salvation implies transformation “in every way imaginable.” 5) Judgment “is the flip side of salvation. . . . In fact, judgment is vital to the fulfillment of salvation in Revelation. . . . Divine justice is fulfilled in mercy, but it involves the exclusion of those who remain persistent in opposing

³³ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation*, Library of New Testament Studies 337 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 193–194. Tonstad suggests that “all the four leading alternatives . . . claim a measure of legitimacy and relevancy. None of the possible options is entirely unacceptable. . . . And so they endure, these four, ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’, ‘the faith of Jesus’, ‘faith in Jesus’ and ‘faithfulness to Jesus’, and greatest among these is the faithfulness of God in Jesus” (*ibid.*).

³⁴ Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 407. See also Kistemaker, 413.

it.” 6) “God does not just save from a distance . . . but invites us to partake of the divine life in being made new.” 7) “Though salvation is possible in Revelation only by the work of the Lamb and the Spirit, believers must also by God’s grace repent, obey, and patiently endure in order to overcome the forces of darkness.” 8) Salvation is not limited, but “is for the nations as well as for individuals.” 9) To belong to the book of life means to belong to the Lamb. 10) “Salvation in Revelation is costly grace. . . . This grace is free, but it is not cheap.”³⁵

Equally significant to a proper understanding of the gospel and the three angels’ messages is Revelation 1:4–8. John’s message in this passage, which he has just received, not only describes the Godhead and the work of Jesus, but also seems to summarize the entire Apocalypse: 1) Jesus loves us.³⁶ His love is “complete and ultimate—Jesus ‘loved his own until the end’ ([John] 13:1). It is sacrificial.”³⁷ 2) Jesus has freed us from our sins. His love led Him to the cross.³⁸ “John goes on to describe the salvation/vindication achieved by Christ as a ransoming from sin (cf. Isa 40:2). This is the only pairing of sin and redemption language in the Apocalypse.”³⁹ 3) Jesus has made us a kingdom and priests. Thomas and Macchia note that Revelation 1:5–6 is the “first occasion of worship in Revelation, [and] John leads the way in giving glory and honor to Jesus. The unlimited praise ‘forever and ever’ matches the unlimited worthiness of Jesus. The prayer ‘amen,’ or ‘so let it be,’ concludes the doxology.”⁴⁰ In addition, He will be coming with the clouds (Rev 1:7). Glory and dominion belong to Him (Rev 1:6). And God the Father is the Alpha and Omega, the Lord, and the One who is and was, and is to come, the *panokratōr* (“the Almighty,” Rev 1:8)—“an identifi-

³⁵ John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 537–543.

³⁶ It has been pointed out that the elements of this doxology are unusual because love occurs in the present tense, while redemption and the new status of the believers are described with aorists. Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation 1–11*, International Theological Commentary (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 91, notes, “He loves us, not just loved us in the past but loves us now with a love expressed in his death.”

³⁷ Thomas and Macchia, 77.

³⁸ Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 82, points out that here a second unusual element occurs: “Also unusual is the focus on Christ’s love that led to the cross—the New Testament more frequently cites the love of God the Father as expressed in the atonement (e.g., John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 8:39; Eph 2:4; 1 John 4:8–10).”

³⁹ Brian K. Blount, *Revelation*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 36.

⁴⁰ Thomas and Macchia, 77.

cation that will act as a refrain throughout the rest of the Apocalypse (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22).⁴¹ The message of Revelation 1:4–8 is foundational to the three angels’ messages. The following table shows the interconnectedness of Revelation’s initial message and the three angels’ messages. The passages are compared both on a literary and a topical level—an approach that could be possible for other passages. The comparison of the message of Revelation 1 and the three angels’ messages shows overlap between the two. We suggest, therefore, that the message in the introduction to Revelation should be considered when one interprets the three angels’ messages.

Comparison Between Revelation 1:4–8 and 14:6–12 with Its Immediate Context

Reference in Revelation 1	Content	Reference in Revelation 14	Content
1:4, 6, 8	God	14:7, 9, 12	God
1:4, 6, 8	God as Creator (the Alpha; the One who was)	14:7	God as Creator
1:5–7	Jesus Christ	14:10, 12–13	Jesus, Lamb, Lord
1:5–7a, 12	Gospel (topical)	14:6	Eternal gospel
1:5, 7	Earth	14:6–7	Earth
1:7	All tribes	14:6	Every tribe
1:7	Second coming and judgment	14:7, 11	Pre-advent judgment/final judgment
1:6	Glory	14:7	Glory
1:5–6	Worship setting (doxology)	14:7, 9	Worship
1:7	Forever	14:11	Forever
1:4	The Holy Spirit	14:13	The Holy Spirit
1:5	The dead (resurrection implied)	14:13	The dead (resurrection implied)
1:7	Second coming	14:14–20	Second coming

The eternal gospel of Revelation 14:6 must be read with this background. The author knows and understands the gospel, the good news. Noun (*euangelion*) and verb (*euangelizō*) put together describe in a powerful way that the message of the first angel is based on the gospel and is not only judgment in a negative sense. When the first angel introduces his message as “eternal gospel,” it is evident “that

⁴¹ Thomas and Macchia, 77.

the end-time gospel, while relevant in particular to the people living in the closing period of earth's history, is not a different gospel from that preached by Paul. It is the same and unaltered gospel, the proclamation of which started at Pentecost.⁴² Indeed, as previously indicated, it is the gospel that Jesus proclaimed and provided the reference point for His followers (Mark 1:14–15). Caird suggests, “Having written the word gospel, he [John] expected his readers to fill it with the full rich content of the apostolic preaching.”⁴³ When John refers to it, he must have in mind the major features of the gospel, including the details that he will mention in the next verses. It is good news that even in this late hour of world history salvation is still available. It is good news because the investigative judgment is still in progress and “Christ is still working in the heavenly sanctuary on our behalf.”⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that Ellen G. White captures the positive dimension of the first angel's judgment message. She notes that “the announcement, ‘The hour of His judgment is come,’ points to the closing work of Christ's ministration for the salvation of men.”⁴⁵ The message is good news because people can leave behind deception and come out of Babylon (Rev 18:4). On the other hand, the executive phase of the judgment mentioned later assures believers that there will be justice and vindication. The bright future for them is developed in Revelation 21 and 22.

The expected response to the proclamation of the everlasting gospel is to fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him (Rev 14:7). The theme of the everlasting gospel, however, cannot be fully appreciated when separated from that of creation. While the gospel comes first in Revelation 14:6 and is followed by the messages of God as the Creator, in reality creation theologically precedes salvation. Salvation is not possible without created creatures. However, with the entrance of sin, creation by itself does not reach God's intended goal of the restoration of all things if there is no salvation. Because creation was followed by the fall, the sin problem could only end with the global death of the created beings—were it not for God's intervention in terms of redemption. Only salvation through the Lamb can open the door to a new creation. Thus, creation and salvation are dependent on each other and cannot be separated.

⁴² Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 453.

⁴³ Caird, 183.

⁴⁴ Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 131.

⁴⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 435.

This is seen early on in the Apocalypse and needs to inform the situation in the three angels' messages. Jesus is introduced as Redeemer in Revelation 1:5⁴⁶ but a little later He appears also as Creator (Rev 3:14). He introduces Himself to a lukewarm but financially affluent, and therefore self-confident, church of Laodicea as the "beginning of God's creation." In this phrase, the issue is not about Jesus as a created being, or even as the first created being.⁴⁷ However, the question remains whether the phrase refers to Him as the cause and originator of creation or as the ruler of creation who had nothing to do with the creation process. Some suggest that with Jesus has come the new creation in a spiritual sense or the creation of the church.⁴⁸ It should be emphasized that Jesus' role as an authoritative originator of creation cannot be missed. Following John's description of the divine Logos as Creator in John 1:1–3, Jesus is clearly presented as being involved in the Genesis creation account. Richard Bauckham argues, "Christ preceded all things as their source. In this belief in Christ's role in creation, Revelation is at one with the Pauline literature (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17), Hebrews (1:2) and the Fourth Gospel (1:1–3)." And he goes on to call Jesus the "divine agent in God's creation of all things and in God's eschatological fulfillment of all things."⁴⁹ Grant R. Osborne suggests that "beginning" (*archē*)

⁴⁶ According to Revelation 1:18, he has the keys to death and Hades and is able to bring about resurrection to eternal life.

⁴⁷ See footnote 10 in the present study.

⁴⁸ E.g., Beale, *Revelation*, 298, who understands Jesus as "sovereign inaugurator of the new creation," but does not view Him as sovereign "over the original creation." He also mentions the view that Jesus is "the beginning, not of the original creation, but of the newly created church or of the new age of the church." Fanning, 8, states that "Christ is never presented in this book as creator or agent of creation" but this does not necessarily mean He is not its ruler (*ibid.*, 185). See also M. R. Mulholland Jr., "Revelation," in *James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Grant R. Osborne and M. R. Mulholland Jr., Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 18 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 452. Dwelling on the aspect of "ruler," Robert M. Royalty Jr., *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 165, suggests "the phrase 'the origin of God's creation' (ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως) evokes the political theme of the proem, where Christ is called the ruler (ἄρχων) of the kings of the earth (Rev 1:5). This play on words (*paranomasia*) on *archōn* and *archē* in Rev 1:5 and 3:14 ground's Christ's political authority over the kings of the earth in his cosmic authority as the beginning or origin of creation (see also Rev 22:13)."

⁴⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56. See also Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 256; Sweet, 107; and Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, New American Commentary 39 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2012), 138.

means not only preeminence or ruler but also “source” or “origin,” and that is a likely connotation here. . . . Jesus is the beginning and source of “God’s creation.” Again, this is a messages to the Laodiceans. In their wealth and complacency, they thought of themselves as in control; Jesus is telling them that he alone controls creation; he is the very source of their wealth and power.⁵⁰

Later in the Apocalypse Jesus is called the Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End (Rev 22:13), appropriating the titles of God the Father. If these titles refer indirectly to God as Creator—as we have proposed—Jesus also needs to be seen as Creator and Authority. In the message to Laodicea, Jesus as Creator warns the church of divine judgment but also offers salvation as church members repent. “The message to the Laodiceans is that their boast in earthly riches is misplaced because all things belong to Jesus, who is worthy of praise and glory.” So in the first chapters of Revelation Jesus appears as Redeemer and is also associated with creation. Both crucial concepts are brought together in one person: Christ.

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Creation and salvation appear again in the seal vision, especially in the introductory scenes of Revelation 4 and 5. God the Father is

⁵⁰ Osborne, 205. Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 84, opts for both “Christ has the supreme authority over creation and . . . he is the origin of created being.”

⁵¹ For a discussion on the connection between judgment and creation in the context of the three angels’ messages, see Clinton Wahlen, “The Letter to Laodicea and the Eschatology of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 29, nos. 1–2 (2018), 142–143.

⁵² Kistemaker, 169.

portrayed and worshipped as Creator (Rev 4:8–11) and Jesus is praised as Savior (Rev 5:9–12). Two hymns are devoted to God the Father, and two hymns are devoted to the Son, the Lamb. Throughout these hymns one can observe a crescendo as the groups and numbers of worshippers increase. Both Father and Son are addressed in the same way, with the phrase “Worthy are you” (Rev 4:11; 5:9), and a number of identical attributes are attributed to both of them (Rev 4:9; 5:12–13). But the first hymn to the Son is singled out and designated as a “new hymn.” As important as creation is, something breathtaking has happened with the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, which has revealed to humanity and to the universe not only the unlimited power of God, but more importantly the character of God—not only His wonderful holiness, but also His incomprehensible love. The Creator God has made it possible for sinful beings to be saved through the death and in the person of His own Son. This leads to a fifth hymn in Revelation 5:13, in which both God the Father and Jesus Christ are being worshipped and praised. But the vision contains two more hymns. The great multitude of the redeemed in front of God’s throne sing, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” (Rev 7:10, ESV) before all the angels fall on their faces and glorify God in the last hymn of the seal vision (Rev 7:11). As Jesus is Savior and Creator, God the Father is Creator and Savior. As Father and Son are inseparable, the concepts of creation and salvation are inseparable in biblical theology and in the theology of the Apocalypse. They are complementary in the best sense of the word, and it is only possible to move from the old creation to the new creation via salvation. Thomas and Macchia observe,

Since all of creation has its being in the creating and sustaining power of the Creator, they can be redeemed, liberated, and made ultimately new only by this same God. In the light of what Revelation says about the creation in relation to the Creator, it is unimaginable that salvation could come from any other source than God.⁵³

The connection between creation and redemption is also true for the next vision in Revelation, the trumpet vision. The mighty angel with divine characteristics (Rev 10:1–2), who obviously is Jesus, swears by the Creator God, most likely God the Father (Rev 10:6). In the next chapter Jesus appears as crucified Lord (Rev 11:8), picking up

⁵³ Thomas and Macchia, 538.

on statements on His death, resurrection, and salvation made earlier in Revelation (Rev 1:5, 18; 5:9, 12). With the last trumpet, the plan of salvation—consisting of creation, salvation, judgment, and new creation—has come to a close. Father and Son are again united in a hymn sung by heavenly voices: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15, ESV).

With regard to Revelation 11:19–14:20, we have already extensively discussed the themes of salvation and creation. We stressed that the background of chapter 12 is Genesis 3 with its protogospel. With the exception of the last two verses, Genesis 3 takes place in the garden of Eden and therefore has a creation background. The introduction of Satan as “the serpent of old” (Rev 12:9, NKJV) highlights this creation background. In other words, the central vision of Revelation begins with creation and moves directly to salvation (Rev 12:10–11). The two topics are again combined in Revelation 13:8, in which the book of life of the Lamb is mentioned—those written in it are saved (Rev 21:27)—“from the foundation of the earth.” The text has been translated and interpreted in two major ways: 1) “. . . everyone whose name has not been *written before the foundation of the world* in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain” (ESV) and 2) “. . . whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb *slain from the foundation of the world*.”⁵⁴ In the first case, the meaning would be that salvation was determined for humans before creation by them being entered into the book of life.⁵⁵ In the second case, it would mean that the plan of salvation with the death of the Messiah was devised even from the foundation of the world—“that is, the death of Christ was a redemptive sacrifice decreed in the counsels of eternity.”⁵⁶ No matter how Revelation 13:8 is being interpreted, the plan of salvation and creation are intimately linked. The plan to save humanity if humans would make a decision against God is not a divine afterthought, but rather is woven into the plan of creation. Therefore, creation and salvation also appear together in the three angels’ messages of the same vision. We suggest that salvation is

⁵⁴ The parallel text in Revelation 17:8 is clear: the names of the earth dwellers “are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.” But the message of Revelation 13:8 may have a different emphasis. In the Greek text, the direct antecedent is “the Lamb slain.”

⁵⁵ God’s plan is to save all people, but not all people allow God to save them. Therefore, they can be blotted out from the book of life (Rev 3:5; 22:19) or their names are not found in the book of life (Rev 20:15).

⁵⁶ Mounce, 252.

addressed by the preaching of the eternal gospel (Rev 14:6), the description of the believers (Rev 14:12), and the addendum of the second beatitude of the Apocalypse (Rev 14:13). Why does the mention of the gospel precede the reference to creation (Rev 14:7)? Maybe this is the greatest need of the end time, when people have to make a decision between life and death, Christ or Satan. However, it is based on the fact that God is the Creator, the giver of life and owner of all, the Father, the Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who breathes life—literally “the breath/Spirit (*pneuma*) of life from God”—into the dead bodies of the two witnesses (Rev 11:11).⁵⁷

While from Revelation 15 onward the Apocalypse mainly deals with judgments in a negative sense, still a number of pages contain passages on creation and salvation. A note on creation: 1) The call “It is done” alludes to the finished creation. The Greek consists of one word: *gegonen* (Rev 16:17). It is derived from the verb *ginomai*, which has various meanings dependent on the context.⁵⁸ This term is frequently used in Genesis and relates especially to God’s creative acts in Genesis 1, where it appears no less than twenty-three times.⁵⁹ Depending on the verbal form *egeneto* in its context in the book of Genesis, it means “let there be” (Gen 1:3), “it was” (Gen 1:5), or

⁵⁷ *Pneuma* means “breath” but also “spirit” and may refer to the Holy Spirit. This phrase has been translated as “breath of life” by a variety of modern English translations (e.g., ESV, NASB, NIV). However, it has been translated “Spirit of life” by older English versions such as the Geneva Bible and KJV, and also by the *Revised Webster Bible* of 1995. “Spirit of life” is also the choice of the French translation of Louis Segond (1910) and the *Nouvelle Edition de Genève* (1979). Many, if not the majority, of German translations use “Spirit of life” (e.g., Luther [1545, 1912, 1984, 2017], revised *Elberfelder Bibel* [1993], *Münchener NT, Schlachter* [2000], and *Zürcher* [2007/2008]). While some commentators opt for “breath of life” (e.g., J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997], 142), others allow for the translation “Spirit of life” or even choose it (e.g., Keener, 296; and Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation*, A Continental Commentary [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993], 134.) The Old Testament background for Revelation 11:11 is Ezekiel 37, the valley of the dry bones where the bones came to life through the Spirit. Thomas and Macchia, 207, seem to be correct when they assert, “Significantly, the Spirit who now enters the two prophets is the same Spirit who has inspired their prophetic activity.”

⁵⁸ These meanings include “to be born,” “to be produced,” “to be made,” “to be created,” “to come about,” “to happen,” “to become,” and “to be.” See Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 196–199.

⁵⁹ Gen 1:3 (2x), 5 (2x), 6 (2x), 8 (2x), 9, 11, 13 (2x), 14, 15, 19 (2x), 20, 23 (2x), 24, 30, 31 (2x); 2:4, 5, 7. See Jon Paulien, “Creation in the Johannine Writings,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the New Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, forthcoming).

together with the particle *outōs* “it was so” (Gen 1:6). 2) The seven plagues describe an undoing of creation. 3) Part of the seven trumpets refers to a reversal of creation. J. Ramsey Michaels notes, “The four areas affected—earth, sea, fresh water and sky—made up the whole of the human environment as the ancients perceived it. These four spheres were what Jews and Christians acknowledged as God’s creation (compare 14:7).”⁶⁰ The same is true for the last seven plagues/bowls, only that the plagues are an intensification of the trumpets. The first plague affects the earth, the second the sea, the third the waters/springs, the fourth the sun, the fifth brings intense darkness, and the sixth ushers in Armageddon so that humans are directly affected (Rev 16). U. B. Müller suggests that with the pouring out of the first four bowls the entire creation of earth, sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies is affected.⁶¹ The bowl series describes the complete undoing of creation and, therefore, stands in contrast to the new creation in Revelation 21–22a. 3) The abyss is mentioned a number of times (e.g., Rev 17:8; 20:1, 3). It is found in Genesis 1:2 (LXX). The “surface of the deep” (Gen 1:2), which is connected to the state of planet earth being formless or void, is translated with the term *abyssos*. “‘Over the surface of the deep’ parallels ‘over the waters’ in the subsequent clause. . . . On the second and third days these waters are eventually separated from the expanse and land masses when the waters are called ‘sea’ (vv. 6–10).”⁶² After the separation, sea (*thalassa*) and earth (*gē*) became visible. It is precisely from these two areas that the two beasts of Revelation 13 come forward: the sea beast and the beast out of the earth. In Revelation 17:8 another beast emerges, but it comes from the abyss. Obviously, John takes his imagery basically from the creation account in Genesis 1.⁶³ Intertwined with the allusions to creation are references to re-creation: 1) The redeemed at the sea of glass singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:2–4) are found in the introduction to the seven plagues. 2) The beatitude of those who are awake at the second coming occurs in the sixth plague (Rev 16:15). 3) The followers of Christ sing about salvation after the judgment of

⁶⁰ Michaels, 121.

⁶¹ Ulrich B. Müller, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984), 281.

⁶² Kenneth A. Mathews, Genesis 1–11:26, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 133.

⁶³ For a more detailed discussion of the abyss, see Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Beast of Revelation 17—A Suggestion (Part 1),” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 10, no. 1 (2007): 40–50.

Babylon who was sitting on the beast of the abyss (Rev 19:1), and the marriage supper of the Lamb is announced, to which people who are not associated with Babylon are invited (Rev 19:7–9). 4) The resurrection of the faithful believers and their reign with Christ is recorded while Satan is imprisoned, and the worshippers of the beast and image are dead. This is still indicated in the third angel's message, although not discussed in detail.

The last two chapters of Revelation are mostly positive. The theme of the new earth combines creation and salvation. While the new creation builds on the Genesis creation and surpasses it, it also contains the concept of salvation (Rev 21:1–7, 22; 22:1–7). This is also true for the epilogue (Rev 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21). Although salvation is a core theme of the three angels' messages, the connection of salvation with other themes elsewhere—such as the Genesis creation as the basis of the new creation—is not developed in detail.

In summary: The messages of creation and salvation are found throughout the visions of Revelation. While they can be studied separately, it is important to also look at them together, because such an approach allows for a broader picture to emerge. In Revelation the Creator is not only God the Father, but also Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In Revelation salvation is not the work of Jesus the Savior only; God the Father and the Holy Spirit are also involved.⁶⁴ Salvation is not an afterthought, but was envisioned even at creation. Creation and the possibility of the fall generated the plan of salvation in the mind of God and, indeed, creation will be reestablished after the millennium. In the interim, salvation is a kind of spiritual renewal and recreation—though not strongly emphasized as such in Revelation. The three angels' messages may be understood as a summary of the Genesis creation account and the salvation passages of Revelation. When discussing the messages of the three angels, these other passages need also to be consulted. We also notice a connection of creation, salvation, and judgment. Many messages of Revelation come in a sanctuary context, which we have noted in passing but have not developed in this study. It may suffice to mention that the sanctuary features strongly in all introduction scenes of the visions of Revelation (Rev 1; 4–5; 8:2–5; 11:19; etc.) and in many other places (Rev 7; 14; 15; 21–22; etc.)

Elias Brasil de Souza is correct in emphasizing that all of these come in a sanctuary context: “In Revelation, inter-connections between salvation and creation occur within the framework of

⁶⁴ See the Holy Spirit as the one who also communicates the messages to the seven churches and who raises from death the two witnesses.

sanctuary imagery. As the concluding chapters of Revelation clearly show, the ultimate outcome of salvation is the full restoration of creation when ‘the tabernacle of God is with men’ (Rev 21:3).⁶⁵

Jesus in the Three Angels’ Messages

Overall, Jesus is indirectly implied as the one through whom the good news of salvation has become a reality. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is Creator, together with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, and thus He deserves to be worshipped. As Creator He is also the Lord of the Sabbath, as He claimed in the Gospels to be (Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:2). Therefore, it is not enough to be only emotionally attracted to Jesus; we also need to listen to Him as Lord and do what He tells us about living the Christian life, including the observation of the seventh-day Sabbath.

In the third angel’s message Jesus is mentioned as people are being tormented “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Rev 14:10, ESV). This text should not be understood as Jesus taking “pleasure in the torment of his adversaries.”⁶⁶ “John here stresses the inescapability and finality of judgment, not the satisfaction it could afford to those who witness it.”⁶⁷ The issue is fairness and respect for individual choices. Interestingly, Revelation does not record that the redeemed are looking on when their persecutors are judged.⁶⁸ There is no virtue in delighting when others are suffering. The angels rejoice when a sinner repents (Luke 15:10). Jesus does not triumph when His adversaries suffer. He came to save people. His death on the cross demonstrates a love that made Him offer the extreme sacrifice. But love does not eclipse justice, and Jesus’ ministry as Redeemer does not exclude punitive judgment. These people are confronted with Jesus, whom they have to acknowledge as Lord,⁶⁹ simultaneously understanding the extent of what they have done and what they are going to miss. They lived their lives with wrong priorities, false decisions, and opposition to and rejection of the One who is the Source of life.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Elias Brasil de Souza, “Sanctuary: Cosmos, Covenant, and Creation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 24, no. 1 (2013): 37.

⁶⁶ Roloff, 176. See also Patterson, 293.

⁶⁷ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 226.

⁶⁸ See Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 209–210.

⁶⁹ Cf. Beale, *Revelation*, 760.

⁷⁰ Richard Lehmann, *L’Apocalypse de Jean: Commentaire biblique* (Collonges-sous-Salève: Faculté Adventiste de Théologie, 2018), 387, notes, “It can be argued that it is

Jesus is mentioned again at the end of the third angel's message. As previously pointed out, the phrases *pistis Iēsou* (Rev 14:12) can be translated differently. But whether understood as faith in Jesus (ESV), faith of Jesus (NKJV), our faithfulness to Jesus ("remain faithful to Jesus," TNIV, NIV 1984), or Jesus' faithfulness,⁷¹ the focus is and must always be on Jesus. While followers of Christ have faith in Him and are faithful, they can rely on the faithfulness of Jesus and should live with the assurance of salvation. Salvation is a gift to be received.

The addendum to the three angels' messages (Rev 14:13) mentions the Lord. His followers die in Him and rest—unless He returns while they are still alive, in which case they will be transformed directly, without tasting death. Whatever happens, this verse contains strong hope. But it also reminds the readers and hearers of the Apocalypse of Christ's solidarity with humanity when He took it upon Himself to become one of us, live, suffer, and die as we do.⁷² However, Jesus did not stay dead; He was raised, and His resurrection is the guarantee of ours. Jesus is the "firstborn of the dead" (Rev 1:5, ESV).

Creation and Worship

As previously outlined, the setting of Revelation 14:6–12 clearly shows that the passage is centered in conflict over worship. Indeed, the book of Revelation is the most liturgical book in the New Testament. It is replete with worship scenes.⁷³ The Greek *proskyneō* ("worship") is applied in the heavenly temple setting both to God and to the Lamb (Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 15:4; 19:4; 20:4), but it also features in earthly scenes designating the worship of evil forces (Rev 9:20; 13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20). This duality highlights the centrality of the problem of idolatry, a misdirected worship in the drama of Revelation, and it clarifies the sovereign

not the angels and the Lamb who stand before the damned as ironic observers of their suffering, but the idol worshippers who stand before the angels. They are paralyzed by the reality whose existence they have denied. After having mocked the One who had worn a crown of thorns, they find him crowned with glory. The time of grace has passed. The opportunity has been lost. Not to receive grace is to face the sad reality of one's own failure" (trans. by Deepl.com).

⁷¹ See Tonstad, *Revelation*, 210.

⁷² This is not to deny that the death of Jesus had dimensions that ours does not have.

⁷³ On hymnic material in Revelation, see Justin Jeffcoat Schedtler, *A Heavenly Chorus: The Dramatic Function of Revelation's Hymns*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd ser., vol. 381 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); and Steven J. Grabiner, *Revelation's Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, The Library of New Testament Studies 511 (London: T&T Clark, 2016).

authority of God against the usurping attempts of the forces of evil.⁷⁴ Revelation 12 clearly depicts a conflict between Christ and Satan. As the details of the conflict unfold in Revelation 13, it becomes clear that while the sea beast receives near worldwide worship, he is set on speaking great things and blaspheming against God, His sanctuary, and those who dwell in heaven (Rev 13:3–6). Furthermore, verse 8 depicts a polarity where all who dwell on the earth worship the sea beast except those whose names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life. On his part, the land beast’s focus on worship is patently evident (Rev 13:12, 15). It is not surprising, therefore, that the messages of the three angels, which is God’s countermove to the actions of the satanic trinity, should focus on worship.

The First Angel

No part of the Apocalypse is so dominated by the term “to worship” as is its central vision (Rev 11:19–14:20). Of the eight usages of the term in this central vision, seven apply to the dragon (once), the sea beast (three times), the image of the beast (once), and both sea beast and image of the beast (twice). In addition, this worship is universal⁷⁵ and enforced by the evil powers. No wonder that the first angel’s message must call the world to worship God. The command to worship God is mentioned only once, in contrast to the demands to worship either one or more of the three evil powers. But the call is weighty and determines humans’ eternal destiny. Emphasizing the fact that God is the Creator of “heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” reveals the truth about the structure of the universe and defines the character of human existence. If the world is understood as God’s creation, then it comes under the rule of God. The first angel’s message is a call to human beings to recognize their creatureliness and act in accordance with the order of creation.⁷⁶ This proclamation stands

⁷⁴ Osborne, 46–48.

⁷⁵ White, *The Great Controversy*, 450, remarks that “in the issue of the contest all Christendom will be divided into two great classes—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark.”

⁷⁶ The notion of order in creation is clearly communicated in the Genesis creation account. Genesis 1:1–2:4 presents a carefully ordered earth. For the symmetry of the Genesis creation account set out diagrammatically, see Laurene A. Turner, *Genesis, Readings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 19–20. The order was already established before human beings were created. The task of human beings was not to put things in order, but to exercise dominion over the ordered creation as the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). The order of creation presupposes an ethic of createdness. Faith in the Creator that acknowledges His otherness is a basic aspect of

in contrast with the claims of the beast who denies the order of creation and makes efforts to deceive the inhabitants of the world to embrace his order of things. His pretensions materialize in demanding allegiance from the inhabitants of the world through worship. His self-image is reflected in a two-part liturgical affirmation: “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (Rev 13:4). This expression of incomparability reflects Old Testament language applied to God, so it functions as an imitation of “Who is like God?”⁷⁷ Also, the expression of invincibility reflects Michael’s role in Revelation 12:7, who “fought with the dragon” and overcame.⁷⁸ By confessing the incomparable and invincible nature of the beast, the inhabitants of the earth recognize that he occupies a position of authority that belongs to God.⁷⁹

Given the foregoing context, the message the first angel proclaims with a loud voice is “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev 14:7). It is instructive to compare this angel’s command to worship with the context of worship in Revelation 4:11. In Revelation 4:11 God is worshipped by the twenty-four elders who are beings in heaven. The scene plays out in the throne room of the heavenly temple. The worship is continuous, and one gets the impression that the worship of the Creator is a joyful worship of deep gratitude. The literary form of Revelation 4 is a narrative, and the ongoing worship can be understood as a worship of the past, the present, and the future.⁸⁰ God is praised because of

what createdness means. It recognizes that human existence is not taken for granted, but it is a gift of God; see Hans Schwartz, *Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 177. Therefore, an existential trust in the Creator defines fundamentally the direction of all human activity; see Christoph Schwöbel, “God, Creation and the Christian Community: The Dogmatic Basis of a Christian Ethic of Createdness,” in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, ed. Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: Clark, 1997), 150–153. So, order is taken for granted in the God-given world and human beings are not called to remake creation in their own image; see Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010), 32.

⁷⁷ Exod 8:10; 15:11; Deut 3:24; Isa 40:18, 25; 44:7; 46:5; Pss 35:10; 71:19; 86:8; 89:8; 113:5; Mic 7:18. As Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John*, trans. Wendy Pradels (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 407, notes, in these texts “the focal point is a polemical argument against false gods and idols.”

⁷⁸ Osborne, 497–498.

⁷⁹ Prigent, 407.

⁸⁰ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Reflections on Worship in Revelation 4 and 5,” *Reflections* 39 (2012): 1–6, suggests that true worship is theocentric, Trinitarian, objective and not only subjective, universal and all-encompassing, continuous and unending, maintains

who He is—in this case His immeasurable holiness, omnipotence, and eternal existence—and what He has done: He has been active in creation, and He is active in sustaining what and whom He has created. However, Revelation 14:7 portrays a completely different situation. The setting is on earth and not in heaven. Here, God is not dealing with His loyal heavenly entourage but with sinful human beings who are drawn into a great war with a focus on worship and loyalty. They have to decide whether to follow the tangible—the enormous power, influence, and propaganda of the evil powers, which appeal even to the worst human traits—or to opt for the less tangible, the holy Creator God.

Theologically, the message of the first angel embodies in principle everything that may be said formally about true worship as far as humans are concerned. Notably, worship is presented as essentially a fundamental human responsibility—hence the angel’s message is given as a “command” with some key action words used in tandem: “fear,” “glory,” and “worship.” The suggestion seems to be that the responsibility humans have to worship (falling before God) consists in the fear of God (holding Him in reverence), which leads to giving Him glory (honoring Him). “Giving God glory is the aftereffect of fearing God,”⁸¹ remarks Ranko Stefanovic, who also summarizes the dynamics of these constituent aspects of worship.

According to Solomon, fearing God and keeping his commandments is the first duty of a human being (Eccl. 12:13). It is in the sense of obeying God and his commandments that the giving of glory to God in Revelation 14:7 must be understood. God’s end-time people in Revelation are referred to as those who fear God (Rev. 11:18; 15:4; 19:5) and keep his commandments (cf. Rev. 12:17; 14:12).⁸²

The unique significance of commandment keeping as an aspect of worship in the end-time context stands out by comparing Revelation 10:6 with Revelation 14:7. In the overall structure of the book of Revelation, the two creation texts, Revelation 10:6 and Revelation 14:7, appear in parallel contexts—namely, shortly before Christ’s second coming. They are quite similar and yet different. 1) Revelation

the tension between God’s immanence and his transcendence, extols the character and nature of God, praises the works of God, and provides a new perspective to life on earth. The completion of the plan of salvation is set into a worship setting.

⁸¹ Stefanovic, 451

⁸² Ibid.

10:6 uses the verb *ktizō* (“to create”) to describe creation; Revelation 14:7 employs the broader term *poieō* (“to make”). However, *poieō* is used in Genesis 1 and 2 (LXX),⁸³ and the connection of Revelation 14:7 to Genesis 1 and 2 is more direct. 2) Revelation 10:6 enumerates three spheres of creation plus “what is in them” (heaven, earth, sea, and what is in them); Revelation 14:7 contains four elements (heaven, earth, sea, and springs of water). In both cases the first three creation elements come in the same order, and thus refer to the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11). Yet, the creation’s connection to the Sabbath is even clearer in Revelation 14:7⁸⁴ because its context refers also to the Decalogue.⁸⁵ Consequently, those who live on earth in the last days need to acknowledge the Creator by respecting Him and His will and by recovering the true Sabbath He instituted at creation and asks humanity to observe. 3) While contextually both texts are dealing with final events, Revelation 10:6 may appeal more to the church, whereas Revelation 14:7 is a call to humanity to make right choices. In Revelation 13 and 14 the issue of whom to worship reaches its point of culmination. True and false worship are pitched against each other.

The Sabbath commandment becomes truly significant. It is the only place in the Decalogue where the rationale of God’s authority over reality is stated: He is the one who made all. Therefore, it functions as a seal of ownership and authority of the Decalogue. It is not surprising, therefore, that Sabbath became a covenant sign (Ezek 20:12, 20)—a visible manifestation of the fact that a relationship between a human being and the Creator God is alive. As the climax of the Genesis account (Gen 2:1–3),⁸⁶ the Sabbath functions as “the memorial of the origin and purpose of life,”⁸⁷ a reminder that God is to

⁸³ Applied to God’s creative acts, *poieō* is found in Genesis 1:1, 7, 16, 21, 25, 26, 27 (3x), 31; 2:2 (2x), 3, 4, and 18. According to Genesis 3:21, God made garments for Adam and Eve.

⁸⁴ See Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9, nos. 1–2 (1998): 179–186.

⁸⁵ Revelation 11:19 mentions the ark of the covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments (Exod 25:21; Deut 10:1–2). Observance of the commandments occurs in Revelation 12:17; 14:12, rejection in Revelation 12:4, 15; and 13:15 (killing); 13:4, 8, 12, 14, 15; and 14:11 (idolatry); and 13:6 (blasphemy).

⁸⁶ Turner, 19–20, demonstrates the organized movement of the Genesis creation account from chaos (Gen 1:2) to rest (Gen 2:1–4a). He points out that the seventh day, “unique in its content and narrative form, forms the apex and goal of God’s creativity” (ibid., 25).

⁸⁷ Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 119.

be worshipped as a Creator. Therefore, one cannot speak of creation without speaking of the Sabbath.

According to the end-time drama of Revelation 13–14, humanity is confronted with a choice between two signs: the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16–18) and the seal of God (Rev 7:1–3; 14:1). These two signs represent the two opposing sides in the eschatological conflict who propagate two different views of the reality: the anthropocentric worldview that glorifies human authority and the theocentric worldview that gives glory to God as a Creator.⁸⁸ In light of the strong creation theology of the vision, it seems that the mark of the beast functions as a counterfeit Sabbath, a kind of anti-Sabbath—a sign signaling the authority of the beast.⁸⁹ Thus, the strong warning of the third angel’s message against receiving of the mark of the beast (Rev 14:9–11) can be seen as an indirect call to choose to receive the seal of God by making a decision to worship the Creator. It emphasizes that it is possible to turn one’s back on forces that are unworthy of worship, no matter how attractive their propaganda is, and seek covenantal alignment with the real authority of the universe. In this choice there is no place for confusion and vagueness. Those who, in spite of the warning, receive the mark of the beast “have no rest” (*ouk echousin anapausin*, Rev 14:11). By contrast, the end-time call to worship God in Revelation 14:7 is given in the language of rest (alluding to the Sabbath), calling the inhabitants of the world to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev 14:7).⁹⁰ Revelation 14:7 challenges people to commit themselves completely to the Creator. All humanity is called to repent.⁹¹ “The inhabitants of the earth have been amazed by the powers displayed by the beast and his false prophet ([Rev] 13:12–14); they are now reminded that they have to do with one who is mightier than the beast—with him who is the source of all things in heaven and on earth.”⁹²

⁸⁸ Ibid., 459, appropriately characterizes the essence of the conflict narrative of Revelation 13–14 as a “confrontation of signs.”

⁸⁹ Anthony MacPherson, “The Mark of the Beast as a ‘Sign Commandment’ and ‘Anti-Sabbath’ in the Worship Crisis of Revelation 12–14,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43 (2005): 267–283.

⁹⁰ For a further discussion of Revelation’s Sabbath theology, see Larry L. Lichtenwalter, “The Seventh-Day Sabbath and Sabbath Theology in the Book of Revelation: Creation, Covenant, Sign,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49 (2011), 285–320.

⁹¹ See George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 193.

⁹² Ladd, 194.

But the internal motivation for worship indicated in the first angel's messages needs to be emphasized. So, Michaels remarks, "In the case of the command, *fear God and give him glory* is a fairly exact equivalent to 'repent' (see 16:9), except that John's vision spells out further implications of this repentance: *Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water* [Rev 14:7]."⁹³ True worship of God, then, is precipitated by repentance that issues in the "fear of God," meaning "reverence" and "respect" for God's authority that enables people to obey His commands (Gen 22:12; Jer 32:40; Ps 111:10).⁹⁴ Such repentance also involves giving "glory" to God. While giving glory to God entails giving Him honor, praise, and homage, it should also be kept in mind that

the order to *give him glory* is a Hebraic saying appearing in both Old and New Testaments: Joshua told Achan to give glory to the Lord (Josh. 7:19; see Jer. 13:16), and the Pharisees commanded the man born blind to give glory to God (John 9:24). The phrase signifies telling the truth by sinners who appear before God's judgment seat.⁹⁵

The idea of "telling the truth" by sinners, as an aspect of giving glory to God, fits well with the rationale given by the angel for worship. As in the case with Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:15), God as the Creator of all things is the motivation given for people "to worship" Him instead of the creation. In the overall context of the beasts' lying activities in Revelation 12 and 13, the first angel's command of telling the truth as an aspect of giving glory to God is the truthful declaration of the rightful recipient of worship: "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (cf. Exod 20:4–6, 11; Deut 10:12–15). Evidently, "giving glory to God" by observing the fourth commandment, rooted as it is in the biblical creation story, is ultimately an act of worshipping "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." In an extended passage, White captures the connections between worship, commandment keeping, and God's creatorship:

By the first angel, men are called upon to "fear God, and give glory to Him" and to worship Him as the Creator of the

⁹³ Michaels, 173.

⁹⁴ David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, Word Biblical Commentary 52B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 827.

⁹⁵ Kistemaker, 408.

heavens and the earth. In order to do this, they must obey His law. Says the wise man: “Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Ecclesiastes 12:13. Without obedience to His commandments no worship can be pleasing to God. “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” 1 John 5:3; Proverbs 28:9. The duty to worship God is based upon the fact that He is the Creator and that to Him all other beings owe their existence. And wherever, in the Bible, His claim to reverence and worship, above the gods of the heathen, is presented, there is cited the evidence of His creative power. “All the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.” Psalm 96:5. “To whom then will ye liken Me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things.” “Thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God Himself that formed the earth and made it: . . . I am the Lord; and there is none else.” Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:18. Says the psalmist: “Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” Psalm 100:3; 95:6. And the holy beings who worship God in heaven state, as the reason why their homage is due to Him: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things.” Revelation 4:11. In Revelation 14, men are called upon to worship the Creator; and the prophecy brings to view a class that, as the result of the threefold message, are keeping the commandments of God.⁹⁶

The Second Angel

Whereas the first angel provides a summary of true worship, the second angel gives a depiction of false worship, especially in its eschatological manifestation. We are presented with a picture of end-time idolatry and its constituent elements, particularly its causal factors. The message of the angel is “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.” A discussion on the nature of Babylon is still ahead, but to provide context for the discussion on worship, a few things must be said about it first. The echo of Babylon’s fall and destruction in

⁹⁶ White, *The Great Controversy*, 436–437.

Isaiah 21:9 has been noted by scholars such as G. K. Beale.⁹⁷ Beale takes the view that all wicked world systems take on the symbolic name “Babylon the Great.”⁹⁸ He may be correct in his general assessment of the universal manifestation of symbolic Babylon in wicked world systems. However, a careful examination of eschatological Babylon in the book of Revelation strongly suggests more definitively that it is “identical to the satanic trinity, consisting of the dragon, the sea beast, and the beast out of the earth—that is, paganism and spiritualism, the ecclesiastical Rome, and America with apostate Protestantism.”⁹⁹

But it is important to observe carefully what Babylon represents in the system of false worship. Babylon is the instrumental cause of false worship; the reason for the judgment soon to fall on Babylon is that she “made all the nations drink of the wine that leads to passion for her immorality.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, Babylon is herself immersed in immorality, but she incentivizes the world with a passion for her immorality. She does this by means of the seduction of intoxicating wine. Thus, the world is led astray and deceived. In the eschatological context, however, how is the deception achieved? Comparing Revelation 14:8 to 17:2 and 18:3, Beale remarks,

The nations’ cooperation with Babylon ensures their material security (cf. 2:9, 13; 13:16–17). Without this cooperation, security would be removed. Such security is a temptation too great to resist. Therefore, the causative idea of the verb *πεπότικεν* (“she made to drink”) means that the nations were forced to “drink,” to comply . . . if they wanted to maintain economic security.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Beale, *Revelation*, 754.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Ekkehardt Mueller, “Babylon Identified,” in *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching*, ed. Artur A. Stele, (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 169.

¹⁰⁰ Osborne, 538. See also Beale, *Revelation*, 755: “Both τοῦ θυμοῦ (‘of passion’) and τῆς πορνείας (‘of fornication’ or ‘intercourse’) are to be taken as genitives of cause, purpose, or result: ‘the wine that causes [or “leads to” or “results in”] passion for intercourse with her’ (cf. NIV: ‘made all the nations drink from the maddening wine of her adulteries’).”

¹⁰¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 756, expands on the economic interpretation: “This economic interpretation of the nations’ intoxicating passion for Babylon is clear from ch. 18, especially 18:3, where ‘(they committed) intercourse with her’ is equivalent to ‘they became rich from the power resulting from her luxury.’ In addition, 18:9 places in conjunction ‘they committed intercourse’ and ‘they lived luxuriously [sensuously] with her.’ In line with this, it is interesting that σπρῆνος and the cognate verb, occurring

The conjunction of cooperation with Babylon (to be taken in its tripartite manifestation as previously mentioned) and the promise of economic well-being seems remarkable, but cannot be fully explored here.

Comparing the first and second angels' messages from the point of view of worship, the contrast is quite clear. First, whereas true worship consists of giving glory to and worshipping (falling before) "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters," false worship consists of trusting one's security to creaturely, worldly systems. Second, whereas true worship is motivated by repentance that results in the fear (reverence) of God, thus enabling obedience to His commandments, false worship is induced by the deception of material security that leads one to "fear" worldly, creaturely systems and render obedience to their demands. The symbolic marking or sealing of the "servants of the Lord" on the forehead (Rev 7:3), while the false "servants" receive the mark in the forehead or in the hand (Rev 13:16), shows that the false worship based on material security evidences a deeper problem of idolatrous worship. The context of this symbolism, presented in Deuteronomy 6:1-8, draws attention to the observance of God's law. In the context of the three angels' messages, obedience to the commandments of God, including the seventh-day Sabbath, will be "a defining difference between the followers of the true gospel and those of the counterfeit."¹⁰² This point shows the close theological connection between the first and second angels' messages.

The Third Angel

With the third angel we encounter the particularization of both the "subjects" and "objects" of false worship in the end-time context. The angel declares,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire

respectively in 18:3 and 18:9, can be translated with the sense of 'luxury' or 'sensuality.' Clearly ungodly humanity's love for Babylon lay in her ability to provide economic prosperity (so 18:11-19). The nations 'weep and lament' over Babylon's fall because they 'fear' that it means their own imminent demise (18:9-10, 15, 19)."

¹⁰² Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 163.

and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. (Rev 14:9–11)

In the message of the second angel, Babylon falls not because she was directly the object of worship, but because of her bad influence. With the third angel, the message is concerned about entities that have become objects of worship: the beast and his image. The angel also marks with particularity the subjects of false worship—those who receive a mark on their foreheads or right hands. Hence, we are presented with the beast and his image as an alternative teleological principle to the Creator God as far as worship is concerned. And the angel announces the judgment of those who embrace this alternative principle: torment with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. The message is as stark as it is clear. Focusing on the wrong goal in worship leads to a dead end.

Receiving the mark on foreheads or right hands may signify identification with the satanic trinity (Babylon) whom they worship.¹⁰³ If true worship ends with obedience, Stefanovic may be correct in his assessment that “in the final analysis, the mark of the beast on the right hand or the forehead serves as identification for the worshippers of the satanic trinity, as the counterpart to the seal of God.”¹⁰⁴ In the immediate context of chapter 14, Revelation speaks of the moral qualities of the sealed. “No lie was found in their mouth; they are

¹⁰³ Sealing in the Bible is significant for several reasons. First, the marking or sealing of an object, animal, or a person indicated ownership. For example, a servant’s ear was pierced to indicate that his master owned him forever (Exod 21:6) and circumcision was the ultimate mark that Israel belonged to Yahweh (Gen 17:9–12). Second, in the Bible sealing is also an indication of protection. Whatever or whoever came under the imprint of a person’s seal or mark also came under the protection of that person. A classic case is the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of the children of Israel the night the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt (Exod 12:7–13). Similarly, in Ezekiel’s judgment vision, those who sighed and moaned over abominations being committed among God’s people were to be marked by the writer with the inhorn as a sign of protection from the executioner (Ezek 9:4–5). Third, sealing marked something or a person as genuine. For a person, it was evidence of constant, unflinching loyalty and commitment. Thus, the overcomers in the church of Philadelphia have the name of God written on them, and they become pillars in the temple of God, and will not go out of it anymore (Rev 3:12).

¹⁰⁴ Stefanovic, 451.

blameless” (Rev 14:5). And, in describing their victory in the spiritual struggle of the end time, John notes that the sealed had not been “defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These *are* the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev 14:5). Here is brought to view the struggle of those who are sealed against harlot Babylon and her daughters who represent apostate religion. It is the war against the remnant (Rev 12:17)—against those who refuse to go along with Babylon’s program (Rev 13:15–17). Indeed, those who are sealed seem to be involved in proclaiming the three angels’ messages, warning the world against the dire consequences of following Babylon (Rev 14:6–12).¹⁰⁵ Obedience to the commandments of God, including the seventh-day Sabbath, will be “a defining difference between the followers of the true gospel and those of the counterfeit.”¹⁰⁶ It will be the final test that determines the destiny of every human being.¹⁰⁷ In this context, White speaks about commandment keepers being misrepresented and condemned in legislative halls and courts of justice. She then adds that “in the soon-coming conflict we shall see exemplified the prophet’s words: ‘The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ’ (Revelation 12:17).”¹⁰⁸ Unlike the antichrist powers who are deceitful, the sealed are truthful, loyal, and walk in God’s ways. Worship of the beast and the reception of his mark stand in antithesis to obedience to God’s commandments, substituting obedience to the satanic trinity for the obedience of God.¹⁰⁹ This assessment seems all the more appropriate in view of the conclusion to the message of the three angels: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

Summary

The three angels of Revelation 14:6–12 depict a conflict of worship in the end time. Together, they paint a composite picture of the structure and contours of both true and false worship.

¹⁰⁵ Ekkehardt Mueller, “The 144,000 and the Great Multitude,” 1, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/the-144000-and-the-great-multitude>, accessed March 31, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ Beatrice S. Neall, “Sealed Saints and the Tribulation,” in Holbrook, *Symposium on Revelation: Book 1*, 258.

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 592.

¹⁰⁹ Stefanovic, 461.

First, the fact that in the end time the whole of humanity is constituted of two opposing worshipping camps underscores the point that worship is fundamentally an essential aspect of human life. True worship places a responsibility—an imperative—on humans to worship the Creator God. In the conflict of the end time, however, forces opposed to the Creator God set up a counterfeit, creaturely system that demands an alternative worship.

Second, true worship is motivated by a response of repentance to the gospel that creates reverence, respect, and awe towards the Creator God and results in giving Him glory, including obedience to His commandments. On the other hand, false worship is encouraged by deception. In the end-time context, the seduction is one of material security that leads a segment of humanity to “fear” a worldly, creaturely system put in place by a satanic trinity that demands obedience on the pain of death.

Third, the rightful recipient of true worship is the Creator God, who alone is worthy of worship.

Creation and Judgment Motifs

We have already noted that Revelation 13–14 presents two worshipping communities. One adheres to the covenant with the Creator God by keeping His commandments and the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:12; cf. 12:17), while the other ignores the Creator and His covenant by giving glory to the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” (Rev 13:4). The conflict between Christ and the antichrist and between God’s people and Babylon comes to a dramatic end in the final scene of the cosmic conflict vision (Rev 14:14–20). Before it, however, a strong warning of a judgment is issued in the three angels’ messages (Rev 14:6–13). Although judgment in the three angels’ messages is not only damnation, a stern warning runs through all three messages. The first message announces the arrival of the “hour” of God’s judgment and calls for worshipping the Creator (Rev 14:7). The second message declares the fall of Babylon with a language of intensity—“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!” (Rev 14:8)—and the third message, given in a loud voice, is the most frightening warning in the New Testament (Rev 14:9–11).

The first angel proclaims the “everlasting good news” (*euangelion aiōnion*), a point of view that is under attack by the campaign of the evil forces. The proclamation counters the misrepresentation of the worldview that centers on the Creator God and it affirms that which

is eternally valid.¹¹⁰ Humanity is called to worship the Creator “for the hour of His judgment has come” (Rev 14:7), a causal clause introduced by *hoti* (“for”). Clearly, this “hour” is a critical moment. However, it is not a single moment or a literal sixty-minute hour. In the context of the vision, the “hour of his judgment” (*hē hōra tēs kriseōs autou*) precedes “the hour to reap” (*hē hōra therisai*, Rev 14:15), an expression designating the second coming of Christ when the harvest for eternity will be gathered. Both “hours” are introduced by the same word, “came” (*ēlthen*), which shows that they are related. Before the harvest is gathered, there is a need for “the hour of his judgment,” a process in which decisions are made regarding those who will constitute the harvest. The goal of this judgment is to provide clarity and security.¹¹¹ As Gerhard F. Hasel notes, “before the harvest is reaped, a judgment must take place in which to decide who among God’s professed children can be reaped and taken into the eternal kingdom.”¹¹² A striking thematic parallel can be observed between Daniel 7 and Revelation 14. Jacques Doukhan argues that the Old Testament judgment scene of Daniel 7 provides the primary background of the warning of the three angels’ messages.¹¹³ It provides urgency to the threefold message.¹¹⁴

The announcement of the arrival of the hour of judgment in Revelation 14:7 is not only a warning, but also good news. Namely, the first angel’s message claims that the judgment is in process and this is still a time during which one has an opportunity to associate oneself with God in the cosmic conflict.¹¹⁵ Also, it is good news since judgment provides an answer to the “How long, O Lord?” (Rev 6:10) question of God’s people, assuring them of the triumph of God’s purposes and that there is justice in the universe.¹¹⁶ So in Revelation 14 divine grace and divine justice are closely linked: they are two aspects of the same work of God—the process of resolving the problem of evil in His work of renewing the creation.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ Tonstad, *Lost Meaning*, 477.

¹¹¹ Tonstad, *Revelation*, 204.

¹¹² Gerhard F. Hasel, “Divine Judgment,” in Dederen, 834.

¹¹³ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 123.

¹¹⁴ Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 340.

¹¹⁵ Rodríguez, 132.

¹¹⁶ Stefanovic, 454.

¹¹⁷ Jan Paulsen, “A Theology of Judgment” (unpublished manuscript, PDF, Northern European Division, St. Albans, 1981), 12.

Judgment and the Fall of Babylon

The interpretation of the concept of end-time Babylon and its fall in Revelation requires an understanding of the theological character of ancient Babylon. Peter J. Leithart rightly notes that because of its rich biblical association, the term “Babylon” “strikes a chord, not a single note.”¹¹⁸ In the Old Testament, Babylon appears as the archenemy of God and the persecutor of His covenant people, destroying the temple and taking His people into captivity. Thus, the fall of historical Babylon, which took place shortly after announcing its moral fall (Dan 5:27–28), opened a way for the freedom of Israel. Hans K. LaRondelle notes the repetition of the same pattern in the end-time scenario of Revelation: first the verdict of end-time Babylon’s fall is pronounced (Rev 14:8) before its actual destruction during the seventh plague (Rev 16:17–21).¹¹⁹

The closing chapters in the story of Revelation narrate a tale of two cities: Babylon and Jerusalem—a “great” city (Rev 14:8) and a “holy” city (Rev 21:2).¹²⁰ “Great” is clearly an ironic epithet for the eschatological Babylon (*Babylōn hē megalē*), as it was for the historical “Babylon” in Daniel 4:30. The title is associated with Babylon’s arrogance.¹²¹ What is actually great is her fall (Rev 18).¹²² Babylon is contrasted in Revelation with the new Jerusalem, the holy temple-city in which God’s presence dwells (Rev 21:3).¹²³ The two cities are personified as two women: the harlot Babylon (Rev 17:1) and the bride of Christ (Rev 21:9). The antithetical parallelism is significant,

¹¹⁸ Leithart, *Revelation* 1–11, 9.

¹¹⁹ Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Remnant and the Three Angels’ Messages,” in Dederen, 877.

¹²⁰ For an in-depth treatment of Revelation’s city motif, see Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999); and Eva Maria Räßle, *The Metaphor of the City in the Apocalypse of John*, Studies in Biblical Literature 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

¹²¹ On the theological significance of the motif of arrogance in Daniel, see Ivan Milanov, “Lords and the Lord: The Motifs of Hubris in Daniel 1–6” (PhD diss., Newbold College, 2014).

¹²² Gordon Campbell, “Antithetical Feminine-Urban Imagery and a Tale of Two Women-Cities in the Book of Revelation,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55 (2004), 87.

¹²³ For the new Jerusalem as a temple-city, see, e.g., Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21–22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd ser., vol. 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 281–285; and G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 313–334.

since drunkenness and fornication (Rev 14:8) stand in contrast to faithfulness and chastity (Rev 19:8).¹²⁴

The most astonishing characteristic of Babylon, the harlot-city, is that she is a covenant breaker. The covenant framework is a critical point of orientation for interpreting the “fall of Babylon” motif.¹²⁵ The symbolic portrayal of Babylon as a “great harlot” (Rev 17:1) who “has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” reflects covenantal language (Rev 14:8). This metaphor is to be understood in light of the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea who portray apostate Israel as Yahweh’s unfaithful wife who became a prostitute.¹²⁶ In the Old Testament oracles, idolatry is designated as the principal means of forsaking the covenant with Yahweh (Ezek 16:38). Significantly, the crucial issue in the eschatological drama of Revelation 13 and 14 is the issue of true worship in contrast to idolatry. Thus, judgment over the harlot-city, the eschatological Babylon, is to be interpreted in covenantal terms, as facing covenant curses that are the consequence of her actions.

The antithetical parallels suggest that in Revelation Babylon represents a counter-religious system to that which calls for the worship of the Creator God (Rev 14:7). It is an idolatrous system that “prizes human ambition, lust, wealth and power,”¹²⁷ and seduces “all nations” for “intercourse” with her (Rev 14:8). Her intoxicating influence, based on the promise of prosperous welfare (Rev 17–18), is unmasked by an alarming warning of the second angel: “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!” (*epesen, epesen Babylōn hē megalē*). The use of the aorist for announcing a future event, also a feature of the Old Testament prophetic oracles, and using reduplication of the word “fallen” underscores the absolute certainty of Babylon’s fate. While she is successful in establishing a worldwide empire based on seeking her own glory (Rev 13), she is finally unmasked by God’s last warning (Rev 14:6–13) as “a charlatan city clothed with stolen scarlet and glistening with fool’s gold, whose designer make-up covers her ugly face.”¹²⁸ As such, Babylon has no future.

¹²⁴ For antithetical correspondences between Babylon and new Jerusalem, see Campbell, 98–106.

¹²⁵ This has been recognized by Hans K. LaRondelle, “Babylon: Anti-Christian Empire,” in Holbrook, *Symposium on Revelation: Book 2*, 157–163, but unfortunately not much attention has been given to this important point by scholarship.

¹²⁶ Isa 1:22; Jer 3:1–3, 8–9; Ezek 16:15–34; Hos 2:2, 4.

¹²⁷ Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 184.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Judgment as the Consequence of Mislplaced Allegiance

While the second angel's message emphasizes the fact of Babylon's judgment and its cause, the third angel's message elaborates on the fate of the inhabitants of the earth who align themselves with the diabolical system that acts as a rival of God—though God as the Creator (Rev 14:7) cannot have any true rivals. So, together with the first message, the two messages form an unbreakable unit. They continue in flight side-by-side as a unified threefold eschatological warning issued by God. However, the third message forms the strongest and most frightening intervention, which implies urgency.

The third angel's message both begins and closes with the reason for judgment: worshipping the beast and his image, and receiving his mark (Rev 14:9, 11).¹²⁹ The use of the literary technique of *inclusio* at this point highlights that the final judgment is the verdict human beings "have passed on themselves by their attitude toward God and his saving purpose."¹³⁰ The emphasis on misplaced worship as a cause of condemnation links the messages to the first angel's messages ("Fear God . . . give Him glory . . . worship Him who made," Rev 14:7), indicating that the condemned rejected the call to worship the one who is worthy of it.¹³¹ Since they identified with the evil of Babylon, they must share its fate, its judgment announced in the second angel's message.¹³²

The judgment over the condemned is stated in terms of drinking "the wine of God's wrath [*tou oinou tou thymou tou theou*], poured unmixed into the cup of his anger" (Rev 14:10). The expression is in contrast with "the wine of the passion" (*tou oinou tou thymou tēs porneias*) of the prostitute's fornication (Rev 14:8). The fact that "the wine of God's wrath" is "poured undiluted" (*kekerasmenou akratou*) and that in the text *tymos* ("wrath") and *orgē* ("anger") feature together indicate the intensity and decisiveness of God's reaction to

¹²⁹ The switch to present tense (in Revelation 14:8 verbs are in aorist and perfect) emphasizes the continual character of the actions: "worshipping" (*proskynei*) of the beast and "receiving" (*lambanei*) of his identifying mark.

¹³⁰ John A. Bollier, "Judgment in the Apocalypse," *Interpretation* 7 (1953), 24.

¹³¹ Roberto Badenas, "Wahre und Falsche Anbetung in der Drei-Engels-Botschaft," in *Studien zur Offenbarung: Die Bedeutung der drei Engelsbotschaften—Heute (Offenbarung 14, 6–12)*, 2 vols. (Bern: Euro-Afrika Division, 1988), 1:257–292, argues that the leitmotif connecting the three messages is the issue of worship: the first message is a call for true worship, the second message is a condemnation of false worship, and the third message is a warning against false worship. Both contextually and textually, this suggestion is convincing.

¹³² Richard Bauckham, "Judgment in the Book of Revelation," *Ex Auditu* 20 (2004): 20.

evil.¹³³ The imagery of God's wine being "mixed unmixed" (literal translation of *kekerasmenou akkratou*) draws on the background of ancient wine drinking, as common practice in the first century was to mix water with wine at least by half, but at times in even a three-to-one ratio in favor of water.¹³⁴ Since it is clearly stated that God's wrath is prepared in full strength, the logical conclusion is that the prostitute's wine is diluted. As Beale notes, "while the intoxicating effect of Babylon's wine seemed strong, it is nothing in comparison to God's wine."¹³⁵ Babylon's influence in misleading people was very effective, as depicted in Revelation 13. However, God's response to the distortion of the truth about reality will be definitive and experiencing God's wrath all the worse.¹³⁶

The severity of God's wrath is defined more precisely in terms of eternal torment. The language of the destruction of the beast-worshippers is drawn from Isaiah 34:9–10, which portrays God's judgment over Edom: "Its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone; its land shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever." The strong language highlights the permanent destiny of Edom: it will never rise again. Similarly, the judgment of beast-worshippers will be definite. While Revelation has often been accused of violence and vindictiveness on account of its judgment language,¹³⁷ its language is hyperbolic and it has a rhetorical function. The frightening messages of Revelation 14:9–11 functions as a warning, a kind of shock-therapy, designed to move people to change course: to acknowledge the Creator God in worship and boycott the quasi-sovereignty that usurps His place.

¹³³ The two terms occur together also in Revelation 16:19 and 19:15.

¹³⁴ Aune, *Revelation* 6–16, 833.

¹³⁵ Beale, *Revelation*, 759.

¹³⁶ In the Old Testament some enemies of the people of God had to drink the cup of wrath. The picture of judgment is drinking until extinction: "They shall drink, and swallow, and they shall be as though they had never been" (Obad 1:16). "Drink, get drunk and vomit, fall and rise no more, because of the sword that I am sending among you" (Jer 25:27). At times, even the covenant-breaking Israel had to drink the wine of God's wrath (Pss 60:3; 75:8; Isa 51:17, 22; Jer 25:15–16, 27; 49:12; Ezek 23:31–34). Jesus' torments in Gethsemane are pictured, against this background, as accepting a cup of divine wrath from God's hand (Matt 20:22; 26:39, 42).

¹³⁷ For a summary of recent discussions on the violent language of Revelation, see Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, The Library of New Testament Studies 586 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 1–13.

The parallel between Revelation 14:11b and 4:8, and the use of the phrase “day or night,” also has an important theological significance that enlightens the relation of judgment and creation. The first text states of the fate of the beast-worshippers that “they have no rest day or night” (*ouk echousin anapausin hēmeras kai nyktos*) from the torment, while in the throne room vision of Revelation 4, which depicts an ongoing reality, the paradigmatic worshippers of God “do not rest day or night” (*anapausin ouk echousin hēmeras kai nyktos*) praising God. Because of their misplaced allegiance, choosing to worship the beast instead of the Creator God, the ultimate punishment of the condemned is not having “rest.” It must be mentioned, however, that these expressions should not be interpreted to indicate a state of perpetuity in the experience of the wicked.¹³⁸ Having divine rest has been a privilege of all human beings since the creation week when God rested on the seventh day after His work of creation (Gen 2:2–3), but the eternal destiny of the beast-worshippers is losing the opportunity to find “rest.” The seventh-day Sabbath, the memorial of the creation and the sign of the covenant, points to God who remains faithful to His creation. Ignoring His covenant by worshipping a power that is unworthy of it has chaos and loss of rest as a consequence. Larry Lichtenwalter concludes, “This creation backdrop highlights the essential nature of the dragon’s attack on God and his people. It is decreation—the reversal of creation.”¹³⁹ It is the consequence of turning away from the truth that is available to human beings (Rev 14:6–7).

While the impression is that the majority of people go along with the idolatrous agenda of Babylon, Revelation calls upon its readers to have patience (*hypomonē tōn hagiōn*, Rev 14:12), assuring them that justice will triumph at the end. The underlying idea behind justice as a concept associated with God’s judgment is the fairness of the Creator in His dealing with the world (“Your judgments are true and just!”

¹³⁸ Since the meaning of the expression *eis tous aiōnas tōn aiōnōn* may be derived from that with which it is associated, “the following is a possible explanation of the use of the compound expression here [Rev 14:11]. The subject matter is the torment of the worshipers of the beast in an inferno of fire and brimstone. The age of a man in such an environment would be very brief, so that if the expression *eis ton aiōna*, ‘unto the age,’ had been used, it would be possible to conclude that the punishment would be but momentary. The compound expression shows that the torment would be for a certain period, not unending of course, as is evident from other scriptures that show that the final fate of the wicked will be annihilation (see Matt. 10:28; Rev. 20:14)” (Francis D. Nichols, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7 [Washington, DC: Review and Herald], 832).

¹³⁹ Lichtenwalter, “Seventh-Day Sabbath,” 305.

Rev 16:7; cf. 15:3; 16:5; 19:2). His judgments are not arbitrary decisions. As Bauckham points out, “God’s judgment is not an external authority imposing its will on people, but the light of truth exposing evil for all to see.”¹⁴⁰ So, God will judge human acts and the results will be evident when the time comes and evil is finally defeated.

After this analysis of the creation and judgment motifs in the three angels’ messages, we turn now to the discussion of their relationship.

Linking Creation and Judgment

A direct link between the motifs of creation and judgment in Revelation is found in 11:18, a text that sheds some light on the nature of the relationship between the two motifs in 14:6–13. This text, featuring at the very end of the seventh trumpet, begins and ends with the notion of judgment, while the middle of the verse refers to the “reward” that will be given to the faithful. It claims that the time has arrived (*ēlthen . . . ho kairos*) for administering justice and setting up God’s kingdom (Rev 11:15–17), which, among other things, involves “destroying those who destroy the earth” (NRSV). In Revelation there are four principal agents of destruction: 1) Satan, 2) the beast, 3) the false prophet, and 4) Babylon. The way they ruin others finally results in their own ruination (*lex talionis*).¹⁴¹ On the other hand, for the people of God the time of judgment is the demonstration of the fact that God has not given up on His creation. The allusion to the Genesis flood story in Revelation 11:18 serves the purpose of stressing the theme of the Creator’s faithfulness to His creation. Bauckham remarks that “the extent to which the Creator’s faithfulness to his creation is the theme of Revelation can be appreciated if we notice a significant allusion to the Genesis Flood story in Revelation 11:18 . . . the phrase—‘for destroying the destroyers of the earth’—also alludes to the equivalent wordplay in Genesis 6:11–13, 17, where the Hebrew verb . . . [תהש] . . . has the same double meaning.”¹⁴² In other words, God’s judgment is to be seen as a crucial step in the process of the good Creator’s restoration of His good creation. Its essence is that “Israel’s God [is] dealing firmly and decisively with everything that has distorted and corrupted his good creation, so that creation itself can be rescued from all its ills and transformed into the new world” (Rev 21–22).¹⁴³ So, the larger picture that provides interpretive

¹⁴⁰ Bauckham, “Judgment,” 3.

¹⁴¹ Koester, 517.

¹⁴² Bauckham, *Theology*, 52.

¹⁴³ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2013), 482.

context for the concept of judgment is God's work of reclaiming and restoring His creation by solving the problem of evil.

The biblical view of God as a Creator presupposes His faithfulness to the creation. God's faithfulness is rooted in His covenantal relationship with the world He created. While the actual term "covenant" (*berit*) does not feature in the creation story of Genesis 1–2, it does not have to feature for a covenant to exist.¹⁴⁴ Basic to the covenant is covenantal loyalty—not only of humanity (Gen 2:15–17), but of the Creator God to His creation. So, the work of creation and the covenant make "an unbreakable theological unity."¹⁴⁵

The link connecting the concepts of God as a Creator and God as a judge in the three angels' messages is His covenantal faithfulness. In the Old Testament God's fairness and justice were the basic assumptions of the covenant. God's covenant people expected the Creator to investigate and set matters right by exercising judgment (Gen 16:5; 31:53; 1 Sam 24:15; 2 Sam 18:19; Ps 7). The judgment acts of the Lord were aimed at safeguarding the covenantal relationship with His people, so they were the demonstration of His faithfulness. A good example is the Genesis flood narrative, in which the faithfulness of the Creator is clearly a central idea. This is suggested by the central significance of the expression "then God remembered Noah" (Gen 8:1) in the narrative.¹⁴⁶ The reference to the creation of the "springs of water" in the first angel's messages (Rev 14:7) as an allusion to the flood narrative (Gen 7:11) seems to serve the same purpose: recalling God's faithfulness to His creation as a context for interpreting judgment (cf. Rev 4:3).

Therefore, judgment in the three angels' messages is a logical outworking of the faithfulness of the Creator God. Because He as Creator is faithful to His creation, He does not allow evil to have the last word. With judgment over Babylon, He is setting boundaries to the work of evil that ruins the creation with violence, oppression, and the setting up of a global idolatrous worship system. God's faithfulness to His creation requires destroying evil and eradicating it from the universe in order to preserve and restore a world that was created in the beginning as "very good" (Gen 1:31).¹⁴⁷ His purpose is

¹⁴⁴ For evidence for a creation covenant, see, e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 19–29.

¹⁴⁵ Hans K. LaRondelle, *Our Creator Redeemer: An Introduction to Biblical Covenant Theology* (Berrien Springs, MD: Andrews University Press, 2005), 17.

¹⁴⁶ For the chiasmic structure of the flood narrative, centered on God's remembrance of Noah (Gen 8:1a), see Turner, 55.

¹⁴⁷ Bauckham, *Theology*, 52.

“taking creation beyond the threat of evil” and transforming it into a home in which divine glory dwells together with humanity (Rev 21:3, 22–23; 22:3–5).¹⁴⁸

The three angels’ messages is a final call for humanity to respond to the Creator God by seeking a covenantal relationship with Him. In contrast to the deceptive claims of the evil forces, Revelation 14:6–13 makes clear that there is one God from whom all things originate, to whom human beings owe allegiance. His covenantal faithfulness to His creation requires Him to right that which is wrong in His cosmos and rescue His creation from what ruins it. His ultimate plan is to create a new world on the foundations of the old one (Rev 21:1–8). Clearly, Revelation’s view of the future is deeply creational: the things that pose a threat to the goodness and God-givenness of God’s creational order are to be defeated and the reign of God over the whole creation is to be restored. The theme of judgment is to be understood within this framework as a crucial step in the Creator’s program of renewal, and as a step by which the health of the creation is restored and by which chaos is replaced with order (Gen 1:1–2).¹⁴⁹ White seems to write from this point of view when she notes,

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, judgment is “good news” (*euangelion*) because it is a “no” to all that stands against God’s good purposes for the world and a “yes” to the restoration of creation itself in line with the original vision in Genesis 1–2.¹⁵¹ As such, it is a responsible expression of divine love.

Conclusion

A unique feature in John’s Apocalypse, which is found at the center of the book, are the successive messages of three angels. It is a proclamation directed especially to the people living in the last

¹⁴⁸ Bauckham, *Theology*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Wright, 481.

¹⁵⁰ White, *The Great Controversy*, 678.

¹⁵¹ Wright, 483.

period of human history. Although many of the messages of the book come together in a nutshell in Revelation 14:6–12, John’s Apocalypse does not stop there. Christ’s second coming is not directly found in the three angels’ messages; its depiction immediately follows it (Rev 14:14–16). And while creation occurs in the message of Revelation 14:7, it is the Genesis creation—that which was made (Rev 14:7)—that is found there.

Theologically, the centrality of the message in the structure of the book of Revelation gives it noteworthy relevance. The connection of the doctrine of the Sabbath to the biblical creation that underlies it requires in itself a closer examination of the creation doctrine and its relation to the three angels’ messages. Indeed, the foundational nature of the doctrine of creation to other biblical doctrines has been recognized: “Alter the doctrine of creation at any point, and you have also altered these other aspects of Christian doctrine.”¹⁵² Consequently, a proper, biblical conception of the connection between the doctrine of creation and the other biblical themes in the messages is needed. The three angels’ messages talk about God, creation, redemption, worship, and judgment, and we have tried to show the connections among these themes. Clearly, creation, covenant, and judgment belong together in the theological thinking of John as related expressions of the work of God that are integral to the “eternal gospel” (Rev 14:6). Part of it may appear threatening and may be seen as negative motivation to “fear God.” Nevertheless, the positive motivation is the concept of salvation in the three angels’ messages and the new creation in communion with the God of love, holiness, and justice being proclaimed in Revelation 21 and 22. Even the divine judgments are to be seen as expressions of God’s love by which He seeks to protect His creation.

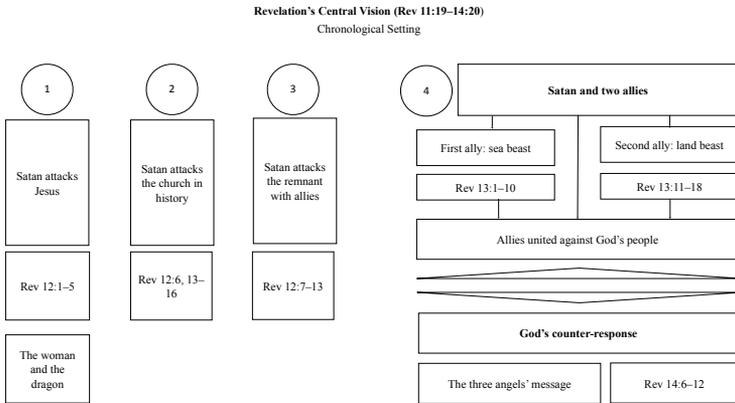
The significance of the three angels’ messages in its universal scope requires that the messages be shared not only as head knowledge (although cognitive truth is important). People need to be challenged to turn to God, follow Jesus, and love the Lord with all their heart, all their soul, and all their mind. Also, while the message is the final message that calls humanity to make a decision for God, it should be understood and shared through the lens of the totality of Revelation’s messages.

¹⁵² Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 393.

STUDY GUIDES FOR CREATION AND THE THREE ANGELS' MESSAGES

These study guides are prepared to make the material presented in this document more accessible. For each main section in the written text we provide a conceptual diagram that summarizes the key points in that section. Following the diagram, some specific questions are offered to help the reader understand the theological and logical connections among the concepts in the three angels' messages that have been presented in this document.

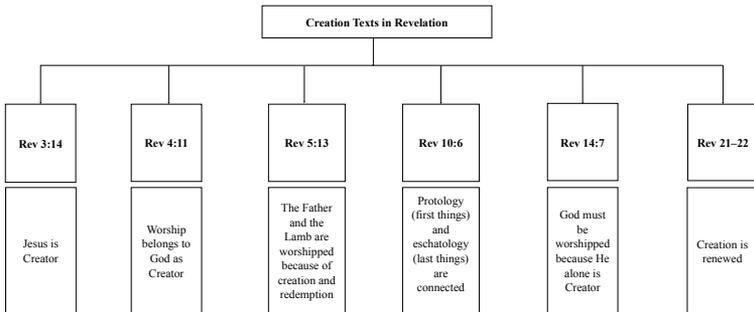
The Setting of the Three Angels' Messages: A Chronological Outline (Rev 11:19–14:20)



Study this diagram in connection with the section “The Setting of the Three Angels’ Messages” (p.6ff) and answer the following questions:

1. The vision recorded in Revelation 11:19–14:20 is a portrayal of the outline of Christian history in symbols. How would you describe the outline of events depicted in Revelation 12?

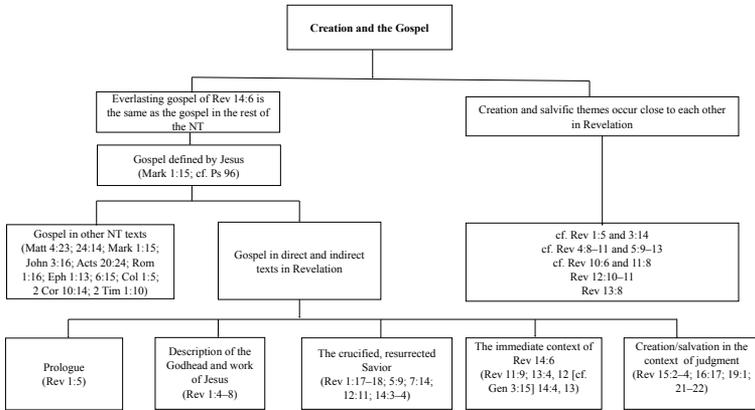
Creation in the Book of Revelation and the Three Angels' Messages



Study this diagram in connection with the section “Creation in the Book of Revelation and the Three Angels’ Messages” (p. 9ff) and answer the following questions:

1. Familiarize yourself with the passages identified as creation texts in the book of Revelation by reading them carefully. Pay particular attention to the contexts in which they occur. How would you explain to someone the message on creation that each passage conveys?

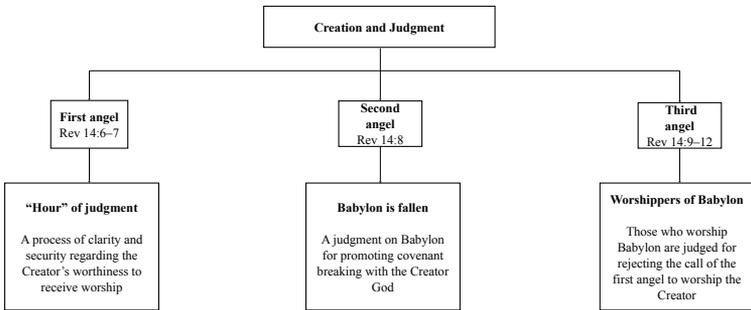
Creation and the Gospel



Study this diagram in connection with the section “Creation and the Gospel” (p. 14ff) and answer the following questions:

1. Look over the passages in the book of Revelation that address the concept of the gospel. How do these passages contribute to the point that the “everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14:6 is the same gospel proclaimed by Jesus, the apostles, and Paul?

Creation and Judgment



Study this diagram in the connection with the section “Creation and Judgment Motifs” (p. 45ff) and answer the following questions:

1. Reflect on the point that the announcement of judgment by the first angel does not indicate a single moment in time, but rather a process. What key moments of the process can you identify in all the three angels' messages?

This book is an initiative of the Faith and Science Council through the Biblical Research Institute. It explores the theological connection between the Genesis creation account and the prophetic messages of the three angels of Revelation 14 and provides a solid exposition of this important biblical connection. The Seventh-day Adventist Church's belief in the seventh-day Sabbath as God's day of rest and its special relevance for our time is rooted in these messages and shapes the church's missionary efforts. Among the theological themes present in the three angels' messages, three stand out—gospel, worship, and judgment. Each of these biblical themes are carefully examined in the setting of the biblical creation within the context of the three angels' messages and the book of Revelation as a whole. A practical study guide is included at the end to facilitate personal study and group discussion of this important topic. The Faith and Science Council supports scientific and theological research in order to provide resources that help confirm and better understand the Genesis creation account on which many biblical doctrines, including the Sabbath, are based.



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