

The Three Angels

Prophecy Is Enigmatic

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You have probably heard the expression that "bad news comes in threes." For those of you who are a bit more optimistic, you might want to say that blessings come in threes (although many of us are scratching our heads wondering when that ever happened.).

It does seem to be that if there is one plane crash, you are going to hear about two more within the next few days or weeks. If there is a bad earthquake, then there is going to be a hurricane and volcano too. Or if it is not those other two, then it might be three earthquakes; or just three major tragedies.

If a man loses his job, then it seems more than likely that his car will break down, and his roof will begin leaking. Now, this is not a hard and fast rule. It is not a rule of the universe. It is not one of those great laws that God put into motion at the beginning.

But, it is a way that the human mind tends to organize things. We like to group things in threes. We categorize events or things in easily handled numbers and three happens to be one of those numbers we tend to use.

We organize things in three parts. For instance, a book has a beginning, middle, and an end. Or, we might say that a sermon or speech has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

We tend to organize things in threes. There is cold, warm, and hot. (Or if you are a church of God member, it is cold, lukewarm, and hot!) There is opaque, translucent, and transparent. There is white, gray, and black. We have the Old Testament divided into the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

And speaking of the Bible: in the Bible the number three tends to mean "completeness." So, things that we put into sets of three in the Bible tend to comprise a whole of something; or you might say a finished work.

For instance, we know that there were three Archangels mentioned, Michael, Gabriel, and the one who became Satan the Devil. There were the three sons of Noah, and they became the progenitors of the entire human race. From them came the various races of human beings.

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There were three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They form the complete basis for the children of Israel. There are three major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. We tend to take those three books together.

Jesus had four sets of three disciples who became Apostles. And He had three (one set of three) to be special to Him: Peter and James and John—the two sons of Zebedee. They formed a nucleus of the New Testament church.

We also know there are three major virtues: love, faith, and hope. The process of salvation is in three parts: justification, sanctification, and glorification. Jesus was in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (72 hours). That was the whole of the time that He was there. It was complete.

I am sure that I have missed a great number of sets of three in the scriptures, but the point is that things in threes tend to symbolize a whole and complete thing—process, group, work, or whatever. The idea is of completeness.

Today, I want to draw our attention to another set of three. It is one I have not mentioned yet today. And this one is in the book of Revelation. This set of three is what is known as the Three Angels of Revelation 14:6-13.

I have not given a prophecy sermon in a while, and I thought I would give one this time. I have been thinking about this particular passage for some time, but have been deep into another series, so I could not get to it until now.

(By the way, this opportunity came up to speak today because we rearranged the speaking schedule to give my dad the opportunity to speak first in the new building.)

So, we are going to look into these three angels, and their messages, however, not to the degree that we went into the Two Witnesses. I do not want this to become like that at all. This is just a stand alone sermon.

What I want to do is to use this as an example of prophecy in general, and help us to understand the process of looking at these things, understanding them, interpreting them, and coming to a conclusion about certain prophecies.

This sermon may disturb you because we will not come to any conclusions today. But, I want this to be a learning example of how I believe that we need to look at prophecy so that we do not get bogged down by being too dogmatic about something and find out that we are wrong, leading people astray in the meantime.

There are probably many interpretations of this passage: Revelation 14:6-13. But, I have narrowed the choices down to three to keep it simple, and because I think that these three are the only plausible fulfillments.

Like I said, we are going to use this as a training exercise. It might be a bit different than what you have come to think a prophecy sermon should be. But, I hope this will help you to understand the process a bit better.

Now, before we look into the messages of the three angels, I want to reiterate my philosophy regarding prophecy so that you do not think that I am trying to confuse you, or that I am being wishy-washy, or that I do not have any answers at all. What I want to do is to show you that we need to keep an open mind on these things, understanding various possibilities.

So, by the end of the sermon, I hope to show you that there may be three plausible fulfillments of this, any of which may actually come to pass. God never does things exactly, simply, like we would. We have heard before of the example that God made H₂O (water) and that can be used in so many different forms and ways, and the Word of God is exactly like that. Sometimes we think that we have something pegged down—a certain scripture means such-and-such—but then someone will use it in another way that will open up a whole new vista of understanding.

Prophecy is the same way. We know that for sure. Prophecy can be interpreted to have a type (typical fulfillment), and anti-type (a later fulfillment that might be spiritual and/or may be end-time). And you can see three things there—typical fulfillment, a spiritual fulfillment, and an end-time fulfillment. How many prophecies are there like that?

The thing is we do not have the mind of God to the extent that we can figure out all these things; so it is important for us to keep several of these options open, and understand them in depth, so that when they occur, we can see them. That is part of what I am going to go through today.

Let us go to II Peter 1 because I want to give you three principles that are the foundation of my philosophy regarding prophecy. (We have gone through this before. So, those of you who have heard some of my prophecy sermons in the past will know that I pretty much do this every time. I want to go through this again so that we are all on the same page.)

II Peter 1:20-21 ...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy

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men of God spoke as *they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.

So, *the first principle* that I am going to give you today is that my speculations—based on what I have studied in the Bible, in history, and in commentaries, and other biblical helps, from what I know from news events, and other sorts of things—should not be considered dogma by any means. I think that if we start saying that certain prophetic things are absolutely going to happen, we are starting to go down that road where we will find trouble. How many times in the past have there been dogmatic assertions about prophecy and we have found a bit later, and sometimes not very long after, that something was left out, or some event occurs to change our view altogether; or God reveals something in another part of the Bible that can apply very well to that prophecy, and changes the meaning somewhat, and, therefore, our understanding of how it is going to be fulfilled.

The Bible does contain the answers to these questions. The problem is the men who are searching after them! Men are imperfect in their analyses. As mentioned in the sermonette, we all have different backgrounds, and we approach things differently. Unless God reveals these things to us, we may, or may not come up with the good answer. So the Bible (as it says here in verses 20-21) is inspired by God. Holy men spoke as they were inspired by God—it is God breathed. Those things are true. But, the way that we approach the scripture, and the way that we understand the scripture is fallible. So, we need to be aware of that.

The second thing is back in Ezekiel 7. I pulled this out as an example. I think it is good to use. This is a judgment upon Israel.

Ezekiel 7:1-4 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "And you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD to the land of Israel: 'An end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land. Now the end *has come* upon you, And I will send My anger against you; I will judge you according to your ways, And I will repay you for all your abominations. My eye will not spare you, Nor will I have pity; But I will repay your ways, And your abominations will be in your midst; Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD!'

It is that last sentence that I was getting at. These things are going to happen—the end coming upon Israel—and God says very clearly at the end of verse 4 that it is **only then** (when the judgment comes upon them, or after it is past) that they really come to understand that God is God. God means what He says. If He says that He is going to do

something, then it is going to happen, and this is the proof that it is God's doing, proof of who God is.

So, passages such as this (and they are all through Ezekiel, there is also one in Joel, and maybe one or two in Zechariah, and one in Malachi; actually all through the Bible) where something similar is said—that is such and such will come to pass, and then you will know. Ezekiel 33:33 talks about the prophet speaking—saying these things of God—and the people coming to him, and thinking that he makes such a lovely song, remember? And then when they see it come to pass, they will know that a prophet has been among them. It is not until after these things come to pass that they begin to see that God was working the whole time, and so certainty can only occur after they happen.

We can speculate about things all we like. But, only God knows how He is going to bring something to pass. And how many times have we seen in prophecies about Jesus Christ and how those who looked at them before they happened had no clue that they were actually prophecies about the Messiah. And so we have the book of Matthew that refers back to all these prophecies, and declares that "this was fulfilled as spoken by the prophet Isaiah, etc.," and suddenly all these prophecies sprang out of the Bible. *"Well! So that is how it was! I would never have figured that is how God would have done that!"*

And the same thing is going to be true of New Testament end time prophecy. I think that we are going to be amazed at the way God fulfills some of the prophecies. There are going to be times when we look at them and say, *"I cannot believe it! Wow, did God bring that together in a strange way! I never would have think it!"*

So, our job, then, is to study the prophecies in detail so that we will be able to recognize it when it begins to take place—as early as possible. But, we need to know the prophecies in detail, and have an idea of the various ways that things can be interpreted. Just maybe there will be one thing—a symbol, a part of the fulfillment—that will spring something off in our minds, and we will say, *"Aha! God is working here!"* And then we will be able to get on the bandwagon, and follow through, then, on what the prophecy is about.

So, this means that we have to have an open mind to many possibilities. One of the things that we should not do is to dismiss all but one.

There may be ways to narrow it down, and say that it could not possibly be this one because it contradicts scriptures somewhere else. But, on the other hand, we should be able to see that there might be a handful of possible interpretations that may be right, and who knows, we may even be able to call a few more as time goes on.

Just think about it. What if you pick the wrong one? What if there are five real different interpretations to a particular prophecy, and we happen to pick one that will not come to pass? God does not have that one worked out that way. What could that mean?

What about the Beast? Let us say we have narrowed it down to a German, or an Italian. We think it is very interesting that all the Beasts since this began have been either Germans or Italians. And so we claim that this last one must be also. And we find out that the last one is a Greek. Or Swiss! Are we going to be stubborn and not see the real one because it just is not the way we thought it should happen? Are you going to take the mark, as it were, because "...it could not possibly be him...He is not a German or an Italian..." That could really have disastrous consequences.

So, we need to have a bit of an open mind—willing to consider that "...yes, the possibility is that he could be a German or an Italian, but he could also be some other nationality." Why not a Greek? Alexander was a Greek. Why not Swiss? They are not all Israelites in Switzerland. They speak French, German, and Italian. Who knows who is really there?

I am pulling this out of the air. But, it is an interesting thing to think about. What if we choose the wrong interpretation? What if we, then, have no idea of any other possibilities? We could be giving ourselves a lot of grief.

The third principle is found in I Corinthians 1:19. This is in the midst of Paul talking about the gospel and how it seems foolish to some folks. He writes in verse 19 (quoting Isaiah 29:14, "Therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work Among this people, A marvelous work and a wonder; For the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, And the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hidden."):

I Corinthians 1:19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

My point here is as the hymn says, "not many wise men are called now." Paul cautions us in Romans 12:3 not to think more highly of ourselves as we ought to think, as if God were speaking through us; as if we have all knowledge about prophecy, or the interpretation of prophecy.

Now, certainly God gives us gifts, and maybe some people have a better understanding of how prophecy is going to come out, or maybe they can look into the symbols and see how they can work together with what else is in the Bible, or what have you.

But, how often have we been right?

There used to be a joke around Ambassador College campus that some evangelist would say one to another "I hear Herman (Dr. Herman Hoeh) has come up with something else. He has figured out when the end is going to be." And the other evangelist would reply, "Yeah, but when has he been right before?"

How often have we had to alter our understanding of prophecy because something new comes to light? I think we need to be humble enough to say, "I am not sure," and allow for the possibility that we may be wrong. That is why I came here. God is wise. We are foolish. And if we think we are wise, He will bring our wisdom down to nothing. If we get too big for our britches, He will cut us down to size.

So, we need to make sure that we do not become self-righteous about our understanding of prophecy, and think that we have got everything pretty much sown up in a nice little neat bag. That is just not true. Our history shows that that is definitely not true.

Now, to balance this, let us go back to II Peter 1, and we will read the verse that we did not read a moment ago.

II Peter 1:19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;

Like I said, this is the balance of those three points above that I have given up to this point. The prophetic word is made more sure than even an eye-witness account.

So, these prophecies will happen. That is what I am trying to say. Just because something is prophesied, and we have a certain speculation about it does not mean that it is not going to happen. It will happen in God's time. That is a given. But, how and when it will be fulfilled is more difficult to know.

So, we should always understand that our explanations are as far as we know right now. Or, we might also say, as far as God has revealed to us at this time. Being too dogmatic about such things, as I have said before, has gotten the church into trouble in the past, and personally, I prefer not to repeat that mistake.

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This is not to say that we might not say, "*This is what I think might happen, and I am pretty sure that it might happen this way,*" because sometimes we get excited about these things. Still, we need to have the humility to say, "*Well, I really do not know for sure. God may bring this about in His own way that I just have not figured out quite yet. But this much we know from scripture and that is as far as God has brought us to this point.*"

So, end of that. I wanted to make sure that you all understand where I stand on this, where I am coming from. I am trying to approach this as humbly as possible, and keeping the possibilities open. And, on the other hand, trying to research from the Bible the clues that God gives us, so that we might come as close as we humanly can—hopefully as close as we spiritually can—with the inspiration of God.

Revelation 14:6-13 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water." And another angel followed, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. "And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Now this seems pretty straight forward on the surface. Well, at least it always seemed that way to me. But then, of course, I had not looked into the details either. And it is always in the details that the doubts begin to spring up.

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Now, some of you just reading over it may say that this is not clear at all. But, really, if you read it in the flow of things, it seems like it fits, and you might think what is so hard about this?

Well, one of the first questions that come up is: Where does this prophecy fit within the time-line of events?

Now, most folks when they read this would say, "*Well, it must take place near the end of the tribulation, possibly as the Day of the Lord is beginning. Does it not say, in verse 7, for the hour of His judgment has come?*"

So, right on the surface this seems like the Day of the Lord, right?

Well, just to make you think a little bit, let us go back to I John 2:18 where similar wording is used. This is what I mean about the details making one wonder. John is writing to the first century church near the end of his life, and he says:

I John 2:18 Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

So, when is the last hour? Could it be now? Could it be all the time since the first century church? Or is it specifically that last little bit of time at the end, the Day of the Lord?

This is what I mean by little doubts could spring in, because it does not seem to be all that clear when the last hour is. And if we consider that it is the Day of the Lord (although it does not say anywhere in here that it is the Day of the Lord—it does not use that phrase), we could go back to Malachi 4, verses 5 and 6, where it says:

Malachi 4:5-6 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Now, when did this happen? Well, from our understanding, John the Baptist was that one—the Elijah to come. He turned the hearts of the fathers to the children.

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And so, when did the Day of the Lord begin? Some might argue that the Day of the Lord began with Jesus Christ's ministry, because that follows directly on the heels of John's ministry in which he did this. You could make an argument, therefore, that we are in the Day of the Lord.

Like I said, though, the Day of the Lord does not even appear in this passage. It does not give us a very firm grip on the timing of this prophecy.

Now, part of the problem with the timing of this prophecy in Revelation 14 is that most commentators believe that Revelation is chronological. If you go into the Protestant commentaries, that is how they approach the book of Revelation.

However, we in the Church of God have approached the book quite differently. We believe that there are several inset chapters. Knowing which chapters are inset, and which are not, can be difficult at times. Where do they start, and where do they begin?

Oftentimes, you have to look at what they are about to figure out when they occur. Or, how much time they cover. Do they go back in time, and then bring you up to the present? Or, whether they complete a certain work that needs to be done, but they give you all the details about that particular work? Or there might be a certain history of something that needs to be understood before you go into the next section.

And sometimes there are several inset chapters back to back to back. If you go back through this section we are in right now, you see an inset chapter beginning in chapter 10, the seven thunders, and then it goes directly into chapter 11 with the two witnesses. The seven thunders start way back in the first century, and the two witnesses are right at the end. And that, chronologically, takes you right up to the return of Christ.

But then, you get into chapter 12. And this begins a new inset with different instruction about Israel, and the fight between God's angels, and Satan's angels, and how that affects Israel, and later on, the church of God.

Chapter 13 is another inset chapter bringing out the Beast, and the False Prophet, and the histories of both of those institutions—the governmental, and religious that work together.

Chapter 14 begins to talk about the 144,000. When does that occur? When are they glorified? It shows them, here, with the Lamb on Mount Zion. But, this is out of order. If this were in order, it would be in chapter 19, or the beginning of chapter 20.

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So, chapter 14 seems to be another inset chapter. Skip over the three angels section and go to verse 14 all the way down through verse 20. The New King James titles verses 14 through 16 "Reaping the Earth's Harvest," and verses 17 through 20 "Reaping the Grapes of Wrath."

Now these sections occur right at the very end. It covers Christ's work as Judge of both the Saints and sinners. First He reaps the Harvest of the Saints, and then He judges sinners.

So, how do verses 6 through 13 fit in to all of this chronologically? We are going backwards, and forwards in this particular inset, it seems to me.

Now, is the proclamation of the three angels the beginning, then, of the return to chronological order? Perhaps, because the very next chapter talks about the Day of the Lord and the Seven Last Plagues, what is also known as The Bowl Judgments, or The Vials of God's Wrath. That starts in chapter 15, verse 1, and goes down through chapter 16, which seems to me to be in chronological order, picking up from the end of chapter 11 (11:15 to the end).

Do you see the problem here?

Where do we put the proclamation of The Three Angels? It becomes a bit of a question. It seems to be in an inset. And our only understanding of the chronology comes from the context of the eight verses which are there.

So, I am not going to answer the question. This is why I told you that you might find this a bit disturbing, or unsettling, because I do not want to answer the questions right now. I want you to think, could it possibly be some other time than the very end? How far back does it go?

We saw in I John 2 that in his time it was already the last hour, and antichrists were already springing up. And this was their clue that it was the last hour. But, because it says "the hour of His Judgment having come", it seems to mean the very last time is the Day of the Lord, meaning right at the end of the Tribulation—that period of time we consider to be "The Day of the Lord," possibly a year in length. It is hard to be certain. That is all I am saying. It is hard to be certain.

The second troubling detail in all of this is the word 'Angel.'

"Why is this troubling?" you might say? Well, this is the normal Greek word, *Angelon*, or

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Angelos, (*Angelos* is the base root word, and *Angelon* is the exact word found here in the Greek). But, this word does not necessarily mean a spirit being. In Greek, "*Angelon*" simply means a messenger, an envoy; one who is sent to announce or proclaim.

Now, granted, in most contexts and in most cases the context usually describes a spirit being. And that would go throughout the New Testament. If it says *Angelon*, or *Angelos*, or any form of them, it is usually speaking of a spirit being, one of God's angels. But it does not have to.

Especially in prophetic contexts, this interpretation becomes a bit more dicey. For instance: If we would go back to the letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3, it says to each one of them, "To the Angel of the Church of (at)...., write:"

Now some people believe that there is an angel for each church, and some people believe that instead, God means a human messenger; an Apostle—someone He has called out to give His message to the people through, to lead His people at a particular time.

Which is it? Is it a spirit being—Angel? Or is it a human messenger?

How about here in Revelation 14:6—is this a spirit being angel flying in the midst of heaven? Or is it more symbolic of a human being who is doing something for God? Like I said, there are questions. It is not all cut and dry when you look at it.

Now, a mitigating factor, here, is indeed this angel is flying in the midst of heaven. How many men have you seen flying in the midst of heaven? Well, not so quick! You have to remember that the book of Revelation is a book of symbols. And an angel flying in the midst of heaven may not be an angel flying in the midst of heaven. This is what John saw, but that may not be what God means by this.

Of course, that would be the literal interpretation—an angel flying in the midst of heaven. And it is also the most likely interpretation—an angel flying in the midst of heaven with this message. But we cannot lightly dismiss other ideas like when God took Israel out of Egypt on eagles' wings.

Imagine yourself as an Israelite in front of Mount Sinai. And then you hear God say this:

Exodus 19:4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

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I can see Joe Israelite looking over to Jane Israelite and saying, "*Did that happen to you? I remember walking all this distance.*"

Let us look at Deuteronomy 32:11-12, and we will get a bit of interpretation of what it really means.

Deuteronomy 32:11-12 As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, So the LORD alone led him, And *there was* no foreign god with him.

So, when God says He bore them on eagles' wings, it does not literally mean that He bore them out on eagles' wings. It means that He was like a mother eagle to Israel, protecting them all along the way. And if they should fall, He would pick them up, and keep them from hurting themselves.

This idea of going on eagles' wings means that they were protected by God throughout their journey like an eagle protects her young. It does not literally mean that they flew out of Egypt.

So, if an angel flies in the midst of heaven, does it necessarily mean that there will be a spirit being seen flying in the midst of heaven? Perhaps. Perhaps not. Perhaps it is more symbolic. We have got to keep both ideas in play because we cannot be certain with any dogmatism.

Perhaps what is being said in verse 6 of Revelation 14 is that it is a kind of prophetic shorthand saying that this messenger will be protected by God during his proclamation.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the Greek does not have "in the midst of Heaven". That is an interpretation. It is a pretty good interpretation, but the Greek says "in mid-heaven".

Now if you said that there is somebody in the midst of heaven, probably the first thing that would come to your mind is that they were in the heaven of God's Throne, or the heaven of the stars. But, that is not what this particular phrase means here. It means the atmosphere where birds, clouds, and airplanes are found.

So, this messenger is up in the sky somewhere, in the middle regions of the atmosphere, flying and proclaiming this message. Thus, a bit more symbolism comes into play. This activity occurs somewhere between Heaven and earth. That is what it

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means. Whoops. I do not want to be too dogmatic. This is one of its meanings. It could mean that there is actually a messenger in the air; or a more symbolically, this activity is somewhere between the heavenly and the earthly.

Now it is very important that we get the setting of these prophecies. It is very important that we understand where these things are taking place. The activity, in this case, is not earthly. It is not carnal. But, on the other hand it is not completely heavenly either.

It could be a spiritual endeavor done to the best of human ability with the help of God. This is obviously a good thing. But, it is done in mid heaven. It is not necessarily done by someone who is perfect. On the other hand, it is not something that is done by someone who is completely carnal.

What would this suggest? This was done by a man in whom is the Spirit of God. He is somewhere between earth and heaven in the symbolism.

Notice, when something is definitely bad, it comes out of the earth. When something is definitely good and done by God, it comes out of heaven.

Right across the page in my Bible is Revelation 13:1, he says:

Revelation 13:1 Then I (John) stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.

So this thing rises out of the earth—a part of the earth, the sea. And it is obviously blasphemous. Go across the column to Revelation chapter 13:11:

Revelation 13:11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.

So, he comes out of the earth; this is obviously someone against God. Go back to Revelation 4:1—now we are going to see the flip side of this.

Revelation 4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this."

And suddenly he is given entrance into the Throne Room of God. Revelation 10:1—this is the opening to Seven Thunders:

Revelation 10:1 I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud...

And then it describes a Being that is very much like the Son of Man as described back in Ezekiel—obviously something of God. Now Chapter 19, verse 11. (This is not all of them, but it is a good many of them.)

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

The coming of Jesus Christ himself.

Revelation 20:1-2 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

That is a godly thing to do!

Revelation 21:2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Another great thing to happen, but it is something that is totally of God. So, the setting (context) as we look back at chapter 14:6 will be very important. That this angel is flying in mid heaven could be an important clue.

Another detail which makes one wonder is the phrase, "everlasting gospel."

Now look, how long have I been speaking? About 25 minutes or so. And we have already come across at least three or four things just in the first couple of verses here that may require some deeper study.

This is the first time the word 'gospel' occurs in the book of Revelation—the Greek word *evangelion*. It is used in one other time in its verb form earlier in the book, and there it meant simply to announce. But, here is the first time that the gospel is mentioned, either gospel, or good news.

Now the concept, the idea of the gospel being preached is throughout the book of Revelation. There is no doubt about that, because it is speaking about a people who do this. And God talks about there being preaching done, and that sort of thing, but this is the first time that the actual word is used.

Now, the question is: Would God have angels preach the gospel to mankind? (It is a minor point.) God can do anything that He wants. But if we go back to Hebrews 2, we will see that there is something better about this new covenant versus the old. This is just an implication. It does not say that it will never happen, but it shows the difference between the new covenant and the old covenant.

Hebrews 2:2-4 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him* [apostles], God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Now like I said, this does not say that an angel will never preach the gospel. But it does leave a question in one's mind because the old covenant was given through angels, whereas the new is given through the Son. And it says that it was entrusted to His Apostles to preach, and confirm—not to angels.

Like I said, this is a minor point. I do not want to make too much of it. But, perhaps it might have some bearing on how we interpret this passage in Revelation 14. When has God in the past (in the New Testament era) used angels to preach the gospel? It is just a question.

A couple more mitigating factors found in verses 12 and 13 (of Revelation 14). There are two details here: the first is the fact that John begins verse 12 with "here is the patience of the saints..." or better, he is speaking about the *hupomone*—remember that word from the previous series? *Hupomone* is courageous endurance. John's interjection, here, at the end of the three messages suggests that the saints are somehow involved

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in these proclamations.

He goes through and shows the three angels and what they say. The first one has the everlasting gospel. He says, "Fear God, and give Him glory! Worship the One who is the Creator!"

The second one says, "Babylon is fallen!" The third one says, "Do not take his mark. Do not conform to the image of the Beast."

And he says, "Here,"—meaning right here—"These messages are the endurance of the saints." What is implied or suggested is that the saints are somehow involved. And, this is very interesting in alternate translations because the verse might better read, "In this is the endurance of the saints," and then the next part is descriptive of the saints. "In this is the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and remain loyal to Jesus." What this means is that contained within these three messages is how the saints endure to the end.

Now this can be taken two ways: It could mean either that they are involved in the actual preaching of it; or it means that in applying these three messages, they will endure to the end.

You see all these questions which come up, and the possibilities that keep popping up. That is why I said that this is an exercise in coming to understand how we need to look at prophecy.

Now I do not mean to really disturb you. That was not my intent. I do not want to reduce your faith with this. That is not my intention at all.

But I do want you to see how difficult it is to work with prophecy. We cannot always be certain because there are mitigating factors all over the place. And so we need to take all these things into consideration.

The other one in verse 13, "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on" The question is: does this mean that those who die in martyrdom at the end during the final days, weeks, and months, of the Day of the Lord are somehow more blessed than anyone else who died beforehand?

And the question is: then when does "from now on" begin?

Does it mean at the end, when these angels proclaim this (if that is, indeed, what the

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whole prophecy means)? Or does it mean from the time of Jesus' death—meaning from the first century onward? Or does it not have anything at all to do with actual spiritual blessedness (although that does not seem very likely because this is said by an angel instructed by God)? Could it mean, on the other hand, that a person who dies from this point on is better off because he is dead, and not living through all the terrors of the Day of the Lord?

Now, I will leave it to you to figure out what you believe that means. Is it, perhaps, impossible to answer what this means, because this is one of the areas—this particular phrase 'from now on'—where there could be a textual problem?

If you read the word, and split it in two, it means "from now on." But, if you read it as one word, it means "truly," or "assuredly."

So, could this mean something like, "Truly, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on"? And then, the Spirit answers, "Yes, that they may rest from their labors; and their works will follow them." Or, is it better read, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Assuredly, 'yes!', says the Spirit, that they may rest from all their labors, and their works follow them."

Do you see what I mean how difficult it is? I hope that we now have a better appreciation of the difficulty of being certain of a prophecy's interpretation.

Questions like these will arise, and they will continue to arise as we get closer to the end. And they must be answered from the Bible. That is the only place where we can find any true answers.

Frankly, sometimes it is difficult if not down right impossible to find the answers from what we know at any given time. Sometimes God just does not give us the answers. He lets us stew in them for a while and sometimes for a long time. God has to reveal these things by His Spirit.

In I Corinthians 2 is one of the basic things that Mr. Armstrong taught us.

I Corinthians 2:9-16 But as it is written: Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God... These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. [You have to find the

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answers in God's Word.] ...But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one...But we have the mind of Christ.

And so there is hope that we can come up with the answers to it in time, when it is necessary to have it—when we really need to know. And, God's Spirit will work with us to provide those answers at the right time. But, perhaps now is not the right time.

I promised you at the beginning of the sermon that I feel that there are three possible interpretations of this passage. So, I want to give them to you, now, and you can mull them over. I want you to think it through. Maybe, over the next week or so you can go into this prophecy a bit more deeply, and try to figure out which one you like best. However, do not totally discount, throw away, or dismiss the other two, because there might be things in there that we do not quite understand just yet.

The first interpretation is the one I will call the "Traditional Interpretation." Another name would be "The Angelic Literal Interpretation." This is that three actual heavenly angels proclaim these messages; one right after the other.

These take place at some point between the sounding of the 7th Trumpet, and the start of the Seven Last Plagues. (This brings in other possibilities as well.) But, this is why I call it the Traditional Interpretation. This is the one that Protestants usually think to be correct.

This takes all the details at their most literal meanings. So three angels proclaim these messages one right after the other at some point between the sounding of the 7th Trumpet and the start of the Seven Last Plagues. This is the most literal of all the interpretations.

The second interpretation is one that I have called "The Human Literal Interpretation." The only real difference in this one from the first one is that instead of angels, they are human messengers; whether Apostles or Prophets who will proclaim or preach these three messages during the end time.

Now one of the ways to look at this from a church of God perspective... I do not contain this one just between the 7th Trumpet, and the Seven Last Plagues. I use it generally as the end time—this might be that some church leader will fulfill the first one, which is the one having mostly to do with proclaiming the gospel as we know it today—Fear God, give glory to His Name, worship the Creator.

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And then during the Tribulation, the Two Witnesses will fulfill the last two messages, one each. One will proclaim the fall of Babylon, and the other one will be very intent on getting across the fact that you should not receive his mark. I am not saying that this is right or wrong, I am just saying that it is a possible interpretation.

The third interpretation is one that I have called "The Ecclesiastical Interpretation." I am using ecclesiastical in terms of the Greek word "*Ekklesia*," meaning the church, the called out ones.

This is that the three messages are three parts of the Gospel message preached by God's servants throughout the church age. Now this means that we take the time elements to mean "from the time of first century down through the time of the end."

The three angels, then, are representative of three very basic parts of the gospel message: first, highlighting the message of salvation; second highlights the message of this world's coming destruction (Babylon is fallen...); and the third highlights the message of eternal judgment—there is a judgment coming, and we need square our character with God, and not take on the mark of the Beast, but be transformed into the image of Christ. In a way, this goes neatly with Romans 12:1-2.

Now perhaps—give this a thought—perhaps this message of the three angels encapsulates the messages of the Seven Thunders. Do you remember one of the things that Mr. Armstrong preached to us so often was Matthew 24:14:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

In a way that is what Revelation 14:6-13 is saying—that once these three angels finish their message, then comes God's judgment—the harvest of the saints, and the judgment of the sinners of earth.

I want to read the message of the Seven Thunders to see how this might go together:

Revelation 10:1-7 I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow *was* on his head, his face *was* like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and *his* left *foot* on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as *when* a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now when the seven thunders uttered their

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voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them." The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.

I do not know, but it is interesting that it says in Matthew 24:14 that when the gospel is finished, the end will come. And it says here in Revelation 10:7 that during the seventh thunder then the mystery of God will be finished, and then Revelation 14:6-13 is evidently a similar type of situation. As soon as these angels give their message, then the judgment comes. It is interesting. I am not saying that it is that way, but it could be put together that way.

Now I know that this study of ours has not been very satisfying as far as answers go. It has actually brought up a lot more questions. A lot of us like solid, concrete answers, and we do have those answers when we study doctrine. Those things are very certain and sure.

But prophecy is purposely enigmatic. And there is a reason for that.

Proverbs 25:2 *It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*

What will you be in the kingdom of God? It may be a part of your glory to search these things out.

Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

God is really good at keeping secrets. I do not know if you have noticed that. But, he keeps them until the proper time comes to reveal them.

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But, questions have their own value. They keep us coming back for more. They keep us searching, they keep us interested. They keep us watchful. They keep us digging into God's Word, and that is a very good thing.

It is far better, as Moses' suggests here, that God has revealed unto us what is really important. What did Moses refer to? The words of His Law. This is God's way of life. We know about that. We can be certain about those things.

But, these things about prophecy—well, maybe we will know them. But for sure, we will know them when God wants us to know them. And that is kind of what John is saying in Revelation 14:12.

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

That is what is important. So, let us be found fulfilling this verse ourselves.