

Bible Studies for Adventists



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January 17–23, 2009

Commentary on “The Gift of Prophecy and the Remnant Church”

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Day 1: Sabbath Afternoon, January 17, 2009

Before we study the details of this lesson it is important to grasp the significance of it. It is at the very core of Adventist theology and self-understanding. Without this belief the Adventist church would lose its self-identity. Consider the following two statements taken from the current Fundamental Beliefs:

13. Remnant and Its Mission: The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)

Notice that this remnant announces “the arrival of the judgment hour”. Historically, this phrase refers to the Investigative Judgment that started October 22, 1844. Therefore, the doctrine of the “remnant church” is tied to the 1844 Investigative Judgment.

18. The Gift of Prophecy: One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)

Here we see additional information that must be considered. The “remnant” is linked not only to the October 22, 1844 Investigative Judgment doctrine but also to the belief that the ministry of Ellen White is “an identifying mark of the remnant church.”

Good hermeneutics—the principles and presuppositions of Bible interpretation—hold that doctrine should come from clear, didactic portions of Scripture, primarily the Epistles which interpret and apply the Christ event. Correspondingly, doctrine should never be founded on apocalyptic writings that may be interpreted many different ways. So at the outset, recognize that the connection of Adventist’s “remnant” to the October 22, 1844 Investigative Judgment doctrine—which is based on Daniel 8:14, one of the most unclear texts in Scripture, make us suspicious of the “remnant” doctrine’s authen-

ticity. Next, consider that the book of Revelation has been interpreted by sincere Christians throughout Christian history in many and varying ways. Why is this? Because it is an apocalyptic book filled with images and symbols that do not convey with certainty the meaning presented. Therefore, at the outset of our study, recognize that Adventist's "remnant" has a very sandy foundation.

Summary

1. Adventist Fundamental Belief #13 states that the remnant church announces the judgment—the Investigative Judgment, a doctrine based upon a unique interpretation of the apocalyptic passage in Daniel 8:14 described only by Ellen White and her adherents and found nowhere else in Christian literature.
2. Fundamental Belief #18 connects the doctrine of the remnant church with Ellen White, calling her its "continuing and authoritative source of truth" and her ministry "an identifying mark of the remnant church."
3. Good hermeneutics require doctrines to be derived from clear didactic portions of Scripture, especially the epistles, never from figurative apocalyptic passages.

Day 2: Sunday, January 18, 2009

The text for today is Revelation 12:1–6 Notice the many images and symbols:

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. 4 And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

As one reads this, it becomes quite evident that some of these symbols are open to more than one interpretation. For example, some teach that the one third of the "stars" represent one third of the angels of heaven. If "stars" refer to angels, then are the twelve "stars" on the woman's head symbolic of 12 angels of heaven? Do we understand the 1260 days to represent 1260 years? If so, where is there evidence for the year/day interpretation of prophecy? These are just a few comments to show that one must be very tentative in his/her interpretation of apocalyptic imagery. Apocalyptic passages are not suitable for a foundation of central doctrines.

Summary

1. The day's Scripture, Revelation 12:1-6, is highly symbolic with figurative language that can be interpreted more than one way.
2. There is no Biblical source to validate Adventism's interpretation of this passage.
3. Apocalyptic passages are not suitable for the foundation of doctrines.

Day 3: Monday, January 19, 2009

The comments in the lesson say that Revelation 12:13–17 "describes the persecution of the Christian church, first by the Roman Empire and later by the apostate Roman Church." This is an assumption that cannot be proved.

The focus on this lesson is on Revelation 12:17: "So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." The lesson makes it clear that it assumes the term "Commandments" refers to the Ten Commandments, specifically the Sabbath. But is this really true?

Commandments of God

The word “commandments,” as used in the New Testament, may refer to one or more of the Ten Commandments. However, this term does not always refer to the Ten Commandments, and when it does, only once is it used in connection with the Sabbath commandment. That one time is:

And they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment (Lk. 23:56).

Other uses of the term commandment or commandments of God include the following:

Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. Let each man remain in the condition in which he was called (1 Cor. 7:19, 20).

There is no evidence that *entolon theou* (“the commandments of God”) was a technical term which would have been understood as referring exclusively (or even primarily) to the Decalogue.

We must remember that we are seeking to define “commandments” as used by John, the author of Revelation. While Luke used the Greek word commandment (*entole*) to refer to the Sabbath commandment, John always, uses the word “Law” (*nomos*) when referring to old covenant law. Following are all the uses of *nomos* in the writings of John. Note the consistency. Note that when referring to the Ten Commandment law, specifically the Sabbath law, John always uses *nomos*. We also recognize that the term “law” in John can refer to the whole law or any part of the law from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

John’s use of Law (*nomos*)

“For the Law [*nomos*] was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (Jn. 1:17).

“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law [*nomos*] and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’” (Jn. 1:45).

“Did not Moses give you the Law [*nomos*], and yet none of you carries out the Law [*nomos*]? Why do you seek to kill Me?” (Jn. 7:19).

“If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath that the Law [*nomos*] of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?” (Jn. 7:23).

“But this multitude which does not know the Law [*nomos*] is accursed” (Jn. 7:49).

“Our Law [*nomos*] does not judge a man, unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?” (Jn. 7:51).

“Now in the Law [*nomos*] Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?” (Jn. 8:5).

“Even in your law [*nomos*] it has been written, that the testimony of two men is true” (Jn. 8:17).

“Jesus answered them, ‘Has it not been written in your Law [*nomos*], “I SAID, YOU ARE GODS?”’” (Jn. 10:34).

“The multitude therefore answered Him, ‘We have heard out of the Law [*nomos*] that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this Son of Man?’” (Jn. 12:34).

“But they have done this in order that the word may be fulfilled that is written in their Law [*nomos*], ‘THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.’” (Jn. 15:25).

“Pilate therefore said to them, ‘Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law [*nomos*].’ The Jews said to him, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death’” (Jn. 18:31).

“The Jews answered him, ‘We have a law [*nomos*], and by that law [*nomos*] He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God’” (Jn. 19:7).

The word “Law” (*nomos*) is not used in Revelation.

John’s use of “Commandment” (*entole*)

The following is a complete listing of the word “commandment” in the writings of John:

“No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment [*entole*] I received from My Father” (Jn. 10:18).

“For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment [*entole*], what to say, and what to speak. And I know that His commandment [*entole*] is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me” (Jn. 12:49, 50).

“A new commandment [*entole*] I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34).

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments [*entole*]” (Jn. 14:15).

“He who has My commandments [*entole*] and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall

be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him” (Jn. 14:21).

“But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment [*entole*], even so I do. Arise, let us go from here” (Jn. 14:31).

“If you keep My commandments [*entole*], you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments [*entole*], and abide in His love” (Jn. 15:10).

“This is My commandment [*entole*], that you love one another, just as I have loved you” (Jn. 15:12).

“And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments [*entole*]. The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments [*entole*], is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3, 4).

“Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment [*entole*] to you, but an old commandment [*entole*] which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment [*entole*] is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment [*entole*] to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining” (1 Jn. 2:7, 8).

“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments [*entole*] and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment [*entole*], that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded [*entole*] us. And the one who keeps His commandments [*entole*] abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us” (1 Jn. 3:22–24).

“And this commandment [*entole*] we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 Jn. 4:21).

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments [*entole*]. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments [*entole*]; and His commandments [*entole*] are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5:2, 3).

“I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment [*entole*] to do from the Father. And now I ask you, lady, not as writing to you a new commandment [*entole*], but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another” (2 Jn. 1:4, 5).

“And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments [*entole*]. This is the commandment [*entole*], just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it” (2 Jn. 1:6).

The word “commandment” (*entole*) is used only two times in Revelation: Rev. 12:17 and 14:12.

As one reads John’s use of the word “commandment” it becomes evident that the main meaning of commandment is “to love”.

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (Jn. 14:15).

He who has My commandments, and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. (Jn. 14:21).

If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. This I command you, that you love one another (Jn. 15:10, 12, 17).

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us (1 Jn. 3:23, 24).

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also (1 Jn. 4:21).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome (1 Jn. 5:2, 3).

Summary

1. The term “commandments of God” as used by John does not refer to the Ten Commandments. If he were referring to the Ten Commandments He would have used the Greek word (*nomos*) “Law” .
2. The word *entole* refers primarily to Jesus’ instruction to “love”.

Days 4 and 5: Tuesday/Wednesday, January 20–21, 2009

The Testimony of Jesus and the Spirit of Prophecy

We have joined these two topics as they build on each other and are intertwined.

The word “testimony” comes from a root word which in its various forms in Greek means testifying, testimony, witness and martyr. The underlying meaning is the proclamation of truth regardless of consequences. The “of Jesus” part of this phrase can be understood in two ways. It can mean the testimony from Jesus, or it can mean the testimony concerning Jesus. The first meaning stresses the fact that this testimony has Jesus as its source. The second meaning stresses the idea that this testimony has Jesus as the subject matter. Either interpretation is valid as far as the Greek syntax is concerned.

In other words, the phrase “testimony of Jesus” means proclaiming the truth of (either from or about) Jesus. When we stop to think about it, this is not a bad definition of the gospel. It is a proclamation of the truth both from and about Jesus. From a linguistic definition we would say the “testimony of Jesus” is a term which stands for the gospel as it is fearlessly proclaimed.

Let us now look at the passages in the book of Revelation which use the terms “testimony of Jesus” or just “testimony” and seek to discover the meaning of this term.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John; who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw (Rev. 1:1, 2).

I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9).

And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained (Rev. 6:9).

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

In these verses the “testimony of Jesus” or just “the testimony” is used as a term for the gospel. John bears witness to the gospel, the truth about (or from) Jesus (Rev. 1:1, 2). The souls under the altar had been slain because they maintained the truth about (or from) Jesus.

With this background let us now return to the two texts in question and see if our definition of “testimony of Jesus” fits within their context.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17).

Who are these people with whom the dragon is angry? They are the people who keep the new covenant commandments of God (to believe in Christ and love one another) and hold to the truth about (or from) Jesus! Notice the close parallel verse in Revelation 14:12.

Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

These two verses seem to say the same thing. In one the saints are described as those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. In the other they keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. Therefore, the term “testimony of Jesus” and keeping their “faith in Jesus” are parallel in meaning.

It is quite evident that the term “testimony of Jesus” has reference to the gospel. It is the truth about (or from) Jesus. If this is true, then what does the Revelator mean when he says “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy”?

And I [John] fell at his feet to worship him [the angel] and he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow-servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

Here the angel says he also holds the “testimony of Jesus.” In other words, the angel also believes the truth about (or from) Jesus. Focusing on the last phrase, we read, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” To paraphrase, “The truth about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Notice how this verse is variously translated or paraphrased.

Those who bear testimony to Jesus are inspired like the prophets (*The New English Bible*).
For the truth revealed by Jesus is the inspiration of all prophecy (*Weymouth*).
For the testimony of Jesus is what inspires prophecy (*Goodspeed*).
It is the truth concerning Jesus which inspires all prophecy (*Knox*).
The purpose of all prophecy and of all I have shown you is to tell about Jesus (*Living Bible*).

These translators have captured the essence of what John is seeking to communicate. All prophecy, when rightly interpreted, in some way points to the truth concerning Jesus.

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me (Jn. 5:39).

“O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Lk. 24:25-27).

There is one instance in Revelation where the Ark of the Covenant (or testimony) is mentioned.

And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm Rev. 11:19.

However, the context of this is totally different from that of Revelation 19:10. It must also be pointed out that Revelation is a book that is saturated with Old Testament imagery. This imagery, however, does not have a one to one correspondence. Rather, it is presented as symbolic of ideas that must be transformed into new covenant truth.

As we mentioned before, Good theology does not have its foundation in apocalyptic prophecy. The book of Revelation has been interpreted in many, many ways throughout the history of the Christian church and even today most honest scholars will tell you that much of it is still remains somewhat of a mystery.

Our conclusion is that Revelation 19:10 and 12:17 have nothing whatever to do with the writings of Ellen White, even if these writings are known by Seventh-day Adventists as “the Spirit of Prophecy” or “Testimonies to the Church.” John was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos not because he had the writings of Ellen White or because he was a prophet, but because he held to the truth concerning Jesus. The church derives its “trueness” as it submits to the head of the church, Jesus Christ.

By using this text as “proof” that the SDA church is the “remnant church of Bible prophecy”, the Adventist church has, in essence, substituted the writings of Ellen G. White in the place of the gospel of Christ!

Summary:

1. The reasoning used by Seventh-day Adventists to prove they are the true, remnant church of the last days is faulty on every count. Not only is this claim of Adventism faulty on every count, it is heretical at its very core.
2. The Adventists' claim of being “the remnant church” has removed the gospel of Christ and in its place substituted the writings of their dead “prophet”, Ellen White.

Day 6: Thursday, January 22, 2009

The lesson for today states,

“Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not just one church among many. It is a church prophetically foreseen. God has called this church into existence for a very specific purpose—to proclaim the three angles’ messages to a dying world.”

The text upon which this is based is Revelation 14:6–12:

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7 and he said with a loud voice, “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.” 8 And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the

great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.” 9 Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 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 and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 “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.” 12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

Adventists interpret the “hour of His judgment” to be October 22, 1844. The focus on this judgment has historically concerned believers. God is said to be comparing the characters of those who profess faith in God with His law. In order to pass in the judgment in Adventist theology, one must believe in Christ, obey the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath Commandment, and have no unconfessed sin—among many other things.

Again, this is another doctrine built on apocalyptic prophecy. When one compares the use of “the hour of judgment” with other texts in Revelation, it is quite obvious that the focus of judgment is not the saints; rather, it is against the wicked.

Revelation 17:1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

Revelation 18:10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'

Revelation 18:20 "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

The focus of God's judgment is not believers. This is clear.

John 5:24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Summary:

There is no one human organization which is the true church. Rather look for a local gathering of Christian believers who confess and worship Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who make Him the center of their theology, derive their doctrines from clear, didactic teaching of Scripture, who demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, who proclaim the simple gospel of God's grace, who practice water baptism and celebrate the Lord's Supper, who study and obey God's word, and who express their forgiven condition by loving one another—even immature sinners who need God. There you will find God's true church regardless of its name.

Day 7: Friday, January 23, 2009

This lesson states:

“A study of the idea of the remnant in the Old Testament reveals a few interesting characteristics. Perhaps the most important one is that all through the Bible, the remnant were those who were living with more light than others. Noah had the light about the coming flood. Abraham had the light about the true God. The nation of Israel was worshipping the Lord in the sanctuary, while their pagan neighbors were sacrificing children on their altars or bowing down to statues of cats and bulls and other animals. In short, the idea of the remnant had more to do with a revelation of truth and of God's character than with the holiness of those who had that knowledge. The point? As expressed in Thursday's lesson, being part of the remnant means only that you have great light, and with that light comes important responsibilities. It does not mean you automatically have salvation; nor does it mean that those who aren't part of the remnant are lost. It's an unfortunate fact of sacred history that many of those who were part of God's remnant not only failed to live up to the light they were given but oftentimes rebelled against it.”

There is no biblical support for the supposition that God's “remnant” is defined by possessing “great light”. God's

remnant, as defined in Romans 11, are those who believe God.

Further, Romans 11 does say God has preserved a remnant. God's remnant are those who believe Him and whom He saves. Nowhere is "the remnant" identified as a specific church or denomination. It is a straw-man argument to suppose an organization could be God's remnant.

Summary

1. God's remnant is not identified by a church or organization.
2. God's remnant is not identified by having "great light" but by believing God.
3. Romans 11 clarifies that God's remnant are those he saves. There is no such thing as God's remnant including unsaved members of an exclusive organization. The Bible nowhere supports this idea.