

Like a Lamb

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Because of the momentous things happening in our world just now we're taking a "break" from our "tour of homes" we've been on in the last few weeks. I have a few questions for us to consider this morning. First, are we expected to be aware of God's timetable; are we expected to know "where we stand" in the stream of time? Should we be looking for "signs"? Second, what if it seems that the what Bible prophecy predicts is too remote to ever take place; should our faith be shaken? Thirdly, can we see any evidence that the "final events," the prophecies revealed in Revelation 13 particularly, are shaping up?

As to the first question, the Bible makes it plain that we should be aware of where we are. The Scripture says, "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets." Amos 3:7. Notice in that text that God is depicted as the One Who knows the future. This information is "secret," but it is "revealed." Now, what is "revealed" is by definition a "revelation." When the 70 priests translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek and came to the word "reveal" in Amos 3:7, they used the word *apocalypses*, which you may recognize as being the name for the last book of the New Testament, Apocalypse. This word means, "the removal of a covering." This revelation, this apocalypse, is given through designated prophets upon whom the Holy Spirit has moved. The same word is used in Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed (*apocalypses* in the LXX) belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

So we see that it is God's intention to reveal through His servants important information. Some of this information is revealed through what are called "signs." The word "sign" in the New Testament is *semeion*, from which we get the word "*semaphore*." Have a picture in your mind of a sailor on board an aircraft carrier with semaphores in his hands, signals conveyed by flags to guide and direct. Likewise, God has given us signs; semaphores to guide and direct.

You remember that the disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3. In this chapter, Jesus blended two events together, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, and gave information relating to their fulfillment. He proceeded to outline a number of events in that discourse which would precede Jerusalem's fall in A.D. 70, including His admonition, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (whoever reads, let him understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." Matthew 24:15, 16.

Here He clearly advised His followers to be aware of happenings around them. He clearly indicated that it would be important to understand Bible prophecy, and to act accordingly. Those three steps would result in the saving of their lives when that time came. And it is true that those who saw, understood and fled were saved. They were aware of circumstances about them; they were fluent in the prophetic message of Daniel; and when the time came, they reacted in the appropriate way and their lives were spared. This is what happened at Jesus' birth. The wise men saw the star, understood the prophecies of Daniel and Balaam, and they moved in response to what they learned.

Jesus continued in His discourse to cover the major signs which would include signs in the heavens such as are listed in verse 29. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days (the closing of the great period of papal persecution of the middle ages), the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." Has history recorded such events as these? Yes, in May of 1780 there was the famous "dark day," in which for some unknown reason before midday the sky became unusually black. A piece of white paper held 12 inches from your face could not be seen. That night when the moon arose, it was blood red. People alive at that time knew that this was the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy.

In November of 1833 there was the famous "star shower" during which the heavens were lit up and what appeared to be shooting stars emanating from one central source in the sky causing enough light to read a newspaper at midnight. Thousands upon thousands of stars cascaded from the firmament. Again, those who witnessed this event were certain that this was the sign of which Jesus spoke.

Notice Jesus' statement following the giving of these signs. "Now learn this parable from the fig tree. When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it (or He) is near, at the very doors." Matthew 24:32, 33. So it is important for us to "see," to understand and to react in the proper way. But if our eyes are closed to what is happening around us, if we're wearing blinders to the signs God has given us, how will we see? And if we're not studying the prophetic Word, how will we understand? And if we don't respond in a proper way, how will we be saved?

Almost all of the signs given by Christ or His prophets have already been fulfilled. Matthew 24 reads like a newspaper. Earthquakes, fires, floods, famines, pestilences and political unrest are all too common. The war between capital and labor predicted by James is particularly prominent right now. The list of conditions in the last day world given in II Timothy 3 is exactly what we see about us today. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power."

So we see that we should be aware of the signs of the times God has given us, and that nearly all of them have already been fulfilled. Our second question is, What if it seems like the last remaining prophecies are too remote from being fulfilled? What if it seems like the content of Revelation 13 is far from coming to pass?

The prophecies of Revelation 13 give us a general outline of last day events. Putting the clues together, it's clear to see that the first beast represents the historical papacy, which persecuted and killed immeasurably during the middle ages. Upwards of 50-100 million people lost their lives for their faith under papal domination. The second beast of Revelation 13 symbolizes the United States of America. It arose just as the first beast was receiving its deadly wound. In the symbolic depiction, it arose "out of the earth," representing a sparsely inhabited area, in contrast with the first beast, which came from the "sea." This second beast's appearance was like a lamb with two horns, portraying its peaceful demeanor with its twin powers of religious and civil liberty. The phrase "like a Lamb" also reflects the fact that America was founded on Christian principles. In the book of Revelation, Christ is symbolized by a lamb 28 times. All of this history has shown to be perfectly fulfilled.

It is in the later part of Revelation 13:11 and the following verses that we come to the substance of remaining unfulfilled prophecy. Verse 11 begins by saying, "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb." This much we have seen fulfilled in the rise of America. But the description doesn't stop with those words. It continues, "And spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed." Revelation 13:11-15.

This represents a severe departure from the first part of the description in which this second beast is portrayed "like a lamb." At some point a radical shift occurs in the behavior of this beast, which is the United States. It repudiates its Christian conduct and its twin powers of civil and religious freedom. They come crashing down as did the twin towers in 2001. Notice that worship is at issue in these verses. The Bible tells us that in the end, we will either worship the beast and his image, or we will worship "Him who made," that is, the Creator God, according to Revelation 14:7.

What is this "image"? What does that mean? An image is a likeness or copy. It is a replica. What was one of the chief characteristics of the first beast, the papacy? It "made war with the saints" and overcame them. It made laws restricting the free exercise of religion. It instituted edicts which compelled the conscience.

Now we're told that the second beast, America, will do the same thing someday. It will make a copy, a replica, an "image." Notice that there are two different prepositions that are used in connection with the beast and its image. In Verse 14 we are told that the second beast makes an image "to the (first) beast." By expressing it this way, it is telling us that the second beast is giving honor or obeisance to the first beast, the papacy. By its conduct, it is giving devotion to it. In the next verse a different preposition is used. It speaks of the image of the beast." This is stressing the fact that there is direct similarity between the conduct of the two beasts. What the second beast does is a copy, an image of the behavior of the first beast. This is telling us plainly that some day in these United States there will be laws that affect the free exercise of religion. There will be laws that attempt to compel the conscience. The United States will copy what first beast did, compelling conscience on pain of persecution and death.

How, you might ask, could this possibly happen? Doesn't our constitution guarantee freedom of religion? Isn't that the point of the first amendment? How could it ever be that America would take a leading role in the restriction of liberty? It just doesn't seem like that's remotely possible. Should my faith waver just because it may not seem to me that this could happen? If you don't think that America the "lamb" could become America the "dragon," consider some other examples in the Bible that defy explanation.

Don't allow your faith to be shaken just because it doesn't seem to our eyes that this could be. Notice that this same question, How could this be? is asked many times in Scripture. Those things that may have seemed impossible nevertheless happened. How could it be that in the perfect environment of heaven one would rebel? How could Lucifer become Satan, the devil. Notice how Isaiah expressed this conundrum. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" Isaiah 14:12. It's a mystery how one created perfect; one as gifted, talented, wise and beautiful as Lucifer could turn against his Maker. It's a mystery how Israel's first king, Saul, who was "turned into another man;" Saul to whom God gave "another heart," could become Saul the unrepentant, Saul who conjured up a spirit to find information, Saul who ended his life by his own hand. You can't explain the change!

How was it that Jerusalem, God's chosen city, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth" (Psalm 48:2), could become the city which voted for Christ's crucifixion and became the venue of His death. How can you explain that? When Jerusalem was founded and became the site of Solomon's temple, inaugurated by the Presence of the divine cloud would you have possibly predicted that one day she would murder the Messiah? Yet it happened.

That very word, "mystery" is employed by both the Apostle Paul and John the Revelator to describe the transition from the New Testament Church being the "pillar and ground of the truth" (I Timothy 3:15) to Babylon, the spiritual harlot. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells us. "Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of

perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." II Thessalonians 2:1-4.

The saints at Thessalonica had somehow lost sight of the truth of Jesus' glorious return and the resurrection that would take place then. So Paul wrote them a letter, which we call I Thessalonians, in which he reiterated the teachings of Scripture, making it clear that we would indeed see our loved ones again who have fallen asleep in Christ. But some of the people who read Paul's letter misunderstood the intent of what he had told them, inferring that Christ's coming and the resurrection of the sleeping saints would take place immediately.

So, Paul wrote a second letter to them, explaining that some things had to take place before Christ's second Advent, including this "apostasy" of which he speaks in chapter 2. This has been remarkably fulfilled by the historical papacy, which has thrust itself into the place occupied by Christ. Claiming the right and authority to forgive sins, the Roman priests "sit in the temple of God," showing themselves to be God. Paul writes, "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way, and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming." II Thessalonians 2:5-8.

What is the expression that Paul uses? He calls this the "mystery" of lawlessness, or iniquity (KJV). It is unexplainable. It would seem impossible that the New Testament church, birthed by the Holy Spirit, the cradle of the teachings given to them by the Lord Himself would one day become the entity which would ban the Word of God, would change virtually all the teachings of the Bible, would claim the authority to change the Ten Commandments, the writing of God's own hand, would substitute another day in the place of God's holy Sabbath, the seventh day of the week and would hunt down like animals those who refused to comply with her teachings. Yet it happened.

Paul saw the beginnings of such a movement even in his day. He said, "the mystery of lawlessness is already at work." He cautioned the elders of Ephesus that, "From among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." Acts 20:30. John saw the beginnings of this apostasy. He wrote, "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." I John 2:18.

To think that something that began in innocence and nobility, would change and become satanic may be hard to believe, but *it is the pattern of sin!* This has happened over and over again. Lucifer the covering cherub became the devil. Saul the humble one who hid at his crowning, the one "little in his own sight" became a proud and disobedient rebel. Jerusalem the chosen of God became, by vote of the Sanhedrin, the instigator of Jesus' death. The New Testament Church became the Harlot of Babylon. And one day the second beast of Revelation 13, the innocent and docile beast with two horns like a lamb, will speak "like a dragon," and copy the tyrannical and

oppressive behavior of the papacy of the middle ages, with its stake, its rack and its inquisition. Does it seem impossible? Does it seem like this could never be? Maybe, but God's Word cannot be broken. Don't let your faith be shaken regarding the clear revelations of His Word. One day these things will be fulfilled before our very eyes.

Even now, if you listen carefully, there are voices which foretell the direction this movement might take. Next week I want to share with you some interesting things along this line. Our part today is to have our eyes open. Jesus said, "When you see." Our part is to study and ask for divine enlightenment in understanding the prophecies. Jesus said, "Whoever reads, let him understand." Then we must be ready to comply with the counsel given us when these things take place. Today we have unlimited opportunities to spend time with God and settle into the truths of Scripture. We have opportunity to confess our sins and ask the Holy Spirit to take them from our lives and make us like Jesus. It is very dangerous to put off this important work and think that the prophecies of Revelation are a long way off from being fulfilled. Jesus' counsel to us was not "get ready," but "be ready."