

Once this truth of the gospel is accepted into the human heart, a new creature is born (see 2 Corinthians 5:17-19). Immediately we become ambassadors for Christ. We testify to the sublime truth of the gospel by personally showing others what God has done for us *and* them (see 1 John 2:1-2). We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord, by showing, as He did on the cross, an attitude of forgiveness for all. In this way the gospel is to go to the world as a witness. And the unjust acts of others lend to this witness. In fact, it is in the midst of coldness, persecution and hatred that the gospel of Christ's forgiveness shines the brightest. Persecution provides a fuller opportunity to see what God is like, to see His changeless love for humanity (see Malachi 3:6). Those who "endure" persecution show the reality of their salvation (see Matthew 24:13). What does the word "endure" mean? The Greek word *upomeno* (endure) means "to remain, to preserve."

In order to preserve food, it must first undergo intense heat, dehydration or cold. In this process, the food loses some of its life. So it will be with God's people in the last days.

This same Greek word for "endure" is used in the following text:

"For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1 Peter 2:20).

We sometimes think we are doing well to patiently endure repercussions for our faults. But God calls us even higher. He calls us to endure even when we are mistreated for doing well. Why is this acceptable to God? Why would God have us endure hardship when we do well? There is no better way to reveal the gospel, to reveal Him, to show what God is like. God has endured wrong for doing well. God has been falsely accused and misrepresented, yet He has endured it patiently. As Christians, we are called to reveal Christ. There is no better opportunity to do such than under abuse and cruelty.

If you want to hear a sermon on last day events, if you want to know what Christ had to say about the signs of the end, here it is. Christ indicates that the key to the end of the world, to the fall of Babylon and to His Second Coming, is the preaching of the gospel *as a witness*. Do not separate the two. It is not the gospel being preached on the one hand and going out as a witness on the other. Rather, it is one thought. It is one statement: the gospel being preached *as* a witness—both as one. And when the gospel is preached as a witness to all nations, then what? Then comes the end of Babylon, the end of all nations, the end of the world as we now know it—Babylon falls.

If you separate the two, you destroy the gospel. There is no gospel without the witness. Without the witness, there is no power; and if you don't have the power of the gospel, you lose the gospel altogether. All you have left is "sounding brass" and a "tinkling cymbal" (see 1 Corinthians 13:1).

We may think we are doing a fine job of preaching the gospel. As a whole, as a church, we may believe that we have done well at taking the message to the world. But you may have noticed, especially if you are a third or fourth-generation Christian, that we are still here. The end has not

yet come. With all of our fine preaching, our worldwide evangelism and tremendous reports from the world field, we are still here. Why? Jesus puts it very simply. It's not complicated. The gospel shall be preached FOR A WITNESS, then the end comes.

When is *then*? It is now, when the signs of the Second Coming of Christ are all about us. It is now, when false teachers with false messages abound. It is now when wars, disease, famine and natural disasters increase daily. It is in this present time, when many are eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. It is now, while the professed followers of God easily blend in with the world, its pleasures, behaviors, and appearance. *Now*, the last sign, the most important sign, the gospel being preached as a witness to the world, is to be fulfilled.

Summary

The gospel is the story of God's changeless, matchless love for the human family. This love has been fully demonstrated in the life and death of Jesus Christ. (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-3). Now God's people are called to assimilate this grace into their mortal bodies, to radiate God's character in the face of persecution and injustice. This takes us right back to Revelation and Babylon's fall. Both in Revelation 14 and 18, Babylon's fall comes in the wake of the proclaiming of the everlasting gospel, with the earth being lighted with the glory of God, just as Matthew 24:14 teaches. So, the gospel is calling us to be its witness, to reveal God's name or character as He revealed it on the cross. It is calling us to allow the earth to be enlightened with the glory of God's character (see Revelation 18:1-4). The gospel calls us to be like Jesus so that the confusion about God will come to an end. Amen.

STUDY 7 OF 13

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GOD'S LAST MESSAGE TO THE WORLD 7

The announcement of the fall of Babylon is the very next message following the proclamations of the everlasting gospel and the call to worship God. In this study we will focus our attention on Babylon and its fall, seeking to ascertain what Babylon represents and when and how this final fall is to take place.

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" (Revelation 14:8).

"Is fallen, is fallen" implies a two-fold fall. The first is Babylon's spiritual descent. The second is its actual, literal ruin. Let us turn our attention to the literal fall of Babylon, in an effort to understand how this final downfall will occur.

What is *Babylon*? The literal meaning of the word is "confusion."

And what is the confusion that Babylon represents? More than anything else, it is confusion about God—about who God is, about what God is like, about how God deals with sin and sinners, about how God saves.

Babylon is Fallen

The announcement, "Babylon is fallen," speaks to the final demise, to the end of Babylon's confusion about God's character. The revelation of God's character will be the last message of mercy given to a perishing world (see Revelation 14:14-20, 18:1-4).

What does the word "fallen" mean?

The Greek word *piptw* (fallen) means "to perish, i.e. come to an end, disappear, cease, to lose authority, no longer have force."

Revelation 14:8 reveals that Babylon "made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." All nations are united with Babylon. The end, therefore, that comes to Babylon is the end of all nations that are united to Babylon. These words of Jesus are found in Matthew:

"And *this gospel* of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto *all nations*; and then shall the *end come*" (Matthew 24:14).

Babylon is Fallen

Revelation 14 Study Guides

There is no sin that any human being has ever committed or will ever commit that Christ has not already carried, borne, or forgiven on the cross.

Babylon is the antithesis, the direct opposite, of the gospel. Everything in the world, “the rudiments of the world,” are in opposition to the gospel (see Colossians 2:8).

The world says, “There is no free lunch. Nothing is free.”

The gospel says, “Salvation is free; it’s a ‘gift.’” (Romans 6:23).

The world says, “Everything costs. You have to earn it.”

The gospel says, “Salvation is ‘without money and without price.’”

(Isaiah 55:1).

The world says, “You get what you deserve.”

The gospel says, “Christ got what you deserve.” (see Isaiah 53:4-6, 12).

Everything the gospel offers, Babylon endeavors to take away. The “everlasting gospel” is the good news about God. When the gospel is preached as a witness, Babylon falls and the confusion about God comes to an end. When does this end come? Jesus tells us:

“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a *witness* unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).

Christ tells us that the final preaching of the gospel as a witness will be done under severe pressure. His people will be persecuted for His name’s sake. The word *name* is synonymous with “character.” This adds major significance to the test that will come to God’s people during this end time. Consider how God’s name or character is described in Exodus:

“And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:5-7).

Notice that while God will by no means clear the guilty, He shows mercy to thousands, forgiving or bearing their iniquity. “Thousand” is the largest number found in the Bible and is used to designate the largeness of God’s goodness. And the word *forgive* is the same word we use today to describe our space program, *nasa*. It means “to lift, bear up, carry, take, support, sustain, endure, forgive, to be borne, be swept away.”

This *nasa* or “forgiveness” is the power of the gospel that lifts our sins from us. And we receive that power by understanding the full measure of this forgiveness. Isaiah 53 offers us much insight here. The prophet Isaiah begins this chapter by asking the question, “Who has believed our report?” (Isaiah 53:1, NKJV). The inference here is significant. What follows is a description of how God has dealt with sin. It is so incredible, few could believe it!

Believing the Gospel

Before Isaiah begins this exposé, he adds, “And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1, NKJV). The arm of the Lord in the Bible represents the power of God to deliver from sin. In other words, few have believed the magnitude of God’s forgiveness and, therefore, few have

experienced the power of the gospel in their lives (see Romans 1:16-17).

In the following verses, Isaiah faithfully gives the report. And we will find as we examine each verse closely that this report is the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The incredible aspect of this report that makes the good news so unbelievable is the idea that Jesus Christ has borne the “iniquity of us all” (verse 6). This is the poignant truth of the gospel. It is the repeated theme of this chapter.

One of the words used to describe what Christ has done for us is “borne.” This word is found first in verse 4 and again in verse 12. Verse 12 describes what Christ did with the “sin of many.” He “bore the sin of many,” which means He carried it, lifted it, forgave it, swept it away. It is the very same word, *nasa*, used in Exodus 34 to describe the character of God. In other words, on the cross of Calvary, Christ paid the price for the sins of the entire world. He forgave all sins and all transgressions. This is why verse 12 says that He “made intercession for the transgressors.” This aspect of the prophecy was powerfully revealed when Christ said of His enemies, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). But what did the people do? They derided Him while soldiers cast lots for His raiment. And this is what the world does with the forgiveness of God to this day. We ridicule it while we seek to earn His raiment or righteousness. Such religion is a gamble. It lacks the assurance of salvation that Christ has wrought for us in the gospel (see 1 Thessalonians 1:5).

There is no sin that any human being has ever committed or will ever commit that Christ has not already carried, borne, or forgiven on the cross. When we ask for personal forgiveness of sins through faith in His sacrifice, we simply accept that glorious fact. Faith does not make facts. Faith takes hold of and receives the fact. Christ does not have to be sacrificed again and again.

“But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, ‘Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up again from the dead.)’ But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:6-9).

No man need claim the power, as the papal system teaches, to break the literal body of Christ anew as a sacrifice for sin. When the sinner asks for forgiveness of his sins, Christ does not need to be crucified again in order to grant the request. Repentant sinners simply receive through faith what God has already accomplished for them through Jesus Christ.

“And not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12, NAS).

“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25, NKJV).

Just as Jesus was delivered up for the offenses of all, just so was He raised for the justification of all. No, this does not mean that all have *received*

forgiveness of their sins. Yes, Christ paid the price. He purchased forgiveness on the cross for everyone. However, all have not personally accepted what Christ has, in fact, accomplished. This is another reason why Isaiah begins this chapter by stating, “Who has believed our report?” Unbelief in this foundational fact of the gospel limits the power of Christ’s forgiveness. Isaiah is speaking foremost of God’s people, as is Christ in the following verse:

“Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel’ (Mark 1:14-15).

If we will not believe, if we will not accept the fact through faith, God will not forever urge it upon us. The fact that we live and move and have our being is proof positive that Christ has indeed borne the sins of all. Every loaf of bread and every drop of water is stamped with the cross of Calvary. This means that neither saint nor sinner eats or drinks but by the forgiveness applied to us through the blood of Jesus.

Yet this temporal justification, which cost the life of God’s only Son, will not become an eternal reality without our willing consent. Jesus wants our sins. He wants so desperately to take them from us that He has borne them from the inception of sin and has extended forgiveness to us (see Revelation 13:8). He has made the exchange in faith that we will see His goodness and be drawn to appreciate and accept the gospel fact, on a personal, intimate level. It is the faith that Jesus has put in us that led Him to the cross to die for our sins. He believes in us. He believes that, when we see this gift of His love, we will accept it and give our hearts to Him.

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:21-23).

The Gospel as a Witness

If forgiveness were something we merited in any way or to any degree, then we would become co-redeemers through our works. But if there is nothing we can do to merit forgiveness, then it is all of grace through faith. Faith is simply the means through which we lay hold of the fact that, on the cross, Christ redeemed the world, taking all our iniquity to Himself and bringing forgiveness to everyone.

Not only so, but if forgiveness came to us from God through some kind of merit, then forgiveness would have to flow from us to others in the same way. In other words, we would have to forgive others in the same way in which we saw or understood that Christ forgave us (see Colossians 3:13). And if we saw God as forgiving us only after we initiated such forgiveness, we in turn would forgive others only after they asked for forgiveness. Yet the gospel calls us to forgive others even if they do not ask. The gospel calls us to regard not man after the flesh, or according to the works of the flesh, that is, their sinful deeds (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-16; Galatians 5:19).