



THE BIBLE STANDS

*The Bible stands though the hills may tumble,
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,
For the Bible stands.*

“Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in.” Isaiah 26:2.

Lesson 28 Supplement: Identifying the Remnant of Christ’s Church from Biblically Specified Characteristics

You will have read the Scripture passages in lesson 28 which provide a description of Christ’s church and an overview of its history.

We may like to think that any denomination holding certain beliefs about Jesus is a part of the “body of Christ.” But the Bible carefully describes the church in the last days as having certain distinguishing characteristics. If an organization does not have those characteristics, we can be certain by God’s word that it is not the true church.

It was easy to identify the Christian church in its earliest days. Only one organization at that time professed to follow Jesus. We also recognize from Revelation 12 that the true church was “in the wilderness” during the long dark ages of papal supremacy. But now that that period is over, where is the church today? In this study we will examine the Biblical identification of the remnant of Christ’s church as it came out of the wilderness after 1798. It is described in Revelation 12:17.

Specific Identifying Marks

1. “Keep the Commandments of God.” Revelation 12:17.

We see from this verse that God’s church today is characterized by its keeping of the commandments of God, which includes the fourth commandment, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.” According to this verse, no Sunday-keeping organization is a part of Christ’s body today.

2. “Have the Testimony of Jesus Christ.” Revelation 12:17.

We should look for a church to which God has given the gift of prophecy. This does not mean that its members are all prophets. It simply means that the prophetic gift has been manifested in the church.

3. “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.

Compare the emphasized words in this verse with Revelation 14:6. From the parallel wording it is quite clear that the everlasting “gospel,” “preached” to “every nation” just before the end, is delineated in the three-fold message of Revelation 14:6-12. The Greek word for angel (Revelation 14:6) means “messenger,” whether heavenly or human (Matthew 11:10; Luke 9:52). Since God has assigned the proclamation of the gospel not to heavenly messengers but to the church (Matthew 28:19, 20), it follows that the world-wide preaching of the message contained in Revelation 14:6-12 is a specific identifying characteristic of God’s last day church.

Note a few details regarding this message:

1. It is proclaimed world-wide. We should look for the true church to be working in every country of the globe.
2. The message is proclaimed with urgency because the hour of God's judgment is come.
3. It declares that true worship acknowledges the Lord as Creator.
4. It identifies the true people of God as those who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

Additional Characteristics

1. Just as a remnant of fabric is identical to the very first yard of the bolt, so the remnant of Christ's church will have the same characteristics it possessed in its early days.
2. Christ gave Himself for us, that He might "purify unto himself a peculiar people." Titus 2:14. God's people will be different from those around them.
3. Acts 11:22 illustrates that the church carried on an organized work in its early days. In Matthew 18:15-17 Christ called for definite organization in His church.
4. Any established organization which was in recognized existence at any time during the 1260 years of Revelation 12:6 cannot be the true church, because the true church was in the wilderness during that time. We must look for the church to have emerged very shortly after 1798.

God Points Out His Remnant

Not content to just give identifying marks, God, in order to make it impossible for the genuine seeker to become confused, decided to go ahead and actually tell us exactly who His remnant are.

Who are the remnant? The remnant are identified in the Bible as that historical group of people who went through the sweet and bitter experience of Revelation chapter 10. This is clear from the fact that it was to them that the voice from heaven said, "Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues and kings." Revelation 10:11. Since they were the ones who were given the task of prophesying before many nations, and tongues, and people, then they must be the ones commissioned to proclaim the messages of Revelation 14. All we have to do is apply the identifying marks to them to determine that they fit the description, and we will have found the Biblical portrayal of God's people as they came out of the wilderness!

But let's first review the background of this story as we touched on it in lesson 15.

The Great Prophetic Awakening

The prophecies of Daniel and the truths they contained were to be closed up and sealed until "the time of the end" (Daniel 8:17, 26; 12:9). In the time of the end God would increase knowledge (Daniel 12:4) and raise up a people who would restore the truths which had been "cast down" (Daniel 8:12). Especially had the sanctuary truth been "trodden under foot" (Daniel 8:13).

Something as important as the unsealing of those prophecies certainly would not be left out of the prophetic record. We find the story in Revelation 10. The Bible says that the little book of Daniel would be opened "upon the sea" and "on the earth." We are familiar with the Revelation 13 use of the term "sea" as representing the populated areas of the eastern hemisphere, and the "earth" as the relatively unpopulated western hemisphere in the 18th and 19th centuries.

While the prophetic awakening was experienced around the world, the most pronounced fulfillment of this prophecy occurred in the United States. William Miller, a Baptist farmer, through a systematic study

of the Bible, found that the 2300-day prophecy was going to be fulfilled “about the year 1843.” Further calculations pinpointed the year to be 1844, and the date, October 22.

They believed the cleansing of the sanctuary meant the purifying of the earth by means of the second coming of Jesus. Never had the message of Christ’s Second Advent been proclaimed so powerfully. Those who united in this “advent movement” sacrificed everything, that they might be ready to meet Jesus when He came.

It was this misunderstanding which would result in their sweet expectations turning to a most bitter disappointment (See Revelation 10:8-10). This experience would separate the wrongly-motivated ones from those who, denying all self-interest, clung to the word of God, desiring to follow the Lord’s leading regardless of consequences.

The Little Flock

After the disappointment of October 22, 1844, those who renounced their confidence in the prophetic word quickly dropped out of the picture. This amounted to the greater number of those who had embraced the Advent message. (Almost a thousand to one!)

A small group, however, clung to the word of God in earnest prayer. They knew that their calculations were correct. There could be no mistake on the date. Realizing that it was the event which had been misunderstood, they soon discovered that in fulfillment of the ritual cleansing of the sanctuary (Leviticus 16), Jesus, on October 22, had entered the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary, there to begin the solemn work of judgment prior to His coming in the clouds of heaven. “Where is the God of judgment?...The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.” Malachi 2:17 - 3:1.

It was to this group that the words of Revelation 10:11 were addressed, “Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.” Their minds were directed to the temple of God in heaven (Revelation 11:1) and the ark of His testament, which contains the law of God, enshrined in that temple (Revelation 11:19).

The realization that God had called them to do a special work for Him soon overshadowed the disappointment they had experienced. The judgment-hour message had begun to be proclaimed in the preaching of Miller in 1831. As the movement had drawn toward its climax in 1843 and 1844, the call of the second angel had been added. With the addition of the charge to “prophesy again,” their task now embraced all three messages, which were to be preached to all nations before the end would come.

The Identifying Characteristics Fit

Now let us notice how each of the Biblical identifying marks of the true church fit the group we are describing.

#1 “Keep the Commandments of God.”

In the winter of 1844 someone approached an Adventist preacher in Washington, New Hampshire about the obligation of the fourth commandment. The minister, Frederick Wheeler, accepted the truth, and shared it with another Adventist minister, T. M. Preble. Soon several of the members of Wheeler’s congregation had accepted the Sabbath.

In February, 1845, Elder Preble wrote an article about the sabbath for a Millerite paper. From that article another Adventist, Joseph Bates, learned the truth. He in turn published a pamphlet on the subject. From that pamphlet others accepted the message, until the little scattered flock, which because of their belief in the soon coming of Jesus were known as “Adventists”, had become “Sabbath-keeping Adventists.” They had passed the first specific identifying mark of the remnant.

#2 “Have the Testimony of Jesus Christ.”

The days following October 22, 1844 were difficult for the little advent company. But the gloom soon turned into hope and confidence as God gave the second specific identifying mark of the remnant, “the testimony of Jesus Christ,” which the Bible says is the spirit of prophecy.

The Lord chose as His messenger a frail little 17 year old girl by the name of Ellen Harmon. Ellen had experienced the disappointment, but had continued to put her confidence in God. In December, 1844, she was at the home of a friend with a small group of other Adventist women who had assembled for prayer. During the prayer the Lord gave Ellen a vision showing the experience of the Advent people. She was shown that the Lord had placed the Millerite experience as a bright light behind them to lighten their new path which would lead them on to the kingdom of heaven.

That was the first of 2,000 visions Ellen would receive in her lifetime. In 1846 she married an Adventist minister, James White, and became Mrs. Ellen G. White. Through her, the Lord fulfilled the second specific identifying mark of the remnant.

#3 World-wide Preaching of the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14.

Very early, Sabbath-keeping Adventists recognized their need for a world-wide work. From that small beginning the Seventh-day Adventist Church has become the most extensive Protestant denomination, working in essentially every country of the world. Thus the third specific identifying mark is met.

The organization which Jesus established, which went into the wilderness at the beginning of the 1260 years, emerged from the wilderness in the early 1800’s, keeps the commandments of God, and has the testimony of Jesus—that same organization is now giving God’s final call to His people who are not yet in His fold (John 10:16) to hear His voice, and follow Him (John 10:27).

The Gift of Prophecy in the Remnant Church

No mortal human has ever possessed the ability to foretell the future or to reveal secret things. Only God knows the future. But by the gift of prophecy He has chosen to reveal information through dreams and visions to His prophets who, under His direction, relate the messages to those for whom they are intended. “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.” Numbers 12:6.

In every particular, the life and ministry of Mrs. White fits the Biblical description of a prophet (which is presented in lessons 29 and 30). She was nothing but an ordinary person. She referred to herself as the weakest of the weak. A serious childhood injury robbed her of much of her natural vigor. She was not naturally gifted with great insight or talent, and claimed no greatness for herself. She was just the type of person God needed, that the power would clearly be seen to be of God and not of man.

The information found in her writings is best explained in the words of Paul: “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.” Galatians 1:11, 12, 15, 16.

Through Ellen White God gave His people messages of encouragement, of reproof, and of guidance. Instruction was given on subjects as diverse as agriculture, astronomy, physiology, nutrition, history, education, marriage, child training, evangelism, theology, administration, finance, temperance, publishing, recreation, dress, mental health, and coming events. She spoke authoritatively in every subject upon which she touched. Thus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Seventh-day Adventist

Church has led the world in the fields of health care, Christian education, international relief work, and in taking the gospel to all parts of the world.

Mrs. White had less than three years of formal schooling, yet she accurately recorded information a century ago which is at the cutting edge of scientific research today.

In 1959, Florence Stratemeyer, professor of Education at Columbia University in New York, stated, "Recently the book Education by Ellen G. White has been brought to my attention. Written at the turn of the century, this volume was more than fifty years ahead of its times."

Dr. Clive McCay, professor of nutrition at Cornell University, stated regarding Mrs. White's books Counsels on Diet and Foods and The Ministry of Healing, "In spite of the fact that the works of Mrs. White were written long before the advent of modern scientific nutrition, no better over-all guide is available today."

The accuracy of the medical and scientific information revealed to this humble woman a hundred years ago has been attested to by the most advanced medical authorities today. Now the United States government is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to find out why Seventh-day Adventists live longer than any other group of people in America. News commentator Paul Harvey observed, "Combine all causes of death, and Seventh-day Adventists have death rates 50 percent lower than that of the general United States population."

What was the source of the secrets that amaze the world today? Inspired revelations from the Spirit of God given to His church through the gift of prophecy as foretold in Revelation 12:17.

Ellen White wrote and published more books than any other woman in history. Her works have been translated into more than a hundred languages. Thus the inspired counsels of God are available to all who will read them.

When you study the counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy, their divine origin is apparent. In strictness of adherence to the word of God, in accuracy of fulfilled predictions, in the high quality of the fruit of her life, in the timeliness of her messages, in the high spiritual plane of her counsel, Mrs. White's work bears the mark of God.

"Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper." 2 Chronicles 20:20.