POISON CONTROL

It was one of those gorgeous September mornings in Chicago. As the sun rose over Lake Michigan and commuters battled traffic jams on the Kennedy and Eisenhower expressways and children made their way to school, a chilling story began to emerge that struck fear into the hearts of all Chicagoans: people were becoming tragically sick, and some were dying just a few hours after taking Tylenol capsules. Upon testing, each of the capsules proved to be laced with potassium cyanide, a deadly poison. A deranged individual had tampered with the medication. To this day, authorities don’t know who did this.

As we have seen, Revelation warns us that the “inhabitants of the earth” will drink a deadly poison called the “wine” of Babylon. There are false doctrines and teachings that, in the end, will lead only to death. However, the world is not left without the antidote, the protection against this spiritual poison: the three angels’ messages.

In this week’s lesson we will continue to look at Babylon’s deceptions, Jesus’ plan to save us from them, and the death they would otherwise bring.
Write out Revelation 16:13, 14 and 18:2, 3 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.
Jesus uttered a powerful warning concerning the last days: “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mark 13:22). Who are the “elect”? Regarding that group, He later says, “And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt. 24:31).

God is obviously going to have some faithful people in the last days, as He has had all through the ages. However, the wording here shows just how widespread Satan’s deceptions really are. A little scary, isn’t it, when the deceptions in the last days will be so great that even the faithful ones will be in danger of being deceived?

People are often told to follow their conscience to determine for themselves what is right or wrong, good or evil, and then live accordingly. But the Scripture says that we are all sinners, all corrupted (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9–18), and so to trust our own sentiments is almost a guaranteed way to, sooner or later, get it wrong and even to do wrong. A lot of evil has been perpetrated through the ages by people utterly convinced of the rightness of their cause. In other words, they followed the “way that seems right” to them (Prov. 14:12).

Instead of trusting our own judgment, we must immerse ourselves in the Word of God, and from His Word, as we surrender to the Holy Spirit, learn truth from error, right from wrong, good from evil. Left to our own devices or even to our own senses, we can become easy prey to Satan’s deceptions.

In Revelation 16:13, 14 and Revelation 18:2, 23, such expressions as the “dwelling place of demons,” the “spirits of demons,” and “sorcery” are used to indicate that demonic activity is one of the tools Satan will employ to deceive the people of the world. We have also been warned that of the two great deceptions in the last days, one will be “the immortality of the soul” (see Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Association., 1911], p. 588). Of course, that’s easy to identify today. Even in the Christian world, the idea of the soul being immortal is all but staple Christian doctrine. Many Christians believe that at death the saved go soaring off to heaven and the lost descend into hell. How often, for instance, after the evangelist Billy Graham died, did we hear that “Billy Graham is safe now in heaven, in the loving arms of Jesus” or the like? This kind of thing is taught all the time from pulpits, in classrooms, and especially at funerals.

One of the pillars of the Babylonian deceptions is a false understanding of death, which, centered on the idea of the immortality of the soul, prepares the way for the harmful influence of spiritualism. If you believe the dead live on in some form and might even be able to communicate with us, what protection do you have from any of the other countless deceptions Satan has? If you thought your dead mother or child had suddenly appeared and talked to you, how easy would it be to be fooled by your senses? This has happened in the past, it happens now, and it will certainly, as we near the very final days, continue to happen. Our only protection is to stand firmly rooted in what the Bible teaches and to cling to the biblical teaching that death is a sleep until the second coming of Jesus.
Sun worship was a prominent practice in Egypt, Assyria, and Persia. The practice was popular in Babylon as well, as James G. Frazer observes in his book *The Worship of Nature*: “In ancient Babylonia the sun was worshipped from immemorial antiquity” ([London: Macmillan and Co., 1926], vol. 1, 529). It may seem surprising, but at times Babylonian sun worship influenced the worship of God’s people in the Old Testament. For example, the prophet Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel’s, depicted some of God’s people standing with their backs toward the temple of God worshiping the sun in the east (Ezek. 8:16; 2 Ki. 23:5, 11). Instead of worshiping the Creator of the sun, they worshiped the sun itself.

In Revelation 17 John describes a time when the principles of Babylon, including sun worship, would enter the Christian church in an age of compromise. This was realized during the reign of Constantine in the early part of the fourth century, whose casual conversion caused great joy in the Roman Empire. Constantine had a strong affinity for sun worship, documented by Edward Gibbon, the renowned historian: “The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine” (*The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* [London: J. O. Robinson & Co. Ltd., 1830], 12). In A.D. 321 Constantine also passed the first “Sunday law.” This edict stated, “On the venerable day of the Sun let the Magistrates and the people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed” (*Edict of Constantine*). This was not a law enforcing Sunday observance for all of Constantine’s subjects, but it did strengthen the observance of Sunday in the minds of the Roman population.

It was in succeeding decades that emperors and popes continued through state decrees and church councils to establish Sunday as the singular day of worship, which it remains for the majority of Christians today. What a powerful example of the hard truth that just because most people believe in something or practice it, it is not necessarily right.

Here is a remarkable statement by Edward T. Hiscox, the author of the *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*. In 1893 he addressed a group of hundreds of Baptist ministers and shocked them as he explained how Sunday came into the Christian church: “What a pity that it [Sunday] comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, then adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!” (Edward Hiscox, before a New York ministers’ conference, Nov. 13, 1893).

The message of the second angel in Revelation 14 is “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” (verse 8). In Revelation 17 the woman identified as spiritual Babylon, dressed in purple and scarlet, rides upon a scarlet-colored beast, passes around her wine cup, and gets the world drunk with error. Church and state unite. Falsehood prevails. Demons work their miracles to deceive. The world catapults into its final conflict.

At the same time, the people of God are maligned, ridiculed, oppressed, and persecuted, but in Christ and through the power of His Holy Spirit they are steadfast in their commitment. All the powers of hell and forces of evil cannot break their loyalty to Christ. They are secure in Him. He is their “refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). (Cont. on p. 85.)
What relationship do the following verses have with Satan’s final deceptions?

Revelation 17:1–6, 14–18
Revelation 18:4
Jeremiah 50:33–38
Psalm 115:4–8
Revelation 12:9
Proverbs 14:12
Job 19:25–27

(Cont. from inSpect, p. 84):

Ezekiel 20:1–20 is an earnest appeal for Israel to forsake pagan practices and to worship the Creator instead of their false gods, in this passage called the “idols of Egypt.” In the message of the three angels, God is making a similar appeal to “worship the Creator,” for “Babylon is fallen.” God is calling an end-time people back to faithfulness to His Word. The Sabbath and our faithfulness to it will play a crucial role in the final events. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17). The truth of God’s Word, not human opinion or tradition, is the spiritual North Star that will guide us in this critical hour of earth’s history.

(Cont. from inSight, p. 87):

As spiritualism more closely imitates the nominal Christianity of the day, it has greater power to deceive and ensnare. Satan himself is converted, after the modern order of things. He will appear in the character of an angel of light. Through the agency of spiritualism, miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and many undeniable wonders will be performed. And as the spirits will profess faith in the Bible, and manifest respect for the institutions of the church, their work will be accepted as a manifestation of divine power.

The line of distinction between professed Christians and the ungodly is now hardly distinguishable. Church members love what the world loves and are ready to join with them, and Satan determines to unite them in one body and thus strengthen his cause by sweeping all into the ranks of spiritualism. Papists, who boast of miracles as a certain sign of the true church, will be readily deceived by this wonder-working power; and Protestants, having cast away the shield of truth, will also be deluded. Papists, Protestants, and worldlings will alike accept the form of godliness without the power, and they will see in this union a grand movement for the conversion of the world and the ushering in of the long-expected millennium.

Through spiritualism, Satan appears as a benefactor of the race, healing the diseases of the people, and professing to present a new and more exalted system of religious faith; but at the same time he works as a destroyer. His temptations are leading multitudes to ruin. Intemperance dethrones reason; sensual indulgence, strife, and bloodshed follow. Satan delights in war, for it excites the worst passions of the soul and then sweeps into eternity its victims steeped in vice and blood. It is his object to incite the nations to war against one another, for he can thus divert the minds of the people from the work of preparation to stand in the day of God. (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 586–589.)
GRACE FOR OBEDIENCE

The woman dressed in scarlet and purple, riding on the scarlet-covered beast, has passed around her wine cup, and the world is drunk with Babylon’s false doctrines (Rev. 17). Speaking of the “wine of Babylon,” Ellen G. White makes this clear comment: “What is that wine? Her false doctrines. She has given to the world a false Sabbath instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, and has repeated the falsehood that Satan first told to Eve in Eden—the natural immortality of the soul” (in Review and Herald, Dec. 6, 1892). These erroneous teachings have deceived millions. As a result, God is giving His people, still entrenched in error, a final last-day appeal to return to Him.

As we already have seen (but what is worth repeating), many of God’s people are in religious organizations that have compromised biblical teachings. They do not understand the truths of Scripture. God’s loving appeal is straightforward: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

Sin is the transgression or the breaking of God’s law. The only way anyone can obey the law is through faith in the power of the living Christ. We are weak, frail, faltering, sinful human beings, but by faith when we accept Christ, His grace atones for our past and empowers our present. He gives us “grace and apostleship, for obedience” (Rom. 1:5). Heaven’s appeal to the people in churches that do not respect and obey the law of God is to step out by faith. His appeal to Adventists in Sabbathkeeping congregations is to forsake all self-centered, human attempts at obedience and live godly lives by faith in the grace of Christ, which delivers us from sin’s condemnation and domination. And just as Israel’s faithfulness to the law (Deut. 4:6) would have been a powerful witness to the world, our faithfulness, too, can be a powerful witness and can help guide people out of Babylon.

“How does 1 John 3:4 harmonize with Romans 14:23, especially in their definitions of sin?”

To you personally, how is Jesus the answer to your faithlessness?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

Prayer Response: Meditate on Revelation 16:13, 14 and 18:2, 3 again and look for where Jesus is.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/3am10-6
inSight

Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the passage, what are your personal takeaways?

What are the takeaways for the organizations and communities that you are a part of?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/3am10-7

TWO GREAT ERRORS

The iniquity and spiritual darkness that prevailed under the supremacy of Rome were the inevitable result of her suppression of the Scriptures; but where is to be found the cause of the widespread infidelity, the rejection of the law of God, and the consequent corruption, under the full blaze of gospel light in an age of religious freedom? Now that Satan can no longer keep the world under his control by withholding the Scriptures, he resorts to other means to accomplish the same object. To destroy faith in the Bible serves his purpose as well as to destroy the Bible itself. By introducing the belief that God’s law is not binding, he as effectually leads men to transgress as if they were wholly ignorant of its precepts. And now, as in former ages, he has worked through the church to further his designs. The religious organizations of the day have refused to listen to unpopular truths plainly brought to view in the Scriptures, and in combating them they have adopted interpretations and taken positions which have sown broadcast the seeds of skepticism. Clinging to the papal error of natural immortality and man’s consciousness in death, they have rejected the only defense against the delusions of spiritualism. The doctrine of eternal torment has led many to disbelieve the Bible. And as the claims of the fourth commandment are urged upon the people, it is found that the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is enjoined; and as the only way to free themselves from a duty which they are unwilling to perform, many popular teachers declare that the law of God is no longer binding. Thus they cast away the law and the Sabbath together. As the work of Sabbath reform extends, this rejection of the divine law to avoid the claims of the fourth commandment will become well-nigh universal. The teachings of religious leaders have opened the door to infidelity, to spiritualism, and to contempt for God’s holy law; and upon these leaders rests a fearful responsibility for the iniquity that exists in the Christian world.

Yet this very class put forth the claim that the fast-spreading corruption is largely attributable to the desecration of the so-called “Christian sabbath,” and that the enforcement of Sunday observance would greatly improve the morals of society. This claim is especially urged in America, where the doctrine of the true Sabbath has been most widely preached. Here the temperance work, one of the most prominent and important of moral reforms, is often combined with the Sunday movement, and the advocates of the latter represent themselves as laboring to promote the highest interest of society; and those who refuse to unite with them are denounced as the enemies of temperance and reform. But the fact that a movement to establish error is connected with a work which is in itself good is not an argument in favor of the error. We may disguise poison by mingling it with wholesome food, but we do not change its nature. On the contrary, it is rendered more dangerous, as it is more likely to be taken unawares. It is one of Satan’s devices to combine with falsehood just enough truth to give it plausibility. The leaders of the Sunday movement may advocate reforms which the people need, principles which are in harmony with the Bible; yet while there is with these a requirement which is contrary to God’s law, His servants cannot unite with them. Nothing can justify them in setting aside the commandments of God for the precepts of men.

Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome. The Protestants of the United States will be foremost in stretching their hands across the gulf to grasp the hand of spiritualism; they will reach over the abyss to clasp hands with the Roman power; and under the influence of this threefold union, this country will follow in the steps of Rome in trampling on the rights of conscience.

(Cont. on p. 85.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why is it so critically important to understand the truth about death? What does it protect us from? Why is it so comforting, too?

How do we explain that some who do evil believe they are following the will of God? What role should the law of God play in this explanation?

Look around at how prevalent Sunday worship is in Christian churches. What should this fact teach us about how pervasive Satan’s deceptions are? Again, as with the state of the dead, what is our only safeguard?

What is God’s appeal to the multitudes still in fallen religious organizations?

How are Satan’s final deceptions different from any of his other ones? How are they exactly the same?

How do we avoid fanaticism as well as naïveté? Which ditch are you more prone to fall into?