

# Are We Living in the Time of the End? (Part 9)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Last Sabbath, as we continued in our discussion of the “seal of God” in the “foreheads” of God’s people, we noted that there is more than one “seal” conferred by God. This is consistent with what we might call “progressive development,” through which God’s grace is continuously and increasingly manifested. The Bible says, “The path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.” Proverbs 4:18. There is what we might call an “early rain seal,” referred to by Paul in II Corinthians 1:21, 22 and Ephesians 1:13, 14, which comes into operation when a person is converted and the Holy Spirit begins the work of reformation in the Christian’s life.

Although Revelation 7 is speaking about something similar, it is obviously different than that. Paul spoke about the believers in his day as having been sealed, while John saw the angels holding back the figurative winds until the saints were sealed. We might refer to this seal, revealed in Revelation 7, as the “latter rain seal,” because it prepares God’s people to receive the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit, empowering them to declare God’s last final warning message to Planet Earth. It represents the Holy Spirit being given in a new and more powerful way.

Today we’re going to share two things. First, we’re going to follow up our discussion of the similarity of God’s seal and His name in the foreheads of the saints, and secondly we’re going to examine a passage in the Old Testament which bears directly on our subject. As we closed last Sabbath, we found that another way that Revelation refers to the “seal of God in the forehead” is found in chapter 14, which depicts God’s saints as having the “Father’s name written in their foreheads.” Because in Bible times often the “name” stood for a person’s character, we understand this symbolic portrayal to be saying the very same thing as the “seal” in the forehead. The “seal” and the “name” are the same thing. They speak to God’s character, His likeness, being written in the minds of His people. The adage “Like Father; like son or like daughter” has a spiritual application.

When Moses asked to see God’s glory, in Exodus 33:18, the Lord set him in a safe place, sheltering him in a cleft of a rock, and “proclaimed the name of the LORD,” listing the attributes of His wonderful character. Like a beautifully cut gem with glistening facets, God enumerated the glorious aspects of His character of love, mercy and justice. Notice that a whole, complete picture is given, revealing God’s love and justice. It’s not an imbalanced picture, emphasizing only God’s

love to the exclusion of His justice, or emphasizing His justice to the exclusion of His love. In God, mercy and truth have kissed each other.

Compare this story given in Exodus, with Moses beholding God's glory, hearing His "name" being declared, with the life of Jesus when He was on earth. In Exodus, Moses was "covered" so that he could withstand the revealing of God's glory. Isn't that what the text says? "So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by." Exodus 33:22. That was a necessity, wasn't it. Moses would not have been able to endure the unshielded glory of God unless He did something. When Jesus came 15 centuries later, when His glory "passed by," God had to do something again, didn't He. In this case, since there were many more people than just Moses, it was His glory that was "covered" so mankind could withstand the brightness of His being. We call that the "incarnation." When Jesus was on earth, His divinity was "covered." Do you see the two "coverings." Moses was "covered" in Exodus; Christ's glory was "covered" during the incarnation.

Like the story given in Exodus, Jesus came here to declare the character of God, to proclaim His "name." The beloved Apostle John begins by telling us of the mission of Christ with these words, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." John 1:18. The word "declared" in that verse is the word from which we get our word "exegesis," which means an "explanation" or an "interpretation." Like the story given in Exodus, Jesus came down to make the Father's character known. He came to declare His name. "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise You." Psalm 22:22. In His priestly prayer Jesus said, "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." John 17:6, 26. Jesus came to make known the beautiful and aromatic "name" of God.

In Ecclesiastes 7:1 we read, "A good name is better than precious ointment." A true understanding of God's wonderful character is as perfume that fills the air and delights the senses. We read in Song of Solomon 1:3, "Your name is ointment poured forth." Does this remind you of something? Is there a story in the Bible that talks about precious ointment being poured forth? When was that? That was when Mary Magdalene "poured forth" the precious "ointment" that perfumed the air at the home of Simon the Pharisee just before Jesus' death. How was the fragrance released? It was when the flask was broken that the "house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." John 12:3. Jesus said that her act demonstrated the gospel. And it was so, that when the body of Christ was broken, as was Mary's flask, that the perfume of God's character of selfless love, the precious ointment of His "name" permeated the "house," that is, the entire universe.

Of course there were critics who stood by to belittle the event and its meaning. Judas, the son of Simon, in whose house this occurred, was there to ridicule and detract. He stood as the representative of Satan, the one who originally vilified and misinterpreted God's character, His name. The same King Solomon who penned, "A good name is better than precious ointment," said also, "Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor." Ecclesiastes

10:1. How could something that smells sweet be turned into something that produces a stench? From the beginning, Satan has sought to turn men's minds away from the true character of God's love and bring reproach upon His beautiful name. In this, he has been remarkably successful. Today so many people are repulsed by the very mention of religion. God dispenses the perfume of His grace, but contaminated by the poison of Satan, deceived humans can only perceive a "foul odor." Is this not true? His "name" for many has become a byword, a cussword.

We can lay this off completely on to Satan, right? We've never done anything to give God's name a bad odor, have we? Do you remember the story of Jacob, when he moved back to Canaan with his family, his 12 sons and daughter Dinah? One of the local residents, a fellow by the name of Shechem raped Dinah and then wanted to marry her. Her brothers didn't think this was such a good idea, but rather than simply say that the marriage wasn't going to happen, they took a huge gamble and said that if Shechem agreed to be circumcised, along with all of the men in the town, then he could marry their sister.

The sons of Jacob felt quite confident that even if Shechem agreed to be circumcised, he'd never persuade his fellow townsmen to do it. Wrong! What's the lesson here? Never gamble with the devil! You might think that you're on safe ground, like Pilate proposing a choice between Barabbas, the "notable criminal" and Jesus, but it might not turn out as you think. The people chose Barabbas, and all the men of Shechem's town agreed to be circumcised.

Now what to do? The brothers really didn't want Dinah to be married to Shechem. Two of the brothers, Simeon and Levi, took matters into their own hands and murdered all the townsmen, including Shechem. When Jacob learned what had happened, he was outraged. He said, "You have troubled me to make me *to stink among the inhabitants of the land.*" Genesis 34:30, KJV. Whatever witnessing might have been done among the Canaanites was going to be very difficult because of the misguided actions of Simeon and Levi. Jacob's name acquired a very bad odor because of the behavior of his children.

So also it is true that the "name" of the Lord has been putrefied by the actions of His children through the years. The precious perfume of "His name" has been putrefied by the dead flies of human failing. All the wars conducted in the name of religion have caused "His name" to stink. Think back over your life. Has there ever been a time when your actions didn't match up with the self-less character of Christ? Every time we fail to live up to the name we bear, Satan uses it to turn people away from God. Every time we misrepresent the self-less love of God's character, we tarnish the beautiful name of Jesus. The world has seen too much of a distorted picture of God's character; it has smelled too often a stench instead of perfume. *If the world could only see God as He is!* If only the mist and fog of Satan's deceptions could be removed and they could see a clear revelation of what God is really like!

This is precisely the role of God's people in the last days! This is what Revelation 14:1 is talking about. The saints are to have the "Father's name" in their foreheads; they are to exhibit the character of God's self-less love and compassion to a lost world in one final attempt to reveal the

truth about God and expose the lies of Satan. God is looking for people who would be willing to play a part in this last day mission of mercy. Would you be willing to be one of them? Would you be willing to allow His Spirit to change your way of thinking and acting, your “ways and doings,” so that He can tell the world through you what He is really like? Would you be willing to have His name written in your thinking, your “forehead”? He is looking over the professed followers of Christ in this world, looking at their lives, conduct and thoughts. He is wondering, “Is My name written there? Is My character of self-less love written in the lives and hearts of My people?”

Now the second part of our study: how does the Bible describe the ones who receive God’s name, His seal, His mark? Let’s take a look at an insightful passage recorded in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel chapter 9. Remember that Ezekiel lived just before and then during the captivity of Judah. He was a contemporary of both Jeremiah and Daniel. Daniel ended up being taken captive in the first wave and served in the courts of Babylon. Ezekiel was taken in the second wave, the attack of 597 B. C. and then lived among the captives in Babylon.

Before he was taken, he warned his people of the coming invasion. He demonstrated it visually by living out the privations of the siege and captivity as a witness to what was going to happen. He was called to deliver the message, “Thus says the Lord GOD; ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her.’” Ezekiel 5:5, 6. Then a description of the effects of the siege are given in the following verses. Disaster and doom were prophesied in chapter 7. “Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘A disaster, a singular disaster; behold it has come! An end has come, the end has come; it has dawned for you; behold, it has come! A day of trouble is near, and not of rejoicing in the mountains. Now upon you I will soon pour out My fury, and spend My anger upon you. Destruction comes; they will seek peace, but there shall be none. Disaster will come upon disaster.’” Ezekiel 7:5-8, 25, 26. Why was this written? It’s for us, isn’t it. There’s a parallel that is meaningful.

Ezekiel was pointed to some of the abominations that were the cause of the Lord’s removing His protective hand and allowing the invasions. “He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary?’” Ezekiel 8:6. The prophet was shown the idolatry and abominations in the sanctuary. Verse 10. He was shown the women of Israel weeping for Tammuz, a false deity. Verse 14. “He brought me into the inner court of the LORD’s house; and there at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about 25 men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east and they were worshipping the sun toward the east.” Ezekiel 8:16. Do you see a last-day application of this scene? When our nation, birthed in liberty, legislates Sunday worship, it will be time for God to take action. That will be when God’s faithful receive the seal of God in their foreheads and the “winds” that had been held back by the angels will be released.

In Ezekiel's vision, what took place just after this? Would all the righteous be destroyed with the wicked? "Then He called out in my hearing with a loud voice, saying, 'Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.' And suddenly six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple.

"And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.' To the others He said in my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and the little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary.' So they began with the elders who were before the temple." Ezekiel 9:1-6. A very solemn and sobering message.

What was the cause of the destruction that was coming? Rebellion; idolatry, specifically sun worship. Who were the ones spared by having the "mark" placed on their "foreheads"? We're used to hearing about the "seal" of God and the "mark" of the beast, but the seal is God's mark. You have God's mark and the beast's mark. Who receive the mark of God in this passage? The ones who "sigh and cry over all the abominations." Well, someone might say, this certainly excludes Sabbath keepers then. We don't bow down and worship the sun. We don't engage in idolatry. Look again. Where were the abominations taking place? In Jerusalem; in fact, in the temple of Jerusalem. What is the antitype of Jerusalem? It is the church. We are "Jerusalem."

It's very easy and comfortable to point to the world and declare the abominations that are done in the world today. But Ezekiel wasn't pointed in this passage to see the abominations of Babylon or Nineveh. It's easy and comforting to point to the professed Christian world that has forgotten God's Sabbath and is living out Ezekiel 8:16 by turning their backs on the temple of the Lord and worshiping, having their faces toward the sun in the east. Yes, there's truth in that. There's a direct application of this text to what Revelation is addressing. But is there more? Are we, as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, exempt from the indictments contained in these verses? What does the Lord say of His beloved church, Laodicea, at the end of time? It's the object of His supreme love, but what is His diagnosis? She needs help, doesn't she. She's in trouble.

Should we be saddened when we hear about failings in our church? Should we "sigh and cry" when we hear reports of things that are happening that shouldn't be happening? Yes we should. There are things happening within us that must bring tears to the eyes of angels. If they don't bring pain to our hearts, then something is dreadfully wrong. Our hearts should be in tune with the sympathies of heaven. God's love "does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth." I Corinthians 13:6. We could spend a great deal of time discussing such failings, but this is not the

time or place. Our church is not perfect. God is perfect, and His Word is perfect, and His last day message contained in the Scriptures is perfect. His people are imperfect. But God still loves them and is striving, if they will let Him, to reproduce His perfect likeness in their characters. He is trying to write "His name" in their foreheads. Does this give us the right to parade ourselves as being "holier than thou," and decry the sins of the church? No.

The one who receives the mark, the saving mark, from the angel in Ezekiel 9 is the one whose heart beats in harmony with the great heart of Christ; it is the one who grieves over sin, whether it's being practiced by the world at large (and we're living in a very wicked age), the Christian world (and we're living in an age of great apostasy) or the remnant church, which is struggling with some very great issues right now. And it doesn't stop there. The grief extends to those sins which afflict my own soul. In humility and contrition, the person who receives the mark is the one who repents of sin in his or her own life. That little word "it" in verse 4 has a very broad application. This person, who receives the sheltering mark, is the one who "sighs and cries for all the abominations that are done within it." The "it" can refer to the world, the professed Christian church, the remnant church and all the way down to my heart. Does it bring tears to your eyes when you see how you've sold Jesus like Judas?

This person is not up on a soap box looking down a pharisaical nose and pointing fingers in condemnation. This person is weeping and crying for the sins that plague the world and his own heart. He is asking for forgiveness and cleansing. He is praying the prayer of Daniel, recorded in chapter 9, in which the prophet expresses many of the same sentiments. Daniel would be a perfect example of the one who is highlighted in Ezekiel 9. He prayed, "O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments." Daniel 9:4-6. He is "sighing and crying for all the abominations," isn't he. And he uses the first person "we." In humility he isn't say, "Oh, those wicked people. They did this and they did that." No, in deep contrition he is saying, "we have sinned." This is the spirit of the one who will receive the mark in the forehead.

Daniel continues, "Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by his servants the prophets. Yes, all Israel has transgressed Your law, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him." Daniel 9:10, 11. The one who receives the saving mark in his forehead will have the attitude of Daniel, as well as the attitude of Jeremiah, the "weeping prophet." Did Jeremiah "sigh and cry" for all the abominations done in Jerusalem? Oh yes.

The signs of the times tell us that soon God will tell the angel with the inkhorn to go about and place His mark on the foreheads of His children, the ones who think like He does, the ones who grieve over transgression wherever it is found. Do you want to be among those who are sheltered

in the storm that is coming? Ask God to give you a new heart; a new way of thinking. Ask that His sentiments and attitudes fill your mind. Ask that His likeness be reflected in your character. "He Who calls you is faithful, Who also will do it." I Thessalonians 4:23.