

# Are We Living in the Time of the End? (Part 10)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Last Sunday evening shortly after 8 p.m. local time, the Goodyear airship “Safety Together” was in the process of making its landing at an airfield in Reichelsheim, western Germany, returning from an appearance at a music festival. Missing the landing target, the blimp slammed into the earth, damaging its engines, likely when a spinning propeller struck the ground. The engine then caught fire. The pilot, 42-year old Australian Mike Nerandzic shouted, “We had an accident,” followed by “I crashed the airship.”

Being only about 6 or 7 feet above ground, as the vehicle bounced from its hard landing, the pilot told the three passengers, all journalists, to jump to safety, which they did. None of them was injured. But because of the sudden loss of weight, with the passengers departing, the blimp shot back up into the air, with the pilot being unable to control it and now unable to easily jump to safety. The blimp became engulfed in flames and the pilot perished in the inferno, the airship shortly thereafter dropping from the sky like a burning ball and crashing to the ground.

The three survivors credit the pilot for saving their lives as he sacrificed his own. The pilot’s widow, Lyndy, was due to fly over to meet her husband in a few weeks. She says that he gave his life for his passengers, bringing the airship close to the ground so the passengers could leap out, while he stayed at the controls. Being an experienced pilot, according to Lyndy, he knew that as soon as they jumped from the airship, it would immediately shoot up into the sky. He also did his best, though the airship was largely out of control, to steer it away from the ground crew below. They found his charred body still at the controls when it crashed.

We are impressed with stories that illustrate valor, courage and self sacrifice. But none of these will ever compare with what Jesus did for us, by coming to this earth as a human and dying on the cross to save us from our sins. As painful and miserable a death as Mike Nerandzic endured, it cannot be compared to the second death that our Savior experience on the cross, not only enduring the physical torture of crucifixion, but what was more, bearing the agony of the weight of our sins and their guilt.

What can we do? We can say “Thank You.” When we say “Thank You to God,” we say it with our lips and with our lives. We allow Him to change us, transform us to be like Him. This is expressed in the language of the Bible as having God’s seal, His name in our foreheads, that is, in our minds.

God wants to have exhibits of converted human beings to whom He can point and say, “These are the ones who have allowed the Gospel to take root in their hearts. These are My demonstration that Satan’s charges are false.”

God’s people will have His name in their foreheads, or seal in their foreheads. They will think and act like Him. That’s what this means. It’s not about barcodes or tattoos, it’s about His changing our character (which is the combination of our thoughts and feelings) to be like Him, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the operation of His Gospel.

Last week we saw that His name, His character, is as precious ointment, ointment poured forth. Ecclesiastes 7;1; Song of Solomon 1:3. The true understanding of His character produces a sweet smell that delights the senses. But as we saw, when the “dead flies” of Satan’s deceptions or human failings are put into the perfume of God’s grace, a stench is produced instead of a sweet smelling perfume. People are turned away just by the mention of God’s name. 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. You and I can be one of them if we say, “Yes” to God.

Today we’re going to look at another passage that tells us important things about the seal of God. 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. We’re going to find that this text discusses a “mark” placed on the foreheads. This is saying the same thing as the “seal” and the “name” that we find in the book of Revelation.

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 of Nebuchadnezzar’s invasions 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. God’s people were strategically placed “in the midst of the nations” to be a missionary nation, but in this they failed.

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? Is this happening today? 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, one that is filled with meaning for us today.

What was the cause of the destruction that was coming? Rebellion; idolatry, specifically sun worship. Who were the ones spared? The ones who had God's mark placed in their foreheads. What was it that characterized them so that they received 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. The Bible speaks of God's mark and the beast's mark. Who receive the mark of God in this

passage? This is one of the key thoughts in this text. The ones who “sigh and cry over all the abominations.” “Well,” someone might say, “this certainly excludes Sabbath keepers then. We’re not involved in the ‘abominations.’ 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, and the world was filled with them. But Ezekiel wasn’t pointed in this vision 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? 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. It should bring grief and sorrow when things are done that are not according to God’s plan or His will. We could spend a great deal of time discussing such failings, but this is not the time or place. They’re there. Our church is not perfect.

Are we described as being better than the children of Israel in the Old Testament? No. Are we described as being the same as those people? No. We are worse. We’ve had greater light than they, but not lived up to it. We are far from 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. This 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?

The Bible describes God's people entering into an experience which is described as "afflicting their souls." This happened during the Day of Atonement in Old Testament times, the fulfillment of which is taking place right now as God is in the process of wrapping up the affairs of mankind. As we follow Jesus in His work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, part of our experience is to "afflict our souls," that is to sincerely repent and be sorry for our sins, put away all of our idols and ask Him to thoroughly cleanse us of all unrighteousness. In Ezekiel's vision, this was shown as His people "sighing and crying" for all the abominations done in Jerusalem.

The person who is doing that 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 the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of his book, in which the prophet expresses many of the same sentiments. These three, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Daniel share so much together as they watched the prophecies be fulfilled.

Daniel would be a perfect example of the one who is highlighted in Ezekiel 9. Put these two chapters together in your mind: Ezekiel 9 and Daniel 9. Look how he demonstrates the principles of what Ezekiel saw in his vision. Daniel 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. This is a demonstration of Ezekiel 9. And he uses the first person "we." In humility he isn't say, "Oh, those wicked people. They did this and they did that. They are the ones who caused the removal of God's blessing." 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, who was called the "weeping prophet." Did Jeremiah "sigh and cry" for all the abominations done in Jerusalem? Oh yes. He wrote a whole book called "Lamentations."

The person who becomes a Christian will think like Christ. What was His life like? Isaiah 53 describes Him as being a "Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." This is not to say that Christ was continually despondent. His life was characterized by a positive and cheerful attitude. But there was also the side of Christ that recognized that ones for whom He was about to give His life

would reject Him. There was a serious side to His life. It pained His heart when He saw the grip that sin had on people's lives.

Why did He weep at Lazarus' grave? Was it over Lazarus, as many people suppose? No, He knew that in a few minutes Lazarus would be coming from that grave. He wept because the power that brought Lazarus from the tomb was offered to people to receive His grace and be prepared to come from the grave at His coming, but they didn't want it. They would refuse the great Gift of salvation, made possible by His death on the cross. They would insist on paying for their sins themselves.

For those who walk in His footsteps there will likewise be sighing and crying. It is true that they will have a cheerful and positive outlook, but a part of their life will also include mourning and grieving over sin. It cannot be otherwise. Tears are a part of Christian living, too. Not tears shed for our own selfish reasons, but tears shed because God's name is not honored and exemplified, because His law is not upheld. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4. This is not talking about someone who mourns over financial losses or personal disasters. It is speaking of someone who grieves over sin, whether it be outside or inside.

When disobedience came in to this world, it brought a shadow with it. Prior to sin, everything was sunshine and cheer. Life was vibrant and buoyant. Then came the cloud of sin. Then came the loss of the beautiful garment of light. Then came shame, regret and sadness. As long as we're in this sinful flesh, which will remain with us till Jesus returns in the sky, there will be that mantle of sadness with us that sin has caused. It is inevitable. We are called to bear the cross, to be burden bearers. "The whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Romans 8:22, 23. Not until that day will we finally be completely free of the sinful nature that drags us down. We were born with a sinful nature, but through the Gospel we can be "partakers of the divine nature," which is a huge advantage. But we will still have the sinful nature to contend with until that Day. Our evil natures can be "subdued" and "controlled" through Christ, but they will be with us until Christ comes. Then will come the "Gilgal" or "rolling off" of Egypt from us completely.

The signs of the times tell us that soon God will finish this up. When that day comes, what we are talking about, the seal of God and being ready for His coming, will just not be words on a page or as idle theories. Nothing will matter on that day except to know that you are accepted by God. "Who will be able to stand?" will be the question forced from the burning lips of those who have not taken the time to study these things out and apply them to their lives.

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.