

Are We Living in the Time of the End? (Part 4)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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In view of the recent tornado tragedies, we see that a very successful business that has started, making what are called “safe boxes.” These are metal containers which can be bolted down to a secure surface such as a concrete slab. They have been tested to withstand wind forces up to 400 mph. You can purchase the smallest model, adequate for a person of slight build, for about \$2500.00. They go up in size and in price to accommodate groups of people. The “storm winds” are about to blow, in the sense of which Revelation speaks. Right now, the angels are holding them back, but soon they will be released and calamities which we’ve never before witnessed will strike the earth. Where will our safety be? Do you have a “safe box”? What, or Who, will be your place of protection when the winds blow? Have you found your Refuge in Christ?

There are three words I invite you to keep in mind this morning; they are “upright,” “pure” and “open.” What are the words? “Upright,” “pure” and “open.” We’ll explain their relevance when we close. Today we continue in our study of last day terms and phrases as found in Scripture. So far we’ve looked at three usages of the word “tribulation.” We looked at the phrases “time of the end” and “last days.” We took a very quick look at the major events yet to take place in Bible prophecy, with the intent of obtaining a “bird’s eye view” of these things, but coming back later to study them in more detail.

We clustered the events into two categories; those taking place before the close of earth’s probation and those that take place after the close of probation. We found that the next big event on the prophetic calendar will be the fulfillment of Revelation 13’s image of the beast and mark of the beast; laws will be passed enforcing the worship of the first day of the week, copying the behavior (that’s what the “image” is) of the church of the middle ages. Following in quick succession will be the test given to God’s people, whether to bow to the “image” (the copy) or face the consequences. God’s faithful, gifted by the power of His Spirit, will say “no” to the temptation to yield and will stand firmly for God and His truth, just as the three Hebrews refused to bow to the image 2500 years ago.

Obtaining, through Christ’s strength, the victory over the test, God’s people will be “sealed,” their sins “blotted out,” and they will be invested to declare God’s truth in a more powerful way than ever before, attested by signs and miracles, even overshadowing the evangelism of the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts. This is called the “refreshing,” the “latter rain,” or the “outpouring of

the Holy Spirit,” which enables the saints to give the “loud cry,” which is the declaration of the three angels’ messages, a warning against receiving the mark of the beast, in a more complete way than has ever been. This last final warning is given during a time of duress, called the “little time of trouble.”

Satan, of course, will have engineered his own “revival,” complete with false signs and wonders. As a crowning touch, Satan will impersonate Christ, resembling the descriptions of Jesus given in Scripture, speaking some of the same blessings that Jesus gave, speaking words confirming the establishment of the false sabbath.

When all have had an opportunity to make an intelligent decision whether to serve and obey God, by accepting His true Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, or to reject the Word of God and accept the false sabbath, then all those who have decided for God will receive the “seal of God,” and those who reject His message of last day truth and follow the “beast” will receive his “mark.” At that time probation for the planet will come to a close, introducing the second cluster of events.

Following the close of probation, the world is hurled into chaos and calamity never seen before. This will be the “time of trouble such as never was,” making the hundreds of ferocious and deadly tornadoes of the last month seem tame. The 7 last plagues will be poured out. It will be the time of God’s “wrath,” His “indignation.” Though God’s people will not have it easy as they endure “Jacob’s trouble,” their lives will be protected. After the close of probation, no child of God will lose his or her life. Then will come the day of God’s deliverance, the day to which His people have looked for centuries. Christ will split the sky and He will split the graves. His children will be resurrected to immortality, and those living will be changed and translated to meet Him in the air, together with the ones who have risen from dusty graves.

These awesome things are yet to be; but we are not far away from them. The question comes to mind, in view of all these stupendous and tremendous events soon to come to pass, how shall we prepare? What should we be doing now to become ready? This is the point we will address today and next Sabbath, before we begin to look in greater detail at the specific events yet to come. Why is this so important? It does no good to know what’s going to happen if we’re not ready for it. What are the three words? “Upright, pure and open.”

We are now living in the time of “preparation,” and it is on that word that we will meditate for the remaining time we have this morning; it’s a term worthy of our study. We’re going to look at several Bible passages where that term is found. The term “preparation” may be divided into two categories; there is God’s preparation, with which we have nothing to do, and there is man’s preparation, which God will accomplish in us if we surrender and comply.

What is God’s preparation? Before Jesus died He said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be

also.” John 14:1-3. Jesus committed Himself to an obligation of preparing a place in which the righteous will dwell.

Has that been done? Did He keep His promise? Only a few decades after this, Paul wrote concerning God’s saints, “Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:16. What does the tense of the verb tell you? We were told before that Jesus promised to prepare a place and the book of Hebrews tells us that “He has prepared” the city. This tells us that God’s part of the preparation has already been done and has been waiting our occupancy for centuries!

There’s a wonderful parallel to this in the Old Testament. When God took Israel from Egypt and sent them on the way to Canaan, He told them, “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.” Exodus 23:20. Before they left the land of bondage, God had already scouted out the area to which He would bring them and had “prepared a place” for them. What a wonderful comparison! In one of the Psalms Asaph testified, “You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. You prepared room for it, and caused it to take deep root, and it filled the land.” Psalm 80:8, 9. So God had “preparation” work to do, both for the Israel of old as they entered earthly Canaan, and for the Israel of today as we look forward to the heavenly Canaan. It seems that He has completed the preparation long ago!

The other category of “preparation” involves us. What three words are we thinking of today? “Upright, pure and open.” We’re going to look at 5 very brief snapshots that illustrate where we are now in the time of “preparation;” what our lives should be like. Two of these pictures are in Genesis, one in Exodus, one in Isaiah and the last in Matthew. The first three, the ones in Genesis and Exodus, we’ll look at today; the other two next Sabbath.

The story of the first is in the book of Genesis, but we’ll start first by looking at a passage in I Peter 3:20 that directs our attention to the word we’re studying. It’s speaking of those who heard Noah’s preaching but rejected the offer of grace. “Who (those who died in the Flood) formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” The first “preparation” we’re going to look at has to do with what Noah built in view of the coming storm. By the way, this passage is misinterpreted by many, coming to conclusions not supported by the rest of the Bible. If you wish, I can send you an email that examines it carefully.

Story one: our first example comes from the experience of Noah as he prepared the ark. We are on good ground making a comparison between his day and ours since we’re told, “As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of man be.” Matthew 24:37. Because of man’s wickedness, a flood was coming to wash the world of its filth. Yet, there would be salvation available through the vessel which Noah was commissioned to build. The ark that Noah prepared was God’s “safe box.”

Question: did Noah dream up on his own the plans for this ship? Not at all! Specific instruction was given him regarding its design. It's length, width, height and features were all provided him from above. God told Noah, "This is how you shall make it." Genesis 6:15. The word "make" in that verse is the Hebrew *asah* which has been translated "prepare" 36 times, including the well-known passage, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He had prepared for him that waited for Thee." Isaiah 64:4, KJV. God told Noah, "This is how you shall prepare it." Preparation was needed for the coming crisis.

What Noah "prepared" went from one "world" to the next. What are we to prepare? There's only one thing that we can take to the next "world," to heaven. What is that? It is our character. Not our bank accounts, not our real estate, not our titles or our looks, things on which the world spends so much time. Only our characters will go to heaven. What exactly is our "character"? It is the sum of our thoughts and feelings. Those are the things that make us what we are. We should give much attention, time and effort to this "construction project," this preparation, in view of the final outcome that it determines.

What is the model in our character building? It is the life of Christ. Here's the lesson from the first story: Because his "world" was going to end, Noah was given a "pattern" from above when he "prepared" the ark. He didn't make up the dimensions of the ark in his head. They were given to him by God. We also are given a "Pattern" from above, the life of our dear Lord. He came to pay for our sins as well as to show us how to live. He was our divine Sacrifice and Example. Look to Jesus to find out how to live. Ponder carefully the episodes of His life journey. Not one flaw; not one mistake will you find in that Record. His life is to be our life. "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked." I John 2:6.

"But I seem to make so many mistakes; I seem to be so weak. I don't think I could ever live like Jesus." Through grace of Christ, which includes both forgiveness for past mistakes and empowerment for today's trials, we can be more than conquerors. Let no one say, "The standard is too high; it can't be done." We're talking about the infinite power of the Creator God! Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Noah was given the pattern, but he had a part to do. I'm sure he found his share of slivers and raised his share of blisters. He worked. He sweated. He invested all he had in the building project. It wasn't done in a day, either. It took 120 years, but when he finished, a vessel was constructed which, with the Lord's guidance and blessing, survived the Deluge. Noah's job was to "prepare" an ark, from the pattern he had received from above. Our job is to build character, through His grace, enabled by the Pattern from above.

Story two comes to us from Genesis 41. Joseph was sold by his brothers in Egyptian slavery, but because "God was with him," he eventually became the prime minister of that country. Pharaoh had had dreams, and it was remembered that Joseph had successfully interpreted the dreams of the king's butler and baker while they were in prison. Joseph was summoned to hear the king's

dreams. They were both similar; they both “said the same thing.” One dream was of 7 fat cows that were eaten by seven skinny cows, who remained skinny after they had eaten the 7 fat cows. The other was of 7 hearty stalks of grain that were consumed by 7 withered stalks of grain.

What did the dreams mean? Joseph, through wisdom given him by God, interpreted the dreams to mean that Egypt would experience 7 years of abundant harvests, followed by 7 years of extreme famine. Egypt enjoyed the rich land of the Nile delta. But it was critical that the rise and fall of the Nile, from high and low points, be timely and accurate. If things went well and they were able to irrigate properly, along with adequate sunshine, rich harvests would come. If the Nile rose too high, or not high enough, famine was the result. Joseph ventured to offer some advice to Egypt’s monarch. Let one be appointed to gather the excesses during the 7 years of “plenty,” and store up grain and in this way prepare for the 7 years of famine. It made sense. Pharaoh accepted both the interpretation given by Joseph and the wise counsel. He appointed Joseph to be the one to carry out the gathering and dispensing project, to be the one to “prepare” for the coming famine. Does Genesis 41 speak to us today? Are we now living in a time of “plenty” to be followed by a “famine”? What do the dreams of the corn and cows have to do with us?

We are living in a time of “plenty” now, in the sense that opportunities to learn about God and His truth abound. We have religious liberty, allowing us to study and pray in private, or to worship together in public without fear of interference. The Scriptures are available to us in unlimited and unprecedented abundance. You can get the Bible in book or electronic form. You can read it as it’s recorded on paper or on an ipad. Now is the time of plenty, when we can “store up” knowledge of God’s Word and His truth, leading to a relationship with Him of faith, strong enough to withstand the times of “famine” that are coming, when religious liberty will be removed.

Here’s what the prophet Amos said. “Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it.’” Amos 8:11, 12. The time will come when the only Bible you will have is what’s committed to your memory. Are you taking advantage of this time of “preparation,” during this time of “plenty”? Do you now appreciate the opportunities to build a relationship of love with your Savior through the study of His word and through prayer?

Story three, from Exodus 16: a few centuries after Joseph’s day the Israelites were delivered from Egypt’s bondage and found themselves in the wilderness. Before very long their stores of food were exhausted. Immediately they cried out to Moses and complained that he had deliberately led them out into the desert, away from the flesh pots of Egypt, to kill them. Exodus 16:3. “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.’” Exodus 16:4, 5.

When the Israelites went out the next morning, they saw something on the ground. "What is it?" they asked. In Hebrew, the way you express the question, "What is it?" is *manna*. Thus that very question became the name for the miracle bread which sustained them the next four decades. On the sixth day of each week, on Friday, twice as much manna fell. Because none would fall on the seventh day, God's holy Sabbath (note that the Sabbath was in existence before the giving of the Law from Mt. Sinai, recorded in Exodus 20), they were given more on Friday. While on other days if they tried to gather and keep manna for the following day it "bred worms," the manna they gathered on Friday to "prepare" for the Sabbath did not.

Thus the sixth day became known to them as the "day of preparation," a designation that continued throughout their generations. When Jesus died on the cross, how does the Bible identify the day of His death? "That day (which we call Good Friday) was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew on." The ladies, fearing that they would run out of time to anoint the body of Christ that very day, "prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." Luke 23:54, 56. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and the word "preparation" (*paraskeve*) has survived as the word for the sixth day of the week in the Greek language to this very day! I double checked it again this week on the internet. How did that happen, that the sixth day of the week in Greek is called "preparation"? I wonder if people ask, "Why is this called the day of 'preparation'? What are we preparing for?" And, "Why is the seventh day called 'Sabbath'?"

I want to take our minds from the literal act of the Israelites "preparing" on the sixth day back in the wilderness to a spiritual application. We are now in the "wilderness," aren't we. The Christian walk has three parts as reflected in the experience of ancient Israel. God has led us from the bondage of sin, represented by Egypt, and we're on our way to "Canaan," but we're not there yet. We're now in the "wilderness." We're in the "sixth day" of the "week" now. A "sabbath" of rest is coming, a millennial "sabbath," but it hasn't come yet.

God has provided a large measure of "manna" for us now, a double portion. What is the manna? Jesus referred to the Israelites in the wilderness and said, "For the bread of God is He Who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the Bread of life.

The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." John 6:33, 35, 63. We are now living in the world's "sixth day." We are now living in the "day of preparation." Now is when we need to be feeding on the true Manna. Now is when we need to be establishing a relationship with Him based on faith and love. What did Jesus say? "When the Son of man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" Luke 18:8.

How do we prepare for the times that are coming, the times which will test our faith to the limit? We make it a priority to grow faith, that is, a love relationship, by spending time with Jesus in His Word and in communication with Him in prayer. Thus we build character, as Noah built the ark. Thus we prepare for the coming famine, as Joseph stored up grain. Thus we gather the double portion of the true Manna, as did Israel.

What are the three words we're remembering today? "Upright, pure and open." How do they fit in with the message today? An author who had great spiritual insight said, What we need to do now is to keep our "vessels," that is, our hearts, upright, pure and open, and wait for God to pour in His grace and love. Keep your vessel pointing above, and not to the things of the earth. Keep it pure and open. This way Jesus will be your "safe Box"? Will you covenant with God that this will be your experience this week?