

# Are We Living in the Time of the End? (Part 19)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

Written By: Pastor John T. Anderson

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Today we bring to a close our series on end time events. This does not mean that we have exhausted the subject, nor that at some future time we won't be studying along these lines, for we must always have the Second Coming of Jesus foremost in our minds. He is coming soon. God's plan for this planet will come to completion, and the sudden way in which it happens will surprise nearly all the world. Satan has covered this earth with the mist and fog of deception so deeply that almost everyone will be unprepared for His return.

But the elect will not be deceived, because they have received the love of the truth in their hearts and have entered into a relationship of love and obedience with Him. There will be people alive when He comes to whom He will point and say, "Here are those who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus." May we be among that group! We can be, if we will ask Him into our hearts and allow the Holy Spirit to bring true conversion into our lives, giving Him permission to remove sin from our minds so that we can reflect His character.

Our study began by noting two general time periods, separated by an unseen event called the "close of probation." Things are pretty bad right now, with fires and floods, earthquakes and hurricanes. I just heard this week about some 60 wildfires raging in Texas. But things will continue to get worse, and when they reach a tipping point, the unsuspecting religious leaders of the world, led by Satan, will put pressure on civil authorities to initiate legislation honoring the first day of the week, Satan's flag which the whole world will salute. Spurring this movement, Satan himself will appear as being Jesus Christ. He will work wondrous miracles and make it seem that he is able to raise the dead, even the leaders of many of the world's religions, who will give their support to the new world order. The effect will be overwhelming for all except those firmly rooted in Bible truth.

God's people who have allowed His Spirit to change them and have refused to bow before this false sabbath will receive His seal and be empowered to proclaim His last day message, summarized by the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14 to the world, giving every inhabitant an opportunity to make an informed and intelligent choice between the law of God or

the law of man; the day of God or the day of man; the government of God or the government of man. When all have had the opportunity to know the issue and have made their decision, probation will close for the entire world, sending it into the “time of trouble such as never was.” God’s people will be blamed for the catastrophes that afflict the earth. Things will get even worse, not better as National apostasy is followed by National ruin. God’s restraining Spirit having been removed, Satan will be at the steering wheel and disaster after disaster on an unprecedented scale will bathe the earth in carnage.

The earth will experience the effects of the seven last plagues, foretold by prophecy. “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous; seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.” Revelation 15:1. Other words in the Bible describe God’s anger as His “indignation” and “fury.” What is the wrath of God? How do you reconcile the concept of God’s “anger” with His love? Notice that there are two “wraths” mentioned in Revelation. There’s the wrath of Babylon and the wrath of God. The last day generation will experience one of the two. Which would you rather suffer, Babylon’s wrath of God’s anger? Just verses before in the Three Angels’ Messages, an announcement was made concerning the fall of Babylon. “And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’” Revelation 14:8.

Babylon’s wrath will be directed at those who refuse to obey her laws and bow to the image of the beast. It will be similar to what happened in Daniel 3 when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, constructed a golden image and commanded all nations to bow before it. A large furnace, probably a brick kiln, stood nearby to swallow dissenters. Three Hebrew captives, faithful to God’s law, refused to bow and were brought before the king. When questioned and given another opportunity to comply, they said that they had not misunderstood the command, and boldly proclaimed that their God was able to deliver them. But if this was not His will, they still would not bow.

This made the king even more furious and he commanded that the furnace be heated 7 times hotter than usual and the three violators of his law be tossed in. This story illustrates the wrath of Babylon, which is directed against the last day holdouts who refuse to bow to the image of the beast. By the way, last week in telling the story of the Hiroshima miracle which preserved the lives of every member of the Hiroshima Seventh-day Adventist Church when the atomic bomb was dropped, I mistakenly said that Asako was teaching a class on the story of Daniel and the lions’ den when she first heard about this. In fact, it was the story in the book of Daniel that referred to the fiery furnace, even more relevant to the dropping of the bomb that elicited the comment from the little girl in the class that resulted in Asako’s quest for information. I also found out later that one of the members of our church served as a student missionary in the 70’s in Hiroshima and was told the very same account of how God preserved His people.

The wrath of Babylon will be unleashed in the direction of those who refuse to bow to the spurious sabbath. Following the close of probation, God will not allow His faithful ones to perish, as we studied last week. The blood of the saints will no longer be the seed of the Gospel, in that all decisions by that time have been made and all either have the seal of God, protecting them from death, or the mark of the beast which has no protective power within it.

But God's wrath, what is it? Does God get mad like human beings do? No! His wrath is not at all like what people exhibit when they lose their tempers. When people lose control, their voice becomes high pitched, their faces turn red and the hair on their necks stands up. This is not at all an accurate picture of God's wrath. What is God's wrath? We are given a definition in Romans, in which Paul wrote, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Romans 1:18. He goes on to say that because of man's evil, particularly demonstrated in idolatry and immorality, "God gave them up to uncleanness." Verse 24. "God gave them up to vile passions." Verse 26. "God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting." Verse 28.

The Bible pictures God as a loving Deity Who has given to all the freedom to choose. Not willing that His creatures be robots, parroting back expressions of love, He has endowed humans with the capacity to make an intelligent choice, by which, having come to an appreciation of the wondrous qualities of the Godhead, they might render willing adoration and obedience. This attitude of worship is never coerced, but is encouraged and wooed. This is how God made us and how He relates to us.

At the same time, it is absolutely true that there is only one system which allows the universe to operate in peace and harmony, and that is through self-denying love. Agape love is the "operating system" of the universe. It was Satan who attempted to introduce another system, that of the love of self. That has proven, through the existence of this planet, to be wholly at odds with harmony and peace. Sin is the grit in the gears of relationships. Those who refuse to live according to the principle of selfless love cannot be allowed to live forever, for that would only continue the cycle of sadness and woe that we've seen over the past 60 centuries.

God informs and encourages, but never forces. Therefore, having been given sufficient light to make a choice, those who refuse truth and refuse to have His love nourished in their hearts will experience God's "wrath." His "wrath" is allowing His creatures to reap the consequences of their own stubborn choices, though it brings great pain to the heart of God. It is His desire that all come to repentance and be saved. When Jesus died on the cross, He bore upon Himself every sin committed; the sins of those who would one day repent, and those who would not. But in the end, if sinners refuse His Gift of grace, He will turn from them and allow them to receive the consequences of their decision. This is what the Bible describes as God's "wrath."

Paul didn't invent this concept. The Old Testament is saturated with this perspective. If people persist, eventually God will let them have what they want, though it is not for their own good. "My people would not heed My voice, and Israel would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their adversaries." Psalm 81:11-14.

The book of Hosea has much to say about this, including the poignant plea, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? My heart churns within Me." Hosea 11:8. "Woe to them when I depart from them! My God will cast them away, because they did not obey Him." Hosea 9:12, 17. God had a perfectly good system in mind for Israel's government. He would be their King. This we call a "theocracy." But they wanted to be like their neighbors and have a visible king to go before them in battle. Eventually God gave in to their hardened hearts. He let them have their desire. Eventually because of their disobedience He removed His protective hand and the nation and its monarchs went into captivity. Notice how the Bible describes this process. "I gave you a king in My anger, and took him away in My wrath." Hosea 13:11. God gave into their wishes, though it brought disaster.

This is His wrath. It is the withdrawal of His protective Presence, leaving the sinner to the cruel desires of the enemy of souls, who is only too willing to inflict pain and suffering. Jesus said to the Jews that He wanted to protect them like a mother hen guards her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing. Matthew 23:37-39. His next words are chilling. "Behold, your house is left to you desolate." Because of the nation's rejection of the Son of God; because of their putting Him on the cross, God's gracious Spirit was withdrawn and Jerusalem was left to the rapacious Romans who desolated her and crucified her citizens. This is a small picture, a thumbnail sketch, of God's wrath, which will be "poured out" in the seven last plagues.

As there were ten plagues that fell on Egypt in judgment against her gods, so there will be seven plagues that come upon the earth at the end of time, recorded in Revelation 16. The first is a "loathsome sore" that comes upon those who have the mark of the beast. We've experienced many an epidemic, but none like this. Satan brought boils upon faithful Job when the Lord allowed, and he will bring upon the unfaithful an affliction that will bring pain and torment. Remember that God's faithful will be protecting through these afflictions. "No plague shall come near your dwelling" is His promise. Psalm 91:10. These plagues serve as divine judgments against a world which has congealed itself in apostasy and rebellion. The setting aside of the divine law by the enforcement of the false sabbath and the decree to kill those who refuse to bow before it brings the world to the precipice of ruin. God's patience, long forbearing, has finally reached its limit.

There are two errors of doctrine into which Satan has led people. He tells them on the one hand that God is unloving and vengeful, delighting in the torment of His creatures. This picture of God, made infamous by preachers such as Jonathan Edwards in his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is utterly inaccurate and misleading. At the same time, Satan leads people into believing that God will never punish, never bring into judgment those who persist in evil. This is likewise a lie. God's wrath is not like human wrath, but there is accountability. We read last week, "Say to the righteous that it will be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe to the wicked! It shall be ill with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given him." Isaiah 3:10, 11. The plagues are divine judgments sent upon a world entrenched in rebellion.

The second plague results in the sea becoming blood, and the third is when the rivers also become blood. These plagues are similar to what fell on Egypt, which worshiped the Nile as a deity. Today men "worship" materialism, and commerce and trade are often represented in Scripture as endeavors conducted by the highways of the sea. As terrible as these scourges are, God's justice stands vindicated. "You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink, for it is their just due." Revelation 16:5, 6. Before probation closed, some did fall by the sword of Babylon. Following probation's close God's people will be spared, but the death decree indicating Babylon's intent brings upon them the divine indictment just as if they had been successful in their endeavor. They are just as guilty of the blood of the saints though mighty angels excelling in strength have stood by to protect them.

The fourth angel's bowl brings forth excessive heat from a scorching sun. The object which man has worshiped through the centuries has now become a curse and its unrelenting blast brings forth the voice of blasphemy from those who refuse to repent of their sins. The fifth plague results in unusual darkness upon the seat of the beast, a fitting symbol of the darkness into which she has led the world, replacing for the light-bringing truths of Scripture the errors of the prince of darkness. This darkness of the fifth plague is a darkness which can be felt and induces pain. Still, the words of blasphemy and not repentance are voiced.

The sixth plague contains language which has caused many to look to a literal battle called Armageddon to occur in the Middle East. "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 'Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.' And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew Armageddon." Revelation 16:12-16.

Notice that attention is drawn to the word “Armageddon” as coming from the Hebrew language. There is no place on earth today bearing that name, nor has there ever been. It requires a leap of faith to interpret that this passage predicts a conflict involving the forces of the east and the west. Instead, I invite you to look at this passage through the lens of Old Testament imagery, with which the book of Revelation is completely at ease.

Although there was and is no place called “Armageddon,” there was a place called “Megiddo,” which sounds very similar to the word in the term Armageddon, and it was situated strategically in the plain of Jezreel. Its meaning was literally “place of slaughter,” or “place of battle,” coming from the Hebrew root *gadam*, meaning “to cut.” Because of its location, it was the scene of many a battle. When archeologists dug at this site, they discovered at least 20 layers, 20 strata of civilizations, representing successive building and destructive episodes through the centuries. In many of those battles, such as the one recorded in Judges 4 and 5, God worked miraculously to deliver His people. In another battle, King Josiah foolishly aligned himself with the forces of Babylon and died, resulting in a great mourning made famous in Old Testament times. By coining this word, “Armageddon,” the Scripture is pointing our eyes in the direction of the many battles in which God fought for His people in ancient times.

The first part of the word, “*Har*,” is “mountain.” This is further indication that we should look to the spiritual meaning, the symbolic value of this term and not the literal, for Megiddo was a city of the plain, and was not located on a mountain ridge. Remember that “excessive literalism” caused the Jews of Jesus’ day to miss the point on many an occasion. Plain and simple, there is no Mt. Megiddo to which we can point and expect this great battle to take place. This term is designed to point us back to the battles of the past, and to take encouragement that God will again fight for His people.

The battle is not between the forces of east and west, but between the forces of the “kings of the whole earth” and the “armies of heaven.” Revelation 19:14. “I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army,” referring to the conquering Jesus riding on the white horse. Revelation 19:19.

This is a picture of the last conflict between the forces of Christ and Satan, between good and evil, between heaven and earth. It will not be limited to a relatively small plain in Palestine, but encompass the entire globe. The rebellion that began in heaven and was transferred to this earth when our first parents gave the keys to Satan through their disobedience will come to a final and climactic end. Jesus and His armies, the angelic hosts, will descend in glory. The sky will split and His divine presence will interrupt the wicked schemes of the ungodly. He has come to rescue His people from Babylon. Be on guard, friends: the interpretation that places the emphasis on a physical battle between the forces of east and west in a literal place called Megiddo misses completely the issue at stake, which is loyalty to Christ and His law. It is the Sabbath of His

appointment verses the sabbath of the beast that is in the spotlight. Where do you find that issue highlighted in the popular view of Armageddon?

Someday the truth will be known by all. As people realize that they have been deceived by their leaders, the swords that had been raised against God's saints are turned against their shepherds. The "ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire." Revelation 17:16. Many are the Old Testament stories, including the victory of Gideon and his 300, which bring to light this aspect of the wicked involved in self-destruction as panic seizes them and they realize the folly of their misguided ways. What about the matter of the waters of the Euphrates being dried up? As Cyrus came to rescue Israel from Babylon and did so by drying the waters of the Euphrates, diverting it from its course, so the heavenly Cyrus will come to deliver His people from spiritual Babylon. The waters which support Babylon, said by the angel to represent "peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues" will "dry up," as eyes are opened to the system of falsehood to which they've pledged their allegiance.

God allowed this planet to continue in order to bring to light two important demonstrations, two lessons that answer the charges brought by Satan in his rebellion. It was important that sin be allowed to blossom and bear fruit, so that forever the question brought by Satan would be answered, who proposed what he thought was a new and better way. And the answer is that sin brings nothing but misery and death. Throughout these 6,000 years the evidence has accumulated showing that to be true. After the close of probation, when the angels release the "winds" of human passion unrestrained from the Holy Spirit, even more and convincing proof will be made visible. In Revelation 14, the wicked, whose blood will flow freely, are represented by the harvest of the grapes.

Secondly, Satan charged God that His law was unfair and impossible to keep. Though there have been some who have lived righteously through the ages, God designates a representative group, referred to as the harvest of the wheat, who live faithfully to Him even after the door of mercy closes. God's purpose for this earth will have been completed in the two great demonstrations. Jesus will come in glory. What a day that will be! Ask Jesus to prepare your heart for that day!