

## **THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES**

We live under the umbrella of God's protective hand in that His angels are holding back the winds of strife. Because of God's mercy that flows from the cross the disasters that we see on every hand are usually limited and local in nature.

"And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God." Revelation 15:1.

Now John sees seven angels bearing the plagues of God's wrath upon the inhabitants of the earth. But before this unmitigated torrent falls it is revealed to John those who are victoriously delivered by the seven last plagues. The victors are presented proleptically, before the fact, that they may be encouraged.

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." Revelation 15:2.

These are the 144,000 who stand upon the parade ground of the "sea of glass" before God's throne. They are composed of four classes: 1) Those who got "the victory over the beast." That is the leopard beast, papal Rome (Rev. 13:1), which the whole world is compelled to worship. There will be many sincere Roman Catholics who will join the 144,000. 2) Those who have gotten the victory "over his image." That is the lamb beast, the New Roman Empire, which forsakes its core principles of civil freedom and religious liberty and combines church and state. There are many genuine Protestants in the churches who will take their stand for truth. 3) Those who have gotten the victory "over his mark." That is the defining identification mark of worshiping the papacy—Sunday worship. Those who have worshiped on Sunday will see that the seventh day Sabbath is the seal of God. 4) Those who have gotten the victory "over the number of his name." Those who are within the highest circles of the Vatican will forsake the worship of man and fall at the feet of Jesus.

"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints." Revelation 15:3.

Throughout the experience of the 144,000 we are reminded of Israel's deliverance from Egypt under Moses' leadership. Following the exodus and mighty miracle of God in drowning Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, Israel sang a song of deliverance and victory proclaiming the justice and mercy of God. Likewise the 144,000 will sing a song of deliverance because of God's plagues poured out on the inhabitants of the earth. Only the 144,000 may sing this song of Moses and the Lamb because it is a song of experience which they alone have endured. The song of the Lamb is His cross. And they have come through His cross experience. With the death decree posted against those who will not receive the mark of the beast, they have steadfastly worshiped God on His Sabbath day. Thus they loved not their lives unto the death. They have laid it all upon the altar of sacrifice for God. Self is not dear to them. Jesus is more precious to them than all else.

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." Revelation 15:4.

To "fear God" is to love God. To love Jesus is to keep His commandments for they are the great principles of love to God and love to our fellowman. This is how His name and character are to be glorified. The first angel's message of Revelation 14:7 has accomplished its mission.

Three reasons are given why they love and glorify God: 1) "for thou art holy;" 2) "for all nations shall come and worship before thee;" and 3) "for thy judgments are made manifest."

"And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened." Revelation 15:5.

Repeated attention has been drawn to the temple of God in heaven as it has been opened to our attention. Our faith is to be fixed upon Jesus as our High Priest in the second apartment of that Most Holy Place. This is where we learn precious present truth for our time. This is the White House of the universe where all the administrative decisions and universal policy-making is made. Only this West Wing is open for all to see. Nothing is done behind closed doors. God wants us to see beforehand His work of cleansing and deliverance.

"And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles." Revelation 15:6.

The purity of their clothing befits the purpose of their mission which is purification. They are on a punitive mission.

“And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.” Revelation 15:7.

One of the four living beings, a representative from this earth, participates by giving the seven bowls of God’s wrath to the seven angels. During days of mercy and salvation these bowls of intercession carried the prayers of the saints mingled with the incense of Christ’s sacrifice. This marks a transition now that these bowls contain “the wrath of God.” This indicates the days of salvation are passed.

“And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.” Revelation 15:7.

Before it is possible for the seven last plagues to be poured out, Jesus must cease His work as Saviour and High Priest. That is why John says, “No one was able to enter the temple, till the seven plagues . . . were completed.” So long as Christ bears the world’s guilt in the sanctuary, full retribution cannot fall on a guilty world.

Just before Jesus leaves the sanctuary to make way for the pouring out of the plagues, He pauses to pronounce this decree: “He who is unjust let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still, he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still” (Rev. 22:11).

From that moment on, it is too late to seek forgiveness, too late to confess. Even those who gain the victory over the beast, his image, and his mark, must now live without a High Priest or Intercessor to plead for them. The reason is simple: The ministry of Christ as High Priest has at that time come to an end. Now He will lay aside His priestly garments and clothe Himself with the robes of a King. That is why it will be too late for the confession and forgiveness of sin, too late for our robes to be washed in the blood of the Lamb. Now is the time for that blessed work!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being

Living on the earth after the close of probation “without a mediator” has caused some anxiety for not a few. The idea is that there is no more repentance, there are no more conversions, there is no more forgiveness of sins. But those who are sealed have spotless characters having washed them in the blood of the Lamb. They choose not to sin, therefore they are not repenting of known committed sin. That was all taken care of by Jesus before He laid off His priestly garments. The saints are not standing in their own righteousness *per se*, it is the imparted righteousness of Christ by which they have perfect their characters.

“And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.” Revelation 16:1.

Never has the Lord been forced to give a command that He dislikes so much to give as this one! He “is longsuffering toward us not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). He said long ago, “I have no pleasure in the death of the one who dies, says the Lord God. Therefore turn and live” (Ezekiel 18:32). If He could have His way He would save everybody: “God our Saviour . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:3, 4). The only reason anyone will ever suffer the seven last plagues is that he has resisted and rejected the salvation that the Lord has already given him.

The work of salvation cannot close so long as there is one human soul somewhere who will yet respond to the good news of the grace of Christ.

So long as the Holy Spirit has been working in the earth, judgments and disasters have brought many people to think and to repent. It has been true up until this time, as Isaiah says, that “when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9). But before the last plagues can be poured out, the Holy Spirit will have been driven finally from the earth by the rejection of the wicked. It will then be demonstrated that troubles will not bring to repentance those who have rejected God’s goodness, for only “the goodness of God leads you to repentance”

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removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon earth.” Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 425.

(Romans 2:4). Satan will then have full control over the inhabitants of the earth. "They did not repent" (Rev. 16:9).

What would this world be like if it were not for the restraining power of the Holy Spirit? Multitudes do not realize that they owe all their security and happiness under what measure of law and order prevails, to the blessed ministry of God's Spirit in the earth. During the time of the plagues, all will see clearly that when men give themselves up to the control of Satan, they will themselves produce a hell here on earth.<sup>2</sup>

It may be asked why God would torment men in the fearful manner described in the seven last plagues after the close of human probation, when there will be no opportunity for repentance. Why does Christ not come and terminate the reign of sin immediately?

In OT times various calamities, such as invasion, famine, pestilence, earthquake, and other natural disasters, were often permitted by God as remedial, disciplinary agencies to bring men to repentance. Quite obviously the seven last plagues can serve no such beneficent purpose.

The first four plagues are preliminary in nature and lead men to realize that they have been fighting against God. But instead of repenting they curse Him more bitterly than ever and become even more resolute in their opposition. The plagues serve to reveal the spirit of rebellion which fully controls their hearts. God's just in destroying them is made evident.

The trials of the great time of trouble attending the plagues, perfect the characters of the saints, and leads them to trust more confidently in God.

This is the time of Jacob's trouble. The reason for Jacob's great fear of his brother was because of unbelief. His sins had separated him from God. The hand of the Lord was heavy upon him, and it was indeed the time of Jacob's trouble. This robust shepherd was attacked by night when he so much wanted to make things right with the Lord. And he still thought that he could do it by his own strength. It wasn't until the Lord put his hip out of joint that this wrestler, this

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<sup>2</sup> "The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when he permits. There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere. {GC88 614.2}

strong man, became weak and clung to the Lord with all the strength that remained in his upper body.

And the Lord tested his faith saying, "Let me go" (Gen. 32:26). "And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Forgive me of my sins. I need justifying.

"And he said unto him, What is thy name?

And he said, Jacob." Sir, I am the Trickster, the Liar, the Deceiver. That is all that I am and no more.

And the Lord said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. . . And he blessed him there." Gen. 32:28, 29.

"As Satan accuses the people of God on account of their sins, the Lord permits him to try them to the uttermost. Their confidence in God, their faith and firmness, will be severely tested. As they review the past, their hopes sink; for in their whole lives they can see little good. They are fully conscious of their weakness and unworthiness. Satan endeavors to terrify them with the thought that their cases are hopeless, that the stain of their defilement will never be washed away. He hopes so to destroy their faith that they will yield to his temptations and turn from their allegiance to God."

"Though God's people will be surrounded by enemies who are bent upon their destruction, yet the anguish which they suffer is not a dread of persecution for the truth's sake; they fear that every sin has not been repented of, and that through some fault in themselves they will fail to realize the fulfillment of the Saviour's promise: I 'will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world.' Revelation 3:10. If they could have the assurance of pardon they would not shrink from torture or death; but should they prove unworthy, and lose their lives because of their own defects of character, then God's holy name would be reproached."

"So, in the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment and have been blotted out, and they cannot bring them to remembrance."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Great Controversy*, pp. 618, 619, 620.

As willingness to die for another is the supreme manifestation of love, so the intent to take another's life marks the ultimate degree of hatred. During the last two plagues a situation develops that makes this distinction fully apparent, even to the participants themselves, and the justice of God in terminating human history is thus made evident to men as well as angels. It will then be demonstrated before the universe that, to a man, the remnant people would rather die than disobey God, and that those who have chosen the service of Satan would, if permitted, slay all who stand in the way of their purpose to control the earth. Caught in the very act of attempting to execute the death decree, they stand without excuse before God.

The line is thus clearly drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not, and through the unconverted the devil is permitted to demonstrate what the universe would be like should he be allowed to control it.

"And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image." Revelation 16:2.

Just as the boils afflicted only Egyptians and not the Israelites, so the malignant sore of the first of the last plagues afflicts only those having the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. They have tried to destroy God's people. This plague carries out the threat forewarned in the third angel's message.

"And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea." Revelation 16:3.

Those who worship the beast and his image and have received the mark of the beast thirsted for the blood of believers in Christ. Though no lives were taken because of the seal of God upon the saints, still the motive of the wicked counts for the act of murder.

The second plague impacts all marine life and the seas. This will shut off the food supply for most of the world's population in that the fisheries will be closed and the sea lanes will be coagulated blood.

"And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood." Revelation 16:4.

Under the third plague the sources of fresh water become polluted with blood. Life cannot be sustained upon earth very long without water. Of all the orbs in the universe earth is the one planet blessed with so much fresh water. I asked my father, "What is the source of all

the fresh water of the great lakes?" He said, the drainage basin is thousands of square miles of river systems and lakes extending all the way from the northern United States into the far north of Canada.

But note God's promise to His people. The child of God "will dwell on high; his place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; bread will be given him, his water will be sure" (Isa. 33:16).

Although we can hardly conceive of the horrors of that state of things, when the pools and fountains and rivers of water shall be loathsome and stagnant blood, the justice of God will stand vindicated, and his judgments approved. Even the angels are heard exclaiming,

"And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy." Revelation 16:5, 6.

In motive and purpose they do shed the blood of saints and prophets. The term, prophets, shows that the spirit of prophecy will be revived, and that there will be prophets in the remnant church.

"And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments." Revelation 16:7.

Here the voice from the altar affirms that the prayers of God's people are finally answered in the plagues. God is beginning to execute the fullness of his disfavor against the oppressors of His people. Justice is being completely vindicated.

"And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give Him glory." Revelation 16:8, 9.

Sunspots on the surface of that great star are giant craters which could swallow up the earth with room to spare. They represent changes in the temperature by a thousand degrees. When they explode into the sun's atmosphere there are giant arches called solar flares which sent out radiant heat which penetrates to this earth. In the days of the four plague the sun will be out of control and this earth



will feels its withering effects. With no water to drink the earth will be a woeful place of existence.<sup>4</sup>

It will be readily apparent that when disasters strike a people should turn to their God. In this case men blasphemed the name of God. Even Pharaoh pled for Moses to intercede with God to turn away the judgments which came upon Egypt, but the hardened hearts of men at the time of the last plagues will not even do that.

“And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.” Revelation 16:10, 11.

The plagues do not at once destroy all their victims; for some who were at first smitten with sores, we find still living under the fifth vial, and gnawing their tongues for pain.

The seat of the beast is the literal kingdom of Rome. It falls first upon his throne, then strikes through to all the inhabitants of his kingdom. This apostate and his followers had rejected the light of God; now God deprives them of physical light. The darkness into which they are plunged must be actual darkness for they are already spiritually darkened.

Under this plague those wicked men break forth into open blasphemy. Not that the plagues come to drive them into blasphemy, but to disclose the blasphemy already in their hearts. The day of repentance is gone. The time to make right all wrongs was before Jesus left the mercy seat. Now it is too late. There is not even a thought in these wicked men’s hearts to turn to God.

And what of the righteous during this time? “Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those who have kept the word of Christ’s patience. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and have heard their prayers. They are waiting the word of their Commander to snatch them from their peril. But they must wait yet a little longer. The people of God must drink of the cup and be baptized with the baptism. The very delay, so painful to them, is the best answer to their petitions. As they endeavor to wait trustingly for

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<sup>4</sup> “These plagues are not universal, or the inhabitants of the earth would be wholly cut off. Yet they will be the most awful scourges that have ever been known to mortals.” *The Great Controversy*, pp. 628, 629.

the Lord to work they are led to exercise faith, hope, and patience, which have been too little exercised during their religious experience. Yet for the elect's sake the time of trouble will be shortened."<sup>5</sup>

"And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." Revelation 16:12.

This sixth plague is most intriguing. It involves the drying up of the Euphrates river preparing the way for the kings of the east.<sup>6</sup> Regarding unfulfilled prophecy we should not be so dogmatic. Prophecy is given so that when it comes to pass it confirms our faith in God's word and encourages us. But when we set forth our assertions with such positiveness and events do not turn out as predicted, it tends to destroy the confidence that people have in Bible prophecy. Take for example, the predictions made by Hal Lindsey regarding the U.S.S.R. invading Israel. Or, the doomsday predictions made surrounding Y2K. These non-fulfillments do not boost the confidence of believers in Bible prophecy.

We may say this. Cyrus of old with his armies diverted the Euphrates River from its channel flowing through Babylon, in order to dry up the river bed and provide access to the inner city preparatory to its fall in the days of Belshazzar.

The modern Euphrates River is not a large river being only one third the length of the Mississippi River. The Euphrates has been crossed by armies from time immemorial. So the drying up of the literal river Euphrates seems inconsequential to the ebb and flow of world history.

However, if the waters of the Euphrates is viewed symbolically; as representing peoples, nations, tongues; then the drying up of such human support from Babylon would precipitate her fall. This would prepare the way for the "kings of the east" identified as Christ and His armies which assemble for the great battle of Armageddon.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 630, 631.

<sup>6</sup> "And still clearer, inspiration says it will be done in one day. Proof. 'And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, come out of her my people .... that ye receive not or' her plagues .... Therefore shall her plagues come in *one day*, death and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire,' &c. Rev. viii, 4, 8. We believe this to be a prophetic day of twelve months, because famine does not cause death in a twenty-hour day. See also Isa. 63:4; 34:8; 21:16." Joseph Bates, "Voice of the Prophets, Vol. 1, No. 1," *Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald* 16, 12 (August 7, 1860), p. 90.

The river Euphrates represents the Ottoman Empire under the sixth trumpet. A date is fixed for its ascendancy at the beginning of the 391 years, 1449 A.D., when Othman was their king. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire came on August 11, 1840, when the European powers took control of Constantinople at her request.<sup>7</sup>

Since the fifth and sixth trumpets deal with Islam, the third “woe” of the seventh trumpet, is a subsequent reemergence of Islamic power at the end of time culminating in utter overthrow of all the kingdoms of the world and Christ’s kingdom being established (Rev. 11:15). We read, “And the seventh angel sounded” (Rev. 11:15), “and the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come” (Rev. 11:18).

Adventist pioneers saw the Euphrates representing the Ottoman Empire. Islam is flexing her power in resisting the coalition forces from the West from invading Allah’s sacred lands. Whether the drying up of Islamic resistance will prepare the way for the assemblage of “the kings of the east” or “the kings of the earth” (Rev. 16:14), remains for the future.<sup>8</sup>

“If the blood of Christ’s faithful witnesses were shed at this time, it would not, like the blood of the martyrs, be as seed sown to yield a harvest for God. Their fidelity would not be a testimony to convince others of the truth; for the obdurate heart has beaten back the waves

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<sup>7</sup> “In the year 1840 another remarkable fulfillment of prophecy excited widespread interest. Two years before, Josiah Litch, one of the leading ministers preaching the second advent, published an exposition of Revelation 9, predicting the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to his calculations, this power was to be overthrown ‘in A.D. 1840, sometime in the month of August;’ and only a few days previous to its accomplishment he wrote: ‘Allowing the first period, 150 years, to have been exactly fulfilled before Deacoze ascended the throne by permission of the Turks, and that the 391 years, fifteen days, commenced at the close of the first period, it will end on the 11th of August, 1840, when the Ottoman power in Constantinople may be expected to be broken. And this, I believe, will be found to be the case.’—Josiah Litch, in *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, Aug. 1, 1840.

“At the very time specified, Turkey, through her ambassadors, accepted the protection of the allied powers of Europe, and thus placed herself under the control of Christian nations. The event exactly fulfilled the prediction.” Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 334, 335.

<sup>8</sup> “The drying up of the river in this sense would be the consumption of the Turkish empire, accompanied with more or less destruction of its subjects. Thus we should have literal judgments upon men, as the result of this plague, as in the case of all the rest.” James White, “Thoughts on the Revelation. Chapter XVI,” *The Review and Herald* 21, 1 (December 2, 1862), p. 5.

of mercy until they return no more. If the righteous were now left to fall a prey to their enemies, it would be a triumph for the prince of darkness. . . . Glorious will be the deliverance of those who have patiently waited for His coming and whose names are written in the book of life.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The Great Controversy*, p. 634.