



READINGS

for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 2 to
Sabbath, December 10, 2022

**"Looking for that blessed hope,
and the glorious appearing of the great
God and Savior, Jesus Christ."**

Titus 2:13

Introduction

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:13.

"Eternal realities must be held before the mind's eye, and the attractions of the world will appear as they are—together profitless.... We are pilgrims and strangers who are waiting, hoping, and praying for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If we believe this and bring it into our practical life, what vigorous action would this faith and hope inspire, what fervent love one for another; what careful holy living for the glory of God; and ... what distinct lines of demarcation would be evidenced between us and the world!" —*That I May Know Him*, p. 357.

Our thoughts, desires, and hopes shape our daily lives in an imperceptible way, even as we tend to conform to the circumstances, events, and situations in which we find ourselves. Therefore, it is very important to consider the moment in which we are living, for we are surrounded by unprecedented changes in society. Soon God will intervene directly on earth, and we need to consider the implications of this in our own existence, especially on the highest level—the spiritual level. For instance, what priorities drive my decisions? How do I plan my life with God now and forever? What is my level of spirituality? These and other important questions need to be answered clearly and decisively for the new year ahead. Both practical and spiritual aspects of the present and the future are fundamental in the attitude that we will have as prophecies are fulfilled before our eyes. Do I know what events lie just ahead? What do I think about the current and coming crises? Our answers must be clear, for the Bible declares: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that

wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." Luke 12:35, 36.

"Now is the time to prepare for the coming of our Lord. Readiness to meet Him cannot be attained in a moment's time. Preparatory to that solemn scene there must be vigilant waiting and watching, combined with earnest work. So God's children glorify Him. Amid the busy scenes of life their voices will be heard speaking words of encouragement, faith, and hope. All they have and are is consecrated to the Master's service...." —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 353.

The days dedicated to the Week of Prayer are special opportunities to assemble together in church, in homes, or virtually. With a spirit of reverence, a willingness to learn, and a desire to participate actively, let each one pray earnestly and share his or her thoughts regarding the subject matter of the Readings. The last Sabbath will be a day of fasting, prayer, and giving. The Reading on that day should be presented as the sermon for the second service and conclude with the gathering of the special offering dedicated to the opening and support of new fields by the General Conference. Please place your contribution in an envelope on which you write a Bible verse that expresses your spiritual desire and experience. "Both riches and honour come of Thee, and Thou reignest over all; and in Thine hand is power and might; and in Thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." 1 Chronicles 29:12.

—*The brothers and sisters of the General Conference*

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READINGS

for the Week of Prayer

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The Early Rain

By Ellen G. White

In the East the former rain falls at the sowing time. It is necessary in order that the seed may germinate. Under the influence of the fertilizing showers, the tender shoot springs up. The latter rain, falling near the close of the season, ripens the grain and prepares it for the sickle. The Lord employs these operations of nature to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. As the dew and the rain are given first to cause the seed to germinate, and then to ripen the harvest, so the Holy Spirit is given to carry forward, from one stage to another, the process of spiritual growth. The ripening of the grain represents the completion of the work of God's grace in the soul. By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ.

The latter rain, ripening earth's harvest, represents the spiritual grace that prepares the church for the coming of the Son of man. But unless the former rain has fallen, there will be no life; the green blade will not spring up. Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection.

There is to be "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." There must be a constant development of Christian virtue, a constant advancement in Christian experience. This we should seek with intensity of desire, that we may adorn the doctrine of Christ our Saviour.

Many have in a great measure failed to receive the former rain. They have not obtained all the benefits that God has thus provided for them. They expect that the lack will be supplied by the latter rain. When the richest abundance of grace shall be bestowed, they intend to open their hearts to receive it. They are making a terrible mistake. The work that God has begun in the human heart in giving His light and knowledge must be continually going forward. Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now. Then the human agent had only to ask for the blessing, and wait for the Lord to perfect the work concerning him. It is God who began the work, and He will finish His work, making man complete in Jesus Christ. But there must be no neglect of the grace represented by the former rain. Only those who are living up to the light they have will receive greater light. Unless we are daily advancing in the exemplification of the active Christian virtues, we shall not recognize the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the latter rain. It may be falling on hearts all around us, but we shall not discern or receive it.

THE EARLY RAIN EXPERIENCE

At no point in our experience can we dispense with the assistance of that which enables us to make the first start. The blessings received under the former rain are needful to us to the end. Yet these alone will not suffice. While we cherish the blessing of the early rain, we must not, on the other hand, lose sight of the fact that without the latter rain, to fill out the ears and ripen the grain, the harvest will not be ready for the sickle, and the labor of the sower will have been in vain. Divine grace is needed at the beginning, divine grace at every step of advance, and divine grace alone can complete the work. There is no place for us to rest in a careless attitude. We must never forget the warnings of Christ, "Watch unto prayer," "Watch,... and pray always." A connection with the divine agency every moment is essential to our progress. We may have had a measure of the Spirit of God, but by prayer and faith we are continually to seek more of the Spirit. It will never do to cease our efforts. If we do not progress, if we do not place ourselves in an attitude to receive both the former and the latter rain, we shall lose our souls, and the responsibility will lie at our own door.

"Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain." Do not rest satisfied that in the ordinary course of the season, rain will fall. Ask for it. The growth and perfection of the seed rests not with the husbandman. God alone can ripen the harvest. But man's cooperation is required. God's work for us demands the action of our mind, the exercise of our faith. We must seek His favors with the whole heart if the showers of grace are to come to us. We should improve every opportunity of placing ourselves in the channel of blessing. Christ has said, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst." The convocations of the church, as in camp meetings, the assemblies of the home church, and all occasions where there is personal labor for souls, are God's appointed opportunities for giving the early and the latter rain.

But let none think that in attending these gatherings, their duty is done. A mere attendance upon all the meetings that are held will not in itself bring a blessing to the soul. It is not an immutable law that all who attend general gatherings or local meetings shall receive large supplies from heaven. The circumstances may seem to be favorable for a rich outpouring of the showers of grace. But God Himself must command the rain to fall. Therefore we should not be remiss in supplication. We are not to trust to the ordinary working of providence. We must pray that God will unseal the fountain of the water of life. And we must ourselves receive of the living water. Let us, with contrite hearts, pray most earnestly that now, in the time of the latter rain, the showers of grace

may fall upon us. At every meeting we attend our prayers should ascend, that at this very time God will impart warmth and moisture to our souls. As we seek God for the Holy Spirit, it will work in us meekness, humbleness of mind, a conscious dependence upon God for the perfecting latter rain. If we pray for the blessing in faith, we shall receive it as God has promised.

The continued communication of the Holy Spirit to the church is represented by the prophet Zechariah under another figure, which contains a wonderful lesson of encouragement for us. The prophet says: "The angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof. So I answered and spake to the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?... Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.... And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves?... Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth."

From the two olive trees, the golden oil was emptied through golden pipes into the bowl of the candlestick and thence into the golden lamps that gave light to the sanctuary. So from the holy ones that stand in God's presence, His Spirit is imparted to human instrumentalities that are consecrated to His service. The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate light and power to God's people. It is to receive blessing for us that they stand in God's presence. As the olive trees empty themselves into the golden pipes, so the heavenly messengers seek to communicate all that they receive from God. The whole heavenly treasure awaits our demand and reception; and as we receive the blessing, we in our turn are to impart it. Thus it is that the holy lamps are fed, and the church becomes a light bearer in the world.

This is the work that the Lord would have every soul prepared to do at this time, when the four angels are holding the four winds, that they shall not blow until the servants of God are sealed in their foreheads. There is no time now for self-pleasing. The lamps of the soul must be trimmed. They must be supplied with the oil of grace. Every precaution must be taken to prevent spiritual declension, lest the great day of the Lord overtake us as a thief in the night. Every witness for God is now to work intelligently in the lines which God has appointed. We should daily obtain a deep and liv-

ing experience in the work of perfecting Christian character. We should daily receive the holy oil, that we may impart to others. All may be light bearers to the world if they will. We are to sink self out of sight in Jesus. We are to receive the word of the Lord in counsel and instruction, and gladly communicate it. There is now need of much prayer. Christ commands, "Pray without ceasing;" that is, keep the mind uplifted to God, the source of all power and efficiency. —*Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.

In obedience to Christ's command, they [the disciples] waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father—the outpouring of the Spirit. They did not wait in idleness. The record says that they were "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God." Luke 24:53....

As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief....

The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 35-37 (1911).

... It was after the disciples had come into perfect unity, when they were no longer striving for the highest place, that the Spirit was poured out. —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 20 (1904).

The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of the early, or former, rain, and glorious was the result. To the end of time the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church....

RESULTS OF THE EARLY RAIN

Under the influence of the Spirit, words of penitence and confession mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven.... Thousands were converted in a day....

The Holy Spirit ... enabled them to speak with fluency languages with which they had heretofore been unacquainted....

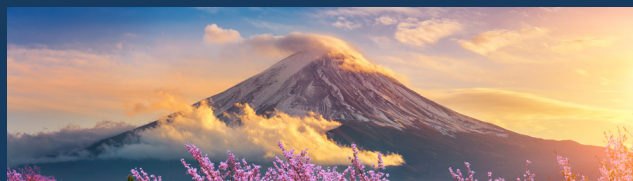
The Holy Spirit did for them that which they could not have accomplished for themselves in a lifetime....

Their hearts were surcharged with a benevolence so full, so deep, so far-reaching, that it impelled them to go to the ends of the earth, testifying to the power of Christ....

What was the result of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost? The glad tidings of a risen Saviour were carried to the uttermost parts of the inhabited world.... The church beheld converts flocking to her from all directions. Backsliders were reconverted.... The ambition of the believers was to reveal the likeness of Christ's character and to labor for the enlargement of His kingdom. —*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 54, 38, 39, 46, 48 (1911). Amen.

"The lamps of the soul must be trimmed. They must be supplied with the oil of grace."

—*Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.



Signs of the Times

By Humberto Avellaneda

Human beings have always wanted to know what will happen in the future. When will the world come to an end? What signs do we have of the end of the world? And there are other questions. In the Old Testament, when the people of Israel needed to go to war, they looked to the prophet for confirmation or asked God directly for an answer, as did King David. "... Wilt Thou deliver them into mine hand? And the Lord said unto him, Go up; for I will deliver them into thine hand." 1 Chronicles 14:10.

In the New Testament, Jesus rebuked the Jews because they knew how to discern appearances in the sky but were ignorant concerning the signs of the times. That is, they did not recognize the signs of His visitation. "The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Matthew 16:1-3.

"At the time of Christ's first advent the priests and scribes of the Holy City, to whom were entrusted the oracles of God, might have discerned the signs of the times and proclaimed the coming of the Promised One....

"All the people should have been watching and waiting that they might be among the first to welcome the world's Redeemer. But, lo, at Bethlehem two weary travelers from the hills of Nazareth traverse the whole length of the narrow street to the eastern extremity of the town, vainly seeking a place of rest and shelter for the night. No doors are open to receive them. In a wretched hovel prepared for cattle, they at last find refuge, and there the Saviour of the world is born." —*Maranatha*, p. 10.

WHAT WE SHOULD WORK ON

The words of the Lord are for us as well. They show that it is very important to know the signs of the times. Jesus emphasized that, just as there are signs in the sky, we must know the signs of the times, the prophetic signs, and current events. That is how we can recognize where we are and where we are going so that we will not lose our way.

I read a story recently about a young man who was traveling by train. He was totally focused on what he was reading when the ticket inspector came down the aisle and asked him for his ticket. The man searched his pockets nervously again and again without being able to find the ticket. Finally, the ticket inspector told him, "Sir, don't worry. When you find it, you can send it to the company. I am sure that you have it."

Totally dismayed, the young man replied, "The ticket is not the problem, but that I do not know where I am going! I do not know where I am going!" The poor man had forgotten his destination.

The same thing can happen to us. It is possible to be so focused on the present that we forget where we are going. We forget the prophecies, even as they are being fulfilled around us, the prophecies that inform us of His soon coming.

"Satan invents unnumbered schemes to occupy our minds, that they may not dwell upon the very work with which we ought to be best acquainted." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 488.

For example, have we ever wondered what all the shootings that are happening mean? How is it possible for a person to take a gun and go to a school or a shopping center and start shooting without mercy, snuffing out the lives of innocent people?

Another concern today is the tremendous economic crisis that the world is going through. The following item appeared in an international newspaper: "Inflation is shooting up to 7% in the United States, and prices have risen to the highest level in the last four decades." With the current crises brought on by war, we do not know how high inflation will rise in the world. This is the reality in 2022, and it is not a problem just for the United States but for the whole world.

DISEASES

"And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." Luke 21:11.

The diseases that are everywhere today have found medical science with few remedies. Thousands and millions of people are dying without being sealed for heaven. The coronavirus pandemic, in addition to changing the world in many aspects, has caused many deaths. This is how Satan works. The Spirit of prophecy says: "Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. When he was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children, were swept away, one trouble succeeding another as in a moment. It is God that shields His creatures and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer....

"While appearing to the children of men as a great physician who can heal all their maladies, he will bring disease and disaster, until populous cities are reduced to ruin and desolation. Even now he is at work. In accidents and calamities by sea and by land, in great conflagrations, in fierce

tornadoes and terrific hailstorms, in tempests, floods, cyclones, tidal waves, and earthquakes, Satan is exercising his power. He sweeps away the ripening harvest, and famine and distress follow. He imparts to the air a deadly taint, and thousands perish by the pestilence. These visitations are to become more and more frequent and disastrous." —*Counsels on Health*, p. 460.

FEW UNDERSTAND THE SIGNS

All of these signs of the times show in what moment of history we are living, for Satan is now working in every possible way.

Have you ever wondered about the sophisticated means of communication that have been developed while, unfortunately, there is a lack of communication between husbands and wives, parents and children? How is it possible that the many communications systems and devices in the world have stolen communication from the family? Do you see this as a problem that is destroying thousands of homes? One of Satan's primary targets is the family. This is why we see such attacks multiplying in that direction within his destructive arsenal. He has perverted the marriage institution as God established it in Eden to the point where governments allow and promote the legalization of different types of marriage. The same thing is happening with the legalization of abortion in numerous countries. Every time such issues advance, it is like an ever-worsening terminal cancer is destroying families and society. Governments consider such things as positive advancements for the people, but the Scriptures say: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Isaiah 5:20.

Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, I believe that we need to carefully and prayerfully study the signs that are for our time, otherwise what happened to the people of Israel in the time of Jesus can happen to us, as the inspired pen says: "Oh, how few know the time of their visitation! How few, even among those who claim to believe present truth, understand the signs of the times or what we are to experience before the end! We are under divine forbearance; but how long will the angels of God continue to hold the winds, that they shall not blow?" —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 426.

"God's people must take warning and discern the signs of the times. The signs of Christ's coming are too plain to be doubted; and in view of these things every one who professes the truth should be a living preacher. God calls upon all, both preachers and people, to awake. All heaven is astir. The scenes of earth's history are fast closing. We are amid the perils of the last days. Greater perils are before us, and yet we are not awake." —*Christian Service*, p. 37.

God has not given the signs of the times to be an end in themselves but to direct the people's attention to that which is much better and greater. These signs are like road signs placed on a highway. Imagine a person traveling by car in an unknown country; if he does not have a GPS device and if the road does not have signs, he could hardly reach his destination. In His great love for people traveling from

this world to the heavenly Canaan, God has provided the signs showing where His people are now in reference to the final events of the world's history.

WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

The signs of the times declare that we are on the threshold of great, solemn events. In this world, everything is in motion and agitation. Before our eyes, the prophecy is being fulfilled in which the Saviour told what would happen just before His coming: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Matthew 24:6, 7.

As I am writing this article, the morning's newspapers carried the following headlines: "Russia Attacks Ukraine," "Conflict in Eastern Europe," "Russian Bombing of Ukraine." In the last few days, the whole world has had its attention drawn not to the pandemic but to countries at war. People wonder, Will other countries intervene in Europe? Will the conflict turn into a world war? Where will all of this stop? Because of this war, the economic crisis will get worse throughout the world. No one knows how much humanity can endure as thousands of people are dying and millions of others are fleeing to other countries in search of a safe place. Brothers and sisters, there is something I want to mention at this time. Just as the pandemic brought about significant changes especially in the political world that will probably never be removed, so this war will cause changes throughout the world that will affect everyone in numerous different ways. People will also suffer hunger, anxiety, and anguish, as the sacred Scriptures say: "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth:..." Luke 21:26. That's right, dear brothers and sisters! The prophecies are being fulfilled in every direction that we look.

The Spirit of prophecy tells us: "We are standing upon the threshold of great and solemn events. Prophecies are fulfilling. Strange, eventful history is being recorded in the books of heaven. Everything in our world is in agitation. There are wars and rumors of wars. The nations are angry, and the time of the dead has come, that they should be judged. Events are changing to bring about the day of God, which hasteth greatly. Only a moment of time, as it were, yet remains. But while already nation is rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, there is not now a general engagement. As yet the four winds are held until the servants of God shall be sealed in their foreheads. Then the powers of earth will marshal their forces for the last great battle." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 14.

"The great controversy is nearing its end. Every report of calamity by sea or land is a testimony to the fact that the end of all things is at hand. Wars and rumors of wars declare it.... The Lord is coming. We hear the footsteps of an approaching God." —(*Review and Herald*, November 12, 1914) *Our High Calling*, p. 346.

"The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude. The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones." —(*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 11) *Christian Service*, p. 52.

A CALL TO THE CHURCH

We could give a whole list of events that are happening in the world that fulfill prophecy and are signs of the end times; but right now, as we are about to end another year, I want to call the attention of my brothers and sisters around the world to the words of the Lord Jesus: "And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:28.

The question is: What should we be doing as a people? What is our duty as a church in these last times? It is true that the end will not necessarily come immediately, or in a few days or weeks; but we have to understand that the signs are being fulfilled in front of us.

Dear ones, we cannot be indifferent when we see that we have what the world needs and that we have what our relatives, neighbors, and friends lack in these times of affliction. We cannot dedicate ourselves to the things of the world more than we do to the things of the kingdom of God! The Lord has given us a very important responsibility that no one else can fulfill for us.

The signs of the times tell us that Christ is at the door, and that also means that much more difficult times are ahead. "We are living in the time of the end. The fast-fulfilling signs of the times declare that the coming of Christ is near at hand. The days in which we live are solemn and important. The Spirit of God is gradually but surely being withdrawn from the earth. Plagues and judgments are already falling

upon the despisers of the grace of God. The calamities by land and sea, the unsettled state of society, the alarms of war, are portentous. They forecast approaching events of the greatest magnitude." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 11.

God invites everyone, ministers and laymen alike, to wake up. All heaven is shaken. The scenes of this earth's history are rapidly drawing to a close. "What shall I say to arouse the remnant people of God? I was shown that dreadful scenes are before us; Satan and his angels are bringing all their powers to bear upon God's people. He knows that if they sleep a little longer he is sure of them, for their destruction is certain." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 262.

"We are nearing the most important crisis that has ever come upon the world. If we are not wide awake and watching, it will steal upon us as a thief. Satan is preparing to work through his human agencies in secrecy...." —*Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 414.

"In the last scenes of this earth's history, war will rage. There will be pestilence, plague, and famine. The waters of the deep will overflow their boundaries. Property and life will be destroyed by fire and flood. We should be preparing for the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare for them that love Him. There is a rest from earth's conflict." —(*Review and Herald*, October 19, 1897) *Maranatha*, p. 174.

To the scribes and Pharisees who demanded signs before they would believe in Him, Jesus told them that the only sign they would be given was the sign of Jonah. But the Lord has loved us so much that He has given us much more than one sign so that we may believe Him. Let us understand the importance of the times in which we live.

"And, behold, I come quickly," Jesus said. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:12, 20.

God help us to say, as did John, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Amen.

"We are nearing the most important crisis that has ever come upon the world. If we are not wide awake and watching, it will steal upon us as a thief. Satan is preparing to work through his human agencies in secrecy...."

—*Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 414.



The Test of Faith

By Jose Vicente Giner

A BLATANT SATANIC GOAL

The enemy has always sought ways to distort and misrepresent God's character, to present Him as a Being who is revengeful, hard, and ruthless. The great adversary has tried to attribute to God all the misfortunes that afflict human beings, to make them appear as caused by the One who created this planet and all life on it. Thus, impressions and opinions have arisen that have led thousands and thousands of souls to believe that, if God really exists, He is cruel and ruthless for allowing suffering to exist and millions of people in the world to suffer from disease, catastrophe, war, pain, and death.

The Bible and the Spirit of prophecy confirms this. In the first case, we find the story of Job, a righteous, godly man, who was put to the test and suffered the most unspeakable affliction. It was not God who caused his misfortunes, but Satan, because he hated Job, who loved and served the true God. The devil hates everyone who loves God, and he will do everything possible to make man suffer and then blame the One who gave him life. Also, in the book of Genesis we find the story of the young Joseph, who was sold as a slave by his brothers. After this terrible mistreatment, worse things followed. He went from one suffering to another like a trunk floating in the sea and being battered again and again by the waves. King David is another Biblical example of one who was hit hard by the hammer of suffering. He prophesied the words of Jesus in Psalm 22:1: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" For the psalmist it was incomprehensible to understand why God did not intervene to end suffering.

Several centuries later, the descendant of David suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, a punishment that He did not deserve. He took the world's sin upon Himself and by His stripes all are healed. Who put Him to death? The devil himself.

The Spirit of prophecy confirms what we have said: "Satan works through the elements also to garner his harvest of unprepared souls. He has studied the secrets of the laboratories of nature, and he uses all his power to control the elements as far as God allows. When he was suffered to afflict Job, how quickly flocks and herds, servants, houses, children, were swept away, one trouble succeeding another as in a moment. It is God that shields His creatures and hedges them in from the power of the destroyer.... Satan has control of all whom God does not especially guard. He will favor and prosper some in order to further his own designs, and he will bring trouble upon others and lead men to believe that it is God who is afflicting them...."

"Satan and his emissaries represent God as even worse than themselves, in order to justify their own malignity and rebellion. The great seducer endeavors to shift his own horrible cruelty of character upon our heavenly Father,... Thus he succeeds in luring souls away from their allegiance to God." –*The Great Controversy*, pp. 589, 534.

GOD HAS REDEEMED HIS PEOPLE IN CHRIST

As we see, the enemy pursues a deadly objective and will not give up his efforts to make people believe either that God does not exist or, if He does exist, that He is very harsh and devoid of feelings of love for His children. But from His holy word we know that God has wonderful attributes of character; we have not seen Him, but we know Him by His character. The Bible presents Him as omnipotent, omniscient, loving, unchanging in His love, kind, eternal, merciful, just, holy, good, and much more. These attributes speak loudly in favor of our beloved Creator's benevolence and kindness.

God does not want the wicked to die, and this is especially true of His children (Ezekiel 33:11); He wants everyone to be saved—everyone—and come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4). His love for man is so great that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save man from eternal damnation. (Galatians 4:4-7). He is always willing to forgive man's sin through Jesus (Ephesians 4:32); He is his refuge in time of trouble (Nahum 1:7); He delivers him from every tribulation (Psalm 34:19); He is compassionate (Luke 6:36); He takes into account all of man's needs and grants him His Spirit (Luke 11:13); He is the door of salvation, the way man must travel, the truth he must believe (John 14:6), and much more.

GOD'S EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Why does it sometimes seem as if our little boat is going to sink in the stormy sea of life? Why do we sometimes feel that our sufferings are so great that they will destroy us as a consuming fire? Why does God allow such things? Isaiah gave the answer: "I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering." (Isaiah 48:10, *New Living Translation*). Notice that God has a clear objective. The devil wants to destroy us through trials, but the Lord takes advantage of such things to "refine us" or, as stated in other Biblical versions, to "purify us." That is what the following testimony explains: "The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. Their hewing, squaring, and chiseling,

their burnishing and polishing, is a painful process; it is hard to be pressed down to the grinding wheel. But the stone is brought forth prepared to fill its place in the heavenly temple. Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace." *—Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 11.

Here is the key, dear reader. God allows difficulties to come upon us to educate us in the Christian life, so that we learn to trust Him, so that our faith is rooted in His promises, and so that He may bless us both now and forever. This is reflected in the apostle Paul's words: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28.

STRENGTH FOR THE TEST

Taking into account these explanations from the Bible and Spirit of prophecy, we can better understand the role that faith plays when trials assail us. What we are experiencing today are issues that are painful enough to shake anyone, but they are especially for those who trust in God. What are we to do? Stand on the platform of eternal truth and embrace God's promises, whether we see the light or not.

"In this time of trial we need to be encouraged and comforted by one another. The temptations of Satan are greater now than ever before, for he knows that his time is short and that very soon every case will be decided, either for life or for death. It is no time now to sink down beneath discouragement and trial; we must bear up under all our afflictions and trust wholly in the Almighty God of Jacob. The Lord has shown me that His grace is sufficient for all our trials; and although they are greater than ever before, yet if we trust wholly in God, we can overcome every temptation and through His grace be victorious.

"If we overcome our trials and get victory over the temptations of Satan, then we endure the trial of our faith, which is more precious than gold, and are stronger and better prepared to meet the next. But if we sink down and give way to the temptations of Satan, we shall grow weaker and get no reward for the trial and shall not be so well prepared for the next. In this way we shall grow weaker and weaker, until we are led captive by Satan at his will. We must have on the whole armor of God and be ready at any moment for a conflict with the powers of darkness. When temptations

and trials rush in upon us, let us go to God and agonize with Him in prayer. He will not turn us away empty, but will give us grace and strength to overcome, and to break the power of the enemy. Oh, that all could see these things in their true light and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus! Then would Israel move forward, strong in God, and in the power of His might." *—Early Writings*, p. 46.

"The very fact that we are called upon to endure trials proves that the Lord Jesus sees in us something very precious that He would have developed. If He saw nothing in us whereby we might glorify His name He would not spend time refining us. We do not take special pains to prune brambles. Christ does not cast valueless stones into His furnace." *—That I May Know Him*, p. 277.

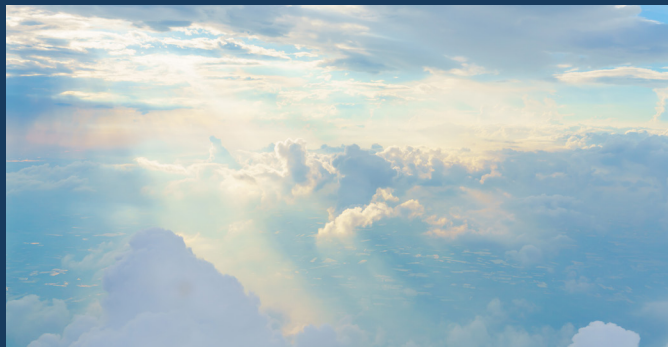
"God's love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity;..." *—The Great Controversy*, p. 621.

My dear brothers, sisters, and friends of the faith, what God's word says that His people will have to face in the future is not pleasant, because before and after probation closes a series of events will occur that will shake the world. There are many who will not endure the final test but will apostatize from the faith. Only those who have prepared during good times, having a deep experience with the Lord, delving deeply into the Biblical message, and being rooted in God's promises will be in a position to face the powers of evil. The grace of Christ will be necessary to overcome the trials of the Sunday law, persecution, and the death sentence that will be issued against the keepers of God's law. Our heavenly Father will not do all these things to harm His children. No. The devil, knowing that his time is short, will lash out at God's faithful children in the attempt to wipe them from the face of the earth. But the Lord will be with them and be their very present help in time of need.

Let us not doubt His love. Just as God was with His children in the past, He will also be with us in the midst of the storms that we have to face. The devil may attack us in every way, but we have the deep assurance that "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 1 Corinthians 10:13. Let our highest aspiration be to grow in holiness and especially to cling to the Saviour when the storms threaten to sink us. May you be blessed greatly during this Week of Prayer is my desire and prayer. Amen.

"God's love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity;..."

—The Great Controversy, p. 621.



The Later Rain

By Anton Salavyov

"And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." 2 Kings 2:9.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the time of ancient Israel is illustrated with various symbols in the Bible. The most common is rain. Rain has always been considered to be a blessing. In Israel there are generally two rainy seasons. The autumn rain is considered the early rain, while rain before the spring harvest season is known as the latter rain.

In the earth's annual cycle of the dew and the early and latter rains, the Saviour gave His faithful children a wonderful example in nature so they would understand that if one desires to have a Christlike mind and character, he needs to receive continual spiritual rain through the divine power of the Holy Spirit for spiritual growth and transformation. It is necessary to be transformed into "Christ's likeness" to be with Him for all eternity. That comes from the Holy Spirit as the dew and the early and latter rains through a very close relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit imparts the heavenly gift of Christ's divine standard, righteousness, and character.

What test will confirm that one has received the seal of the living God? How does He accomplish that spiritual transformation making one Christ-like? Elisha said to Elijah, "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." 2 Kings 2:9. Elijah initiated a genuine reformation in spiritually corrupted Israel, but Elisha needed a double measure of the divine Spirit to complete it.

At the beginning of the New Testament, a similar event took place. John the Baptist aroused Israel to a spirit of repentance, along with baptism and justification, as the first stage of his anointed mission in accordance with God's plan. Jesus completed this amazing plan of salvation with a double measure of His Spirit. We are now living at the end of time, when we likewise need a double portion of God's Spirit. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple." Psalm 27:4. We receive the beauty of the Lord through His Spirit. One thing you may safely desire—a double portion of the Holy Spirit.

WHAT DOES "A DOUBLE PORTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" MEAN?

"Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face, behold-

ing as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18. By beholding, you will become changed from glory to glory, from character to character." —*The Colporteur Evangelist*, p. 10.

Why are so many neglecting to receive the early and the latter rains as a double portion of the Holy Spirit? "I saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful and were looking to the time of 'refreshing' and the 'latter rain' to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight. Oh, how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter! They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God." —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 337.

"At no point in our experience can we dispense with the assistance of that which enables us to make the first start. The blessings received under the former rain are needful to us to the end. Yet these alone will not suffice. While we cherish the blessing of the early rain, we must not, on the other hand, lose sight of the fact that without the latter rain, to fill out the ears and ripen the grain, the harvest will not be ready for the sickle, and the labor of the sower will have been in vain." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 507.

WHO ARE THE TWO ANOINTED ONES?

What system does the Godhead use to transform man's human nature into a glorious Christ-like nature and character? "What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be?" Zechariah 4:12, 13.

"Concerning the two witnesses the prophet declares further: 'These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.' 'Thy word,' said the psalmist, 'is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.' Revelation 11:4; Psalm 119:105. The two witnesses represent the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 267.

"When the mind, instead of being centered upon self, is occupied in seeking to enrich poverty-stricken souls, the treasure of God's love in His word—the golden oil from the two olive trees—is poured into the heart. Those who impart to others of the riches of the grace of heaven will be themselves enriched. This blessed experience all can obtain who will be channels through which God can impart His grace.... Men and women can reach the highest stage of mental and moral development only by cooperating with Jesus Christ, by learning His methods, by accepting His Holy Spirit, by laboring together with Him." —*The Gospel Herald*, January 1, 1901.

We need to consider the Old and New Testaments as the two anointed olive trees, and the Spirit of prophecy harmonizes with Christ and the Holy Spirit, guiding those who seek the truth as it is written.

The mission of the two olive trees is to give every faithful believer a completed Christ-like character through the holy influence and guidance of the divine oil. Depending on how much and how quickly one personally cooperates with these two divine Powers, the child of God will be transformed in mind and soul step by step from glory to glory.

HOW DO CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDE THE CHRISTIAN TO RECEIVE THE LATTER RAIN?

"There is to be 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.' Mark 4:28. There must be a constant development of Christian virtue, a constant advancement in Christian experience." —*Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Deuteronomy 32:2.

The first general step of the spiritual experience of transformation is called "justification." From a spiritual point of view, the Holy Spirit acts as the "dew" and the "early rain." The reason why the first stage of the spiritual growth process is called "justification" is because it produces conversion. The Holy Spirit guides the repentant sinner to forgiveness and victory through faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1.

The second general step in the spiritual experience of the faithful believers is "sanctification." After conversion, the faithful believers are baptized by the divine Holy Spirit, who communicates with and guides each soul to become a divine personality in harmony with Christ. The two heavenly Powers of Christ and the Holy Spirit inspire and guide God's children to become Christ-like. And the result is their acquiring the Pentecostal missionary spirit of love and the desire to win souls to Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit in this stage of the Pentecost experience is part of the early rain and includes both justification and sanctification.

The third spiritual step relates to "glorification." The latter rain is the final stage in the development of the Christ-like character in God's faithful believers. This equips them with spiritual gifts that are necessary to proclaim the "loud cry" to the world and to greet Christ in peace at His second coming. During the latter rain, God guides His people through their final personal tests as through a "baptism of fire" to complete their Christ-like character and obtain the final victory. From a prophetic and historical point of view, the disciples received the early rain as a church.

"Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul-temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost." —*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 189.

Let us clarify two important steps in the preparation for receiving the latter rain:

First, every faithful believer has his or her own personal experience of the three main steps of spiritual transformation—justification, sanctification, and glorification—by the guidance of the divine heavenly Powers. "Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection...."

"'Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain;...' By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 506.

Second, there are many Biblical meanings, prophecies, and periods of time in the history of humanity that will end with Christ's second coming; for example, "We should pray as earnestly for the descent of the Holy Spirit as the disciples prayed on the Day of Pentecost. If they needed it at that time, we need it more today." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 158 (1882).

WHAT ARE OUR EXPERIENCES CONCERNING EARLY AND LATTER RAINS?

"If we do not progress, if we do not place ourselves in an attitude to receive both the former and the latter rain, we shall lose our souls, and the responsibility will lie at our own door." —*Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897.

"Unless the early showers have done their work, the latter rain can bring no seed to perfection." —*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 506.

From a historical point of view, the early rain fell upon Christ's disciples in the upper room. From an individual point of view, each faithful believer must personally receive the early rain. Through the experiences of the early and the latter rain and the test of fire in the final prophetic events, the faithful followers of Christ are prepared for the kingdom of heaven. How do many people make a mistake in this regard? "We are not willing enough to trouble the Lord with our petitions, and to ask Him for the gift of the Holy Spirit. He wants us to press our petitions to the throne." —*Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 537.

HOW DO WE ANSWER PEOPLE'S QUESTIONS?

Some of the questions people may ask us include the following: "Have you been baptized by water?" We should then give an appropriate answer. Then, as Adventists, what will be our answer if someone asks us this question: "When were you baptized with the Holy Spirit, as when the disciples received the early rain?" Another question is: "Are you prepared to be baptized with the latter rain?" Maybe we should first ask ourselves these questions now, so that we can give a correct answer to others. Without having the experiences of each of the three main steps of salvation—spiritual baptism as the dew, the early rain, and the latter rain, for sure we will not enter the eternal heavenly kingdom. Sadly, there are members of the church who have not had the experience of the holy dew. They know the principles of the church, but

their spiritual fruit and behavior show that they do not have a connection with God's Spirit.

"The measure of the Holy Spirit we receive, will be proportioned to the measure of our desire and the faith exercised for it, and the use we shall make of the light and knowledge that shall be given to us." —*Review and Herald*, May 5, 1896.

"To Jesus, who emptied Himself for the salvation of lost humanity, the Holy Spirit was given without measure. So it will be given to every follower of Christ when the whole heart is surrendered for His indwelling." —*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 31.

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Interesting! What will happen if we personally receive Christ and the Holy Spirit's spiritual powers without measure to transform our hearts and minds?

"Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the third person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy, but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character on His church." —*Review and Herald*, November 19, 1908.

"... Christ's true disciples shall receive ... His image—partakers of the divine nature." —*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 8, p. 292.

"When a man is truly converted, he becomes a Son of God, a partaker of the divine nature." —*Signs of the Times*, December 1, 1881.

Those who put their faith and trust in Christ will, by His divine promise and power, be transformed into the sons of God and receive His image as "partakers of the divine nature." 2 Peter 1:4.

However, read the following statement that urges us not to postpone the work of sanctification until we see the latter rain falling. "It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us as the early rain fell upon the disciples on the Day of Pentecost." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 214 (1882).

Christ had two natures—divine and human. So likewise, if we surrender entirely to Christ, He will purify us and will make us to be partakers of the divine nature. This is a real miracle, showing the wonderful message of the amazing love of Christ that is available to every human being. But we must be aware that the latter rain message comes with the following warning: "The great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with His glory, will not come until we have an enlightened people, that know by experience what it means to be laborers together with God." —*My Life Today*, p. 59.

REVIVAL AND REFORMATION

Now is the time to understand that to be a member of the right Reform Movement does not necessarily mean that we are really reformers. It is time for us to wake up.

"Reformation will not bring forth the good fruit of righteousness unless it is connected with the revival of the Spirit. Revival and reformation are to do their appointed work, and in doing this work they must blend." —(*Review and Herald*, February 25, 1902) *Christian Service*, p. 42. Where now is the spirit of the first faithful Reformers? Are we personally and as a church receiving the early rain abundantly, as well as the baptism of the Holy Spirit in preparation for the latter rain? If not, now is the time to wake up before it is too late.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY LAW

"As America, the land of religious liberty, shall unite with the papacy in forcing the conscience and compelling men to honor the false Sabbath, the people of every country on the globe will be led to follow her example. Our people are not half awake to do all in their power, with the facilities within their reach, to extend the message of warning." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 18.

"History will be repeated. False religion will be exalted. The first day of the week, a common working day, possessing no sanctity whatever, will be set up as was the image of Babylon. All nations and tongues and peoples will be commanded to worship this spurious Sabbath.... The decree enforcing the worship of this day is to go forth to all the world." —*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 976.

"The Lord has shown me clearly that the image of the beast will be formed before probation closes; for it is to be the great test for the people of God, by which their eternal destiny will be decided." —*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 80.

COMING EVENTS AND BEGINNING OF THE TIME OF TROUBLE

"'The commencement of that time of trouble,' here mentioned does not refer to the time when the plagues shall begin to be poured, but to a short period just before they are poured out, while Christ is in the sanctuary. At that time, while the work of salvation is closing, trouble will be coming on the earth, and the nations will be angry, yet held in check so as not to prevent the work of the third angel. At that time the 'latter rain,' or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out." —*Early Writings*, p. 85.

"The sign, or seal, of God is revealed in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, the Lord's memorial of creation... The mark of the beast is the opposite of this—the observance of the first day of the week." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 117.

THE LATTER RAIN AND EVENTS TO FOLLOW

"I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action." –*Early Writings*, p. 71.

"The work will be similar to that of the Day of Pentecost....

"Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.... Thus the inhabitants of the earth will be brought to take their stand....

"Hence the movement symbolized by the angel coming down from heaven, lightening the earth with his glory and crying mightily with a strong voice, announcing the sins of Babylon. In connection with his message the call is heard: 'Come out of her, My people.' These announcements, uniting with the third angel's message, constitute the final warning to be given to the inhabitants of the earth....

"Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children....

"Angels are hastening to and fro in heaven. An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received 'the seal of the living God.' Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above.... Christ has made the atonement for His people and blotted out their sins." –*The Great Controversy*, pp. 611, 612, 604, 464, 613.

THE FINAL STAGE OF THE SUNDAY LAW

"I was pointed down to the time when the third angel's message was closing. The power of God had rested upon His people; they had accomplished their work and were prepared for the trying hour before them. They had received the latter rain, or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and the living testimony had been revived. The last great warning had sounded everywhere, and it had stirred up and enraged the inhabitants of the earth who would not receive the message." –*Early Writings*, p. 279.

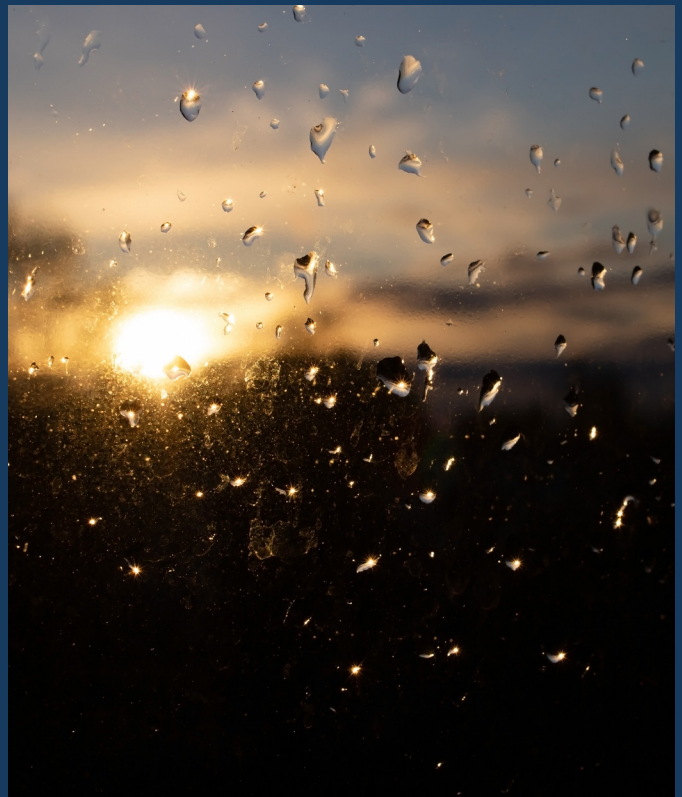
"Those who are not branches of the divine root, who are not partakers of the divine nature, will not and cannot love those for whom Christ has given His life." –*The Home Missionary*, August 1, 1896.

"The Catholics will give their power to the image of the beast. And the Protestants will work as their mother worked before them to destroy the saints. But before their decrees bring or bear fruit, the saints will be delivered by the Voice of God. Then I saw that Jesus' work in the sanctuary will soon be finished. And after His work there is finished, He will come to the door of the first apartment, and confess the sins of Israel upon the head of the Scape Goat." –*Spalding and Magan Collection*, p. 2.

With contrite hearts, let us pray most earnestly that now, in the time of the latter rain, the showers of grace will fall upon His faithful people. Amen.

"I saw that none could share the 'refreshing' unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action."

–*Early Writings*, p. 71.



The Seven Last Plagues

By Idel Suarez Jr.

"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.

The seven last plagues are the seven cups filled with God's wrath that will be poured upon the earth before Christ's return in glory. This event is similar to the great exodus of the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Just like God poured out His wrath in the form of 10 plagues upon the mighty idolatrous and polytheistic Egyptian kingdom before taking His elect to the promise land, so God will once more bring about His strange work to liberate and emancipate His last generation on earth.

"When Christ ceases His intercession in the sanctuary, the unmingled wrath threatened against those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark (Revelation 14:9, 10), will be poured out. The plagues upon Egypt when God was about to deliver Israel were similar in character to those more terrible and extensive judgments which are to fall upon the world just before the final deliverance of God's people."¹

According to the above testimony, the 7 last plagues will be "more terrible and extensive" than the plagues that fell on Egypt. Throughout this article, different possible or probable scenarios from a historical and scientific point of view are presented to bring the symbolic descriptions of Revelation to life. Remember that John was describing what he had never seen before and was limited by his own experiences and observations, even as modern believers are today. Only the future will reveal exactly what will happen, yet it will be worse than the explanations given here.

AN EGYPTIAN SCRIBE'S ADMONITION

History at times appears cyclical. History also strangely seems to echo the future as a repetition of past events. The coming seven last plagues are no exception. They will mirror the plagues that fell upon Egypt, but will be more terrible. By God's grace, we have the testimony of Ipuwer, an Egyptian scribe who was an eyewitness to the 10 plagues which fell upon Egypt and wrote about the frightening destruction beheld. His papyrus known as the Admonitions of Ipuwer preserved at the Dutch National Museum of Antiquity located in Leiden, Netherlands.

Here is a brief summary of Ipuwer's writing not as a poetic imaginary prose but as a historical factual declaration. Hence we have archaeological proofs for the Egyptian plagues which validate the Biblical registry.²

"Pestilence is throughout the land, blood is everywhere, death is not lacking...Indeed, the river is blood, yet men drink of it. Men shrink from human beings and thirst after water...Egypt has become an empty waste...it is the destruction of the land... Lacking are grain...Indeed, laughter is perished and is [no longer] made; it is groaning that is throughout the land, mingled with complaints...Indeed, the children of princes are dashed against walls, and the children of the neck are laid out on the high ground...Indeed, trees are felled and branches are stripped

off... there is no food [. . .]. cattle moan because of the state of the land...Indeed, everywhere barley has perished and men are stripped of clothes, spice, and oil; everyone says: 'There is none.' The storehouse is empty and its keeper is stretched on the ground...Woe is me because of the misery of this time!.. Behold, the fire has gone up on high, and its burning goes forth..."³

THE PLAGUES AS RETRIBUTION FOR EVIL

The seven last plagues are the result of disobeying God's moral law, natural laws, and health laws. Moses wrote that because of the abominations committed in the land, the earth vomits out its inhabitants. "And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." Leviticus 18:25. The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left." Isaiah 24:5, 6.

Similarly, our planet, known to the ancient Greeks as *Gaia*, appears like a woman going through labor pains which become more frequent, intense, and longer as the time of birth approaches. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Romans 8:22. Scientists and historians have been tallying the amount of natural disasters over time and have concluded that climate changes have caused frequent, severe, and escalating storms, earthquakes, droughts, fires, devastations, and natural disasters.⁴ It seems that these damages become an avalanche racing toward the end of all things.

Yet "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. All the judgments upon men, prior to the close of probation, have been mingled with mercy. The pleading blood of Christ has shielded the sinner from receiving the full measure of his guilt; but in the final judgment, wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy."⁵

THE WRATH OF GOD

The final plagues do not start till the door of grace is shut closed. They will last close to one year. They are literal plagues not spiritual ones. Five of the ten plagues which fell upon Egypt resurface as part of the seven last plagues to fall upon our planet. Each Egyptian plague was removed so that the subsequent one could be poured out, but such is not the case with the seven last plagues. Although not universal, the first plague does not cease when the second begins and so forth with each additional plague till all seven are excruciating their effects concurrently in different areas having a huge global impact.

The first plague is similar to the boils which the Egyptians suffered. The scripture says, it was "a boil breaking forth [with] blains upon man, and upon beast." Exodus 9:10. John writes, "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. The skin is our first barrier against the microbial and viral attacks. These sores are skin ulcers that break forth like blisters, causing itch and pain. Could it also be like small pox which deformed people's faces? Or will they be like bed sores that produce pus? Regardless, this skin disease will be incurable. By the fifth plague, those with these boils, "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. It will fall primarily upon Rome, the seat of the beast, and America, the seat of the image of the beast.

The second and third plagues are similar to the plague that fell upon the Nile River and Delta of Egypt which turned into blood. "And the fish that [was] in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt." Exodus 7:21. The ocean, the rivers, and fountains of water, and itself will stink. Much of marine life will die. Perhaps it will be resemble "red tide"—an algae bloom whose presence and neurotoxin (poisons) causes water discoloration and affects the marine and human respiratory systems. The sea "became as the blood of a dead [man]; and every living soul died in the sea." Revelation 16:3. Many whales, dolphins, sharks, turtles, and fish will beach themselves on the shores of the red oceans. Flies will probably roam over the dead bodies. "The plague will extend to the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood." Revelation 16:4.

These plagues will cause thirst for water and for the word of God. Many will travel from country to country, from sea to sea, from north even to the east, searching for the gospel which was rejected, but "shall not find it." Amos 8:11-12. These plagues are poured out because the governments of this world will have issued a death decree upon all Sabbath keepers. "By condemning the people of God to death, they have as truly incurred the guilt of their blood as if it had been shed by their hands."⁶

During the fourth plague, the sun scorches the earth, its animals, plants, and humans. It produces terrible heat waves, heat strokes, sun stroke, and wild fires. The ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra. In a transformed manner, many professed believers continue to adore the sun in submitting to the reigning Sunday law. Under likely intense greenhouse gas emissions, ozone depletion, and climate change effects, the modern Sunday worshippers languish, collapse, and die. Power was given to "the sun... 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. Joel foretells that "the trees of the field are withered... the beast groan! the herds... are perplexed, because they have no pasture... The rivers of water are dried up." Joel 1:10-12; 17-20. This description echoes Ipuwer's lamentations.

The fifth plague is poured "upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness." Revelation 16:10. It brings darkness resembling the dark day of May 19, 1780, and the dark days which hovered over Egypt. "There was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: They saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three days..." Exodus 10:22, 23. It is imaginable to conclude that the raging heat causes fires which burn out electric utility plants. Perhaps it will also entail a total utility blackout like the one which New York suffered on August 14, 2003. It started with a bush fire in Ohio which caused a trans-

mission line to go out.⁷ All electric and internet services ceased. Subways did not run. Elevators were jammed. No hot water. All refrigerated and perishable foods spoiled. Looting and crime resulted, but in this case the darkness may well be felt with the fingers! Why darkness? "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19.

While the fifth plague falls over the papacy, the sixth probably affects Islam. The frogs that sprang out over the land of Egypt reappear as part of the sixth plague. "Their land brought forth frogs in abundance, in the chambers of their kings." Psalms 105:30. These new frogs are the spirits of devils which bring their evil spells upon the leaders of nations to make war. "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs [come] out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, [which] go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Revelation 16:13, 14.

This sixth plague is known as the battle of Armageddon—the last world war. Revelation 16:16. To those who are skeptical of a world war involving the lonely mount of Megiddo, World War I included a major battle over Jerusalem between the British under the command of General Allenby and Turks exactly at Armageddon and its surroundings.⁸ Here, the Euphrates River, which was one of the four rivers of Eden, literally and prophetically dries up. Waters are a symbol of people. Revelation 17:5. Hence, Islam's millions inhabiting the lands—Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait—through which the Euphrates flows may perish in war. Muslims will embark on a Holy Jihad over Jerusalem. Daniel 11:44-45. They are part of "the kings of the east." John Wesley clearly taught this. "Those who lie east from the Euphrates, in Persia, India... will rush... toward the Holy Land, which lies west of the Euphrates."⁹ These will face the King of Kings who will come as the lighting from the east to the west. Matthew 24:27.

During the final plague, is "the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air." Why the air? Perhaps it is because the heavens will shake and be rolled up as a scroll. "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together." Revelation 6:14. God's voice will shake the atmosphere. "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven." Hebrews 12:26. The seventh plague involves two great earthquakes. One at the beginning of the seventh plague awakens the part of the 144,000 dead known as the special or partial resurrection. The other at the end of the plague awakens the Great Multitude as the first resurrection and part of Jesus' Second Coming. With these huge earthquakes greater than the Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755, "every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" Revelation 16:20. "There was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, [and] so great." Revelation 16:18. The great cities with their massive sky-scrapers will crumble like the Twin Towers of New York on September 11, 2001. "The cities of the nations fell." Revelation 16:19.

Revelation mentions "hail" which in the original Greek was "*chalaza*". It literally means "to let loose, or let fall". So is it hail, hailstones, meteorites, fire balls, or all of them, or something else? Conceivably, our solar system's great meteorite belt which Job beheld will release its space stones resembling a supersize hail storm. "Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved

against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" Job 38:22,23. "And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, [every stone] about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great." Revelation 16:21. Each will weigh 50 to 70 pounds (or 23 to 31 kilograms).

The Testimonies do mention the fall of "great balls of fire" from heaven in the end of times:

"Great balls of fire were falling upon houses, and from these balls fiery arrows were flying in every direction. It was impossible to check the fires that were kindled, and many places were being destroyed. The terror of the people was indescribable. After a time I awoke and found myself at home."¹⁰

The world shall make war against Christ and His host coming in the clouds of heaven, but those who are called, chosen, and faithful will overcome. "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him [are] called, and chosen, and faithful." Revelation 17:14.

GOD'S PROTECTION ASSURED

In the midst of all the pestilence, natural disasters, sword, and genocide, His 144,000—the last generation of saints on earth—will be preserved and not die during this terrible ordeal. Daniel looked into the future and witnessed these last seven plagues and wrote, "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation [even] to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Daniel 12:1. Hence, those who are written in the book of Life will be spared not from suffering, nor thirst, nor heat, nor fear, but from death.

"The people of God will not be free from suffering; but while persecuted and distressed, while they endure privation and suffer for want of food they will not be left to perish. That God who cared for Elijah will not pass by one of His self-sacrificing children. He who numbers the hairs of their head will care for them, and in time of famine they shall be satisfied. While the wicked are dying from hunger and pestilence, angels will shield the righteous and supply their wants."¹¹

Isaiah too beheld that time and took particular notice of God's people on the verge of their deliverance from life's toils and the world's grand massacre. He wrote that God's people were to hide within their doors sprinkled with the blood of a lamb like the Israelites during that infamous night of terror in which the first born of Egypt died mysteriously. Isaiah also hinted to the special resurrection. "Thy dead [men] shall live, [together with] my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew [is as] the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead. Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." Isaiah 26:19-21.

Like with Elijah, the living 144,000 are promised water and bread. Many will be in hiding in mountains as Jesus advised. Others will be in dungeons and prisons. Some may be in their own rural homes. "He shall dwell on high: his place of defence

[shall be] the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters [shall be] sure." Isaiah 33:16.

The Psalmist's counsel to the elect is to hide in God, to hide spiritually, emotionally, and mentally in the Almighty, like a little girl who hides in her mother's skirt in the presence of perceived danger. He tells the children of God not to be afraid. The last pandemics would not touch His elect. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; [nor] for the arrow [that] flieth by day; [Nor] for the pestilence [that] walketh in darkness; [nor] for the destruction [that] wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; [but] it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the LORD, [which is] my refuge, [even] the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." Psalms 91:5-10.

"The precious Saviour will send help just when we need it. The way to heaven is consecrated by His footprints. Every thorn that wounds our feet has wounded His. Every cross that we are called to bear He has borne before us. The Lord permits conflicts, to prepare the soul for peace."¹²

ANOTHER SCRIBE'S ADMONITIONS

Ipuwer, the Egyptian scribe, wrote his admonitions, so did God not only in Scripture but in the inspired Testimonies. The messenger of God had a vision of the plagues and she tells about it.

"Said the angel, 'Get ready, get ready, get ready. Ye will have to die a greater death to the world than ye have ever yet died.' I saw that there was a great work to do for them and but little time in which to do it.

"I was then made capable of enduring the awful sight of the seven last plagues, the wrath of God. I saw that His anger was dreadful and terrible, and if He should stretch forth His hand, or lift it in anger, the inhabitants of the world would be as though they had never been, or would suffer... Terror seized me, and I fell upon my face before the angel and begged of him to cause the sight to be removed, to hide it from me, for it was too dreadful. Then I realized, as never before, the importance of searching the Word of God carefully, to know how to escape the plagues which that Word declares shall come on all the ungodly who shall worship the beast and his image and receive his mark in their foreheads or in their hands."¹³

Are you ready for the seven last plagues? Will you be able to stand? Take hold of Jesus, His righteousness by faith, and grace, and you will. Amen.

¹ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 627, 628.

² Anne Habermehl, *The Ipuwer Papyrus and the Exodus*, Research Gate, July 2018. Accessed on March 29, 2022. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329770320_The_Ipuwer_Papyrus_and_the_Exodus

³ Complete translation of the ancient Egyptian Ipuwer Papyrus with notes (potential confirmation of Moses and the Exodus), Bible Blender, February 1, 2020. Accessed on March 29, 2022. <https://www.bibleblender.com/2020/biblical-lessons/biblical-history/ancient-texts/complete-translation-ancient-egypt-ipuwer-papyrus>

⁴ Carlyn Krinking and Katie Peek, "The Rise of the Billion-Dollar Disasters," *Audubon*, Winter 2021, 16-17.

⁵ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 628, 629.

⁶ *The Great Controversy*, p. 628.

⁷ "Disasters: New York City Blackout of 2003," NYC Data, Baruch College, New York. Accessed on March 31, 2022. NYCdata | Disasters (cuny.edu)

⁸ "General Allenby Shows How a Moral Man Conquers Jerusalem," *Haaretz*, December 11, 2014. Accessed June 24, 2022. HYPERLINK "<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2014-12-11/ty-article/premium/1917-general-allenby-shows-how-a-moral-man-conquers-jerusalem/0000017f-db81-df9ca17f-f992e570000>"

⁹ John Wesley, *Comments on Revelation 16:12*, New Testament Notes.

¹⁰ *The Evangelism*, p. 29; *The Last Day Events*, p. 24.

¹¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 629.

¹² *The Great Controversy*, p. 633.

¹³ *The Early Writings*, pp. 64, 65.

Jacob's Anguish

By Henry Dering

THE CLOSE OF PROBATION

"At that time shall Michael stand up, the great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every-one that shall be found written in the book." Daniel 12:1.

Very soon, Jesus will end His high priestly work in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Then there will be no more mercy extended to the lawless and disobedient. Before the myriad of angels, Jesus will say with a loud voice, "It is done." He will also make another solemn announcement: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Revelation 22:11. What does this pronouncement mean? It signifies that the case of every human being on earth has been decided—to be rewarded with eternal life or to be doomed to eternal death.

Some people believe that there will be a second chance. They count on having a second probation when all who then choose to know God will be saved. "In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Christ shows that in this life men decide their eternal destiny. During probationary time the grace of God is offered to every soul. But if men waste their opportunities in self-pleasing, they cut themselves off from everlasting life. No after-probation will be granted them. By their own choice they have fixed an impassable gulf between them and their God." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 260.

Therefore, NOW is the time of our probation! This life is man's time of preparation for the future life. We will not be able to accept Christ after death or after His second coming. Every man's record will have been sealed by then. That is a very serious matter to be considered by all who are alive.

In the classic book, *The Great Controversy*, p. 614, a vivid description is presented of one of the last scenes of earth's history. "When He [Jesus] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor. The restraint which has been upon the wicked is removed, and Satan has entire control of the finally impenitent. God's longsuffering has ended. The world has rejected His mercy, despised His love, and trampled upon His law. The wicked have passed the boundary of their probation; the Spirit of God, persistently resisted, has been at last withdrawn. Unsheltered by divine grace, they have no protection from the wicked one. Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of hu-

man passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old."

A VIVID VIEW OF COMING EVENTS

The close of probation marks the beginning of the great time of trouble, when Satan will plunge the world into misery much worse than anything that has ever occurred. But the enactment of the death decree will mark the beginning of the greatest emotional crisis for God's faithful people, called the time of Jacob's trouble. "I saw that the four angels would hold the four winds until Jesus' work was done in the sanctuary, and then will come the seven last plagues. These plagues enraged the wicked against the righteous; they thought that we had brought the judgments of God upon them, and that if they could rid the earth of us, the plagues would then be stayed. A decree went forth to slay the saints, which caused them to cry day and night for deliverance. This was the time of Jacob's trouble." —*Early Writings*, pp. 36, 37.

On Friday, January 18, 1884, God's special messenger for the end times, Sister Ellen G. White, was shown what would be the final crisis for God's people. "The time of trouble was upon us. I saw our people in great distress, weeping and praying, pleading the sure promises of God, while the wicked were all around us mocking us and threatening to destroy us. They ridiculed our feebleness, they mocked at the smallness of our numbers, and taunted us with words calculated to cut deep. They charged us with taking an independent position from all the rest of the world. They had cut off our resources so that we could not buy or sell, and they referred to our abject poverty and stricken condition. They could not see how we could live without the world. We were dependent on the world, and we must concede to the customs, practices, and laws of the world, or go out of it. If we were the only people in the world whom the Lord favored, the appearances were awfully against us.

"They declared that they had the truth, that miracles were among them; that angels from heaven talked with them and walked with them, that great power and signs and wonders were performed among them, and that this was the temporal millennium they had been expecting so long. The whole world was converted and in harmony with the Sunday law, and this little feeble people stood out in defiance of the laws of the land and the law of God, and claimed to be the only ones right on the earth...." —*Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 427, 428.

When the death decree is enacted, the people of God will be plunged into that great affliction and distress that

is described by the prophet as the time of Jacob's trouble: "Thus saith the Lord: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace.... All faces are turned into paleness. Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." Jeremiah 30:5-7.

For God's people, it will also be a time of wrestling in prayer. While Satan is urging the wicked to destroy the little company who keep God's commandments, they make God their defense. Additionally, Satan accuses the people of God on account of their sins. Their confidence in God and their faith will be severely tested. As they review their lives, their hopes sink as they are fully conscious of their unworthiness.

JACOB'S ANGUISH

"Jacob's night of anguish, when he wrestled in prayer for deliverance from the hand of Esau (Genesis 32:24-30), represents the experience of God's people in the time of trouble." —*The Great Controversy*, p. 616.

One night, while he was still working for Laban, the Angel of God spoke to Jacob in a dream and said, "I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." Genesis 31:13. Although Jacob obeyed the divine instruction, he had many misgivings as he retraced the road home. His sin in deceiving his father and brother was ever before him and weighed heavily on his conscience. When his messengers informed him that his brother Esau was coming to meet him and that four hundred men were with him, Jacob was filled with terror. He realized that it was his own sin that had brought this danger upon himself and his family. His only hope was trusting in God by faith.

Following is the account that we find in God's word about the struggle and victory that occurred at that critical point in Jacob's life: "And he arose that night and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven sons, and crossed over the ford of Jabbok. He took them, sent them over the brook, and sent over what he had. Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, 'Let Me go, for the day breaks.' But he said, 'I will not let You go unless You bless me!' So He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Jacob.' And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked, saying, 'Tell me Your name, I pray.' And He said, 'Why is it that you ask about My name?' And He blessed him there. So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: 'For I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'" Genesis 32:22-30, *New King James Version*.

It is noteworthy that Jacob was all alone when he faced the crisis in his life. His two wives, eleven sons and two women servants were not with him. Jacob needed divine help in this extremely serious and dangerous situation,

and he reached out to God in humility, earnestly praying to Him for help. He agonizingly searched his soul. "Jacob in his distress was not overwhelmed. He had repented, he had endeavored to atone for the wrong to his brother. And when threatened with death through the wrath of Esau, he sought help from God.... 'He wept, and made supplication.' Hosea 12:4. 'And He blessed him there.' Genesis 32:29.... The power of evil in his own nature was broken; his character was transformed...." —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 10.

HOLD ON

Some years ago, on a hot summer day in South Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his family's house. In a hurry to dive into the cool water, he ran out the back door leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt. He jumped into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. In the house his mother was looking out the window when she saw the two getting closer and closer to each other. In sheer terror, she ran toward the water, calling out to her son as loudly as she could.

Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and quickly turned around to swim back to his mother. But it was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, his mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator grabbed his legs. This began a tremendous tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was much too tenacious to let go. At that moment a farmer happened to drive by, heard the screams, raced from his truck, took aim, and shot the alligator.

Remarkably, after many weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were badly scarred by the vicious attack of the animal. But on his arms were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails had dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to her beloved son. When interviewed by a local reporter, the boy, after being asked, showed him the scars left by the alligator. Beaming with pride he told him, "I have huge scars on my arms, too. I have them because my mom wouldn't let go." Likewise, we need to hold on to Jesus with all our being and not let go! —*Author unknown*.

"Jacob's experience during that night of wrestling and anguish represents the trial through which the people of God must pass just before Christ's second coming." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 201. Jacob's experience was much more than a physical struggle; it was a highly spiritual battle between the forces of light and darkness. Thank the Lord, Jacob was saved out of his trouble.

"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." —*The Great Controversy*, 620.

A NEW NAME

Reading Genesis 32:28 again, "And He said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Jacob [the supplanter], but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.'" The *James Moffatt Bible* replaced the word "prevailed" with the word "won." There is a sentence from the inspired writings of Sister Ellen G. White that tells about the outcome of Jacob's wrestling with God: "His sin as a supplanter and deceiver had been pardoned." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 198. The change of name represented Jacob's transformation from a deceiver of men to the "victor of God." Likewise, upon the heads of the overcomers Jesus will with His own right hand place the crown of glory. For each there is a crown, bearing his own "new name." Revelation 2:17. With Jesus everyone can have victory over sin and win the heavenly race for life eternal; no one needs to be eternally lost!

The time of Jacob's trouble will be a final, special test, like a special degree of character perfection. To understand this properly, we need to compare it with the test that Christ passed through in Gethsemane. It was there that He took the cup and the baptism of suffering. By it He was perfected. "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Hebrews 5:8, 9. Yet, before entering upon that final test, Christ was already without sin. So the final test will be, not for the removal of sin, but a special experience in trusting the Father in the midst of very crucial trials.

"Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ.... It is in this life that we are to separate sin from us, through faith in the atoning blood of Christ. Our precious Saviour invites us to join ourselves to Him, to unite our weakness to His strength, our ignorance to His wisdom, our unworthiness to His merits...."

"Jacob's history is also an assurance that God will not cast off those who have been deceived and tempted and betrayed into sin, but who have returned unto Him with true repentance. While Satan seeks to destroy this class, God will send His angels to comfort and protect them in the time of peril. The assaults of Satan are fierce and determined, his delusions are terrible; but the Lord's eye is upon His people, and His ear listens to their cries. Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but the Refiner will bring them forth as gold tried in the fires. God's love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity: but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected." —*The Great Controversy*, pp. 623, 621.

PROTECTION BY ANGELS

"In the day of fierce trial He [Christ] will say, 'Come, My people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors

about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.' Isaiah 26:20. What are the chambers in which they are to hide? They are the protection of Christ and holy angels. The people of God are not at this time all in one place. They are in different companies, and in all parts of the earth.

"I saw the saints leaving the cities and villages, and associating together in companies, and living in the most solitary places. Angels provided them food and water, while the wicked were suffering from hunger and thirst.

"During the night a very impressive scene passed before me. There seemed to be great confusion and the conflict of armies. A messenger from the Lord stood before me, and said, 'Call your household. I will lead you; follow me.' He led me down a dark passage, through a forest, then through the clefts of mountains, and said, 'Here you are safe.' There were others who had been led to this retreat. The heavenly messenger said, 'The time of trouble has come as a thief in the night, as the Lord warned you it would come.'

"In the time of trouble just before the coming of Christ, the righteous will be preserved through the ministration of heavenly angels; but there will be no security for the transgressor of God's law. Angels cannot then protect those who are disregarding one of the divine precepts.

"In the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right.... In the midst of the time of trouble—trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—His chosen ones will stand unmoved. Satan with all the hosts of evil cannot destroy the weakest of God's saints. Angels that excel in strength will protect them, and in their behalf Jehovah will reveal Himself as a 'God of gods,' able to save to the uttermost those who have put their trust in Him." —*Maranatha*, p. 270.

God promises to preserve the righteous through the ministration of heavenly angels. "In the midst of the time of trouble that is coming—a time of trouble such as has not been since there was a nation—God's chosen people will stand unmoved. Satan and his host cannot destroy them, for angels that excel in strength will protect them." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 17.

Dear brothers, sisters, and friends, I believe it is high time to confess all our sins today before the time of Jacob's trouble begins. Why not do this during this Week of Prayer? Pray for the forgiveness of your sins, your misdeeds, and your shortcomings. Pray for cleansing of your hearts, pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in your lives, and pray and work for others as the time of trouble and Jesus' second coming approach.

My sincere wish and prayer during this Week of Prayer is that we all will come closer to Jesus and soon be welcomed into His eternal kingdom. Amen!

"In the closing period of earth's history the Lord will work mightily in behalf of those who stand steadfastly for the right...." —*Maranatha*, p. 270.

Christ's Second Coming

By Tzvetan Petkov

"For the Son of Man is going to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay each person according to what he has done."

Matthew 16:27, *English Standard Version*. "The proclamation of the judgment is an announcement of Christ's second coming as at hand. And this proclamation is called the everlasting gospel. Thus the preaching of Christ's second coming, the announcement of its nearness, is shown to be an essential part of the gospel message." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 227.

Adventism originated in the proclamation of Christ's soon coming. Therefore, true Adventism identifies itself with and is based on prophecy, the fulfillment of the signs of the times, and the time of the judgment, of which the most glorious moment is the second coming of Christ.

HOPE OF ALL AGES

Down through the ages, Christians have faced difficulty, trial, and persecution. Their hope has always been the reward to be received at the second coming of Christ. In the Middle Ages, the martyrs who were burned at the stake during the Inquisition sang hymns as they looked up to heaven, embracing the hope of the second coming of Jesus. Their faith and conviction were so deep that many of them felt no pain from the flames, and their faces reflected the joy of salvation and eternal life. Those beholding them were astonished, and thus every drop of martyr blood became a seed, a powerful sermon of and testimony for the gospel.

"It pointed forward to His second coming in glory to redeem His people, and it set before men the hope, through faith and obedience, of sharing the inheritance of the saints in light. This message is given to men today, and at this time there is coupled with it the announcement of Christ's second coming as at hand." —*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 226.

A PLACE FOR YOU

A major portion of Jesus' sermons were related to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and His return to the Father. He promised His disciples that, after His ascension, He would prepare dwelling places for His followers. "... Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." John 14:1-3, *English Standard Version*.

To live forever in the new heavenly kingdom has always been the desire of every true believer. Also, the prophet Isaiah was shown in vision what life in the new kingdom will be like. He declared in his poetic writings that the lion and the lamb will live together, thus demonstrating the peace, harmony, and love that will exist among God's creatures. Together, the redeemed

will celebrate the glorious restoration of God's perfect creation as the unfallen worlds, man, animals, and plants will rejoice in and reflect God's divine love and perfection forever.

COMING IN THE CLOUDS

When Jesus walked on earth in His human nature, He suffered from heat, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and all of the other limitations of this world. He came to serve in humility and was subject to the persecution of the fallen spiritual world and the people who were allied with it. Crucified and sacrificed for the fallen human race, the Saviour gained the complete victory over the enemy and became man's sole Representative and Substitute. But at His second coming, He will come in power and glory. "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." Mark 13:26, 27, *English Standard Version*.

Since this great event is so greatly desired and longed for, Satan will try to deceive the whole world by appearing as Christ in different places around the world. The Lord warned His followers to be watchful, because false christs and prophets will appear before Jesus' coming takes place. In Matthew 24:8, the Lord equated His coming with birth pains. No matter how prepared a pregnant woman may be, the pains accompanying her child's birth will always surprise her. No one knows the day and hour of Jesus' coming, so continual readiness is necessary for all who will participate in that glorious event. Those who see Him without their having tasted death will be changed and meet Jesus in the air. "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." "Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:17, *English Standard Version*.

FIRST RESURRECTION

When Christ appears in the clouds, "every eye shall see Him." Revelation 1:7. He will call the righteous from their graves in the first resurrection. All of the faithful believers who died, from the time of Adam to the close of probation, will arise from the dead and join the 144,000 who are alive. What a day that will be! The saints will witness the greatest event of all time—the appearance of Christ and the resurrection of the saints. In the partial resurrection that occurs previously during the seven last plagues, according to the prophecy of Daniel, the sealed faithful part of the 144,000 will come from the grave at the same time as will the fiercest persecutors of Jesus, in-

cluding the Sanhedrin that condemned Him. This special resurrection will fulfill Christ's prophecy: "And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory." Mark 13:26, *English Standard Version*.

All who arise in the first resurrection will not only inherit eternal life but will also have the privilege of participating in the judgment of the unbelievers during the one thousand years of rest. "Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with Him for a thousand years." Revelation 20:6, *English Standard Version*. In the book of Revelation, this resurrection is called the first, because the prophecy reveals that a second great resurrection will take place after the one thousand years, when Jesus will raise the wicked from the dead to reap the fruits of their deeds and unbelief, facing the result of the divine judgment. Their full and final destruction in the lake of fire will cleanse God's universe of every sin and all evil.

NO MORE TEARS OR PAIN

"I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." Revelation 1:9, *English Standard Version*. The reward of all the faithful believers will finally be given to them, and justice and righteousness will be fully restored. The saved will have no more suffering but will thrill to eternal joy and happiness. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:4, *English Standard Version*. For those who have passed through the seven plagues, a special promise is given: "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat." Revelation 7:16, *English Standard Version*.

It is difficult to imagine life without the hurt of physical or mental pain. Today, the enemy of souls is trying to destroy the followers of God, attacking them with trials and temptations. However, God uses the difficulties we face as instruments for our perfection and sanctification. Nothing can harm the elect. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:31, 32, *English Standard Version*.

For those who go through suffering on this earth, God promises not only salvation and eternal life but also glorification and the complete restoration of the human race as it was originally created. The redeemed will have the privilege of being partakers of the divine nature. "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also conquered and sat down with My Father on His throne." Revelation 3:21, *English Standard Version*.

CROWNS AND HARPS

The symbol of the crown is used by the Lord Jesus to describe the glory and honor that will be given to those who overcome and become part of the heavenly kingdom. The apostle Paul exclaimed: "Henceforth there is laid up for me the

crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:8, *English Standard Version*. Crowns with stars will be given to all who are saved. The redeemed feel that they do not deserve them and will lay them down at the feet of Jesus, the Author of their faith. Unimaginable joy will be experienced by those who are saved. All of the difficulties, poverty, privation, loss, persecution, and trials of this life will be considered as nothing when compared to the glory and greatness that will be given to the faithful.

Those who inherit eternal life will be so filled with joy that they cannot hold back the song, praise, and rejoicing that spring from their hearts. Glorious instruments will be given to them. "And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth." Revelation 14:2, 3, *English Standard Version*. All of the redeemed will have the gift of music. They will be able to express with music those things that cannot be said with words. A surge of emotions and feelings will stream from their hearts. God's glorious presence in the heavenly kingdom inspires the angels and the four living creatures before the throne of God to constantly repeat, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Revelation 4:8, *English Standard Version*.

SONG OF THE LAMB

The redeemed will sing a special song. "And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and amazing are Your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the nations!'" Revelation 15:3, *English Standard Version*. The words of this song reveal the special experience made by those who enter heaven, like that of Moses and the Israelites, who crossed the Red Sea through God's miracle and experienced His deliverance from their enemies. Through the merits of the Lord Jesus, by a miracle, we may become partakers of His righteousness, the forgiveness of sin, and eternal life. No one else can sing this song, because salvation is a personal matter. The experience of others cannot bring about our salvation. Christ calls His sheep by name. He opens and closes the door, and only those who hear and recognize His voice are part of His flock. Those who follow Christ on earth will rejoice to be with Him in the heavenly Jerusalem.

STREETS OF GOLD AND A PLACE OF LIGHT

The new Jerusalem is described by the apostle John as an amazing place with twelve foundations of precious stones, twelve pearly gates, and streets as of pure gold. "The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass." Revelation 21:18, *English Standard Version*. The angel also provided the exact measurements of the city—its length, width, and height. Everything is so real, wonderfully planned for the saints, and designed to meet their needs. In the middle of the city is the temple. Only the 144,000 will be privileged to enter there. Furthermore, we understand from the Scriptures that the light that illuminates the city comes from Jesus Christ Him-

self. Many artists have attempted to illustrate this majestic city, but human imagination is not sufficient to imagine the beauty and glory of the new Jerusalem.

In vision, Sister White visited the heavenly kingdom, and on several occasions when she returned to the earth's reality she found it to be unbelievably dark in comparison with the wonderful heavenly light. "After I came out of vision, everything seemed changed; a gloom was spread over all that I beheld. Oh, how dark this world looked to me! I wept when I found myself here, and felt homesick. I had seen a better world, and it had spoiled this for me." —*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 67. The redeemed assemble on the shore of the sea of glass before entering the heavenly Jerusalem. Depending on one's character, each one of the redeemed will enter the city through a specific gate named after the twelve patriarchs, who overcame traits that are reflected in all of humanity. The light of the heavenly Jerusalem will be so bright that no sun will be needed. The amazed throng of the redeemed will be overwhelmed with joy and gratitude in that holy place. The promise of Jesus will be fulfilled. The saints will enter their dwelling places, knowing that they are of great value, much more than any person's merits by comparison.

VISITING OTHER WORLDS

A special privilege will be given to the group of the 144,000, "... They that follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth..." Revelation 14:4, *American Standard Version*. They will visit unfallen worlds with the Him and enjoy the presence of other holy beings and the angels. Sister Ellen G. White made the following

experience in vision: "The Lord has given me a view of other worlds. Wings were given me, and an angel attended me from the city to a place that was bright and glorious.... The inhabitants of the place were of all sizes; they were noble, majestic, and lovely.... Then I was taken to a world which had seven moons. There I saw good old Enoch, who had been translated.... I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place.... Then the angel said, 'You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.'" —*Early Writings*, pp. 39, 40.

The experience and reward of the redeemed will be beyond imagination. If today, as we observe nature, we sense something of the Creator's wisdom and perfection, how much more wonderful it will be when we are able to fly around the universe and study the creation of other worlds. The heavenly kingdom consists of the new heaven and the new earth. It is an infinitely better place where no sin or death exists. "Heaven is a good place. I long to be there and behold my lovely Jesus, who gave His life for me, and be changed into His glorious image. Oh, for language to express the glory of the bright world to come! I thirst for the living streams that make glad the city of our God." —*The Adventist Home*, p. 543.

If we are faithful to the end, we will be there. We will see and touch the golden streets of the new Jerusalem. We will see the light shining from the Lord Jesus, receive the crowns of gold, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Let us do everything in the light of eternity, dedicating our hearts and minds to Jesus, and preparing to meet Him in the clouds when He comes soon. Amen!

READINGS for the Week of Prayer

Friday, December 2 to
Sabbath, December 10, 2022



International Missionary Society
Seventh-day Adventist Church
Reform Movement
General Conference

"Now is the time to prepare for the coming of our Lord. Readiness to meet Him cannot be attained in a moment's time. Preparatory to that solemn scene there must be vigilant waiting and watching, combined with earnest work. So God's children glorify Him. Amid the busy scenes of life their voices will be heard speaking words of encouragement, faith, and hope. All they have and are is consecrated to the Master's service...."

—*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 353.