

ARMAGEDDON¹

By Paul Penno Jr.

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The book of Revelation assures us of a solid reason for hope, revealing how Heaven's constant communication with humanity illuminates otherwise dark corridors of history. And it does more, opening up a cosmic view—the eternal significance of world history, past, current, and future. It is a profound docudrama that depicts in a few words world truth more profound yet recognizable than anything we could gain from a shelf of Folio Society books.

The climax of Revelation focuses on unprecedented troubles yet to descend on earth as we approach the end of time. Every venerable institution that we have thought secure will prove to be vanity.

Great powers that we have naively assumed were benign will metamorphose into those destructive of liberty and true human happiness. It's solemn language: "The cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found" (Rev. 16:19, 20).

It isn't a pretty picture. But commonsense sees how injustice, corruption, crime, greed, and sensuality are steadily gaining the upper hand. The ruin of wars that we have seen on TV is an intimation of what the world is ultimately headed for,

¹ Rev. 16:15, 16. 382 "O Day of Rest and Gladness;" 523 "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place."

according to Revelation. But what proves that the book of Revelation is truly inspired by God is its Good News, not its bad news. It tells of redemption and salvation.

God's "wrath" is not a tit-for-tat retaliation against rebellious mankind. He is too big and too wise for that. The future time of trouble is the natural result within history of man insisting on his own self-centered way. Although God has given us freedom of choice, "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). Man's final rebellion is symbolized in Revelation by the "battle of Armageddon" when the nations "will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb" (Rev. 17:13, 14). They *hate* Christ, and *they* start the "war," not He.

The Bible speaks of the great battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16; also, it speaks of a time of trouble coming on the world like the world has never seen before (see Daniel 12). It is not God who brings that trouble on the earth, and it is not God who provokes the battle of Armageddon. God does not bring disaster—wicked people bring such troubles on the earth.

The same seeds of rebellion and hatred which produced that strife have been sown in all the world. And it is this spiritual rebellion against the law of God that will eventually lead the world into the time of trouble and the battle of Armageddon.

But in the meantime, there is another spiritual power at work in the world to bring peace and harmony, to make life livable. That is the power of the gospel, the good news, of Christ. Whenever and

wherever it is permitted to be proclaimed, there come the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and nations are blessed.

In Revelation 7:1-4 we see a vivid picture of what is happening behind the scenes—the news behind the headlines. Four terrible winds of human passion are about to burst loose like a wild tornado, but God sends four special angels to hold back those four winds until a special work is performed among mankind. Another angel is seen with the seal of God, and God tells the four angels, Hold those terrible four winds until we have sealed the servants of God in their foreheads. That seal of God is what prepares sinners like you and me to be ready for the second coming of Christ, to be ready to stand for the Lord through earth's last time of trouble.

Now we ask, What is the seal of the living God? Ezekiel will help us understand, for he mentions the "mark" which is placed upon the foreheads of God's people (Eze. 9:3, 4). This "mark" is a sign of victory over all sin.

In Egypt, as the destroying angel went through the land to slay all the firstborn of the Egyptians, he "passed over" those homes where the mark of blood was placed on the doorpost. So, in the final destruction, the destroying angels are commanded, "Come not near any man upon whom is the mark" (Eze. 9:6). The "seal of God" is therefore the mark identifying God's people as His. Being placed in their "foreheads" signifies that it is in the character. The power that applies the seal is the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4:30).

John further describes this seal in Revelation 14:1, saying that the 144,000 have "the Father's name written in their foreheads." What is God's name? In 1 John 4:6, we read: "God is love." When the character of the people of God is transformed into perfect love, then will the "Father's name" be written in their foreheads.

But how is love revealed? "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10). If we profess to have love, but do not fulfill the law of God, we deny the seal of God. And if we profess to keep God's commandments, but do not reveal love in our lives, we deny the Holy Spirit who impresses the seal upon God's people, because "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22).

A seal is the sign of authority, and is associated with the laws of government! "The writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse" (Esther 8:8). Queen Esther knew that if King Ahasuerus sealed the writing of the Persian law, it could never again be changed. God says through Isaiah: "Seal the law among my disciples" (Isa. 8:16). We shall find the seal of God in His law.

A seal must have three things in order to be legal: (1) The name of the law-giver; (2) his position, or authority; and (3) the territory over which he rules. For example, the Queen of England's seal would read, "Elizabeth (name), Queen (position or authority) of Great Britain, Ireland, and the Commonwealth (territory)."

Now we ask, where can we find the seal of God in His law? In the fourth commandment, concerning

the Sabbath. Only the Sabbath commandment contains all three essentials of a seal: (1) "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God" (name of the law-giver); (2) "In six days the Lord made" (His position or authority, He is the Creator); (3) "heavens and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (the territory over which He rules).

When Isaiah spoke for God, "Bind up the testimony, seal the *law* among my disciples," he spoke of a work of restoring God's law to its rightful place of authority. Something in the law of God had evidently been overlooked and neglected by God's disciples. This *something* was to be restored by the angel who places the seal of God upon the foreheads of God's people before the seventh angel brings history to an end.

Now we ask, What is the commandment usually neglected by God's "disciples" today? It is indeed the fourth commandment, the Sabbath commandment. Many have turned away from the true Sabbath of the Lord, which is the seventh day, and have accepted a rest day chosen for them and commanded by the Roman Catholic Church, which day is the first day of the week. Our Lord says that His Holy Spirit sanctifies His people through the proper observance of the Sabbath: "Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; *that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you*" (Exodus 31:13). Further, it is by observing the Sabbath that God's people come to know Him: "And hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign

between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God" (Ezekiel 20:20).

To receive the "seal of God" is to receive a distinguishing mark that sets one apart from others as very different and peculiar. The destroying angels are told, "come not near any man upon whom is the mark" (Eze. 9:6). But all others, including "the ancient men which were before the house," were to be slain. Does the observance of the true Sabbath distinguish a person as different from most of the people?

Yes, most certainly. Even in this so-called "Christian age," one of the most peculiar things that a person can do is to observe the true Sabbath of the Lord, the seventh day, which is Saturday. The whole world, Christian and pagan, regularly use the Lord's true Sabbath as their busiest working day. Millions, because of the influence of paganism and the papacy, observe the first day of the week instead. This very peculiarity of observing the seventh day is an evidence that it is indeed the seal of the living God.

But it must be remembered that true Sabbath-keeping is the fruitage of a genuine conversion to Christ. It is not merely a case of resting on Saturday. To receive the seal of God through true Sabbath-keeping is to receive the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, a "rest" from sin and self: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Heb. 4:9, 10). These "works" are works of pride and love of self.

The work of this angel in sealing God's people is the most important work going on in the world today. It will continue until in "every nation, kindred, tongue, and people" God's true followers shall have been sealed. No power on earth or in hell can prevent the accomplishment of this work. For this purpose, the "four angels" continue to hold back the "winds of strife" in all the world a little longer. This explains the mysterious interventions of God in the affairs of certain nations that have suffered tyranny and restrictions of religious liberty. The angels of God hold back those "four winds" so that the work of the gospel can proceed. But only a little longer—soon will come that "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" (Dan. 12: 1). Now is the time for us to receive the seal of God.

God has made this promise. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on His cross is the only reconciling agency in existence; therefore it follows that the coming of "Elijah" must be proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ in all His reconciling power. It will be what unbelieving hearts find almost inconceivable: a proclamation of what the Bible calls "the atonement" that will work miracles of grace worldwide. The mention of "fathers" and "children" means the entire human race in all our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural alienations. A blessed unity will be realized as people kneel together at the cross of the Son of God, at last "beholding" or perceiving its full significance.

No, it will not be 100 per cent successful. It would be, except for one anti-Elijah-message factor that will intrude: the Battle of Armageddon. Side by side,

two movements will develop—on the one hand, a blessed reconciliation ("at-one-ment") of human hearts with each other and with the heavenly Father, and simultaneously on the other hand, the exacerbation of enmity between humans and God (Rom. 8:7): it will be the ultimate polarization of the human race, "the hour of His judgment" (Rev. 14:6). No one will be neutral.

That sealing work is going forward today. A vast number from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people will gladly receive the seal of God and they will refuse the mark of the beast. You are invited to be one of them!

Preparing for Armageddon

That battle is the final scenario for a world rejecting God's grace. At last all pretense will be thrown off, and man's "enmity against God" will be laid open (Rom. 8:7).

But how can mankind's puny war against God bother Him? There is one thing that will arouse His wrath: *the wicked try to take out their hatred against Him by oppressing His people.*

How would you react as a parent if you saw hoodlums beating your innocent child, trying to kill him because they hate you? Every cell in your body would be shot through with adrenalin as righteous wrath drove you to the defense of your child. This gives us some insight into God's final "wrath" against sin. It is not selfish on His part.

On the cross, Christ freely forgave those who murdered Him. And He has kept silent for millenniums while tyrants and persecutors have tortured and killed His followers by the millions,

because some seed of hope blossomed that humanity might learn to do better. Lincoln saw a “last, best [political] hope” for humanity. God must give the world every chance to learn and to repent. But humanity has misinterpreted His mysterious silence.

When the world attempts to crucify the Lord again in the person of His saints, Armageddon will be its final refusal of His grace, a deliberate attempt to reenact Calvary and His cross on a global scale. After this ultimate tragic choice, a holy, divine wrath will be a withdrawing of His mercy, leaving the world to itself at last bereft of mercy as never before except in the flood of Noah’s day.

Few realize how actively God’s Spirit works to restrain evil in the world, counteracting men’s murderous designs. Thank Him that at least part of the time bombs are discovered before they go off, and that police can catch at least *some* of the criminals who lurk furtively.

God cannot be the author of mayhem. Those “four angels” are increasingly straining themselves to hold back the four winds of final turmoil. But God has commanded them to hang on tight *until the gospel of His grace can accomplish its purpose in the world*. Think seriously why you’re alive.

The focal point of Revelation is not the terrible time of trouble that is coming. God has better news than that. *There is a last-day message of much more abounding grace.*

Those who finally reject God’s grace will hear no scathing denunciation from either the Father or the

Son. They will hear only silence from God, and the voice of their own accusing conscience.

There’s a Message That Can Demonstrate God’s Love

This astounding work of grace is accomplished by Good News proclaimed by three special angels. Because it’s “the everlasting gospel” we know it isn’t a new invention; it’s given in a modern setting of our last-day needs. It’s in language people today can understand, symbolized as truth proclaimed by three angels flying like helicopters over the treetops: “I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’” (Rev. 14:6, 7).

It’s clear: the angel symbolizes a worldwide proclamation of pure, unadulterated truth, a rediscovery of something long lost sight of. It probes the solution to mankind’s deepest psychological and spiritual needs—the conquest of inner insecurity. Thus it embodies deliverance from every evil that enslaves or distorts the human soul.

A second and a third angel follow, bringing the first’s message to completion. The message of the three angels achieves a phenomenal worldwide impact. Every “nation, tribe, tongue, and people” hear it. What a courageous prediction to make some 2000 years ago! (Should it take courage to believe it today?)

Why is the message so striking? It says, “Worship Him who made heaven and earth” (Rev. 14:7). Swimming upstream almost alone against the world current of evolutionary teaching, this creation-message makes its way against popular opinion. The memorial of His creation that God’s appointed is the seventh-day Sabbath—the true Lord’s day. Already in response to this “angel’s” message, millions of Christian seventh-day Sabbath-keepers have sprung up in almost every nation in the world.

The call to “fear God and give glory to Him” is not to crawl on our stomachs like a cowering slave before a tyrannical master. It means to reverence Him, to cherish a humble appreciation of His love and holy righteousness. God does not want us to shake with terror before Him, but to shiver with the delightful thrill of appreciating His glorious self-sacrifice of love. It led the Son of God to yield Himself totally on His cross! It makes shivers run up and down on your back. The death He died for us was the equivalent of what Revelation calls “the second death,” the final yet-unknown despair of being “forsaken” of God (Matt. 27:46; Gal. 3:13; Rev. 2:11; 20:14).

Nor is God a selfish potentate reveling in the shallow flattery of fawning admirers. To “give glory to Him” means to cooperate with His Holy Spirit in demonstrating His love to the world, to pass on the welcoming message, “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). God’s greatest joy is seeing alienated, miserable, wrecked people find the sunshine of a healing reconciliation with Him. This is His glory—

saving lost people. And we can “give Him glory” by ministering with Him in that work of reconciliation.

God does not want anyone to serve Him in terror of being condemned in judgment. The “house of His judgment” cannot be the hour when *He* condemns the world, for “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). If anyone is condemned at last, it won’t be the Father who condemns him, for Jesus said, “The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22). And furthermore, Jesus says that neither will *He* condemn those who reject Him: “If anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47).

Thus it is evident that those who finally reject God’s grace will hear no scathing denunciation from either the Father or Son. Amid the silence from God, the voice of their own accusing conscience will be defeating. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). And the one whom Christ will judge, He vindicates: “I will confess his name,” He says, “before My Father” (Rev. 3:5).

So the angels’ call to believe God’s “everlasting gospel” in the context of “the hour of His judgment” is really a message assuring us of vindication. It tells us that “in Christ” God has accepted us, forgiven us, and adopted us.

These three angels proclaim an arresting message that focuses all the revealed truth that God has

been communicating for thousands of years, demanding at last a thorough-going response. No one can sit on the fence after hearing and understanding this last-day message. “Everyone” will choose either to believe and respond, or to disbelieve and reject. All will line up on one side or the other for the final “battle of Armageddon.”

The Great Final Battle of Armageddon

The Bible declares that the evil world will organize to make war against God. The pent-up resentments and enmity of the ungodly will finally erupt in a battle known as Armageddon. In holy vision the prophet John saw this final conflict develop. First, he saw that two “harvests” on earth will ripen side by side: those who are the good grain and are loyal to God; and those who are rebels against Him, the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. . . . And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress” (Rev. 14:15, 19, 20). This is the final crisis.

All upon earth will join one side or the other. Those who rebel against Him will “[a] make war with the Lamb [Jesus], and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and [b] they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev. 17:14). “The spirits of devils, working miracles, 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 . . . into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon” (Rev. 16:14, 16).

This sheds light on many mysterious developments in the world. This war is not to be

understood as a *literal* one with armaments. Since the “carnal mind is enmity against God,” and “whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15), it is clear that this is a *spiritual war*. But it is even more real than any physical war, because these are the final spiritual issues lurking in the shadows behind all of humanity’s wars. This great controversy between God and Satan will be resolved for all eternity, and truth will win the victory. In symbolic language, John beheld this final conflict:

“I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; . . . and he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev. 19:11-16).

The picture becomes clear from these several passages:

- (1) The enemies of God initiate this last battle.
- (2) The “kings of the earth and of the whole world” will join in the cause against “the Lamb”.

(3) Some serious world crisis will provoke this eruption of “enmity against God,” as they imagine that somehow God is responsible for the evil that has become by then unmanageable throughout the world.

(4) As The Word of God, Christ wins the victory.

(5) There are those loyal to Him, on His side, “clothed in fine linen, clean and white.” Because they are loyal to Him, the world’s enmity will be directed against them also. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, . . . but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18, 19). Christ comes to defend and save them.

(6) The reason for God’s “fierce wrath” is not a selfish one; the world will seek to destroy those people who choose to remain loyal to Him. As a parent is angry when some beast tries to beat up or kill his helpless child, so this is what arouses God’s anger (see Rev. 13:11-17).

(7) The ones who stir up the nations to “make war” against Him are “the spirits of devils, working miracles.” But those who “make war” against Him *think* they have good reason to do so.

Will the Message Succeed?

Revelation gives us no sorrowful picture of the Lamb of God turning away from the final scenes of history in a staggering defeat. Multitudes will joyfully respond to the call to reverence the Creator and Redeemer. It’s as though God can hardly contain His joy as He points to these people as the fruitage of His last appeals: “Here is the patience of the

saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

Those who respond are described in Revelation as a special group. “I looked, and behold, a Lamb [the once-crucified Jesus] standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). Who are these? “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. . . . And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14:4, 5).

Can any of us reasonably hope for God to say that he or she is “without fault”? Scripture says, yes. The grace of the Lamb will bring about this seemingly impossible goal. That is what Jesus died to accomplish, and He did not die in vain. That is the essence of the message of the three angels. The message is not sent to prepare people to die, but to prepare people for translation at His coming.

Satan insists that it is impossible to overcome as Christ overcame, and many theologians and preachers unwittingly side with the enemy. The message of the three angels is that God will certainly have a people who bring glory to Him. Revelation’s primary concern is the vindication of the Lamb who paid an infinite price to redeem us.

But His vindication also involves our own, for we are one with Him. Those who stand faithfully “with Him” in this final struggle will not do so in order to gain a reward for themselves. Salvation is indeed a bargain, but getting a good bargain will not be the

motive for anyone who truly follows Christ in these last days.

Is it possible for us self-seeking humans, who all our lives have been immersed in pursuing trivial self-interest, to find a larger perspective—a genuine heart sympathy with the Lamb of God? Appreciation of Him for His own sake? Can it transcend both our fear of being lost and a merely selfish hope of reward in heaven? This is the mature faith toward which God is calling us.

For most of our history we have been prone to see in the three angels' message a fear-oriented, imperious demand, "Shape up! or face damnation."

And true, there is in God's last message an element of solemn warning. But John the Revelator recognized that the "earth is lightened with [God's] glory." The apparent terrors of the third angels' message are transcended by its genial proclamation of grace. The warning against the mark of the beast is in reality the Good News that the Lord is trying His best to persuade us to receive the seal of God. Herein is the overriding concern of the God's "most precious message"—let's stop resisting that on-going grace! *Let* Christ do what He wants so much to do—save us "to the uttermost."