

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***The Book of Revelation***  
**Lesson 12: Judgment on Babylon**

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. Revelation is a profound portrayal, depicting in a few words, world truth more profound yet recognizable than anything we could gain from a shelf of uninspired books.

The climax of Revelation focuses on unprecedented troubles that will descend on the earth as we approach the end of time. Every worldly institution that we have thought secure will prove to be meaningless. Great powers that we have naively assumed were benign will change into those that are destructive of liberty and true human happiness. “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 common sense sees that injustice, corruption, crime, greed, and sensuality are already steadily gaining the upper hand. The ruin of civil wars that we have seen on TV is an object lesson of what the whole world is ultimately headed for, according to Revelation. 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 back and forth retaliation against rebellious mankind. He is too big and too wise for that. The future time of trouble is simply 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). Rather, they hate Christ, and *they* start the war, not He.

That battle is the final chapter for a world rejecting God's grace. What Satan wants is to enlist every human being on earth to join with him in his hopeless war against God. Until a person rejects the truth that God sends him, he cannot be fully tricked by the lies that Satan sends him; but once he finally rejects truth, he has no defense against them.

According to Revelation, the nations of the world will pass a decree authorizing the people to put the saints to death after a certain time. But Christ, as always, identifies Himself with His persecuted people. He accepts this declaration of war against His

people as a declaration of war against Himself. When Babylon—the mix of nations and religions—passes this decree, that city will have made her last tragic mistake. She will be doomed forever.

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.

As a parent if you saw gangs beating up on your child, trying to kill him, you would come in 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. God must give the world every chance to learn and to repent. But humanity has misinterpreted His perceived "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, God's wrath will be a withdrawing of His mercy, leaving the world to itself at last as never before except in the flood of Noah's day.

God has commanded to hold this Babylonian union of church and state joined for battle, until the gospel of His grace can accomplish its purpose in the world. The focal point of Revelation is not the terrible time of trouble that is coming. God has better news for us than that. There is a last-day proclamation of a message of grace.

The pure message of grace much more abounds than all the abounding sin the devil has led humans to wallow in. But traditional legalistic concepts of the gospel come short of its true New Testament clarity, and fall far short of its powerful truth.

The endless succession of sinning and repenting and then sinning again is not what Christ died to accomplish for us. Only a diminished idea of His sacrifice and His High Priestly work can accommodate such defeat. A century ago (in the 1888 era), the Lord gave to Seventh-day Adventists a "most precious" understanding of the gospel as the power of God unto salvation. It is a unique joining together of righteousness by faith and the Day of Atonement ministry of Christ.

"It has always been Satan's deception, and has always been the working of his power to get [us] to think that Christ is as far away as it is possible to put Him. The farther away [we] put Christ, even those who profess to believe in Him, the better the devil is satisfied; and then he will stir up the enmity that is in the natural heart. ... Is Christ away off still?—No; He is 'not far from every one of us.' ... And as certainly as you get a definition of 'not far,' you have the word 'near.' He is near to everybody, to us; and He

always has been. ... He wants us all to see the nearness of the living Christ dwelling in the heart and shining in the daily life" (A. T. Jones, *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 478).

Millions of Christians hunger to "see" Christ as a Saviour nigh at hand and not afar off, as One who knows how we humans are tempted, and who does indeed save to the uttermost those who come unto God by Him (Heb. 4:15; 7:24, 25).

—*Paul E. Penno*

**Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/1pCVhcASTgU>

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