

Armageddon at the Door

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Chapter Ten

Dueling Gospels and Worldwide Confederacies

Before concluding this book, I think it would be helpful to briefly summarize the order of the last events of earth's history as far as they can be determined on the basis of Revelation alone. Rather than a chapter-by-chapter approach, the order chosen is grounded in my perception of the order in which these events actually occur at the end of history. Since the Book of Revelation is not a linear book, but bounces back and forth in time as you work through the chapters, this outline should be a helpful way to summarize the Battle of Armageddon as a whole. I will attempt to be as specific about these events as the text allows, while taking care not to be more specific than the text allows. To over-specify the events of the End usually does more harm than good.

1) Worldwide Proclamation of the Gospel

Life has gone on for centuries since the time of the New Testament. People have been

eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Generation after generation has passed, many of them thinking that they were the last generation. Many spectacular events occurred. Major wars have been fought. There have been horrific storms, great earthquakes, famines and pestilences. Yet none of these events have precipitated the end of the world. There is one defining event that will mark the shift from business as usual to the sequence of events that will truly lead to the end of the world. That event is predicted by Jesus in Matt 24:14, NIV: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." This text indicates that it is the worldwide proclamation of the gospel that precipitates the events of the end. While the Book of Revelation is not as explicit, the worldwide proclamation of the gospel is clearly central to the end-time narrative.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water."

Revelation 14:6-7 (NIV)

In the Book of Revelation the eternal or everlasting gospel is given by the three angels, who represent the remnant of the woman's seed (Rev 12:17). The remnant comes at the end of time. The remnant of a carpet is like the rest of the roll, it is not totally new or totally different from the rest of the carpet. In the same way, the end-time remnant will be in continuity with the faithful people of God throughout the ages.

The remnant at the end, however, will have a unique mission and identity which will unfold in the run-up to the final events of earth's history. In the third volume of this series I

intend to explore the mission, message and identity of the end-time remnant (or the confederacy of the saints, as I have called it in this book) in more depth. While the remnant's mission will be unique, its message will be grounded in the New Testament gospel of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It will be grounded in the gospel but uniquely packaged for the end-time.

Revelation 14:7 summarizes the end-time version of the gospel in three statements:

Fear God, give Him glory, and worship Him.

"Fear God and give glory to Him, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water.

Rev 14:7

The reference to judgment is not the main point of the verse, it is a subordinate clause in the Greek ("for" or "because" the hour of His judgment has come). So the gospel at the End is preached in the context of a pre-advent judgment. This gives it a unique flavor and urgency.

The Fear of God

To fear God means, above all, to take Him seriously in your life, to make Him your ultimate priority. This message is completely relevant for the times in which we live. We are so overscheduled, moving from one activity to another, that making God central in our lives is truly a challenge. There are so many distractions that we easily become casual about our relationship with God, even though we may have all the theological knowledge we think we need. The gospel of the end-time will put God first, no matter what the cost to our personal

agendas.

In the Old Testament the “fear of the Lord” was a common expression, particularly in the poetic writings of the Psalms and the Prophets. Hebrew poetry did not express itself in rhymes, instead it made use of rhythm and the parallel of ideas to charm the ear. Notice the rhythm and parallel ideas of Prov 9:10, NIV:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Even in English, the words have a beautiful rhythm, don’t they? But notice the parallel of ideas. Obviously the main verb is the same in both lines: “is.” The latter part of the first line, “the beginning of wisdom” is paralleled in the second line by the word “understanding.” That means that “the fear of the Lord” is a parallel idea to “knowledge of the Holy One.” To fear the Lord is to know Him, to have a living relationship with Him. The “fear of the Lord” is paralleled in other texts with “keeping the commandments” and “avoiding evil.” (Ps 111:10; Prov 3:7; 16:6) So the Old Testament concept of the fear of the Lord has rich meaning for those who want to live by the message of Rev 14:7. It means to know God personally, to be obedient to His will and to avoid actions that would harm our relationship with Him or with others. It means to take Him seriously in everything we do.

To take God seriously, therefore, involves an element of accountability. We live our lives in the consciousness of our relationship with Him. We are aware of His presence, we speak with Him and listen to Him. We make all our decisions in life on the basis of an awareness of judgment, a consciousness that everything we do matters, even if no human on earth knows

about it. God knows and it all matters to Him. So God's end-time people will be as faithful inside as they are outside. They will be authentic. They will live with a godly sense of "fear." In the biblical sense that means awe, respect, taking God seriously in all we do.

Many people don't like accountability, they feel that it "cramps their style." They don't like other people telling them what to do. But the reality is; very little of usefulness is accomplished in this life without accountability. Let me give you an example. Suppose I decide to go jogging at 6 AM in the morning. What are the chances I will get up without hesitation at 5:45 AM? Very little. But suppose again I agree to meet a friend at the corner at 6 AM. Now I'm thinking, *Joe is counting on me to be there, I'd better get going.* So I get up and meet my friend and go jogging. It doesn't matter that Joe was thinking the same thing! We both made it to the corner and we both accomplished the task thanks to our accountability with each other.

The same can happen with accountability to God. We know that God is present. We know He reads our hearts. So we can make a covenant with Him to do whatever challenging thing we know He wants us to get done. And in the consciousness of His watching eye, we are motivated to get up and get tracking on whatever assignment we have both agreed upon. In the last days of earth's history God's people will be all the more focused on His will and His ways and accountability to Him will be a powerful motivator toward doing what needs to be done.

I realize that the above concept of the gospel will be hard for some to take. In your own personal history there may have been physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Abuse may even

have happened in a church context or in relation to a pastor or teacher. Authority figures of any kind, even spiritual ones, can become repugnant to you in light of such a past. Accountability may be the last thing you feel you need. My response to you would be that I fully understand. The message of accountability to God may not be what you need right now. The thought that God sees every action might drive you to unhealthy behaviors.

If the above is true in your life, let this message go for right now. Rest in the assurance of God's love. Read my book *Meet God Again for the First Time* if you are unclear in regard to how God saves people like yourself. God is neither a tyrant nor a spiritual abuser. He cares about you more than you care about yourself. When you are ready for a deeper walk with Him, He will gently lead you there. Just don't settle for a diminished life because things have been hard for you. Study the gospels and books like *Steps to Christ* and *Meet God Again*. Seek out healthy mentors who can help you untangle confused and negative thoughts. Attend a small group that is salted with mentally healthy and stable people. Visit a counselor and pour out the things you can't even tell to God right now (*Desire of Ages*, 297). Know that there is a higher goal for your life in these end-times and spend much time in prayer for readiness to know the truth and to follow wherever God may lead.

Give God Glory

To give God glory also means to put Him first in every thought and action. But the concept "glory of God" has some unique twists in Scripture that are worth exploring. "Glory" of

course has a primary meaning of radiance or splendor. A monster fireworks display in New York City or Disney World is “glorious.” Some of Ellen White’s dazzling views of the throne-room of God provoked her to repeatedly say, “glory.”

More to the point for us, however, is a secondary meaning of the term, having to do with things like honor, praise and pride. By nature all of us “glory” in ourselves. We glory in the things we possess; that new house, new car, or new surround sound system. We glory in our achievements, our Ph.D.s, our careers, our baptisms, our athletic accomplishments (even if 30 years ago!) And some of us, of course, glory a great deal in the size (or alleged size) of the fish we have caught! We glory in who we know, our successful children, and celebrities we may have seen or briefly spoken to. We glory in anything that makes us look better in comparison with others.

So when it comes to giving glory to God, the basic meaning is to ground our pride and joy not in ourselves and the things we have done, but in the things that God has done for us. To glory in our possessions, our performance, or the people we know is to lean on a broken stick. Any one of these can be suddenly removed from us by the circumstances of life. The one thing that cannot be taken away from us is the objective reality of what God has done for us in Christ. This concept is clearly taught in the Scriptures:

23 Thus saith the LORD,
Let not the wise *man* **glory** in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty *man* **glory** in his might,
let not the rich *man* **glory** in his riches:
24 But let him that glorieth **glory** in this,
that he understandeth and knoweth me, . . .

Jer 9:23-24, KJV

Tragic. It is perfectly natural for sinful human beings to focus on their own riches, their own wisdom, their own strength. We are constantly playing “one-up” games with others to demonstrate that we are somehow smarter, stronger or have better toys than the next person. But a focus on our own wisdom, strength or material possessions distracts us from the only focus that will prepare us for the events of the end-time. True and lasting peace can only come when we focus outside of ourselves. Paul expressed this in one of his most powerful “sound-bites” (Gal 6:14, KJV):

God forbid that I should **glory**, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

I have deliberately used the King James Version in these last two texts, in spite of the archaic language, because it preserves the consistent usage of the original languages here. Both Greek and Hebrew use the word “glory” with reference to that in which people find their “pride and joy.” The things we talk about excitedly, the things that run constantly through our minds, the things that motivate us, those are the things that we “glory” in.

According to Rev 14:6-7, the final proclamation of the gospel will underline the component of glory. God’s end-time people will be focused on Him and what He has done, rather than on themselves and what they have or have not done. The gospel, even the end-time gospel, is all about Him, it is not about us. God is glorified when we trust in Him for salvation, rather than in our own pitiful attempts to add some glory to what He has done. We glorify God when we believe His Word and when we rest in His finished work like Abraham did.

To glorify God is to accept the message of justification by faith in verity (see Ev 190 and 1 SM 372).

2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to **glory**; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Rom 4:2-5, KJV

But there is one added dimension to this “glory” business. At a couple of crucial points Paul points out that we can glorify God not only with our mouths or in the things that we think about, but also with our bodies. We can glorify God or not with the things that we do and even the things that we eat or drink. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the **glory** of God.” 1 Cor 10:31, NIV. If we are truly conscious of God in our lives, if we are grateful that He has made us and has provided us with gifts and talents, then everything we do matters, even what we put into our bodies. God’s end-time people will care about what they eat and drink. They will take time for sunshine, exercise, fresh air and adequate rest. They will be aware that others will judge God by the way they look and the way they behave.

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So **glorify** God in your body.

1 Cor 6:19-20, ESV

Paul brings this point out in the context of a discussion of whether or not it is appropriate for Christians to consort with prostitutes. Paul makes it clear that sexual sin compounds the failure to bring glory to God because it engages two individuals, not just one. It

is evidence of spiritual confusion because it implies that the same person can glorify God with mouth or hand, yet use another part of the body to glorify self and exploit others. What we do with our bodies matters a great deal to God and it has a powerful impact on who we are and what we become.

Whenever a minister or a TV preacher is found to be practicing the very things that he or she preaches against, it is God and His church that take the biggest hit. Secular people take from such things that Christian faith is ultimately a sham and that God does not really change lives and transform communities of people. When we use our sexuality for self-gratification we speak the lie to our own profession of faith and bring God's name into disrepute. What we do in response to the gospel matters a great deal. We can glorify God with our bodies.

I remember leading an Adventist tour group in a Muslim country a few years ago. There were 37 Adventists on the bus and 2 chain-smoking Muslims (the driver and the tour guide). On the second day of the journey the entire group got sick with some intestinal virus that also produced a high fever. The sickness rolled back and forth through the bus for nearly ten days, while the driver and the guide were completely unaffected. The group became so grumpy that the guide repeatedly threatened to abandon the tour. What impression of Adventists do you suppose the driver and guide took away from that tour?

Perfect health is certainly not an option in this life. We are beset with toxic waste, pollution and the stress of the internet world. Nevertheless, God's end-time people will live in such a way that others will notice a difference, a positive difference! Do you feel like you are

not there yet? I don't feel that I am either. But it is well to keep a vision of God's purpose before us, it helps to keep us focused on the goal.

Worshipping God

We covered this part of the text in an earlier chapter. The end-time message of the gospel will include a call to worship the One who created all things. The gospel continues to be all about Him and not about us. We worship Him in full obedience to all His commandments with a special focus on the Sabbath as a test of the lengths to which God's people are willing to go in their commitment to Him. We will choose to worship Him in the way that He requires because it is all about Him, and not about us. We will avoid counterfeits to focus in detail on all that God calls us to do. And we will do this even at great cost to ourselves.

I recently returned from a speaking engagement in Guam, a beautiful island in the Western Pacific. There I met Steve. Steve is the owner and manager of the best-known beach club on the island. He offers visitors waterfront experiences like jet skiing, parasailing, dolphin watching and snorkling. When confronted with the truth about the Sabbath, he realized that Saturday was the busiest day of the week for his business. And Saturday was also the day when people signed up for Sunday, the second busiest day. So he would be losing the two biggest revenue days every week and he was already millions of dollars in debt. It was likely that if he closed on Sabbath his business would go bankrupt and he would have to let all of his employees go. He reasoned that it was not fair to them to be so heavily affected by his own personal

decision.

But under the conviction of the Spirit he decided to trust God and close his business on Sabbaths. Informing the major beach hotels of his decision, he received only derision and a complete cut-off of their business, and they had been the source of most of his business! Nevertheless, he moved ahead. That Friday night he closed the business, turned the lights out, and left the answering machine on. That Sabbath was the worst weather Guam had seen in some time! When he checked the phone on Saturday night he was amazed to find scores of reservations for Sunday. Way above the norm! This weather pattern continued every weekend for six months. The weather on Sabbath was terrible and on Sunday was beautiful. With his spirit of service and caring concern for people filtering down through his employees, his beach club not only did not fail, it became the dominant player in the market!

I saw this with my own eyes. Every time one of his boats came to the dock, it was completely filled from a long line of people waiting to get on. At the same time I noticed that the boats of his competitors were never full. They often had only two or three people on them (Steve's boats were carrying a dozen people at a time for parasailing and other water sports). It was obvious that Steve's operation was uniquely blessed.

But what if his business had failed? What if he had gone bankrupt? Steve is still convinced that the only way to happiness and peace is through the gospel of Jesus Christ and through a response to that gospel that includes full obedience to all of God's commandments. It is better to have nothing of this world than to lose what you have in Christ. This was the spirit

of the martyrs. Steve has gotten a taste, not only of the end-time gospel commitment, but of the power of a creator God to make something out of nothing!

Other Gospel Texts in Revelation

Revelation 14:6-7 is not the only place in the book that makes reference to a final proclamation of the gospel. Revelation 16:15, as we have seen, recalls the message to Laodicea (Rev 3:17-18). At the very end of time there will be a call to authenticity and full readiness for the Second Coming of Jesus. The four angels of Rev 7:1-4 hold back the winds of strife so that the final sealing message can make its way around the world. In the last moments of this world's history, the "mystery of God" will be brought to completion (Rev 10:6-7). The two witnesses of Revelation present a message that causes people to fear God and give Him glory just before the close of probation (Rev 11:11-13). And finally there is a mighty angel who lightens the whole world with the glory of God just before the End (Rev 18:1).

So the concept of a final proclamation of the gospel just before the close of probation is a major theme throughout the book of Revelation. One could even add Rev 1:4-7, where strong references to the death, resurrection and heavenly reign of Christ precede a reference to His Second Coming. The whole book of Revelation is about the gospel in the context of the events just before the end.

The result of this final proclamation is a world-wide confederacy of the saints, known as the remnant (Revelation 12:17); the 144,000 (Revelation 7:1-8 and 14:1-5); the great multitude

(Revelation 7:9-17 and 19:1); the saints (Rev 13:7; 14:12); the called, chosen, and faithful followers of the Lamb (Revelation 17:14); and the watchful ones who hang onto their garments (Revelation 16:15; 3:17-18), which have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:15-17; 19:7-8). This multitude of images portray the one people of God at the end of time.

How does the gospel come to universal attention at the end? Is there some new twist, some theological detail about the gospel that has been overlooked until now? I rather doubt it. There are many people and groups saying that if you only taught it my way everything would be different. Yet those various twists haven't changed the world. If we accept the assertion of the New Testament that it presents the full and final form of the gospel (Rom 16:25-27; Eph 3:1-7), then it is not a new gospel that we need but a gospel that is presented in the context of a new situation at the end. The decisive turn in the world's interest will occur due to God's over-ruling of events. God will bring things to the point where the New Testament gospel and the people who proclaim will become the center of the world's attention (Rev 10:11; 14:6). It is not at the center of the world's attention now, but it will be then and God's people need to be prepared to deliver such a message with power and clarity.

2) Worldwide Proclamation of a Counterfeit Gospel

The Book of Revelation teaches us that there will also be a worldwide proclamation of a counterfeit gospel (9:14-16; 16:13-14) at the end. This counterfeit will be the great deception of the unholy trinity (Rev 13). The purpose of the counterfeit is to confuse those who hear the

true gospel as to just where the truth lies. The two proclamations go out to the world side by side at the end. The preaching of the true gospel is the context in which the end-time deception functions (see Matt 24:24-27 in the context of verse 14 and 2 Thess 2:8-12).

This counterfeit is found in a number of contexts beside that of Revelation 13. The counterpart of Rev 10:7 and 11:11-13 is the fearful picture of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13-21). The description of the grotesque army of the sixth trumpet is just as military as the Battle of Armageddon, yet its mission is clearly in the context of faith and unfaith. This army of 200,000,000 is the spiritual counterpart of the 144,000 (compare Rev 9:13-16 with Rev 7:1-4). It operates at the same point in history, attempting to draw people away from the gospel.

As a result of the activities of this “army” many lives are lost and the “remnant” (Rev 9:20-21), the “rest” of mankind, refuse to repent. This unrepentant remnant is in clear contrast with the “remnant” of Rev 11:13, which does repent and gives glory to God. So the double action during the sixth trumpet (which runs from Rev 9:12 to 11:14) results in a contrasting result, people who repent and people who do not. The worldwide counterfeit of the gospel is at work in the sixth trumpet.

The counterfeit trinity, of course, is first identified in Revelation 13. It is then specified in Rev 16 as the dragon, beast, and false prophet (Rev 16:13). They send out three unclean spirits like frogs as “gospel messengers.” They go out to the same world as the true gospel of the three angels (Rev 16:13-14, cf. 14:6). The actions of the counterfeit gospel, therefore, are signaled in Revelation by contrasting groups of angels. There are four angels that release the forces of evil

from the Euphrates River (Rev 9:14-15) and there are four angels that seek to restrain them and spread the sealing message of the true gospel (Revelation 7:1-3). There are three demonic angels gathering the kings of the world in Revelation 16:13-14 and three divine angels that present God's last day message in Revelation 14:6-12.

To some degree the worldwide counterfeit of the gospel is also represented in the fornication and intoxication mentioned in Rev 17:2. At its first appearance the false gospel has the purpose of bringing together a coalition of religious institutions. But when this has occurred there will still be many institutions, nations and groups that are not subservient to the aims of the religious confederacy. So the kings and the inhabitants of the earth will be seduced or at least confused by the continued proclamation of this false gospel. But that is a matter we will get into shortly.

The result of this counterfeit proclamation is a world-wide confederacy of religion in opposition to the true God. As we have seen earlier, this confederacy is named by many names in the Book of Revelation: the dragon, beast and false prophet (unholy trinity— Rev 16:13); prostitute Babylon (Revelation 17:1-6); city Babylon (Revelation 17:18 and 18:1-24); and the great city (Revelation 11:8; 16:19; and chapters 17-18). The proclamation of a false gospel will succeed in convincing the religious institutions of the world that they have more interests in common than there are interests that separate them. If nothing else, they will have a common interest in thwarting the confederacy of the saints, whose gospel exposes the illegitimacy of false religion and its passion to serve God in ways that glorify human pride and power instead

of God.

There is need of a much closer study of the word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. . . . The Holy Spirit has so shaped matters, both in the giving of the prophecy and in the events portrayed, as to teach that *the human agent is to be kept out of sight, hid in Christ*, and that *the Lord God of heaven and his law are to be exalted*. Read the book of Daniel. Call up, point by point, the history of the kingdoms there represented. Behold statesmen, councils, powerful armies, and *see how God wrought to abase the pride of men, and lay human glory in the dust*.

Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 112

An interesting parallel to this concept in Revelation is the “mystery of iniquity” in 2 Thessalonians 2. The mystery of iniquity is the proclamation of a counterfeit gospel throughout the Christian age. (Cf. SDABC 7a on 2Thess 2:3-4) It is restrained for a time (2 Thess 2:2-3, 6-7), much as the angels of Revelation 7 were holding back the four winds. But, the restraint is removed at the end (2 Thess 2:7) and the full power of this counterfeit gospel is experienced (2 Thess 2:9-12). It is fully brought to an end by the events surrounding the Second Coming of Jesus (2 Thess 2:8-9). Those interested in a more thorough exploration of Paul’s little apocalypse (2 Thess 2:1-12) should read the chapter on this in my book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*.

Now in this order of events I have listed the proclamation of the true gospel first and the proclamation of a counterfeit second. While the texts themselves are not perfectly clear on this, it is my sense that the true revival comes first and the counterfeit follows behind it. One could argue that the counterfeit anticipates the true, but it seems to me that it is only in the context of the true gospel that the proclamation of the counterfeit makes any sense. You can

only truly have a counterfeit when there is something genuine to counterfeit.

Even if it is not clear in Revelation, the priority of the gospel seems clearly taught in other parts of the New Testament. It is the proclamation of the gospel to the entire world (Matt 24:14) that precipitates the deceptions of the end (Matt 24:23-27) in Jesus' end-time sermon. It is the opportunity to be saved (2 Thess 2:10) that sets the context for the removal of restraint and the full-blown deception of 2 Thessalonians 2 (7-9). When the true gospel becomes headline news throughout the world, the Evil One will marshal all of his wiles in the attempt to counteract and defeat it. This counter-attack is front-row center in the Battle of Armageddon.

As the two "gospels" accomplish their work two worldwide confederacies come into view, the confederacy of the saints and the confederacy of religion. The confederacy of the saints is the spiritual result of the true gospel working in people's hearts. Kindred spirits from every nation, tribe, language and religion will reach out to one another, finding common cause in a world gone mad. In reaction to their loss of power and influence, the religious institutions of the world will seek to counter this development with a plausible but flawed substitute. That, along with a few threats, will provide the setting for a worldwide unity of religious institutions, something that has never truly happened before. The saints may not be visible as an organized body on earth, but they will certainly be known by God. The worldwide confederacy of religion, on the other hand, will be much more public and obvious.

What this counterfeit will be like, according to Revelation? Certainly it will not be teaching obedience to all of God's commandments. Obedience to the commandments of God is

a defining difference between the followers of the true gospel and the followers of the counterfeit. The evidence we have explored in Revelation suggests that the religious confederacy will seek ways to counteract the Sabbath command. In addition to such things as Sunday laws, there could be restrictions on Sabbath worship, requirements to do certain business on Saturdays or perhaps even a spiritual sounding alternative, “keep everyday as if it were a Sabbath” (but try to do that while earning a living!).

In addition, the most powerful counterfeit of the gospel has always been salvation by works. At the foundation of every heathen religion (see Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 35) is the need to pacify a god who is, at best, needing to be persuaded you are worth paying attention to. At their worst pagan gods are malicious and need constantly to be appeased in order for humans to survive. What an awful way to live! And yet in many ways Christians treat God as if He cannot be trusted. No matter how clearly the gospel describes the prior actions of God in our behalf, we still respond as if we needed to earn our way into His favor. We fear that no matter what we do, He will never forgive someone as wretched as we are. So we go to church, and give alms, and do good works, hoping against hope that God might decide to be merciful and forgive our sins. And in the process, we unintentionally call God a liar, for He has promised to forgive all who confess (1 John 1:9).

So the end-time counterfeit of the gospel will include some form of works righteousness, the idea that unless you perform certain rituals or go to certain human mediators or pay a certain price, or join a particular group, you cannot receive favor with God.

Human behavior becomes the condition for acceptance with God, not the mighty power of God manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But isn't the Sabbath a form of works righteousness? How can the true gospel exalt both obedience to the commandments and salvation by faith alone? That is the tension that must be preserved in order for the gospel to be rightly understood. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. Saving faith is demonstrated in a changed life. It is not the change of life, however, that saves us, it is the work of God that saves us. The changed life is simply a grateful response to what God has already done for us.

Think about it this way: If we were saved by works in any sort of way, then all of our good deeds, all of our loving kindness, all of our Sabbath-keeping, all of our service to God would ultimately be self-centered acts. We would be doing all of that *in order to* become right with God. Our obedience would have a self-centered purpose. And the root of all sin is selfishness.

But when we realize that we are saved by grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24-25), that even our best deeds will never be good enough to save us (Rom 3:23; 4:1-5), then our acts of goodness and service become the living evidence that we *are* saved by the mighty prior action of God. There is no longer a selfish motive in our works because they themselves get us nowhere and we know it! We do good works for others because we are learning to love them the way God does. We keep Sabbath and worship God because of an overflowing gratitude for all He has done. Our works become a reaction instead of a primary

action. Our salvation is no longer about us, it is about Him!

So keeping the Sabbath is not necessary to win the favor of God, it is the grateful reaction of one who knows the works that matter most have already been done in Christ. The Sabbath becomes a rest from our foolish attempts to earn favor with God, it is a resting in His works rather than in our own (Heb 4:9-11). The Sabbath is no longer about what we do, but about what God has done. When we know these things, keeping Sabbath becomes a delight rather than a burden.

3) Formation of a Worldwide Political Unity

The third development in the end-time sequence of events is the formation of a worldwide secular and political unity which will create a true “united nations” for the first time in world history (Rev 16:12; 17:1,15; 17:12-13). This parallel event to the formation of two religious confederacies is also called by many names in the Book of Revelation: It is represented by the Euphrates River (Rev 16:12 and 17:15); the kings of the whole inhabited world (Rev 16:14); many waters (Rev 17:1 and 15); the kings of the earth (Rev 17:2 and 18:3-9); the earth-dwellers or inhabitants of the earth (Rev 13:12 and 17:2 among others); the beast (Revelation 17); the ten horns (Revelation 17); the cities of the nations (Revelation 16:19); seven mountains (Revelation 17:9) and seven kings (Revelation 17:9). When this national or political confederacy is complete, there will be three great worldwide confederacies in the world, each symbolized in a variety of ways in Revelation, illustrated as follows:

| Saints | Political | Babylon |
|---|---|--|
| Remnant 144,000 Great Crowd Kings of East Watchful Clothed Called Chosen Faithful | Euphrates Kings of World Many Waters Kings of Earth Earth Dwellers Beast 10 Horns Cities of the Nations 7 Mountains 7 Kings | Babylon The Great City The Great Prostitute The Unholy Trinity Woman |

The development of the political unity is not spelled out in much detail. The use of seven-headed, ten-horned beast imagery indicates that it stands in the heritage of the earlier world empires seen in Daniel 7 and in Revelation 12 and 13: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece (Rev 17:10-11). For a more comprehensive look at the details of Rev 17:10-11 see the appendix at the end of this book.

The confederacy develops in at least two stages. It is fully viable only when a significant sub-group of ten kings decides to join and support the rest of the beast. “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.” Revelation 17:12-13. Many would like to be far more specific such topics than I have chosen to be in the book, but ultra-specific applications to the present or immediate future

have led to many embarrassing inaccuracies of interpretation. While texts like Rev 17:12-13 do not give us enough detail to know in advance exactly how things will work out, they do give us enough information to recognize these realities when they come. It is critical that God's people know the prophecies about the future but it is difficult to apply them to specific events in advance. We are assured, however, that if we know the text, we will recognize the major movements when they come (John 13:19: 14:29). Note the words of Jesus Himself:

I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that ***when it does take place*** you may believe that I am he.

John 13:19, ESV

In this text Jesus does not promise that prophecy (speaking specifically of His own words here) would give the disciples a detailed, unmistakable outline of events ahead of time. He did promise, however, that when the actual events took place, they would be able to discern the times and have the kind of faith needed to survive spiritually. Prophecy was not given in order to satisfy our curiosity about the future, it was given to help us develop the kind of faith we need in the present.

While the world-wide confederacy of nations certainly acts a part in the plans of Satan for the end, it is also part of the plan and action of God. In fact, God Himself precipitates this end-time version of the United Nations.

For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.

Rev 17:17, NIV

God is in full control of events from beginning to end: He arranges things in such a way

as to bring world-wide attention to the gospel; He monitors Satan and His agents as they put in place the great end-time counterfeit of the gospel; and He precipitates the end-time political confederacy as well. Revelation 17:17 views events from the worldwide perspective. There are three great worldwide confederacies.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, on the other hand, a more individualized approach is taken by Paul (2 Thess 2:9-12). Paul implies that there are three groups of people: 1) those who love the truth, 2) those who hate the truth, and 3) those who are sitting on the fence. These three individual categories correspond to the three great worldwide confederacies of Revelation. One group loves the truth (the saints) a second hates the truth (religious institutions) and the third is reluctant to commit to one or the other (the nations). And God is in control of the whole process:

“For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. . .” 2 Thess 2:11, NIV. It is the battle over the third group, the political-secular group that neither loves nor hates the truth, that provides the context for the final chapters of the Battle of Armageddon.

The first three steps in the order of final events, therefore, are the development of three great world-wide confederacies. It is clear that we are not now (at the time I am writing) in the process of these events because none of the three confederacies are now in place, although all three may well be in process. In a sense the first three developments of the final events will take place in parallel lines, so the order I have placed these developments in is

probable but not certain. Media observers may well notice the political moves before they notice the religious ones, for example, but according to the scenario of Revelation the decisive movements are the religious ones.

So it is my educated guess that the final worldwide proclamation of the gospel (under the guidance and arrangement of God) precipitates the worldwide counterfeit as a reaction. Somewhere in the course of this process an increasing collection of national alliances leads closer and closer to a worldwide unity of nations. When all three confederacies are in place, astute observers of prophecy may well discern that the final events are in motion. But even if they do not, they will certainly realize that they are living in decisive times. Times when life and death decisions are being made.

The final outcome of Armageddon will be a surprise to many.