

Why God Holds the Winds

Herbert Douglass

We're Adventists, awaiting the advent of our Lord and Saviour! We are looking for the eastern sky to brighten as we have never seen it before. We are listening for trumpets and violins like we have never heard them before—stirring music, with more fidelity than ten thousand Bose radios, the Hallelujah Chorus as only angels can sing it as they truly lift us off our feet. And before we know what is happening, we are at those special places where their ashes now rest or those grassy plots where we buried Mother and Father, or daughter or son, or sweetheart, or wife, or husband, or dear friend. And we see loving eyes again, no longer tired or ill. And we hug again, and play again, and then it begins to sink in—we are home, never again to say “Good Bye.”

Adventists, and many other Christian groups, have been looking toward that eastern sky for a long, long time. Should we be given A for enthusiasm but F for incorrect theology? Does the Bible give us any clue as to *when* Jesus will return?

In Revelation 7 John clearly focuses on the end-times. Naturally, however, the Great Deceiver doesn't want us to focus on where the real action is. That's how he started the Great Controversy in the first place. Satan is the master of diversionary tactics as he tries to muddle the truth (1) about God, (2) about how He plans to save men and women out of this rebel world, and (3) about how we should think about Christ's return..

The Great Deceiver, for example, doesn't care about how many people are talking about the end of the world as long as they keep their eyes off the real issues and away from where the real battles will be fought. He will help manufacture many decoys to keep our eyes turned aside from the main events of the end-time.

Satan's Battle Plan Decoded

Do we have any way to figure out what Satan is trying to do to Seventh-day Adventists in these last days? Of course we do, because God has decoded Satan's battle plans for us. John the Revelator was given the key to decoding

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Satan's plan, even as the Allies were decoding Germany's Enigma machine in the early 1940s. So let's ask John to tell us where the real battle is to be fought in these last days—and why the action has been delayed for at least a century.

Revelation 7 opens: "I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads'" (Rev. 7:1-3, RSV).

What on earth could John be describing? Why is God holding back these last-day winds of terror and destruction? Why is He telling angels to: "Hold, hold—hold back the north wind of nuclear war? Hold back the south wind of those seven last plagues!" Why? "God's people are not ready! Hold back the east wind of human madness!" Why? "God's people haven't caught on yet as to where the battle is really to be fought. Hold back the west wind of satanic fury until God's people are ready to carry out their last assignment. Hold the winds until God's people are ready to be sealed, Hold the winds until His people are ready for His stamp of approval, Hold the winds until His people are ready for God to use them in His final message to earth's last generation."

"And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed." The number, of course, is symbolic of people in the last days who are totally committed to honoring God. This sealing work is the final work to be accomplished by the gospel. God holds back the winds because His people are not yet sealed. His people are not ready yet to be the creditable witnesses of the everlasting gospel to a world on the edge of time. Can anything be any clearer? One of these days God's people will have caught on as to where the battle is really to be fought and what the final battle is really like!

In the 14th chapter of Revelation, John highlights that last generation he depicted in chapter seven—that impressive group for whom God waits and holds the winds: "Then I looked and lo, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name on their foreheads."

What will identify God's people in these last days? Their Sabbath-keeping, health-reforming, tithe-paying habits? Yes and No! After all, Sabbath-keeping, health-reforming tithe-payers once crucified God!

The Value of a Seal

John tells us God's people in the end-time will have the Father's name written on their foreheads. They will be sealed with His approval. Many products can't be sold without a certain seal of approval, the seal that tells the world the product has passed all the tests and can be trusted—such as that seal of the Underwriter's Laboratory on the bottom of electrical appliances.

DOUGLASS: WHY GOD HOLDS THE WINDS

What's the importance of a seal, or the value of a signature? Ask any world-class violinist as he checks his Stradivarius. Ask your son or daughter when they buy Arnold Palmer golf clubs or Chris Evert tennis rackets. Or those looking for a reliable washing machine (perhaps a Maytag) or lawn mower (maybe a Snapper or Toro). For most products, the name means everything. It means the product carries the endorsement of someone who cares about quality, someone who can be trusted—therefore you, in turn, can trust those Arnie Palmer golf clubs or a Maytag washer. Those names mean quality, and you can trust anything those names are on.

Remember those TV ads for Hanes underclothing! Can't you see that determined female inspector with all of her formidable charm: "*The quality goes in before the name goes on!*"

Down here in the days of the held winds, that is what God is telling the universe when He writes His name in the foreheads of His faithful: "Listen to them," He is saying, "Here are people who have let my Holy Spirit do His work, people who indeed reflect my glory. I am not embarrassed by how they represent Me. You can trust them. I have given them my seal of approval. The quality goes in before the Name goes on."

The Bible calls this the "sealing work." And this is what all heaven is focusing on today. This is where the real battle is being fought today. Satan knows it. God knows it. Do we?

In the 12th chapter of Revelation, John gave us Satan's game plan "The dragon [or Satan] was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest [remnant] of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17, NKJV).

How does Satan make war with us? One way is so obvious—through pain and heartbreak, until one can barely take a deep breath. Satan has a way of beating us down until we feel like driftwood along an unwalked shore. And we wonder if anyone cares, or if there will ever be any relief. The dark hours of the night pass so slowly.

Satan is an expert at these things. But strange as it may seem to him, many Christians have learned how to cope well against these satanic kamikaze raids. They find their hiding place in Jesus. They beat Satan at his own game. I have seen it happen over and over to young and old who discover the truth about God as their Best Friend. They find their Best Friend very close, even during the darkest hours of life.

But when Satan sees that physical troubles and emotional disappointments seem to strengthen God's people, he shifts his attack to something more subtle. He sets up decoys that are very believable: He confuses Bible students about the meaning and purpose of the gospel, especially in these last days during the sealing work. He obscures the meaning of the sealing work whereby God and His people hasten the end of Satan's rule on Planet Earth.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

What Is This Seal?

What is this seal of God that makes Satan angry? “Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, so they cannot be moved—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and ready for the shaking, it will come.”¹

Illuminating this Biblical theme, we read that the seal is “the mark of God’s sealing approval . . . the pure mark of truth, wrought in them by the power of the Holy Ghost.”² Those sealed “have on the wedding garment, and are obedient and faithful to all God’s commands.”³ God recognizes those sealed as “worthy representatives of the truth as it is in Jesus.”⁴

God seals those who “are to be distinguished from the world by . . . their words and their works. . . . He does not ask, Do they possess learning and eloquence? Have they ability to command and control and manage? He asks, Will they represent My character? . . . Through them He will represent to the world the ineffaceable characteristics of the divine nature.”⁵

God will not seal a person “if the truth is not rooted in the heart, if the natural traits of character are not transformed by the Holy Spirit.”⁶

The gospel that seals, as described in Revelation 14, is the “everlasting gospel” that prepares a cleansed people to represent their Lord—the time when the angels and all the unfallen universe will judge whether God is fair in His judgments about men and women.

Peter was given a glimpse of that sealed group, those cleansed people who truly experienced the purpose of the gospel: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. . . . Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found in Him in peace, without spot and blameless” (2 Peter 3:11-14, NKJV).

Another messenger of the Lord focused on these end-time people and their message when she wrote: “It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. . . . At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His

¹ Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 219; Ms 173, 1902. Note the author’s insightful ellipse of truth: The truth that seals is grasped by both the intellect and the heart commitment. Too often spiritual commitment lacks one or the other, settling for either cold reason or hot feeling. The truth that seals is understood first by the mind, which then generates a heart appreciation of and commitment to the Author of truth.

² _____, *Testimonies*, 3:267.

³ _____, Letter 126; 1898, *SDA Bible Commentary*, EGW Comments on Revelation 7:2, 968.

⁴ _____, Letter 77, 1899; *SDA Bible Commentary*, EGW Comments on Revelation 7:2, 969.

⁵ _____, Letter 270, 1907; *SDA Bible Commentary*, EGW Comments on Revelation 7:2, 269.

⁶ _____, Letter 80, 1898; *SDA Bible Commentary*, EGW Comments, on Revelation 7:2, 269.

DOUGLASS: WHY GOD HOLDS THE WINDS

goodness, mercy, and truth. . . . The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life, and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works,—in words of truth and deeds of holiness.”⁷

The Everlasting Gospel

The gospel preached and lived by these end-time people is a gospel with New Testament precision, not the limited gospel being preached in Babylon. It is a gospel that proclaims pardon and power—a gospel that beats back all the soft promises of a salvation without self-denial. It is not a limited gospel without the kind of faith that cooperates with grace in overcoming inherited and cultivated tendencies to say No to the light of truth.

What are some of those limited gospels that are Satan’s decoys? Babylon’s gospel promises salvation with at least four options, all aimed at obscuring God’s character and law that Satan is so angry about. He lets you take your pick:

Option #1: “Forget the law—You’re under grace—the law was abolished at the cross.” If the weakness of that argument becomes obvious, Satan becomes more subtle with three other options.

Option #2: Exalt the law as being so high above human attainment, that no man or woman could ever hope to keep it—but don’t worry, the argument goes, “you don’t have to keep the commandments because Jesus kept the law for you.”

Option #3 uses a different approach, also subtle with its half-truths: “You can’t keep the commandments because you were born a sinner, you live in sinful flesh, and you will always be falling short. But don’t worry—as long as you are sorry for your sins, that is all the Lord requires. God looks at Jesus’ record in the judgment and not yours.”

Option #4 is very enticing to some: “You shouldn’t try to keep the commandments, because if you do, you will be a legalist. The main thing is to have a relationship with Jesus.”

Of course, you recognize some half-truths in these attractive deceptions. But careful Bible students will see through them and will keep their eyes on where the real battle is to be fought in these last days. They let the Bible speak plainly to them, such as Paul’s words to Titus: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from

⁷ _____, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 415, 416. See also *The Acts of the Apostles*, 599-601: “It is the privilege of every Christian, not only to look for, but to hasten the coming of the Saviour.”

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:11-15, NIV).

And they remember the admonition: “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God, . . . That to deceive man, and thus lead them to transgress God's law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued, . . . and that the last great conflict between truth and error is but the final struggle of the long-standing controversy concerning the law of God.” “Satan is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome.”⁸

“To Him Who Overcomes . . .”

And so when we are led to believe that it is either unnecessary or impossible to be overcomers, we should remind ourselves, in so doing, that we are redefining the plan of salvation in order to make up our own sense of security and assurance—all of which is self-deceiving.

Why does Satan hate the law so? Why is he so determined to confuse the issue regarding God's law, especially in these end-times? Because God's way of running the universe is what he once resisted face-to-face when he was the chief of angels, long before He was cast out of heaven (Rev. 12). The law of God reflects the character of God, especially Jesus—whom He resented and then hated when He came to earth to prove Him wrong. And reproducing the character of Jesus is exactly what the purpose of the gospel is all about.

That is why Satan is angry with people in these last days who finally get serious about keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He is furious with people who are finished with theological word games that allow them to be called Christians while never expecting to be overcomers. He is furious when people see through his false gospel which is truly the new legalism—that men and women can be saved by believing in a legal adjustment of the books of heaven without a character adjustment on earth, and then call that “Righteousness by Faith.”

The gospel that seals is not a rigid, toe-the-line conformity motivated by either fear of God's displeasure or hope of eternal reward. Such concern for the law is pure burden and not the yoke of Jesus; it stands the gospel on its head. It repels young people and generates either gloom or pride in older people. The difference between the joy of grace-supported obedience and the burden of legalism is simply the motivation: Am I watching the edges of the Sabbath, for example, in order to impress God or to honor Him? Real love knows no end of honoring the one loved and the “effort” is hardly burdensome!

The gospel that seals produces people who say with joy, “Great peace have those who love Your law and nothing causes them to stumble” (Ps 119:165,

⁸ _____, *The Great Controversy*, 582, 489.

DOUGLASS: WHY GOD HOLDS THE WINDS

NKJV); “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . . . more to be desired are they than gold . . . sweeter also than honey, and in keeping them there is great reward” (Ps 19:7-10, NKJV).

We are focusing on the gospel that the apostles preached. It either produced a riot or a revival—never boredom or a ho-hum. It met and solved the same human problems that perplex psychiatrists and social scientists today. Look what happened at Corinth: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. (1 Cor. 6:9-11, NKJV).

That’s the good news that Jesus promised. From His birth to that awful focus of Calvary, the gospel of Jesus did something for people then and it will do the same for people today—whenever the real gospel is heard.

People who take His words seriously possess the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12). This is saving faith, the same kind of faith that saved Jesus from sin. Such faith made Jesus into a powerful, lovable, gracious Person. That is what the faith of Jesus is designed to do for you and for me.

Preparing for the Winds

And all heaven is waiting to seal that kind of person in these last days before the wind blows, before unbelievers tune out forever the pleadings of the Holy Spirit, before this world becomes a madhouse. These are the people who have learned how to endure in tough times— “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

God can trust His people to endure all the hell that Satan will throw at them in the Seven Last Plagues. They will vindicate His Name, His power, and His judgment about them. These people have knocked down all the lies that Satan has been getting away with for more than 6000 years. After probation closes, they are showing the universe that God’s grace continues to keep them from falling, even during the toughest of times,.

Let us not be distracted as to where the real battle of the gospel is to be fought in these last days. Listen to Jesus whisper: “Limit not the Holy One of Israel.” There is no limit to the creative power of the Holy Spirit that once brought order and beauty out of chaos in the Beginning. He will do the same for us today. Give Him a chance. He has left the front door open for you. His angels are still holding back the winds of human and satanic passion. Jesus will save you from your sins and seal you for great exploits in His Name, if you do not frustrate Him. That is the purpose of the gospel. He is waiting for us to get serious about having His seal so that our witness to others will bear His credentials. Let God get us ready for His seal. Go for it!

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Herbert E. Douglass, though officially retired, is currently vice president of Adventist Heritage Ministry. He holds a Th.D. from Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California. He has served as dean and president of Atlantic Union College and president, Weimar Institute; vice president, Pacific Press Publishing Association; associate editor, *Adventist Review*; head, Religion Department, Atlantic Union College, and associate professor of religion, Pacific Union College; and pastor in Illinois. Douglass has authored a dozen books and many periodical articles. douglass@newworld.net