

Newsletter December 2017

In our October 2017 newsletter, we continued our study of the book of Revelation into Chapter 5 in which we saw a scroll having seven seals offered in the right hand of God the Father. Under the protection of a mighty angel, no man or other creature could even look upon it. Then, we saw Jesus suddenly appearing, as a “lamb as it had been slain” to stand in the midst of the worshipers before the throne. Jesus immediately took the scroll from the right hand of his Father, which, as we discussed, carried with it momentous implications of power and glory.

In our November Newsletter, we moved on into Chapter 6, wherein we observed Jesus as He began to break open the seven seals of the scroll to claim his glorious inheritance of the earth and receive authority over all that dwells upon it. As each seal was broken open, a momentous event simultaneously occurred upon the earth in reaction. The first four seals, brought forth four “horsemen.” The first was the Antichrist, whom Satan sponsored to head up a global government. The second brought forth a great world war, and the next two brought forth starvation and disease in its aftermath. Altogether, one quarter of the earth’s population was killed.

When the fifth seal was broken open, it brought forth a period of great tribulation on earth during which men indiscriminately slaughtered each other without cause or reason; it was a world gone insane. Jews were heavily persecuted as Russia and her Arab allies came against Israel in a powerful attempt to destroy it, such that God openly intervened on Israel’s behalf to thwart them. The breaking of the sixth seal brought the great tribulation to a sudden end as a mighty earthquake shook the entire earth from pole to pole. Simultaneously, a great cataclysm took place in the heavens as the sun was blackened, and the moon turned blood red. The sky then rolled away into total emptiness, and against that backdrop of darkness, the Lord Jesus was seen descending out of Heaven in bright clouds with mighty power and great light. In overwhelming fear, the reprobate of the earth mourned over their pending judgment and sought to entomb themselves in caves and mountains to avoid looking upon the face of the one whom they had previously cursed, who was now arriving from Heaven as their supreme Judge.

In this month’s newsletter we continue on into the text of Revelation Chapter 7, and in doing so, we shall utilize edited excerpts taken from *CRC Book III*, Chapter 20.5. As we mentioned at the end of last month’s newsletter, two very important events must take place before Jesus breaks open the seventh and last seal of the scroll from which seven great trumpet judgments will be rapidly dispatched by Jesus Christ upon the reprobate inhabitants of the earth in a period referred to in Scripture as the great “Day of the Lord.”

Even in the worse periods of apostasy, God has left a small remnant of believers on earth to hold to the Truth and to witness of Him. This study in the text of Chapter 7 is all about how God plans to ensure the safety of two loyal but diverse remnants during the period in which his fierce wrath must be unleashed against the ungodly.

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree” (Re. 7:1).

After the events of Chapter 6, in which Jesus Christ appeared in the sky and men had sought refuge from his wrath by burying themselves in the rocks and caves, one would reasonably expect God’s judgment of the reprobate earth-dwellers to immediately begin, but instead we find a brief pause before that judgment takes place. The four angels mentioned here in this verse are angels of destruction, and the winds that they hold back represent God’s righteous vengeance that must one day blow forth across the entire surface of the earth. The angels stand on the “four corners of the earth.” This phrase does not mean to imply that the earth is a flat square or rectangle, as some critics of the Bible spout forth. These four “corners” obviously stand for the four major compass points, which are north, south, east, and west. Not one square mile of the earth will be exempt from God’s retribution when these winds are allowed to blow forth in all their fury. Until now, these angels have been holding back God’s almighty power, giving men time to repent, but as we see in the next verse they were just about to release these four winds of destruction upon the earth when a fifth angel appears on the scene:

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” (Re.7:2–3).

This angel having greater authority than the other four is seen ascending up from the east much as the sun rises in the morning. This angel carries with him “the seal of the living God,” and he commands that the four angels of destruction delay the release of the winds of retribution until it is applied to the foreheads of the loyal

servants of God that remain upon the earth. In Jesus' Olivet Discourse we read, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mt.24:31). The elect Jesus referred to in this pronouncement are the chosen remnant of Israel, who must be gathered together to be sealed for their physical protection. The angel carrying the seal of the living God is most probably the archangel Michael, who has ever guarded and protected Israel (cf. Da.12:1; Jude.1:9). A seal signifies both ownership and protection. God's claim of ownership implies his control over this remnant for his specific use. So terrible will be that time which will be coming forth through the seven trumpet judgments that none of them could be assured survival without the seal of God's ownership and protection upon them. Thus, this brief delay has taken place before the winds of God's judgment begin to blow across the earth to ensure that there will be survivors from the nation of Israel to both witness of Him during the next three and one half years during his judgment of the earth and afterwards to constitute the core inhabitants of the earth during a glorious Millennial Age in which Christ shall reign supreme upon the earth as its King.

"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Re.7:4).

Here we are given the precise number of the elect descendants (children) of Israel. To ensure that this remnant representing all of Israel will survive the great judgments ahead, twelve-thousand men descended from each of the twelve tribes of Israel will be sealed in advance of the onslaught of God's judgment.

Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Naphtali were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zebulun were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand." (Re.7:5-8).

In these four verses, each of these tribes of Israel are specifically named and the precise number of twelve thousand is given for each group. It must be noted that the original tribes of Dan and Ephraim have been omitted in this listing. Those two tribes had led the nation into idolatry at the time of the division of the kingdom such that any remnant of them that remain in that day will not be sealed (cf. Ro.9:6). As to Dan, they had set up false gods and abandoned the temple in Jerusalem: "Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. and he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. and this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." (1Ki.12:28-30). As to Ephraim, those of this tribe had completely given themselves over to worship idols. God said, "Ephraim *is* joined to idols: let him alone. Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers *with* shame do love, Give ye. The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices" (Ho.4:17-19). Any remaining descendants of these two tribes must endure the great wrath to come without the benefit of God's seal upon them, along with a greater number of individual Gentile unbelievers who will be mercifully passed over. Accordingly, we find in this list that the tribe of Joseph has taken the place of tribe of Ephraim and that the priestly tribe of Levi, who had inherited no land in Israel, has taken the place of the tribe of Dan. Through their specific number all Israel that are truly of Israel will be redeemed and sealed (cf. Ro. 9:6,27).

Some have attempted to assert that the elect who are sealed here are members of the Church. For instance, there remains to this day a broad movement within Great Britain, dating back to the sixteenth century, which is known as British Israelism or Anglo-Israelism. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned to Jerusalem after their captivity in Babylon, but the ten northern tribes never again returned after their Assyrian captivity took place, but were dispersed throughout the Gentile world. This movement claims that the peoples of the United Kingdom are "genetically, racially, and linguistically" descended from the ten northern tribes of Israel, which had historically lost their identity. In addition, another group known as Russelites, making up an American cult commonly known as Jehovah's Witness (cf. CRC Book III, page 376), have likewise attempted to identify themselves with the 144,000. Nevertheless, the very specific language and context of this verse denies the possibility of them being anything other than elect Jews who have been called out of the entire nation of Israel such that all of Israel will be saved through them (cf. Ro.11:25,26). The precise listing of each tribe of Israel by name makes it quite clear that

the ten northern tribes were never lost to the mind of God. Therefore, any attempt to allegorize those tribes into twelve divisions of the church is without foundation and would be a very extreme interpretation indeed.

The nation of Israel was originally intended to be a witness to the entire world of God's absolute authority over and love for mankind. As a nation, Israel failed to live up to that high calling and faithfulness of purpose to the extent that when their Messiah finally arrived to gather his people unto Himself, they completely rejected Him and sentenced Him to death. Yet God's purpose was not thwarted, for out of the death, burial, and resurrection of their Messiah, the Christ, his Church was born. The Church thus displaced unfaithful Israel in that great task for a span of time. During the time of the great trumpet-judgments to come forth from the opening of the seventh seal, this redeemed remnant of Israel will again become God's sole witnesses of Him on earth, as those of the Church are miraculously changed into immortal beings and are transported off the earth to be with Christ. This transport of the Church, commonly referred to as the Rapture, constitutes the second purpose for this brief delay before the last seal is broken open and the terrifying trumpet judgments begin. John apparently sees this great event take place from his unique vantage point in Heaven and from Heaven's perspective:

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Re.7:9,10).

Immediately after the sealing of the one-hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel, John saw this great multitude of people appear before him in Heaven. So many were they that John could not put forth any estimate of their number, as he had done earlier regarding an incredibly great company of angels that he saw (cf. Re.5:11). This multitude was composed of people from every conceivable background and represented every nationality on earth. They were of every kindred: both male and female, young and old, and those of many generations as well. They were of every ethnic group ever found upon the earth and of every possible skin color. They spoke many native languages, but here they were all united as one standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

They were all clothed in white, which is fully indicative of their righteous state, and they carried palm leaves in their hands as a token of the great victory they had received. They loudly acknowledge with one unified shout of praise and adoration the sole source of their salvation – fully attributing it to God who sits upon the throne and from the Lamb through whose death and resurrection they have received their final redemption.

“And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen” (Re.7:11,12).

Angels are sinless beings who find it impossible to understand redemption. Those of their kind that had followed Satan in his rebellion were irrevocably condemned to outer darkness forever. Observing the appearance of this great company of redeemed mankind, they were understandably overwhelmed by what God had done.

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. (Re.7:13).

The fact that one of the twenty-four elders asked John who they were and where they had come from indicates that John should instinctively know the answer to this question. Surely, John had given rapid thought to where this great multitude had suddenly come from and who they may be; could he dare hope that this massive assemblage consisting of men and women of every nation and kindred of peoples and tongues were the redeemed descendants of the struggling and persecuted Church that he knew so well at the end of the first century? John was so overwhelmed by their number that he dared not express that great hope aloud. Instead, he deferred to the elder to speak aloud that which he so greatly desired to hear as he humbly answered him with, “Sir thou knowest.” So prompted, the understanding elder replied in turn,

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them (Re. 7:14,15).

As is made evident by the phrase “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,” this multitude is almost certainly the redeemed Church largely made up of multiple generations of Gentiles. They were the elect of

every nation yet constituted one body over all the earth. We believe that this is the Church universal, which John sees appearing before him immediately after they had arrived in Heaven victorious from the spiritual warfare she had endured upon the earth. Here at long last we see the Church finally at rest, having completed her mission on earth against great satanic opposition. However, the phrase saying this multitude had come “out of great tribulation” has caused many dispensationalists to assume that this great company are a unique body of believers who have been martyred during the great tribulation period of the last days and are not therefore members of the Church, which following the teaching of Darby, they believe had been caught up to Heaven earlier before Jesus broke open the first seal. However, this narrow interpretation of context would be to dismiss the reality of the great tumults, trials, and tribulations that countless generations of Christians have repeatedly experienced ever since the Church’s inception on the day of Pentecost in the first century. The history of the Church is filled with wave after wave of persecutions in which many devout believers in Christ were not only hated for his name sake, but suffered loss and large numbers of them were martyred (cf. *CRC* book III, pages 37-40, 94-98, 128-131, etc.).

Unlike the 144,000 elect Jews who had received a seal of God’s protection to remain on the earth as his witnesses following the opening of the sixth seal, these are those men and women – both the transformed living and the resurrected and transformed dead in Christ (cf. 1Th.4:16,17) – who have been caught up in the air at the conclusion of the great tribulation period on earth and who are now safely in the heavenly realms with Jesus Christ, their Savior and Lord.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sunlight on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Re.7:16,17).

We have earlier hypothesized that the true Church must one day become scattered into small groups hidden away in individual homes, as the institutionalized temporal church finally falls into the pit of total apostasy and seeks to expel and persecute true believers (cf. *CRC* Book III, pages 544-550). This Home-Church or House-Church movement is already underway in various parts of the world, but it will become much more prevalent and will be replicated world-wide as the Antichrist comes to power. During his reign, it will become necessary that the true Church gather together in secret city enclaves, or in sparsely settled or uninhabited areas of the earth, to avoid the inevitable wave of intense persecution that he will send their way for worshipping the one true God and his Christ. The difficulties the true Church will encounter on earth during that three-and-one-half-year period can only be imagined; therefore, here we must cautiously speculate. Although hidden away in city enclaves and isolated parts of the earth, the great war and the famine and pestilence that will have followed it will not have left them unscathed. Inasmuch as it will become impossible for them to buy or sell anything on the open market, including food, without the identifying mark of the Antichrist, many will suffer hunger, and in the isolated areas where many have hidden themselves away they must often suffer thirst. Any food they will be able to grow and barter among themselves will be meager indeed. Nevertheless, by God’s grace and providence they will have been enabled to survive during the Antichrist’s terrifying reign over the earth.

Not only so, we can reasonably conjecture that their numbers will greatly increase as they are joined by unsaved men and women who through the providence of God have avoided being branded by the identifying mark of the Antichrist. As they seek refuge from his retaliation, many will encounter Christian believers hidden away in their isolated communities. As those unbelievers are enlightened with the Word of God concerning the trials that they are currently experiencing, and as they hear the Gospel of salvation along with the sure hope of the Church for her ultimate redemption, they will accept Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord in great numbers. In so doing they will become faithful members of the true Church. Together as one body yet scattered across the earth, they patiently await the appearance and return of Christ to transport them safely into his heavenly realm.

Here in Re.7:16,17, we find that the faithful who have been gathered at last in Heaven to be with Christ will never again hunger or thirst or experience the heat of persecution, inasmuch as the “Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water.” The past tribulation and distress they once suffered on earth will be forgotten as if it had never happened when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Even as God had removed faithful Enoch of old who had walked closely with Him, Jesus Christ will have removed his beloved Church, which had faithfully walked with Him on earth, into his heavenly realm to remain by his side forever and ever. Therefore, God’s coming wrath can never fall upon them, even as the earth’s reprobate population is ready to be judged by God in his righteous anger. © *Arthur J. Smith, December 2017*