

## CHAPTER 7

***"After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads'" (7:1-3).***

We have read about the first six seals, and so it would seem logical that the seventh should now follow here in chapter 7; but it does not.

Indications that chapter 7 is a true interlude are the change in tone from the subject matter referred to in the sixth seal as well as the delay until 8:1 in opening the seventh seal. Two main subjects may be distinguished in the chapter. John first sees the angel who will unleash destruction on the earth restrained until the 144,000 servants of God from every tribe of Israel are sealed (vv. 1-8). Then he sees an innumerable multitude clothed in white standing before the throne of God, who are identified as those who have come out of the "great tribulation" (vv. 9-17).<sup>1</sup>

According to Tregelles,

Chapters 7-9 is a section giving fuller details of the Divine judgments which precede the Advent. The *preface of blessing* is given in Chapter 7, which sets forth the two elect bodies who are preserved for blessing at that period; first, The Elect Remnant of Israel (Chapter 7:1-8), and, second, The Church of the first-born ones which are written in Heaven. (Cf. Heb. 12 .23.)<sup>2</sup>

Here in the seventh chapter we first read of the 144,000 who are sealed. *"And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed."* Four angels are introduced who hold back the four winds of the earth. They are not to harm the earth until the sealing takes place. A fifth angel is introduced who seals the 144,000. The text affirms they are of the twelve tribes of Israel. Any literal reading tells us that 12,000 sealed from each of the twelve tribes of Jacob means we are talking about physical descendants of Jacob.

So long as men will keep thinking of the present Church and the location of these events in the past, or in what is now transpiring, just so long will they remain bewildered in the fog and fail to find any solid way through these wonderful revelations. If we only take to heart that when John writes "*children of Israel*" he means "*children of Israel*"--the blood descendants of the patriarch Jacob--and that when he mentions "*the tribe of Juda,*" "*the tribe of Reuben,*" . . . he verily means what he says, we will at once have the subjects of this apocalyptic sealing unmistakably identified. . . . Though all the prophets were Jews, and Jesus was a Jew, and the writer of this Apocalypse was a Jew, and all the Apostles were Jews, and salvation itself is of the Jews, and the Jews as a distinct people are everywhere spoken of as destined to continue to the world's end, it is regarded as

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1 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 477.

2 See Tregelles' outline at the end of this paper.

the next thing to apostasy from the faith to apply anything hopeful that God has said to this particular race.<sup>3</sup>

Johnson notes,

In support of the first view [144,000 are Jews] is the normal usage of "Israel" in the NT as referring to the physical descendants of Jacob. Galatians 6:16 is no exception, as Peter Richardson observes: "Strong confirmation of this position comes from the total absence of an identification of the church with Israel until A.D. 160; and also from the total absence, even then, of the term "Israel of God" to characterize the church." . . . Thus, in this first view, John would symbolically be describing the beginning of what Paul foretold in Romans 11:25-29 as the salvation of "all Israel."<sup>4</sup>

Culver makes the following noteworthy observation:

The Bible reveals that the very worthiness of God as the object of the faith of the patriarchs requires that He yet restore Israel and fulfill the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. . . . After writing of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the writer to the Hebrews observes: *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth* (Hebrews 11:13, A.S.V.). Not all of the promises of God to the patriarchs have been fulfilled yet. Of course, as the New Testament makes clear, some of the promises have come true in Christ, in the benefits of His redeeming work at Calvary. But all the distinctive promises to Israel wait for complete fulfillment.<sup>5</sup>

Fruchtenbaum believes that in chapter 7 we are given two purposes for the tribulation that are specifically related to the nation of Israel:

The first purpose is to bring about a worldwide revival (Matt. 24:14; Rev. 7:1-17). . . .

The second purpose is to break the power or the will of the Jewish nation. In Daniel 11:36-12:4, the prophet was given a vision of what conditions will be like for his people (Israel) during the Tribulation. In Daniel 12:5-7, a question is raised as to how long this period will be allowed to continue. The answer is that the persecution of the Jews will last for three and one-half years. This passage then states a goal of the Tribulation: to break the power or the will of the Jewish nation. The Tribulation will continue and will not end until this happens. God intends to break the will of the holy people in order to bring about a national regeneration.

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3 Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, Vol. I, pp. 404-405.

4 Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 479. This, however, is not the position that Johnson himself takes.

5 Culver, *Daniel and the Latter Days*, pp. 89-90. Culver's point is well-taken. The patriarchs surely could not be "examples of faith" if they believed and held on to what was later proved to be false. Neither could they be examples of faith for believing something they thought was true but which they apparently "misunderstood." Such a thing would bring reproach upon the name of Yahweh. A man who sincerely believes something to be true which is not, and clings to that belief to the end of his days, is a man for whom we have pity and not praise.

The means by which God will perform this purpose is given in Ezekiel 20:33-38 where Ezekiel draws a simile with the Exodus. What is important to note here is that after God gathers the Jews from around the world, He will enter into a period of judgment (the Tribulation) with them. The rebels among the Jewish people will be purged out by this judgment; the remainder will turn to the Messiah. Only then will the whole new nation, a regenerate nation, be allowed to enter the millennial Israel under King Messiah.<sup>6</sup>

"After these things" John sees an innumerable multitude with palm branches standing before the Lamb and before the throne. The text itself states who they are: "*These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,*" and "*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*" Even though the text seems to make it clear who they are, not everyone can agree.

Are they the Gentiles who are saved in the Tribulation in contrast to the Jews in vv. 1-8? Beckwith answers no because they are described as coming from every nation and tribe and language, and this would mean both Jews and Gentiles (p. 539). Are they, then, martyrs who have given their lives in the Great Tribulation and have been slain by the beast? If martyrs, are they the remainder of those to be killed referred to when the fifth seal is opened (6:11)? Are they the complete group of martyrs? Or do they represent the whole company of the redeemed in Christ as seen in glory?

These are good questions. Fruchtenbaum argues that the innumerable multitude consists of saved Gentiles who came to faith through the preaching of the 144,000 Jews.<sup>7</sup> Gundry sees them as a separate group also and takes the post-tribulational view that the redeemed multitude "constitute the last generation of the Church."<sup>8</sup> Reese sees three groups of martyrs: "In chapter vi. 9-11 we see the souls of the martyrs slain before the End-time; in vii. 9-17 the innumerable multitude of martyrs who fall in the last tribulation under Antichrist, and stand before the throne; in xv. 2-3 those who had gained victory over the beast and his image."<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, another who sees this group as different from the 144,000, also takes them to be an additional number of martyrs to those spoken of in chapter six. He comments as follows:

In the Greek the expression is far more specific. Literally it could be translated, "These are those who came out of the tribulation, the great one." It is undoubtedly a reference to the specific period of the great tribulation of which Christ spoke (Matt. 24:21).

The common tendency to ignore the definite terminology of the prophecies in the book of Revelation is illustrated in the interpretation which would make this throng refer to all the elect of all ages and the great tribulation as "the whole sum of the trials of the saints of God, viewed by the Elder as now complete" [Alford]. One must not read into a passage something that is foreign to its express statement. The group here described is a particular group coming from a

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6 Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, pp. 767-768.

7 *Ibid.*, pg. 768.

8 Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, pg. 80.

9 Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pg. 88.

particular time.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter 7 concludes with a beautiful picture: *"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

Heaven would be no heaven to the Christian, if it were a place of selfish repose: it is one of the brightest of all its revelations that it is to be a place of service. But of what nature? Not, like earth's best and highest service, one of many imperfections, one of intermittent zeal, one of frequent drooping and flagging, the service of a corruptible body and of a sinful soul; but a service like that of Angels, yet with a motive (if it might be so) even more constraining than theirs, a service hearty, constant, perfect, a service of day and of night, a service carried on in God's temple, that is, in God's presence, the service of priests, ministering not in *holy places made with hands*, but in the very scene and presence of His glory.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 134, 145.

<sup>11</sup> Vaughan, *Lectures*, pp. 199-200.