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SECTION IV

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF THE REVELATION

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Chapter VI

THE OPENING OF THE SEVEN SEALS

Rev. 6:1-17; 8:1, 2

Chapter five of Revelation closes with a picture of the Son of God, taking into His hands the title deed to the earth, and receiving praise and worship from the hosts of the redeemed, as well as from myriads of angels. Chapter six continues the vision, again with no break in the thought; and we follow the events, through the eyes of John, as, one after another, the Lion of the tribe of Judah breaks the seven seals and opens the scroll. Strange and startling are the things which pass before our eyes; and this is our lesson today—the opening of the seven-sealed book.

A FOREVIEW OF THE PERIOD REPRESENTED BY THE SEVEN SEALS

Before we take up this study in some detail, let us note first of all that chapter six tells of the opening of six of the seals. Then a parenthesis follows in chapter seven; and the breaking of the seventh seal, as recorded in 8:1, 2, introduces the seven trumpet judgments. In like manner, as we shall see later, six of the trumpet judgments are described in chapters eight and nine; while another parenthesis follows, in 10:1—11:14, before the seventh trumpet judgment is pictured in 11:15-18. And in the same manner, the six bowls of the wrath of God are described in 15:1-16:12. Then follows a brief parenthesis, in 16:13-16, before the seventh angel pours out his vial into the air.

All of this, even to the most minute detail, reveals a divine plan. Not only are the three main divisions of the book logic-
ally set forth; not only are the various groups of seven plainly marked out; but even the sub-divisions also follow a well defined and logical plan. Six opened seals, a parenthesis, then the seventh seal, introducing the trumpets; six trumpet judgments, a parenthesis, then the seventh trumpet; six bowls of wrath, a parenthesis, then the seventh—marked evidence of the Master-mind that planned it all.

It is well to remember also that the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of wrath—all picture the scenes which are to take place on earth during the great tribulation period. Beginning with the appearance of the Antichrist in the first seal, and continuing right through the seventh vial of wrath, unspeakable suffering and chaos and woe are depicted. Each group of sevens—the seals, the trumpets, and the vials—portrays the entire tribulation period. Thus we have a kind of repetition for the sake of emphasis and warning of impending judgment, soon to fall upon a wicked world. Again, each succeeding picture seems more terrible than the preceding scene; likewise, the anguish of “the great tribulation” period will be intensified as this period goes on to its swift and certain close. Opening with “the beginning of sorrows,” the powers of hell will work feverishly, seeking to bring to naught God’s eternal purpose. But their doom is sealed, and our holy God will permit Satan to bring his wicked devices to pass during “the great tribulation” period, thus purging the earth with His purifying judgments before His only begotten Son returns to reign.

Two other significant portions of Scripture tell of this same period of tribulation:

1. *The Olivet Discourse* of our Lord, found in the twenty-fourth and the twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew, presents an outline picture of this yet future time, called by Him “the great tribulation.”

   You will remember that our Lord was in the temple; and as He went out, His disciples called His attention to the beauty of the building, and the “goodly stones and gifts” with which it was adorned. Then Jesus said to them, “There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Naturally, the disciples wondered what He meant by His statement; and “as He sat upon the mount of Olives,” they went to Him and asked what He meant—when those things would be, and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age.

   Now, when the disciples asked Jesus for the sign of His coming, they did not have in mind the translation of the church. They did not know anything about the rapture at that time. That was “a mystery . . . hid in God” (Eph. 3:9), a part of His program which He had not up to that time revealed. The translation of the church and the peculiar characteristics of the church age were revealed later through the Apostle Paul.

   When the Word of God refers to anything as a “mystery,” it does not mean something hard to understand, but simply some truth that God, in His wisdom, has kept secret until His time for revealing it. When the disciples asked Jesus, “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the age?” they had in mind the coming which is foretold in Old Testament Scripture, that coming when Jehovah shall take the reins of government in His hands. They had in mind that day when the Son of God shall plant His feet upon the Mount of Olives, and set in motion the current that shall sweep evil and unrighteousness from the face of the earth—when He shall reign “from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”

2. *Daniel’s Prophecy of the “Seventieth Week.”* In His Olivet discourse, the Lord Jesus answered the disciples’ questions by referring to Dan.9:27. (Compare Matt. 24:15.) He gave them a description of the period of time which is to run its course just prior to the return of the Lord to set up His reign on earth. I do not believe that anything which Jesus said to the disciples during the Olivet discourse has reference to the church age, in which we are now living. It is, I believe, an account of what will take place during the period of time known as the “seventieth week,” described in the book of Daniel, the same period which John depicts in the chapters of Revelation which we are now to consider.

   After describing the first half of that period, our Lord said to His disciples, “All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8). Then He went on to add: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by
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Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place . . . then shall be great tribulation" (Matt. 24:15, 21).

That period of time consists of seven years, divided into two parts of three and one-half years each. The first period of three and one-half years is “the beginning of sorrows”; the second half, the great tribulation period.

Note the significance of Jesus’ words, as He said further: “Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ . . . ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars . . . nation shall rise against nation . . . there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places . . . Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you” (Matt. 24:5-9).

When Jesus made the statements quoted above, although He was talking to His disciples, He did not have them in mind; He was thinking, rather, of the Jewish nation, which is to come into view once again after the church age is over. His disciples occupied the relationship to Him that the Jewish nation shall occupy during the period represented by the seventieth week of Daniel. Those disciples were not members of the church at the time: for the church did not come into existence until the day of Pentecost, after Christ died and rose again and ascended into heaven. They were individual believers, and they aptly represent the relationship that the faithful Jewish remnant shall bear to the Lord Jesus Christ at the time of the end.

And how shall His coming be? “As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:27).

Coming events cast their shadows before them; and during the present age there have been wars and rumors of wars, pestilences, earthquakes, and false Christs. But all of these things that have been since the church age began, and that are now in the world, are but shadows of coming events. Have you not noticed, my friend, in studying history, that every war becomes greater in magnitude than the preceding war, and that the world, reeling and staggering under each fresh war, has to put forth greater and greater efforts to right herself? The wars of past years were as nothing compared with the first World War, and World War number two was more horrible than any previous carnage! Just as the Napoleonic wars were as nothing compared with the two World Wars of our own day, so these global conflicts are as nothing in comparison with what the world will know during the time of the end. The tribulation will be brought to an end only by the personal, visible, bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth.

To the careful student of prophecy Daniel and Revelation go hand in hand. The one explains and throws a flood of light upon the other. Hence our turning aside, as it were, to see that both Daniel and John wrote of the same period of time, to which the Lord Jesus referred before He went to the cross, foretelling “the great tribulation” that is to come upon the earth. A grasp of this correlation of Scripture will help us immeasurably in understanding the vision which John saw on the Isle of Patmos.

And now let us turn again to the sixth chapter of Revelation. We have already seen that the breaking of the seals does not take place until the church, the bride of Christ, has been taken out of the world, until the day of grace has ended. Then, and not till then, will the day of God’s vengeance be executed; then, and not till then, will the door be closed in the face of sinful, Christ-rejecting nations of Christendom. Then will the seven-sealed book be opened by the Judge of all the earth.

"THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE"—

THE FIRST FOUR SEALS

1. The First Seal—The White Horse and the Antichrist (verses 1, 2).

“And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals . . . and I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.”

Who is the rider upon the white horse that appears upon the earth when the Son of God breaks the first seal? Some hold that he is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is true that our Lord is portrayed as returning, riding upon a white horse; but we do not see Him until the nineteenth chapter is reached. The rider referred to in the verse just quoted is not the Son of God, but is that great personage whose portrait is shown to us in various portions of the Scriptures. Satan always
offers a counterfeit; and here he tries to imitate the Lord of Glory by having Him appear upon the stage of the world’s last, tragic drama in imitation of Him who is “called Faithful and True” and will soon afterwards be revealed from heaven, riding upon a “white horse” (Rev. 19:11-16).

It is the counterfeit whom John saw when the Lord broke the first seal. And he it is for whom the nations wait. The Word of God prophesies the rise of a dictator, a superman, who will appear after the church has been translated, a man described in the Bible as “the man of sin.” As soon as the church has been taken out of the world, then, says Paul the Apostle, “shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (II Thess. 2:8). To this man is given the name of Antichrist. He is the “little horn” which Daniel saw (Daniel 7). He will be a man with the combined genius of a military leader and a leader in the financial world, as well as being versed in all branches of learning. He will be Satan’s masterpiece.

When the devil, “the prince of this world” and “the god of this world,” took Jesus to a high mountain and offered Him the kingdoms of the world and their glory, if He would fall down and worship him, Jesus did not dispute the devil’s ability to give Him those kingdoms with their power and glory. Instead, He said to him, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt. 4:10). But one day the devil will find the man who will accept his terms, and that man will be the Antichrist.

There is one thing I would have you remember: The church of the Lord Jesus will never see the Antichrist. We often hear people speculating as to who the Antichrist will be. Some mention one name: some, another; but it is useless to speculate; for the church will be out of the way before the “man of sin” begins his reign. When the church has been caught up, then it is that the devil will put into the world his man, the rider upon the white horse, who goes forth, wearing a crown, “conquering, and to conquer.”

(a) The Antichrist’s Domain. The part of the world, over which the Antichrist will exercise authority, is that covering the territory of the old Roman Empire. He will consolidate Europe, reviving the Roman Empire, and will go forth to conquer. He will become its head, the head of the prophetic earth. By “prophetic earth” we mean that portion which formed the old Roman Empire.

It is significant that all would-be world conquerors and world rulers have dreamed of reviving the Roman Empire. The fulfillment of that dream will be accomplished by him whom the Word of God refers to as the “man of sin.” We are definitely informed in Daniel 9:26 that the “prince that shall come” will be a Roman. “And the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary.” Please note that it is not the “prince” who was to destroy the city, but his people. “The city and the sanctuary” were destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Roman Legions. The Antichrist will be the future “prince” of that Empire.

(b) The Antagonists of the Antichrist. This “man of sin” will have three great antagonists: the king of the north, the king of the south, and a confederacy of the eastern nations. The king of the north is the Antichrist’s greatest antagonist. Let me say, in passing, that when the four directions, north, east, south, and west, are referred to in the Bible, they are always given in relation to the land of Palestine. Palestine, scripturally speaking, is the geographical and political center of the earth; therefore, we have no difficulty in identifying the antagonists of the Antichrist.

During this period of time there will be four great confederacies: (1) The Roman Empire, under the leadership of the Antichrist; (2) those European nations that were not in the old Roman Empire, under the leadership of the last ruler of Russia, the king of the north; (3) Egypt, taking in the surrounding territory in North Africa, under the leadership of the king of the south; and (4) the nations under the leadership of the “kings of the east,” the nations of the east.

Greatest of all these leaders will be the Antichrist. He will be a dictator such as the world has never before seen. You ask if it is possible that the world will ever see such an absolute dictator? This world today has a population of over a billion people, hundreds of millions of whom are governed by dictators. But these men are insignificant indeed compared with the “man of sin” who will appear as soon as the church it taken away. He will be the devil’s christ. And let me say this: If you have never bowed the knee to God’s Christ, you will one day bow the knee to the devil’s christ.
God's Christ, and are alive and upon the earth when the saints are taken away, you will be left to acknowledge the devil's Christ. Our Lord said, referring to the Antichrist, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43).

2. The Second Seal—The Red Horse and War (verses 3, 4).

The temporary peace which the rider of the white horse will bring in his train will be of short duration, for there can be no permanent peace until the Prince of Peace comes to rule. The people will think they have found the solution for their problems when the Antichrist begins his reign. But alas for them! It will be only a false peace, and will be followed by war and bloodshed. Not only will there be war between nations, but there will also be war between classes. The world has never seen such conflict as will arise after the restraining power of the Holy Spirit has been removed. Listen to the words of this prophecy: "And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (verses 3, 4).

3. The Third Seal—The Black Horse and Famine (verses 5, 6).

"And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine."

Jesus, in the Olivet discourse, as you will remember, said that "there shall be famines." We have seen famine on a small scale; but in that day bread will be meted out by measure, and a measure is just sufficient for a meal.

During the first World War, I remember going to the grocery store where we traded. I had a list of things I wanted. The grocer was a member of my church, and he said, "Mr. Talbot, you can get only a certain measure of this, and that, and the other thing." We knew, during those days, something of what it meant to have our food measured out to us. We had our meatless days, our wheatless days, our breadless days; but those days and the days of food and gas rationing in the second World War are only faint shadows of what the world will see when the church has been taken away, and the Son of God opens the seals, setting in motion the forces that will bring upon the earth such misery as it has never seen.

"A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny." A penny in that day was a day's wages; a measure was sufficient wheat or barley for one meal. So in that day, the famine will be on such a scale that it will take a day's wages to get sufficient wheat to furnish one meal. And if a person is to subsist on barley, which is inferior to wheat in food value, then he will be able to get three meals for a day's wages. Wheat and barley are the foods of the common people. You will notice that the "voice in the midst of the four living creatures" said, "See thou hurt not the oil and the wine." Oil and wine are luxuries of the rich, and it appears that the judgment connected with the opening of the third seal does not affect the rich man. But never fear; their judgment will come later on. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you," says James. Their judgment may be a bit delayed, but it will come! However, the famine which follows the opening of the third seal will evidently be a famine that will affect the working-class in particular.

4. The Fourth Seal—The Pale Horse and Death (verses 7, 8).

"And there shall be . . . pestilences" (Matt. 24:7). Long before John was given his glimpse of "the things which shall be hereafter," our Lord spoke the words just quoted. Perhaps John remembered those words, as he beheld the pale horse, with Death sitting upon his back, followed by Hades.

"And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth."
Pestilence! What a chill the very word produces! First war, then pestilence, following each other as naturally as the night follows the day. During the first World War we had a taste of that, too. The deadly influenza, baffling the doctors' skill, broke out over the earth, and three times as many people succumbed to it as fell upon the field of battle. Those who felt themselves to be safe from it fell victims along with the rest. While people were dying from it daily in this country, my people, who were living in Australia, were not touched by it at first. The heads of the government over there got together and said, “We will search every boat that comes to Australia, and we will put into quarantine any who have the disease before they get within the twenty-five mile limit of the coast of Australia.” They were seemingly immune from the influenza. Then, as it were out of a clear sky, the people began to die by the hundreds. My own mother was among them.

Starvation that stalks Europe in World War two is certain to bring pestilence and death in its wake; indeed, it has already done so to countless thousands.

Dreadful pestilences this world has seen, but they are as nothing when compared with what it will see when the church has been taken from the earth, and the seals are opened!

5. The Fifth Seal—the Martyred Remnant (verses 9-11).

Following “the four horsemen of the apocalypse,” John saw “under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

Here we have a body of people, crying out for judgment and vengeance upon those who had shed their blood and taken their lives. Of course, this great company of martyrs is not the church, for we have seen that the church is to be translated before the seals are broken; but this company of martyred people is the Jewish remnant. When the church is taken away, God is going to deal with Israel once more. Many Jews will turn to God in that day. The Apostle Paul says: “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). He further says, in the twenty-sixth verse of the same chapter: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” In other words, Israel, nationally, is to be saved; the veil of blindness will be taken away; and many of the Jews will turn to God and reject the claims of the Antichrist, giving their allegiance to God and His Christ. As a result, the Antichrist will make their blood run like a river. There will be a great company of martyred Jews in that day.

“How long, O Lord . . . dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

Why do they pray for vengeance? Is that the attitude we are to take toward those who injure us? Then why does the martyred company pray such a prayer? A man prays according to the attitude God is taking toward the world in the dispensation in which he lives. This present age is the age of grace. God is showing grace and mercy to the worst of men, and we are told to pray for them that despitefully use us.

But in the tribulation period God will be meting out judgment upon the earth. Thus it is that the company of souls “under the altar” are praying according to the plan and purpose of God in that day, asking that judgment may fall upon their enemies.

What answer is given those who cry with a loud voice for judgment upon their enemies? They are told to “rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.” From that we learn that yet others are to be martyred, and then judgment swift and sure will be meted out to those who shall have slain them.

6. The Sixth Seal—Anarchy (verses 12-17).

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus told His disciples that there would be “earthquakes, in divers places.” And, no doubt, there will be physical earthquakes in increasing numbers, as the end time draws near. But the “great earthquake” which
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comes at the opening of the sixth seal, that earthquake, after which the sun will become "black as sackcloth of hair" and the moon "as blood," will not be a physical earthquake. It will doubtless be a great moral, spiritual, and political upheaval that even now we can hear rumbling in the distance. The passage of Scripture which depicts the awful happenings which followed the opening of the sixth seal speaks to us of a time when the world will see such chaos and confusion and anarchy as we tremble to contemplate. God has put into this world governments; but rulers have corrupted these governments to such an extent that nothing can come of them but ruin. They are beyond all hope of reform, and must be wiped off the face of the earth by Him who only can rule in righteousness and peace.

"The sun became black as sackcloth of hair." The sun, in the Word of God, is a symbol of supreme government. Malachi tells us that "unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." The word is S-U-N and not S-O-N. Therefore, in that day when the sun is darkened, kingdoms will topple, and governments will fall.

It is to be that upheaval which will give Antichrist his opportunity to show his marvelous political genius and powers of leadership; and out of that chaotic condition, he will bring forth his kingdom.

"And the moon became as blood." As the moon receives her light from the sun, so here the governments of this earth are permitted by God to exercise power, until, because of their failure, they will crumble and go to pieces.

"And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth." The stars represent the leaders of the people. You will recall the reference to the seven stars, in the first chapter of Revelation. There they represent the messengers of the church. In the twelfth chapter of Daniel, we are told that "they that turn many to righteousness . . . shall shine . . . as the stars for ever and ever." In the day when the sixth seal is opened, the stars will be hurled from their places. In that day, when the church has been translated, there will be many a Protestant and many a Romanist leader who will be likened unto the stars of the ecclesiastical heavens; but when the time of upheaval comes, those stars will fall. Those leaders will be turned out of their places of leadership.

In the French Revolution we have an example of conditions similar to those which will prevail at the time the Antichrist takes his throne. The circumstances surrounding the rise to power of Napoleon Bonaparte are a very good illustration of those happenings which are set forth in symbolical form in the sixth chapter of Revelation, beginning with the twelfth verse, which portrays the opening of the sixth seal.

When France was turned into a chaotic state, the ungodly religious leaders were cast out. The streets of Paris ran like a river with human blood, and it looked as though government, human and divine, had ceased. When things were at their worst there arose a little man, born in Corsica, who was just the one needed for an hour like that. Napoleon Bonaparte welded the country together, and brought out of chaos a great European empire. He was "the man of the hour."

So it will be when the happenings described under the sixth seal take place. There will be a "man of the hour" who will step in and bring out of the chaotic condition which exists a ten-toed kingdom. Those nations that were part of the Roman Empire, as it originally existed, will be part of his kingdom. He will have under his leadership dictators who will give allegiance to him, men like Adolf Hitler. And the man will be the Antichrist.

**THE GREAT DAY OF GOD'S WRATH**

"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains" (verse 15).

Tottering kingdoms and falling thrones, the collapse of civilization, will fill with terror those who live upon the earth. The mighty men, the great men, the rich, the bond, the free, will see the approaching of the day of wrath, and they will shrink in terror from the impending doom. Men whose lips never opened to pray will cry out in their fear. They will plead for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them and hide them "from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

To the ungodly will come an awful realization of the fact that because the nations have rejected His Christ, God is dealing with them. The strange thing is that they will not
pray to Him. They will pray to the rocks and the mountains to hide them from the face of a holy and just God.

There may be men and women reading this book who have never prayed. If you do not turn to God, and if you live to see the end of the age, my friend, you will pray! You will realize what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of an angry God. The wrath of the Lamb—what an awe-inspiring spectacle! The Lamb of God, who walked the earth with humble mien; the Lamb of God, who looked over Jerusalem and wept as He saw Israel’s sin; the Lamb of God, who was nailed to the cruel cross to redeem a sin-cursed earth and a sin-cursed humanity; that Lamb will one day come in wrath! “And who shall be able to stand?”

We look out over a world that is filled with turmoil. The nations are at one another’s throats. Concentration camps and the firing squad, bombs and submarines, war and hunger and pestilence cover much of the earth. Coming events are casting their shadows. It will not be long, surely, until the last member shall be added to the body of Christ. And when that happens, there will be a great stir because of the missing ones. But it will only a “nine days’ wonder.” Soon afterwards the world will begin to listen to a man talk, a man who will talk as no man has ever talked before. Into his hands he will gather the reins of government; but soon his power will be taken from him. The judgments that will culminate in the personal, bodily, visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth will run their course; and the Son of God Himself shall take the reins of government in His own hands. He will sweep the earth clean, and in that day the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdom of God and His Christ.

7. The Seventh Seal (8:1, 2).

As we have seen already, the seventh seal follows a parenthetical vision, recorded in chapter seven; and as it is opened, the seven trumpet judgments are proclaimed.

“And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.”
We have already called attention to the fact that John saw a parenthetical vision between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. It is this vision that we are to study in this lesson. But why the pause? Why the delay? For our answer, let us read the first three verses of chapter seven: "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. 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."

In these verses the four angels are portrayed as restraining the winds of heaven until the sealed ones are called out. Now the winds, in the Word of God, represent the providences of God. The Lord, in that day, will be allowing certain events to take place. The Antichrist will be put into the world; but here, after the sixth seal has been opened, God restrains the winds. He holds back certain movements until He seals His witnesses in the world—12,000 from every tribe—144,000 children of Israel, redeemed and sealed for His service.

The sealing of the 144,000 Jews is set forth in verses 4-8; then follows a description of the vision John saw of the redeemed from among the Gentile nations during the tribulation period. God never leaves Himself without a witness in the earth. And chapter seven is a bright picture in a dark set-

1. Who They Are. There can be no doubt as to the identity of the 144,000, for John plainly states: "And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (verse 4).

The tribes mentioned in the verses following that quoted above, are Juda, Reuben, Gad, Aser, Nepthalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph and Benjamin. Out of each of these tribes there were 12,000 sealed, making a total of 144,000.

Various religious cults and sects falsely claim to be the 144,000. I recall an incident in my early ministry in this connection. A young man and his wife, whom I had the privilege of leading to the Lord, gave a faithful testimony in our midst. Shortly afterwards they moved to another city. Soon after their departure, I had occasion to travel to Chicago. I received a letter from them, asking if I would pay them a visit en route. They wanted to see me, looking upon me as their father in the Lord. When I reached their city, they met me at the station; and, among other things, the young woman said:

"Oh, Mr. Talbot, we have invited a young woman, who is a leader of a certain movement here, to supper; and we want you to talk to her. We have already joined this movement."

She told me something about it, and I recognized at once that the cult they had joined was Seventh Day Adventism. Lectures were being given in their city. This young couple had listened, and of course they were interested. Then they had identified themselves with the organization. They said to me:

"Now, this young woman will not agree with you; but
when you are at the table, we want you to promise that you will not say anything to hurt her feelings."

"Why, I would not hurt anybody's feelings for the world," I said.

At dinner we had something which appeals to me at any time—a piece of good old roast beef, cooked as only the English can cook it. My hostess passed me my plate. The young woman passed her plate for vegetables.

"Aren't you going to have any of this meat?" I asked her. "Oh, no!" she answered quickly.

"Don't you like it?"

"Yes, but I must not eat it."

"Have you any scruples against eating it?" I inquired. "Yes," was her reply, "I am one of the 144,000. You know that one of these days the Antichrist is going to appear, and I expect to be in that witnessing company. Therefore, I must prepare myself."

Then she went on to describe the condition the world would be in during the reign of the Antichrist. A great deal of what she said was correct. But then she said, "I must fit myself for that great ministry which I and the others who belong to this company are going to render in that day."

She told me about all of the trials she was going to go through; and in spite of the seriousness of the subject, I could not repress a smile as I thought that, if I were going to go through what she said she was, I would stand in need of a piece of the roast beef we were having at that dinner!

I tell you this incident to illustrate the erroneous claims that are being made not only by the organization referred to, but by other sects as well. The Mormons, followers of "Pastor" Russell, certain holiness sects, and others assert that they are the 144,000 sealed ones of the seventh chapter of Revelation.

If people would only read the Word of God, and read it carefully, they would never get into movements of this kind. They would never make such unfounded claims. The Word of God makes it quite clear in the verses before us that these are "of all the tribes of the children of Israel."

Moreover, this company is not seen now. These Jews will not be called out until after the church is completed and has been caught anyway. The world will never see the great witnessing body composed of the children of Israel, until after the church, which is His body, has been taken out of the world. But because God never leaves Himself without a witness, He will, in that day when there is no longer a believing church in the world, take the veil of blindness from the eyes of the 144,000 Jews. They will see the Word of God as they have never seen it; the veil will be lifted, and those Jews will be the witnesses for God upon the earth during the reign of the Beast.

And let me add this—the 144,000 will not be taken from the so-called Reformed Jews. Those who are in that movement do not believe anything, really. They have gotten away from the faith of their fathers; they do not believe in the prophets and patriarchs of the Old Testament; they have taken up the teaching of men like Spinoza, and call themselves Reformed Jews.

But the 144,000 will be orthodox Jews, those who are looking for the Messiah. I was talking to a Jew sometime ago, and in the course of the conversation I asked him if he believed the writings of Moses.

"Yes," he answered, "I believe them."

"Do you believe that a Messiah is going to come?"

"Yes, I do."

"And that the Messiah, God's Son, is a real Person?"

"Yes, I believe that," was his reply.

There are in the world today thousands of old-time, orthodox Jews. They are the ones who are going back to Palestine. When the church is gone, God will take the veil of blindness from their eyes; and from out of each tribe will come 12,000 witnesses for Him.

2. Their Message—"The Gospel of the Kingdom." And now, what will the 144,000 redeemed children of Israel preach during the tribulation period? What will be their message? Are they going to preach what we preach today? No, they are not. We preach today the Gospel of the grace of God. Those who believe the Gospel of grace are made heavenly saints, and are members of the body of Christ. But that is not the message which will be preached by the 144,000. Theirs will be the Gospel of the kingdom.

You will remember, in the Olivet discourse, when the dis-
ciples asked our Lord what would be the sign of His coming, and of the end of the age, among other things, He said,

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

Are we preaching the Gospel of the kingdom now? It was preached by the Lord Jesus Christ; it was preached by John the Baptist when he came into the world, saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

"The kingdom"; that is, the "rule" of heaven is "at hand." When Jesus came, He sent out the twelve, and then the seventy, not among the Gentiles, but among the Jews; and they preached saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The rule of the heavens is at hand. That kingdom was presented to Israel by the prophets in the Old Testament days. The preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom culminated in the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where He presented Himself officially to the people of Israel. And they cried out, "Hosanna to the son of David." But the leaders came and arrested Him; and instead of recognizing Him as King, they put Him on a cross, nailing over his head the superscription, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. They jeered at Him then, but there will come a day when those who have rejected and disowned Him will tremble before Him!

During the period which is the age of grace, this present church age, the preaching of "the gospel of the kingdom" has ceased. The kingdom was set aside, or postponed; and on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came into the world as had been promised by the Lord Jesus. His message was different. It was not: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"; it was the Gospel of the grace of God, the Gospel of Christ. It was the Gospel of grace, of which the Apostle Paul was talking, when he said, "It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Rom. 1:16). It is the Gospel of grace, the acceptance of which makes us heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. It is the Gospel of grace which makes us members of the body of Christ.

The Gospel of the kingdom—as it was preached by John, and as it will be preached again after the church age is over—never made the offer that the Gospel of grace makes. Let me repeat: The Gospel of the grace of God makes one a heavenly saint; the Gospel of the kingdom makes a man an earthly saint.

3. The Acceptance of Their Message by the "Sheep Nations." When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, He said to them, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses . . . neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matt. 10:9, 10). "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). "When the Son of man shall come in his glory . . . before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left" (Matt. 25:31-33).

The sheep nations are those that will hear the message of the preachers who go out without gold and without extra clothing. They will reject the Antichrist and accept instead the claims of the heavenly Christ, who is one day to return to this earth and take possession of His kingdom.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me" (Matt. 25:34-36).

Are you wondering if our Lord meant that they would receive salvation because of works? Well, that is not what the Scripture just quoted means. We are being given a glimpse of the way in which those preachers of the tribulation period will go out. They will go the same way those early disciples went, without food or money or clothing. And those who receive their message will, I believe, feed them and give them raiment and protection.

4. The Fitness of the Jew for the Task of Evangelizing the Nations. The Jew is a cosmopolite. In every land under the sun you will find a Jew. Consequently, it is not surprising that in those last days, he can go out and evangelize the
nations of the world; for he speaks every language. The Jew will not have to labor for long months and years over foreign languages before he can preach the Gospel of the kingdom; because of his cosmopolitan nature, he is at home in every part of the world. As soon as God takes the veil of blindness from the eyes of the Jewish people, they will be able to go out and preach immediately. As we shall see, their influence will not extend over Christendom; it cannot combat the influence of the Antichrist, which will be prevailing there. The great delusion will be gripping the minds of the people. But these Jewish preachers will find their response from the so-called heathen nations of the earth, who will refuse to receive the mark of the Beast, refuse his authority, and suffer, and die rather than repudiate the Gospel which they will accept.

THE VISION OF THE SAVED GENTILE NATIONS

Rev. 7:9-17

"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. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures, 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" (verses 9-12).

1. A Millennial Scene. As a result of the faithful ministry of the 144,000, "a great multitude" from out of the kingdoms of the world will be saved during the great tribulation.

As John stood gazing at the vast multitude of people, standing before the throne, "clothed with white robes, and with palms in their hands"; as he heard them crying with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," he was not looking at a heavenly scene. He was looking upon an earthly scene, a millennial picture. The great tribulation is followed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory, and John beheld a scene whose action is laid on earth, not in heaven. The worshipful multitude, clothed in shining white robes, are those who will come out of the great tribulation.

You will note that verse 15 reads: "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."

This is a millennial scene, and the multitude will be serving Him in a world where He is reigning and ruling. The temple referred to is the earthly temple which will be set up. (See Ezekiel 40:1—44:8.) But the church, the body of Christ, will have a place in a more celestial city, a city where there shall be no night and no temple; where "they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

2. "These ... Have Washed Their Robes ... in the Blood of the Lamb." The words of John here are full of meaning: "And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Do you see, my friend, that even in that day, as in past ages, God will have just one way of saving people? The blood of the Lamb is the only way. Those who believe in Him have their robes washed white in His blood.

If you ever expect to be in the right relationship to God, you must be "washed in the blood of the Lamb" which was shed for the whole world. And that includes you and me.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

During the reign of the Beast, no man will be able to buy or sell without the mark of the Beast upon him. That will be a time when those who believe in God and His Christ will go hungry and thirsty. But that condition will not last always. The day will dawn when they shall be hungry and thirsty no longer.

During the reign of the Antichrist the very heat of the
sun will be intensified. But after the tribulation, when the Son of God sets up His throne upon a redeemed earth, "neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

3. No Revival for Apostate Christendom. There are some people who teach that after the Church has been translated, there will be a great revival in Christendom; that there will be multitudes of people in professing Christendom saved. The Word of God does not say so. It does tell us that Christendom—that part of it that is spewed out of the mouth of the Lord—is going to take the very attitude toward the Gospel of the kingdom that it takes toward the Gospel of the grace of God now.

No, the great multitude John saw will not be composed of professing Christian nations who rejected the Gospel of grace, and then accepted the Gospel of the kingdom. It will be made up of "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" who are now the so-called heathen nations.

God says, speaking through the Apostle Paul, and referring to those who will be living on the earth when the Antichrist appears—those who have rejected the Gospel of grace and have been left behind when the church is taken away—"... they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged (R. V.) who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:10-12). It is a serious thing to harden your heart against God. It is a serious thing to hear the Gospel of the grace of God and reject it.

If the church were translated today, those who have heard the Gospel and rejected it would go into the tribulation, and the delusion of the Antichrist would be their portion.

The company which John saw was not a company of professing Christian nations who later accepted the Gospel, but it was composed of the heathen nations; that is, of heathen people who will hear the message of the kingdom in that day. They will be the millions of China, India, Africa, and the islands of the sea.

After the church is gone, God will put into the world His witnessing body, 144,000 Jews. They will preach, not the Gospel of the grace of God, but the Gospel of the kingdom. Theirs will be an exhortation to "repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Their message will not be fruitless; as a result of their preaching, there will be a great multitude which no man can number, out of the nations of the earth. It is that multitude which John saw, and which he was told came out of great tribulation.

But I would have you remember that if the Lord Jesus Christ returned today, and took out of the world His church, those who would be left behind—and everyone who has not been born of the Spirit, and made a member of the body of Christ will be left behind—would go into the tribulation, and it seems to us, without hope of salvation. That is, everyone who has had an opportunity to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as His personal Saviour, and has rejected Him, every person whose Christianity is but a profession, a lukewarm mixture of religion and worldliness, will be among those who will be blinded by the "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

That great multitude, as we have pointed out, will not be made up of men and women who have sat beneath the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God; people that have rejected God's grace and rejected God's Son; who have heard the way of life, but have repudiated the Word of God. You will remember how God hardened Pharaoh's heart. But long before God hardened his heart, Pharaoh himself had hardened his own heart.

My friend, are you among those who are rejecting God's Son? If you are, and the translation of the believing children of God should take place today, you would go into the tribulation period, and be among those upon whom God will send a "strong delusion."

4. The "Strong Delusion." And what is that strong delusion? That the Antichrist, the devil's man, is worthy of worship. Those who reject God's grace and God's Christ, will accept Satan's Christ. And why? "That they all might be judged (R. V.) who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thess. 2:12).

Never let any cult or person lead you to reject the Gospel of the grace of God with the hope that you will have another
chance after the church is translated. There is no word in the Bible which would lead anyone to believe that there will be any hope for those who reject Christ as their Saviour, after the day of grace is over.

THE BLESSED HOPE

I am glad that I am washed in the blood of the Lamb! If this day should close the age of grace, if the last member should be added to the body of Christ right now, and the church should arise to meet the Lord in the air, I rejoice in the knowledge that I should be among that number. There are many things that I am not sure about; I am not sure of my health; I am not sure of my wealth; but I am sure of this: that I have been "saved by the blood of the Crucified One"!

One day, as surely as God lives, that translation will take place. We are nearer it now than ever before in the history of the world. Many signs point to His soon coming. This I believe: Although we do not set dates, and there is nothing in the Word of God to warrant our doing that, yet there is a possibility that we who live in this day may be permitted to "go without dying."

Someone might ask those who cherish such a hope, "Sup­pose you are disappointed?"

Well, if we are disappointed in our hope of soon being caught up to meet Him in the air, and do have to "go the way of all flesh," we shall die, and wait for the Lord up there! We shall wait for Him in the drawing-room, whereas now we are waiting for Him down in the coal cellar! All those who are with the Lord now are waiting for that day, just as we are waiting, only they are waiting in the parlor, while we are waiting in the basement!

These things are not idle tales. If you have never been washed in the blood of the Son of God, do not forget that the day of grace will end sometime. Then God will do what He did in the days of Noah. And what was that?

"And they that went in, went in... as God had com­manded him: AND THE LORD SHUT HIM IN" (Gen. 7:16).
Chapter VIII

THE SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS

Rev. 8:2-9:21; 11:15-18

In our former studies we have observed that between the sixth and seventh trumpets, as well as between the sixth and seventh seals and between the sixth and seventh bowls of wrath, there is a parenthetical vision. Now let us read prayerfully chapters eight, nine, ten and eleven, which record both the trumpet judgments and the parenthetical vision. This reading of the entire passage will give us a bird's-eye-view of the seven trumpets, which we can get in no other way, and which we need to have in mind before we consider each trumpet judgment separately.

Having read these chapters, let us study today the seven trumpets; and in our next lesson, the parenthetical vision of 10:1—11:14.

When we considered the seven seals, we noted that the opening of the seventh seal (8:1) ushers in the seven trumpet judgments. Let us read again this significant passage:

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour."

The seven-sealed book is now completely opened. With the breaking of the seventh seal, there comes a strange, portentous hush, foreshadowing the solemn things which are in store for the earth. It is the breathless silence that precedes the storm. All heaven seems to be waiting to see what the Son of God will do next. The "silence in heaven" speaks to us of the hush which will precede the sounding the trumpets of judgment.