

SECTION TWO

CHAPTERS 4–7

THE THRONE AND THE SEVEN SEALS



○ U T L I N E

A. What is happening in heaven during the Church Age

- 4:1-3 Almighty God on His Throne (4:1-3)
- 4:4, 10-11 The 24 elders—the souls of the saints now in heaven
- 4:4-11 The 4 living creatures—the cherubim of God
- 5:1-14 The Lamb prevails and all heaven worships Him

B. The Lamb opens the seven seals

- 6:1-11 Five seals unveil earthly events affecting the Church
- 6:12-17 The sixth seal describes the wicked end of the world
- 7:1-8 The Rapture of the Church
- 7:9-17 The eternal blessed state of the saints

Theme: The great and worthy Lamb has prevailed, and every creature worships and praises Him for their redemption.

REVELATION CHAPTER FOUR



THE THRONE AND THE SEVEN SEALS

The group of men surrounding the young, animated speaker were scowling, their seething anger barely under control. Judging by their clothes, these were prosperous men of authority, accustomed to receiving all respect due them and more. But the young man before them was unfazed by the stature and demeanor of his judges. He chose his words carefully, trying to establish some common ground, but without success. Quickly the low murmur around him became a loud growl, and when he realized that his audience was beyond reason he *cut them to the heart* with his last words. And with one accord they stopped their ears and ran at him, throwing the young man out of the city where they stoned him to death. But not before God allowed him to see into an opened heaven and glimpse the risen Christ standing at the right hand of God.

Stephen was the first of untold (and often forgotten) millions of men, women, and children who have died for their faith in Jesus Christ. Some,

like Stephen, were put to death for spreading the Gospel, others only for living it. All have left behind loved ones who wonder what the *hereafter* is like, and what their loved ones are doing there. Some wonder if they too will be called to glorify God in the ultimate way—dying at the hands of wicked men. Chapters 4-5 of the Revelation is Christ's special encouragement to those who will be persecuted, tormented, and even killed because of their choice to follow Him. They are equally precious to all those who persevere to the end of their life, and wait eagerly to see Him face to face.

Chapter 4 begins the next section of the Book, which we entitle "The Throne and the Seven Seals." This vision is essentially a chronological survey of the NT Age, but there are two main topics, or divisions, that the reader will quickly identify. The first is the description of the Throne of God and its surroundings (Chapters 4-5), which leads into the second topic of the Lamb opening the book with seven seals (Chapters 6-7). This section is also tied back to Chapter 1 in that the *first voice*, which John heard behind him (1:10), speaks again, inviting him to see *things which must be hereafter* (v1).

Much like Stephen, John is permitted to see through a door directly into heaven. He glimpses what is happening there, and what he and all saints will be doing *hereafter*, or after death. This is the purpose of the vision: to illustrate the heavenly realm and describe how wonderful it is. The greatest scene of the vision is the Victorious Lamb (5:1-13), whose great act of sacrifice inspires every creature in heaven to praise and worship Him. This detailed picture of heaven is especially dear to the persecuted and afflicted Kingdom-saints who despite their trials have their eyes firmly fixed on a heavenly goal.

In this section we will see many parallels to OT temple worship, and an understanding of the typology involved will greatly enhance deeper study. God gave Moses *an example and shadow of heavenly things* when He showed him how to build the tabernacle (Heb 8:5) and all of the attendant furniture. God designed each piece with spiritual significance that would not be understood until the Saviour came and fulfilled these types and prophecies of the OT. The sacrificial rituals, the carefully detailed feasts, and each article of the temple worship system foreshadow the Messiah's work and the way in which the New Covenant would fully reconcile God and man. An excellent book

for further reading on the types and shadows of the Old Testament is The Shadow of the Cross, written by my grandfather, Dan JB Byler.

In Chapters 4-7 of the Revelation, John is able to see into heaven and view the actual antitypes of some of the OT articles of worship. It is important to remember that the setting of this section is not the future heavenly state but the present state of the saints now in heaven. Those who have died in Christ go immediately to be with Him in Paradise. Their bodies are not resurrected, but their spirits and souls, which live eternally and do not die at physical death, go to be with the Lord. Several passages in the Bible tell us about these things, and we will explore them as we progress through this section.

Keeping the purpose of the vision in mind, reading Chapters 4-7 several times will make the picture clearer and more meaningful. Consider just a few of the parallel types between Revelation 4-7 and the OT temple listed below. Especially note the two conspicuously missing articles: the veil and the altar of burnt offering. The veil of the temple kept man from the presence of God, and the altar of burnt offering was a unique type of Christ's one and only sacrifice of Himself on the cross. John sees neither of these in the heavenly realm, for there the saints dwell in the very presence of Christ.

OLD TESTAMENT TYPE	SYMBOL IN THE REVELATION
The Ark of the Covenant	The Throne of God
The Lampstand with seven lamps of fire	Seven Lamps of Fire
The Cherubim of the Temple	The Four Living Creatures
The Molten Laver	The Sea of Glass
The Altar of Incense	The Altar in Heaven
The 12 loaves of Shewbread	The 24 Elders
The Book of the Covenant	The Book of the Seven Seals
The Veil of the Temple	Fulfilled and removed by Christ
The Altar of Burnt Offering	Fulfilled in the Sacrificial Lamb

1. *After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*
2. *And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.*
3. *And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.*

A DOOR INTO HEAVEN

Probably the biggest disagreement in this section among the different views of the Revelation involves the time setting. The Futurist believes that beginning with Chapter 4 the entire Book foretells events that will take place after the Church has been removed from the earth by the Rapture. In contrast, Historicists believe Chapter 4 is fulfilled during the present Age of Grace, before the taking up of the saints into heaven. Futurists admit that nothing is here said about the Rapture. Instead, they point out circumstantial facts which they feel indicate that by the time Chapter 4 begins the Rapture has already taken place. Then note that the Church is not mentioned by name after Chapter 3, which is construed to mean that it does not exist on the earth. We would point out that it doesn't matter that the Church is not literally named in these chapters, for she is expressly signified twice therein, first by the woman and her seed in Chapter 12, and again at the marriage supper of the Lamb in Chapter 19. Another point Futurists make is that Chapters 4-19 detail the wrath of God, which is never directed upon His Church. On this we agree, and over and over again these visions comfort those Christians who are living of that very fact. (See 9:4, 12:14, 15:3, 17:14.) Throughout the Book we see the Devil attempting to corrupt the Christian (13:7), and God sending judgments on the wicked to get them to repent (9:20).

The question remains, why is there no text in the Revelation that presents the Futurist's idea of the Rapture? This is the most important event for the Christian in the last 2,000 years; should it not be most convincingly shown?

We believe that it is presented, being one and the same as the Second Coming of Christ, which is described first in 6:12-17 and again in each of the remaining five sections (see page 22). The great "rapture" passage, I Thessalonians 4:13-5:6, gives no hint that any event will follow it, or that time will continue. Jesus' Second Coming will be visible and with clouds (Acts 1:11), exactly as Paul says, *the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord* (I Thes 4:16). Futurism's complex scheme of the end is nowhere given wholly in one passage of the Bible. It must be pieced together from many texts by human commentators who often ignore the most important of Bible study principles: do not let obscure passages overrule the clear ones.

There is no indication in the text that there is any time gap between 3:22 and 4:1. The phrases *after this*, and *hereafter* are translated from the same Greek phrase which is used about 40 times in the New Testament. It can be used to show chronology, or a change in the setting (7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). Since there is an obvious connection with 1:10 in that the *voice as of a trumpet* speaks to John again, there is a strong indication that there is a change in the setting beginning with Chapter 4. The second *meta tauta* (hereafter) of the verse most likely does indicate chronology in that John was shown things future to himself, which all agree that he was. We believe the vision concerns the hereafter: what happens to the Christian after physical death, which is the stated setting of the passage—heaven *in the spirit* (v2).

THE THRONE OF GOD

The first thing that John sees is a *Throne*, and sitting on it a Personage he can only describe with a metaphor, for God cannot be comprehended by the human mind. The entire description of heaven is highly symbolic, for neither can human language describe nor human intelligence understand the heavenly realm. When Paul *was caught up into paradise*, he *heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter* (II Cor 12:4). *Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God*

hath prepared for them that love Him (I Cor 2:9). In order to receive these things we must open our spiritual minds (I Cor 2:14), and "see" the heavenly in pictures of the natural. That is one of the reasons why the Revelation is so highly symbolic. We cannot see spiritual things or imagine a place without time. Only figurative language and analogy can take us there.

The *jasper* stone is described in 21:11 as *clear as crystal*, and the *sardine* stone was evidently a reddish color. See Ezekiel 10 for another vision of God that describes Him with gems. Why did the Spirit direct John to write these two particular gems? The Scriptures show that the sardius stone was the very first of the gems on the High Priest's ephod, and the jasper was the very last (Ex 28:17). The symbolism reminds us of the phrase in 1:11, *I am...the first and the last*. The Book of Revelation is full of these interesting and deeply satisfying hidden meanings that speak loudly of the Book's true author—the Holy Spirit, the One who reveals *the deep things of God* (I Cor 2:10).

Encircling the Throne of God is a *rainbow* like unto an *emerald*, a gem that was probably translucent green in color. Ezekiel also saw a rainbow in his vision of God (Eze 1:28). God made the first rainbow as a sign of His promise to never again destroy the earth with a flood, and thus the emerald *rainbow* seems to be a symbol of the promises of God.

Throughout the Bible, the Throne of God is a majestic, awesome place of complete holiness, purity, and power. Moses records that he *saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness* (Ex 24:10). Isaiah *saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke* (Is 6:1-4). The Scriptures speak of a mighty Throne set in heaven, from which the triune God rules in wisdom and power.

4. *And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.*

5. *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS

Encircling the Throne are 24 smaller thrones, or *seats* as the KJV reads, but the Greek word here is *thronos*, the same word translated *throne* in verse 2. Twenty four *elders* (Gk—*presbuteros*) clothed in white sit on the thrones, wearing *crowns of gold* on their heads. The 24 elders will reappear several times throughout the Revelation, and to identify them we must study their various features. We believe these features establish that the elders are part of the elect of God now reigning with Christ in heaven, and submit the following proofs for that belief.

First, the elders are clothed in *white raiment*, which symbolizes purity and holiness. Several times in the Revelation we will see the saints beyond death clothed in white. Especially note 19:8, *And to her (the Bride) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints* (see also 3:5, 6:11, 7:9, 19:14).

Second, the 24 elders are wearing *crowns of gold*, symbolic of victory, purity, and reward. The Greek word for *crown* here is *stephanos*, a wreath or garland given to the winner of a race or contest. The same word is used by Paul: *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing* (II Tim 4:8). It is not a physical crown, but a heavenly reward of victory. The crowns of the elders represent their triumph over the wiles of the Devil and their compliance to the will of God in following Christ and the Spirit. They are given these crowns as rewards for excellence in the service of God. Paul says, *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Php 3:14). Paul was not trying to just get inside the gates of heaven, he wanted *the prize of the high calling*. Contrast *stephanos* with the crowns of God in 19:12, where the Greek word is *diadema*, similar to our English word diadem. *Diadema* is a kingly ornament showing royalty, honor, and power.

Third, the elders have been redeemed from the earth, and are seen several times praising God for their salvation from sin (4:10, 5:9). This would indicate that they have human souls, and once were men living under the curse of sin.

The 24 elders are part of the heavenly multitude of the redeemed. They have overcome the world in this life and have received heavenly crowns in the presence of Christ. They are now living and reigning with Him in Paradise, risen with Him in that *first resurrection* spoken of in Chapter 20. The 24 elders are seen often in the Book of Revelation praising God and serving Him in His heavenly Temple. God uses them as key messengers in giving several visions to John (5:5, 7:13, 19:10, 22:9), and thus they seem to be capable of more than just resting in Jesus. They are useful in His service, and are given special responsibilities under His command. Jesus evidently had this in mind when He spoke to His 12 disciples not long before His crucifixion, *verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the Throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Mt 19:28). In light of Revelation 3:21 and 20:4, I believe this promise extends to all those who have fallen asleep in Jesus and are reigning in heaven now: *they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him* (20:6). The *regeneration* begins with the new birth according to Titus 3:5 (the only other verse to contain this Greek word), and continues into the next world. Christ is now *gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him* (I Peter 3:22). What a picture of promise this gives to those enduring persecution and trouble in this life; *if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him* (II Tim 2:12).

Some people do not believe that after death a Christian goes directly to be with the Lord, but that souls “sleep” until the final resurrection. This erroneous belief is based on a misconception of the resurrection itself. Man on this earth is made up of three parts: the physical body, the spirit, and the soul. What we call death is the separation of the body from the spirit and soul. It is the body that sleeps (Acts 7:60; I Thes 4:13), waiting for the final resurrection which reunites the body (in a glorified, incorruptible state) with the spirit and soul (I Cor 15). At physical death, the spiritual soul goes to heaven instantly, for

Paul says that *to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord* (II Cor 5:8); he desired *to depart and be with Christ, which is far better* (Php 1:23).

When we say the soul goes instantly to heaven upon physical death, we mean that it goes to Paradise, not heaven our eternal home. The bodily resurrection of the saints will not take place until the end of the world, and heaven is the eternal home for the resurrection body. Paradise is that intermediate state of the righteous dead who are waiting for the resurrection and is a counterpart to Hades, which is the intermediate state of the wicked dead. Those who have died in Christ will not be resurrected until Christ returns to earth, bringing with Him the souls of those whose bodies have fallen asleep. Then their new bodies will rise from the graves to meet Him in the air. Those who are alive will not die; their bodies will be changed to incorruptible, spiritual bodies in the twinkling of an eye! The teaching of Paradise and Hades is consistent with the great resurrection passage of I Thessalonians 4:13-17, which says that *those which sleep in Jesus God will bring with Him* but that *the dead in Christ shall rise first*. (See page 496.)

Revelation 4-7 pulls back the curtain just a little so that we are able to glimpse some of what the saints are doing in heaven now, but our limited human senses create many questions that will only be answered when we see it for ourselves.

There are not just 24 redeemed in heaven, nor are there only 144,000 as given in Chapters 7 and 14. The numbers are representative of all the saved in heaven, an amount growing daily as physical death awards more crowns of victory to those who have overcome in this life. The 144,000 represent the saved of all ages in every measure of grace and faith. These would include children who have died before reaching the age of accountability and those born with mental deficiencies who cannot understand the plan of salvation. The 24 elders represent those who have proven themselves especially faithful. They have laid up more treasure in heaven and have gained a corresponding reward. What this means and how it will unfold must wait to be answered in eternity, but Jesus gives us an illustration of this in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:15), which teaches that those who are faithful, even in little, will be rewarded accordingly. Individual rewards in eternity will be based upon our

works (I Cor 3:14, 4:5; Rev 22:12), and *many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first* (Mt 19:30).

The elders appear to symbolize these faithful ones. They are given responsibility and honor beyond that of the 144,000. The 24 elders and the 144,000 are distinct groups, for in at least two occasions they are mentioned in the same passage and appear as separate entities. See 14:3, where the 144,000 sing a new song before the Throne and the 24 elders. (Read more on this topic at page 498.)

The symbolism of the number 24 is based on two different Bible sources. First, the priests of the OT were divided into 24 courses, with each course having its own offices and responsibilities in the temple (I Chr 24-25). John the Baptist was born into the *course of Abia*, whose responsibility was to burn incense before the veil (Luke 1:1-13). In the Revelation, the 24 elders are seen serving God in His heavenly Temple as messengers (5:5; 7:13; 22:8).

Secondly, the number 24 combines the twelves of the Old and New Covenants, making the 24 elders around the Throne encompass the entire history of God's plan for mankind. Twelve represents God's chosen, His elect. Under the Old Covenant, God chose the 12 sons of Israel and their posterity to be His peculiar people. And under the New Covenant He chose 12 Apostles to initiate and teach the Gospel message of salvation for the entire world. There were actually 13 tribes of Israel, for Joseph was divided into two after the lineage of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48). Similarly, in the NT there were 12 Apostles chosen by Jesus, but Paul became an Apostle later, making 13 (see I Cor 15:7). The pattern is perfect, the 12 patriarchs of Israel plus the 12 apostles of the NT equal the 24 elders of the Old and New Testament Church reigning in heaven now on thrones with Christ. *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His Throne* (Rev 3:21). Upon the OT table of shewbread in the Holy Place were 12 loaves of unleavened bread, one for each of the tribes (or sons) of Israel. The New Covenant is built upon a foundation laid by *the twelve apostles of the Lamb* (Rev 21:14). Together they form the group of 24 elders.

There are *seven lamps of fire burning before the Throne, which are the seven Spirits of God* (v5). The number seven here is a symbolic number representing

the fullness and perfection of the Spirit of God. Seven should be understood in the same way Jesus used it when He said that we are to forgive those who sin against us *seventy times seven* (Mt 18:22). The sevenfold Spirit portrays the complete, perfect, all-knowing power of the Holy Ghost, working within and for the Church of Christ.

At first glance the *seven lamps* as a symbol seems to conflict with the *seven candlesticks* of 1:20, but deeper study reveals that the two symbols correspond rather than contradict. The *lamps* (Gk-*lampas*) of fire are actual light-givers, and therefore correctly symbolize the work of the Spirit. The *candlesticks* in 1:20 (Gk-*luchnia*) are light-bearers, a lampstand on which to place the light-giver, and therefore correctly symbolize the work of the Church. This is consistent with every other use of these words in the NT. For example, the ten virgins in Matthew 25 carry *lampas*, a signification of the Spirit. Without a burning lamp, the virgins are not permitted to go into the wedding feast with the bridegroom. Compare also the symbolic star that falls from heaven burning like a *lampas* (8:10) with the lampstand whereupon a man places a lamp so that all *may see the light* (Luke 8:16).

The golden lampstand of the temple stood before the veil of the Holy of Holies (Heb 9:2). God instructed specific workmen to make it according to His exact pattern (Ex 31; Num 8:4). It was a beautiful, intricate vessel that was to be filled with pure, beaten (not crushed) olive oil. The oil was mixed with special spices, and the mixture was never to be copied for private use or allowed to come into contact with human flesh. The oil lamps of the lampstand were to be kept burning continually, providing the only light in the Holy of Holies (Lev 24:2). Here in the Revelation we see the *luchnia* (light-bearers) of Chapters 2-3 burning with the *lampas* (Light-giver) of Chapter 4, closely paralleling the OT type of the golden lampstand. Zechariah 4 describes a vision of this same lampstand with a consistently similar symbolic meaning. We will study that in 11:4, in the account of the lampstands and olive trees of John's vision.

Out of the Throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices (v5). The picture is of mighty and frightening power. Three more times in the Revelation John describes lightning, thunder, and voices coming out of the Throne (8:5, 11:19, 16:18). As we will see in the trumpet series, these are illustrative

of the powerful acts of God on the earth. They originate in the heavenly Temple, from the very Throne of God (Ex 19:16; Is 29:6). David writes about the intervention of God on behalf of His people in similar figurative language: *The voice of Thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook* (Ps 77:18). (See 8:5 and the glossary for more on the symbolic meaning of this phrase.)

6. *And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.*
7. *And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.*
8. *And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*
9. *And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,*
10. *The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*
11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.*

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES, OR CHERUBIM

In front of the Throne was a *sea of glass, like crystal*. This is a rather strange word picture, and appears to describe a vast expanse of transparent floor. The phrase is also found in 15:2, in John's vision of the saints of God standing on a *sea of glass, mingled with fire*. This symbol also is taken from the temple, being drawn typologically from the *molten sea* (II Chr 4:2), called the laver

in Moses' tabernacle. The *molten sea* is widely believed to typify the Word of God. The priests would wash in the *sea* (II Chr 4:6), which was made of mirrored brass (Ex 38:8; I Chr 18:8), before they entered into the Holy Place, and as they carried out the required blood sacrifices.

The spiritual significance of the *laver* is explained in James 1:22-25, which gives the analogy of a man *beholding his natural face in a [mirror]* and, even though he sees it is dirty, does not wash it. So also is the *hearer [only] of the Word*, but the *doer* not only sees his sinful condition in the mirror of God's Word, he asks Christ to wash him *with the washing of water by the Word* (Eph 5:26).

The Word of God is the basis for all things—*by Him all things consist* (Col 1:17). His Word spoke the worlds into existence, and His Word will one day bring it to an end, at which His Word will be the one and only judge of every man (John 12:48). All true faith is based on the promises of Christ in His Word, and it is on those promises that we will one day stand, *having the harps of God* in our hands. In this *earthly tabernacle* we live by faith in the Word of God, not being able to physically see those wonderful things that we are convinced God has prepared for us. In our heavenly home we will continue to stand upon the Word of God, no longer a mirror, but a transparent, solid foundation on which we can trust forever.

In Ezekiel's vision of God he saw a *firmament*, or expanse, in the heavens which was in color like *the terrible crystal* (Eze 1:22). Above that crystal floor he saw God, seated upon His Throne. This is very similar to Moses' description of God, who saw *under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness* (Ex 24:10). Both Ezekiel and Moses were looking upward and saw through the *sea of glass*, into the heavenly realm where God reigns. John saw into heaven too, and he sees the saints above the sea of glass (15:2), in the presence of God. The *crystal glass* of Revelation, the clear *paved work* of Moses, and the *terrible crystal* of Ezekiel all seem to reference the same thing. The one difference is that Ezekiel saw *four living creatures*, the cherubim, under the fiery sea, while John saw them above the sea—around and in the midst of the Throne of God.

In the midst of the Throne, and round about the Throne, were four beasts (v6). The translation *beast* (Gk—*zoon*) should not be confused with the *beast* that

will be introduced in Chapter 13 (Gk—*therion*). *Zoon* is simply a living creature; *therion* is a wild, dangerous animal. Throughout the Revelation, *zoon* always refers to the four living creatures before the Throne. The fact that the four living creatures are very similar in Ezekiel's vision strongly suggests that they describe the same thing—the enigmatic cherubim.

Cherubim appear throughout the Scriptures, but little is written as to their appearance or purpose, and excepting that they are spiritual beings, we do not really know what they are. God placed cherubim to guard the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve had sinned, and though men probably were able to see them up until the time of the Flood, no description of them can be found from those days. Comparing Ezekiel 1:10 with Ezekiel 10:14 hints that the cherubim may have had faces resembling the face of an ox. The Hebrew word *kerub* appears to mean, “like unto the great, powerful God.” *Kerub* is used exclusively for the cherubim, whether as spiritual beings or in reference to the carvings and statues that represent them. Cherubim were engraved on the walls of the temple and stitched into its curtains. There were two small cherub statues of pure gold over the mercy seat and two huge ones with wings that stretched from wall to wall in the Holy of Holies, making a total of four in the temple.

Cherubim appear to be angels of very high rank, apparently involved in direct service to God and His Throne. Several times God is described as riding on a cherub, or attended by them (II Sam 22:11; Ps 18; Eze 10). We know that there are several types of angels. The Bible mentions seraphim, archangels, and messengers, but cherubim seem to be the strongest, wisest angels that God created. Satan was once *the anointed cherub that covereth*; and *wast upon the holy mountain of God* (Eze 28:14). Heaven abounds with angels, and if God's creativity extends to the angelic host as much as it does to man and His earthly creation, they will dazzle us with their complexity and variety. This is even implied by the various descriptions of cherubim in the Bible. Ezekiel saw them with four faces and peculiar wheels transporting them; Isaiah describes them as six-winged fiery serpents (*Heb-seraph*) and John saw them covered with eyes and capable of speech. Physical eyes are not capable of seeing spiritual things, and we must wait until our mortal bodies

are changed into glorified ones before we can even begin to understand the heavenly realm where the fullness of the Godhead will be revealed.

John's description of the *four living creatures* (NASB, NKJV), or cherubim, may have symbolic meaning as well. The eyes *before, behind, and within* would indicate that they are vigilant, always watching, protecting, and alert. Eyes are symbolic of knowledge and wisdom (see glossary). The wings may symbolize protection and safety, as in Psalms 57:1, *in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge* (also Luke 13:34; Ruth 2:12; Ps 91:4). See also Isaiah 6, where the wings of the seraphim were used to cover themselves. The *six wings* speak of the creative work of God, *for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day* (Ex 20:11). *Four beasts* relate the work of these powerful spirit-beings to the earth, the number four being the number of the world (see glossary).

The *four living creatures* are spiritual intermediates carrying out the will and commands of God. Many times when God intervened in the course of world history the Scripture speaks of the *angel of the Lord* as the instrument of His power. Zechariah saw a vision of *four spirits that stand before the Lord of all the earth* who go out to *quiet His Spirit* on the earth (Zec 6). The angels were created by God for His honor and glory in the spirit world and as *ministering spirits* for the *heirs of salvation* (Heb 1:14). Though they apparently had the power of choice in the past, when many chose to follow Satan, the pure angels now seem to involuntarily obey God. More thoughts on this will be given later in Chapter 12.

The four faces of the *living creatures* in 4:6 match closely the description of Ezekiel's cherubim (Eze 1:10), and various ideas have been given concerning them. Irenaeus, writing about A.D. 170, correlated the four living creatures with the four Gospels sent out into the world. Matthew emphasizes the royal power of Christ—the *lion*; Mark highlights the sacrifice of Christ—the *ox*; Luke shows His humanity—the *man*; and John details the gift of the Holy Spirit—the *flying eagle*. Another interpretation follows a Jewish tradition that says the four standards under which Israel encamped around the tabernacle were Judah, the lion; Dan, the eagle; Ephraim, the ox; and Reuben, the man. A third approach is to find in each face common characteristics of the given

symbol. Thus, the lion represents strength, being the strongest of the animals (Pro 30:30; Is 5:29); the ox represents sacrifice and service, being the strongest of tame beasts (Jer 11:19); the man represents intelligence, being the wisest of God's earthly creation (Gen 1:26); and the eagle represents swiftness, being chief among the birds (II Sam 1:23).

Regardless of these peripheral particulars, the overall meaning should not be missed. Angelic, created beings surround the Throne, praising God and worshipping Him. Never in the five or six places that the *living creatures* appear in the Revelation do we read that they accepted worship. They are always shown worshipping before the Throne with the 24 elders. Therefore, the essential thought of the *living creatures* in heaven around the Throne is that all creation worships God and praises Him, and this will become even more evident in the next chapter. Their continuous praise is *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come* (v8).

When the *living creatures* worship, the 24 elders cast their crowns before the Throne saying, *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created* (v11). The Greek word translated *pleasure*, is *thelema*, and usually is translated "will," as in the Lord's Prayer, *Thy will be done*. God's purpose cannot be changed by any power—heavenly or earthly. But His *pleasure*, or desire, is not always manifested on the earth. It is not His will that any should perish, but many will (Mt 18:14; II Peter 3:9). God withholds His power in the earthly realm, but in heaven both God's purpose and pleasure are done at all times.

The beautiful picture of these verses is describing the saints now in heaven standing before the Throne worshipping and praising the One who has redeemed them. They cast their crowns of victory at his feet, attributing all their triumphs to Him, and acknowledging that all glory is due His worthy name. Happiness, peace, safety, and rest without end forever and ever are their incredible reward. The redeemed of all ages glorify Christ, reigning with Him in the heavenlies until the day of *restitution of all things* (Acts 3:21).

REVELATION CHAPTER FIVE



THE SEARCH FOR A SAVIOUR

The heavenly scene John began to describe in Chapter 4 comes to its climax in Chapter 5. After the glorious setting of the Throne, a new theme emerges as the characters take active part in the vision—a search for someone worthy to open the book that God holds in His right hand. Again the picture is given with symbols and figurative expressions: the Lamb is Christ, the book represents God’s covenanted purpose, the new song symbolizes salvation, etc.

What is this event that compels such spontaneous and overwhelming praise and worship from *every creature in heaven and earth*? Without doubt it is that great focal point of all history, the death of God the Son to redeem His creation from the curse of sin. All time, before and after, is reckoned from that infinitely important act of love and sacrifice. All heaven watched intently as Christ bowed His head and died, while mankind, largely unknowing and uncaring, missed that momentous event, prophesied so many years before.

Though the world did not immediately understand the coming of Christ, given time it would. The perfect sacrifice was offered and the way of reconciliation between God and man was accomplished. That truth would stir up a flame that has burned through history and will never be extinguished.

1. *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book, written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.*
2. *And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof?*
3. *And no man in heaven, nor in earth, nor under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.*
4. *And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.*

THE BOOK OF THE COVENANT

In his vision of the heavenly Throne, John's attention is drawn to a book, actually a scroll, (Gk—*biblion*) in the right hand of God. Scrolls were the standard medium of writing used in the apostolic age, before books (or codices) were invented. They were written in columns, and therefore the reader needed to be constantly unrolling the scroll as he continued to read. Rarely were they written on both sides like the one in John's vision, but they were sometimes sealed with a wax impression so that the recipient could tell if the scroll had been unrolled and tampered with beforehand.

In establishing the meaning of the scroll itself, let's consider briefly the whole picture. John has been allowed to see through a door into heaven, where a re-enactment, or play, is performed for his benefit and our learning. The play is set in the time before Christ's first coming, and its purpose is to illustrate the wonderful act of love and sacrifice of Christ in redeeming man. The angels and elders assist in the heavenly re-enactment (v2, v5) and help us to understand its meaning.

John sees a book in God's hand, unopened because nobody had been found *worthy* to open it. The book is obviously extremely important, and

John is sorrowful unto tears until the announcement is made that a worthy One has been found; the Lamb has prevailed and is willing to take the book. Immediately, all heaven breaks into song, and every creature worships the *Lamb that was slain*. They worship Him with harps, incense, and song, a mighty multitude of men and angels. The overall meaning is very clear. The songs of praise ring out because salvation has come! The victory of Christ over Satan and death has brought hope and healing to a people corrupted by sin and estranged from God.

The plan of God in reconciling man to Himself requires finding a person who is able to overcome Satan's corruption and become the suitable sacrifice to pay the debt incurred by sin. Thus, a search is made of heaven, earth, and Hades for a person that is able to carry out the requirements of the Covenant. But *no man*—the Greek would extend to more than "man" alone: no being, no animal, no spirit, nothing was able to take the book from God's hand. There were many angels, many men, many creatures, but not one was *worthy*, or suitable for the task. The death of an innocent, perfect man in the place of guilty, sinful mankind was the only means by which God and man could be reconciled, and God Himself was the only one *worthy* to be that man.

John sees the book in the *right hand* of the Father, indicating its importance and value (see page 53). There is writing on both sides of the scroll—*within and on the backside* (see Eze 2:10). This corresponds to the two Covenants of the Old and New Testaments that God made with man. The first Covenant has passed away in Christ, but the second will endure forever (Heb 8:6-13). There is no mention of the length of this book, or even what is written therein, for the book itself is the symbolic object of the vision, and it represents the full purpose of God in creating and redeeming man.

Notice the two-part question in verse 2: *Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof?* It would appear that the order is reversed, for the seals must be loosed before the book can be opened. The translation is true to the original Greek however, and as soon as the Lamb takes the book, all creation praises Him with harps, songs, and incense (v8). The loosing of the seven seals will come later, and forms a different theme (6:1-17). The significance of this two-fold action is that the first step was to find one worthy to take the book, that is, to accept the responsibilities that it required and

to perform the necessary actions. Only then could the seals of the book be loosed, and the prophetic history of the New Covenant be revealed.

We believe the book symbolizes the complete plan of salvation for man that God had ordained even before He created the world. The book represents the purpose of the Trinity in reconciling sinful man with holy Almighty God. It is *the mystery of Christ* (Col 4:3). Jesus initiated (opened) the book when He prevailed over sin, Satan, and death on this earth; the events of the Kingdom of Christ were then set into motion.

Many years earlier God had given Moses the First Covenant on two *tables of stone* (Ex 31:18). These were put inside the Ark, which we earlier showed was a type of the Throne of God, and there they were kept during Israel's travels in the desert. Later they were stored in the Ark of the Covenant in Solomon's temple. Sometime thereafter, maybe during Jerusalem's destruction by King Nebuchadnezzar, the tables of stone disappeared.

The Second Covenant was foretold by the prophets and established by Jesus Christ. It fulfilled the requirements of the First Covenant and is the only means by which man can be saved. The book that Jesus the Lamb takes from the Father's hand is the Book of the Covenant, old and new. Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant and ratified the New with His own blood, shed vicariously for guilty man.

The importance of the Second Covenant cannot be overstated; it is the only way to God. Even those living under the First Covenant would have failed to see heaven without the Lion of Judah establishing the Second. *For this reason He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first Covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance* (Heb 9:15, NKJV, see also Heb 11:40). God planned the Second Covenant even before the First was instituted, a fact typified in the action of Moses angrily destroying the first set of stone tablets of the Law after he saw Israel's appalling idolatry and immorality (Ex 32:19). Those stone tables and the writing were the handiwork of God (Ex 32:16), but Moses prepared the second set of stone tablets and God engraved the requirements of the Covenant upon them.

John *wept much* because nobody was found worthy to open the book. Much like English, the Greek language has at least six different words to

describe crying. Here the word is *klaio*, which means to weep and wail audibly, in deep emotional sorrow as one without hope (see Mark 5:38, Mt 2:18). The word is much stronger than the context would seem to require, but I believe the Holy Spirit in some way allowed John to realize the vital importance of that book. He understood that every human soul was at stake, his included. If the book were not taken and opened, God and man would remain forever estranged, and he wept at the thought, in deep sorrow and distress of soul. It was not John only who sorrowed without hope, for the whole creation labors under the curse of sin and death.

Yes, God knew before the world began that the Messiah would die for man, but the key truth here is that He was the only sacrifice admissible. There was not another creature in heaven or earth that could fulfill the requirements of the Covenant—become a man and live a sinless life, and then become the sin-bearer and death sacrifice. The words of the songwriter explain well John's thoughts as he wept:

Just suppose God searched through heaven
 And couldn't find one willing to be
 The supreme sacrifice that was needed
 To buy eternal life for you and me.
 Oh, had it not been for a place called Mount Calvary,
 Had it not been for the old rugged cross,
 Had it not been for a man called Jesus,
 Then forever my soul would be lost.

Author—Rusty Goodman

No wonder John wept aloud. The full realization of human inadequacy, hopelessness, and need of a Saviour was impressed on him. How important it is that every Christian experiences this truth. How greatly it will affect his life as he sees that his own soul hangs by a single thread. There is salvation in none other except God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. There is no work of righteousness which we can do that will pay for our own acts of sinfulness. *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ* (I Cor 15:57). The Lamb has prevailed, taken the book, and redeemed us from the penalty of our sins.

5. *And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.*
6. *And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

THE LION-LIKE LAMB

One of the elders comes to John. “Do not weep,” he says, “For the Lion of the tribe of Judah has overcome, and is worthy to open the book.”

But John does not see a lion, he sees a Lamb. Here is another indication that the Revelation cannot be taken completely literally. *The Lion of Judah* is a reference to Genesis 49, when Jacob gathered his children and blessed them just before he died: *Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be* (Gen 49:9-10). This is one of the oldest specific prophecies of the Messiah in the Bible. The meaning of *Shiloh* is “the seed,” a reference to the Messianic prophecy in Genesis 3:15. Jesus came from the tribe of Judah, and was in the direct lineage of David. He is called *the Lion* because a lion is a symbol of great strength and power (I Chr 12:8; Num 24:9), being *the strongest among beasts* (Pro 30:30). Though it is a well-known term for Jesus, Revelation 5:5 is the only place the phrase *Lion of the tribe of Judah* appears in the Bible.

Jesus is also *the Root of David* (v5). This figurative expression comes from several OT passages, most notably Isaiah 11:10, *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.* Amazingly, Futurists ascribe this prophecy to a future dispensation called the Millennium, instead of the literal first coming of Christ to earth as a man. We challenge all to read the entire chapter of Isaiah 11 and see how perfectly it has been fulfilled in Christ and His new covenant people, the Church of blood-bought Gentiles and Jews. Whether

you believe in a future Millennium or not, the astonishing accuracy of each prophetic detail of Isaiah 11 to the work of Christ and the establishment of His Church is compelling. Moreover, Paul quotes this exact verse in Romans 15:12 and applies it to the Gentiles of his day! Read also Jeremiah 23:5 for a similar linking of Christ with the *Root of David*. The *Branch* is really the same thing as the *Root*, as the actual Hebrew meaning of the *Branch* is a tender shoot which itself grows into a tree.

The Lamb John sees is standing *in the midst of the Throne*, showing the oneness of Christ with God the Father. The four living creatures and the 24 elders surrounding the Throne are watching as He comes and takes the book. The literal act of a Lamb taking and opening a book is inconceivable; it is the word picture that we must follow. The Lamb appears as if it had been slain, and has seven horns and seven eyes. The horns typify strength and power (I Sam 2:10; Ps 75:10; Zec 1:21) and the eyes indicate all-knowing, all-seeing wisdom and knowledge (see glossary). The horns and eyes indicate that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, and corresponds closely with Revelation 4:5. The Throne, the seven Spirits, and the Lamb—all members of the Trinity are in complete harmony of purpose for the redemption of Man. The fact of the Trinity becomes clearer when we realize that God the Father could not have left His Throne to die, but God the Son could and did.

7. *And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.*
8. *And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints.*
9. *And they sung a new song, saying, thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.*
10. *And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

THE LAMB ACCEPTS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE COVENANT

The taking of the book is a most important occasion, for immediately the four living creatures and the 24 elders prostrate themselves before the Lamb. Earlier, in 4:10-11, this group fell down before the Throne in worship, but this time it is to the Lamb that they begin to sing a *new song* of praise and thanksgiving, offering up incense and harp music to the One who is all-worthy. They do not sing hymns (*hymnos*) or psalms (*psalmos*) but a spontaneous song of victory. The taking of the book typifies the Son of God in heaven undertaking and finishing His mission of reconciliation—the opening of the New Covenant between God and man. Jesus left His heavenly home and became a man so that He might redeem man from the clutches of Satan. Knowing the outcome, He still prayed, *O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done* (Mt 26:42). He took the book willingly, but wished there were another way. He understood the requirements it held, for only He could *look thereon* (v4). Taking the book, drinking the cup, was the only way to open the way to heaven, and so He did it—for us.

No wonder the saints in heaven fall in immediate worship before the risen Christ. They were not redeemed with gold or silver, *but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot* (I Peter 1:18-19). The souls of these OT saints had been waiting in Hades (Hebrew—*sheol*), for Jesus had not yet opened the doors of Paradise to the righteous. After His death on the cross He descended into Hades and entered the *strong man's house* (Satan's) and spoiled it, freeing its captives and ascending with them into heaven (Mt 12:29; Eph 4:8-9). Now these forgiven ones sing a *new song* of deliverance and salvation, the *song of Moses* (15:3), which nobody else can learn except the redeemed (14:3). They stand with *the harps of God*, a multitude from every tongue and nation, with happiness and joy before them forever. (Read more about souls in Hades on pages 194 and 282.)

The overwhelming praise and worship of all creation comes at the heavenly event of the risen Christ's coronation as King of the Universe. The Lamb *hath prevailed to open the book* (v5). He has accomplished all that He had been sent to do, and now He ascends into heaven to the Throne of God. The

coronation of Christ is an essential step in God's master plan to redeem man. Its importance is primarily in the realm of the spiritual, and affects the world and the Church through that medium. The full details of that heavenly event are unclear, but the basic points we do know. To understand it, we must go back in time, to the creation of the world.

This earth was created in perfection; there was no sin, death, or decay—God *saw that it was good*. But sin brought a curse to God's creation, and Satan became the prince of this world as its sinful ruler. From that time on Satan corrupted every part of God's perfect creation that he could. Man was his special target, and not one man was left uncorrupted by sin—until Jesus was born. Did Satan know how God planned to redeem fallen Man? He definitely did not, but he did see a sinless Jesus mature into a sinless Man, and he was determined to corrupt him. Satan offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world if He would sin but once. Jesus rejected that offer, knowing that it was a sinister attempt to corrupt His life and disqualify Him as the acceptable offering for the sin of man.

Thus it was that one perfect Man bought back the rights to fallen creation, and *the prince of this world [was] cast out* (John 12:31, 16:11). *Through death He...destroy[ed] him that had the power of death, that is the Devil* (Heb 2:14), and with that supreme victory Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and became the Ruler of the Universe, King of kings, and Lord of lords. *God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things* (Eph 1:20-22). The scepter of His Kingdom is forever (Heb 1:8) and we are His subjects. We will reign with Him both now and forever.

The coronation of Christ was seen and described by Daniel: *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given [the Son of man] dominion, and glory, and a Kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed* (Dan 7:13-14). A king and crown require a kingdom,

but Jesus' *Kingdom is not of this world* (John 18:36). It is a spiritual Kingdom, with entirely different laws, goals, and constituents. Unless one fully appreciates this truth, the Book of Revelation will remain a jumbled collection of misunderstood visions. The Kingdom is not a physical one, for Jesus said *the Kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21). It is a Kingdom of souls which spans heaven and earth. He reigns in His earthly Church and in heaven with those He has redeemed—*the whole family in heaven and earth* (Eph 3:15). Physical death does not separate us from our Saviour and King; the soul and spirit are immediately with Him in heaven.

Consider the time that Christ the Son of God was on this earth. Never in all history was there, or will there be, a greater moment with such enormous consequences for the entire universe. Praise God that He *hath prevailed*, and *purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they* (Heb 1:3; see also Acts 2:33; Col 2:15; Heb 7:26, 8:1, 9:24, 10:12). Jesus has defeated the powers of darkness and wrested control from that wicked one. Now the saints of the Kingdom can reign with Him on earth and in heaven (Rom 5:17). Yes, the Devil is still the *prince of the power of the air* (Eph 2:2) but his judgment is absolutely certain, only the word must be spoken for the sentence to be carried out and his punishment executed. The point we are making is that the coronation of Christ as King in heaven means that He is now the ruler of the nations and the kingdoms of the world, all authority is His, and He uses it for the benefit of His spiritual Kingdom.

Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us by Thy blood to God out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. And hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth (v9). Some writers think these words were part of an early Christian song. There is an obvious similarity of this verse with 1:6, the basic difference being the final phrase *we shall reign on the earth*. Millennialists may try to use this phrase to bolster their view of a future earthly reign, but several facts force us to reject that idea. The Greek is actually in the present active indicative tense, which Weymouth translates: *and hast formed them into a Kingdom to be priests to our God, and they reign over the earth*. The word *shall* in the KJV is added for emphasis rather than tense. It must be added that a few of the early manuscripts we have of the

New Testament do have a future tense in this verse, and it is from these manuscripts that our modern versions come from (the critically acclaimed Nestle text). Read our thoughts concerning the various manuscripts and translations of the New Testament on page 179.

Regardless of the original tense used, the context of verse 10 is against the Futurist view. The passage portrays the saints in heaven singing a song of praise and thanksgiving before the Throne of God in gratefulness for the salvation that the Lamb has wrought for them. They express words of the redeemed immediately after Christ had taken the book and prevailed over Satan with His death and resurrection. In that time setting even the future tense fits well, for two thousand years have passed and the redeemed in heaven are still reigning over the earth. Chapter 20 will give added detail to the idea of the saints reigning in heaven during the Church Age.

11. *And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;*
12. *Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*
13. *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.*
14. *And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth forever and ever.*

ALL HEAVEN MAGNIFIES THE LAMB

Not only the redeemed praise the Lamb. John hears the voices of countless billions of angels lauding Him with loud voices of praise and honor. Imagine all heaven ringing with beautiful songs of deliverance and victory!

David wrote, *He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God* (Ps 40:3). In heaven the newly crowned King of the Universe is acknowledged and praised by every created living thing, but how often He is marginalized and rejected on earth by the only created being He gave the privilege of choice to honor Him.

Why should creatures without the capacity for reason and choice be included in this multitude praising the Lamb for His redemptive act? Because they too are under *the bondage of corruption* (Gk—decay) due to the sin of Adam, when God made them *subject to vanity*. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now waiting in hope for the manifestation of the sons of God* (Rom 8:19-22). The law of decay and death has affected every structure God had originally created *very good*. Someday He will create a *new heaven and a new earth* in which no law of death or sin will exist. Without the propitiation of Christ, this new creation could never happen. It is appropriate then to see all of God's creation rejoicing at this time and event in heaven. With seven-fold praise they worship the Lamb: *power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing* (v12).

Chapter 5 is one of the most emotionally moving visions that John will relate in the Book of Revelation. Its message is: *Worthy is the Lamb!* With symbolism and imagery it inspires the Christian reader to love Him who first loved us so greatly. It gives courage and reason to overcome Satan, self, and this world. The beautiful description of heaven stirs a deep longing and desire to be there too, taking in the wondrous sights and standing on the sea of glass before the mighty Throne of God, singing in the greatest chorus ever assembled. The vision motivates us to keep our eyes heavenward, away from material things which are destined to pass away. Heaven is worth any cost this short life may require. As Jim Elliot, the martyred missionary, once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

REVELATION CHAPTER SIX



THE SEVEN SEALS: THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

CHAPTERS 6-7 continue the vision of Chapters 4-5, but there is an obvious change in the theme of the vision. The same symbols—the Lamb, the book, the 24 elders, the four living creatures—continue, but a new set of symbols is introduced that describe what happens after the Lamb has taken the book from the hand of God. If the taking of the book symbolizes the redemptive work of Christ and the institution of the New Covenant, then the opening of the book should symbolize what will happen afterward. We believe this is exactly what is presented by the loosing of the seven seals. The Lamb initiated the New Covenant with His own blood, thereby receiving the authority to loose the seven seals and reveal the effects that the taking of the book caused.

The seals are simply a logical, numerical way to separate the overall picture into the several visions. In the literal sense, no part of the scroll could be seen until all of the seals were removed, allowing the scroll to be unrolled and read. Notice that as each seal is opened, something happens, but it is not until the

final seal is opened that the *mystery of God is finished*. The opening of the last seal allows the book itself to be opened, and the full purpose of God concerning man is completed. It is only then that we will be able to understand the real meaning and character of God and His relationship with man.

With no formal introduction, John writes what happens when each of the seven seals on the scroll is individually opened. And here we must answer several questions about these seals before beginning an interpretation of them.

- 1) When do the seals begin and end?
- 2) Are they chronological or simultaneous?
- 3) Do they refer to events, people, conditions, or something else?

In answering the first question we look ahead to the opening of the sixth seal, where the fear of the wicked at having to meet the *wrath of the Lamb* is described. The heavens are said to vanish, and every island and mountain is uprooted and moved out of its place. While some expositors attempt to symbolically interpret the description of the sixth seal, the vivid account so closely parallels other passages of the end-time that we believe it must be a literal description of the horrors the world will endure at its final destruction. Indeed, even a surface reading would indicate that the sixth seal surely describes the destruction of the world. Any other interpretation has some other reason for not understanding it as such.

If the seals end at the end, do they begin at the beginning? There is every reason to believe that the seals continue the vision of Chapter 5, because the characters and symbols are the same. A few times in the Revelation we will see a radical change in setting, characters, and symbols in the middle of a section. When this happens we must re-determine the time setting, for the vision may be taking us back in time to describe a different character, or it may be showing the same event from a different perspective. For example, consider the changes in setting within Chapters 10-11. The sixth trumpet begins at 9:14, and ends at 11:14, but the setting changes several times within the vision of the sixth trumpet. This is an important element common to literature, but not always immediately obvious in the visions of the Revelation.

The opening of the seals takes place after Christ established the New Covenant and ascended to His heavenly Throne, for that was the theme of Chapter 5. This idea is directly opposed by Futurists, who would locate the events of

the seals in the seven-year time-period after the Rapture of the Church from this earth. If they are correct, the seals are meaningless to the Christian.

The most compelling reason to believe that the seals begin with the ascension of Christ into heaven after His resurrection and end with the destruction of the world, should be found in the content of the seals. These will be studied in due course, but let it be said here that the seals present a most convincing picture of this very idea. They are a condensed overview foretelling what the Church on earth should expect during the time of her earthly pilgrimage.

Are the seals chronological or simultaneous? The answer is both. The obvious choice would be to take the seals as chronological events. The first horse for one time period followed by the second horse for a second time period, etc. This is not, however, quite the presentation of the text, for in each case John sees a horse go out, but never sees one return. The parallel passage in Zechariah 6 is similar in this regard; the horses *walk to and fro* in the lands of the north, south, east, and west and do not return. The horses are released chronologically, but then continue until the end of the world.

As to what the seals represent, much has been written interpreting them as either events or epochs in world history. Others apply them to world leaders, or influences that affect the world. Surely they directly concern the purchased possession of Christ—His Church—for that is the whole reason for the Throne and Seven Seals vision of Chapters 4-7. Christ is unveiling what the people of His Kingdom will encounter on earth, and so we ask, “What do the seals mean to the Christian?” By using other Scripture as our key to interpreting the language (see Premise One, page 16) we hope to find a safe, Biblical understanding of the vision.

1. *And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.*
2. *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.*

THE WHITE HORSE: THE CONQUERING KINGDOM OF CHRIST

When the Lamb opens the first seal on the book of the New Covenant, John hears the first living creature say in a thunderous voice, *Come and see*. Thunder is often used figuratively of God's power in action on the earth, as in Job 37:5, *God thundereth marvellously with His voice; great things doeth He, which we cannot comprehend* (see also Ps 29:3, Is 29:6, I Sam 2:10). That the seals are acts of God is hinted at in Psalms 66:5, *Come and see the works of God: He is terrible in His doing toward the children of men*.

The horse in the Bible is a symbol of war, swiftness, and strength (Job 39:19; Ps 20:7; Pro 21:31; Hab 1:8). The Israelites were forbidden to use horses in battle, for God did not want them to think that they had defeated their enemies by their own strength (Deut 17:16). Beginning with Solomon, however, the kings of Israel disobeyed this command and relied on horsemen as the nations around them were doing. Horses are frequently associated with angels and spirit beings in Scripture. When Elijah ascended into heaven there appeared a chariot and *horses of fire* (II Kings 2:11). Later, Elisha saw many *horses of fire* around him and his servant (II Kings 6:17). These were angels that God had sent to protect him.

The most significant vision of spiritual horses is in Zechariah 6, which resembles the four horses of Revelation 6 too closely to be a coincidence. Zechariah saw four chariots pulled by four differently colored horses: red, black, white, and grisled. The colors are the same as in Revelation 6, with the exception of the *grisled* horse, which has been variously translated. The *grisled* horse would parallel the *pale* horse of Revelation 6, which has its own translation difficulties. The Greek word for *pale* is *chloros* which is translated *green* in Mark 6:39 and Revelation 8:7, but translators generally agree that the intended color is actually an ashen, sickly pale-green. The horses in Zechariah are identified as *the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth* (Zec 6:5). They carry out the will of the Lord concerning the nations as they *walk to and fro through the earth*. Actually, the chariots seem to be the real subject of Zechariah's vision, just as in Revelation 6 it is the riders who have been granted power to do this or that. The color

of each horse is symbolic, and its meaning will help identify the message of each seal-vision.

After reviewing the parallel passage of Zechariah 6 we get an idea of the structure, intent, and background of the four horsemen of John's vision. We believe that each seal portrays an important event in Church history, and the spirit characterizing that event. As we have already said, we cannot restrict each horseman to one particular time period of the Church, but we can see the event that first began the horseman's journey. The prophecies of the four horsemen apply to different regions of the world, and to different times in the Church Age. History repeats itself, and so do the effects of the four horsemen. The prophecy of the seals is beneficial for churches of every age and place, and if the warning message of the four riders of the Apocalypse is heard and accepted it will guard against sin, apostasy and eventual death. With the framework of the vision established, let's look at the seals individually and study their meanings.

John sees a *white horse*; its rider has a *bow* in his hand and a *crown (stephanos)* is given to him. The horse and rider go out with the purpose of *conquering*, and wherever they go, they do *conquer*. Remembering that this seal should take place soon after Christ's heavenly ascension, does not this describe the rapid and worldwide spread of the Gospel by the Apostles and witness of the early Church? Jesus Christ is the Rider with bow and crown; and His Kingdom, which *is not of this world*, goes out conquering the hearts and souls of men. Christianity grew at a mind-boggling rate as the Apostles took the Good News throughout the known world. There is no other event in history to rival the world-changing message of Jesus Christ and its supernatural increase. Indeed, the white horse of the early Church *turned the world upside-down* (Acts 17:6) as the Gospel *was preached to every creature which is under heaven* (Col 1:23). But the *white horse* gallops on still, in search of new regions to conquer and win to the cause of Christ.

Since the Futurist interpretation is that the rider on the white horse is the Antichrist, we feel compelled to offer the reasons we strongly believe that idea is wrong. First, white is never used to describe something evil. Over and over in the Book of Revelation white is used for purity, holiness, and righteousness (3:4; 4:4, 6:11; 7:9, etc). Never does it symbolize anything else; it

is completely incongruous to make it represent evil. Second, the picture of the Rider with bow and crown follows perfectly the scene of the victorious Lamb of the previous chapter. Upon Christ's ascension to heaven all authority and dominion were given Him, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end (Is 9:6). Finally, the Rider on the white horse appears again in 19:11, where all expositors agree He is the Christ. The slight differences between the two passages are to be expected, for here He appears at the beginning of the Gospel Age, going out to win the world, while in the latter passage He appears at the end of the Age, in judgment and destructive power. That is why in 6:2 He has a victor's wreath for a crown (Gk-*stephanos*) illustrating His defeat of Satan on the cross, while in 19:11 He has a royal king's crown (Gk-*diadema*) showing His final authority and power. There is no inconsistency with the Lamb opening the seal and being a character in a seal at the same time. Many times in the visions of John we read things that cannot be visualized exactly; they are to be understood in the symbolic language of the Holy Spirit.

Christ carries only a *bow* as He goes out to win the lost. There is no mention of arrows. This is intriguing, for a bow must have arrows to be effective. In Habakkuk 3 God is described in full battle array, with spear, bow, and arrows. There He went to *thresh the heathen in anger*, while here He goes forward under the banner of love to conquer human hearts. There is another bow in the OT, the rainbow, though it is never found by that word; in Scripture it is always a *bow*. God said to Noah, *I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth* (Gen 9:13). To this day the rainbow is a symbol of promise and God's faithfulness and mercy to mankind. In the hand of the conquering Christ it is a fitting symbol. Not a sword or spear to kill the enemy, but a bow of promise: *Come unto Me...and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28).

The white horse and its rider stand in stark contrast to the next three riders, all of whom portend trouble and affliction for the Kingdom of Christ. We will examine these riders individually, the way in which they afflict the Church of Christ, although their three-pronged attack is a collective effort of Satan in direct opposition to Christ.

3. *And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see.*
4. *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.*

THE RED HORSE: THE CHURCH PERSECUTED

When the second seal is opened, the living creature like unto a calf (4:7) invites John to watch as a fire-red (Gk-*purrhos*) horse goes out. This rider is given a *great sword* (Gk-*megas machaira*), and he is given permission to take peace from the earth, making men kill each other. The key words of the passage indicate that the red horse and its rider symbolize the persecution, affliction, and death that the Church of Christ must endure. *Red* signifies blood (Ex 25:5; Num 19:2; Is 63:2), and the *sword* is often used in Scripture to represent the military arm of governments and authorities (Ex 18:4; Eze 33:2; Rom 13:4).

Notice that the rider does not kill, but his influence makes men *kill one another*. How truly this has been fulfilled down through the centuries of history. Millions have been killed in the very name of Christianity, a fact that Christ foretold in John 16:2, *the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service*. This was immediately illustrated by the persecution of the Church by Saul and the Jews, and was followed by a long line of others: Romans, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Communists, etc. The true people of God have been hounded, ostracized, ridiculed, and put to death without mercy—very often under the banner of the formalized, accepted “church.” The true Church has suffered more from those claiming to be Christians than from the heathen, though in recent years that has been changing. Communism, for example, has attempted to stamp God out of society—Stalin killed millions of his own people in one such purge.

When the white horse of the conquering church advances in a land or individual, the red horse of persecution and tribulation will inevitably follow. In

past times, accepting Christ often meant death, and this is still true in various places of the world today, but sometimes persecution comes from our family and friends. Jesus warned, *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword* (Gk—*machaira*). *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother...and a man's foes shall be they of his own household* (Mt 10:34-36). Yes, the Christian life brings inner peace—but often outward tribulation.

The *sword* (*machaira*) in verse 4 is quite different from the *sword* (*rhomphaia*) of the pale horse in verse 8. The *rhomphaia* was strictly a weapon of war—a heavy, three-foot long, two-handed broadsword. The *machaira* was a light, short-sword carried for personal protection. It is fitting that the short-sword, which was also the instrument used in killing the Jewish animal sacrifices, is used to symbolize persecution of the faithful by family and authority. The *rhomphaia* of the fourth horse describes general war, nation rising against nation.

Notice also that the living creature that announces this seal is described in 4:7 as resembling a calf, the animal uniquely associated with sacrifice and service. All Christians are called to give their bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1) and some are called to give their very lives for Him.

5. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast 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.

6. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts 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.

† THE BLACK HORSE: † THE CHURCH WITHOUT THE WORD

Next John sees a *black horse*, whose rider is carrying a *pair of balances*, or measuring scales in his hand. He measures out *wheat* and *barley* for exorbitant prices, but the *oil* and *wine* are not *hurt*, meaning that they are available in plenty at their normal prices. The meaning of this seal is evidently famine,

though not a desperate one like the one Samaria experienced (II Kings 6:25). Eating *bread by weight* is a figurative expression for famine brought on because of iniquity (Eze 4:16-17), but why are the oil and wine unaffected by the famine? This requires some deeper searching.

Black, when used figuratively, represents sin and spiritual wickedness. We are *called out of darkness* (I Peter 2:9), and wicked men reject God until *their foolish heart[s are] darkened* (Rom 1:21). In Micah 3 there is an extended passage about the spiritual blackness that had descended on Judah, so that her prophets and leaders could no longer discern the will of God. It was a desperate and terrible condition for Judah, and the *black horse* represents this type of spiritual famine brought on by apostasy and sin. This darkness comes over a people who have been led astray by false prophets and power-greedy leaders. Blackness also symbolizes suffering—suffering which comes on account of sin. *Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness* (Joel 2:6; also Lam 4:8; Jer 8:21; Nahum 2:10). Darkness brings fear, treachery, and confusion, all of which are more terrible in the spiritual sense.

The rider on the black horse is measuring out the essential food of life, bread, at a price only a few can afford. *Wheat* was the rich person's flour for bread, while the poorer class used *barley*. A *penny (denarius)* was a day's wages for a working man (Mt 20:2; John 6:7), and a *measure* was a little less than a quart, implying that after working all day a man could only afford to buy enough food for himself; there would be nothing left over for his family or other needs. In John's day, a measure of wheat costing a penny would be about fifteen times higher than the normal price—expensive, but attainable for those who worked diligently.

Bread is a well-known symbol for the Word of God, whether it is made of wheat or barley. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever* (John 6:51). Christ is called *The Word* several times in John 1, and bread is one of the symbols of Communion that remind us that we must eat Christ, which is to make Him one with us. Daily we take the Word into our being, just as the Israelites daily gathered manna, not relying on what had been gathered previously. *The bread of life* is Christ, *The Word*. He is life and sustenance to the Christian.

The figurative meaning of the *black horse* implies a severe dearth of the Word of God. It is available, but only at a high price. The *oil and the wine* however, seem to be had in abundance. *See thou hurt not the oil and the wine*, the voice commands. This would be highly unusual in a famine or siege, as olive trees and vineyards suffer along with the grain crops. When we look at the symbolism of these words we will be able to explain the apparent paradox.

Oil and wine occur together some 40 times in the Bible, and were essentials in every home. One could live without them, but not happily it seems. Oil was used for medicine, cooking, sacrifices, and lamp fuel, while wine was the preferred beverage of many, and was also used as medicine (Luke 10:34). Oil and wine represent the good things of life—joy, happiness, and pleasure (Joel 1:10; Pro 21:17; Ps 104:15; Num 18:12). They are listed together in the merchandise of Babylon given in Revelation 18:13.

Thus, it appears that while the Word of God is in meager supply and available only at high cost under the *black horse*, life on the surface continues without great interruption. Materialism and selfishness characterize those living under the effects of the *black horse*, and likely it is on account of deception that sin flourishes. The suppression of God's Word means that without divine intervention the darkness will only grow deeper. The Holy Spirit is still working, and the cleansing power of the blood is unhurt, but the Word is not being spread and taken into people's hearts. Instead, lethargy engulfs the Church as apostasy leads people farther and farther away from God.

The blackness of sin descends upon the land as the Church fails to provide light to the world. No time in history better illustrates this type of apostasy and spiritual famine than the days following the fall of the Roman Empire. The Dark Ages, as historians call them, lasted 1,000 years and saw civilization decline unbelievably. Knowledge, education, government, and living standards deteriorated until man led only a meager existence. None of the common people had a Bible, and would not have been able to read one anyway. Even more astonishing, the Word was not translated into the spoken language of the day, so that the priests who read Latin aloud to the congregation may as well have been muttering gibberish (which they were often accused of doing). There were scattered groups of faithful Christians like the Waldensians who suffered much persecution, but the Church in general became characterized

by superstitious rituals done out of fear and oppression. Its leaders were hardened, power-hungry individuals with no concern for God or the people of God. It was not until Gutenberg and the printing press had spread the newly translated Bible into the common languages of the people that the long night began to end, and a new day dawned with the Reformation.

An alternative method of interpreting the oil and wine is to use their individual figurative meanings rather than their combined symbolic meaning. Remember that we chose the latter in regard to the *lightnings, thunderings and voices* (4:5) as well. Oil is a type of the Holy Spirit, as illustrated in the parable of the ten virgins—five did not keep oil in their lamps and were left behind (see page 52). Wine may be a type of the blood of Christ, which He shed for the whole world, for the emblems of communion are the cup and the bread, the blood and body of Christ. Wine, however, is never directly associated with the blood of Christ. The communion emblem is always called either the *fruit of the vine* or *the cup*. Wine also comes with negative connotations on numerous occasions in Scripture, but not always.

If the oil and wine are individual symbols of the Holy Spirit and the blood of Christ in this passage, it would leave the overall meaning of the black horse unchanged. Even in times of deep spiritual darkness, the Spirit and blood of Christ are still effective and available to those who sincerely seek Him. The fact that wine is not a clear symbol for the blood of Christ makes the first interpretation more likely. When used together, *oil and wine* clearly symbolize the good things of life (see above), and speak of material satisfaction.

Spiritual famine brought by deception and sin is the common enemy of people and congregations throughout the Church Age. The famine of the Dark Ages is no greater than the spiritual famine for the Word of God in lands like Afghanistan and Iran, and the OT prophets also spoke of *black horse* conditions: *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord* (Amos 8:11). A *famine for hearing the words of the Lord* is growing in the world today. In a time of prosperity, luxury, and pleasure—of *oil and wine*—we do well to remind ourselves often of the warning message of the black horse. Though the text does not directly say so, the reason the *black horse* thrives is because of deception and lethargy. When we study that Beast

called the *False Prophet* later in the Book, this fact will become evident. The work of the *False Prophet* leads directly to the conditions of the *black horse*.

7. *And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see.*

8. *And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. 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.*

THE PALE HORSE:

THE DECEIVED CHURCH UNDER JUDGMENT

The fourth seal reveals a truly horrid picture. Death is riding a *pale horse*, and Hades follows closely. *Power was given* to them over one-fourth of the earth, to kill in various ways. Any person seeing this Grim Reaper would definitely recoil in fear, though he cannot be seen with physical eyes. As so often in the Revelation, vivid word pictures are employed to help us understand what we cannot physically see—those things in the spirit world. The interpretation of this seal is aided by the identification of its rider, who is called *Death*, and by the passage in Ezekiel on which Revelation 6:8 is based: *For thus saith the Lord...I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast* (Eze 14:21).

That to *kill with death* means *pestilence* is demonstrated in that the Hebrew word for *pestilence* was translated *death* more than 30 times in the Old Testament Septuagint. (See 2:23 for an identical meaning.)

Ezekiel 14 is a long prophecy against the Israelites, who had *set up their idols in their heart*. God called for them to *repent, or bear the punishment of their iniquity*, and describes what will happen *when the land sinneth against Me by trespassing grievously*. First, He will *send famine upon it*, and then He will *cause noisome beasts to pass through the land*. Next, He will *say, Sword, go through the land and send a pestilence into that land, and pour out my fury upon*

it in blood. After each one of these pronouncements God says: *Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness.* God will punish the land that sins against Him, and this is the meaning of the fourth seal. Continued wickedness will cause God to permit the death angel to pass through the land, summoning the wicked to Hades by His *four sore judgments*.

The fourth horseman is a wicked individual, and is none other than Satan himself, for his name and actions betray him. Notice that *power was given* to the rider, the Greek would strictly translate: *authority was granted him*. On many occasions in the Revelation we will see evil coming upon the earth, and every time it is carefully said that Christ has allowed the evil to come. It is because of wickedness that the pale rider goes out on his mission of death, and only those who are truly righteous will live, and that forever. He kills by common rather than supernatural means: sword, famine, disease, and *beasts of the earth*. The death angel passed through the land of Egypt in judgment, and does so in nations even today. Though we do not see him physically, he is nevertheless active in both lands and individuals.

To kill with *death* can be understood either as spiritual death or physical death, with spiritual death being the more fearsome of the two. The Bible tells us that many do not love the truth, *and for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie* (II Thes 2:11). This is spiritual death that continues beyond the grave.

The *beasts [therion] of the earth* is an interesting phrase. While the literal meaning may be the correct one, it is significant that *therion* is used 40 times in the Revelation, and every other occurrence is clearly used symbolically. In its most basic symbolic meaning, a *beast (therion)* is Satan manifested in an earthly form, whether it be a government, false religion, or societal order. These beasts will be the chief subject of Chapter 13.

There is a definite Satanic element to the *pale horse*. Scholars believe the color of this horse is a sickly pale-green, which even today we see associated with ghouls, Halloween, and evil spirits. Some interpret the entire seal as a reference to Satanism, but we see it representative of that final reprobate condition in which God's longsuffering has ended, and the time for judgment has come. It is true that this is often characterized by Satan-worship, as Paul

describes in Romans 1, but the real message of the *pale horse* for the Church is to warn those living in sin of imminent judgment. The Spirit will not always strive with man; when the day of mercy has ended, judgment will follow.

LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH FROM THE FOUR HORSEMEN

There are many lessons for the Church to be taken from the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. One lesson is the distinct, one-way progression of a church historically. It begins with the vibrant, conquering white horse church of zeal and love. Then Satan takes notice and directly attacks the church with the red horse of persecution. Though this takes the lives of many faithful believers it fails to defeat her. And so Satan tries a new approach, offering the church affluence and power. Sadly, the church often falls to this black horse of spiritual famine, lethargy, and ineffectiveness, which leads directly to her moral failure and complete apostasy. And then the pale horse rides in. We have only to look at history to see this repeated over and over again. Even in our own memory examples could be given of local churches and whole denominations that began powerfully, but now allow the grossest sins behind their very pulpits. The early enthusiasm of heeding the Spirit leads to attacks by the enemy, both from within and without. Later, as affluence and a sense of safety lull the church into laziness, sin and wickedness are able to sneak right inside until complete apostasy takes over. May we pay attention to this lesson from history and the four horsemen to keep our own church from the black horse of apostasy and the pale horse of the death angel.

At the beginning of Chapter 6, we stated that the seals each portray a segment of church history, and the accompanying spirit characterizing that age. Notice that the horses go out, but do not return. They will run to and fro until the end of the world. The red horse once ruled in Russia, but now in China; the black horse once in Europe, but now begins to ride through North America. Down through the centuries the four horses have been demonstrated in various parts of the world.

There is also an overall trend that the Church of Christ has taken. No age can compare to the white horse of the early conquering church to perhaps A.D. 250, and the red horse of persecution followed closely the progress of

the white horse. The black horse of apostasy began to infiltrate the Church about A.D. 330 and continues to the present in many lands, while the pale horse of complete moral failure and judgment follows the black horse until the end comes.

The meanings of the seals are also supported by the figurative descriptions of the four living creatures. Each one takes a turn introducing a horseman: the first living creature introduces the first horseman, the second living creature introduces the second horseman, etc. *The first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle* (Rev 4:7). Christ, the rider of the white horse, was just presented as the *Lion of the tribe of Judah* in the previous chapter (5:5), and the living creature like a *lion* is appropriate in announcing Christ. The calf reminds us of sacrifice and death (Heb 9:19), the very characteristic of the red horse. The black horse of spiritual famine and apostasy was introduced by the beast with the *face as a man*, and speaks of self and pride, humanity rather than divinity. Finally, the *flying eagle*, being a bird of prey, is used often in the OT to symbolize destruction, war, and death (Hab 1:8; Jer 49:22; Deut 28:49; Luke 17:37), linking it with the pale horse of the death angel.

One last Scriptural validation can be given in support of the foregoing thoughts. The words of Jesus in Matthew 24 concerning the end of the world correspond so closely with the four horsemen that they surely address the same subject. *Nation shall rise against nation...and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes* [pale horse]. *Then shall they kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake...then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another...* [red horse]. *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold* [black horse]. *And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations* [white horse]; *and then shall the end come*. Here is a history of the Kingdom in a nutshell, from the very mouth of Christ. The message of the four horsemen is that the Church must endure persecution and tribulation until the end.

The last three horsemen relate closely to the trinity of evil we will see introduced in Chapters 12-13, and whose individual judgments are detailed in Chapters 19-20 in this order: Beast, False Prophet, and Dragon. The Beast corresponds to the red horse of persecution (13:1-10); the False Prophet

corresponds to the black horse of Scriptural famine (13:11-18); and the Dragon corresponds to the pale horse of death and Hades (12:3-17). Whether the riders are actually the Beast, False Prophet, and Dragon is a matter of speculation, but the goals of the trinity of evil and the three horsemen are equal, and can be seen in the messages of these visions.

9. And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10. 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?

11. 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.

THE MARTYRS WAIT FOR THE RESURRECTION

The opening of the fifth seal is different from the previous four. The living creatures and horses do not appear, and no new event is suggested. Instead, the picture reveals what happens hereafter to those Christians who have given their lives for the sake of Christ. The scene is a heavenly one, and describes those who have died in the Lord, but it is written for the sake of the living.

Notice again the intangible language of the Book. John sees the souls of the righteous dead under the altar. But how can one see a soul? You can't with physical eyes, and so one must open spiritual eyes. The whole Book becomes more profound and meaningful when we understand that it is much more than a night vision John is relating from memory. The thoughts and words themselves are spiritual pictures of the humanly indescribable. I can imagine John sitting down and writing, without stopping to think of the right word or how to phrase a thought as the Holy Spirit directs his mind to the exact words He wants to communicate. Each expression is shaped by connotations developed by the rest of Scripture, and is designed to convey a precise meaning.

It may seem strange that the souls of the righteous dead cry out for vengeance for their shed blood. We should understand this in the same way we read in Genesis 4:10 that the voice of righteous Abel's blood cried out from the ground. It is the wrongful manner of their deaths that cries out for justice; the innocent blood of these victims speaks out against the wickedness of their evil persecutors. There is something about injustice that stirs our emotions to outrage and anger quicker than anything else. The deaths of innocent people make us want to see justice rendered on those who are at fault. True justice and vengeance must wait for that final day of reckoning. Many are the souls of those beyond the grave whose blood has been poured out like water because of their faith in Christ. These rest in comfort and peace with Christ until the cup of the earth's iniquity has been filled up and the full number of saints has been gathered in.

The fifth seal announces that God's plan on earth is almost complete. The four horsemen have come and now there must be a *little season* of waiting while the wicked fill up the measure of their fathers to the full (Mt 23:32). The fifth seal is also a reminder to the living faithful that God has not forgotten them; He will return and His reward will be with Him. It has now been 2,000 years since Christ ascended to heaven, much longer than the early Church probably thought He would tarry. Scoffers sneer at the promise of His return, but the people of the Kingdom must be content to *rest yet for a little season*.

Notice also the position of the righteous souls. They are *under the altar*, resting in *Abraham's bosom* (Luke 16:22). This is either a reference to the altar of burnt offering, where daily a lamb was sacrificed and its blood poured at the base (Lev 4:7), or the golden altar of incense which stood just outside the Holy of Holies and upon which was offered sweet incense each day at the same time that the daily sacrifice was offered. The NT concepts of atonement and grace are found in types and figures of these two altars. There is no mention of the brazen altar of burnt offering in the Revelation, but the golden altar of incense is pictured as in use in heaven now (8:1), and it is most likely the heavenly altar of verse 9. Remember that the literal temple and altar at Jerusalem were both destroyed before this Book was written, which implies that the altar that John sees in heaven is the antitype. The typological

meaning of the golden altar is prayer and the atonement—Christ’s death that we might have life. Here the martyrs who have sacrificed their lives on the altar and have had their innocent blood poured out on the ground are shown as recipients of the atonement, *under the blood and resting with Christ in white robes*, waiting for the day that they will receive glorified bodies and obtain incorruptible crowns of righteousness (I Cor 9:25).

The long wait (in man’s eyes) for justice is presented again in Chapter 18. And when Babylon finally falls it will be said, *Rejoice over her, thou heaven and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her* (18:20). Living Christians earnestly wait for the resurrection too: *even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body* (Rom 8:23). The *little season* appears to follow the release of the four horsemen and their influences on the Church. This parallels the other sections of Revelation which also mention a short time of great wickedness and trials just before the end of the world. We will link this later in our study.

12. *And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;*
13. *And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind.*
14. *And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*
15. *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;*
16. *And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:*
17. *For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*

THE END OF THE WORLD

The fifth seal brings the Age of Grace to its end, and remember that five is the number of grace. The measure of iniquity has been filled up, and the longsuffering of God has reached its fullness. As the sixth seal is opened the world comes to an end with a mighty and spectacular display of power. While the passage is written figuratively, the overall picture will be literally fulfilled when the final *Day of the Lord* arrives.

Many commentators however, do not believe that the sixth seal describes the end of the world because the passage comes much too early in their framework for the interpretation of the Revelation. They apply the prophecy to a great tribulation period that grips the world after the Rapture has taken place. Speaking for the Futurist position, Charles Ryrie emphatically states that the Revelation must be taken literally, at face-value, and criticizes those who find spiritual fulfillments for some of the visions (see Ryrie Study Bible notes). Then, disregarding his own advice, he goes on to explain that the sixth seal is not a description of the end of the world, but only that men will act as if the end of the world has come. In this instance, Historicists take the text far more literally than do the Futurists. We believe the stars will really fall, the heavens truly depart as a scroll, and the mountains and islands literally disappear. The great Day of the Lord will reveal these events so vividly that the wicked will run in utter terror as they begin to take place. *Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the Throne* (v16).

Another once-popular approach is to symbolize the contents of the sixth seal to the extent that it can be applied to non-endtime events. Some Historicists are guilty of this error. There are two problems with this interpretation. First, we should never use symbolism to lead away from the clear overall meaning of a particular vision. Symbols and figurative language are aids to help us understand the meanings of the visions, and they will always harmonize with the overall intent of the picture. Remember the four horsemen and how the symbols match the meanings. The imagery of the sixth seal, when taken as a whole, would clearly lead one to think that this is a description of the end of the world. There are symbols in the passage, but they serve to unify rather than to conflict with the general intent. The second problem with

over-symbolizing will become evident as we compare other end-time Scriptures with the figurative language of the sixth seal. Whole phrases of the sixth seal have been taken from the words of Christ and the OT. If we do not interpret Revelation 6:12-17 as the end of the world, then we should not do so with the other passages with similar language that have always been applied to the end-time. These will be discussed shortly.

If we see the Revelation as ordered, parallel visions of the Age of Grace from Christ's first coming to His second, the problem of the sixth seal being an account of the end of the world is simply resolved (see page 24). Indeed, if this pattern is accepted the entire Book becomes clear and understandable in general meaning and time sequence. The five seals show in general what will befall the Church on earth, and the sixth seal shows the final world judgment that follows when true faith is almost not to be found. The sixth seal is actually presented in two parts, and does not end until 7:17. The first part gives the awful description of the wicked in terror, fleeing from the wrath of the Lamb, and the second part gives a comforting account of the safety of those who have been sealed with salvation. These dwell with Christ in heaven in everlasting life.

There are several Scriptures with language that closely resembles the opening of the sixth seal. Foremost are the three Gospel accounts of Christ's prophecy of the end of the world. We quote Mark 13:24-27: *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall He send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.* (See also Mt 24 and Luke 21:25). Isaiah 34 is a tremendous OT account detailing the final *indignation of the Lord upon all nations* that should be read in its entirety; it includes this statement: *All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down...as a falling fig from the fig tree* (Is 34:4). These are the only Scriptures saying the stars will fall from heaven, and they are speaking about the end of the world. The Greek word translated *departed* in 6:14 means to rend apart, and agrees with II Peter 3:10, which says *the day of the Lord will*

come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up.

In OT figurative language, the light of the sun is dimmed and the stars refuse to shine when God's judgment comes upon a land, but the final judgment of the world will be much worse. The whole heaven will be gone, and even the very elements will melt—imagine our universe as a cinder floating through space. Hebrews 1 says the heavens will grow old and perish, and like a vesture He will change them, making new heavens and a new earth that has been delivered from the curse of sin and decay.

An earthquake is often mentioned in connection with the end of the world. In the section of the seven vials, when the seventh angel announces the end of the world, *there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great...and every island fled away, and the mountains were not found* (16:18-20; compare Joel 2:1-12; 3:9-17). Earthquakes are scary to experience and can be very destructive. They announce important, earth changing events like Christ's death, and also His resurrection. He warned us that there will be many earthquakes before His Second Coming, and according to Revelation 6:12 His return will be announced by the greatest earthquake ever. Just as a rainbow should remind us of the promises of God, so an earthquake should remind us that someday He will return to *shake terribly the earth*. (See Isaiah 24, 29 and Zechariah 14.)

When these things begin to happen, every man on earth will tremble with fear. From the least to the greatest, the wicked will flee from the terrible visage of the Lamb (see also 20:11). Remember that the first part of the sixth seal describes the reaction of the unsaved when Christ returns. As we progress farther into the sixth seal and come to the account of the righteous, we read that the angels to whom power has been given to hurt the earth are told to withhold their judgments until all the servants of God have been sealed.

Chapter 6 is a warning for the backslidden and weak. Another prophetic passage says, *And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and*

to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth (Is 2:19-21). Every man left behind, from the rich and famous to the poor and weak, will forget entirely the idols that have kept him from following God. In their foolish attempt to flee from His angry face they will cry out for the mountains to fall on them and cover them—anything to hide the shame of their nakedness from the One who sees right into the deepest crevices of their souls. Their cry of complete terror should be enough alone to confirm that this is indeed the very end that Jesus foretold: *men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh* (Luke 21:26-28). These verses indicate that Christians who are alive when Christ returns will see these terrible things beginning to happen but will be completely unharmed by them. The very day destruction comes the Christian will leave this earth (Luke 17:24-30).

The wicked, as well as the negligent Christians who have let their lamps run out of oil, will know that the great day of His wrath has come (v17). *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb 10:31). Especially fearful it is for the one whose *impenitent heart* has earned the reward of *wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God* (Rom 2:5). There are many other verses that also detail the terrible things that will come upon the wicked at the end of the world. Often they are introduced with similar phrases like *the day of the Lord*, or *in that day*, or *the day of Christ*, or *the day of wrath*. Not all of these passages directly refer to the last day, so care must be taken not to misapply them. Many had immediate fulfillments soon after the time they were given but still contain allusions to the final great day of wrath. The imagery of the prophets in describing an angry God is fearful, powerful, and just. *The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day* (Is 2:11).

In the New Testament however, virtually every occurrence of one of these phrases is cause to believe that the passage is speaking about the end of the

world. For more study, some of the best examples are Isaiah 2, 13, and 34; Joel 3; Jeremiah 25; Ezekiel 38; Luke 17:24, 21:34; Romans 2:5; I Corinthians 1:8 and 3:13; II Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 2:16; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Thessalonians 2:2; II Peter 3:10; Jude 1:6; and Revelation 16:14. Two clear examples of *the Day of the Lord* not referring to the end of the world can be seen in Jeremiah 46:10 and Malachi 3:2.

What will the end of the world be like? Scripture indicates that it will be a time of peace and prosperity, of scoffers and pleasure-seekers, of little personal faith and few believers. Without warning the heavens will suddenly split apart, and with the sound of a trumpet growing louder and louder Christ will descend from heaven with the saints of all ages, and every Christian alive will rise up to meet him in the air. Then the earth will shake and totter like a drunkard, and the lights of the heavens will wink out. The earth and the works therein will burn up with a great noise until there is not so much as a molecule left. The wicked will be resurrected and brought to stand speechless before the *great white Throne*, knowing that the justice of God will send them to experience Hell forever. In contrast, the righteous will rejoice in the mercy and grace of the One who is worthy of all honor, and praise, and thanks giving. They will live joyously in the comfort and love of His provision forever and ever. Shouldn't we be practicing for that day now?

Several times we read that God *will shake not the earth only, but also heaven* on that day (Heb 12:26, also Is 13:13; Joel 3:16; Hag 2:6). Jesus said the *powers that are in heaven shall be shaken* (Mark 13:25). We believe this is speaking of God executing the sentence of judgment upon Satan and his angels. Christ, at His death and resurrection, has defeated Satan, and he and his demons know it, for the *devils also believe, and tremble*. Isaiah gives several prophecies of that day in which Satan was judged: *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high* (Is 24:21). The day the sentence is executed will see them confined in chains of darkness forever. No person, power, or being will be able to stand before the wrath of the Lamb on that day.

REVELATION CHAPTER SEVEN



RAPTURE AND THE SCRIPTURE

The Rapture. People experience varying emotions when they hear these words. As a boy, I attended a strongly Pre-millennialist grade school, and the one event that we were most afraid of was the secret Rapture. Stories and films described in scary detail how thousands of Christians will suddenly disappear, leaving the authorities of the world arguing over who is to blame. Husbands will not be able to find their wives, or children their parents as one is taken and the other left behind. Even though I was a Christian, and should have had no fear of a secret Rapture, at least once I thought the Lord had returned and left me behind.

The sixth seal has brought us up to the Day of Judgment for the wicked and day of Rapture for the saved. We have already read about the terror of the wicked as the Day of the Lord comes, and now we will see what the people of God will experience on that final day.

Before looking at Chapter 7 in depth we would like to review the two general eschatological views concerning the Rapture. Futurists believe a secret removal of the Church from the earth, called the Rapture, will suddenly take place, and a return to Judaism will be God's earthly program for seven years. As the Antichrist is deceiving the world, Christ will return with the saints of all ages and set up an earthly reign for 1,000 years, which ends when a widespread revolt against Christ necessitates the final destruction of the world. Historicists believe that the world in general will continue normally until the day of the Lord's return, when the saints will suddenly be taken off the earth just before the world is destroyed and the eternal state begins. Futurists and Historicists agree that the next event on the prophetic calendar is the Rapture, though there are major differences as to its meaning and some would argue that we should not even use the word Rapture, as it is not found in the Bible. This is not wholly accurate, "rapture" is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *harpazo*, rendered into English as *caught up* in a single end-time passage (I Thes 4:17). The Greek meaning has the idea of seizing by force, as illustrated by its usage (see Mt 13:19; John 10:12, 28; Acts 8:39, 23:10; Rev 12:5).

The real reason some don't like the word "rapture" is because of the radical difference in meaning it carries for Futurists and Historicists. To a Historicist, the Rapture means the end of the world, the second resurrection, and eternity with Christ with glorified bodies. It is both the "catching up" of those *which are alive and remain* when Christ returns and the opening of the graves of those who have died *in the Lord*. To a Futurist, the Rapture means only that the Church at that time will be taken off the earth (where is unclear, but not to heaven); history and time will continue for another millennium before the world is finally destroyed and the eternal state begins.

Both sides should be able to agree that the Rapture is the catching up of God's people. The difference is whether it happens at the end of the world, or 1,007 years before the end. What will it be like and where will the raptured saints go? There are only a handful of Scriptures to guide us, but they are detailed enough that if one reads them in harmony with each other, a clear understanding is possible. It is wrong to use only those passages that fit a preconceived system and either ignore or use bizarre explanations for the

passages that contradict it. Consider for example, the "secret Rapture" idea; that suddenly, silently, the saints will simply disappear from the earth. This theory is based on Matthew 24:36-44, a passage which does not even contain the Greek word for rapture. The only passage with "rapture" in it (I Thes 4) conflicts radically with the secret Rapture theory, for it predicts loud announcements and signs in the heavens when the saints are *caught up*. Many Futurists have discarded the secret part of their Rapture interpretation because of the extreme (we say impossible) difficulties in reconciling this idea with the other Scriptures describing the Rapture; nevertheless, many continue to teach it.

Futurism or Historicism. It comes down to this question: is there a 1007 year time-gap between the Rapture and the end of the world, or are the Rapture and the end of the world one event? We do not see the slightest hint of a thousand years between the Rapture and the destruction of the world presented anywhere in the Scriptures. Christ's Return, the Rapture, the Judgment, and the cataclysmic End of the World are inextricably interwoven into one colossal event. It is impossible to logically argue, as some enterprising commentators amazingly attempt, that it is only one event, but that it is stretched out over 1,007 years! These commentators propose that the Second Coming will happen in two or three phases over a thousand years, but that it remains a single event. This innovative theory allows them to choose which passage refers to the phase they desire.

Π† PASSAGES OF THE SECOND COMING

Rather than list and refute the various teachings of end-time events, we offer for consideration the following NT passages containing details of the Second Coming, the Rapture, and the end of the world. Study them for yourself and notice how they overlap each other. Look for the thousand year gap, or any gap at all, between the Rapture and the destruction of the world. The listing is in order of most detail, beginning with the only passage that contains the Latin word "rapture."

I Thes. 4:13-17—*But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

II Peter 3:3-13—*Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God,*

wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

I Cor. 15:21-26, 51-55—*For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death...Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Mt. 24:27-42—*For 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. For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 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. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. (Read also Mark 13)

Mt. 25:31-34, 41, 46—When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the Throne of His glory: and 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. 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... Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels... and these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Luke 17:24-30—For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in His day. But first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought,

they sold, they planted, they builded. But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. Also Luke 21; Rev 11:11-19.

Rev 1:7—*Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

ONE RESURRECTION, OR MORE?

In all of these Scriptures we read not a hint that there will be a gap between the return of Christ and the Judgment, or between the Rapture and the eternal state, etc. The whole end is presented as one culminating event with no time left for repentance of any kind. Perhaps the most concise verse of all is in II Timothy 4:1, *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the [living] and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom*. A plain reading of this verse would certainly indicate that Christ will return, judge the world, and let the saints *inherit the Kingdom* (see Mt 25 above). There is nothing about an intervening thousand-year reign, or two resurrections separated by a thousand years. Revelation 11:11-19 contributes a similar picture, John watching as the saints *ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them*. Then comes *the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that Thou shouldst give reward unto Thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear Thy name, small and great, and shouldst destroy them which destroy the earth*.

In order to have the Rapture 1,000 years before the end of the world, Millennialists must propose at least two resurrections and judgments: one at the Rapture for the saints, and one after the Millennium at the end of the world for the resurrected wicked and the righteous born during the Millennium. There is absolutely no support for this in Scripture; the comings, resurrections, and judgments are always shown as one event—the wicked and just will live together until the Judgment. Notice the way Jesus speaks of the judgment of the wicked in John 12:48, *He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not*

My words, hath one that judgeth him: the Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. Earlier, in John 6:54, He says of the righteous: *Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.* Hopefully we can agree that there is only one last day! According to these verses that *last day* will see both the judgment of those who reject Christ, and the awarding of eternal life to those who receive Him¹. Paul also affirmed that *there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust* (Acts 24:15)—one resurrection for both wicked and righteous.

What did the early Anabaptists believe? Here is what Article 18 of the Dortrecht Confession of Faith says: “On the day of the judgment all men will be resurrected from the dead and appear before Christ where the saved will be severed from the lost, the righteous to enter into the unspeakable joys of eternal life, and the wicked to be damned to eternal hellish torment.” Read also Jesus’ parables of the wheat and tares (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43) and the net (Mt 13:47-50) where the wicked and righteous live together until the harvest, when the good and bad are separated.

My purpose in giving this negative review of the Pre-millennial Rapture is not to cause animosity. For the most part we do not refute the various Millennial and Dispensational teachings of the end-time in this book. There are however, maybe half a dozen teachings which we consider unscriptural and potentially dangerous, and on account of these we wish to give sound Biblical evidence to show their deficiencies. The secret Rapture theory allows time for repentance after Christ’s return, a dangerous doctrine to offer the weak and backslidden. The theories partitioning out the events of the last day over a millennium of time should be rejected, for they cannot be harmonized with the many Biblical passages describing the end of the world. The Bible presents the return of Christ as one momentous event, culminating the *mystery of Christ*.

What is the Rapture, and how will it take place? The previous Scriptures make it clear that it is the “catching up” of the living Christians at the time of Christ’s return and the changing of their *vile* bodies into glorious ones. It will

1 {There is a difference between *the last day*, and *the last days*. We are living in *the last days* now; *the last day* is the end of the world. Read the difference at Luke 17:24-30 and the many passages in the NT with these phrases. See page 34.}

happen with the sound of a trumpet, with every eye beholding His appearing in the clouds, and all tribes mourning in fear. The Rapture is simply the first moment of Christ's Second Coming, but for the Christian it is the most glorious and most highly anticipated event on the Gospel calendar. Be there at the station ready and waiting and the Rapture Rocket will take you to glory; be somewhere else doing your own thing and you will miss heaven—but not eternity.

We also read that the dead saints will rise from their graves to be resurrected first, and then all will rise to meet Christ in the air. Certainly they do not meet on this earth, as it is scheduled for immediate demolition (Luke 17:24-30). The wicked dead must also be resurrected and will stand before the *great white Throne* to be judged, after which the eternal state begins. Of greatest importance to those living today is the fact that when the sign of the Son of man appears in the clouds there will be no more time for repentance, no more time for prayer—it is forever and ever too late. Extreme anguish will be felt and bitter tears will be shed by those who knew they should have repented, but have put off salvation one day too long. There will be shock and excuses from those who have been deceived, who thought they were saved but instead stand speechless as the Lord says, *I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity* (Mt 7:23). Yes, the Rapture should be a scary, sobering thought for every person, but for those who are ready it will be a day of unparalleled glory and joy, a day of...Rapture!

1. *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.*
2. *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,*
3. *Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*

SEALING THE SAINTS BEFORE THE END

Chapter 7 continues the vision of the sixth seal, with one distinction: the focus shifts from the fate of the wicked to the reward of the righteous. This can be confirmed by reading into the next chapter, where the opening of the seventh seal obviously begins an entirely new set of visions, the trumpets. *After these things* delineates further the duality of the sixth seal, as John's attention is directed to four angels who have been commanded to hurt the earth. Earlier, in the events of the sixth seal, we saw the sky go black and a huge earthquake shake the whole earth as men ran in terror from the impending judgment of God. Then we heard of the stars falling and saw the heaven dissolving and the earth disintegrating. But just before judgment falls the *servants of God* must be sealed and numbered, which we believe refers to the final gathering of God's elect from the earth—those that are alive when the Lord returns and those who have died in the Lord. This is what we shall see as we progress through Chapter 7. The separation in the sixth seal between the wicked and the just parallels Jesus' parable of the net, where He concludes: *So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth* (Mt 13:49-50). The wicked and the just will be separated on this final and terrible *Day of the Lord*.

John sees *four angels holding the four winds*, restraining the *destroying wind* (Jer 51:1) from the earth until God's people are safe. These are not wicked angels, for they are obeying the command of God to *hurt not the earth*. They must be God's angels of judgment, carrying out His righteous acts of punishment and justice at the end of the world (similar to 14:14-20). The number four stands for the entire creation, which is about to be destroyed, and the *four corners of the earth* expresses the extremities of the world (Is 11:12; Zec 2:6; Rev 20:8; Jer 49:36), for nothing will be spared. This verse reminds us of Jesus' sketch of the end, when *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).

Three specific things are said to be in harm's way, *the earth, the sea, and the trees*. While the literal meaning will also be fulfilled, there is a lesson to be

found in the symbolic meanings too. The *earth* often represents the unsaved who are under the sound of the Gospel, as in Jeremiah 22:29, *O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord* (Mic 1:2; Is 1:2; Eze 9:9; Deut 32:1). The *sea* could symbolize the heathen people groups of the world, as it does in 17:15 (see also glossary). A green and fruitful tree is often used to illustrate the Christian, while a dry, barren tree illustrates the wicked. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit* (Mt 7:17, also glossary).

The *earth, sea, and trees* represent three types of people: those who have heard the Gospel but rejected it, those who have never heard it, and those who have heard and accepted it. According to the words of Jesus, all of these must be tried at this time, *for the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works* (Mt 16:27). The green trees are mentioned again in Revelation 9:4, where they also represent those who have the seal of God in their foreheads.

The angels of destruction restrain the devastating winds at the command of an *angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the Living God* (v2). Several keys would indicate that this angel is Christ Himself. To those who do not like the thought of an angel symbolizing Christ we would point out that this is not the only place in the Bible that Christ is called an angel. Jacob spoke of *the Angel which redeemed me from all evil* (Gen 48:16; Ex 23:20-23), and the Angel that offers John the book of salvation (10:1-11) is surely Christ. Jesus is represented by objects lower than angels (*lion, lamb, morning star*) so that is not the issue. However, some groups like the Mormons teach that Jesus is only an angel—a falsity of the highest order—and this is probably the reason we are uncomfortable with Christ being represented by an angel. But we should not over-react to false teaching by denying the obvious. Jesus never appears in the visions of the Revelation as literally Himself. He is always symbolized by some other object. In fact, the words *Jesus* and *Christ* appear only eight times combined in Chapters 2-20. Before and after the visions, Jesus does appear to John, but never is He seen within them outside of symbols. Angels are spiritual beings of the highest order, and there is nothing that would make them an inappropriate symbol for Christ. Christ is not an angel, but He is represented at times by an angel (see page 491).

In our view, the *angel ascending from the east* is Jesus Christ. The *east* is often associated with Christ (Mt 2:2; Luke 1:78; Eze 43:2; Lev 16:14) and His return: *for 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* (Mt 24:27). Additionally, that He is *ascending* relates this again with the Second Coming. A parallel verse in Revelation 11:12 uses the same Greek word twice: *and they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them*. Finally and most importantly, the *Angel* possesses *the seal of the Living God*. It has not been given Him, He possesses it on His own merit, and He gives the seal to those He has chosen to ascend with Him into heaven.

This seal is the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer as we can see from the following verses: *Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts* (II Cor 1:22). *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise* (Eph 1:13). *And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption* (Eph 4:30). The Spirit is our ticket allowing us entrance into heaven, and if we have not the Spirit then we are none of His (Rom 8:9).

This sealing of the servants of God alludes to the time Ezekiel, in a vision, saw a man go through Jerusalem and *set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof*. Behind him followed five more men who were instructed to slaughter every person who did not have the mark, beginning at the temple. Young and old, they were to spare none, or have pity on any, for the iniquity of the people was very great (read Eze 9). So will it be at the end of the world, when the angels will first gather out of the Church those who really have the seal of the Spirit. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when many realize their nakedness, for only a certain amount from each tribe is selected.

This final sealing is not a lengthy procedure but will happen in the twinkling of an eye, when we are *caught up*, and our vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body (Php 3:21). Those who are alive and faithful at the end of the world will be gathered and united with the large number of saints who have been previously gathered by death into the

presence of Christ. Not one righteous soul will be left out, for He will *send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven* (Mark 13:27).

4. *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.*
5. *Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.*
6. *Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.*
7. *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.*
8. *Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.*

THE ISRAEL OF GOD SEALED FOR HEAVEN

Next John hears the *number of them which were sealed*: 12,000 from each tribe of Israel, 144,000 altogether. Viewed in context with the numberings of Israel in the OT, this scene continues to present the gathering and numbering of the entire *Israel of God* on the earth, the selecting of the faithful to go to heaven, whether Jew, Gentile, bond, or free. The reasons which compel us to this conviction begin with considering the context. Just seven chapters into the Revelation we already have seen how the visions are deeply rooted in Jewish symbolism and typology—altars, cherubim, incense, lavers, etc. The natural reading would lead one to understand this passage in harmony with the surrounding thought and context.

Under the Mosaic law, the Israelites were to be numbered every year by the priests (Ex 30:12). Every male over 20 was to give half a shekel, *the rich*

shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls. These half shekels, called *atonement money*, were counted in order to number the people, and the money was then used in the service of the tabernacle. The numbering typifies salvation. God requires the same half shekel from each person and He provides the other half. There are only two recorded occasions in the OT the numbering was actually done as outlined by God. The first was soon after the tabernacle was set up in the wilderness (Num 1), and the second was just before the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the promised land (Num 26). King David numbered the people, but without following the rules laid down in Exodus 30:12, and because of his disobedience Israel suffered great affliction from God (I Chr 21).

Futurists believe the 144,000 are actual physical Jews, though opinions vary widely as to their significance. According to verse 3 they are Christians, for they are called *servants of our God*. There is a physical Israel and there is a spiritual Israel according to the Apostle Paul: *They are not all Israel which are of Israel* (Rom 9:6), *for he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart* (Rom 2:28-29).

We believe that this sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel has reference to spiritual Israel, in which there is physically *neither Jew nor Greek*, all are Christ's, and therefore *Abraham's seed* (Gal 3:28-29). The true people of God are made up of Jews and Gentiles, being one olive tree in the Lord. *Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out* (Mt 8:11). The NT contains many references to Israel that must be understood as spiritual Israel. For example, the epistle of James was written to *the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*, but his message was for the Church, completely Christian in character and rejected by Judaism, or physical Israel. Even in the letters to the churches we saw two passages concerning *Jews* which unquestionably refers to Christians (2:9; 3:9).

The passing of the Covenant from physical Israel to spiritual Israel is clearly presented in the Book of Hebrews, which was written to convince Jews that Jesus Christ was the Messiah by showing out of their own Scriptures that He

is the promised Saviour of the world. God has made *a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in My covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.* (Heb 8:8-9; Jer 31). A sizable portion of Jeremiah 31 is quoted in Hebrews 8 and applied to Christ's institution of the New Covenant for all people, Jew or Gentile, making up the new *Israel of God* (Gal 6:16) and continuing forever.

A favorite passage of Futurists who believe the Jews are still God's chosen people is Jeremiah 31:37, *Thus saith the Lord; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord.* This, they tell us, proves that God will always keep Israel as His chosen people, bless them, and work on their behalf. But this verse is part of the exact passage that Hebrews 8 quotes from, and therefore must be understood to relate to spiritual Israel. Read Jeremiah 31 in conjunction with Hebrews 8 and see how this New Covenant was revealed centuries before Christ came. Notice also that the passage specifically says *all the seed of Israel*, and nobody believes that God has banned every Jew from heaven. He did not *cast off all* Israel when they rejected and killed the Messiah, thousands and thousands became Christians and were powerfully used by God to evangelize the world. The early Church was entirely Jewish.

Moreover, if God has not cast off physical Israel why have the Jews been the off-scouring outcasts of the earth for the last 2,000 years? The world has never seen a people or nation more persecuted and afflicted than the Jews. Since the time of Christ they have been a corporate enemy of the Gospel, and remain an obstinate, closed society to this very day. God has not blessed physical Israel; He has rewarded her according to her iniquity. For centuries He has kept her alive for the purpose of showing what happens to those who reject His mercies and grace. How can people teach that America must bless Israel in order to be blessed of the Lord? This is utter nonsense. The Old Covenant, Judaism, is *obsolete* (Heb 8:13 NASB), no longer in effect! Jews must come to God through Christ and not through their old law: *Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from*

grace (Gal 5:4). That is strong language. Judaism is not another valid way to God. The day may come that Jews are more receptive to the Gospel message than they are now, and we pray that will happen, but the only way to God is through Christ: *for by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight* (Rom 3:20). (Read more about physical Jews at page 233).

Most unusual about the sealing of the 144,000 is the listing of the tribes, which does not match any of the 18 or more OT lists. The tribe of Dan is completely left out, and the tribe of Levi, which was never to be numbered, is included. The list is not in the standard order of eldest to youngest, nor is it arranged in order of importance, land allotment, or population size. Never once in the OT is a tribe left out of a list, though Levi is often separated because of its special responsibilities. Never once is Ephraim called Joseph either, though several times Ephraim and Manasseh together are called Joseph. The most normal listing of the 12 tribes would be eldest to youngest, with the brother tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim called the tribe of Joseph as given in Genesis 46. This would total 12 tribes descended from the 12 sons of Jacob.

DAN: THE TRIBE THAT REJECTED GOD'S PLAN

We are not told why Dan was not numbered with his brothers, but there surely is a reason that could be uncovered with deeper study, and we will offer one possibility. The Revelation contains amazing details and truths that cannot be seen by only a surface reading, and the same is surely true here. Some commentators believe the tribe of Dan was omitted because of its history of idolatry, and while it is true that Dan did have idol problems, the other tribes had serious sin issues as well. Benjamin, for example, was slaughtered until only 300 men remained alive because of their gross immorality.

The inclusion of Levi is to be expected in this final numbering and sealing of God's people. Though they had no land inheritance, the Levites had the great and noble responsibility of administering the Law and the sacrifices. In the OT, the numbering was done for the purpose of war, and since the Levites were forbidden to go into battle, they were never numbered. Here the numbering connotes approval, acceptance, and choice. Those numbered have been chosen for salvation on account of their faith and works.

The reason the tribe of Dan is not sealed must be on account of their actions. Early in their history the Bible describes them as lazy and rebellious and by the time of the Babylonian Captivity they had generally disappeared. Idolatry has been the chief sin laid upon Dan, but in my opinion Dan's rejection of God's plan for them is the greater transgression. Dan is criticized for failing to drive out the Canaanites from the land inheritance God had given them through Joshua. This was due to their lack of desire and trust in God, for He had promised to help them overcome their enemies. Rather than fight the wicked Canaanites as God had commanded, the Danites migrated northward beyond the designated boundaries of Israel, and ambushed a peaceful, defenseless city. There they set up a graven image and had their own priesthood with ephod and teraphim, which lasted until the Babylonian Captivity. Essentially, Dan left the Israelite nation and rejected God. The sad story can be read in Judges 17-18. Samson is the lone noteworthy person from the tribe of Dan.

Regardless why, the omission of Dan is conspicuous and intentional. Israel had only 12 sons, but he took both of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and blessed them as his own. This made thirteen named tribes of Israel, though often Manasseh and Ephraim are called Joseph in order to total 12. Joseph also received the birthright blessing which normally went to the firstborn, but when Israel blessed Joseph's sons, he gave the birthright to Ephraim, the second-born (Gen 48). Normally the tribe of Joseph would consist of Ephraim and Manasseh, but in Revelation 7 John includes both Joseph (as Ephraim, the birthright son) and Manasseh. This leaves no room for Dan. Since the tribe of Joseph is numbered, John could have left out Manasseh since he is literally half of the tribe of Joseph, but the Holy Spirit through John intentionally names Manasseh and Joseph, leaving us with no doubt as to His purpose—Dan was deliberately and intentionally left unnumbered and unsealed.

The rejection of Dan parallels the rejection of Judas Iscariot. The symbolism of the 24 elders is drawn from the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles of the Lamb. Both of these groups had an unworthy member, whose office was later filled by one more worthy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 144,000

Twelve thousand were sealed out of each tribe, totaling 144,000 all together. This by itself strongly points to a symbolic meaning for *all the tribes of the children of Israel* (v4). The huge tribe of Judah merits no more sealed than the tiny tribe of Asher, an oddity unexplainable by literalism. It is also a fact that today no Jew can be certain of his lineage at all, for the 12 tribes have been so thoroughly scattered that genealogies are irreparably broken. The number 12 represents the elect or chosen of God, and 1,000 represents a large, all-inclusive number that God alone knows exactly (see glossary). The 12,000 sealed ones multiplied by 12 represents the full elect of God sealed by the Holy Spirit for salvation.

Notice that they were sealed *out of* (Gr-*ek*) the tribes, implying that many more were not sealed. Twelve thousand would be a relatively small number compared to the overall size of the individual tribes, and the lesson is that just being part of a church does not guarantee that one will be sealed for salvation. *Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity* (Mt 7:22-23). The saints are comforted in the fact that *the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His* (II Tim 2:19), and at the last trump He will gather them into the heavenly fold, clothing them in the twinkling of an eye with glorious, immortal bodies. And this brings us to the next scene—eternity with God.

9. *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;*
10. *And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*
11. *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,*

12. *Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*

EVERY CREATURE GLORIFIES THE LAMB, FOR HE HAS REDEEMED THEM

The four angels have been holding back the destroying winds until every saint has been gathered in. All have been counted and sealed, not one is missing. Now we see the sealed saints arriving at the Throne of God, and it is a most wonderful sight. An innumerable multitude of redeemed ones, every child of God from the beginning of time to the very end, is standing before the Throne dressed in *white robes* and carrying *victory palms in their hands*. They are worshipping the Lamb with songs of victory and praise. The walls of Jericho fell at the shout of only half a million voices; imagine the combined shout of this uncountable multitude: *Salvation to our God!* The very heavens will ring with the sounds of praise and worship.

That these verses describe the glories of heaven and eternal rest with God cannot be doubted. It may not be a literal description, but as a spiritual picture it conveys the emotions and feelings that the redeemed will experience as they stand on the sea of glass and behold the Lamb of God face to face. The 144,000 sealed ones and the innumerable multitude are one and the same. We have followed them as the sealed elect of God in the temporal to their arrival at the Throne. Their robes and songs show that they have truly entered their celestial, eternal home. The heavenly picture is very similar to that given in Chapter 4. The Throne is the central gathering place, with the four living creatures in some way actually part of the Throne (4:6). Immediately around the Throne stand the redeemed of the earth, and surrounding the entire company are the angels of God.

The redeemed stand before the Throne with *palms in their hands*. Palms are symbolic of victory. When Jesus entered Jerusalem the people spread palms on the ground in front of Him. Though they did not know it at the time, they were celebrating His victory over death that would take place just a few days later. Palms were used in the last of the seven Jewish feasts—the Feast of

Tabernacles, which is a type of the heavenly rest (see page 340). The Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration that took place after the harvest season. It was a time to go camping and do nothing but rest and enjoy life. They were to take palm branches and *rejoice before the Lord your God seven days* (Lev 23:40). Palm trees were also engraved on the walls of Solomon's temple. In heaven, the palms of the saints indicate victory, peace, and happiness, for they have overcome the world and have received the reward of eternal rest with Christ. They praise and glorify the One who alone deserves all glory.

The angels worship God with seven-fold words of honor (v12). Their song is almost identical to that given in 5:11-13, and is different from the worship of the saints. Though the angels are evidently not heirs of salvation, they do have the ability of choice in some unknown sense. Satan deceived some of the angels into sinning against God, and these angels will share his fate in Hell. The good angels will be living in heaven with the saints, and their acts of praise, though different, are combined. In heaven the saints will know in a new way all the intricacies of the plan of salvation; the how and why, and the purpose of God that we now see only darkly. The whole heavenly scene exemplifies the awesome power and goodness of God, and the insignificance and unworthiness of man.

13. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?*
14. *And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. 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.*
15. *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.*
16. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.*
17. *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.*

THE HEAVENLY REST

As if to erase any doubt as to the identity of this great, white-robed company, one of the 24 elders approaches John and asks, “Who are these clothed in white, and where did they come from?”

“Sir, you know,” John rightly answers, for this elder was himself a member of that multitude.

“These are coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” replies the elder (my translation).

The Greek word *came* in verse 14 is in the present tense, indicating that they have just come, or are even still coming.² The *great tribulation* is the earthly test of trials and temptations that every Christian must overcome. The Greek word translated *tribulation* is *thlipsis*, which occurs about 45 times in the NT, and refers to affliction, persecution, or sorrow. Futurists apply this to a short period of persecution (3-7 years) that is supposed to occur before the Millennial reign begins. We believe this does discredit to the billions and billions of men and women who have lived in the Age of Grace and have already endured the *great tribulation*—and have prevailed. Tortures and afflictions of every kind humanly imaginable have been devised and implemented. The end of the world will surely see an increase in persecution, but it will probably be of an entirely different sort than the physical torment that many have experienced in Church history. Spiritual persecution results in more souls for the Devil than the fires of his earthly tormentors. The *great tribulation* encompasses all the *afflictions of the righteous*, whether in times of physical persecution or satanic temptation. Jesus said, *In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world* (John 16:33).

There is no doubt that some endure more suffering than others, but Jesus knows all about it. He comforts them with the most wonderful words of rest, happiness, and fulfillment in all of Scripture. Read verses 15-17 again and put yourself into that future world. All physical discomforts of hunger, weariness, pain and thirst will be gone forever. The emotional sorrows of this life, no matter how deep and painful will never sting again, for *God shall wipe away*

2 See Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary for Revelation 7:14.

all tears from their eyes. Yet heaven is much more than just removing the effects that the curse of sin has brought; the saints will be given the joy of serving in His Temple, which surely fills the need for approval and usefulness that many do not have on this earth. Most wonderfully, the Lamb will be our shepherd! He will lead us to *living fountains of waters*. The phrase brings to mind a clear bowl of spring-water, boiling over and running forever and ever. As a source of unending joy and comfort it flows, spreading peace and health all along its banks.

Several Scriptures use the imagery of *living fountains of waters*. Jesus told the woman at the well that He could give her water that would quench her thirst forever, and that would *be in [her] a well of water springing up into everlasting life*. He was speaking of eternal spiritual life, saying, *he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst* (John 6:35). Jeremiah speaks wistfully of Israel's falling away: *O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed...because they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters* (Jer 17:13).

The Lamb which is in the midst of the Throne shall feed them (v17). The Greek word *feed* is ***poimaino***, which is used about a dozen times in the NT. It is used to describe a shepherd caring for and feeding his flock, and in the NT it is almost always used to describe a pastor leading his church: *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof* (I Peter 5:2). Jesus asked Peter to *feed My sheep* (John 21:16). In the Revelation however, ***poimaino*** always refers to the work of Christ, as in, *He shall rule [poimaino] them with a rod of iron* (19:15, 12:5). Of course, in heaven Christ will not need the rod as He shepherds His flock.

There is a subtle commentary in verse 14 on a popular doctrine. The saints *have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*, intimating that man must have a part in his continued righteousness. We first come to Jesus on faith only; there is absolutely nothing we can give to merit our salvation—it is a gift, given on the confession of faith in the shed blood of Christ for our sins. Thereafter we go to the laver daily to wash, and we serve Him out of love and thankfulness. The robes of white linen represent *the righteousness of saints* (19:8), and privilege the Christian to stand before God. Salvation is entirely Christ's work, but a man must accept the requirements

of the Covenant if he expects to be part of that happy multitude. He must keep himself unspotted from the world, and constantly view himself in the mirror of God's Word.

Verse 15 speaks of a Temple in heaven. Is this a literal Temple, or simply word imagery? Maybe it is the place of worship that the saints will praise and glorify God and the Lamb forever. Maybe there will be a commemorative "museum" there to remind us of how we were saved from Hell, and of that former earthly life under the curse of sin and death. The heavenly Temple seems to involve the saints in serving God, and will be mentioned several more times in the Revelation. Hebrews 9:24 indicates that the temple is a symbol of heaven, but John saw no temple in the New Jerusalem (21:22).

There is coming a day, when no heartaches shall come.
 No more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye.
 All is peace forevermore, on that happy, golden shore.
 What a day, glorious day, that will be.

What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see,
 When I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace.
 When He takes me by the hand and leads me through
 the Promised Land,
 What a day, glorious day, that will be!

There'll be no sorrows there, no more burdens to bear.
 No more sickness, no pain, no more crying over there.
 And forever I will be with the One who died for me,
 What a day, glorious day, that will be.

What a day that will be, when my Jesus I shall see,
 When I look upon His face, the One who saved me by His grace.
 When He takes me by the hand and leads me through
 the Promised Land,
 What a day, glorious day, that will be!