

prising the new and rated religion, and regarded him as an apostate. It was the existence of these sentiments and feelings among the inhabitants of Rome, which, for one thing, led Constantine to seek elsewhere a new center and seat of his court and government.

But far outweighing all other reasons for the removal of the capitol were the political motives. Constantine, like Diocletian, wished to establish a system of government modeled upon the despotic monarchy of the east . . .

In honor of the emperor the name was changed to Constantinople, the "city of Constantine."—Myers Ancient History, pages 527, 528.

These historical events, forming the most remarkable revolution that the world has ever seen, constitute an exact fulfilment of the symbolism of the sixth seal. Sun and moon are darkened and stars fall, mountains and islands are removed out of their places.

With the blasting of pagan hopes by the victories of Constantine and his subsequent embracing of Christianity, accompanied by his decree to destroy all heathen temples, more than one imperial champion of paganism called out in distress.

Some of the pagan writers almost used the very language of Revelation in their description of this particular period of history:

"As a dreadful and amazing prodigy, which covered the earth with darkness, and restored the ancient dominion of chaos and night."

We have styled the sixth seal as "the seal of Revolution," both in the political and religious realms.

CHAPTER VII

SEALING OF GOD'S SERVANTS

Text (7:1-17)

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great 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 shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. 4 And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel: 5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; 6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; 7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; 8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

9 After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and about the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? 14 And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: 17 for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

vs. 1 After the cry of the panic-stricken kings and potentates resulting from the political and religious upheaval symbolized in the sixth seal, we would naturally expect the seventh seal to be opened at once, and the unfolding events described therein to follow immediately.

But this is not the case. Rather the first of two parenthesis of the first division of Revelation is thrown in to reveal the sealing of God's servants.

Here in this parenthesis a scene of a very different character is presented.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of earth, holding the four winds of earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." (Rev. 7:1-3)

Why, we might ask, is this particular vision, occupying the entire seventh chapter, introduced at this time? The answer is obvious. The preceding visions of the seals "uncover" how things were to go, during that time in history, with men in general. The need now was that a vision should be given to show what provision God had made for His own during this time of political and religious revolution.

The company of sealed servants of God is in direct contrast to that of the panic stricken opponents of the Lamb of God.

We must remember that we are still under the sixth seal and will be until the seventh seal is opened in (Rev. 8:1).

"And after these things" (Rev. 7:1) refers to the events described under the seals of the sixth chapter. Now the sealing of the saints follows "after these things."

John saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds. These four angels undoubtedly represent four hurtful agencies which are to perform their works of destruction.

The wind in the Scriptures is used as a symbol of divine visitation using human instrumentality to accomplish God's purpose. We read in (Jeremiah 51:1)

"Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up against Babylon and against them that dwell in the midst of them that rise up against me, a destroying wind."

Again in Jeremiah 49:36, the divine judgments coming in from every quarter are spoken of as the *four winds*.

"And upon Elam will I bring the *four winds* from the four quarters of heaven."

In Daniel 7:2 we read, "Daniel spoke and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea."

These scriptures not only define the symbol of "wind" as a divine visitation using some human instrument of force, but they give us a strong hint that armies of powerful and cruel nations play a significant part in this last stage of the sixth seal.

These four powerful angels seen by John were observed holding back for a time these four destroying powers.

vs. 2 and John says, "I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of God, and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels . . . saying, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads."

What this sealing in the foreheads was is not revealed, but it certainly has to do with their eternal safety. In a similar impending temporal judgment on the population of Jerusalem, Ezekial saw a vision of God's glory, and heard a command given to one clothed in linen to go through the city and set a mark on the foreheads of those who sighed and cried because of the abominations thereof. (Ezekial 9:3, 4) This man had an inkhorn by his side, and while it is not said that he used this inkhorn, yet the implication is that he did use it in marking the foreheads.

vs. 3 In Rev. 22:4 we read, "And they shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads." The servants of Christ dwelling in the place of Christ has gone to prepare will have His name on their foreheads. Here in Rev. 7:5 it would seem the mark in the forehead refers to an open profession of obedient belief in the Lamb, as the mark in the hand would indicate service. The seal is the mark of God, as the seal of a state is the mark of that state.

vs. 4 John heard the number of them that were sealed. It was one hundred and forty-four thousand of the tribes of the children of Israel. John, in this vision of the sixth seal, saw two companies of sealed saints. He saw first a vast company of Abraham's descendants in the blood line, and then he saw another company so vast in host that no man could number them. Since the gospel, as Paul said, is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16), so the Jewish Christians are likewise mentioned first here.

The number of the tribes of Israel mentioned here is one hundred forty-four thousand and twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Significance of the Number Given

These numbers are hardly to be taken literally, since we must ever keep in mind that we are still in the realm of symbolism, and studying in a book sign-i-fied" or written in symbols. They signify a great number. But there seems to be a profounder meaning than this. The number signifies "totality," that is to say, the complete and perfect number of God's servants out of the old Israel of God.

The meaning is intensified by the fact that of each tribe the number sealed is given as precisely twelve thousand. In the total, the number twelve is multiplied by itself and then by one thousand. This makes a square of twelve multiplied by the number of enlargement and totality—a thousand.

In Exodus 30:12-15 we have God's original directions for numbering His Israel of God in that day.

"When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel, them that are to be numbered then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the Lord, when thou numberest them. This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary . . . the rich shall not give more than a half shekel, when they give an offering to the Lord to *make an atonement for your souls.*"

This presents these glowing facts that every man who is numbered has been ransomed, for whom atonement has been made, and that all men stand on the same level with God, who is no respecter of persons. All require precisely the same ransom, for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for "both have been proved under sin." (Romans 3:9, 22, 23)

When the people were numbered by Moses, the number came out *unequal*, signifying incompleteness, "for the law made nothing perfect." But in this final enumeration of those for whom Christ "gave Himself as a ransom" (1 Tim. 2:6) the result is perfection.

The number "twelve" not only symbolizes completeness, but it also symbolizes the perfection of the final abode of the ransomed. We shall deal with this when we come to the description of that eternal city which has twelve gates, twelve angels at the gates, and twelve foundations, and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, etc.

There is some difficulty in reference to the naming of the twelve tribes of Israel in the vision John saw. Of the tribes, Ephraim ap-

pears under the name of Joseph and the tribe of Dan is omitted altogether. The number twelve is preserved by naming Manassas, Joseph's first born son in the place of Dan. Dan's name may have been dropped because he fell away into idolatry, but this is only a surmise.

vs. 9. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude," which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues."

Here we find an innumerable multitude which no man could number. They were from every nation.

This second multitude represented the saved of all the nations—the Gentiles, in other words.

In the first part of this vision, which had to do with Abraham's descendants being sealed, John said he *heard* the number of them. Here he is given to *see* the vast throng of sealed from every nation.

Christ spoke of this Gentile multitude, "and I say unto you that many shall come from the east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 8:10, 11) John here sees the fulfillment of Christ's prediction, when this host of Gentiles is incorporated into the Israel of God today.

These "stood before the throne, and before the Lamb clothed with white robes." This is ever the garb of the redeemed. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"And palms in their hands." This declares them to be sharers of Christ's victory.

vs. 10-12 "And cried with a loud voice, saying salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

This multitude, "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," are by their singing of salvation identified with the company John heard singing the new song in Rev. 5:9, for that was a preview of this. The theme of the song here entitled "Salvation" is given in fuller detail in the vision of the seals, where we have the words, "For thou wast slain, and has redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation."

This is the "great salvation" whereof Peter speaks in (I Peter 1:9-12), which things the angels desire to look into," for the next words of the scripture here are,

The Seven-Fold Doxology

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four living creatures, and fell down before the throne

on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power and might, be unto our God for ever and ever, Amen."

It is interesting to compare this seven-fold doxology with that of Chapter 5:12. They are identical in six of the seven items (for "strength" in Rev. 5:12 is the same in the original as "might" in Rev. 7:12). The only difference in terms being that in this later song the expression "thanksgiving" takes the place of "riches" in the former song. This is understandable in that here is the fulfillment historically of that in prospect in Rev. 5:12. They were singing "thanksgiving" for the "riches of His grace."

vs. 13, 14 As if to call especial attention to this singing multitude, one of the elders, or angelic princes, answered (we wonder if this is in response to an unrecorded question of John's) saying unto John, "What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

vs. 14 John confesses his inability to answer either question by saying, "Sir, thou knowest." whereupon the elder replies: "These are they which come out (literally "are coming out") of the great tribulation." While the authorized version reads "great tribulation" there is an article in the Greek,—literally "those who are coming out of the great tribulation."

What Tribulation is Meant Here?

Some expositors teach this "great tribulation" to be the same spoken of by Christ in (Matt. 24:21) "And then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no nor even shall be." They make it a period of tribulation yet future, a period *immediately* following the return of the Lord to raise the dead and transform the living saints. These of the "Futurist" school teach there is to be a "great tribulation" after the rapture of the saints.

But this cannot be because the elder expressly said of those John saw, that they were *then*, at that very time, *coming* out of the great tribulation. This forever forbids postponing the tribulation mentioned here to some future dispensation after Christ's return.

Another identifying feature of the time of this tribulation is a fact that we must not overlook. This opening of the sixth seal corresponds historically with the beginning of the *Pergamos period*, in which the doctrine of compromise in writing of human creeds (Council of Nicea called by Constantine) and the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes

(Elevation of bishops to lord it over God's heritage) lead to the "depths of satan" in the Thyatira Period. *And it was in the Thyatira Period* that we read of the apostate church, called Jezebel, but known historically as the Catholic church, in (Rev. 2:22)

"Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her *into great tribulation*, except they repent."

This "tribulation" in the vision of the seven churches, coincides with that of the parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals. In the Thyatira church there is mentioned the *cause* of the tribulation and in Rev. 7:14, we see those who have repented and *are coming out of the great tribulation*.

vs. 15-17 Because they have stood the trial and remained true, "Keeping his words unto the end" (Rev. 2:26), they are permitted to be before the throne to serve God constantly and experience the unspeakable joy of having God's presence among them. They shall neither hunger or thirst any more and all tears shall be wiped from their eyes. The "Man of Sorrows" shall banish all sorrow.

Summary

Thus we bring to a close the discussion of the parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals by presenting a summary of the chapter.

The theme has been the sealing of the servants of God, both of the Jews and the Gentiles. But while we have been absorbed in this task we must not lose sight of the fact that four destructive agencies were being withheld until this sealing was completed.

These powers were restrained until some great work of the church could be accomplished. The eighth chapter continues with the opening of the seventh and last seal, in the first division of which, this quartet of destruction is let loose under the symbolism of the blowing of four trumpets in succession. We shall find that these first four trumpets heralded the four tides of invasion which swept over the western half of the Roman Empire.

But before these great catastrophes fell upon the western part of the empire, did the church experience a great triumph? Let us remember this is a book of great symbolism and this is a symbolic picture of great historical events connected with the welfare of the saints.

We have already learned under the sixth seal that Constantine had embraced Christianity and by decree in A.D. 331 ordered the destruction of pagan temples and the abolishing of pagan worship in the empire.

Thus we see that the church of Christ had grappled with the ancient pagan religions and, after centuries of trial and untold suffering, had won a glorious victory. The temples of Jupiter, Mercury and Mars were closed and their idol worship forbidden. If a person today could have visited Rome in the end of the second century he would have beheld a pagan world. Had they visited the eternal city in the latter portion of the fourth century he could have hardly believed his eyes, for he would have looked upon an empire blessed with churches filled with followers of the Christ.

Until this sealing of the saints, was completed, the four winds of destruction were held back. It was a definite act of God to see that they were restrained from their missions of destruction until Christianity had captured the empire.

Had these four destructive agencies done their work before this great victory of the church in the sowing of the seed of the kingdom everywhere, Christianity could never have survived the wreck of the empire and the passing of a civilization hoary with age.

Christ indwelling in the hearts of converted Romans helped them to rise above the ruins of the past. The invading hordes from the north laid aside their paganism and embraced the Christian belief from those whom they had vanquished.

We are now ready to consider the events accompanying the opening of the seventh seal.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SEVENTH SEAL OPENED

Text (8:1-13)

1 And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. **2** And I saw the seven angels that stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

3 And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. **4** And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. **5** And the angel taketh the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth: and there followed thunders, and voices, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

6 And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

7 And the first sounded, and there followed hail and fire, mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of