

Revelation 7 — Parenthesis Between the Sixth and Seventh Seals

Notes on The Revelation with Practical Reflections

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This chapter is a remarkable break in this inspired book. Judgment after judgment on men living on the earth has passed before us; and while the heart has been saddened at the tales of woe which the opening of the various seals has brought out, this chapter seems introduced to remind us that mercy rejoices against judgment {see James 2:13}.

As on former occasions, so now, God's electing love comes in to spare, when all would otherwise terminate in misery and woe. The terror and distress of men, crying to mountains and rocks to fall on them, had just passed before the eye of the apostle; and the seventh seal, with its thunderings and lightnings, is stayed for a little, while John sees that there is mercy for some on the earth, amidst all the terrible outpourings of divine judgments. The seventh chapter, then, must be regarded as a parenthesis, not having its fulfilment between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, but presented to the apostle after the sixth seal, [After these things I saw {Rev. 7:1},]

to show that God yet remembers mercy to many on the earth. Two gracious scenes are here opened up to us; one in relation to Israel, the other comprehending Gentiles -persons of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues {see Rev. 7:9}.

Now we have three classes in the world spoken of in Scripture -Jews, Gentiles, and the Church of God. After the Church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air, we shall have again only Jews and Gentiles on earth. As we have repeatedly noticed, God begins again to deal with his ancient people Israel, and Jesus acts as their Melchizedec High-Priest; this makes it probable that this election and sealing of the twelve tribes may take place early in the apocalyptic period. The latter vision of this chapter must have its fulfilment during the persecuting power of "the man of sin," when every one is threatened with death who will not fall down and worship the beast. It would seem as if four of the seven angels which have the seven trumpets have a mission in relation to the earth, the sea, and trees. They are presented as 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. Another angel, having the seal of the living God, ascends from the east or sun-rising (the source of blessing), and cries 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. 7:3}.

The judgment of these angels must be suspended until the sealing has taken place. These sealed ones are the

special objects of God's care; for when the fifth angel sounds, the locusts which come out of the bottomless pit are commanded that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads (Rev. 9:4).

Some have thought, that the angel with the seal is Christ, but we should judge it not to be so; first, because he says, Till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads {Rev. 7:3};

and, secondly, because angelic agency is almost always exercised in acts of mercy, as well as judgment, towards those who stand in relation to the earth, or to the kingdom at the end of the age. The Church waits for Christ Himself. His promise is, I will come again, and receive you unto myself {John 14:3};

but angels will gather the scattered tribes from the four winds (Matt. 24:31), and angels will bind the tares in bundles, and gather the wheat into the barn, as also sever the wicked from among the just. I need, perhaps, scarcely say, that the catching up of the saints is not a severing of the wicked from among the just, but a separation of the saints from among the wicked, and will have taken place before the end of this present age (Matt. 13:49). The number of Israelites sealed is an hundred and forty and four thousand; twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes. They are marked and set apart for blessing in the earth, according to the election of grace, before the judgments are enacted. The fleshly order, therefore, is not observed; hence Judah, and not Reuben, heads the list; for blessing on the ground of mercy can only be by Him who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root and Offspring of David. Instead of Dan, we have Manasses. There have been many conjectures why Dan is omitted. Some have thought it is because the tribe of Dan has been so mixed up with idolatry; others, because they suppose that "the man of sin" will be a Danite; but as the hundred and forty and four thousand is an election from Israel, these reasons cannot be entertained for a moment; and we believe that the difficulty is only solved by even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight {Matt. 11:26; Luke 10:21}.

Where the ten tribes are now, no man knows; but God's eye is upon them, and however they may be scattered, He is able to bring them forth again in His own time (Matt. 24:31). It is remarkable, that when the land is again divided, Dan's lot is mentioned first (Ezek. 48:1). We may notice also that the tribes are sealed with the seal of the living God, which intimates their security and preservation in time of judgment and death. Their standing before God is that of "servants," not "sons," or members of the body of Christ, as we are. Our blessings are in the heavenlies in Christ; Israel's portion is blessing in the earth.

Notes on the Revelation

Not only must preparatory judgments have been poured out, but the time of the great tribulation must have set in, before the second action of this chapter, the salvation of the innumerable multitude, can have its accomplishment. The Church having been completed and removed, God again deals with Jews and Gentiles as such; therefore we have in the former part of the chapter a certain number of Jews sealed, and in the latter part a separate company of Gentiles saved as such, who came out of the great

tribulation, and are brought by the blood of the Lamb to stand before the throne of God. It is not the idea of “one body,” a limited number of members, as is indicated by the “one new man,” but an innumerable multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. Their position of victory, with palms in their hands, shows that they had been in previous conflict, and had overcome; and though they do not prostrate themselves in adoration and worship, as the elders in the fourth chapter, they do cry with a loud voice, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb {Rev. 7:10}.

This shows that they are redeemed to God. In the fourth and fifth chapters, we have the throne of God, the Lamb, the elders, and living creatures, and all the angels standing round about the throne; but here we have in addition this great multitude, which no man could number {Rev. 7:9}.

They have white robes {Rev. 7:9},

as we saw that those also had who suffered unto death for the truth’s sake under the fifth seal, which shows that God: accounts them righteous and spotless in His sight. But observe that this “great multitude” have no crowns, are not seated on thrones, neither have they harps, as the elders in the fourth and fifth chapters. Moreover, they are described as serving God day and night in His temple {Rev. 7:15}

whereas when the Church is seen in Rev. 21: it is said, I saw no temple therein {Rev. 21:22}.

We notice also that all this “great multitude” came out of the great tribulation; this specially characterizes them. Eighteen hundred years have passed away since the Holy Ghost came down on the day of Pentecost, to baptize believers into “one body,” an immense number of whom have fallen asleep in Jesus; and the “great tribulation” has not yet commenced, so that this also distinguishes them as a people, though saved, not identified with the Church. This “great multitude” have also been exposed to peculiar bodily sufferings and hardships, as those will be who live during the unparalleled persecution and oppression of “the man of sin.” It is therefore said of them that they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, etc. {Rev. 7:16};

and that God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes {Rev. 7:17}.

Some may say, Does not this chapter present the Church to us, only in another aspect to what we saw in the fourth and fifth chapters? We reply, that if those who had previously included the Church were omitted here, there might be some reason for the supposition; but the “great multitude” comes in here as an additional company. Besides, one of the elders, who, as we have

before noticed, are always characterized in this book by their spiritual intelligence, raises the question, and then gives us the answer, what are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? {Rev. 7:13}.

Do not these questions at once distinguish them? The elder does not say, who are we? but, What are these? and whence came they? Can anything be plainer? The answer is, These are they which came out of (the) great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, &c.{Rev. 7:14}.

The great tribulation is called by Jeremiah, Jacob's trouble,

for they crucified the true Messiah, and will receive the false one. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive (John 5:43).

The prophet says, Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it; it is even the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7).

Mark, it is not called the time of the Church's trouble, but of Jacob's trouble. The Church is promised to be kept from it (Rev. 3:10). Daniel says, There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time. . . . The wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand (Dan. 12:1, 10).

Our Lord also said, When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet [see Dan. 9:27] stand in the holy place (whoso readeth let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: . . . for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake [Israel is called the elect in Isa. 45:9, 22,] those days shall be shortened (Matt. 24:15, 22).

That is, so terrible will be the hand of oppression, in causing all to be put to death who will not worship the beast, that unless God were to shorten the days, all the faithful on the earth would be exterminated. Out of this "great tribulation" this "great multitude" came. How beautifully parenthetical, then, this seventh chapter of the Revelation comes in, to relieve the heart in the contemplation of such terrible scenes as this book presents to us, both before and after it. How it tells us of divine mercy rejoicing against judgment, and shows us that those faithful ones, who refuse to bow down to the beast or his image, and will not receive his mark in their foreheads and right hands, will overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, and find a place of never-ending blessing in God's own presence.