

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HUNDRED AND FORTY-FOUR THOUSAND AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE OF GENTILES

(Lecture 7)

IN our last address we were occupied with the first half of the 70th week, yet future, of Daniel's prophecy: "**the beginning of sorrows**" when "**the wrath of the Lamb**" will be poured out on guilty Christendom and apostate Judaism.

Now we find that before the Lord gave John the vision of the opening of the seventh seal (which introduces the great tribulation in all its intensity), we have this parenthetical seventh chapter in which are recorded two important visions.

- In the first, John sees a hundred and forty-four thousand Israelites sealed by an angel, and
- In the second, he beholds a great multitude of Gentiles led in triumph by the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, taking possession of the millennial earth.

I am sure that many of my hearers have often been perplexed by conflicting theories regarding the hundred and forty-four thousand. The way in which so many unscriptural and often positively heretical sects arrogate to themselves this title would be amusing, if it were not so sad.

You are perhaps aware that the Seventh-Day Adventists apply it to the faithful of their communion, who will be found observing the Jewish Sabbath at the Lord's return. They suppose that these will be raptured when the Lord descends, and judgment poured out upon the rest of the church.

Then we have the followers of the late Pastor Russell who teach that the hundred and forty-four thousand include only the "overcomers" of their persuasion who continue faithful to the end, following the teaching of the system commonly called "Millennial Dawnism."

That very absurd and weird cult known as the “Flying Roll” makes claim to the same thing; only with them, the hundred and forty-four thousand are those who will have their blood so cleansed that they cannot die, but will have immortal life on this earth!

Besides these, there are many other sects, whose leaders consider their own peculiar followers will be the hundred and forty-four thousand sealed ones at the time of the end. All of these, however, overlook a very simple fact, which, if observed, would save them from their folly. That is, the hundred and forty-four thousand are composed of twelve thousand from each tribe of the children of Israel. There is not a Gentile among them, nor is there confusion as to tribe.

Whenever I meet people who tell me they belong to the hundred and forty-four thousand, I always ask them, “Which tribe, please?” and they are invariably put to confusion for want of an answer.

Now let us look carefully at the three opening verses.

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

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

John tells us that he saw “**four angels**” (four is the world number) “**standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of heaven that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.**”

In Daniel’s vision, as recorded in the seventh chapter of his prophecy, he beholds “**the four winds of heaven**” striving upon the great sea, and as a result you have the various world empires coming forth like wild beasts from beneath the restless waves.

Here we have the angels holding back these four winds until a certain event takes place.

It is very evident that they are restraining the last wild beast from making his appearance. In chapter thirteen, the beast with seven heads and ten horns, the Roman Empire in its last form, comes forth from the sea, symbolizing the nations in unrest.

This is the great federation of nations which God’s word predicts for the very near future - a federation of Satanic origin, and which will not be developed until after the church is gone, and even then certain events must transpire before it assumes its final diabolical form.

Verses two and three make clear what this event is that must first take place. John sees 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.”

The point is, you see, that God has chosen a remnant of Israel to inherit the kingdom under the Son of Man, which is so soon to be established; and ere the final form of the Roman Empire is fully developed, these are sealed, marked out for God’s protecting care; so that all the power of the Beast and all the hatred of his ally the Antichrist will not be able to destroy them, and thus prevent the carrying out of God’s purpose.

Verses four to eight leave no doubt whatever as to the identity of these sealed ones. John **“heard the number of them that were sealed: and there were sealed a hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.”**

As you go over the last half you note that the tribe of Dan is absent, and instead you have two tribes from Joseph - Manasseh and Ephraim.

Ephraim, however, bears Joseph’s name. Why is Dan omitted from the twelve, and the twelfth made up in another way? I cannot positively tell you. The rabbis used to say that the false Messiah (the Antichrist) would arise from Dan, and they based the supposition on Jacob’s words in Genesis 49:17: **“Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.”**

We note from the historical record, in the book of Judges, that Dan was the first tribe to go into idolatry, and it would not be a matter of surprise if Dan would be the leader in the last great idolatry - the worship of Antichrist. But we may leave this where faith leaves every other difficulty - resting in the infinite wisdom of God and knowing that He has revealed all that is necessary for us to know in the present age.

The balance of the chapter, from verse nine, brings before us an entirely different company. John says,

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever. Amen.

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation (literally, the tribulation, the great one), and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“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 (or, spread His tabernacle over them). **They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed** (or, shepherd) **them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”**

It seems very strange that some have taught that in this great multitude we have the raptured church; hence they have supposed that the Lord would not come for His church until the middle of the tribulation period: but a careful study of the passage makes it very evident, it seems to me, that we are here gazing upon an earthly, not a heavenly, company.

This great multitude embraces the Gentile nations who will enter into millennial blessing. It is the great ingathering of the coming dispensation, when from all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, a vast throng from all parts of the earth will be redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb, and will enter into the earthly kingdom of our Lord. During the dark days of the great tribulation they will heed the testimony which will be carried to the ends of the earth by Jewish missionaries, the wise among the people (see Daniel 12), who shall instruct many in righteousness. They are identical, I take it, with the **“sheep”** of Matthew 25, who are placed on the right hand of the Son of Man when He comes in His glory and all His holy angels with Him, and who inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the earth.

They are said in verse fourteen to **“come out of the great tribulation,”** to have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; but they are nowhere said to be taken away to heaven - quite the contrary; they are in a scene where it is necessary that the Lamb should feed them and lead them, and spread his tabernacle over them.

Verse 15 plainly tells us: **“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and minister before Him day and night in his temple”**: that is, I take it, the millennial temple, which is to be built in the land in that coming day. There will be no day and night in heaven. The expression can only refer, in this connection, to the temple on earth.

Then we read, **“He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among** [spread His tabernacle over] **them.”**

The reference is undoubtedly to the Lord’s covering His people when He led them of old through the wilderness. The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night not only guided them through the scene but sheltered them from the fierce rays of the desert sun. Thus will He protect and shield His redeemed ones in the age to come.

We are also told that **“they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”**

It is probably because people have not realized the blessedness of the millennial day that these verses are made to refer to heaven, but they are at one with the predictions of Isaiah, and others of the prophets, in regard to the blessing that the saved nations shall enjoy when the Lamb Himself reigns.

- The struggle for daily bread will be over - they shall hunger no more;
- The oftentimes vain effort to quench their thirst will be at an end - they shall thirst no more.

Even the unpleasant and disagreeable things with which men have been afflicted because of the way sin has jarred God's creation will be at an end. The sun shall not light upon them, nor any heat.

In that day all the saved of the nations will be able to take up, in the fullest sense, the beautiful words of the Psalmist, which we but feebly enter into now:

**“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
For his name's sake.”**

While it is true that the church of God will be in a far better scene; while our hope is heavenly, not earthly, yet we can indeed rejoice and our hearts may well swell with gladness to think of the blessing awaiting the earth and its inhabitants. And God has surely promised it, and will fulfil all that He has caused to be written by His holy prophets in the sacred Scriptures, for **“the Scripture cannot be broken.”**

What a long, dreary night, with what frightful disturbing nightmares, if I may so speak, has this world known, since sin, with all its attendant evils, came in to wreck man's hopes of joy and gladness!

But how precious to know that evil shall not always have the upper hand; that a time is coming, aye, and is very near, when the curse will be lifted, the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the rose; even the lower creation will be changed and revert to former habits ere sin entered; **“the lion shall eat straw like the ox”**; the little child need not fear the midst savage of beasts; for they shall not hurt nor destroy in that day. Then government will be righteously regulated; abuses of every kind will be stopped, and for a thousand glorious years our Lord Himself shall reign in righteousness.

But there is one thing I wish especially to press upon both saved and unsaved, and that is this:

Whether in dispensations past, in the present age, in the period of judgment just before this world, or in that glorious millennial age, everyone who is saved at all will be saved through the precious blood of Christ. God has never had any other way of reconciling man to Himself than through the blood of His Son.

In Old Testament times, men were saved, if I may so say, on credit. The Lord Jesus Christ had already pledged Himself to pay the fearful debt with His own most precious blood, and all who, in every dispensation, owned their guilt and believed the record God had given, were justified by faith on the basis of the work that Christ was yet to accomplish. That work having now been completed, God has manifested His righteousness in passing over these sins done aforetime in the days of His forbearance, and now He shows Himself to be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

If you own your sin, dear unsaved one, if you confess your guilt and put your heart's trust in that blessed One, who on Calvary's cross gave Himself for you, then you will be justified and accepted with God in all the value of that precious blood. In the coming hour of tribulation, the hundred and forty-four thousand of Israel, and all the Gentiles who receive their message, will be saved in exactly the same way, but saved for earth - not for heaven. To the very end of the millennium that precious blood will still have the same cleansing efficacy, and the last soul who trusts in Christ will have an unimpeachable standing before the throne of God through its infinite value.

So all blessing for time and eternity rests upon the cross of Christ, and the reason the nations have missed their way in the past nineteen hundred years, and are struggling in vain for peace and a government in righteousness, is because they have ignored the blood of that cross, where, alone, peace was made, both in relation to time and eternity.

And now in closing, let me emphasize one thing which I believe needs to be emphasized in these days.

I have run across the error in many recent books on the coming of the Lord, that after the rapture of the church there will be a great revival, an unprecedented spiritual awakening in Christendom, when vast numbers of people who have been undecided during the present dispensation of grace will turn to the Lord; and it is being widely taught that these will form the great multitude of which we have been speaking.

Let me say that I have searched my Bible diligently for any confirmation of such teaching, but I fail to find it. On the contrary, we are distinctly told in II Thessalonians 2:1 I that God is going to give up those who, during the present age, receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved; they will be given up to hardness of heart and perversity of spirit.

We read in verses eleven and twelve, **“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned that believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”**

Now, there is no intimation here that people who refuse the gospel in this dispensation will have another opportunity to be saved, if they are still living when the dispensation of judgment begins.

A careful reading of the entire passage will show that the time referred to is when the mystery of iniquity is fully developed and the wicked one revealed - that is, the man of sin.

In that age, the Holy Spirit will have been withdrawn. He will go up with the church at the Lord's return to the air.

This is not to say that the Holy Spirit will not act afterwards, during the tribulation period, but His operations will be similar to His activities in Old Testament times. From heaven He will influence the hearts of men, opening the eyes of the remnant of Israel, and through them reach, as we have seen, an innumerable multitude of Gentiles. But there is no promise that He will operate for blessing on the hearts of those who have had the opportunity to be saved and have refused it. They will be given up to the strong delusion of the last days. They will believe the lie of the Antichrist, and thus go into judgment because they deliberately refused the truth when it was offered to them, choosing instead error and sin.

It is a very solemn thing to harden the heart against God and His message of grace.

Pharaoh tried it, and is the standing example of what strong delusion really means. He hardened himself against the message that Moses brought, and afterwards God Himself confirmed him in his course.

Light rejected brings abiding night.

- Darkness may be natural: in this all are born.
- Darkness may be willful: in this men deliberately choose darkness in place of light.
- Darkness may be, and alas, often is, judicial: in this men are given up to darkness because of their own perversity.

So we read in Jeremiah 13:16, **"Give glory to the Lord your God, before He cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and, while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness."**

No man need be lost for want of light. He who will follow the slightest gleam that God gives may be sure of increasing light, and light sufficient to lead him to the knowledge of sins forgiven. But, I repeat, light rejected brings night! And, therefore, let me plead with anyone who has not closed with God's offer of grace in Christ Jesus, to receive now the gift of His love, and thus be assured of a place with Christ in that coming day. For if the Lord should descend from heaven to call His church away, you who have heard the gospel and are rejecting it, abiding in your sins, your doom will be eternally sealed.

Among the heathen nations, where the gospel has not yet been fully proclaimed, in the waste places and the neglected parts of the world, where the grace of God is as yet unknown, a vast number will be found to receive the message of the Israelitish remnant as they flee from Antichrist's persecutions and proclaim to all the world the gospel of the kingdom. But you will not be numbered among them if the coming of the Lord finds you still unsaved. You will be in exactly the same condition of soul, and position of condemnation before God, as if you had died in your sins.

Jesus said, "When once the master of the house has risen up and shut the door, - who is there that shall open it? The five foolish virgins, left outside when the Bridegroom came, knocked in vain for admittance later. They picture those who will be on the wrong side of the door, closed for all eternity.

Yet, strangely enough, this very parable of the ten virgins has been used by certain teachers to bolster up their unsound theory of a second chance for Christ-rejecters after the Saviour calls His church away. The foolish virgins are, by them supposed to represent persons afterwards gathered in, but who miss the heavenly blessing.

Others have based on this parable the equally unscriptural hypothesis that only the more spiritual saints will be caught up at the rapture, and the weaker ones will be left behind to be purified during the great tribulation. This is a virtual denial of the truth of the one body, the unity of the body of Christ. The weakest member of that body is as dear to the Head as the strongest and all who are Christ's will have their part in the rapture, irrespective of their more or less advanced stage in the Christian life. It is the perfection of the work of redemption that gives title to any of the promises of God; it is not as a reward for service or merit.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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