

Message 17 – The Scene in Heaven after Christ’s Ascension

All Christians know that Christ has ascended into heaven and that He is in heaven today. However, not many are familiar with the scene in heaven after Christ’s ascension. This scene is quite particular, and we need to see it very clearly. Revelation 4:1 says, “After these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying. Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” God’s plan is hidden in heaven. When God finds a man on earth after His heart, heaven is opened to him. It was opened to Jacob (Gen. 28:12-17), to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:1), to Jesus (Matt. 3:16), to Stephen (Acts 7:56), and to Peter (Acts 10:11). Here, and in 19:11, it is opened to John, the writer of this book, and it will be opened to all believers in the Lord in eternity (John 1:51).

I. A Throne in Heaven

Verse 2 says, “Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven.” In heaven, there is firstly a throne, and the book of Revelation is focused upon it. Beginning with chapter four, this book unveils God’s universal administration. The throne of God in Revelation is the center of God’s administration. While the throne in the Epistles is the throne of grace from which we receive mercy and find grace (Heb. 4:16), the throne here is the throne of judgment from which the world receives judgment.

II. God sitting on the Throne

When John saw the throne set in heaven, he saw “One sitting upon the throne, and He who was sitting was like in appearance to a jasper stone and a sardius, and there was a rainbow around the throne like an emerald in appearance.” God on the throne has the appearance of a jasper stone. According to 21:11, jasper is “a most precious stone...clear as crystal.” Its color must be dark green, which signifies life in its richness.

God on the throne is also in the appearance of a sardius stone. Sardius is a most precious stone, red in color, which signifies redemption. Today, God is not only the God of life, but also the God of redemption. While jasper indicates God as the God of glory in His rich life, sardius signifies God as the God of redemption. Because we, His created ones, fell, He came in to redeem through the blood of Christ. Therefore, He has two colors—the color of life and the color of redemption. He is the life-giving

God and also the redeeming God. On the breastplate of the high priest in the Old Testament, the first stone was sardius and the last jasper (Exo. 28:17, 20). This signifies that God's redeemed people have their beginning in God's redemption and their consummation in God's glory of life.

On His Right Hand a Scroll

According to 5:1, in the hand of Him who sits upon the throne there was a scroll. This life-giving and redeeming God has a mystery which is held in His hand. This mystery concerns the destiny of the universe and is sealed with seven seals. The mystery, the secret, of the universe is held by the God of life and redemption.

III. TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS SITTING ON TWENTY-FOUR THRONES AROUND THE THRONE

Verse 4 says, "And around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads." The elders in this verse are not the elders of the church, but the elders of the angels, because here, before the Lord's second coming, they are sitting on thrones already (cf. Matt. 19:28; Rev. 20:4). In God's creation, angels are the most ancient ones. In the Bible there are different types of elders: the elders of the Israelites, the elders of the churches, and, as here, the elders of the angels. The elders of the angels are the elders of the whole creation of God. That they sit on thrones with golden crowns on their heads indicates that they must be the rulers of the universe until the millennial kingdom, when the authority to rule the earth will be given to the overcoming saints (Heb. 2:5-9; Rev. 2:26-27; 20:4). The white garments with which they are clothed reveal that these angelic elders are sinless, having no need of the washing by the blood of the Lamb as do the redeemed saints (7:14).

IV. FOUR LIVING CREATURES IN THE MIDST OF AND AROUND THE THRONE

A. Full of Eyes in Front, Behind, and Within

Verse 6 says that "in the midst of the throne and around the throne" there were "four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind." According to verse 8, they are also "full of eyes around and within." The most striking feature of the four living creatures is their eyes. They are full of eyes in front, behind, and within, and they can see in any direction without turning. Eyes are for living things to receive light and vision. That the four living creatures are full of eyes indicates that they are absolutely not opaque, but are crystal clear on every side and in every aspect. Christians should be like that, full of eyes. When we are full of eyes, we are transparent. If a person has

no eyes, he is completely opaque. Our eyes make us transparent. If we had hundreds of eyes over our body, both within and without, our whole being would be transparent. In the presence of God, we, the redeemed people, should be like this.

V. THE WORSHIP OF GOD

In 4:8-11 we see the worship of God. Here we do not yet have the worship of the Lamb, for the Lamb does not appear until the next chapter. This chapter only presents the scene into which Christ ascended. The worship of God here is by the four living creatures representing all the creatures (vv. 8-9) and by the twenty-four elders representing all the angels (vv. 10-11). In this scene, all the creatures are worshipping God.

As the ones who carry out God's administration in the universe, the twenty-four angelic elders speak out in their praises the will of God's creation. People can easily realize the creation of God, but they scarcely know the will, the purpose, of God's creation. The praise of the angelic elders is an introduction to the contents of this book, which unveil the will, the purpose, of God's creation—to have an eternal habitation for God's satisfaction and expression. This is the holy city, New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem, God's will in creation will be completely revealed and fulfilled. God will be fully satisfied and wholly expressed in and through the New Jerusalem. This is God's will in His creation and it is the goal of the book of Revelation. The praise of the angelic elders points us to this, and Revelation proceeds on toward this and eventually brings us to this, the ultimate consummation of God's will in His creation.

MESSAGE 18 – THE WORTHY LION-LAMB

I. . THE SECRECY OF GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

Revelation 5:1 says, “And I saw on the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne a scroll, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.” God's administration is a secret, a mystery. Throughout the centuries, many wise men have earnestly tried to learn what the secret of this universe is. Because they did not have the revelation, they failed. In the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we have an unveiling of God's economy.

In 5:1 the One sitting on the throne has a scroll in His hand sealed with seven seals. These seven seals are actually the contents of the scroll and the contents of the book of Revelation, for this book is the opening, the unveiling, of the seven seals. The scroll itself must be the new covenant, the grand title deed enacted with the blood of

the Lamb. The new covenant is a scroll covering the redemption of the church, Israel, the world, and the universe. The book of Revelation is a record of God's thought concerning the church, Israel, the world, and the universe. When Christ died on the cross, He tasted death not only for man, but for everything (Heb. 2:9). Here we see the secrecy of God's administration in the universe. While the New Testament was enacted by the death of Christ, it has been a mystery to mankind. The new covenant is the secret of the universe and the content of the book of Revelation. As we read Revelation, we must realize that in vision after vision we are seeing what is included in this new covenant, what is contained in this secret and sealed scroll.

Now, after Christ's ascension, there should no longer be a secret, for it has been unsealed by Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. Before His death, there was a mystery that no man knew anything about. But by His death, resurrection, and ascension, He has fulfilled all of God's requirements. Thus, as we shall see, He has opened the mystery and revealed it to John, charging him to commit it to writing. Therefore, this book is just the opened secret, or scroll, in God's hand. It is no longer a secret—it is an open mystery. Now, as we are reading the book of Revelation, we are reading the contents of the scroll that has been unsealed by the ascended Christ. This is a great matter, and few Christians are aware of it. Most Christians have the book of Revelation, but not many have the unsealed scroll, because they do not realize that Revelation is the unsealed scroll.

II. NO ONE WORTHY

In 5:2-4 we see that no one in heaven, on earth, or under the earth was worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. When John first saw the scroll, it was still sealed. If we had been there, we, like John, certainly would have been desirous to see what was contained in that scroll. But John "wept much because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it." If actually no one worthy was found in the whole universe, we would surely need to weep, for the whole universe would be vanity, with none qualified to unveil its secret. If there were no Christ in this universe, the whole universe would weep. But there is Christ, and we do not need to weep.

Message 19 - WORLD HISTORY FROM CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO THE END OF THIS AGE (SEALS ONE THROUGH FOUR)

In this message we come to the first four seals with the four horses and the four riders (6:1-8). (White Horse – Gospel; Red Horse – War; Black Horse - Famine, Pale Horse - Death)

Message 20 - **THE CRY OF THE MARTYRED SAINTS AND GOD'S ANSWER TO IT (SEALS FIVE AND SIX)**

In this message we shall consider the fifth and sixth seals. According to the record of Revelation, the first four seals are not consecutive. Rather, they are simultaneous. They all began to take place at nearly the same time and they will conclude at the same time. It is very similar to a four-horse race where the horses begin and end at almost the same time. The seven seals may be divided into two groups consisting of the first four seals and the last three seals. While the first four seals are not consecutive, the last three seals are consecutive.

As we have seen, the first four seals unveil the new testament age, which is an age of gospel preaching. Between Christ's ascension and His coming back, the preaching of the gospel will continue. The other main things—war, famine, and death—work together for the advancement of the preaching of the gospel. God has a unique purpose in this age—to have the gospel preached that the church might be produced and built up for the fulfillment of His eternal plan. We need to have this overall view. But the great men on earth do not have this view. Not even the kings and the presidents of the nations know what they are doing. But we know. Everything these rulers do helps the preaching of the gospel. God is sovereign in this matter.

The book of Revelation begins with the local churches with Christ in their midst and it ends with the New Jerusalem with Christ as its centrality and universality. Between these two ends of Revelation, we have the church age and the kingdom age. In the church age, the new testament age, God is doing one thing: He is producing the churches through the preaching of the full gospel. All twenty-seven books of the New Testament are included in the full gospel. God's purpose is not merely to save a group of pitiful sinners. This concept is too low, and many of the philosophical people refuse to accept it. They need to see that the preaching of the gospel has a much higher purpose and that it is on the highest plane—producing the churches for the composition of the New Jerusalem.

I. THE CRY OF THE MARTYRED SAINTS—THE FIFTH SEAL

The seven seals are firstly divided into four and three, and secondly into six and one. The number four signifies the creatures, as symbolized by the four living creatures, and the number six signifies creation, since creation was finished in six days. The number three signifies the Triune God, and the number one the unique God. Hence, both four plus three and six plus one indicate that the seven seals, through God's judgment, bring God's creation with all the creatures to God.

The fifth seal discloses the Christian martyrdom from the first century to the time near the end of this age. (It may include the martyrdom of the old testament saints—Matt. 23:34-36.) While the gospel is being preached, as indicated by the first seal, there is always the martyrdom of the faithful saints.

A. The Martyrdom

During the age of gospel preaching, many saints have been martyred because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Stephen, Peter, and nearly all the other apostles were martyred. The apostle John was exiled, and Paul was imprisoned and later sentenced to death. Throughout the centuries, wherever the preaching of the gospel has gone, there has been martyrdom. Thousands of those who have been faithful to the Lord's testimony have been martyred. In a sense, even Brother Nee was martyred. Nearly all my older co-workers suffered martyrdom during the past twenty-six years by being kept in prison until they died.

The martyrdom of the saints is not because of their opposition to any human rules, but because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The word of God is the glad tidings, the gospel, they proclaim to people. The testimony of Jesus is the life they live. Human society with human culture is wholly under the evil influence of Satan, as it says in 1 John 5:19, "the whole world lies in the evil one." Both the preaching of the word of God and the life of the testimony of Jesus are against the satanic trend in the world. Certainly Satan hates this. Hence, whenever and wherever the saints preach the word of God and live the testimony of Jesus, Satan instigates people to persecute them, even to death. This is a fighting, not between men and the saints, but between Satan and God. The time will come when God will avenge the saints by exercising His righteous judgment over the earth which is under Satan's evil influence.

B. The Cry

Revelation 6:10, speaking of "the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they held," says, "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, will You not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" In 6:9 we see that the souls are underneath the altar. This points to the sacrifices killed on the altar. When a sacrifice was killed on the altar, its blood flowed down to and under the bottom of the altar. The soul of the flesh is in the blood (Lev. 17:11). That the soul of the martyred saints are under the altar indicates that, in the eyes of God, they have all been offered to God as sacrifices on the altar and that their blood, their life, was shed there. Now their position is under the altar. In figure, the altar is in the outer court of

the tabernacle and the temple, and the outer court signifies the earth. Hence, “underneath the altar” is underneath the earth, where the souls of the martyred saints are. It is the paradise where the Lord Jesus went after His death (Luke 23:43). It is in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40), and should be the comfortable section of Hades, where Abraham is (Acts 2:27; Luke 16:22-26).

Today, the martyred saints are in paradise underneath the altar, that is, underneath the earth. It is altogether erroneous to say that these saints are in heaven.

C. The Lord’s Approval

Verse 11 says, “And to each of them was given a white robe; and it was said to them that they should rest yet a little while, until the number of their fellow slaves and their brothers who are about to be killed even as they were should be completed also.” The white robe here signifies that their martyrdom has been approved by God. Those “who are about to be killed” refers to those who will be martyred during the great tribulation (20:4).

According to the word, “yet a little while until the number...should be completed,” this cry of the martyred saints should transpire near the end of this age. We are still in the first four seals. The fifth seal has not yet come. However, I believe that we are close to the time of the fifth seal.

II. GOD’S ANSWER—THE SIXTH SEAL

A. The Beginning of Supernatural Calamities

The sixth seal (6:12-17), which marks the beginning of supernatural calamities, is God’s answer to the cry of the martyred saints in the fifth seal. After the opening of the sixth seal, the Lord comes in to shake the earth and the hosts of the heavens. The earth will quake greatly, the sun will become black as sackcloth made of hair, the moon will become as blood, the stars of heaven will fall to the earth as a fig tree casting its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind, the heaven will recoil as a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island will move out of its place (6:12-14). This great shaking will be a warning to the dwellers on the earth. It will warn them to repent and return to God. God may seem to be saying to them, “You earth dwellers are only for yourselves. You don’t care for Me. Now is My time to shake the earth as a warning to you.” While some people have blasphemously said that they are God, the Lord will shake the earth and the heaven as a reminder to them that He is God. What a terrible shaking this will be! The earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars will all be affected.

B. The Reaction of the Earth's Dwellers

In verses 15 through 17 we see the reaction of the earth's dwellers. They will hide themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains and they will beg the mountains and rocks to hide them from the face of God and from the wrath of the Lamb. Verse 15 reveals the feeling of their conscience, for they fear the coming of the judgment of God, considering that the great day of the wrath of God and of the Lamb has come. However, the sixth seal is not the proclamation of God concerning the coming of His judgment. Rather, it is a warning to the dwellers of the earth. The kings and all the great, rich, and noble men of the earth will be shocked by this earthquake and will think that the day of the wrath of God and of the Lamb has come. Actually, this will not yet be that day, it will be just a foretaste and a warning to them to repent. In this warning God seems to be saying, "Return to Me. Do not say that you are God. You are the poor dwellers on the earth created by Me. I created the sun, the moon, and the stars for your living. But you forget Me and oppose and blaspheme Me. Now is the time for you to be warned in order that you might repent."

C. The Significance of This Calamity

The significance of this calamity is that it is a warning to the earth's dwellers. It is not yet the actual wrath of the Lord. It is God's answer to the cry of the martyred saints in the fifth seal and it reveals that God is soon to come in to avenge them and to vindicate Himself. God is coming to avenge the blood of His dear saints.

III. THE WARNING BEING BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD

The sixth seal, being an introduction to the great tribulation, is a warning before the day of the Lord. **According to Joel 2:30-31, there will not be much difference in time between the sixth seal and the first five trumpets (8:6-11).** Joel 2:30-31 firstly has the **blood** of the first and second trumpets, the **fire** of the first, second, and third trumpets (8:7-10), and the **smoke** of the fifth trumpet (9:1-3), and then the **sun and the moon** of the sixth seal. Chapter 9:4 compared with 7:3 indicates that the fifth trumpet is very close to the sixth seal.

Joel 2:30-32 (30) And I will **show wonders** in the heavens and on earth: / **Blood** and **fire** and **pillars of smoke**. (31) The **sun** shall be turned into darkness, / And the **moon** into blood, / Before the great and terrible / Day of Jehovah comes. (32) And everyone who calls on the name of Jehovah shall be saved; / For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem will be an escape, / As Jehovah has said, / Even for the remnant / Whom Jehovah calls.

Revelation 7:3 (3) Saying, Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we seal the slaves of our God upon their foreheads. (fifth trumpet)

Revelation 9:4 (4) And it was said to them that they should not harm the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree, but men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (sixth seal)

There will be two calamities in the shakings and changes of the earth and of the hosts in heaven. The first will occur before the day of the Lord, before the great tribulation (Joel 3:11-16; 2:30-31; Luke 21:11). And the second will occur after the day of the Lord, after the great tribulation (Matt. 24:29-30; Luke 21:25-26). What is covered in the sixth seal is the first calamity. It may be considered not only as a warning but also as an introduction to the coming great tribulation. Following the sixth seal, at the opening of the seventh seal, are the first four trumpets as indicators that the great tribulation is coming (8:1-2, 6-13). Then the great tribulation will be carried out in the last three trumpets (9:1-21; 11:14-19).

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE - GOD'S PRESERVATION OF HIS PEOPLE

In the book of Revelation there are a number of insertions, and chapter seven is the first of them. This chapter is not the continuation of chapter six. It is an insertion between the sixth and seventh seals, showing how God cares for His people while He is about to execute His judgment upon the earth. Chapter eight is the continuation of chapter six. At the end of chapter six we have the sixth seal, and in the beginning of chapter eight we have the seventh. The opening of the seventh seal will bring in the seven trumpets, the last three of which constitute the great tribulation (8:1-2). But before this transpires, God will seal the Israelites whom He intends to preserve (7:3).

God will preserve His two peoples—the **Israelites** and the **redeemed saints**. Why does this insertion regarding God's preservation of His people come here? **Because in the sixth seal we see the warning of the coming tribulation. As we have seen, the fifth seal is the cry of the martyred saints for revenge, and the sixth seal is God's answer to this cry, which is also a warning to the dwellers on the earth that the tribulation will soon come.** Since the ascension of Christ, there have been a great number of earthquakes and other calamities. All these have been **natural calamities**. However, **beginning at the opening of the sixth seal, the calamities will no longer be natural but supernatural.** Both natural and supernatural calamities are God's punishment upon the earth. This rebellious earth deserves God's punishment, and the punishing hand of God has never been removed from it. To a certain extent, God punishes the earth for His purpose. Since the ascension of Christ, God has been punishing the earth.

One aspect of God's punishment is seen in the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by Titus and his armies... That destruction was a terrible punishment which was accompanied by famine, pestilence, and death. After that, throughout the centuries, **natural calamities** have been and will be used by God to punish the earth until the sixth seal.

At the time of the sixth seal, the calamities **will be changed from natural calamities to supernatural ones**. The earth will be shaken, and the sun, moon, and stars will be damaged. These calamities will be a preface to the seventh seal. When the seventh seal is executed, the situation will be terrible and no one will be able to bear it. Shortly after the opening of the seventh seal, the first trumpet will be sounded, and "the third part of the earth" will be burnt up (8:7). At the sounding of the second trumpet, "the third part of the sea" will become blood (8:8). At the sounding of the third trumpet, a great star will fall upon "the third part of the rivers and upon the springs of waters" and "the third part of the waters" will become wormwood (8:10-11). At the sounding of the fourth trumpet, "the third part of the sun and the third part of the moon and the third part of the stars" will be smitten "so that the third part of them might be darkened" (8:12). God made the earth for man to live on. The sun, moon, and stars all help to maintain life on earth. But because the dwellers on earth have been so insolent toward Him for centuries, the time will come when God will no longer endure it. He will come in to judge the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun, moon, and stars. The earth is for human existence, and every form of life on earth is for man's benefit. The animals, vegetables, and minerals are all for the existence of mankind. These did not come into being by accident, but were planned and created by God. For example, there is no air on the moon, but there is air on earth. Around the globe is a layer of air which the Bible calls the firmament (Gen. 1:7). The earth is the planet with a firmament. **God created it in such a way so that it would produce the supplies for maintaining human life. The air, sunshine, and water are all necessary for man's existence. But after God judges the earth and heaven, the earth will no longer be a suitable place for man to live on.**

At this juncture we need to consider the second chapter of Joel. Joel 2 says that certain things will occur before the day of the Lord. If you read New Testament prophecy along with the Old Testament prophecies, you will see that there is a time called the day of the Lord. This is the great tribulation. The day of the Lord means the day of the Lord's wrath, the day of His coming in to interfere with the world by means of supernatural calamities. The day of the Lord will be terrible. Several prophets of the Old Testament mention the day of the Lord, and they all indicate that it will be a dreadful day (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5). The sixth seal will

be before the day of the Lord, meaning that it will be before the great tribulation. The great tribulation will begin at the sounding of the fifth trumpet. The first four trumpets are the preliminary to the great tribulation. It is similar to starting an automobile. First the ignition is turned on, the motor starts, and then the car will run. In like manner, after the warning of the sixth seal, the first four trumpets will be the preliminary to the great tribulation. But, like an automobile which is warming up but has not yet moved, the four trumpets are the preparation for the great tribulation. But even these trumpets will cause severe suffering. The damage to the earth, waters, and the heavenly hosts will be greater than that caused by the earthquake of the sixth seal. From the time of the sixth seal, there will be nothing good for man on earth.

The New Testament indicates that the early overcomers, such as the man-child and the firstfruits, will be taken away from the earth shortly before the sixth seal. However, we cannot calculate the exact time. But according to Revelation, Matthew, and other portions of the Word, we can say that the first kind of rapture, the raptures of the man-child and the firstfruits, will take place before the sixth seal. Recall that the Lord promised to the church in Philadelphia to keep them out of the hour of trial which will come upon all the inhabited earth (3:10). The Lord's lovers and seekers will be taken away before the sixth seal. Immediately after the opening of the sixth seal, we have chapter seven, an insertion revealing that before the great tribulation God will do two things to preserve His people: He will seal the chosen remnant of Israel and He will begin the rapture of the redeemed ones of the church.

I. THE SEALING OF THE CHOSEN REMNANT OF ISRAEL

Revelation 7:1 says, "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding fast the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth nor on the sea nor on any tree." This is the insertion between the sixth and seventh seals, showing how God cares for His people while He is about to execute His judgments upon the earth. The winds here are for God's judgments (Jonah 1:4; Isa. 11:15; Jer. 22:22; 49:36; 51:1). The next verse says, "And I saw another Angel ascend from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and He cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and sea." The "another Angel" here refers to Christ, as also in 8:3; 10:1; and 18:1. In the Old Testament Christ was called "the Angel of the Lord," who was God Himself (Gen. 22:11-12; Exo. 3:2-6; Judg. 6:11-24; Zech. 1:11-12; 2:8-11; 3:1-7). Here in the New Testament He is again called the Angel.

Although I love Israel, I feel very sad for them because, according to prophecy and their present situation, they have returned to the land of their fathers in unbelief. They

still cling to their old religion, and they do not believe in God according to His new testament economy. They are actually in rebellion against Him. When the Lord Jesus came, God changed the dispensation from that of keeping the law to that of believing in the Lord Jesus. But the Jews would not accept this change and they refused to turn from keeping the law to believing in the Lord Jesus. This was their rebellion, stubbornness, and disobedience. God has borne with them for centuries, and according to His sovereignty, they have returned and have been restored as a nation again, but they are still in unbelief. They do not believe in the Lord Jesus. According to some reliable information I have received, the government of Israel is doing everything possible to exclude any type of Christian activity. They do not want any Christian missionaries to carry on mission work. The prophecies regarding Israel indicate that they will remain in unbelief until the last day. God, however, is sovereign and He will always take care of the nation of Israel, not for their sake but for His economy. He knows that among the unbelieving Jews there are some faithful ones, and before He will actually judge the earth with supernatural calamities, He will seal them.

A. Before the First Four Trumpets

The first trumpet is to harm the earth and the trees (8:7), the second trumpet is to harm the sea (8:8-9), the third trumpet is to harm the rivers (8:10-11), and the fourth trumpet is to harm the heavenly hosts (8:12). Before the executing of the first four trumpets, God will seal His chosen Israelites to preserve them from the supernatural calamities which will be carried out by these trumpets.

B. Preserved on Earth Especially from the Torment of the Fifth Trumpet

The first four trumpets will harm only the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the heavenly hosts. It is the fifth trumpet that will torment men directly. God's sealing of His chosen Israelites is especially to preserve them from the torment of the fifth trumpet (9:4).

C. Twelve Thousand of Each of the Twelve Tribes Sealed

In 7:4-8 we see that God will seal one hundred forty-four thousand "out of every tribe of the sons of Israel," sealing twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes. These are the Israelites who will keep the commandments of God during the great tribulation (12:17; 14:12). Altogether, one hundred forty-four thousand faithful Israelites will be sealed on their foreheads. I do not know what kind of seal this will be, but it will be a mark recognizable to the angels sent to judge the earth. This is

God's way of preserving His chosen Israelites while He is executing His judgment upon the earth.

II. THE RAPTURE OF THE REDEEMED ONES OF THE CHURCH

In addition to the chosen remnant of Israel, God has another people—the redeemed saints of the church (7:9-17). In this insertion we see a vision revealing how God preserves His redeemed saints throughout all the tribulations. The way God preserves the chosen remnant of the children of Israel is to seal them and to leave them on earth. While the Israelites are God's earthly people, the Christians are God's heavenly people. God promised to give Abraham people like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the seashore (Gen. 22:17). The heavenly people, the Christians, are the stars, and the earthly people, the Israelites, are the sand of the seashore. In order to preserve His earthly people, God seals them and keeps them on earth. He will not take them from the earth to the heavens. However, God's way of preserving His redeemed saints is not to keep them on earth but to take them away by means of rapture. The rapture will not only occur once or be just of one kind. There will be at least two or three kinds of raptures. Eventually, all the redeemed saints in the church will be raptured from earth to heaven. The insertion in this vision concerning the church gives us an overall view from the time of rapture until eternity. In other words, Revelation 7 ends with eternity. For eternity, the whole church will be under God's care and under the Lamb's shepherding.

A. Beginning before the Sixth Seal

God's rapture of His redeemed saints will begin with the first overcomers, comprising the man-child in 12:5 and the firstfruits in 14:1-6. This should be before the sixth seal, because the sixth seal will be the beginning of supernatural calamities executed by God as the "trial which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth" (3:10). God's rapture of His redeemed saints will continue with the two witnesses in 11:12, the late overcomers in 15:2, and the harvest in 14:14-16 (the majority of the believers who will pass through most of the great tribulation), until all the saints will be raptured to participate in God's care and the Lamb's shepherding for eternity.

B. A Great, Innumerable Multitude

Verse 9 says, "After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number." The great multitude consists of the redeemed ones throughout all generations from the nations, who are innumerable and who constitute the church (5:9; Rom. 11:25; Acts 15:14, 19).

C. From Nations, Tribes, People, and Tongues

This great multitude consists of those who have been purchased with the blood of the Lamb from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue (7:9; 5:9) to be the constituents of the church.

D. Having Come out of the Great Tribulation with Palm Branches in Their Hands

Speaking of the great multitude mentioned in verse 9, one of the elders said, “These are those who come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (v. 14). The great tribulation here is different from the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:21. The great tribulation here is tribulation in a general sense. All of God’s redeemed people have passed through certain tribulations, sufferings, persecutions, and afflictions. No Christian can avoid these things. In our spirit, we Christians are a people of enjoyment. But, on the physical side, we are a suffering people. But one day we shall come triumphantly out of the great tribulation and stand before the throne and before the Lamb. All those in the great multitude in this chapter have palm branches in their hands, signifying their victory over tribulation (cf. John 12:13), which they have undergone for the Lord’s sake (v. 14). Palm trees are also the sign of satisfaction through watering (Exo. 15:27). Palm branches were used for the feast of tabernacles, in which the people of God rejoiced for the satisfaction of their enjoyment (Lev. 23:40; Neh. 8:15). The feast of tabernacles was a type which will be fulfilled by this great multitude of God’s redeemed ones enjoying the eternal feast of tabernacles. This multitude “shall flourish like the palm tree” in the temple of God (Psa. 92:12-13).

E. Standing before the Throne and before the Lamb

“Standing before the throne” indicates that the great multitude of the redeemed ones must have been raptured to the presence of God. “Standing before the Lamb” corresponds to “stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36), which clearly indicates the rapture. Since this is mentioned immediately after the opening of the sixth seal, it also implies that the rapture of the believers should begin to transpire before the sixth seal. The record in verses 9 through 17 composes in a general way a scene from the rapture of the believers to their enjoyment in eternity.

F. Clothed in Blood-washed White Robes

In verse 9 we see that this great multitude is “clothed in white robes,” for they “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (v. 14). *Robes*,

being plural, signify the righteousness of their conduct. *White* indicates that their conduct is pure and approved by God through the washing in the blood of the Lamb.

G. Praising God and the Lamb

Verse 10 says, “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb.” The loud praise mentioning only salvation indicates that the praisers are the saved ones. The great multitude, those who are saved, are grateful for God’s salvation.

H. Serving God Day and Night in His Temple

Verse 15 says, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple.” This great multitude has come out of the great tribulation into a heavenly state, into the temple of God where they serve Him day and night.

I. God Spreading His Tabernacle over Them

Verse 15 also says that “He who sits upon the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.” The great multitude will enjoy God and His care. He will spread His tabernacle over them, meaning that He will make His dwelling place their dwelling place. God will cause all His redeemed ones to dwell together with Him. In a very positive sense, God will even be our dwelling place, our tabernacle. As He spreads Himself over us as a tabernacle, we shall enjoy Him to the uttermost. Christ is the tabernacle of God (John 1:14), and the New Jerusalem as the ultimate enlargement of Christ will be God’s eternal tabernacle (21:2-3) where all God’s redeemed ones will dwell with Him forever. God will overshadow them with Himself as embodied in Christ. Christ, as the embodiment of God, will be their tabernacle. The portrait in verses 15 through 17, similar to what is portrayed in 21:3-4 and 22:3-5, is of eternity.

J. The Lamb Shepherding Them and Guiding Them to Springs of Waters of Life

Verses 16 and 17 say, “They shall not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, neither shall the sun beat upon them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them and shall guide them to springs of waters of life.” Here we see that the Lamb will shepherd them and guide them to springs of waters of life. Shepherding includes feeding. Under the shepherding of Christ, “I shall not want” (Psa. 23:1). The Lamb will also lead us to springs of waters of life. In eternity, we shall drink of many springs and enjoy many different waters. How good this is!

K. God Wiping away Every Tear from Their Eyes

Verse 17 also says that “God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Tears are a sign of dissatisfaction. Waters of life are for satisfaction. Because the Lamb will supply them with waters of life for their satisfaction, they will have no tears of dissatisfaction. The waters of life shall be supplied, and the water of tears shall be wiped away. There will be no tears, hunger, or thirst—just enjoyment.

L. The Angels, the Elders, and the Four Living Creatures Worshipping God

Verses 11 and 12 say, “And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” This is similar to the word in Luke 15:7, where there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Here the angels say, “Amen” to the redeemed ones’ praise of salvation.

In this chapter we see how God takes care of His people. When He is about to judge the earth, He will seal His earthly people and rapture His heavenly people. While the chosen remnant of Israel is sealed, the believers are regenerated, for God has put Himself into us as life. He does not simply put a mark on our forehead; He puts Himself into us as life. Thus, we are not His earthly people but His heavenly people. Would you rather be a regenerated Christian or a sealed Israelite? We Christians do not have this seal—we have God in us, which is much better. Unlike the chosen remnant of Israel, we shall not remain on earth. Rather, we shall be preserved by being taken away to the presence of God. We shall be in that eternal state enjoying God’s divine and eternal care and also enjoying the Lamb’s eternal shepherding. How pleasant that will be! The sealed remnant of Israel will be the better people, but we shall be the best people.

However, if we would be taken away to God’s presence, we must be mature. If we are still tender and unripe, God will not take us away. Instead, He will leave us in the field to suffer until we have ripened. While all the church people will be taken away, there is nonetheless a condition, the condition of maturity and of ripeness. We all must ripen and mature. This is the condition of our being taken away from this earth by God. This is fully and adequately revealed in the book of Revelation. In chapter fourteen, for example, we clearly see the firstfruits and the harvest. In that portion of the Word, we are told definitely that after the field has ripened, the harvest comes. Thus, we all need to grow. It is impossible for people to grow in religion because there is no food or nourishment there. In a sense, there is not even a field there. The only place where Christians can grow today is the church, for in the church is the pasture—Christ—for the flock to feed on and receive nourishment for growth. By the

Lord's sovereign grace, we are enjoying this pasture. We all can testify that since coming into the church life, we have been in the green pasture with the tender grass. Day by day we are feeding on the tender grass which is Christ Himself. Here in the church life we feed on Christ and grow. Here we take all the tender nourishment into our being. Thank the Lord that we are growing day by day. Praise the Lord that we are growing and that He is preparing us for our rapture. We do not expect to face the tribulation. We are growing into maturity, growing into rapture, growing into His presence. One day, we shall be there.

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE –

THE SCENE IN HEAVEN AFTER THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE JUDGMENT UPON THE EARTH, THE SEA, THE RIVERS, THE SUN, THE MOON, AND THE STARS— THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

We come in this message to 8:1-12. In this chapter we have the opening of the seventh seal (vv. 1-2), the scene in heaven after the opening of the seventh seal (vv. 3-5), and the sounding of the first four trumpets (vv. 6-12).

I. THE SEVENTH SEAL

The seventh seal, which will begin before the great tribulation, consists of the seven trumpets, for the seven trumpets are the content of the seventh seal. If we would understand the prophecy of this book, we must realize that the secret of God's economy is sealed with seven seals. As we have pointed out, the scroll in chapter five is the new testament enacted by Christ with His precious blood. This new testament is the scroll of God's economy sealed with seven seals which are the contents of the scroll. We have seen that the first four seals are not consecutive but simultaneous and that the fifth and sixth seals are consecutive. The seventh seal includes everything from after the sixth seal to eternity future. Thus, the seventh seal, consisting of the seven trumpets, is all-inclusive. As we shall see, the seven bowls are a part of the seventh trumpet. The seventh seal consists of the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet consists, in part, of the seven bowls. Both the seventh seal and the seven trumpets run to eternity. The seventh trumpet will close this age and usher in the kingdom, the new heaven, and the new earth.

We must forsake the concept that the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls are consecutive. No, to repeat, the seven trumpets are the content of the seventh seal, and the seven bowls are a part of the seventh trumpet. This is the key to understanding the prophecy of this book. Only God could have written the book of Revelation because only He has the wisdom to compose it in such a marvelous way.

Who else has the wisdom to write a book with such signs and symbols as that of the four horses which fully cover the history of the past twenty centuries? That the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls are not consecutive reveals God's wisdom in writing this book. If we do not have the light to see this arrangement, although we may read Revelation again and again, we shall still be confused.

II. THE SCENE IN HEAVEN AFTER THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

In 8:1-2 we see the seven trumpets brought in as the answer to the saints' prayer in the fifth seal. The seals are opened secretly, whereas the trumpets are sounded openly.

A. Silence in Heaven about Half an Hour

When the Lamb "opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about half an hour" (v. 1). This silence indicates solemnity. At the opening of the seventh seal, all heaven becomes silent because the age is about to be changed. The period before the opening of the seventh seal was the age of God's toleration. For the sake of His purpose of preaching the gospel to produce the churches to fulfill His eternal plan, God has been tolerating the sinful situation on earth. But with the opening of the seventh seal, the age of toleration is terminated and another age is brought in. This is the age of God's wrath. God is now coming in to intervene in the rebellious and sinful situation on earth. Because this occasion is so solemn, heaven becomes silent, an indication that something serious is about to take place.

B. Christ Ministering in Heaven as the High Priest

1. As "Another Angel"

2. Offering the Saints' Prayers to God

3. Casting Fire to the Earth to Execute God's Judgment upon the Earth

Verse 5 says, "And the Angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar and cast it to the earth; and there were thunders and voices and lightnings and an earthquake." This implies the answer to the prayers of the saints, especially the prayer in the fifth seal mentioned in 6:9-11 and the prayer mentioned in Luke 18:7-8. The prayer of the saints in this chapter must be for the judgment of the earth which opposes God's economy. The answer to the saints' prayers is the execution of God's judgment upon the earth by the following seven trumpets. To cast fire to the earth is to execute God's judgment upon the earth. Therefore, the thunders, voices, lightnings, and the earthquake come as signs of God's judgment.

God's judgment upon the earth is the answer to the prayers of the saints with Christ as the incense. Although the sixth seal has been opened and the seven trumpets are ready to be sounded, nothing happens until Christ comes to offer the saints' prayers to God with Himself as the incense. At that time, there are thunders, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake. This indicates that while God has the intention of executing His judgment upon the earth, there is still the need of the saints to cooperate with Him with their prayers. God needs His saints to pray that He might execute His judgment. If you read Luke 18, you will see that the Lord Jesus says that at a certain time the saints on earth will cry to God to come in to deal with the situation and to vindicate Himself. At the end of this age, people will be so rebellious against God that they will even declare to the whole universe that they are God. While God has been tolerating this, some of the faithful saints will no longer bear it and will pray, "O sovereign Lord, how long will You bear with this? Will You tolerate this rebellion forever? How long will it be before You come in to vindicate Yourself and avenge us? How long will it be until all the earth will know that You are the Lord?" Eventually, there will be a need for this kind of prayer. I believe the time is coming when we shall all be pressed to pray like this. I cannot charge you to pray this way today because you are not under this kind of pressure. But one day the pressure will be upon us and we shall be burdened to pray in this way. This will indicate that the end is at hand because our spirit will not tolerate the situation any longer. Then we shall pray to the Lord to vindicate Himself and to let all the rebellious ones know that He is God. When we pray like this, the Angel sent by God will minister to God with our prayer, adding to it Himself as the incense. God will certainly answer this prayer, and there will be thunders, voices, lightnings, and an earthquake. That will simply be the beginning of God's judgment upon this rebellious earth. This will take place at the opening of the seventh seal when Christ, the other Angel, will minister as our High Priest to bring to God our prayers mingled with His incense, and will be the One sent to execute God's judgment on earth.

Verse 6 says, "And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to trumpet." The seven trumpets were given to the seven angels (v. 2). But it is after the prayers of the saints in verses 3 through 5 have been answered that the seven angels are prepared to trumpet. God's will in heaven requires the saints' prayer to carry it out on earth. The offering of the saints' prayers to God by Christ brings in the seven trumpets.

III. THE FIRST TRUMPET— THE JUDGMENT UPON THE EARTH

Verse 7 says, "And the first trumpeted: and there was hail and fire mingled with blood, and it was cast to the earth; and the third part of the earth was burnt up, and

the third part of the trees were burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.” When the angels begin to trumpet, everything in the universe will be turned upside down. The first trumpet will damage “the third part of the earth.” Note that this verse does not say “a third,” but “the third part.” This means that a certain part of the earth, “the third part,” will be damaged. While the whole earth is sinful, some parts of the earth are particularly hellish, devilish, satanic, demonic, and evil. I do not believe that the third part of the earth will include the United States. The United States is sinful, but, unlike other parts of the earth, it is not devilishly sinful. Those regions of the earth that are so sinful will be “the third part.” Many people need to hear this word and be warned by it not to be so evil against God that their region becomes “the third part” of the earth, the region that will be fully damaged by God’s judgment. According to Revelation 9, God’s judgment of “the third part” will still be used to warn the rebellious world to repent.

IV. THE SECOND TRUMPET— THE JUDGMENT UPON THE SEA

In verses 8 and 9 we see the second trumpet: “And the second angel trumpeted: and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and the third part of the sea became blood, and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea and which had life died, and the third part of the ships were destroyed.” Here we see that the second trumpet will damage “the third part of the sea.” Some powerful nations are developing their navies in order to expand their ocean territory. Their aim in doing so is to commit evil against God. In the same principle as the judgment upon the earth in the first trumpet, God will judge the third part of the sea. Verse 9 especially mentions the destruction of the third part of the ships. That part of the sea which is defiled by evil against God will be damaged by God’s judgment.

V. THE THIRD TRUMPET— THE JUDGMENT UPON THE RIVERS AND UPON THE SPRINGS OF WATERS

Verses 10 and 11 describe the third trumpet: “And the third angel trumpeted: and a great star fell out of heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers and upon the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and the third part of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters because they were made bitter.” Again we see that the third part of the rivers and springs of waters will be damaged. Water is crucial to human life. The opposers of God and those who practice evil against Him still enjoy God’s creation. Although they partake of the water of God’s creation, they continue to oppose God. One day, God will seem to say, “Now I shall cause wormwood to fall out of heaven into your

water and it will become bitter.” God’s judgment here still has a limitation, for it is limited to the third part of the rivers and springs.

VI. THE FOURTH TRUMPET— THE JUDGMENT ON THE HEAVENLY HOSTS

In verse 12 we read of the fourth trumpet, the judgment on the heavenly hosts: “And the fourth angel trumpeted: and the third part of the sun and the third part of the moon and the third part of the stars were smitten, so that the third part of them might be darkened and the day should not appear for the third part of it, and the night likewise.” After the judgment of the earth, the sea, and the rivers, God’s judgment will smite the third part of the heavenly hosts, damaging the third part of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The part of the sun to be damaged will be that part which shines upon the evil nations. God knows this part, and it will be darkened.

II. SATAN FALLEN OUT OF HEAVEN TO THE EARTH

With this as a background, we come now to the fifth trumpet. Revelation 9:1 says, “And the fifth angel trumpeted, and I saw a star out of heaven fallen to the earth, and to him was given the key of the shaft of the abyss.” The star here refers to Satan, who will be cast down from heaven to earth. The angels are likened to stars (Job 38:7; Rev. 12:4). As the archangel, Satan was the daystar (Isa. 14:12, Heb.). In Luke 10:18 we see the judgment upon him. Here, and in 12:9-10, we see the execution of that judgment. The abyss is the dwelling place of the demons (Luke 8:31, translated *deep* in KJV).

When will Satan fall out of heaven to earth? The answer to this question is in chapter twelve. That chapter reveals that after the man-child is raptured to heaven, he will fight against Satan and seem to say to him, “Satan, now that we are here, there is no place for you. You must be cast down.” According to that chapter, Satan will fall from heaven at the beginning of the last three and one-half years. We have pointed out that this is a strong proof that the great tribulation will not begin before then, for, prior to this, Satan will still be in heaven.

When Satan falls from heaven to earth, the key of the abyss will be given to him that he may open the abyss to release the demon-possessed locusts to torment man for five months.

III. THE LOCUSTS

Because the great tribulation begins with the first woe at the sounding of the fifth trumpet, it includes neither the sixth seal nor the first four trumpets. The sixth seal

will be a supernatural calamity, and the first four trumpets will be judgments upon the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the heavenly hosts. But these judgments are not a part of the great tribulation. The first four trumpets are very severe, but they do not injure man directly. Following them will come the great tribulation which will directly torment man. Prior to the fifth trumpet, man will not be touched directly; only the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the heavenly hosts will be directly damaged. This may be considered as a preliminary to the coming great tribulation. God's judgment of the earth, the sea, the waters, and the heavens is a warning to man. At the time of the fifth trumpet, man himself will be directly tormented.

Verses 3 through 5 say, "And out of the smoke came forth locusts to the earth, and authority was given to them as the scorpions of the earth have authority. And it was said to them that they should not injure the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, except men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them, not that they should kill them, but that they should be tormented five months; and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man." The locusts here are not like the locusts in Exodus 10:12-15, because they have tails like scorpions and stings and they injure man (v. 10). They must be demon-possessed ones, because they come out of the smoke which issues from the dwelling place of the demons (v. 2). The plagues of the first four trumpets are not directly upon man, whereas the woes of the last three trumpets are. Those who will not be injured by the demon-possessed locusts are the Israelites who have the seal of God on their foreheads (7:3-8).

In verses 7 through 10 we see the characteristics of these locusts. Verses 7 and 9 are very similar to Joel 2:4-5, 25, and 1:6, words spoken concerning Israel. This, with the fact that the Israelites need to be sealed by God to escape the injury of the locusts, may indicate that the woe of the fifth trumpet is especially upon the Israelites. Verse 7 says, "And the likenesses of the locusts were like horses prepared for war, and on their heads as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as faces of men." These locusts are like an army, similar to the locusts mentioned in the book of Joel, where we are told that God will send an army of locusts. While the locusts in Revelation 9 are not to be identified with the locusts in Joel, they are related. The likenesses of the locusts are like horses prepared for war, and they have crowns like gold on their heads. Their hair is as the hair of women, and their teeth are like the teeth of lions (v. 8). They have breastplates as breastplates of iron, and "the sound of their wings" is as "the sound of the chariots of many horses rushing into battle" (v. 9).

Verse 10 says that “they have tails like scorpions, and stings.” In the Bible, scorpions signify demons, the evil spirits that follow Satan. In Luke 10:19 the Lord said, “Behold, I have given you the authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.” We, the believers in Christ, have overcome the scorpions, Satan’s demonic servants. Verse 10 also says that “in their tails is their authority to injure men five months.” Although the torment of the first woe will damage man directly, the time will still be limited by God to a period of five months. The torment will be so excruciating that “in those days men shall seek death and shall by no means find it; and they shall long to die, and death flees from them” (v. 6). During these five months, those who are tormented by these dreadful, demon-possessed locusts would rather die than live. Surely the shaking of the earth and the blackening of the sun are nothing compared to this. This is the first of the three woes announced by the eagle from mid-heaven in 8:13.

IV. THE ANTICHRIST

Speaking of the locusts, verse 11 says, “They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he has the name Apollyon.” The angel of the abyss is the beast, the Antichrist, who will come out of the pit of the abyss (11:7; 17:8). In Hebrew the angel of the abyss is called Abaddon, which means destruction, as in Job 26:6; 28:22; and Proverbs 15:11. In Greek he will have the name Apollyon, which means destroyer. The Antichrist will do much destroying (Dan. 8:23-25).

Antichrist is a special person, being the composite of two persons: the spirit of Caesar Nero and the body of another Caesar of the Roman Empire. Nero began the persecution of the Christians in the first century, and his is the spirit that is kept in the abyss until the day it will be released to enter into the body of another Caesar. The Caesar into which this spirit will enter will be killed and will be resurrected with the spirit of Caesar Nero. This will be Antichrist. Satan will then release the locusts which will be organized as an army under the rule of the beast, Antichrist, who will be their king. The locusts will proceed to torment for five months those who do not have the mark of God on their foreheads.

According to the Bible, the universe is composed of three sections: the heavens, the earth, and the region under the earth (Phil. 2:10). At the beginning of the great tribulation, that is, after the first half of the last seven years, Satan will be cast down from heaven to earth and, simultaneously, Antichrist, the king of the devilish, demon-possessed locusts, will be released from the abyss and ascend to meet with Satan. Thus, a devilish spirit will meet a devilish man. Although they will come from two

directions, Satan from above and Antichrist from beneath, they will have one goal—to torment the mankind created by God. These two figures will come together and will collaborate in tormenting mankind as much as possible. We shall consider Antichrist in more detail when we come to chapters thirteen and seventeen.

As we have seen, the great tribulation will last three and one-half years. Before that time, there will be the supernatural calamities of the sixth seal and the first four trumpets. But according to Matthew 24:22, the great tribulation will be limited to a short time which will begin only after Antichrist erects the abomination of desolation in the Holy Place.

Where will you be when the great tribulation is taking place? Do not say, “As long as I am among the heavenly people, I will be all right.” As God’s heavenly people, we do not have the mark that is on the chosen remnant of the Israelites. The heavenly people should not be there, for God has no intention of leaving us on earth with the remnant of Israel. God’s intention is to rapture us to the heavens. However, if we would be raptured to the heavens, there is a condition to fulfill—we must be mature. God’s way of dealing with the Israelites differs from His way of dealing with the believers. If I were an Israelite, I might cry to God, and He might have mercy on me and put a mark upon my forehead. Then I would be preserved during the tribulation. But God does not seal the believers; instead, He raptures them away to the heavens. But for this, they must be mature.

My burden in this message is to point out when the great tribulation will begin and what will bring it about. As we have seen, Satan will be cast from heaven to earth and will have the key to open the abyss and release the demon-possessed locusts. At the same time, the beast, Antichrist, the king of the locusts, will be released from the abyss. The army of locusts will then torment people for five months. The torment will be so severe that people will want to die, but death will flee from them. Today, people seek to avoid death, yet death pursues them. At that time, they will desire death, but it will elude them. What suffering that will be! What great tribulation! However, this is only the first woe, the beginning of the great tribulation. The two other woes are yet to come.

The three woes of the last three trumpets constitute the great tribulation. The first woe will be the fifth trumpet, the second woe will be the sixth trumpet, and the last woe will be the seven bowls of the seventh trumpet. The three woes are introduced very solemnly. As we have seen, 8:13 says, “Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth because of the remaining sounds of the trumpet of the three angels who are

about to trumpet.” Revelation 9:12 says, “The first woe is past; behold, two woes are yet to come after these things.” Finally, introducing the last woe, 11:14 says, “The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is coming swiftly.” The sixth seal and the first four trumpets are merely a preliminary to the suffering of the great tribulation.

This great tribulation probably along with the supernatural calamities of the sixth seal and the first four trumpets is the “trial which is about to come on the whole inhabited earth, to try them who dwell on the earth” (3:10). The Lord promised the church in Philadelphia that He would keep them out of this hour. If you would be kept from the hour of trial, you must be ready to be raptured from this earth. We should not talk lightly concerning the Lord’s coming or the rapture of the saints. According to the pure Word, if we want to be raptured before the tribulation, we must be mature and ready for Him to take us from this earth. If we are mature and ready, then whatever happens on earth will not affect us. Praise the Lord that we have a way of escape.

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE - FURTHER JUDGMENT UPON MEN—THE SIXTH TRUMPET

Apart from the introduction (1:1-8) and the conclusion (22:6-21), the book of Revelation has three main sections. In 1:19 the Lord said to John, “Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which are about to take place after these things.” Thus, these three main sections are “the things seen” (1:9-20), “the things present” (2:1—3:22), and “the things to come” (4:1—22:5). In chapter one, there are the seven golden lampstands with Christ in their midst, which are “the things seen,” and in chapters two and three there are the seven churches, which are “the things present.” The section on “the things to come” begins with the scene in heaven in chapter four. As chapter five reveals, Christ comes into this scene as the unique One worthy to open the secret of God’s economy. As we have pointed out, the first four seals give a brief history of the world from Christ’s ascension until His coming back, portraying it as a four-horse race. Near to the end of this age, at the time of the fifth seal, the martyred saints will cry to God. The sixth seal will be God’s answer to their cry. He will shake the universe as a warning to those who dwell on the earth and as an introduction to the coming great tribulation. Following this, the seven trumpets will come in as the content of the seventh seal. The first four trumpets will be God’s judgment upon the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the heavenly host. Due to this judgment, the earth will no longer be a suitable place for man to dwell. Because the calamities of the sixth seal and the first four trumpets do not directly injure man, but only damage the earth, making it no longer suitable for man to live in, they are not a part of the great tribulation. As we pointed out in the

last message, the fifth trumpet marks the beginning of the great tribulation. The great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:21 is composed of the three woes of the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpets.

In the fifth trumpet mankind will be directly tormented. At the sounding of the fifth trumpet, Satan will come down from heaven to earth and Antichrist will come up from the abyss, and together they will cause men to be tormented for five months. Unlike the foregoing calamities, the torment of the demon-possessed locusts will directly touch man's being. As we have seen, at the beginning of the last three and one-half years, Antichrist will change his mind about the Israelites, will discontinue the worship of God, and will torment the man created by God for Himself. This will be the beginning of the great tribulation. This torment, as the first woe, will be so severe that no one will be able to bear it. Following this, there will be the second woe, which is the sixth trumpet.

I. THE LOOSING OF THE FOUR ANGELS

The second woe is more complicated than the first. It is not as clear cut as the woe of the fifth trumpet, which is caused by the collaboration of Satan and Antichrist. Revelation 9:13 and 14 say, "And the sixth angel trumpeted, and I heard a voice out of the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound at the great river Euphrates." The blood of the atonement was put upon the four horns of the golden altar, the incense altar, for atonement, that is, for redemption (Lev. 16:18). The voice which comes "out of the four horns of the golden altar" indicates that God's judgment upon man is based on the redemption of Christ; it is because men do not believe in Christ's redemption that God sends His judgment.

Verse 12 says, "The first woe is past; behold, two woes are yet to come after these things." Since it is at the fifth trumpet that Satan falls from heaven to earth to damage the earth and persecute the people of God for three and one-half years (12:10, 12-17, 6) and that at the same time (the last three and one-half years—13:5-7; 11:7), Antichrist comes up out of the abyss to collaborate with Satan to torment people, persecute the saints, and blaspheme God, and since it is also in the same last three and one-half years that the holy city Jerusalem is given to the Gentiles for destruction (11:2), the woe of the fifth trumpet must be the beginning of the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21). The second woe of the sixth trumpet and the third woe of the seventh trumpet (8:13; 9:12; 11:14) must also be parts of the great tribulation, which, probably with the damage caused by the sixth seal and the first four trumpets, will be

the trial on all the earth's dwellers (3:10). The two woes spoken of in verse 12 are the sixth and seventh trumpets (9:13-20; 11:14-15).

Undoubtedly, the four angels "which are bound at the great river Euphrates" are four evil, fallen, rebellious angels who followed Satan. The Bible does not indicate how long they have been bound there. Verse 15 says, "And the four angels were loosed who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they might kill the third part of men." Many understand this word according to their natural concept, thinking that "the hour and day and month and year" refer to the specific year, month, day, and hour when the killing of the third part of men will take place. But this is not the meaning. "For the hour and day and month and year" means that the four angels have been prepared unto the hour, plus the day, plus the month, plus the year—altogether thirteen months, one day, and one hour—for the killing of men. The killing will firstly last one hour, then one day, then one month, and then one year. It will be so severe and terrifying that, firstly, people will not expect it to last more than an hour. When, after an hour, it has not ended, they will expect it to last only for a day. After that, they will expect that surely it will not be prolonged more than a month. After a month transpires, then people will think that it could only continue for a year. Altogether, the time of this horrible killing will be thirteen months, one day, and one hour.

During World War II many of us suffered. When that war broke out on July 7, 1937, I was traveling in China. The next morning I read an express edition of the newspaper which said that war had broken out the previous night. From that time on, we began to suffer the war, firstly for four years. Then came the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the United States entered the war. As our suffering continued, we expected the war to end at any time. The news came again and again that after a certain period of time the war would probably end, but it still dragged on and we kept counting the days. During the war, I was imprisoned by the invading army for thirty days. As I suffered there in prison, I not only counted the days but also the hours, expecting surely that the next hour would see my release. After thirty days I was released, but I still had no freedom, and we continued to count the days. From this experience we can understand the meaning of "the hour and day and month and year" in 9:15. When the dreadful killing mentioned in chapter nine comes upon man, people will expect the slaughter to cease in an hour, then in a day, then in a month, and then in a year. The four angels that are bound by the river Euphrates are prepared to kill man for such a long period of time—for an hour, a day, a month, and a year.

II. TWO HUNDRED MILLION CAVALRY TROOPS

Verse 16 says, “And the number of the cavalry troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.” In order to kill the third part of men, the four angels will use two hundred million cavalry troops. The number of these horsemen is nearly that of the total population of the United States. The two hundred million horsemen will come from the rising of the sun (16:12), that is, from the east. The place on earth that produces the most horses is Mongolia. The Western world has invented so many modern methods of transportation, but these cavalry from the east will not use them. Instead, they will use horses. Travel on horseback does not require modern roads or railways. Perhaps each horseman will bring an extra horse for food and drink. It would be easy for these cavalry troops to hide themselves or to scatter when some would attack them by bombs, and it would be quite difficult to trace them. These troops will move westward, killing as they go. The riders on these horses will have “breastplates of fire and of hyacinth and of sulphur” (v. 17), and the heads of the horses will be as the heads of lions, and out of their mouths proceed fire, smoke, and sulphur (v. 17). Verse 19 says, “For the authority of the horses was in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents having heads, and with them they injure.” The horses’ tails here, being like serpents, are more poisonous than the locusts’ tails, which are like scorpions (v. 10). The locusts will only torment men for five months (vv. 5, 10), whereas the horses will kill the third part of men (vv. 15, 18). This means that the woe of the sixth trumpet will be more severe than that of the fifth.

As we have seen, the four angels will be loosed to stir up the two hundred million cavalry troops. These troops will move from east to west and, passing through the Euphrates, will come to the richest region on earth—the Middle East. Revelation 9:14 says that the four angels were bound at the great river Euphrates, and 16:12 says, “And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way of the kings from the rising of the sun might be prepared.” These two hundred million cavalry troops from “the rising of the sun” will join the war at Armageddon (16:10-16; 19:17-18).

Revelation 16:13 and 14 say, “And I saw, out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, doing signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole inhabited earth, to gather them to the war of the great day of God Almighty.” As verse 16 of the same chapter says, “And they gathered them to the place which in Hebrew is called, Armageddon.” This drying up of the Euphrates will be the result of the pouring out of the sixth bowl. By the mention of the river Euphrates in chapters nine and sixteen, we see that the two hundred million cavalry troops of the sixth trumpet are related to the sixth bowl of the seventh trumpet for the

gathering of the earthly armies to Armageddon. These two hundred million cavalry troops from the east and the armies from the north and the west will be gathered together there. God will assemble all the armies on earth to one place. This will be His wisdom. This will occur at the sixth bowl, which is a part of the woe of the seventh trumpet. At the same time, Satan will be doing His best to damage people, and Antichrist will be persecuting God's people and even fighting against God, doing everything possible to corrupt the earth. Thus, God will send His judgments upon the earth. **During the last three and one-half years, Satan and Antichrist will do their best to injure people, and God will judge the earth. What a dreadful place the world will be at that time!**

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX CHRIST COMING TO TAKE POSSESSION OF THE EARTH

In the past several messages we have been considering the content of the seven seals. In the book of Revelation, the number seven is composed two ways: four plus three and six plus one. Both the seven seals and the seven trumpets are composed this way. With the number seven there is addition but no multiplication. The number twelve, however, is the product of three times four. The seven seals mean that in God's complete move His creatures will be brought to the Triune God. God's creature—man—will also be brought to the unique God. Thus, the seven seals indicate God's complete move. The seven seals, which are God's complete move on the earth and in the universe, are the content of God's economy. The purpose of God's move is to bring His creatures, signified by the number four, to the Triune God, and to bring man, signified by the number six (man was created on the sixth day), to the unique God. The seven seals actually bring God's creation to Himself. The fall of man, which was caused by Satan, has kept man from God. While the fall was a subtraction, God's economy today is an addition. The fall caused man to go away from the unique God, but God's economy and His move bring man back to Himself.

Many Christians do not understand the matters pertaining to the sixth seal and the first four trumpets. The sixth seal and the first four trumpets of the seventh seal are mainly concerned with the shaking and the judgment of the earth and the heavenly host. As a result of this shaking and judgment, the earth will no longer be a suitable place for man to live in peacefully. The sixth seal and the first five trumpets are closely related to one another in time, for there is not much of an interval between them. Some, counting from the time of the first horse, say that the great tribulation will last seven years. Those who do have not seen that Revelation covers the whole history of mankind since Christ's ascension. Their interpretation leaves a great gap between the ascension of Christ and the end time. To have such a gap, approximately

two thousand years in length, is altogether illogical according to the Lord's prophecy, because it was in the first century that He prophesied of the things to come (1:19). Furthermore, the scroll in chapter five is a full revelation of God's economy. As such, it must include the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel for the producing of the church is a great item in God's economy. Because it is illogical for there to be such a great gap in this book, we believe that the four horses of the first four seals are an outline of human history from Christ's ascension until the end of this age.

By careful study we have also seen that the last seven years will probably not begin with the time of the sixth seal, because the period from the sixth seal until the fifth trumpet, which is the beginning of the great tribulation, will be a very short time. It will not be three and one-half years. The great tribulation will last three and one-half years, the second half of the last seven years. If you count the last seven years from the sixth seal, then the time from the sixth seal to the fifth trumpet must be at least three and one-half years. Logically speaking, this is too long. Between the sixth seal and the fifth trumpet there will be four trumpets, the judgments on the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the heavenly hosts. Although it is less severe, the sixth seal, which will be the shaking of the earth and the damaging of the heavenly host, is the same in principle as that of the first four trumpets.

The sixth seal and the first four trumpets are an introduction, a preliminary, to the great tribulation. In none of these calamities will God directly touch man. This will not occur until the torment of the woe of the fifth trumpet and the slaughter by the two hundred million cavalry troops of the woe of the sixth trumpet. After the woe of the sixth trumpet, there will be the seven bowls as the last woe and as a part of the content of the seventh trumpet. The sixth bowl, which is related to the sixth trumpet, will be for the gathering for war at Armageddon. That war will be the great winepress of the fury of God trodden by the Lord (14:19-20; 19:15) when He comes down to earth to fight against Antichrist and to cast him into the lake of fire (19:11-21). This should be at the same time the seventh bowl will be poured out upon the air to bring in the greatest earthquake and the greatest hail which will be the last plague and the end of the great tribulation.

In this message, we come to 10:1-11, an insertion between the sixth and seventh trumpets. If we would understand the book of Revelation, we must know which sections are continuations and which are insertions. When we were on chapter seven, we pointed out that it is an insertion between the sixth and seventh seals, showing God's preservation of His people. That chapter shows the vision of the marking of

the remnant of Israel and the vision of the rapture of God's redeemed ones. Chapter ten is part of an insertion between the sixth and seventh trumpets. This insertion is composed of three visions: the vision of Christ coming to take possession of the earth (10:1-7), the vision of the treading of the earthly Jerusalem by Antichrist and his armies (11:1-2), and the vision of the two witnesses (11:3-12).

We must read and study the book of Revelation until we know and are able to recite all the main facts. We should be able to summarize every chapter. In chapter one there are the seven lampstands with Christ walking among them; in chapters two and three the seven churches; in chapter four the heavenly scene; in chapter five Christ as the One worthy to open the scroll; in chapter six there are the six seals; in chapter seven an insertion showing two visions regarding God's preservation of His people; in chapter eight there are the first four trumpets; in chapter nine the fifth and sixth trumpets; in chapter ten Christ coming to take possession of the earth; in chapter eleven the two witnesses; in chapter twelve the man-child; in chapter thirteen the beast; in chapter fourteen the firstfruit, the worship of the beast, the harvest, and the winepress; in chapter fifteen the overcomers on the glassy sea; in chapter sixteen the seven bowls; in chapter seventeen the religious Babylon; in chapter eighteen the material, political Babylon; in chapter nineteen the wedding feast of the Lamb and the war at Armageddon; in chapter twenty the binding of Satan, the millennial kingdom, the last rebellion of mankind, and the judgment at the great white throne; and in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem.