

Place: Lurgan Baptist 27:1:2004

Reading: Rev Ch 7

EXPLORING THE FUTURE

13. WHO WILL BE SAVED DURING THE GREAT TRIBULATION ?

In 1936 the mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, was confronted with a difficult decision. A high-ranking diplomat from Nazi Germany was coming to New York, and the mayor was expected to provide his foreign visitor with protection. Anti-Nazi feeling ran high throughout New York. The Mayor himself found Nazism repulsive and uncivilized. Torn between his revulsion for the Nazis and his sense of duty as Mayor, he was struck by a compromise solution that was sheer inspiration. He hand-selected a contingent of body-guards from among the New York City Police Department. And every one of them was Jewish. What an irony. A Nazi who owed his safety and his life to the Jews. The truth is that every Gentile Christian owes his eternal life to the Jews. Do you recall what Christ said to the Samaritan at the well ? " *Salvation is from the Jews.*" (Jn 4:22)

Our Lord was a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Indeed from Genesis to Revelation, the Word of God records the Past and Future history of the world primarily as it relates to the nation of Israel. In the O.T. Israel is the exclusive focus of events. In the N.T. a new concept, the concept of a church comprising not only Jews but Gentiles as well is introduced. Yet even in the N.T. Israel occupies centre stage. You can see the primacy of Israel in the Gospels, when Christ sends out his twelve disciples to preach and heal in His name. There He tells them, " *Go not into the way of the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" (Matt 10:5) You can see the primacy of Israel in the Epistles. Indeed in the Book of Romans Paul devotes three chapters to the place of Israel in the plan of God. Today Israel again occupies centre stage in world events. Ever since its re-establishment as a nation in 1948, the existence of the Jewish state has been the focus of world attention and world tensions.

Even though Israel is a tiny Nation, the size of Wales with a population of some four million people all eyes and all T.V. cameras are frequently centred on Israel. Why ? There is only one possible explanation for this extraordinary fact. Israel occupies a central place in God's programme of human history. God will not let the world forget or ignore the Jewish people. The central place of Israel in History, in Current Affairs, and in God's Plan for the Future is abundantly clear. Yet how many ignore the important place God has reserved for this great and historic race of people. Now as we consider (Rev Ch 7) we begin to see the place that God has for Israel. The next

prophetic event the world will experience is the Rapture, or the removal of the church from the world. Millions of Christians will suddenly disappear from the earth, and without a trace. This is how the last days of human history will begin.

Immediately after this event, God's program of Judgment commences, and at the centre of this program will be the nation of Israel. In (Ch 6) we saw the opening of the six seals of judgment. Thus will be a time of unprecedented disaster, unrelieved terror and unimaginable slaughter. Those awful judgments described for us give rise to the final question of

(Ch 6) " *Who is able to stand ?*" (6:17) Revelation

(Ch 7) answers that question. John shows four angels Standing in (7:1) then he shows us a great multitude Making their Stand in (7:9) and then the angels round about the throne make a Standing Ovation in (7:11)

Then after showing us Who is able to stand John continues in (Ch 8) where he left off in (Ch 6) So

(Ch 7) is a Parenthetical chapter. Between the sixth and seventh seal judgments, God calls a divine time-out. And after the terrible scenes of judgment in (Ch 6) its a welcome intermission, isn't it ? Now I believe (Ch 7) answers the question, Who will be saved during the great Tribulation ? In order to put a handle on our study I want you to notice:

(1) THE SUSPENSION OF JUDGMENT

You see the judgments have been blowing, but now there is a lull in the storm. In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy and suspends judgment. Notice:

(a) THE INSTRUMENTS OF THIS SUSPENSION:

John says, " *I saw four angels* " (7:1) Now don't sentimentalise angels. Don't try to explain them away. Don't discount the reality of Satan's demonic angels, either. (12:4) The angels seek to minister to us, the demons want to murder us. Angels are still ministering today. They seem to appear in certain times of great crisis. During this Tribulation Period angels are going to have a distinctive ministry. They are associated with the forces of nature, the wind (7:1) fire, (14:18) and water. (16:5) People ask the question, " *Do we interpret the Bible symbolically or literally ?* My answer is, " *Yes.* " We believe the Bible is literal truth, and John certainly tried to explain complex events and concepts literally. He attempted to describe what he saw. At the same time, the Holy Spirit communicated in symbolic ways in Scripture ! Now when John says he saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, he does not mean he believes the earth to be flat and square. This is simply an idiom for the four directions on a compass, north, south, east and west. John literally says he saw angels at the four points of the compass. The angels are holding back the wind. Is that literal wind or symbolic wind ? How can one

know ? Do you recall what I said in our first study ? In this book symbols are employed. God sent and "*Sign-ified*," the book by his angel to his servant John. (1:1) In other words Christ made his revelation to John by signs or symbols. Now the symbolic language does not do away with the literal interpretation. The "*wind*," here seems to stand for judgment. (Prov 1:27) says,
 " *When you fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind: when distress and anguish come upon you.*" Winds represent distress: anguish, and destruction blowing upon the earth. So what does John see ? He sees four angels holding back this destruction and anguish on the earth. They seem to be holding back these winds, so that they cannot blow, because God has something He must do first. For the moment God restrains His wrath. What's:

(b) *THE INTENTION OF THIS SUSPENSION:*

Look at (7:2-3) The purpose of this suspension is that a certain group may be Sealed. These are designated,
 "*the servants of our God.*" (7:3) And who they are is described in detail in (7:4-8) Now in Scripture a seal indicates ownership and protection. You probably realise this is not the first time that God has sealed off some of His people from judgement. When God sent the flood, He sealed Noah and his family from the rest of the human race. When he destroyed Jericho, He sealed Rahab and her household by means of a scarlet thread. He did the same for Lot and his family when they escaped from Sodom just before the fire fell. He sealed the firstborn in Egypt when they applied the blood to the lintel and doorposts of their homes. Today, God's people are sealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul says,
 "*having believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*" (Eph 1:13) The presence of the Holy Spirit in us is the unmistakable mark of God's ownership upon our lives. This is God's guarantee that we are saved and safe, and that He will one day take us to heaven.

Now here are 144,000 Jews who are sealed. In contrast to "*the mark of the beast*," that Antichrist will give those who follow him (13:17 14:11 16:2 19:20) these will have, "*the mark of the Lord*," (14:1) and this seal will protect these chosen Jews from the judgements that will "*hurt the earth and the sea.*" (7:2) and that will occur when the first four angels blow their trumpets.
 (8:1) My because of this seal these 144,000 will be able to do their work and glorify the Lord. But who are these 144,000 ? Where do they come from ? What is their mission ? (1)

(2) THE SEALING OF JEWS

You see, judgment is suspended until 144,000 Jew's are sealed. My God still has a covenant to keep with Israel. He has kept them for ages. You never see a Hittite any

more, and when was the last time you had lunch with a Jebusite ? But God has preserved His people, the Jews. Haman tried to destroy them, Caesar tried to make them disappear, Hitler tried to wipe them off the face of this earth, Saddem, tried to drive them into the Mediterranean Sea. But God has kept His people. Paul tells us in (Rom 11:25-29) " *That blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*" The Jewish nation is spiritually blind. That is why they missed their Messiah. But God is preserving them to save them. My the church is not

" *spiritual Israel*," since the church would never be called " *Jacob*." Paul says, that Jews, real, fleshly Jews will be led to Christ. Now according to (Rev 7) they'll go through the Tribulation Period, but many shall be saved during it. Have at look at these sealed Jews. Notice here:

(a) *THEY ARE NAMED:*

Look at (7:4) " *The children of Israel.*" Now what God is underscoring in this passage is a significant truth. It is Israel and only Israel that is centre stage in these verses. I believe that when God says " *Israel*," He means Israel. This text does not talk about the Church. There are other passages in Revelation which talk about the Church and they do so with clarity, but here God is describing the Jews. The Church is not in view at all. The Church is in heaven with the Lord. J.A. Seiss wrote " *As I read the Bible, when God says children of Israel, I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not, and when He speaks of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles, in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not.*"

Robert Thomas says this, " *the fact is no clear cut example of the church being called Israel exists in the New Testament or in ancient church writings until A.D. 160 ... this fact is crippling to any attempt to identify Israel as the church in (Rev 7:4),*" Now if you are a student of the O.T. you'll have noted some problems about this list. For example, Why is Levi included when it had no inheritance with the other tribes ? (Num 18:20-24 Josh 13:14) Why is Joseph named but not his son Ephraim who is usually connected with his brother Manasseh ? Then, why is the tribe of Dan omitted here and yet included in Ezekiel's list for the apportionment of the land during the millennial kingdom. (Ezek 48:1) Many suggestions have been made but we don't know the answers.

One thing is absolutely sure that Dan is omitted because it was Dan that introduced Idolatry into Israel.

(Lev 24:11 Judges 18:1-2 1 Kings 12:28-30) And some scholars think that the Anti-christ will come from the tribe of Dan. (Gen 49:17 Jer 18:6) Some years ago a

Jehovah's Witness called one day with Pastor Mullan, when he was living in Lurgan. She said, "*I am one of the 144,000.*" He said, "*to which tribe do you belong ?*" Oh, she said, "*I am from the tribe of Dan.*" He said, "*Dear, you picked the wrong one.*" You see this company of 144,000 are Jews and they are named.

(b) *THEY ARE NUMBERED:*

These 144,000 are exactly what the Scriptures say they are, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. If someone approaches you and tells you that they are one of the 144,000 ask them this question. "*To which tribe do you belong and can you prove it ?*" My the 144,000 described here are not Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mormon elders, or some symbol of the church, they are Jews, Jews, Jews. Some object to this interpretation by saying that most Jews today don't know which tribe they stem from. But we must remember that while an individual may know not his tribe, God certainly does.

(James 1:1) Another objection raised is the thought of the ten lost tribes. The fact is that there are not ten lost tribes, for God knows who and where all the tribes are. He chose the people of Israel for His own, and He knows all about them. No tribe is lost to God.

So these people are Named, Numbered. But,

(c) *THEY ARE NEEDED:*

For look at (7:9) Now where did this crowd appear from ? My in the Tribulation God will use Israel to perform a special function and it is to that end that John sees God sealing 144,000 of the 12 tribes. Now think of this for a moment. Seven years before this event there was not one person on the earth who knew Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. At the end of that seven year period, there is a multitude from every nation. Something supernatural will have to take place for this to be. Now if you turn to (1 Cor 15:8) I think we have a clue concerning the way God will work after the Rapture of the church. "*born out of due time,*" can read "*born prematurely.*" Saul was saved on the Damascus Road, direct from heaven, (not at a gospel meeting) and I think God is going to perform the same miracle He performed in Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road, 144,000 times over, so that these Jews can witness for Him !

Is Christ not speaking of the witnessing ministry of the 144,000 Jews when He says, "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come.*"

(Matt 24:14) My the gospel they will preach is the same gospel we preach today (7:14) God has only one plan of salvation. But I'll tell you this, they'll not have to go to language school to learn a language in order to preach the gospel for they will know all the different languages of the nations, thus these 144,000 can begin

immediately to preach the gospel. Tell me, have you ever known a genuine, devoutly converted Jew ? He will put many Gentiles to shame in his bold witness for Christ. After all, only twelve Jews turned the first century upside down. My this band of Jews, converted to Christ after the Church has been taken out of the world, will go throughout the whole world like 144,000 Paul's, preaching the gospel of the kingdom during the time when God is pouring out His wrath on the earth. (Matt 10:23) Can I say if God can empower these Jews then, He can empower you now. Are you a witness for Him ? Are you being used as His instrument to reach people for Christ ?
(1) (2)

(3) THE SALVATION OF MANY

Now its important that we distinguish between the two groups of people described in this chapter. In the first group we have Jews, in the second we have Gentiles, in the first they are Numbered, 144,000, in the second they are not numbered, nor could be. The first group are sealed on earth and the second according to some are standing in heaven. Now we see here what takes place as a result of the preaching ministry of the 144,000. Notice what (7:9) *"After this I beheld, "* Some people ask the question, *" Will those who have heard the gospel and rejected it get a second chance after the church has gone ?"* I am inclined to believe that this multitude will consist entirely of those who have never heard the gospel before the Lord's Coming for the church and the beginning of this 7 year tribulation period. (2 Thes 2:10) You see this great multitude from around the world will be a harvest of those to whom the Gospel is not only good news but new news. It will be a Gospel they have never heard before. I recall one

Sunday evening in Carryduff a lady stepping into the gospel service. I did not know her well, she had never been in before. She heard the gospel, and a few days later she was at our door. I brought her in and listened to her story. She was a Roman Catholic, she had never heard the gospel before that Sunday evening, and upon hearing it once she there and then came to Christ.

Now there have been many times of great response to the gospel throughout history. We think of the church's birth on the day of Pentecost, the reformation in Europe in the 16th century, the Great Awakenings in America and Britain. During those powerful movements thousands came to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Has it not been the prayer of God's people down through the ages that God would bring in such great harvests of souls ? Often God has answered. But my there is coming in the future a worldwide response to the gospel that may exceed any other in history. Millions who have never heard the gospel will one day be swept into the kingdom of God. Now lets notice several things about this multitude, look at:

(a) *THEIR PECULIARITY:*

Incidentally, the scholars are divided as to whether this scene is heavenly or earthly and they are problems with both. But look at (7:13) Now this elder is not asking John because he does not know. He's asking John, to show us that John does not know. John was puzzled as to the identity of this group. Now if they had been O.T. saints John would have recognised them. Do you recall he recognised Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration ? (Matt 17:1) If they had been N.T. saints, would he not have recognised them ? But the fact that he does not know them proves to us that they are neither. Indeed they are explicitly identified as those who came out of "*tribulation, the great one.*" They are a different body of saints altogether. (Eph 3:14-15) My these are the saints we read about in (6:11 Their exit from this world has been one of horror and pain yet that does not dampen their desire to thank God for so great a salvation. But look at:

(b) *THEIR POSITION:*

" *Before the throne.*" (7:9) Look at (7:15) Is there a Temple in heaven ? (21:22) What about day and night in heaven ? (21:25) Am I confusing you more ? Pastor Mullan believes that this crowd won by the 144,000 are still on earth but spiritually they are before the throne.

One thing is sure, they owe a debt of gratitude to those 144,000 Jewish missionaries, the wise who shall shine because they turn many to righteousness. (Dan 12:3) Do you see,

(c) *THEIR PURITY:*

For they are "*clothed with white robes, and made white in the blood of the Lamb.*" (7:14) They are robed in righteousness and holiness. They are accepted.

Now it is true that this company performed good works

(Matt 25:40) but they were not saved by their good works. (Titus 3:14) For their salvation is attributed to the sacrifice of Christ. (7:14) My God has only one way of saving people and that way is through the blood of the Lamb. "*What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus*" Have you been washed in Christ's blood ? Have you availed yourself of the efficacy of His work at Calvary ? Did you notice:

(d) *THEIR PROTECTION:*

For John saw "*palms in their hands.*" (7:9) The Jews used palm branches at their Feast of Tabernacles

(Lev 23:40-43) which was a special time of national rejoicing. Here are a crowd who are celebrating the triumph of having been brought through the Great Tribulation. Look at:

(e) THEIR PRAISE:

" And cried with a loud voice " (7:10) When they do that, it seems that all fall on their faces before God. My this kind of worship would make some of us nervous ! Shouting to God ! But you know, it should be exciting to worship God. If being forgiven of your sins and having a place reserved for you in heaven doesn't excite you, something is wrong with your soul. When was the last time you got so excited about being saved you had to shout ? As the psalmist said, *" Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord."*

(Ps 150:6) Did you notice that the focus of their praise is the Lamb ? They are in heaven not because they were willing to be martyred for their new found faith in Christ, not because they gave their bodies to be burned, not because they were counted as sheep for the slaughter, not because they were rendered destitute and subjected to a torrent of vulgar abuse from everyone, not because they endured to the end, not because they came through the Great Tribulation no, a thousand times no. They are there only because of the Lamb and well they know it. Here is a humble recognition that they owe everything to the One who is seated on the Throne.

(f) THEIR PRIVILEGE:

For (7:15) says, *" Therefore are they "* the heavenly temple currently is the holy domain where God's presence dwells outside the fallen universe, there will also be a temple on earth during the millennial kingdom of Christ. (Ezek Ch 40-48) But in the eternal state, there will no longer be a need for a temple *" for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it."* (Rev 21:22 (Micah 4:1-4) But what will be true in that day is true now, that he who faithfully witnesses for God knows the joy of His presence every moment of every day. Notice in closing:

(g) THEIR PROVISION:

" They shall hunger " (7:16-17) Do you see that word *" feed,"* it means *" Shepherd."* The Lamb is the Shepherd who will graciously provide for their every need. My these people under the hands of Antichrist will suffer. They will suffer hunger, (13:17) thirst (16:4) exposure. (16:8-9) But the Lord will bring them through and the Lamb will be their Shepherd. He will dry the tears of those who have suffered greatly for their faith during the Tribulation and in Him they will find satisfaction and sufficiency. *" And God shall wipe all tears from their tears."* (7:14) Here on earth our joys are often tempered by our many sorrows, we are no strangers to the vale of tears. But do you see what God does with our tears ? He wipes them away ! They are gone ! *His is a ministry of tenderness and comfort.* So far as God is concerned the past is put behind us and when we arrive in heaven it is to a brand new future where burdens are

no more. My the saints in glory will be occupied with the beauty and wonder of heaven and the worship of their Saviour. You see, the tears will be gone, and the vision we will have of Christ will be unblurred. What an exhilarating prospect.

***“ Face to face with Christ my Saviour
Face to face what will it be
When with rapture I behold Him
Jesus Christ who died for me.”***

Are you not glad this that the Lamb is your Shepherd ? He's the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11) He died to pay for the Penalty of sin, He's the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20) He rose to take care of the Power of sin, He's the Chief Shepherd, (1 Pet 5:4) He's coming to take us away from the Presence of sin. But my we can say this, " *The Lord is My Shepherd*," And all I'll need in life, in death, in Eternity He will provide. What a Saviour !