

## Chapter 4

### The Vision of The Seven Seals

(Rev. 4:1 - 7:17)

#### The Throne

4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

“After this,” that is, after the dictation of the seven letters to the seven churches, John looked; and there before him was a door standing open, revealing the interior of heaven. Almost simultaneously, John heard a voice speaking to him. This voice, which resembled the sound of a trumpet, was the same voice that the Apostle John heard at the beginning of the first vision (1:10). This voice, which was the voice of the Lord, extended the invitation to John: “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” What an experience that must have been! We mention several things here that attract our attention.

In the first place, it is significant to note once again that we can know absolutely nothing of future events except that which God is pleased to reveal to us. These events are hidden behind a veil, as it were, until God opens the door. Here God opened the door, not only to let John catch a glimpse of heaven, but also to show him events that must transpire before the end of all things.

It is interesting to note also that the invitation given to John, “Come up here,” is similar to the call which God extended to Moses as he and the children of Israel were assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai. At that time God summoned Moses to the mountaintop, where He revealed to him the divine Law, which Moses in turn was to deliver to the Children of Israel. Similarly, John is summoned to heaven’s open door that certain things and certain events might be revealed to him, which John, in turn, was to make known to the people of God.

We believe it is important to emphasize that what John saw and recorded was not the result of speculation, but was the result of revelation. John did not engage in “guessing.” He recorded only what God revealed to him and what God told him to record.

When the Lord said of these events that they “must take place,” we realize that God alone knows the future, and that He knows it just as clearly as He knows the past and the present. Furthermore, when He says that these things must take place, they will take place. Of that we can be absolutely sure!

4:2-3 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.

“At once,” says John, “I was in the spirit.” He was in a state of spiritual exaltation, a “state of heightened spiritual awareness,” hearing and seeing things which normally are not seen and heard. It was a state about which men like to speculate; but they will never really know. We must bear in mind that we are dealing here with something that belongs in the category of the supernatural. The Apostle Paul, who had a similar experience and was caught up to the third heaven, simply states: “Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows” (2 Cor. 12:2).

In this ecstatic state John saw “a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.” The throne is symbolical of power and authority; and this picture of God sitting on the throne expresses the infinite power and dominion of God, as the Psalmist also affirms when he says: “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne” (Ps. 47:8). And again we read: “The Lord established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all” (Ps. 103:19). To put it briefly, this is what John says: “At once I was in the spirit; and behold, I saw God, the omnipotent, the almighty One ruling over all things.”

In 1 Tim. 6:6, we are told that God “lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” Consequently, there are no human features that can be used to describe God. The dazzling, brilliant light reflected from the precious stones symbolizes the glory and majesty of the Lord. Whether the colors of the various gems have any particular, symbolical meaning, we are unable to say. John merely states that the occupant of the throne, who is God, “had the appearance of jasper and carnelian.” It may be that the translucent, diamond-like jasper symbolizes His glorious holiness; while the red carnelian signifies His justice, an attribute displayed in pardoning as well as in punishing. God is just in pardoning the sinner, because God laid on His Son the sins of the whole world; and in His Son God punished every sin of every human being. Now God’s justice is satisfied, and God can justly declare every sinner pardoned. But God’s justice is revealed also in His punishment inflicted on those who

reject Jesus Christ and the pardon Christ has earned for them. He who believes not shall be damned, - and that is a just verdict.

John relates also that “a rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.” You will recall that originally the rainbow was the sign of the covenant which God made with Noah and his descendants, namely, that He would never again destroy all life by the waters of a flood. (Gen. 9:8-17). Thus the emerald-like rainbow encircling the throne of God is a reminder and a symbol of the covenant of grace which God made with us in Christ Jesus, - the everlasting promise that if we accept Christ in true faith, we shall be the children of God and the heirs of eternal salvation. The green in the rainbow may be regarded as a symbol of God’s faithfulness to all His promises.

**4:4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.**

John sees several groups surrounding the throne. First, he mentions the twenty-four elders. To explain who these are, we should consider that there were twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament, from whom the twelve tribes of Israel descended. These were God’s Old Testament people. In the New Testament we have the twelve Apostles, who at times were also called “elders;” and they symbolize the New Testament Church. Adding the two together, we have the twenty-four elders, who represent the entire Church of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, - the fellowship of all true believers in Christ of all times and in all ages.

There is only one way to eternal salvation, and that is through faith in Christ Jesus. Basically, the only difference between the Old Testament believers and the New Testament believers consisted in this, that the Old Testament people of God looked forward in faith to the Christ who was to come, while the New Testament Christians look back with the eyes of faith to the Christ who has come. In either case, whether people lived in the Old Testament era, or whether they live in the age of the New Testament, for all alike there was and is only one way to eternal salvation and that is through faith in Christ Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord, the world’s only Savior and Redeemer.

These twenty-four elders, who represent the entire Church of God, are seen as sitting on twenty-four thrones. This is a reference to the promise which Jesus made a number of times, namely, that all faithful Christians will reign with Him in glory. The statement that they are seated around the throne of God signifies their relation to God, their nearness to Him. The Church at all times enjoys most intimate fellowship with

God.

John furthermore notes that the twenty-four elders were dressed in white and that they had crowns of gold on their heads. The meaning of this is clear. The true believers, represented by the twenty-four elders, are cleansed with the blood of Jesus Christ and thus are clothed with the white garment of Christ's righteousness, which is theirs through faith in Christ. The crowns of gold on their heads signify the honor and authority given them by God, as well as the glory which they will enjoy with Him, - the immortal and unfailing glory of heaven.

**4:5-6a      From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.**

Having viewed the twenty-four elders on the twenty-four thrones, John now observed "flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder" proceeding from the throne. These are symbolic of the awesome majesty and power of God. In Scripture, particularly in the Old Testament, we find that God's appearance often is accompanied by an unusual display of sounds and sights. A dramatic example of this we find in Exodus 19:16-19, where we read: "On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder."

The seven lamps blazing before the throne are identified immediately as "the seven spirits of God." This is Revelation's way of describing the Holy Spirit, - "the sevenfold Spirit," - the number "seven" symbolizing completeness and perfection. God sends forth His Holy Spirit to perform His very important mission in the world (John 16:8-11). During His earthly ministry Jesus gave this promise to His disciples: "The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). And in John 15:26, Jesus says: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me." Praise God for all the spiritual enlightenment that comes to us from the Holy Spirit!

Before the throne of God John also saw “what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” This perhaps symbolizes the beauty of the Lord’s glory and the peaceful beauty of His rule. Can you imagine how this crystal-clear sea of glass would reflect the lights, as well as the colors of the various gems, and thus magnify the already indescribable beauty of the scene which John was privileged to behold? Then, too, does not this “sea of glass” tend to produce a soothing effect? The fact that this “sea” is smooth, completely calm, seems to suggest that this is symbolical of the undisturbed peace existing in heaven and in the presence of God. And the added phrase that the sea is “clear as crystal” might signify that in God’s presence there is no pollution of any kind. All is pure, all is peaceful, all is perfect!

**4:6b-8**      In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”

In the center, close to the throne, John saw the four living creatures. When it comes to identifying these four living creatures, we realize that we are facing a difficult problem, since commentators have many and varied interpretations. Our personal conviction, however, is that they are four angels of high rank. Ezekiel, in his vision of the glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:4-28), also saw four living creatures, whom, later on in his vision, he identified as cherubim (Ezek. 10:20). Since the symbolism in Revelation in many ways is similar to that in the vision of Ezekiel, we feel that to regard the four living creatures in Revelation as cherubim is indeed justifiable. These four living creatures “were covered with eyes, in front and in back;” and a little later we are told that each of these four living beings “was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.” This signifies their ability to see in every direction, both backward and forward, both around and within. Nothing escapes their attention. Their eyes can be found continually on the Lord and His will; and at the same time, they can watch everything that transpires in heaven and on earth. Thus they are well-equipped and well qualified to serve as God’s agents, utilized by the Almighty both in governing the world and especially also in protecting His people and the servants of the Most High.

We are told furthermore: “The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.” If

these four living beings are God's agents, through whom He governs the world, then these four different heads or faces might well symbolize the four major divisions of God's creation, or life on earth: (1) the wild beasts (the lion); (2) the domestic animals (the ox); (3) man, the crowning work of God's creation; and, (4) the birds (the flying eagle). Through the four living beings God controls all facets of His creation.

Next, we are told that "each of the four living creatures had six wings." What these six wings represent or symbolize we are not told in Revelation. Generally speaking, wings seem to symbolize swiftness in carrying out God's will concerning the rule and control of the universe. In Isaiah's vision (Is. 6:1-2), each of the angelic beings (also called "seraphs") likewise had six wings; and there we are told that with two wings they covered their faces (perhaps because, as creatures, they could not gaze directly at the bright and shining glory of God); with two wings they covered their feet (perhaps to signify their humility and reverence); and with the remaining two wings they were flying (certainly symbolizing their readiness and swiftness in performing the tasks assigned to them by God).

Finally, we are told of these four living beings: "Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" Here we have described for us the constant activity and ambition of these cherubim. They do not rest by day or by night. In the great "Tersanctus," as it is called, they continually praise the Triune God: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." It is He who is omnipotent! It is He who is eternal! It is He who is the same yesterday, today and forever! It is He whose coming is imminent! The great judgment is at hand! Thus the glory and praise of the Triune God is sung continually by His angelic beings in the corridors of heaven. May we, His creatures here below, do likewise! This thought of giving God eternal honor, praise and glory is expanded further in the closing verses of this chapter.

4:9-11                      Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives forever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

As the four living creatures sing their hymn of praise and glory to the Triune God, they are joined in their doxology by the twenty-four elders, who represent the

Church of all ages. In humility, these elders bow down before the great King of the universe and worship Him with songs of glory, honor and thanksgiving. They lay down their golden crowns before the throne, thereby confessing their complete dependence upon God and the mercy He has shown them in Christ Jesus. At the same time, they acknowledge that their victory, their high honor and the blessedness that they enjoy have all come from God, without any merit or worthiness in them.

The twenty-four elders, representing the communion of saints, the total number of all the saved, declare that God is worthy to receive all honor and glory and that it is right that all power be ascribed to Him. God is worthy of this praise both because He has created all things and because He upholds all things by the word of His power.

As His followers, as members of His Church, let us never lose sight of this cardinal truth. In this age of skepticism, when men are seeking to explain the origin of this world and everything in it by advancing all kinds of evolutionistic theories, - in this age when men are boasting of their own might and of their own great inventions and accomplishments, - we must always remember with grateful hearts that God is the Almighty Maker of this world and all things in it, and that He “keeps all things going” by the word of His power. If He for one moment withdrew His power from this universe, it would crumble immediately. What is true on a cosmic scale, is true also of all the endeavors in our daily life. It is as the Psalmist declares: “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (Ps. 127:1). Since we are so completely dependent upon God’s blessing, therefore to God alone must be ascribed all honor and glory.

### **The Lamb And The Scroll**

**5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.**

John now sees in the right hand of God the Father a papyrus scroll. On the reverse side of a scroll, where the fibers are vertical, writing is more difficult than on the front side. This scroll which John saw in the hand of God, however, had writing on both sides. We regard “the scroll” to be a symbol of the thoughts and deeds of Almighty God as they are to be executed among men until the end of time. To keep any and all unauthorized people from reading it, the scroll was sealed with seven seals. Because the contents of this scroll referred to future events, it was to be a closed book to men until God Himself chose to reveal its contents.

**5:2-3 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy**

to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

We know that all the good angels excel in strength; but this particular angel that John saw in this vision must have been one of the especially mighty ones. With a booming voice, he proclaimed the challenge: “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” Or, in other words, “Who thinks that he is qualified either to reveal or to execute the counsels of God?” And there was no creature in the entire universe who was able to reveal what God had planned with regard to the future. It is well for us to remember that the future belongs to God. What God wants us to know of the future, He has revealed to us on the pages of Sacred Scripture. Beyond that, we are not to venture. Any and all attempts to probe the future apart from God’s revelation is a gross violation of God’s Law.

5:4-5 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. ”

John wept because no one was worthy to open the scroll or look inside, that is, no one was found who could reveal and execute what was written in the scroll. In view of the violent persecutions that the church was experiencing at that time, John and his fellow Christians may have wondered what lay in store for the Church of Christ; and they may have faced the future with little or no hope, fearing perhaps that the “little flock” was doomed to destruction and that the Lord would never again reveal His counsels to men.

As John thus wept over the apparently dark, unknown and uncertain future that confronted the Church, because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll, one of the elders said to John: “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Both of these Old Testament titles, “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Gen. 49:9-10) and “Root of David” (Is. 11:1, 10), are messianic in nature, referring to the conquering Christ. By His death on Calvary and by His glorious resurrection, Christ already has triumphed, - He already has emerged victorious over every spiritual enemy. There is therefore nothing to fear, since He has complete control of the future. He is both worthy and able to open the scroll and its seven seals.

5:6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center



of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

These next verses further identify the Messiah. John sees Him as a Lamb, - a very familiar term to New Testament Christians. In the Old Testament church, lambs were sacrificial animals. In this vision John saw Jesus as a Lamb who had the appearance of having been slain. There can be no doubt that this is a reference to the Lamb of God, who, through His suffering and death on the Cross, has redeemed us from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil. John the Baptist had called Him “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); and the Apostle Peter affirms that we have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet. 1:19).

Continuing his description of the Lamb, John says that He had “seven horns and seven eyes,” and in the same breath explains that these “are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” We have heard previously that “the seven spirits of God” refer to the Holy Spirit, - the sevenfold Spirit, the perfect and complete Spirit, who sees and knows all things, even the deep things of God. This seven-fold Spirit of Christ is “sent out into all the earth.”

It is interesting to note that here the Holy Spirit is portrayed as the seven horns and the seven eyes of the Lamb. This surely conveys the truth that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son; and again it is stated that He is sent forth into all the earth to accomplish His mission, even as Jesus had promised: “When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me” (John 15:26).

5:7-8 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Since Christ alone was worthy to open the scroll, He took the scroll from the hand of His heavenly Father. Thus Jesus, according to His human nature, became the recipient of the full majesty and power of God and is now in complete control of the future. The Father, as it were, gave the sealed scroll of His eternal counsels to Jesus, who gladly took it into His hands: for He delights to reveal and carry out the will of His Father and to bring to fulfillment God’s plan and intention for the world.

As Jesus received the scroll from His heavenly Father, all heaven broke forth in worship and praise. First the four living creatures united with the twenty-four elders in bringing homage to the Lamb who was slain. They fell down before Him and gave Him the same devotion and honor that previously they had given to God the Father. That was perfectly proper, for during the course of His earthly ministry Jesus had said: “Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent Him.” (John 5:22-23).

We are told further that each of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders had a harp, - no doubt, the instrument used to accompany their songs and hymns of praise: and each also held a golden bowl full of incense, which is identified as the prayers of the saints. (By the way, isn't it a beautiful and comforting truth to know that when we Christians here below present our prayers and petitions before the throne of grace, we are, as it were, joined in this act of worship by the saints above?) Thus this vision in which the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders not only give to Jesus, the Lamb, divine honor and glory, but also present to Him their prayers, is in accord with what we confess of Jesus in the Apostles' Creed: “He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.”

5:9-10      **And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth. ”**

The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders began the doxology by singing “a new song,” - a song of praise for the salvation which God has prepared, - a song that will never grow old, - a song that must never be forgotten or omitted in the Church.

The first part of this song declares that Jesus, the Lamb of God, was worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because He had given His life as a perfect and all-sufficient payment for the sins of the world. By shedding His holy, precious blood, - and what a staggering price that was, - He “purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” We take note of the fact that we have here no racial discrimination whatsoever.

While it is true that Christ died for all people, yet we know from clear passages

of Scripture that only those who, by a Spirit-wrought faith, have accepted Christ and the salvation He offers really belong to God. These believers Christ has made “to be a kingdom” and has given them a position of authority. Just think of it! All believers in Christ constitute a kingdom: and as such, “they will reign on the earth,” - they are partakers in Christ’s rule of the world. What an honor!

But still more! Christ has also made all believers “priests to serve our God.” We recall that the people of God in the Old Testament could not offer their sacrifices or approach God directly, but had to do so through the duly-appointed priests. Now, however, since Christ has made the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, there is no further need of intermediaries. All believers can now approach God directly, because Christ has made all believers “priests to serve our God.” Indeed, they are a “royal priesthood” (1Pet. 2:9). God grant that we and all believers may ever show our gratitude to Him, who has bestowed such high honors upon us, by continually worshiping and serving Him, even as the hosts of heaven worship and serve Him!

5:11-12      Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.”

The doxology begun by the Church (the twenty-four elders), was continued by the angels, who surrounded the throne and the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. John gives their number as “thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand,” - signifying an indefinitely large number.

They, too, joined in praising the Lamb. Though they themselves did not need a Savior, since they are without sin, yet they rejoice in the redemption and salvation which Jesus procured for all sinners. To this day it remains true that “there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). We note, too, that these millions of angels also affirmed that Jesus, by virtue of His death, was worthy “to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise,” - the great gifts which He received at the time of His exaltation.

5:13-14      Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: “To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory

and power, forever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Finally, John witnessed all creation joining this symphony of praise and confessing that blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the Father and to the Son forever and ever. Thus the praise of God, the Almighty Creator, and the praise of Jesus, the world’s only Redeemer, are blended in a hymn that will resound throughout eternity.

The four living beings said, “Amen,” - truly, truly, so shall it be! And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped. What a beautiful service of worship and praise John had been privileged to witness! And so we have seen the sealed scroll pass from the hand of the Creator into the hand of the Redeemer. Now everything is ready for the opening of the seven seals.

## The Seals

6:1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!”

We note that there are three sevenfold series of judgments in Revelation. In addition to the seven seals, there are also the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. We must not regard these three series of judgments as occurring in chronological order. Rather, each series covers the entire New Testament era from its beginning until judgment day, but each from a different perspective. In other words, these three series parallel one another.

John watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then he heard one of the four living creatures saying in a thunderous voice: “Come!” Is this command addressed to John or to the rider on the horse? It really is not a big issue. However, since John was right at hand, it would seem more likely that the command, “Come,” was addressed to each of the four horsemen.

6:2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

When it comes to identifying the rider on the white horse, there are several interpretations. Some say that the rider is Christ; others contend that he is the Antichrist; and still others maintain that he represents the spirit of conquest through

the preaching of God's Word.

In chapter 19 of Revelation we again meet a rider on a white horse; but there He definitely is identified as Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Not so here in chapter 6. We can say that the description of the rider in 6:2 resembles the conquering Christ as He is depicted in 19:11-21; and so this rider in 6:2 could very possibly be identified as the Antichrist, who both imitates and opposes Christ. It is his purpose to resemble Christ and to act like Christ. This might explain why he is dressed in white and wears a crown. By his pretense and deceptive words he endeavors to conquer the hearts and minds of men. How many millions there are who have fallen prey to his false teachings and vicious propaganda! The Apostle Paul had warned the Thessalonian Christians of this Antichrist when he wrote: "Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God" (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

Then, too, we notice that since the other three of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse represent calamities that overtake the world, it would seem only natural that this first rider should also represent some form of judgment.

Again, in Matthew 24 Jesus gives us a number of signs that will precede the end of the world. It is interesting to note that in the first four seals we find the same sequence as in the prophecies of Jesus pertaining to the last days. There is a unique parallelism between Revelation 6 and Matthew 24. (1) In Rev. 6:2 the white horse = the false christs in Matt. 24:5. (2) In Rev. 6:3-4 the red horse = the wars and rumors of wars in Matt. 24:6. (3) In Rev. 6:5-6 the black horse = the famines in Matt. 24:7. (4) In Rev. 6:6-7 the pale horse = the pestilences in Matt. 24:7.

It might be significant to mention also that the rider on the white horse had a bow. From Ezekiel 39:3 we learn that the bow is the weapon of Gog, the great enemy of God's people in the last days.

As stated before, some interpreters believe that the rider on the white horse is Jesus Himself. Others say he represents the world-wide preaching of the Gospel; and it should be pointed out that among the signs preceding the end of the world, as given in Matthew 24, Jesus does say in verse 14: "The Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Could this truth possibly be represented by the rider on the white horse?

In the final analysis, therefore, we find it impossible to reach a definite and absolutely certain conclusion on this matter. The considerations that have been given, however, seem to favor the interpretation that the rider on the white horse represents the Antichrist and perhaps also all the false Messiahs.

6:3-4 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

After the Lamb had opened the second seal, John heard the second living creature issue the command, "Come!" And a rider on a red horse came forth. There can be no doubt that this horse represents war. The fiery red color of the horse, - peace removed from the earth, - men slaying each other, - the large sword, - yes, everything in this vision points to war and bloodshed. The millennialists interpret this as referring to a specific war. However, this is a reference to every war and rumor of war. In relating the signs that would precede the end of the world, Jesus had said: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come" (Matt. 24:6).

We note with interest that the rider of this horse "was given power to take peace from the earth." Our God is always in complete control of all things. Although He does not approve of war, yet He will permit it that it might serve as a judgment. The large sword also symbolizes divine judgment.

Of course, the sad fact of any and all warfare is expressed in the phrase that "men slay each other." Every war is a frightening thing and leaves in its wake countless tear-stained eyes and bleeding hearts. However, while Christians also experience the heartaches and sorrow caused by war, yet they find comfort and hope in the assurance that our Lord is in complete control and that no war shall ever be able to destroy His Church. He will cause all things, - even wars, - to work together for the good of His believing followers. May we never lose sight of this consoling truth as we continue our journey through life!

6:5-6 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine,"

As John witnessed the opening of the third seal, he saw before him a black horse. There can be no doubt that this symbolizes famine. Jesus had foretold that famines would occur and that they, too, were to serve as signs of the approaching end. Famines generally are accompanied by scarcity of food and inflationary prices. In such times, it seems as though the wealthy are able to secure whatever they desire, while the poorer classes of people are barely able to exist.

The rider of the black horse is pictured as holding a pair of scales in his hand. This balance beam, with scales hung from either end, was used for weighing grain. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. The announcement was made by "a voice among the four living creatures" that with the denarius, a working man could purchase a quart of wheat, - hardly enough to keep him alive for one day. Or, with the day's wage, he could purchase three quarts of barley, a less nutritious grain, - but at least a little something for his family.

But now come the strange words: "Do not damage the oil and the wine." The verb used here can mean to damage, or to spoil, or to adulterate. We like the translation "to adulterate." In times of famine there existed the possibility that poorer people would be inclined to dilute the oil and wine with water or some other liquid in order to make these basic items last a little longer. The caution is given, however, not to spoil or adulterate the oil and the wine. Why is the caution given with regard to just these two articles? We know that oil and wine were household items in the preparation of food and meals. However, another thought has come to our mind. In the Biblical account of "The Good Samaritan," when the Samaritan saw the wounded man lying half-dead by the roadside, what did he make use of? We are told that he treated the man's wounds with wine and oil. Wine served as an antiseptic, and the oil served as a soothing and healing ointment. If, in times of famine, these basic necessities were damaged or adulterated by diluting them, they would lose their effectiveness in the treatment of wounds, sores, and the like.

The rider of the black horse is ever riding throughout this world of ours. Famines there have been, and famines there will continue to be, - each one proclaiming the message: "The end of all things is approaching." While many Christians also suffer on account of famines and inflationary prices, yet they have placed their trust in the Lord, who has promised never to leave them. Rest assured, the Lord, in His own way and at His own time, will always provide for His own!

6:7-8 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale

horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

With the opening of the fourth seal, John saw a pale horse, whose rider is called “Death;” and following closely behind him was Hades. As the word “Hades” is used in the New Testament, it is a name for hell, - the place to which the unbelievers, the ungodly, are committed. While death is the power to which all people, sooner or later, must succumb, yet here “death” seems to refer to those who are killed as a result of war, famine, plagues and the wild beasts of the earth. It is stated further that Death and Hades “were given power over a fourth of the earth,” - thus indicating that these judgments of God are partial and that they surely are intended also to call people to repentance.

It is evident that the judgments here symbolized pertain only to the ungodly. While it is true that also the godly are subject to physical death as a result of wars, famines, plagues and other calamities, yet their death is not followed by eternal death in hell. This fourth horseman strikes the ungodly; and following closely behind him is Hades, to swallow up the souls of his victims. Yes, all those who reject Christ and His saving Gospel go directly from physical death into the “second death,” which is hell and eternal damnation.

On our journey through life, therefore, it is so important for us to remember that there is something far more terrible than temporal death; and it is well that at all times we heed the words of our Savior: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28).

In this New Testament era, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have always been on the scene. Always have there been antichrists and false messiahs, bent on conquest, bent on conquering the souls of men and women with their deception and lies. Always have there been wars and rumors of wars. Always have there been famines, pestilences and other calamities. As this world of ours hastens onward toward its close, we can expect conditions to become increasingly more severe. Hear the words that Jesus spoke when He gave the signs that would precede His second coming. He said: “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:12-13).

6:9-11      When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the



testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

As the fifth seal was opened, John saw the souls of those who had been killed because they had held fast to the Word of God and had been faithful in their testimony of Christ. It is interesting to know that John saw the souls of these Christian martyrs. In all probability, their bodies already had returned to dust and ashes, or at least were in the process of doing so; but their souls were there in heaven. The theory that the souls of believers are not in heaven until after Judgment Day certainly is ruled out by this passage of Scripture.

John saw the souls of these Christian martyrs "under the altar." The origin of this expression possibly can be traced to the Old Testament ritual in which the blood of sacrificed animals was poured out at the base of the altar. Here, however, the expression "under the altar" is simply a symbolic representation of the heavenly tabernacle. The souls of these martyrs, who died for their faith, are in heaven, living in the presence of God.

We note also that the souls of these Christian martyrs are described as being conscious. John hears them calling out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Our first impression may be that this request of the martyrs is completely anti-scriptural. Are we not taught that we are to forgive our enemies and that we are to do good to those who abuse us and that we are to pray for those who persecute us? However, there is no conflict here. We know that it is God's will that all who reject Him and deliberately sin against Him and His people should be punished; and this prayer of the martyrs simply asks that God's will be done and that His holiness and truth be vindicated. Thus their request also serves to remind "the inhabitants of the earth" that, unless they repent, their sins surely will be punished. (In Revelation, the expression "inhabitants of the earth" always refers to the ungodly, the enemies of the Lord and His Church.)

In answer to the question of the martyrs, "How long....until you avenge our blood?" God tells them "to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." Since the time of Stephen, who was the first Christian martyr, there have been many who

have been put to death because of their unwavering faith in Christ Jesus; and throughout the New Testament era there will continue to be martyrs until the number of the martyred is complete, that is, until all are accounted for. God knows each one; and when the full number of those to be martyred has been reached, then God will show that He is indeed the sovereign, holy and true Lord by avenging the blood of the martyrs.

In the meantime each of the martyrs was given a white robe, - a symbol of purity. Since the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us of all our sins, we now can stand before God, clothed in the spotless garment of Christ's righteousness. The martyrs are reminded that their white robe of righteousness is a gift of God's love and grace, - not anything merited or earned by them. May we also be reminded once again of this cardinal truth!

Finally, we note that the sainted martyrs were told "to wait a little longer" before God would avenge their blood. As God reckons time (and remember, in His sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past), it indeed is only "a little while." In the meantime, patience and complete confidence in the government of God are required. Our holy God knows full well what He is doing; and you may rest assured that all His works are done in righteousness and truth.

6:12-14     I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

As the sixth seal is opened, John witnesses a scene that well-nigh defies description. It is the passing away of this present world on Judgment Day. Following the rule of letting Scripture interpret Scripture, let us see how the details, so graphically described in these verses, are the fulfilment of prophecies and predictions recorded in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

First let us enumerate the details as they are recorded in these three verses under consideration: the great earthquake; the sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat-hair (such a black sack was often used in times of mourning and despair); the moon turned blood-red; the stars falling from the sky as late figs (the reference is to green figs which appear in the winter and are easily blown from the tree); the sky receding like a scroll; and the removal of every mountain and island,

Now, without further comment, we will simply quote passages from Scripture in which these very events were predicted or foretold:

Luke 21:11 - “There will be great earthquakes....and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”

Matt. 24:29 - “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”

Joel 2:31 - The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Joel 3:15 - The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

Isaiah 34:4 - All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

2 Peter 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

Jeremiah 4:23-24 I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying.

6:15-17 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

The last three verses of this chapter describe the punishment that awaits all the

enemies of God and His Church. On the day of God's wrath, the blood of the martyrs will be avenged. The terror and despair which the enemies of the Lord will experience is indescribable. Whether high and mighty, - whether prominent and renowned, - whether rich or poor, - whether slave or free, - all will receive the punishment which they have deserved. In vain will they hope to find a spot where they can escape the wrath of God and of the Lamb. In desperation they will call to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us." Isaiah had foretold this when he wrote: "Men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from dread of the Lord and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth" (Isaiah 2:19). And on His way to the cross, Jesus had said of the unbelieving Jews: "Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!'" (Luke 23:30).

But escape will be impossible. The day of grace will have come to an end; and the enemies will have no other choice than to face the wrath of God and of the Lamb. They had despised God, they had rejected the Son of God, they had persecuted the Church of God, they had turned a deaf ear to all pleading and to all warning. Now they must not only face the wrath of the Father, who "sits on the throne," but they must also face the wrath of the Lamb, who, in addition to being the gracious Savior, is also the stern Judge; and from His lips they will hear the final verdict: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

This chapter closes with the question: "Who can stand?" Certainly none of the ungodly! Only those who are clothed in the white robe of Jesus' righteousness will be able to stand before the throne of the Almighty. The promise of Jesus is the absolute truth: "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16).

### **144,000 Sealed**

7:1-5 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea. "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

To give a brief summary of this chapter, we might say that the first eight verses describe the Church on earth, also known as the Church Militant; while the last nine

verses describe the Church in heaven, also known as the Church Triumphant.

After the six seals had been opened, John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth, These four winds represent the destructive agents of God, as we can see from Jer. 49:36, where the Lord Almighty says: “I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam’s exiles do not go.” Once unleashed, these four winds have the power of complete destruction. However, a fifth angel, bearing the seal of the living God, appears on the scene. He calls out to the four angels that they are to restrain, or hold back, the four winds until the appointed time.

There is good reason why these special visions are given before the seventh seal is opened and the winds of complete destruction are let loose. The opening of the six seals had revealed the terrifying judgments of God which are to come upon this wicked and unbelieving world. Now, before the opening of the seventh seal, God wants to make it clear to His children that He has not forgotten them, but that they are safe and secure. They will not be harmed when the four winds of destruction are finally unleashed. They will have nothing to fear in the great day of God’s wrath. In fact, the complete destruction of the earth will be delayed until the last of the servants of God has been sealed.

A seal indicates ownership and protection. When sinful human beings are converted, they become the servants of God, - they belong to God, - they are God’s special possession, - God puts His seal on them and says of them: “You are mine!” “God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’” (2 Tim. 2:19). This seal on the forehead is not a visible mark. Rather, it is the new spiritual life within us. It is the Spirit Himself testifying with our spirit that we are God’s children (Rom. 8:16). In Holy Baptism God sealed us and claimed us as His own. In His Word, He has given us many promises to assure us that we are sealed and that we belong to Him. One of the most outstanding of these promises is recorded in Isaiah 43:1: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.” How comforting to know that we Christians are under God’s constant care and protection! And how reassuring to know that this present world will not be destroyed until all the elect have been brought to faith!

7:4-8 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of usher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of

Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the scribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the scribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000,

From the very outset it is obvious that the 144,000 are not converted Jews “from all the tribes of Israel,” because the list of the twelve tribes here does not agree with any Old Testament listing. In the Old Testament, Levi was not counted as a tribe; here Dan is omitted; Judah here is listed before his older brother Reuben; and Manasseh, one of the two Joseph tribes, is here listed separately. Hence, it is clear that here we are not dealing with the literal twelve tribes of Israel.

Here we are dealing with God’s spiritual Israel. The Jewish nation, as such, no longer occupied a special position as the chosen people of God, The true Israel today - God’s spiritual Israel - is made up of all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles. In Rev. 14:3, the 144,000 are referred to as those “who had been redeemed from the earth.” Whenever the New Testament speaks of God’s spiritual Israel, it means all true believers, including the Gentile believers. To reassure ourselves of this fact, let us look at a few passages. In Rom. 2:28-29 Paul says: “A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code.” In Rom. 9:6-8 we read: “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham’s children. On the contrary, ‘It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.’ In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” And in Gal. 3:26-29 we are told in very clear words: “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

The number 144,000 is symbolic of all faithful believers in the world, - the entire Church. Everywhere in Revelation, the number 12 is representative of the Church. 12 squared is 144; 10 cubed is 1000, a number for completeness in the highest degree.  $12 \times 12 \times 1000 = 144,000$ , - symbolizing the full number of the people of God, who are under His watchful providence. No one can pluck the elect from God’s hand. God knows each one of them by name. “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30). Yes, God will bring each and every one of them to the eternal home!

7:9-10      After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. "

This "great multitude that no one could count" and the 144,000 are not different groups, but are one and the same. As we stated previously, the 144,000 constitute the Church on earth, also known as the Church Militant. This second group is the Church in heaven, also known as the Church Triumphant.

The fact that those who make up this unnumbered multitude come from every nation, tribe, people and language is further evidence that the "Israel" in this chapter is God's spiritual Israel, - the entire number of all true believers in Christ.

What a beautiful picture! What a hope-filled prospect! All the faithful, all the elect, standing before the throne and the Lamb, all safe in their heavenly home! They are clothed in white robes, symbolic of the righteousness of Christ, imparted to them by faith. We can almost hear them saying in the words of the Prophet Isaiah: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (Is. 61:10). In their hands they hold palm branches, symbols of victory. Loudly and jubilantly they sing their song of thanksgiving and praise: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Thus do they ascribe their salvation to God the Father and to Jesus Christ. God devised the way of salvation, He planned it; and it was Jesus, who carried out the Father's plan and will and who, through His suffering and death, earned salvation for the world of mankind. Had it not been for God the Father, had it not been for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, there would be no salvation. Salvation must be ascribed to "our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb," - never to ourselves or any other being.

7:11-12      All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!"

After the song of the redeemed, the entire assembly of angels took up the refrain. "Amen" is a word of assent, meaning "This is absolutely true." Thus the

myriads of angels agree to the song of the elect. Though the angels never experienced salvation, because they have never sinned, yet they are filled with awe when they see what God has done to accomplish the sinner's salvation. Accordingly, they sound forth the grand doxology: "Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever, Amen!" This sevenfold blessing expresses complete or perfect praise.

Observe how the angels' posture is very humble, expressing deep reverence. In the presence of our great God, we, too, must reflect a spirit of reverence and humility, - the humility of the publican in the temple, who smote himself upon the breast and cried aloud, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" Always must we be aware of the fact that, had we been left to ourselves, we would be eternally doomed. Purely by the grace of God we are to be numbered among the children of God. All glory and thanksgiving and praise be to God alone!

7:13-14      Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

One of the twenty-four elders asked John whether he could identify these multitudes who were robed in white. John politely replied, "Sir, you know." The elder then proceeds to answer his own question in most beautiful phraseology.

The elder says first of all, "These are they who have come out of great tribulation." The millennialists identify "the great tribulation" as a period of extraordinary suffering, lasting seven years; and they claim that the saints will escape this tribulation by being "raptured" out of this world for seven years. We note that Jesus spoke of "the great tribulation" when He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem and also when He spoke of the final destruction of the present world; but nowhere in Scripture will you find these words used in connection with a reference to seven years. While it is true that calamities, trials, sufferings and persecutions will increase and become more severe as the world nears its end, yet we maintain that the tribulation here referred to includes the many trials and sufferings which Christians in every generation must endure, even as it is written in Scripture: "We must go through many hardships (tribulations) to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Every time a child of God dies, he "comes out of" the great tribulation into the glories of heaven.



The elder continues his description of these saints in heaven by saying, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” By nature, their robes were not white, but dirty, filthy with sin; yes, all their “righteous acts” were “like filthy rags” (Is. 64:6). But by the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ, their sin-stained garments were made white as snow, as St. John also wrote in one of his Epistles: “The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We have mentioned previously that the white robes are symbolic of the righteousness which Christ, through His suffering and death, has earned for us and which is offered and imputed to all believers through the Means of Grace, - the Word and the Sacraments.

7:15-17      “Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

“Therefore,” that is, because these people have been cleansed of all their sins by the blood of Jesus, they now enjoy the bliss of heaven, - that perfect bliss which here is described in ten beautiful phrases: they are before the throne of God - they serve Him day and night in His temple - He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them - never again will they hunger - never again will they thirst - the sun will not beat upon them - nor any scorching heat - the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd - He will lead them to springs of living water - God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Since the number 10 in Revelation is the number of perfection, completeness, we may say that these ten phrases are symbolic of the perfect joy and bliss which we and all true believers will experience in the heavenly mansions.

The first three statements speak of the blessedness of the believers in the presence of God, where they will serve Him in uninterrupted bliss. There will be activity in heaven; and while no particular type of service is mentioned, yet we know that whatever work the redeemed will perform will be to the honor and glory of their great God and Lord. The picture of God spreading His tent over them is symbolic of the shelter that they will enjoy in the presence of God. What the cloud above the mercy seat in the Old Testament tabernacle typified, will be fully realized in heaven. God will

be ever present with His saints to bless them with His gifts of love.

The next four phrases of this description of heavenly bliss show the freedom of God's people from the effects of sin. The Lord knows how difficult it is for us to even begin to visualize what heaven is like. Accordingly, for our benefit, much of the blessedness of heaven is stated in negative language: no hunger, no thirst, no sun beating down, no scorching heat. All of these, - hunger, thirst, penetrating and scorching heat, - symbolic of the trials and hardships of life, - so familiar to us here on earth, will be conspicuous by their absence in heaven.

The last of these descriptive phrases speak of the source of this bliss: "The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water." We are reminded here of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want....he leads me beside quiet waters." The Lamb, our Redeemer and Lord, will satisfy all thirst forever. He had promised this already during His sojourn here on earth when He said: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14). Full satisfaction will be found in Christ and in His presence.

And there will be no tears. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes," - as Isaiah also wrote: "The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Is. 25:8). Whatever may have caused the Christians sorrow and weeping here on earth will be gone forever.

What a picture we have in this chapter of the bliss of heaven! How this must have encouraged the early Christians in the midst of bitter persecutions! What comfort and hope it ought to impart also to us in these last days of great distress! Remember, what John is seeing in this vision is a picture of all true believers of all ages. As the elect of God, as faithful believers in the Lord Jesus, we also are included in that innumerable multitude of white-robed saints. With them we gratefully sing: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

We are ready now for the vision of the seven trumpets, which is introduced by the opening of the seventh seal.