

The Sealed of Israel

Revelation 7:1-8

I am always deeply humbled when I can come together with God's people and minister the Word of God to them. And this morning we would like to do this by examining Revelation chapter seven verses one through eight.

We began around the first Sunday of this year studying the *Apokalypsis Iesou Christou* and here we are now in chapter seven in this amazing study that the Lord has given us. Follow along as I read Revelation seven beginning verse one.

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.¹

I am sure you join me when I say that I long for every blessing that God can give me in my Christian life. And certainly I rejoice knowing that God has revealed many ways for us to be blessed through the truths of his Word. And this is precisely the benefit of the study of Bible prophecy. You may recall that in the prologue of the apocalypse in chapter one verse three we are told, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."²

Indeed, what an enormous comfort it is to know that God is in control of the universe, to know that Satan is a defeated foe, to know that one day the wicked will be judged and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

People around our country and, indeed, around our world are growing increasingly concerned about what they see. Recently we have had citizens gather together in our country having what they call "tea parties" where they are protesting the Marxist ideologies that are now driving our government and bringing ruin to our nation as it has every other nation in the history of the world. As I watched these tea parties I thought to myself, my, for the most part—certainly not with everyone—but for the most part these

¹ Revelation 7:1-8.

² Revelation 1:3.

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people have no idea what the real problem is. The real problem is not our government. The real problem, dear friends, is sin. They have no idea how bad things are really going to get. And they have no idea what is about to happen on the earth because most of them have no understanding of the Word of God, especially the prophetic Word.

There is a danger looming on the horizon even our country and, in fact, the whole world that is far worse than Marxist ideologies, and that is the scourge of sin scourge of Islam. I was studying some demographic statistics this last week and I learned more about the exponential rise in the population of Muslim peoples whom, by the way, we should love with all of our hearts and do everything we can to present the gospel of Christ to them.

But as I studied the research I learned that in order for a culture to maintain itself for more than 25 years it must have a fertility rate per family of 2.11 otherwise the culture will decline and it will take 80 to 100 years for it to correct itself. In fact, historically, no culture has ever reversed a 1.9 fertility rate. However, across the European Union, 31 countries, the fertility rate is 1.38. But with the Muslim people it is 8.1. Yet it is interesting that because of not only the Muslim fertility rate, but also immigration, the population of Europe is on the rise. In fact 90% of all immigrants are Muslim. In 39 years France will be an Islamic Republic according to the statistics that I have read. And within one generation all of Europe will be dominated by Muslims.

Muslims are very excited about this. Mu'ammarr Qadhafi of Libya says, and I quote, "There are signs that Allah will grant victory to Islam and Europe without swords, without guns, without conquest. We don't need terrorists. We don't need homicide bombers. The 50 plus million Muslims in Europe will turn it into a Muslim continent within a few decades."

Currently in Russia one in five are Muslim and they are concerned that in just a few years 40% of their entire military force will be Muslim. Russia will very quickly, then, become a Muslim nation. This makes the Russian invasion of Israel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 all the more probable in the very near future.

In the United States the fertility rate is 1.6. You add the Latino immigration and their fertility rate and it increases it to 2.11 which is the bare minimum required to sustain a culture. In 1970 we had 100,000 Muslims in the United States. Today we have nine million and in 50 years there will be 50 million Muslims in America. If the Lord tarries, dear friends, your children and my grandchildren will grow up in a world dominated by Islam. And eventually they will live in a Muslim country here in the United States.

The demographic trend is now irreversible. In fact, it is estimated that in about 60 years the whole world will be dominated by the most wicked, satanic religious system in the history of the world which is Islam. Now this is a terrifying reality especially in light of the prospect of a nuclear Iran and Islam's obsession with the elimination of Israel and all who support her.

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The ancient battle between Satan's kingdom of darkness and God's kingdom of light can be seen in all of this. You will recall that according to 2 Corinthians four and verse four, Satan is the temporary "god of this world" and we know that he has erected a counterfeit temple, an Islamic temple right on Mount Moriah, the very place where the ark of the covenant once sat, the very place where the holy of holies once stood and the place where it will stand one day in the future.

In fact, conflict over this particular piece of real estate is the very key to understanding not only the shift in the world's demographics, but also every other world crisis that will give rise to the antichrist and set into motion God's final judgments upon the nations and the establishment of his earthly kingdom on Mount Zion. Satan knows this very well. His time is short and he is doing all he can to prevent these things from occurring. But how thankful we can be that our God reigns, that he works all things after the counsel of his will.

Now, here in the book of Revelation, in the apocalypse, in the unveiling, we are reminded again of God's sovereign rule over creation. For here the Lord Jesus Christ unveils to us the final stages of his plan of redemption and restoration whereby he will, once and for all, take back from the usurper Satan that which is rightfully his and punish the wicked who rebel against him and establish his glorious kingdom that the glory of the Lord will the earth as the waters cover the sea.³ And I pray that together we will humble ourselves before these incredible truths and ask the Holy Spirit of God to penetrate our hearts with these truths as we contemplate the majesty of God that is manifested in his glorious plan of redemption, a topic of which I never tire.

Chapter seven is an interlude between the unprecedented terrors of the sixth seal judgment which is the beginning of "the day of the Lord" and the opening of the seventh seal that will unleash the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowl judgments. In the sixth seal the focus is on God's enemies and in the seventh seal the focus is on God's chosen people. In the sixth seal the focus is on God's wrath, but in the seventh, the focus is on his mercy and protection and saving grace. Now, given the unspeakable terrors and slaughters of the sixth seal, the question is posed: "Who is able to stand?"⁴ Who can possibly endure the wrath of God upon sinners? Chapter seven answers this question, that only those who have been united to Christ by grace through faith will be able to stand. And here we see two groups that have availed themselves of God's grace through his sovereign choice, two groups that can survive the fury of divine justice.

The first group is the 144,000 as we will learn, 144,000 redeemed Jewish male evangelists whom God has sealed to be protected from the final trumpet and bowl judgments that will ensue in the last half of the tribulation. And the second group is a great multitude of martyred saints from every kindred, tongue and nation who availed themselves of God's grace and worship him and the Lamb around the heavenly throne.

³ See Isaiah 11:9, Habakkuk 2:14.

⁴ Revelation 6:17.

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Now let me set the stage for our study this morning. As we approach this text concerning the 144,000 representatives of the godly remnant of Israel on the earth during the time of the tribulation, we are reminded afresh of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to his ancient people given first to Abraham. You will recall that in the Old Testament the promises of God's restoration of a national Israel is dominant on virtually every page. But because of the hardness of their heart in rejecting their messiah, they were temporarily displaced by the church, making the church, now, the primary focus of the New Testament. Notwithstanding the central emphasis on the Church in the New Testament, the inspired writers of the New Testament, as well as the first century audience, never lost sight of God's promises to Israel evidenced by the frequent citations and allusions to the Old Testament that affirm the Old Testament promises of restoration to a national Israel. And we see this, again, here in Revelation chapter seven.

For example, in Acts chapter one and verse six, the disciples said, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"⁵ To which he responded in verse seven, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority."⁶ In other words he is saying, "Your expectation is correct, but the timing is not yours to know. " He did not say to them, "No, no, no. Wait a second. You are confused. There will be no earthly kingdom. The kingdom is just merely in you now. It is a spiritual kingdom. It has nothing to do with Israel. Israel has been eternally disenfranchised." He did not say that. He merely told them that they had no right to know the timing of God's sovereign plan. But obviously their anticipation of a restored national Israel was justified.

In fact, in the first eight verses of Acts chapter one we read about Israel's national restoration. That was the theme of conversation between Jesus and his disciples just prior to his ascension into glory from the Mount of Olives. In verse three we learn that after his resurrection Jesus spent 40 days instructing his disciples about "the things concerning the kingdom of God."⁷ Now this was an important follow up to his previous discussion on the topic at his last supper with them where he told them that the next time he would celebrate the Passover with them would be "in the kingdom of God."⁸

He told then in Luke 22:15:

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.⁹

And, likewise, Matthew added a very important emphasis here, a distinction that we Gentiles typically have no understanding of, that typically goes right over our head. He said in Matthew 26 verse 29, "I say to you, I will not drink of *this* fruit of the vine from

⁵ Acts 1:6.

⁶ Acts 1:7.

⁷ Acts 1:3.

⁸ Mark 14:25; Luke 22:16.

⁹ Luke 22:15-16.

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now on until that day when I drink it *new* with you in My Father's kingdom."¹⁰ Again, this statement has enormous significance to the Jewish mind. Dr. Randall Price explains the substance of this statement this way, quote, "While Luke focuses generally on eating the Passover, Matthew emphasizes the specific aspect of drinking the Passover cup, quote, '*this* fruit of the vine,'¹¹ not simply, quote, '*the* fruit of the vine,' as in Mark 14:25." He goes on to say, "The Passover Seder which is in the background of these texts has a final cup of praise taken at the conclusion of the Passover with a focus on the future restoration of Israel in the Messianic age. Such an event in terms of a new exodus, which the Passover Seder rehearsed, was predicted by the prophet Isaiah to attend the final restoration of Israel at the coming of the Messiah," end quote.

And that text to which he refers is Isaiah 25 and verse six. And here is what we read.

LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, Even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the LORD has spoken.

And it will be said in that day, "Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation." For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.¹²

Again, a reference to Mount Zion in Jerusalem from where the Lord will one day reign.

What a marvelous promise, the renewal of eating and drinking in celebration of the Lord's perfect and final sacrifice will resume in the glorious earthly kingdom just as he promised his disciples in Matthew 19:28 where he said, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."¹³

And Luke adds to Jesus' statement in Luke 22 and verse 30:

Just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁴

¹⁰ Matthew 26:29.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Isaiah 25:6-10.

¹³ Matthew 19:28.

¹⁴ Luke 22:29-30.

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Another important clue pointing to Israel's future kingdom is that after 40 days of teaching the disciples about the coming Messianic kingdom Jesus ascended into heaven and Luke tells us in verses 52 through 53:

And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.¹⁵

Now think about it. Had the Lord taught them that the Church had permanently replaced Israel and therefore there will be no earthly kingdom, no restoration of a national Israel, wouldn't you think it odd that they went "continually in the temple praising God"? Moreover, if all of this were true, why would Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost speak so plainly about the need for repentance in order for Israel's promised restoration to occur? In Acts chapter three in verse 19 he said:

Repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.¹⁶

Again, a reference to the millennial reign of Christ.

My point is simply this. The New Testament affirms the Old Testament promises of a restoration of national Israel on the basis of God's mercy and his unconditional covenants that he made "to the fathers" as it says so clearly in Romans nine through 11.

Now that brings us back to the book of Revelation, an epistle that was written largely to Jewish Christian Churches of the Diaspora who still longed for the promised messianic kingdom. And here in Revelation seven we once again have a reference to the tribes of the nation of Israel. We see it again in chapter 12, verses 13 through 17. We have references to the land of Israel in chapter 11 verses one through 14, the tribes of Israel once again in chapter 14:1. And all of this, of course, is in the context of Daniel's 70th week judgment on Israel that will culminate in the future national restoration of ethnic Israel.

Now, once again, we see the elective purposes of God being fulfilled in his sovereign plan even in the sealing of these 144,000 Jewish men who will be God's instruments of righteousness through their testimony to their Jewish kinsmen as well as may Gentiles.

This morning I want to invite you to examine the text before us. There are three truths that emerge from this text. First we will see *the mercy of God in the midst of wrath*; secondly, *the sealing of the first fruits of Israel*; and then, thirdly, *the elective purposes of God for Israel*.

¹⁵ Luke 24:52-53.

¹⁶ Acts 3:19-21.

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First *the mercy of God in the midst of wrath*. Notice verse one of chapter seven.

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”¹⁷

Now here we see God commanding four of his magnificent angels to enact a pause in the impending judgments of God between the close of the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh. And we will see this pause as an act of mercy so as to protect this select group of people chosen and empowered to perform a specific role in the final reconciliation of Israel to her Messiah. Keep in mind, the Church has been snatched away. The Church has been raptured and these are now the judgments of the tribulation poured out upon the world.

Now notice the curious phrase here: “standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth.”¹⁸

Whenever I read this I recall a time in my post graduate studies where a particular student who was a skeptic of all things Christian and certainly of the Bible used this as one of several texts to support his charge that the Bible is false. He argued, as many do, that this statement, “the corners of the earth,” proves that they thought that the earth was flat and so if God had really written this, surely he would have known better.

Now, unfortunately, what he failed to recognize is that the second part of the verse, as well as many other passages, interpret the first part. Now think about it. From where do the four winds of the earth blow? Well, the answer is from the North and the East and South and the West demonstrating that the semi-poetic language that John employs with the statement, “the four corners of the earth,” is merely another way of referring to the four cardinal directions or points of a compass used for geographic orientation on the earth which can be calculated anywhere on a rotating astronomical body.

Dr. Henry Morris adds further scientific insight. Here is what he says. “Accurate, modern geodetic measurements in recent years have proved that the earth actually does have four corners. These are protuberances standing out from the basic “geoid,” that is, basic spherical shape of the earth. The earth is not really a perfect sphere, but is slightly flattened at the poles. It’s equatorial bulge is presumably caused by the earth’s axial rotation and its four corners protrude from that.” One secondary point here is: Don’t ever stand in judgment of the infallible record of the Word of God or you will be made a fool.

So during this interlude God commands four angels in ways that we can’t fully understand, to “hold back” or literally “restrain” the wind. In verse one we read that “no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”¹⁹ The Greek grammar adds

¹⁷ Revelation 7:1.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

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clarification to the sense of this phrase where it says, in essence, “Hold it back lest it keep blowing, lest it keep coming.”

The phrase, “the four winds,” is elsewhere associated with divine judgment. We see this in the Old Testament. In his vision of the four beasts Daniel said in chapter seven verse two”

I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another.²⁰

We see a similar description in Jeremiah chapter 49 verse 36 and Hosea chapter 13 verse 15 where the wind is symbolic of an invading force of divine judgment. So I believe here we can interpret the wind as this force of destruction in the impending trumpet and bowl judgments that must be temporarily restrained from their mission of justice that God has unleashed upon the world.

Now John tells us that there will be an eerie calm before these next judgments occur; a stillness over the earth that has just experienced catastrophic destruction. So here we have a *mercy in the midst of wrath*, a time for the men and women of the earth to examine their hearts before the judgments that they see and a time for God to set apart a select remnant of Israel to accomplish his purposes to them.

Secondly, we see *the sealing of the first fruits of Israel* in verse two. “And I saw another angel.”²¹ “Another” in the original language is *allon* (al’-lon). It is a term that refers to another of the same kind. So this is another angel of the same kind as the other four. And he says, “I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun.”²² Again, that is from the East.

Now for John on the Isle of Patmos this would be Mount Zion. This was the place that was promised to the Jewish people from which the Messiah would one day come and bring salvation to the 12 tribes. Salvation is always depicted as coming from the East.

I find it fascinating. In Genesis chapter two and verse eight we see God’s plan of redemption set in motion and we read, “The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden.”²³ And because of Israel’s sin we know that the glory of the God of Israel departed to the East from Israel as we read in Ezekiel 11 verse 23. That is the same direction from which he will one day return as we read in Zechariah 14:4 where the text says, “In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east.”²⁴ And in Ezekiel chapter 43 verse one, in his vision of the glory of God that will one day fill the millennial temple we read:

²⁰ Daniel 7:2-3.

²¹ Revelation 7:2.

²² Ibid.

²³ Genesis 2:8.

²⁴ Zechariah 14:4.

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Then he led me to the gate, the gate facing toward the east; and behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the way of the east.²⁵

Likewise, Malachi tells us in chapter four and verse two that the Messiah is pictured as the sun, S-U-N, of righteousness that will “rise with healing in its wings.”²⁶ Again, the sun rising in the East.

So we have another angel ascending from “the rising of the sun” and he says that he has “the seal of the living God.” The term “seal” is important for us to understand. The seal in that ancient day described the signet ring of a monarch, the ring that they would use to affix an imprint of their “signature,” shall we say, upon very important documents and, thus, validate the authenticity of that particular document and also express the full force of his authority to carry out his wishes.

And notice this is the seal of “the living God.” Here God separates himself from all other gods, all of the other idols that are dead. He is the living God. Satan, the master counterfeiter, will continue to produce idols and, certainly, by this time the antichrist is in full swing and he has demanded that the world worship him. So God is setting himself apart here.

We see that the antichrist will also have a unique seal of ownership for all who serve him during the tribulation. In Revelation chapter 13 verse 16 we read the will, “be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead.”²⁷ And, likewise, we know that the Lamb of God will mark a select group of the 144,000 Israelites for his possession and purposes with his seal. We read, for example, in Revelation 14:1, “Having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.”²⁸

Now, God has sealed his people before. We know this from other occasions in the Old Testament. Remember, the mark of the blood on the door posts and lintels in Egypt instructing the angel of death to pass over the first born. An even more striking comparison is found in Ezekiel chapter nine and verse three where the godly remnant of his people of that day who had remained faithful to him were left very vulnerable because the presence of the glory of God had departed from Israel and now the Babylonians were coming in and God decided to protect them. So we read in verse four of Ezekiel chapter nine the angel of the Lord, “put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.”²⁹ He did this to protect them, but the others would not be spared. So this was the marking of God’s elect, a sealing of possession and protection of a righteous remnant.

²⁵ Ezekiel 43:1-2.

²⁶ Malachi 4:2.

²⁷ Revelation 13:16.

²⁸ Revelation 14:1.

²⁹ Ezekiel 9:4.

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So John tells the angel that cried out to the other four, in verse three, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants,” literally the slaves, “of our God on their foreheads.”³⁰ In Revelation chapter 14 and verse three he describes them as those who had been “purchased from the earth.”³¹ He describes them in verse four as morally pure servants that “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”³² And in verse five, “And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.”³³ These will be preserved from the impending judgments of “the four winds” that will fall upon the unbelieving world so that they can be the instruments of righteousness in God’s elected purposes for Israel as well as many Gentiles of that day.

Now, I might also add, while they will be protected from the wrath of God, from the trumpet and bowl judgments, that does not mean that they might not well succumb to the fate of martyrdom as indicated in other passages.

So we have seen *the mercy of God in the midst of wrath* and *the sealing of these first fruits of Israel*. And, finally, *the elective purposes of God for Israel* in verse four. “And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”³⁴

Now the question arises: Who are these 144,000? Of course, I have already told you who I believe and many others believe they are. And I might add that there is absolutely no exegetical reason to deny the normal meaning of language and argue that this refers to the Church. There is not one unambiguous example in all of the New Testament where the Church is called Israel. Instead the term Israel always refers to ethnic Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Moreover, to insist that this text refers to the Church would require us to impose some kind of bizarre typological interpretation upon the Church that would necessitate that we somehow divide the Church up into 12 different tribes. Obviously we are not going to do that. So, once again, I would humbly say that I am constrained by the normal meaning of Scripture. And here we have an unmistakable assertion in this text that says that God “sealed 144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” And, of course, this also fits perfectly into all the concepts with respect to the pre-kingdom judgments of Daniel’s 70th week prophecy pertaining to Israel.

And then we see that John proceeds to list the specific names of the tribes. And I am not going to read them again, but this is a list that varies. All through Scripture we see about 19 different lists of them and they are all a bit different. But it is fascinating there that we have this list, and we don’t want to gloss over it.

In fact, John MacArthur offers some very helpful insights on this particular list. Here is what he says, quote, “Although Reuben was the first born, Judah is listed first. Reuben

³⁰ Revelation 7:3.

³¹ Revelation 14:3.

³² Revelation 14:4.

³³ Revelation 14:5.

³⁴ Revelation 7:4.

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forfeited his birthright as punishment for his sexual misconduct with his father's concubine. The omission of the tribe of Dan in favor of the priestly tribe of Levi is also unusual. Dan was evidently omitted due to the tribe's penchant for idolatry which was even worse than that of the rest of the nation. While Dan will share in the millennial blessings—as we read in Ezekiel 48:1-2 and verse 32—the tribe will not be selected for this duty nor protected during the tribulation. Similarly the name of Ephraim is omitted in favor of his father Joseph because Ephraim defected from the ruling house of Judah. Also Ephraim, like Dan, was consumed with idolatry. His brother Manasseh is included because he was the faithful son of Joseph.”

Now it should be of no surprise to any of us that God who is omniscient will know precisely who these various people will be during this time, which man will belong to which tribe. He knows the “tenth portion” as Isaiah tells us, of the remnant of Israel, “the holy seed,” Isaiah 6:13. And Malachi reminds us also that God has a “book of remembrance” to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked of Israel in chapter three and verse 16 and 18. In Malachi 3:17 he tells us this, “‘They will be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’”³⁵

So here in Revelation 7 we see the Lord preparing the way for the future conversion of his ancient people consistent with all of the Old Testament promises and all of the allusions and all of the promises we see in the New Testament, a future restoration that will bring God's covenant people into the land as well as countless Gentiles that will believe.

I want to close with this thought. We are living in amazing times. The very last days, I believe, before the Lord returns. And let me tell you just one of many reasons why I would say that. The prophet Ezekiel prophesied on a number of occasions that prior to the pre kingdom judgments, Israel will be *regathered* back into her land in unbelief. And that would be followed by a time of unprecedented persecution which will ultimately lead to her national restoration. And, beloved, I believe that we see this preparation taking place today in the modern state of Israel.

And why will God do all of this? In Ezekiel chapter 36 verse 22 here is what he says.

It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. "And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land.

³⁵ Malachi 3:17.

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"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.³⁶

Oh, dear Christian, what a graphic picture of God's unfailing sovereign love we see in his dealings with his covenant people. And what an astounding testimony to the nations of the world when one day they witness the Lord of glory reconciling his beloved enemy unto himself and restoring them to their land.

It was this theme that inspired Horatio Bonar to compile a variety of Scripture passages and pen the words of this hymn. Here is what he said, quote,

Forgotten! No; that cannot be:
All other names may pass away,
But thine, My Israel, shall remain
In everlasting memory.

Forgotten! No; that cannot be:
Inscribed upon My palms thou art;
The name I gave in days of old
Is graven still upon My heart.

Forgotten! no; that cannot be:
Beloved of thy God art thou,
His crown for ever on thy head,
His name for ever on thy brow.

Forgotten! no; that cannot be :
Sun, moon, and stars may cease to shine,
But thou shalt be remembered still,
For thou art His, and He is thine.

May God in his grace teach us these great truths and make us ready for his return. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for the promises that you have given us, how many we have seen fulfilled, literally hundreds and hundreds of them which assures us that the promises left to be fulfilled will also be fulfilled literally. Lord, we

³⁶ Ezekiel 36:22-28.

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praise you for your work of grace in our hearts and we pray that you will speak to those especially who might be within the sound of my voice that know nothing of the love of Christ, who know nothing of what it means to worship and serve you as the Lord of their life, who know nothing of sins forgiven, who do not share the hope of heaven.

Lord, I pray that you will speak to their hearts and may today be the day that they experience the miracle of the new birth.

Lord, dismiss us with your grace. We thank you and we love you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcript Explanation: Each transcript is a rough approximation of the message preached and may occasionally misstate certain portions of the sermon and even misspell certain words. It should in no way be considered an edited document ready for print. Moreover, as in any transcription of the spoken word, the full intention and passion of the speaker cannot be fully captured and will in no way reflect the same style of a written document.

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