

### BOOK OF REVELATION

#### Lesson 18 - Chapters 7 and 8

Last week we ended Revelation 7 with a discussion about who the people Heaven dressed in white robes were; that is the question asked of John by one of the Heavenly elders. John answered saying effectively that he didn't know, but that obviously the elder who asked him the question did. The elder responded with what we read in Revelation 7:14. In the CJB it reads: "These are the people who have come out of the Great Persecution" (capital G Great and capital P Persecution making it the name of an event). Various other English Bible translations treat this verse slightly differently. The KJV says the people came out of great tribulation (not THE great tribulation). The NAB says the people **survived** the time of great distress. The NAS says they came out of the great tribulation (little g great and little t tribulation meaning it is not the name of an event). Each one of these somewhat different interpretations reflects a doctrinal belief held by the translator. While 3 of these translations are similar notice how the NAB goes so far as to say that these people dressed in the white robes did not die during this great tribulation but rather were survivors. I must stress, however, that this interpretation is an outlier, doesn't agree with the original Greek, and I haven't found it elsewhere.

We also looked at what the early Church Fathers thought about the identity of these people and particularly focused on Primasius of the mid 500's A.D. at least partly because he leaned heavily on the Revelation commentary of Ticonius, written in the mid 300's A.D., for his conclusions. And the bottom line was that these people were a conglomerate of Believers who died at some point during a time when human evil was running amok on a scale that the world has never before experienced. That is, while some of the Believers died as martyrs for their faith, others died for various other causes such as disease or age. They included people of weak and strong faith, and even people who had fallen away but because of the tremendous persecutions and the generally hopeless condition of society came back to Christ. I agree with Primasius because the statement made to John by the elder in Heaven is too broad to attach any specificity to it. Certainly those academics and laymen who have a strongly developed End Times doctrine (such as the Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine created by Darby in the early 1800's) read their point of view into those vague words. I suggest that it is best that we take the wide view that Primasius and Ticonius adopted more than 1500 years ago.

The last words of Revelation 7:14 that concludes the identity of those dressed in the white robes is that they have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. If we were take this fully literally, then we'd have to scratch our heads because if we dipped a garment into a vat of blood it would come out anything but white! Some commentators take this statement to indicate martyrdom; however it is not the blood of the Believer who is being credited with making his robe white but rather the blood of Christ. So essentially the term "blood of the Lamb" is an expression that refers to Yeshua's death on the cross as the means of atonement and purification for all God worshippers.

Let's conclude chapter 7 by reading verses 15 - 17.

### RE-READ REVELATION 7:15 - end

Concerning those in white robes, the few words to begin verse 15 are telling: "That is why they are before God's throne." Those dressed in white robes are before God's throne in Heaven for 2 reasons: first, they died and so their souls are in Heaven. Second, they have been purified through Christ's sacrifice. So the distinction being made about this particular group of Believers is that they died during a period of tremendous tribulation on earth. However the distinction is only about the **timing** of their arrival in Heaven; not the way they merit being allowed into Heaven. All Believers will arrive in Heaven upon our death and stand before God's throne whether we die in a time of peace or tribulation, and whether after living a full life span or experiencing an early death by any means.

Notice something interesting here that we should not merely dismiss as figures of speech. The next words of verse 15 are: "Day and night they serve Him in His Temple". Certainly since the scene is in Heaven there are no such things as day or night, and there's nothing like a physical Temple. Rather this is meant to draw us towards remembering how important are the earthly Temple, its Levite Priests, and the daily rituals that occurred there. However they are but physical shadows of a spiritual, heavenly ideal and reality. I guarantee you that while this flies over the heads of most gentile Christians of nearly every era, the mental picture of the Jerusalem Temple and its operation were the first thing to enter John's mind, and to enter the minds of the Jewish Yeshua followers in John's time, who read and heard about John's visions. For example, we've previously discussed how clearly the 24 Elders surrounding God's thrones were Levite Priests who had become Believers. Even the description of God and His throne were directly tied to the High Priest's breastplate and to the 12 tribes of Israel and to Yeshua's own tribe: Judah. And even the constant terminology about what we're witnessing going on in Heaven that speaks of a Temple, altars, golden bowls, and musical instruments is meant to remind us of the crucial duties performed in the Jerusalem Temple on behalf of God's people.

Back in verse 9 we saw how a huge crowd of Believers of every race, language and nation were waving palm branches; and this is a central feature of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot). And now when we get a literal translation of the final words of Revelation 7:15 we read this in the Young's Literal Translation Bible:

**<sup>YLT</sup> Revelation 7:15 *because of this are they before the throne of God, and they do service to Him day and night in His sanctuary, and He who is sitting upon the throne shall tabernacle over them;***

Whereas the CJB has taken great liberties with the text in order to say "And the One who sits on the throne will put his **Shekinah** upon them", that is a poor translation that pulls us away from an intended connection. The Greek word that is in question is **skenoo**; it decidedly does not mean **Shekinah**. Rather it means to have one's tabernacle or to dwell in one's tabernacle. So here the matter of the tabernacle surfaces again and links back to verse 9 that speaks of the palm branches that are so central to the Feast of Tabernacles ritual. And indeed, the **sukkah**, the tabernacle that we are instructed to build and live in during the week long Feast of Tabernacles celebration requires having palm branches in its construction, and is symbolic of God's supernatural protection (of this Jews have always agreed as far back into antiquity as we

can find). And so now this symbolic protection on earth becomes a permanent reality in Heaven for Believers. We will live in God's **sukkah**...God's tabernacle....with Him, forever protected for an eternity.

Let's take this thought about the Feast of Tabernacles being represented in John's vision one step further. Verse 16 is an allusion to Isaiah 49:10. That verse reads:

**CJB Isaiah 49:10 <sup>10</sup> They will be neither hungry nor thirsty; neither scorching wind nor sun will strike them; for he who has mercy on them will lead them and guide them to springs of water.**

While Revelation 7:16 is not a direct quote of Isaiah 49:10 it is close. But as I've taught you in earlier lessons, we must never get so focused on the Scripture verse that is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament that we lose track of the Old Testament context in which that verse is found. That is, remember that in Old and New Testament times there were no such things as chapters and verses; this organization of Scripture for study would not be invented for many centuries later. So when a Jewish writer of John's era and earlier wanted to bring to mind a specific section of Scripture, he would either quote it or allude to it using only a few words of it; sufficient enough for the reader or hearer to identify what portion of Scripture he was being guided to. So let's go to the larger section of Scripture that John's vision is alluding to. But first understand that among Jewish Sages and scholars it is agreed that what we are about to read is one of Isaiah's several prophecies about the End Times and especially as it involves Israel.

**CJB Isaiah 49:1-10 <sup>1</sup> Coastlands, listen to me; listen, you peoples far away: ADONAI called me from the womb; before I was born, he had spoken my name. <sup>2</sup> He has made my mouth like a sharp sword while hiding me in the shadow of his hand; he has made me like a sharpened arrow while concealing me in his quiver.**

**<sup>3</sup> He said to me, "You are my servant, Isra'el, through whom I will show my glory." <sup>4</sup> But I said, "I have toiled in vain, spent my strength for nothing, futility." Yet my cause is with ADONAI, my reward is with my God.**

**<sup>5</sup> So now ADONAI says- he formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Ya'akov back to him, to have Isra'el gathered to him, so that I will be honored in the sight of ADONAI, my God having become my strength- <sup>6</sup> he has said, "It is not enough that you are merely my servant to raise up the tribes of Ya'akov and restore the offspring of Isra'el. I will also make you a light to the nations, so my salvation can spread to the ends of the earth."**

**<sup>7</sup> Here is what ADONAI, the Redeemer of Isra'el, his Holy One, says to the one despised, whom the nations detest, to the servant of tyrants: "When kings see you, they will stand up; princes too will prostrate themselves, because of ADONAI, who is faithful, the Holy One of Isra'el, who has chosen you."**

**<sup>8</sup> Here is what ADONAI says: "At the time when I choose, I will answer you; on the day of salvation, I will help you. I have preserved you, and I have appointed you to be the**

***covenant for a people, to restore the land and distribute again its ruined inheritances to their owners,<sup>9</sup> to say to the prisoners, 'Come out!' to those in darkness, 'Show yourselves!' They will feed along the paths, and all the high hills will be their pastures.***

***<sup>10</sup> They will be neither hungry nor thirsty; neither scorching wind nor sun will strike them; for he who has mercy on them will lead them and guide them to springs of water.***

The issues of living water and ending thirst directly connect to salvation and to the Feast of Tabernacles. Ah; but the connections to the earthly Temple and the Feast of Tabernacles don't end there because in Revelation 7:17, we read that the Lamb will lead them to springs of living water. Now listen to what Christ, the Lamb, said when He was attending Sukkot at the Jerusalem Temple; apparently His final Sukkot before His death.

***CJB John 7:37-38 <sup>37</sup> Now on the last day of the festival, Hoshana Rabbah, Yeshua stood and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him keep coming to me and drinking!" <sup>38</sup> Whoever puts his trust in me, as the Scripture says, rivers of living water will flow from his inmost being!"***

I am convinced that what we are witnessing in at least the last half of Revelation chapter 7 is the fulfillment, in Heaven, of the prophetic Feast of Tabernacles.

Let's move on Revelation chapter 8.

### **READ REVELATION CHAPTER 8 all**

The first 6 seals of the scroll were opened in Revelation chapter 6. Then we had an interlude in chapter 7. And now with chapter 8 the opening of the 7 seals on the scroll resumes. Assuming that what we have been reading is approximately chronological in order (and understanding that some events could have been happening in parallel), then here is how I interpret it. Sometime between the opening of the 4th and the 6th seals, the Rapture of Believers occurs. I cannot see the events of the first 4 seals as anything but human evil occurring on earth on an unprecedented scale (this is my definition of tribulation as it is used in the Bible). Egged on by Satan, but mostly because of mankind's own unrestrained evil inclinations, we have injustice, civil chaos, and wars around the world that also bring on famine and pestilence. But none of these things can be legitimately categorized as God's wrath. The opening of the 5th seal only deals with God's wrath in a peripheral way; that is, God promises the martyred souls abiding under the Heavenly altar that He will avenge their unjust murder; just not yet. This vengeance will be not human evil perpetrated on the murderers, but rather it be the result of God's wrath and then at the final judgment their ultimate destruction.

The 6th seal of Revelation chapter 6 speaks of a great earthquake, the moon turning blood red and the sun growing dark, with stars falling from Heaven and other celestial phenomena that is not only frightening to all humanity but also devastating to planet Earth. This is the beginning of God's wrath. And if we go by the Biblical principle that we've seen since early in Genesis, then it is not imaginable that the Lord would pour out this wrath upon those who are innocent in His sight (Believers) along with those who are guilty in His sight (non-Believers). Therefore the

Rapture of Believers must have occurred not later than the opening of the 6th seal.

I realize that most very influential Bible academics would disagree with me and I humbly accept that. Might I be wrong? Yes. That said, obviously since I am teaching you otherwise, I am convinced in my conscience that my rough timeline more faithfully follows Revelation as it is written as well as basing some of my interpretation on difficult passages in the context of God's never changing patterns; God-patterns that we learn about only from the Torah and the remainder of the Old Testament.

So the Rapture of Believers occurs (possibly fulfilling **Yom Teruah**, the biblical Feast of Trumpets), then **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, is fulfilled in some way that is not yet entirely clear (it may have something to do with the opening of the 5th seal that is neither directly inciting tribulation nor raining down wrath ), and then **Sukkot**, the Feast of Tabernacles, appears to be fulfilled in chapter 7.

To begin the next happening in sequence, the 7th seal is opened with the result of an ominous silence in Heaven for a half hour. Silence in Heaven seems to mean that the constant praising of God and the Lamb temporarily cease, because prior to this the mention of sounds in Heaven had to do with the 24 Elders playing their golden harps, and all creatures great and small singing their allegiance to, and adoration of, God and the Lamb. The only other sounds were of the 4 living beings ordering the 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse to "Go!" and instigate chaos and havoc on earth. Biblically, God's wrath is usually initiated with some kind of sound from Heaven such as thunder; and this too is absent. So what we have is sudden inactivity on multiple levels in Heaven; it is the silence before the storm. I think the American expression I would liken this to is waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Saying the silence was for half an hour probably means a short time, as well as something that is unexpected. This is not speaking about Earth time; that is, half an hour is not a measurement of time, rather it is an expression. An hour in the Bible usually means the time is near or it has come time for something to occur. So half of that means that what is about to happen is super-imminent and it is going to be filled with surprise. During this short time of silence in Heaven 7 angels who stand before God are armed with what most texts call "trumpets"; indeed that is the correct English translation of the Greek **salpigx**. It is said in Messianic Judaism and in other non-mainstream quarters that this cannot be trumpets but rather this is speaking of shofars.....Ram's horns. A case could be made either way. Metal trumpets were used by the Levites for ritual ceremony at the Temple. However when going to battle, it was not trumpets but rather shofars that were used. Since the angels are about to engage in spiritual warfare and behave as God's agents in carrying out His punishment of the Earth, then it is more likely than not that this is speaking of shofars and not trumpets. However for the sake of not making things confusing, since the common way of speaking about these 21 judgments of Revelation is as 7 seal, 7 trumpet, and 7 bowl judgments we'll do the same. Just know that likely the "trumpets" were actually "shofars".

Who are these 7 angels who stand before God? The Bible doesn't help us out very much. About the only named angel who stands before God is Gabriel. We read of him in the Gospels in Luke.

**CJB Luke 1:19 <sup>19</sup> "I am Gavri'el," the angel answered him, "and I stand in the presence of God. I was sent to speak to you, to give you this good news**

It is well attested from the most ancient times in Jewish literature that there were 7 special angels assigned to stand in God's presence. I don't want you to put too much stock in this, and I'm not agreeing that what the Israelites believed about these 7 special angels is truth. Yet I also can't say that it is not. At the least it is worth knowing about. Just be aware that the Jews developed a great deal of traditions about what we call Angelology and Demonology, and Christianity has adopted a great deal of it even though very little of it is expressly biblical. So here we go. Jewish tradition is that these 7 angels served God and their names more or less describe their duties or areas of authority. Uriel means "fire of God". Raphael means "God has healed". Raguel is "friend of God". Michael is "who is like God?" Sariel means "prince of God". Gabriel means "God is my strength". And Remiel means "thunder of God". If the Jewish Sages don't have this correct, then I really have nothing to add because we simply aren't given any more information about these 7 angels, and nothing is said of them in the Holy Scriptures.

Each of these angels was given a trumpet (likely a shofar) that they would use to herald a specific woe. Then an 8th angel showed up and he stood at the altar of incense. At the earthly Temple there were 2 altars: the Altar of Burnt Offering where sacrifices were made, and the Altar of Incense where incense was burned to send up a sweet aroma for God to savor. The smoke from the Altar of Burnt Offering went up to Heaven for God to know that His commands were being met regarding atonement for sins as well as for Thanksgiving offerings, vow offerings, First Fruits offerings, and Free Will offerings. But the smoke from the incense altar was said to carry the prayers of His people. So this 8th angel was given a golden incense bowl as he stood at the Heavenly Altar of Incense, and he was provided with a large quantity of incense in order to multiply the prayers of the people, or perhaps to enhance their effect. The image here is of God Himself assuring that the prayers would be divinely accepted and acted upon. However, if the Rapture has already occurred and there's no Believers (or awfully few) left on Earth, where are the prayers coming from? It could be prayers that were made and more or less stored up before Believers were raptured away. Or it could also be prayers from the souls of the martyrs who earlier in verse 9 are said to be dwelling "under the altar". And their prayers...their pleadings....to God were for Him to punish those who murdered them. I mentioned earlier that the Lord asked them to wait a little while longer; perhaps that wait is up. And now, from that same altar, the prayers from those under it are supplemented by this powerful 8th angel who not only agrees with them but will be the agent for carrying out God's justice upon these martyrs' murderers. That justice begins with God's wrath being poured on the Earth's unbelieving inhabitants.

In somewhat of a reversal, the bowl that was full of holy incense that was meant to give the prayers of the people under the altar even more holiness, would now be used to throw down destruction upon Earth. The angel is said to have taken fire from the altar and filled the bowl with it. Here it is just not clear if this is speaking about fire from a different altar (the Altar of Burnt Offering in Heaven) or the same one (the Incense Altar). Some say it must be the same altar because it is not reasonable to think that there would be animal sacrifices in Heaven. Others say it has to be two separate altars because the mention of fire from the altar is only used to speak of the Altar of Burnt Offering in other places in the Bible. I think it's more likely

that is speaking of the same altar because the Incense Altar had fire on it, and since this entire matter involves an incense bowl along with prayers it would make sense that incense fire would be used and not fire from an altar made for animal sacrifice. Either way, upon doing this, the sounds from Heaven resume after the half hour of complete silence.

Peels of thunder, voices, lightening, and an earthquake are said to be the result from the incense bowl filled with holy fire being poured out on earth. Peels of thunder and voices (along with flashes of lightening) as well as smoke remind us of Mt. Sinai.

**CJB Exodus 20:15-16 <sup>15</sup> All the people experienced the thunder, the lightning, the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled. Standing at a distance, <sup>16</sup> they said to Moshe, "You, speak with us; and we will listen. But don't let God speak with us, or we will die."**

No doubt all the people on earth will also tremble from the sounds coming from the sky and be very afraid. So at this point in Revelation the 7 seals of the Heavenly scroll have been opened, and the 7 so-called seal judgments have occurred. Now the 7 trumpet (or shofar) judgments begin. The first of the 7 angels of the presence blows his shofar, and hail and fire mingled with blood are thrown down upon the earth. This is patterned after the plague of fire and hail that God sent upon Egypt.

**CJB Exodus 9:22-25 <sup>22</sup> ADONAI said to Moshe, "Reach out your hand toward the sky, so that there will be hail in all the land of Egypt, falling on people, animals and everything growing in the field, throughout the land of Egypt." <sup>23</sup> Moshe reached out with his staff toward the sky, and ADONAI sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth. ADONAI caused it to hail on the land of Egypt- <sup>24</sup> it hailed, and fire flashed up with the hail; it was terrible, worse than any hailstorm in all of Egypt since it became a nation.**

**<sup>25</sup> Throughout all the land of Egypt, the hail struck everything in the field, people and animals; and the hail struck every plant growing in the field and broke every tree there.**

The result of the Egyptian judgment was localized only to the land of Egypt; but in Revelation one-third of the entire land mass of our planet is burned up from hail that, uncharacteristically, bursts into flame upon hitting the ground. One-third of all the trees in the world are burned up and all green grass that grows everywhere in one form or another is also destroyed. Notice that this judgment, or woe, targets the dry land. And also notice that as terrible as the final 2 seal judgments are, the trumpet judgments are worse. And as we eventually get to the bowl judgments, they will be the most horrific of all. Why might God keep increasing the awful effects of the judgments? Just as long ago in Egypt, very likely it was to try to drive even the most stubborn into submission to Him. Unlike in Egypt, however, God's hope is that this submission will lead to salvation so that even though those who finally submit will have to go through the Hell on Earth caused by God's wrath, they won't have to live in Hell for an eternity. It is inevitable that many of the survivors will believe and beg for mercy from God at some point within these catastrophic judgments. Many people will no longer be able to deny that all was prophesied thousands of years earlier and now is happening just as written. And yet many more will so harden themselves (as did Pharaoh) that despite their suffering and afflictions they

would rather curse God for their troubles than seek Him for forgiveness and mercy.

The second trumpet is sounded and the sea (the salt water) is afflicted with judgment. What looked like a blazing mountain was hurled into the sea with the results that one-third of the earth's seas turned to blood, and so the corresponding sea life of those immediate waters died out, and a third of the ships operating nearby were destroyed. This is like the plague of blood that God sent upon Egypt that turned all the waters into a blood-colored, undrinkable mess. It killed the fish that the Egyptians relied on and caused a huge stench! Does this vision mean to imply literal blood, or more that the water turns blood-red? Very likely the latter, again like the Nile River plague. It is fascinating to me that the Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist adherents and a few other of the various End Times doctrine Believers think that the mountain that is blazing that causes the catastrophes of the world's oceans is only symbolic and not literal. Rather they take the term "mountain" to mean "government". Therefore according to them this is about God judging the world economic system called Babylon, and the subsequent sea life death is symbolic of famine. The loss of the ships is symbolic of world commerce collapsing. The reason that this symbolic interpretation is favored is because symbolism and allegory are the basis for their interpretation of Revelation in general. Such a method allows for End Times timelines to be arranged in such a way as to make them workable and their doctrines plausible. I certainly acknowledge that there is an element of symbolism in Revelation, as there is in many Bible books. But that hardly leads towards assuming that every bit of information in the book must be symbolic and not literal. I don't know what this blazing mountain might be for sure (it could be an enormous volcano, or perhaps a large meteor. The meteor possibility is something that is so worrisome that we have an entire government organization within NASA dedicated to watching the solar system to detect any substantial hunk of space rock that might collide catastrophically with Earth...something they say is inevitable). But if we're going to take every instance of a mountain in the Bible to mean a government, then I suppose Mt. Sinai is also symbolic of a government and isn't literal either. I don't think what we are reading about the disasters of God's judgments are symbolic; they are literal even if the vision doesn't give us the kind of specifics or terms in use in the 21st century. Rather these are the best descriptions using the vocabularies and word illustrations available to those who lived in these ancient cultures.

Then the third angel blew his shofar and the fresh water of the earth was assaulted. One-third of the earth's rivers and springs and lakes were affected when something like a blazing star fell into them. This, again, sounds like a meteor but of course could be something else entirely. The blazing star is given the name Bitterness according to the CJB or Wormwood according to most other English translations. The Greek word is ***apsinthos*** and it means wormwood or that which turns something bitter. The idea is, of course, that the fresh water becomes so contaminated that it is unusable. Jeremiah says:

***CJB Jeremiah 23:15 <sup>15</sup> Therefore, this is what ADONAI-Tzva'ot says concerning the prophets: "I will feed them bitter wormwood and make them drink poisonous water,***

While this Jeremiah passage might not be prophetic of the same event, it explains why the word wormwood was used in John's vision in order to describe the poisoning of a major portion of the earth's fresh water. Wormwood (and its effect) is a term that Jews were quite familiar



with. One has to assume that this judgment (and probably the first 2 trumpet judgments) involves one particular large region of the earth as opposed to all regions of the earth somehow each having about one-third of their own fresh water ruined. Again, those doctrinal Believers who refuse to take Revelation mostly literally say that stars are at times symbolic of angels, so this mention of a blazing star must be the judgment of a certain angel who represents sinful people. I think this takes symbolism too far and rather that whatever it is that has come from the sky and polluted the fresh water, is quite real and the fresh water supply, so necessary for life, really has been affected. And, as one can imagine, water would become so scarce for some of our world population that they would try to drink it anyway; or even perhaps try some risky means of purification with the result, says verse 11, that many people die from it.

We'll move on in chapter 8 next week and then get well into chapter 9.