

Bible Studies

A magazine for the exploration of the word of God

2020

JULY

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THE GRAMMATICAL FREEDOM OF REVELATION 1:4,1:8 and 4:8

The name of God

John's striking introduction of Jesus in his Gospel as 'the Word', for eighteen verses, prepares us for his title in the last Bible book for God the Father, unique in the New Testament—'him who is and who was and who is to come' (Rev. 1:4 ESV). In an apparent disregard for normal grammar, the literal Greek reads, 'the (one) being and the (one) was and the (one) coming'. 'One' has to be inserted to make sense in English, but the strangest thing is 'the (one) was'. It can hardly be that John didn't care much about grammar, since in much of this book he is as correct as we would expect of a man who had to use the language with accuracy for trade in a substantial fishing partnership.

The explanation most commentators favour is that John is using the statement of the divine Name in Exodus 1:14, 'I AM WHO I AM', as it would appear in the Greek version of his time—'I am the (one) being' = 'I am the one who is.' John then adds the past. But the Greek verb 'to be' has no past participle, so he is forced to use 'was'.

He next uses his own idea for the future—'the coming one' or 'who is to come', instead of the expected future tense of 'to be' (Gk. *esomenos*).

It seems clear that he had in mind the amplifying of the Old Testament divine name Yahweh, 'He who is, who was, and who ever shall be.' He had been a devout Jew from his youth, and still drew on the old Scriptures to teach the character of God and His abiding truth, as developed in the New Covenant. 'The one who is to come' thus seems charged with the power of the wonderful visions he had just seen. It was as though in every future scene that unfolded to him—there was his Lord at the centre of events: whatever was coming next, He would be there.

The same expression, ending 'who is to come', is used in 1:8, where the title 'The Alpha and the Omega', associated elsewhere with the Son, is merged with attributes that belong to God as revealed in Genesis and Exodus, but are appropriate for the Son because He is also God.

Thus in 4:8 also, the same phrase, 'who is to come', is again best understood as describing God as existent in the eternal future, and true of all three Persons; not to be tied to particular events, such as the Lord coming to the air at the Rapture, or to the earth as Son of Man.

M.A.

From Study Groups . . .

THE 144,000 SEALED AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE (Revelation 7)

From Aberdeen: *The setting and tribulation of Revelation 7* must be closely related to the latter half of the ‘seventieth week’ of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 9:27). The combination of satanic and human rebellion will inevitably bring about severe judgements from God upon this earth. The world is on a downward trajectory, and is assuredly moving towards the time of the Great Tribulation. It is the unprecedented ‘time of trouble’ foretold in Daniel (Dan. 12:1 RV). Surely what the world sows it eventually reaps, but the consolation for the child of God is the knowledge that God is in control, no matter how severe the coming tribulation events. The four angels are sent to intervene in the affairs of this world by holding back the four winds, thus to ensure the accomplishment of God’s purposes in sealing the 144,000 servants (Rev. 7:3). This is necessary, so that a great multitude from every tribe, tongue and nation should hear and respond to the gospel of salvation, yet to be preached by the 144,000 witnesses. Never will there be such a troubled time as the 42 months of the Great Tribulation. Some of God’s children will be called to endure this future time of tribulation and will experience hunger and thirst. They will be cast out from regular society, be without a place to call home, be on the run from persecution, and be made homeless as a consequence of refusing to accept the 666 mark of the beast, for none may buy or sell if they do not have this mark on their hand or forehead (13:17) [Comment 1].

What shall the reward be for those who will suffer thus with Christ? After their time of suffering is ended, they will hunger and thirst no more, God will wipe every tear from their eyes and the Lamb will lead them to fountains of waters of life (7:17). The one who sits on the throne shall ‘spread his tabernacle over them’ (7:15). The thought here is of being *sheltered* by God (*Notes on the Epistles*, J. Miller, 1986, p.672). No longer will they experience homelessness or being exposed to the heat of the sun or any heat. Disciples who endure the Great Tribulation, together with disciples who endure present day troubles, can draw strength from this: ‘If we endure, we shall also reign with him’ (2 Tim. 2:12).

James Johnson

From Aberkenfig: *The horrific events described in Chapter 6*, when the 6th seal was broken open, revealed people from varied backgrounds—rich and poor, elite and common—fleeing to the caves and screaming ‘Who is able to stand?’ The

whole scene is one of unspeakable terror. Instead of bowing before God, seeking His merciful and loving presence, they flee from Him overcome with frenzied fear. God never compromises His sovereignty: He is in complete control, whether expressed through 'natural' disasters or through depraved human beings. His actions never spiral out of control. The chilling screams fade away as Christ prepares to break the final seal of the scroll.

Chapter 7 Four angels are now seen standing to restrain 'the four winds of the earth' so that the coming judgements will not affect the land, sea or vegetation. There was another angel who ascended from the rising of the sun, holding 'the seal of the living God ... until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads' (7:2-3 NAS). We then have two other groups of people described in this chapter. The first, in verses 3-4, is a listing of Hebrew people from the twelve tribes of Israel—12,000 from each tribe, making 144,000 in total; whereas the second, in 9-17, is 'a great multitude which no one could count.' It is interesting to note that the tribe of Dan was omitted in the list given in verses 5-8, but Joseph is substituted for Ephraim. While we can speculate as to why there are four lists with differing tribes (Gen. 35—the summaries of birth; 1 Chr. 4-7—genealogy records; Ezek. 48—future land allotments, and here in Rev. 7—the sealing), we can be certain that God has His reasons.

It is possible to be side-tracked over a few minor details we can't figure out and lead us to 'strive ... about words, to no profit', as Paul exhorted (2 Tim. 2:14). Rather we observe, the vast multitude were from all nations, [see Buckhaven paper, para. 1, end—*Eds.*] standing in heaven before God on the throne and before the Lamb, and they were clothed in white robes, as they cried out, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' (Rev. 7:10 ESV). One of the elders identifies them as 'the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' (7:14). Clearly they must have been martyrs [Comment 2]. Their robes illustrate their habits or behaviour, and their way of life showed that they had applied the blood of the Lamb and hence they are before the throne of God. What an awesome sight, a scene too vast to comprehend! There will be continuous praise, as day and night they serve God in His temple. These martyrs will come out of tribulation, but their suffering will instantly give way to victorious worship.

Bill Paterson

From Buckhaven: After the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, one era closes and a new one opens, commonly known among evangelicals as 'The Dispensation of Grace'. It began with a group of Jewish believers preaching 'the gospel of the grace of God' (Acts 20:24). When the Lord returns for those who have believed in Him, this era will close and the 'gospel of

the kingdom' (Mat. 24:14) will again be proclaimed by Jewish preachers, God's future witnesses to the four corners of the earth. They will receive a new outpouring of the Spirit of God (Joel 2:28-32), but the deluded subjects of Antichrist who reject the gospel of Christ's kingdom will never be saved. God's witnesses will face great opposition in the kingdom of the Antichrist, many of them suffering unto death. This period is 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7 RV). The gospel of the kingdom will have a special focus on Israel. 144,000 Jewish preachers will herald forth the soon coming kingdom of God. They will be set apart, having a seal (Gk. *sphragizō*) on their foreheads, just as the followers of the Antichrist will have a mark (Gk. *charagma*), possibly a tattoo (Rev. 13:16). They are His servants (slaves or bond-servants—RV, ESV footnotes) and witnesses. There will be an awakening in the hearts of millions, a work of the Spirit of God. Many Jews, alas, will accept the false security and take the mark of the Beast. Many others will face martyrdom having believed the gospel of the kingdom. A great multitude (host) of mankind, both Jew and Gentile, will receive the gospel of the kingdom.

The winds of the earth Four angels now stand at the four corners of the earth. These angels seem to be restrainers, holding back the winds of the earth to preserve the vegetation and the trees. Zechariah 6:5 speaks of the winds of heaven; Psalm 104:3 tells us God walks upon the wings of the wind; John speaks of the winds of earth. He sees another angel coming up from the east (the place of sunrise) who is told not to harm the earth until God's servants are sealed, the number being 144,000.

Finally, John sees a great multitude of every tongue, tribe, people and nation robed in white attire (Gk. *stolas*—long apparel), signifying victory and righteousness. They ascribe glory to God and the Lamb with the song 'Salvation unto our God' (v.10). The heavenly order then join in adoration to God in a seven-fold doxology ascribing blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might to God. One of the elders draws our eye to the white-robed throng who came from the Tribulation. They enter into a continual activity of worship and are in the immediate presence of God, who spreads His tabernacle (Gk. *skēnoō*) over them—an allusion to the 'Shekinah' glory (the presence of God) [Comment 3]. They will know the blessing and kindness of God eternally. The great heavenly scene reveals all in heaven expressing their adoration to God and the Lamb.

Martin Notman

From Cromer: *The 144,000 sealed* Who are they? Interpretations have varied widely; some have identified them with the 'great multitude' of 7:9, but there are difficulties with this. The multitude could not be numbered, and were from 'every nation', whereas the 144,000 are specifically said to be from Israel (v.4). It may be

argued that the New Testament people of God are called ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16), but the problem with this is that those described in verse 9 onward are undeniably those who have been redeemed by the work of Christ [Comment 4]. Why should a section of those be sealed while the others are not? [Comment 5] Further, those sealed are described as being from specific tribes of Israel (with the curious exception of the tribe of Dan and the inclusion of Joseph and Manasseh, his son, but not Ephraim). Why is this list there at all, since few Jews can say what tribe they belong to? [Comment 6 and cp. Mount Forest para. 2]

The great multitude Who were they? One of the elders told John, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ (v.14). What does the definite article imply—the great tribulation? Some have suggested that it might refer to the summation of all the trials that Christians have had to bear over the centuries; alternatively, it might relate to a specific event, referred to by the Lord in Matthew 24:21. The white robes point us to justification; the saved stand before God perfect in the righteousness which Christ supplies. The size of the innumerable host suggests that they comprise all those redeemed by the work of Christ [cp. Comment 11].

Rest under the Lamb’s protection. Many of the redeemed had suffered for the sake of the Name, but now ‘They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

Peter Hickling

From Greenock: *The sealing of the 144,000* Jewish witnesses will not be the first time that God has sealed His servants for a specific purpose, and sealing was not always manifested by a specific mark. God sealed Noah and his family into the ark (Gen. 6); He sealed Lot and his family from the people of Sodom (Gen. 19); He sealed the Jewish families who applied the blood of the paschal lamb to their dwellings (Ex. 12); He sealed Rahab and her family from the people of Jericho (Josh. 2); He sealed the 7000 Israelites who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kin. 19:18) [Heb. *sha’ar* means ‘leave, (p)reserve, spare’—no main version translates as ‘seal’—*M.A.*]; He sealed men in Ezekiel’s day with a mark on their foreheads (Ezek. 9:4). The 144,000—twelve thousand from the twelve tribes of Israel—will be sealed with a mark on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3).

Satan, the arch-deceiver, will compel men and women to have the mark of the beast on their right hands or on their foreheads before they can buy or sell (Rev. 13:16-17). It can be assumed that when the tribulation begins, the 144,000 will be complete and ready for action to preach the gospel of the kingdom to

wherever they are sent in the world. It can be assumed, too, that they are also elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and that they will have come to Christ for salvation as every sinner must do individually who wants to accept God's offer of salvation. They would have to know God's saving grace before they could preach to others [Comment 7].

The Tribulation, especially the second three-and-a-half years, will be a time of the most unprecedented and unparalleled persecution: 'For then there will be great tribulation such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened' (Mat. 24:21-22 NKJV). The 144,000 witnesses who love not their lives unto death (cp. Rev. 12:11), will not be deflected from their God-given message to preach the everlasting gospel to those who dwell on the earth—'to every nation, tribe, tongue and people' (Rev. 14:6-7). God will triumph over Satan; good shall triumph over evil [Comment 8; see also Comment 5].

The apostles turned the world upside-down with their preaching. The preaching of the 144,000 witnesses will have an even greater effect and will bring about the greatest revival that the world has ever known.

How say some Christians that the Church, the Body of Christ, has replaced Israel? They believe that as the Rapture draws ever nearer God is gathering the elect, including the 144,000 [Comment 9]. Post-tribulation Israel, having been reconciled with their Messiah, will enter into the most glorious period of her long history when they will reign with Christ and the redeemed in the Millennium, and in the New Jerusalem in the eternal state.

John Peddie

From Halifax: 'After this' Six seals have been opened up by the Lamb (Rev. 6); a seventh remains unopened. Meanwhile a parenthetic Chapter 7 is introduced, the interlude being indicated by a change in tone from features referred to concerning the sixth seal and the delay, until 8:1 in opening the seventh. The words 'And after these things' (Rev. 7:1 KJV) or 'After this' (RV, ASV, NIV, ESV) indicate that the preliminary visions or episodes of chapter 7—the sealing of the 144,000, and the redeemed before the throne—are revealed to John consequent to the detailing of the sixth seal in the previous chapter.

Twelve tribes The Old Testament has no fewer than twenty variant lists of the tribes of Israel (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, 1981, p.478); but the order given here in Revelation 7:5-8 is unique. Reuben was Jacob's firstborn; Judah, however, (meaning 'praise'—Gen. 29:35) heads this list, probably because Christ sprang from that tribe. As to the missing tribes of Dan and Ephraim, this is likely due to their being associated with idolatry (Judg. 18:18-19; 1 Kin. 12:29-30;

Hos. 4:17) [see Comment 6]. Twelve thousand people were chosen out of each tribe and these were sealed with the seal of the living God (Gk. *sphragis*), which is in contrast to those who bore the 'mark' (*charagma*) of the beast (Rev. 13:16-17).

The multitude in white John then sees an innumerable host comprising people from every nation, dressed in white and holding palms in their hands (7:9). They stood before the throne and the Lamb and cried out 'Salvation to our God' (v.10). Who were these? John had no idea. 'These', said one of the elders, 'are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (v.14 RV).

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: John might have been familiar with soldiers' tattoos. Today, we might think of micro-chipping. When God's sealing is imitated by the Beast (Rev.13:16) he will use a mark detectable by men. But in Revelation 7 it is the 'seal of the living God', conveying His authority 'written on their foreheads' (cp. Rev. 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). To fulfil a spiritual purpose it may, like Ephesians 1:13, include more than a physical aspect. On the 'forehead' may typify the living God's deeper impression on their minds, and sanctified service (cp. Ex. 28:36-38; 29:15,17). In Ezekiel 9 forehead marking was for those who shared God's thinking about surrounding idolatry. That mark ensured immediate deliverance from the Lord's executioners, but not from eventual death. Likewise, the 144,000 are preserved from impending *divine* judgments *against the unrepentant* (see Rev. 7:3; 9:4). After martyrdom of His 'servants' on earth (see Rev. 6:9-11; 13:7) they may later be seen in heaven (Rev. 14:1-5). Matthew 10:28 fits this picture, too; and though 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God', He is also the Saviour (Heb. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:10). In John's vision there are 144,000 believing Jews sealed: a great number! And later (Rev. 7:9), we see a multitude from all nations that no one could number before God's throne in heaven, all having died in faith during 'the great tribulation' (Rev. 7:14), and yet more multitudes surviving on earth will enter the Millennium (Mat. 25:34). The King is victorious; Hallelujah!

DNA testing can now reveal ancestries previously hidden, but it will be the living God who amazingly brings about renewed tribal identity [Comment 10]. From 'every' tribe present, only certain men are sealed. 'Every' can be a generalization still leaving some out (e.g. Gk. *pas* in Mat. 3:5; Mark 13:23). There are over 20 significantly different tribal lists in Scripture. The Rev. 7:5-8 list is not by obvious geography, chronology, birth or mother, nor historic tribal size, nor evident past loyalty. Interestingly, stones for each tribe were laid in Jordan and Gilgal (Josh. 4:2,9,20) as a sign of deliverance, but the order is not revealed there (or 1 Kin. 18:31). Rev. 5:5 may best explain why Judah must head this one, and it was Judah who led in Israel's march (Num. 10:14). Levi is notably included here

(Mal. 2:7 explains); Dan and Ephraim are omitted. Some think Dan will simply not then have living descendants. But Dan will reappear later (Ezek. 48): so, will it be resurrected Danites occupying their territory? Romans 11:32-36 applies! Perhaps God passes over Dan's living progeny in fulfillment of Deut. 29:20 because of their idolatry (e.g. Judg. 18:30, and the Danites left their inheritance, too). Ephraim was likewise guilty (though in Hos. 4:17 'Ephraim' means the whole northern kingdom). Actually, since Manasseh is limited to 12,000, the other 12,000, of 'Joseph', must be Ephraimites, from Joseph's only other son and bearing their father's more noble name (see Num. 1:32; 1 Chr. 7:20,29) [cp. Comment 6].

The purpose of protecting those sealed (Rev. 7:3) may be seen in their implied faithful testimony: 'in their mouth no lie was found' (Rev. 14:5), though this could just emphasize moral purity, and we are not told they preach [see Comment 5]. But we know many will have believed, and the principle of Rom. 10:14-15 applies to them and to us.

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: The sixth seal has been opened and the people of earth tried to hide from God asking who can survive (6:12-17). When all hope seems lost, four angels hold back the four winds of judgment until God's people are marked as His; only then will God break the seventh seal (8:1). A seal on a scroll or document identified and protected its content. God places His great seal on His followers, identifying them as His own and guaranteeing His protection over their souls. Our physical bodies may be beaten, maimed or even destroyed, but nothing can harm the soul of those marked by God. The seal of God placed on the foreheads of His servants is the exact opposite of the mark of the beast explained in Rev. 13:16. These two marks place people in two distinct categories: those owned by God and those owned by Satan [though the 144,000 sealed are not the sum total of all who belong to God as believers—*Eds.*]. This reveals a theme running throughout Revelation—Satan's attempt to imitate the great work of God.

The number 144,000 is 12 x 12 x 1000 and symbolizes God's followers who will be brought safely to Him; not one will be overlooked or forgotten. If they are to endure persecution the seal does not necessarily guarantee protection from physical harm—many will die (6:11)—but God protects them from spiritual harm [see Comments 5 and 8]. No matter what happens, they will receive their reward in heaven. Their destiny is secure. These believers will not fall away from God even in intense persecution. This is not saying 144,000 individuals must be sealed before the persecution comes, but when it begins we know that the faithful have already been sealed (marked by God) and will remain true to Him until the end. This is the different list from the usual listing of the 12 tribes in the Old Testament because it is a symbolic list of God's true followers. Judah is mentioned first in this list because he is both the tribe of David and of Jesus the Messiah (Gen. 49:8-12;

Mat. 1:1). Levi had no tribal allotment because of their work for God in the temple (Deut. 8:1); but here the tribe is given a place as a reward for faithfulness. Dan and Ephraim are not mentioned because they were known for rebellion and idolatry: this is unacceptable in God's followers (Gen. 49:17) [cp. Comment 6].

The great multitude in white robes Before, they were being prepared; now they are victorious. Those crowned in heaven are those who remained faithful to God, from throughout the generations [Comment 11]. People try many methods to remove the guilt of sin—good works, intellectual pursuits and even casting blame. The throng in heaven, however, praise God, saying 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb' (Rev 7:10 ESV). Salvation from the penalty of sin can come only through Jesus Christ. It is difficult to imagine how blood could whiten any cloth, but the blood of Jesus Christ is the world's greatest purifier because it removes the stain of sin. White symbolizes sinlessness, perfection and holiness, which can be given to people only by the sacrifice and shed blood of the sinless Lamb of God. This is a picture of how we are saved by faith (see Is. 1:18; Rom. 3:21-26).

The Great Tribulation will cause intense suffering that saints will endure by remaining loyal to God. God will be their shepherd and will lead them to fountains of the water of life. God will provide for His children's needs in their eternal home where there will be no hunger, thirst or pain, and He Himself will wipe away all tears.

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: The people with the seal of the living God (7:2) are God's specially owned flock (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). These people will be protected from future judgements such as torment from locusts (9:4) and in times of difficulties (Ezek. 9:4). The four angels are restrained from hurting the earth and sea until God's people are sealed [Comment 12].

The first group sealed is on earth with a limited number from the tribes of Israel. The number 144,000 denotes completeness with 12 times 12,000 from each of the tribes. These people will have a special task of preaching the Word in difficult times as they are called 'servants of our God'. At the end of the ages all Israelite people will turn toward God and accept Christ as their Saviour [Comment 13].

The second group is an innumerable flock from all over the world, nations speaking various languages. This great multitude is seen standing in heaven before the throne of God and in front of the Lamb. God purified them as white as silver taken from fire (Zech. 13:9). They washed their clothes white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14; 6:11). They refused to take the stamp of the beast and were exposed

to the sufferings. The promise of the crown for them is certainly fulfilled. It will be a time of 'Jacob's trouble' though they will be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7).

Blessed are those who whitened their clothes by washing (22:14) to enter through the gates of heaven with a right to enjoy the tree of life.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: It is often with reverent trepidation we venture on a discourse of events in a forthcoming dispensation; more so as we consider the calamity that will befall the world and the extreme suffering believers will be subject to: 'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened' (Mat. 24:21-22 NKJV; cp. Jer. 30:7).

It is to part of that divinely chosen elect that we are introduced in these breathtaking scenes: 'Then I saw another angel ... And he cried 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, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads'' (Rev. 7:1-3). God always has the best interest of His saints at heart, the age or dispensation notwithstanding, and the words of Moses are apt: 'There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deut. 33:26-27).

The number of witnesses We are not of those who consider the events above and the number mentioned as merely symbolic. True, symbolism is an integral part of the interpretation of Scripture, but here we believe is a description of actual events and an exact number of people. It has been the Lord's way in all dispensations always to have witnesses to His name: 'Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God ... To Him all the prophets witness ...' (Acts 10:40-43). 'Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness ...' (Acts 14:17).

Jewish males Since the Great Tribulation is a time of Jacob's trouble, it is thus fitting that the frontline witnesses would be his descendants, all male Jews. It is not that the Lord is partial, but once the fulness of the Gentiles is complete (Rom. 11:25) then the Lord's attention turns fully to 'the apple of His eye' (Zech. 2:8).

God's prerogative The 144,000 are sealed for the service they are to undertake on the Lord's behalf, and for protection. They are from the tribes of Israel, not in the usual names of the 12, with Dan and Ephraim excluded and Joseph added. It is a divine service to be undertaken, and a difficult one at that, and the Lord God reserves the prerogative to decide who approaches Him in service: 'Blessed is the

man you choose, and cause to approach you, that he may dwell in your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, of your holy temple' (Ps. 65:4) [cp. Comment 6].

Frederick F. Ntido

COMMENTS

1. (Aberdeen): A point to keep in mind is that the proclamation of this 'gospel of the kingdom' has to do with God's time of judgement on the nations during the tribulation period of seven years as stated in Daniel 9:27 (cp. Mat. 24:8), which you quote. The emphasis of the message is on 'the day of vengeance of our God' (Is. 61:3)—*note the absence of this phrase in Luke 4:19 when the Lord Jesus was here on earth, which was the beginning of 'the day of grace' (2 Cor. 6:2)*—that is imminent with the need to prepare for the avoidance of that by believing on the coming Messiah or Saviour, and ensuring resistance to the overtures of false prophets and satanic deceptions. Many who believe the message will lose courage to persevere through the tidal wave of iniquity engulfing the world (Mat. 24:9-14; cp. 2 Thes. 2:3-4, 8-10).

The coming or arrival of the Son of man in all His glory to earth will usher in the judgement of the living nations, and one of the criteria of righteousness and entrance into the millennial kingdom will be the type of treatment that was administered to God's messengers, viz. the 144,00 of Israel, of the tribulation period (Mat. 25:31-46).

R.B.F.

We note, however, that the Lord can be understood to stop His reading of Isaiah 61 before 'the day of vengeance of our God' because He chose to speak to His townsfolk in the grace of forgiveness by faith in Him and His coming work at the cross (though yet to be revealed to them), while adding the warning that unbelieving hearts in Israel's past were shamed by Gentiles who obeyed God's prophets. Thus in preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the final future vengeance, on unbelievers of Israel and on Israeli believers' enemies, that He declared in Matthew 24 was foreshadowed. (As also—either foreshadowed or implied—in Mat. 4:23,9:35; Luke 4:43, 8:10,16:16.) For a seminal study see *B.S.* 1959, pp. 20-22, 36-37—online at churchesofgod.info > Publications > Bible Studies > B.S. Archive.

M.A.

2. (Aberkenfig): Not all of these white-robed persons will become martyrs. Many will die but others will 'endure to the end' (Mat. 10:22), suffering extreme privation, as outlined in Aberdeen's paper. See also Comment 8.

3. (Buckhaven): *'Shekinah'* To shed further light on this word, we refer readers to the following observation: 'The expression 'Shekinah glory' was used in the Jewish Targums (ancient paraphrases or interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures). It is not found in our English Bibles. Nor of course are the expressions 'the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ' and 'the Trinity' but these truths are clearly in evidence in Scripture. The 'Shekinah glory' was the visible majesty of the Divine Presence, especially when resting between the cherubim on the mercy seat in the tabernacle, and in the temple of Solomon. This would seem to convey the idea of a most brilliant and glorious light enveloped by the cloud, so that the light was seen as through a veil (cf. Ex.16:10)' (R.F. Lundwill, 'The Glory of the Lord', *Needed Truth* 1981, pp.29-32—online at churchesofgod.info > Publications > Needed Truth > N.T. Archive.

See also *The Glory of the Lord*, by Dr A.T. Doodson, B.S. 1937, pp.7-8—online at churchesofgod.info > Publications > Bible Studies > B.S. Archive.

J.J.

4. (Cromer): It would be difficult to be categorical that the expression 'Israel of God' exclusively belongs to the people of God today; equally so that it refers to the church, the body of Christ, as there is a differentiation made between 'as many as shall walk after this rule' from the 'Israel of God' in the Galatian scripture. Perhaps Paul's exposition of Romans 11:5, 26 and 9:27 may be of some help, when he makes mention of 'a remnant according to the election of grace', who are part naturally of the whole Israeli nation, but are truly the 'Israel of God' by divine calling, for whom special grace will be required.

R.B.F.

5. (Cromer and others): *The sealed servants* Cromer paper helpfully sets out some key issues in identifying these groups. We likewise cannot have certainty about detail, but see that in this interlude between the opening of Seals 6 and 7, the focus on two companies and their final triumph has the power to reignite hope.

The 144,000 are sealed (1) as distinctively servants of God; and (2) for protection from the blast of the winds released. They are Jewish, which the listing of tribes emphasises. Thus they can hardly be a symbolic configuration of the innumerable multitude, which is of 'every nation' and all peoples. Their sealing for protected service suggests that they will be kept alive through God's judgement on the nations in order to give practical help to others, thus winning readiness to trust their testimony. This would have further point if their witness is to fellow Jews, who in the second half of Daniel's 'week' will be targets of persecution. There is no mention of the servants being killed, but they will surely also be prime targets for the forces of the Antichrist. Yet to their God, and spiritually to those they

succour, this ‘remnant of Jacob shall be ... like dew from the LORD, like showers on the grass ...’ (Micah 5:7). See also Comment 8.

6. (Cromer and others): *The numbering and order of tribes* A reason for the exact number given may be the sovereignty and knowledge of God in selecting His servants, as may be true also of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-4. (These are surely a different group who have outstandingly dedicated themselves to service by personal purity and abstinence from marriage.) The absence of Dan could signal God’s displeasure at the example of idolatry set by them from the days of the Judges, and contrasts with the sealed servants’ commitment; though their place in Millennial allotment of Israel’s land does seem at variance with this. Could the title of Joseph be given here to the tribe of Ephraim as a mark of honour reflecting divine estimation of Joseph the overcomer? The tribe of Ephraim’s association with idolatry (see Halifax paper) was present in other northern kingdom tribes, and in some passages in the prophets (e.g. Hos. 4:17—cp. 5:3), the northern nation is the subject rather than the tribe, or the seat of government in Samaria, as Mount Forest paper notes (para. 2, end).

M.A.

In favour of the view that the 144,000 in Chapters 7 and 14 are different groups, is the statement in 14:4 ‘These were purchased from among men’. It could be argued that if these were the same 12 tribal groups of chapter 7, this would have been clearly stated. In favour of the opposite view, i.e. that they are one and the same, is the fact that both groups of 144,000 are sealed on their foreheads. We cannot be dogmatic since there is not enough Scriptural evidence one way or the other.

J.J.

7. (Greenock): There can be no question that the 144,000 are part of the elect of God. As to whether they have come to know the Saviour as we have by faith through grace in the present dispensation of God’s grace, of that we cannot be certain. As stated before, their message is one of a coming Messiah and impending judgment upon those who have no desire to know God in a personal way, thereby preventing Him having an influential place in their hearts and lives, and therefore exposed to the Devil and his minions. The gospel of the kingdom has different features from the present good news, in that it will demand faith with works—enduring to the end all that comes against them by way of the Adversary’s pressure and persecution (Mat. 24:13; 10:16-23).

R.B.F.

8. (Greenock and others): Can we be sure that the sealed servants will be killed? It may be that the protection is described as from the effects of the winds because

related to the sounding of the first two trumpets; and if they are to lead witness to the nations, as twelve Jewish apostles did for the first preaching of the gospel, others have suggested the protection could also preserve their lives, so that they would suffer, but enduring to the end be saved by the return of the Son of Man. Cp. *B.S.* 1972, p.109, Comment 4—online at churchesofgod.info > Publications > Bible Studies > B.S. Archive.

M.A.

9. (Greenock): In my view, the 144,000 cannot be saved until the church which is Christ's body has been caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thes. 4:17). This goes to the heart of the argument between those who believe in a pre-tribulation 'rapture' and those who do not.

Firstly, If the church which is Christ's body is not taken out of the world before the Great Tribulation, then those who are 'in Christ' would co-exist on earth during 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jer. 30:7) alongside the 144,000 Israeli preachers and those saved through their preaching—who are part of 'the elect' of that future day but not 'in Christ' and not part of 'the Bride' ('the elect' of the present era, during which the Lord is building His church). As I see it, this is not compatible with the orderly way in which God works out His purposes.

Secondly, Paul wrote to saints saved in the present era: 'God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thes. 5:9). I would suggest that the Old Testament accounts of Enoch, translated prior to the flood and Lot snatched away from divine judgement on Sodom, give us grounds for taking this to mean that God will remove from the world the Church which is Christ's body prior to that future time of judgment.

Thirdly, the church which is Christ's body has not replaced Israel. However, Israel was temporarily set aside when the Lord said, 'The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof' (Mat. 21:43). After the church meets the Lord in the air (1 Thes. 4:17), Israel will again take centre stage in God's purposes, when the 144,000 will proclaim the gospel of the coming kingdom of God (Mat. 24:14).

Looking beyond the Great Tribulation period, when the Lord Jesus returns to earth '...he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed' (2 Thes. 1:10) Then Paul's exhortation to Timothy will have its fulfilment: 'if we endure, we shall also reign with him' (2 Tim. 2:12).

10. (Mount Forest): That there has been a progressive dilution of Jewish familial identity over the centuries, is a fact freely acknowledged by Jewish organisations (e.g. chabad.org.)

Interestingly however, in 2010 a team of geneticists in New York analysed DNA blood samples ‘from a total of 237 Ashkenazi and Middle Eastern Jews in New York City and Sephardic Jews in Seattle, Washington; Greece; Italy; and Israel.’ Among other methods, they used a technique called IBD (Identity by Descent) ‘to determine how closely two individuals are related.’ Contrary to previous suppositions positing a cultural rather than a blood relationship, they found that all the Jewish groups tested, consistently ‘had high levels of IBD, roughly equivalent to that of fourth or fifth cousins.’

[<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2010/06/tracing-roots-jewishness#>]

The genealogical record of at least nine Jewish family groups may be lost to men but it is not lost to God! As noted in Mount Forest paper, He knows who belongs to each of the 12 tribes or 13 family groups. During the time of the end, when the Antichrist imposes the severest of restrictions on freedom of thought, speech and behaviour, God who is able to call ‘the things that are not, as though they were’ (Rom. 4:17), will call 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes mentioned in chapter 7, to be ambassadors on behalf of their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

J.J.

11. (Podagatlapalli): The view that the ‘great multitude’ of Revelation 7:9 is the redeemed from all generations since Pentecost depends on only one major early manuscript omitting the definite article ‘the’. ‘The’ is twice used—literally ‘the tribulation the great’—in the text accepted by the United Bible Societies *Greek N.T.*, 4th Revised. Ed., 1993, and so seems beyond doubt. That John sees an aggregate of all who are redeemed out of *the Great Tribulation*, i.e. including those who have been killed and those who, having endured to the end, are so saved by the return of Christ, is commended in *B.S.* 1972, pp.110-111, Comment 9.

M.A.

12. (Ravulapalem): It is true that possession, protection and preservation are common to sealing. But it is better for clarity of thought to distinguish the invisible sealing of believers in this dispensation of grace, referenced in the texts given from the epistles, from the visible sealing of the specific Israelite servants of our God in the future dispensation in view in Revelation 7:2.

P.D.

13. (Ravulapalem): Paul’s words in Rom. 9:6b are, ‘For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel’, which, put another way, is saying not all are spiritually in the true believing Israel who belong to the earthly nation of Israel. That’s why he intercedes so strongly for his natural compatriots – ‘kinsmen according to the flesh’ (v. 3) – knowing that by human birth they are Abraham’s seed but not his children of and by faith (v. 7). Romans chapters 10 and 11 confirm this, so that when we

come to verse 26a of chapter 11, 'And so all Israel shall be saved' he is referring to those of the nation who have believed on the Saviour. *R.B.F.*

'...All Israel will be saved' (Rom. 11:26). This statement is also true in the context of the return of the Son of Man to earth, when the beautiful Old Testament type of Joseph revealing himself to his brothers will be fulfilled and the touching scenes foretold in Zechariah 12:10-14 will take place. According to Zechariah 13:8,9, two thirds will have been 'cut off' and only a third of God's ancient people will be left when He descends from heaven to the Mount of Olives in answer to their cry 'Save now...' (Heb: *Yasha-awnaw* i.e. 'Hosannah' (Ps. 118:25-26)—the Psalm the Lord Jesus quoted from when He said, 'You will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'' (Luke 13:35 ESV) Then the words of Isaiah 66:8 will find an answer 'Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment?' All that are left of Israel will be born again in one day, by faith in Jesus their Messiah. Blessed thought!

J.J.

From the Mail-box . . .

Why 'who is to come' is in the title of God in Revelation 1:4, but omitted in 11:17, 16:5

I write in follow-up to April issue, Comment 11. We are of course in full agreement as to the Godhead being eternal. We cited Revelation 11:17, which follows the explicit statement in verse 15 (ESV), 'he shall reign forever and ever.' The question is what explains the absence of 'who is to come' or 'the coming one' in 11:17 and 16:5. Our attempted explanation was that when the eternal Son comes to reign forever, for that reason the title 'who is to come' is replaced by the 'reign forever' statement. If what we proposed is not a sound enough explanation, what is the alternative one? And how does that alternative address what we presumed was the agreed timing of those 'non-use' statements, i.e. concurrent with the Coming One having come to reign forever? Do editors disagree with that timing? *G.M. Hydon, Mount Forest*

Two editors reply (and see 'Introducing') . . .

The reasoning above is perfectly consistent with interpreting 'is to come' in 4:8 as referring to the Lord's coming to earth. It would have helped if the Comment had acknowledged that as a view held by others besides

Mount Forest friends. Nevertheless, I am unpersuaded that 'is to come' in 4:8 necessarily means 'is to come to earth'. Nor am I persuaded that the omission of the phrase in 11:17 and 16:5 clinches the argument.

1. 'Was' and 'is' refer to existence, not location. Why should 'to come' be different and refer to location, not existence?

2. Why would heavenly-located beings say that another heavenly-located being was to come to earth? If a change of location was envisaged why not rather say 'go to earth'?

3. Why would the whole Godhead be distinguished from the specific person of the Godhead, namely the Son, in the 'is to come' element of the title, and not in the 'is' and the 'was' elements? That is an issue mentioned in Mount Forest's paper.

Thus the interpretation of 'to come' in 4:8 as meaning 'will be' is the most straightforward one since it does not shift unnaturally from an existence-centred concept to a location-centred one. As to the omission in 11:17 and 16:5, there are many instances in Scripture of an array of names or titles being used in full sometimes but not so elsewhere.

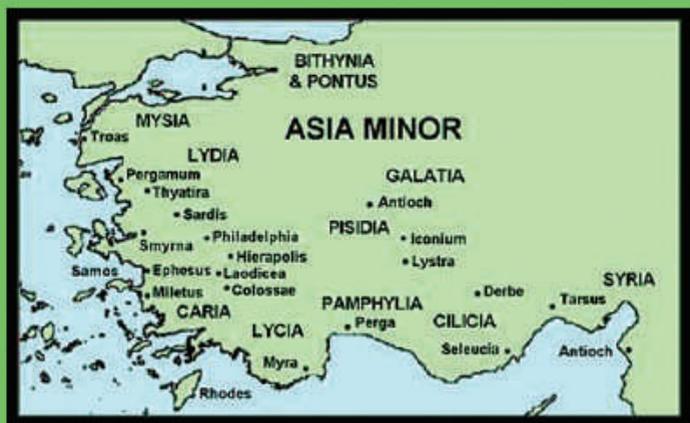
The absence may have significance, but I am not, so far, persuaded of its significance for the present matter.

P.D.

If the triune God is being addressed by the four living creatures in 4:8—'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty'—why would they switch from addressing the three Persons of the Godhead to only one, when the expression 'which was and which is and which is to come' (RV) is a continuation of that address? If the living creatures don't differentiate between the Triune God and God the Son, then we have no reason to read more into it.

I don't see any need to connect the differing statements you allude to with the timing of the return of the Son of Man to earth.

J.J.



New Testament churches in Asia Minor

Published by and obtainable from
Hayes Press, The Barn, Flaxlands, Royal Wootton Bassett,
Wiltshire, England SN4 8DY