

What Saints Will be in the Great Tribulation?

by H. A. Ironside

It is very evident from the Word of God that certain saints will be found on earth in the days of the great tribulation, many of whom will be called upon to suffer martyrdom for the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, others being preserved in life through this entire period to enter into the kingdom to be set up on earth. Because of this, it has naturally been concluded that these are necessarily members of the Church, the Body of Christ. Many, of course, think of the Church as the cognomen whereby the entire family of faith from Adam to the end of the millennium is designated. If one takes this ground of course there can be only one answer to the question, "Will the Church or any part of it go through the great tribulation?" for certainly many members of the household of faith will have to endure great suffering during that time of trouble. But if one has learned to distinguish clearly from Scripture between new birth, common to all children of God in every dispensation, and membership in the Body of Christ which belongs alone to the saints of this present age from Pentecost to the Rapture, it should not be difficult to distinguish the saints who will have part in the tribulation from those who will be caught up ere it begins. But because many believers are not clear as to this distinction, I think it well to go into it somewhat fully, and in order to do so, I take the liberty to quote from an earlier work of mine entitled, "*Who Will Be Saved in the Coming Period of Judgment?*" part of which is included in the discussion here.

First, then, let it be noted that Old Testament prophecy never refers to this dispensation in which we live (extending from Pentecost to the Lord's coming for His own), save in a most indefinite way, as, for instance, in Daniel 9:26. From Moses to Malachi, Scripture is mainly occupied with one nation, Israel (Amos 3:2; Deut. 7:6; Ps. 147:19,20), and the hope of that nation, namely, the raising up of the Prophet (Deut. 18:15), Priest (Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:13), and King (Isa. 32; Ps. 2:6), who is to bring them into everlasting blessing as a people (Ps. 132:11-18; Isa. 35:10; 51:11; 61:7), though not until they have been bom again (Ezek. 36:24-30).

The Gentiles will share in that blessing (Isa. 56:6; 65:1), but not as on the same footing with Israel; rather in subjection to them (Isa. 14:1-3; 60:3-5; 62:2,3). Ere the ushering in of that day of Jehovah's power and Messiah's glory, however, the prophets predicted the rejection of the looked-for Redeemer by Israel to whom He came (Isa. 53), and in consequence Israel is set aside by God (Zech. 7:13,14), while the rejected Messiah takes His place in the heavens on Jehovah's throne (Ps. 110:1), which He will occupy until the future repentance of the people (Hos. 5:15). This setting aside of Israel, however, is not final, as the thirtieth and thirty-first chapters of Jeremiah, with many other portions of the Word, plainly declare. But before their restoration to divine favor and the land of Palestine, they must pass through a short period of unequaled persecution and chastisement, called "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30: 7). At the close of this time they will be ready to acknowledge the Crucified as their Lord, and will "mourn for Him as one mourning for his only son" (Zech. 12:10-14; 13:6,7). In the darkest hour of their sorrow, when Jerusalem is compassed about with armies and they are in direst distress, He will appear as their Deliverer and to the destruction of their enemies, after which the tabernacle of David will be raised up and the reign of righteousness ushered in (Zech. 14; Amos 9:8-15).

Thus far the Old Testament. Turning now to the New, we find many new data introduced, without which the present working of the Spirit of God in the world would be inexplicable. In Romans 11 we are told that upon the breaking off of the natural branches (Israel) from the tree of promise, wild branches (Gentiles) are introduced in their place. In other words, Israel's rejection has but made way for unforetold grace to be shown to the nations, though Old Testament prophecy of blessing to the heathen can be quoted as proof that such grace is not in collision with their final blessing. This special work among the Gentiles is not to go on forever though; for if these continue not in divine goodness, they too shall be cut off and the natural branches grafted in again, for God is able.

God, then, is doing a work, unmentioned in the Jewish oracles, during the time that His earthly people are "Lo-ammi" ("Not My people," Hos. 1:9), unacknowledged by Him; and "blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25). This is one of the "mysteries," one of the

secret things (Deut. 29:29), till now unrevealed. The Lord Jesus confirms this (but rather from the political side) in His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, the long period of desolation and Gentile supremacy following it, and, finally, the end in His personal appearing. Luke 21:24 records: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles *until* the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

This connects us again with Daniel 9, where we get the great prophecy of the "seventy weeks." A lengthy exposition of this passage cannot be attempted here, but we briefly notice the main points. From the course of time, seventy weeks (or heptads) of years (note the periods before the prophet's mind in verse 2), making in all 490 years, are "determined," or "cut off," and given to Daniel's people—the Jewish nation.

Ere this period of time expires six important events will have taken place: first, transgression will be finished; second, an end will be made of sins; third, atonement (rather than *reconciliation*) will be made for iniquity; fourth, everlasting righteousness will be brought in; fifth, vision and prophecy will be sealed up, or finished, i.e., all fulfilled; and sixth, the most holy, or holy of holies, of the millennial temple at Jerusalem will be anointed (see Ezek., chaps. 40-48).

The seventy weeks are divided into three unequal periods: First, seven weeks, or forty-nine years; second, sixty-two weeks, or 434 years; third, one week, or seven years. During the first seven weeks, "the strait times" (see *margin*), the city and wall of Jerusalem were to be rebuilt. The date from which to count is found in Nehemiah 2, when a "commandment went forth to restore and build Jerusalem." The sixty-two weeks seem to have immediately followed, and ended in the coming of Messiah. After the conclusion of this period He was cut off and had nothing, but by this atonement was made. Then comes in the present long interval of Jerusalem's treading down. The city is destroyed, as our Lord foretold also, and "even unto the *end* shall be war," until one arises who confirms a covenant with the mass of the Jews for the last final week. Clearly, then, this week is still future. The prophetic clock stopped at Calvary. It will not start again till "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

The present is a timeless epoch, parenthetically introduced

between the 69th and 70th week, in which God is taking out from among the Gentiles a people for His Name (Acts 15:14). Not that He has utterly given up the Jew now, but both Jew and Gentile stand on one footing; "There is no difference, for all have sinned" (Rom. 3:22, 23). Both alike are saved through faith in Christ, and all such are made members of the one Body, the Church, and by the Holy Ghost united to the Lord Jesus Christ as Head in Heaven, another mystery hitherto unrevealed. (See Rom. 16:25-28; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; Col. 1:24-29.) This began with the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 12:13). It will be completed at the coming of the Lord to call His Church to be forever with Himself, an event which may take place at any moment (1 Thess. 4:15-18; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 2 Thess. 2:1). Then the long-delayed seventieth week will begin to run its course. At its conclusion Daniel's prophecy (as all other millennial prophecies) will be entirely fulfilled. Atonement was made for iniquity after the expiration of the sixty-ninth week. Everlasting righteousness will be brought in at the end of the seventieth.

This brief period, however, will be one of judgment throughout, and that threefold. It will include judgment on apostate Christendom, on Israel, and on the nations at large. It is to be the awful result of the rejection of the Prince of Peace.

The Book of Revelation from chapter four to nineteen is occupied entirely with its solemn events. The saints —of all prior dispensations, as well as the Church—are seen enthroned in heaven as the twenty-four elders who have been redeemed with the blood of the Lamb (chap. 5) at the beginning of the week. They ride forth as the "armies of Heaven" with "the Word of God" at His glorious appearing at the close. The last three years and a half will be especially the time when Israel shall receive "of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Isa. 40: 2), the "time of Jacob's trouble" of Jeremiah 30:7 and Daniel 12:1, and the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24 and Revelation 7:14. The covenant-breaking prince of Daniel 9 is doubtless the Beast, the head of the Roman Empire, who makes a league with the wilful king of chapter 11:36-39—the Antichrist of prophecy (1 John 2:18), the idol shepherd of Zechariah 11:15-17, who will "come in his own name," as foretold by the Lord Jesus in John 5:43, and be received by the mass of the Jews as Messiah, but who will become the cruel persecutor of a faithful company

designated as "the remnant" (Isa. 11: 11; Ezek. 6: 8; Rev. 12: 17, etc.).

When we turn to the study of the Book of the Revelation (chap. 7), we read there of 144,000 out of all the tribes of Israel, and a numberless white-robed multitude of spared Gentiles who will follow the Lamb wheresoever He goeth, and who are said to come up out of the great tribulation and to have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Many take it for granted that this is a heavenly company, and one is not surprised at that, for the language used is so nearly like that which we find later on in connection with the saints in the new Jerusalem. But a careful comparison of this chapter with a part of Isaiah 49 seems to make it very clear that this great multitude really represents the nucleus of the Kingdom to be set up in this world at the time when our Lord returns and the days of Heaven prevail on the earth. In other words, it refers to heavenly conditions in this world. In Isaiah 49:8-13, we read: "Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them. And I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His anointed." Notice that there is no question here of resurrection or the peopling of the heavenly Jerusalem. This entire prophecy has to do with the resurrection of Israel and the blessing of the Gentiles through them on the earth in a coming day. The language of verse ten is almost identical with that of Revelation 7:16. Who then are these saints?

First, we must consider the 144,000. There has been a great deal of idle speculation regarding this company. Some see in them a picture of what they call a "first-fruits rapture," linking this

passage with Revelation 14, where the 144,000 are seen standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion. And so in many places, the teaching has become current that a select group of believers will be raptured before the great tribulation, while the rest will have to pass through it. The 144,000 are supposed to represent this select group, and the great multitude, the majority of the Church who will be purified in the fires of the great tribulation. Needless to say, Scripture knows nothing of any such selective rapture. The Word of God is perfectly plain, "Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at His coming." And again, "We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together." There is no hint of any division in the Church of God, the Body of Christ. All are saved by grace, all are alike made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The rapture is never presented as reward for special devotedness, but is preliminary to the judgment-seat of Christ, where we shall all stand to receive our rewards. We will be in our glorified bodies when we appear at that great tribunal. This could not be true if only a special group were raptured before the tribulation.

It is remarkable and almost amusing, if it were not so sad, as indicating the blindness of so many who ought to know better, to observe the way various sects and systems seek to identify themselves with the 144,000. According to the Seventh-day Adventists, these are those who keep the commandments perfectly. The Russellites insist that they are a special class of overcomers who will be exalted to the divine nature, whereas others will be saved on a lower plane. Various Pentecostal groups declare that they are those who have been baptized with the Spirit and speak in tongues, or are characterized by other remarkable gifts.

But what are the facts? First, we have the vision (Rev. 7:1-3), and then (verse 4) the interpretation. The 144,000 are out of all tribes of the children of Israel and represent therefore that remnant which will turn to the Lord after the Church has been caught up, in accordance with Romans 11: 25, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." In the book of Daniel, and in many parts of the prophetic Scriptures, we find this remnant distinguished from the mass. They are the wise who understand. They are the gleanings in the day of Jehovah's wrath, who will be recognized by Him as His own. They are sealed for preservation in view of the coming

kingdom, before the dreadful storm of the great tribulation is permitted to break upon the earth. In chapter 14 we see them as a victorious company who have safely emerged from that storm, and form what we might call the bodyguard of the Lamb, when He returns to Mt. Zion. It is evident that they will be a witnessing company and will carry the gospel of the kingdom to millions who have never heard and rejected the message of grace. As a result of their testimony, we see the great multitude of Gentiles brought to a knowledge of Christ and cleansed by His precious blood. Isaiah 66:18-21 is very instructive in this connection: "For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see My glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles. And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the Lord, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord. And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord." Here we have God dealing in grace with Israel and the Gentile nations during the time of the great tribulation and just before He sets up His glorious kingdom here on the earth.

We are told in Daniel 12:3, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." This, as the first verse of the same chapter shows us, has to do with their testimony in the time of trouble yet to come, but Daniel has told us, "At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." I quote again from the work previously referred to:

"The hour of their darkest trouble and deepest sorrow will result in the elect among them returning to the Lord. The 144,000 of Revelation 7 picture to us those who will say, 'Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath tom, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up' (Hos. 6:1). Zion's sore travail shall result in a great bringing forth of children, as predicted in Micah 5:3 and Isa. 66:8. We quote the latter

passage: 'Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed she brought forth her children.' The verses following are deserving also of special notice in this connection. See, too, Zechariah 12 and 13.

"And so the 'blindness in part' is to be done away, the 'fulness of the Gentiles' having come in, as shown also in Hosea 3:4,5. 'For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.' This is true not of the nation as a whole (see Zech. 13:8,9; Isa. 24:13; also Ezek. 20:31-44), but of the remnant. The mass will be destroyed for their apostasy. The remnant will be acknowledged as the nation, and 'so all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. 11:26). To be of the sons of Jacob even, will not ensure an opportunity of grace. None who refuse the truth now, whether Jew or Gentile, can be saved then."

In Matthew 25 we have the judgment of the living nations at the Lord's return. This is to be distinguished from the judgment of the Great White Throne. The former is pre-millennial, and the latter is post-millennial. We read: "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations." Notice there is no word of people here being raised from the dead, as at the final judgment; but we see the living nations gathered before Him, and a separation is made according to the treatment afforded those whom the Lord calls "My brethren." Linking this with the passages we have already considered, it would seem to be clear that the "brethren" here referred to, are His brethren after the flesh, the remnant of Israel. Those who enter into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, are the Gentiles who received these brethren and heeded their message. These are the ones who inherit the millennial kingdom.

Those who are martyred under the Beast and the Antichrist in that day, will be raised from the dead when the Lord descends to take the kingdom, and will thus form the last cohort of the first

resurrection. Notice the order indicated in Revelation 20: 4-6. First, John says, "I saw thrones and sitters upon them, and judgment was given to them." These are undoubtedly identified with the saints who are raised at the rapture before the tribulation. Then John mentions another class: "And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received the mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." These are the martyrs of the tribulation period. They have their part in the heavenly side of the kingdom. As to the unsaved, we are told in verse 5, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection." Verse 6 includes the entire company who have part in the various cohorts of the first resurrection: "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."

It is plain then that there will be saints on the earth during the great tribulation, but they are not members of the Body of Christ, as that Body is now constituted by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They will be individual believers, as in Old Testament times, and will through grace be enabled to witness for Christ in that day of great distress. They will share in the kingdom and enjoy the blessing of the Lord in a wonderful way, but they are not included in the Body of Christ which occupies a distinct place through all the ages to come.

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