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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 8

REVELATION 7:9-17

The Great Tribulation Myth

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PART EIGHT

THE GREAT TRIBULATION MYTH

Revelation 7:9-17

“These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:14)

The non-church theory of the Book of Revelation has for many years dominated evangelical thought with grievous consequences to the holy art of prophetic interpretation. Arising out of this theorising emerges the GREAT TRIBULATION MYTH which is a territory beloved alike by many orthodox believers and those heretical and apocalyptic sects whose principal propaganda appears to centre around bizarre forecasts of future horrors. It is with no pleasure that we find the necessity to address ourselves to the refutation of these extraordinary theories which have so fascinated impressionable minds in this impressionable age. One of our chief objectives in this exercise is to restore to the comfort of God’s people that of which they have been deprived by a false prophetism.

The late Dr. F.E. Marsh, a well-known evangelical minister of recent times has correctly outlined the general teaching existing among evangelicals with regard to this mythical period – teaching with which this good man was himself prominently identified:

“Tribulation in a general sense is not meant; it is something special. The sentence in Rev. 7:14 in the Revised Version is ‘The Great Tribulation’, and as Alford points out, the definite article should not be left out: in fact the sentence might be rendered ‘The Tribulation, the Great One’.”

(With regard to Dr. Alford, we point out later how that peerless master of the Greek testament shows that though the article is there, it does not mean what Dr. Marsh claims, but something far otherwise.)

Dr. Marsh proceeds, “The Book of the Revelation unfolds the Great Tribulation. It takes place under the fifth, sixth, and seventh seals, and under the seven trumpets and seven vials of wrath. It is variously described as to

the length of its period, namely 42 months, 1,260 days, a time, times and half a time, which means 3 ½ years. The description of what will then take place will be terrible, awful and unprecedented. (It will be) a time of martyrdom, a time of wonders and signs in heaven, a time of great physical convulsions and changes, a time of terrible privation, a time of intense bodily suffering, a time of great wickedness, a time of devil domination, a time of unnatural death.”

As is customary with those who hold to this theory, Dr. Marsh is insistent that no church members will pass through this dreadful time because the church will be ‘raptured’ (taken up) out of the world prior to the onset of this “tribulation”. Readers will note that according to Dr. Marsh (who was ‘standard’ on these matters) practically the entire Book of Revelation is exclusively occupied with this period lasting at the most seven years, but probably only 3 ½ years, for he asserts that the action takes place during the period of the seals, trumpets and vials outside of which there is very little of the Book of Revelation left. The pyramid of time therefore stands upon its apex, and the last book of the Bible is largely concerned with a period which scarcely begins before it ends, and from which the church of Christ is carefully excluded.

Readers will also appreciate at its true value the theory that the numberless host of the converted during this fragment of time apparently dwarfs the achievements of the Twelve Apostles during the 40 years of their Spirit-filled testimony to the world. They will take particular notice of the fact that John (who dwells throughout the Revelation in Old Testament figure and language) describes the multitude who “came out of great tribulation” in precisely the terms which God uses to Abraham when foretelling the uncountable multitude of his (Abraham’s) seed - as the dust of the earth and the stars of heaven innumerable - figures which the New Testament applies to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 4:18, etc.).

“A great multitude which no man can number” (Rev. 7:9) is obviously a description taken from the promise to Abraham, that one would have to accuse John of theological and Biblical ignorance in the use of such a term if he had not meant to describe the whole multitude of believers in all ages, according to the Abrahamic covenant. The uncountable nature of the multitude seen by John would in any event be out of all proportion to any possible aggregation of ‘tribulation saints’ converted in the short space of seven years.

The futuristic theory is further complicated by the teaching that not only has the church disappeared by ‘secret rapture’ from the world prior to this tribulation, but

the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Third Person of the Ever Blessed Trinity has been 'withdrawn' so as to expose the world to the maximum violence of Satan, so that the phenomenal success of evangelistic enterprise during the period of the 'withdrawal' is either achieved without the aid of the Spirit, or at least without the aid of that measure of divine power which came into the world on the Day of Pentecost. Seeing that the results dwarf those of the Pentecostal outpouring, this is an enigma we are not competent to solve.

This teaching of the withdrawal of the Divine Spirit is based entirely on one verse in 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 7: "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (hindereth) will let, until he be taken out of the way." It would be fair to say that no-one could possibly have taught that this verse was speaking of the Holy Spirit unless on the basis of a prior theory. Let us examine the context. Paul was warning the Thessalonians that the Second Advent of Christ was not imminent until certain historic events had taken place. That day would not come till there had been a great 'falling away' from the faith and a Man of Sin (understood by all parties to refer to the Antichrist) should be revealed. This apparition would not appear until some hindering cause had been removed. Our theorists maintain that this interfering cause is the Holy Spirit. There is of course nothing in the passage which tells us this is the case. It could be other circumstances which the apostle had in mind and which HE HAD ALREADY BY WORD OF MOUTH COMMUNICATED TO THE CHURCH (see verses 5-6). Now if Paul was privately teaching that the hindering cause was the Holy Spirit, why the secrecy? Why not say so openly? But if the hindering cause was Caesar, then master of the world, there might be every reason that the information should be privately communicated, for if committed to writing it would quickly be conveyed to the Roman authorities, and interpreted as a treasonable utterance calculated to bring upon the writer and upon the entire Christian cause the vengeance of the authorities.

It was essential therefore that Paul's inspired insight into the future, based not only upon the direct communication of the Divine Spirit but also upon the inspired writings of Daniel (written also in the same guarded manner) - that this insight should be given as a caution to the church, in such a way as not to expose the Christian community to unnecessary danger.

In short, Paul was saying that great events over an immense period of time must run their course before the Second Advent. These events would involve a great and mysterious apostasy from the faith accompanied by the exaltation to a position of unique power and authority of a man or a system in the region of the historic

Christian church. This apparition in turn could not emerge so long as the then existing imperial system held sway. He who hindered the development of the antichristian system could only be Caesar. So long as there were Caesars in Rome dominating the world no such power as that foretold by Daniel and Paul could have room to develop, inasmuch as the ancient prophecies of Daniel foretold that antichrist would be a 'little horn' sprouting from the many-horned empire of the Fourth Monarchy (Rome) - see Daniel 7:21-27.

The fall of the Caesars did in fact, in the fifth century after Christ, lead to the emergence of a new power in Rome which robed itself in the purple of the Caesars and proclaimed itself the universal head of the church, the arbiter of all kingdoms on the earth, and even extended its audacious claims to the throne of God in heaven.

It will be seen therefore that antichrist is not a single person but a succession of persons or a system wielding the same ecclesiastical power and claiming on pain of death or suppression of all dissent the right to be acknowledged as the true and only successor of the apostles, having power and authority not only upon earth but in heaven itself "so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God." (2 Thess. 2:4)

If this be true it is easy to see how convenient it would be for Satan to have his kingdom accepted as the true and lawful kingdom of Christ and thus divert attention from himself to an acceptable substitute.

A PROTESTANT ANTICHRIST

It could be argued that the Papacy no longer wields its ancient power and therefore is irrelevant to prophecy. There has been a noteworthy and most alarming extension of antichristian power in our day, however, going beyond the ancient boundaries of antichrist's kingdom, and including a large section of that protestant world which 400 years ago seemed to give Rome her death blow. We now have to reckon with a protestant antichrist denying not only Christ and His word, but also the very existence of God as creator and lord of the universe - a Protestantism which goes outside even the traditional boundaries of Christendom and embraces in brotherly fashion anything and everything which calls itself religion, and even those who deny religion in any and all its forms - an atheistic and pseudo-scientific antichrist, without faith, morals, or piety.

It is perhaps not surprising that a prophetic novelty should be created to direct the attention of the evangelical world away from the real enemy to a mythical person who, when he comes, will be irrelevant to the church (no longer here to greet him).

NO SEVEN-YEAR ANTICHRIST

“Even now” writes John in his first epistle, “there are many antichrists, whereby we know that it is the last time.” (1 John 2:18) A seven-year antichrist such as our friends envisage is scarcely relevant enough to be important in the light of John’s inference that antichrist has already been with the church for 2,000 years past. During that great span of time the people of God have continuously gone through great tribulation, not just for seven years, but often for whole generations.

Our friends base the special nature of the great tribulation described in our chapter, upon the use of the Greek article – “THE great tribulation”, and call in aid our Lord’s words in Matt. 24:21 “Then shall be great tribulation (no article) such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” But our friends cannot have it both ways.

The two verses are not related. That in Matthew belongs to the suffering of the Jewish nation at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70; that in Revelation to the age-long suffering of the church at the hands of the power of this world.

There are those who contend that the sufferings of the Jews in Europe during the Hitlerian massacres in 1939-45, were greater than those in Jerusalem in AD 70, but again they do not attend to the meaning of prophecy. The Jews though suffering terribly in the last war, did not suffer alone. An incalculable number of victims of all nationalities suffered with them. Untold millions perished during the German invasion of Russia. The ravages of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane pale beside those appalling devastations.

The unique ‘greatness’ of the tribulation suffered by Jerusalem in AD 70 lies not only in the actual number of victims but in the awfulness of the divine judgment upon a whole nation which had sold itself to unbelief by not only rejecting and crucifying their Saviour and King, but in pursuing their infatuated career of persecution of the saints, with inveterate impenitence, during 40 years of apostolic ministry accompanied by miracles and signs and wonders, till there was no remedy. The greatness of their fate exceeded all, because of the greatness of their privilege and the greatness of their unbelief in the face thereof. No such privilege was ever granted to any people; no such crime was ever committed in any age past

or to come; therefore, warned the Saviour, ‘such tribulation as was not since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be’.

That tribulation was shortened for the sake of the elect church in Israel, else not a solitary member of the nation would have survived. The tribulation of the nation was followed by the darkening of their sun and moon and the falling of their stars from heaven -common prophetic figures indicating the removal of their ordinances and privileges and the ministry of God’s Word amongst them, literally fulfilled in the historic fact that never since that day have they as a nation had their spiritual privileges restored. Their physical presence in Palestine today remains one of unbelief, frequently of atheism, scarcely tolerating the presence amongst them of pious Christian Jews. Our friends had better wait before jubilantly pronouncing on the score of the present state of affairs in Palestine that a ‘restoration’ has taken place. At any rate they must confess that the sun, moon and stars of the Jewish order and privilege have not yet been recovered from the debris of history.

It is further to be noted as to the relative numbers of Jewish victims in AD 70 compared with those who lost their lives in the Hitlerian massacres, that the destruction wrought by the Roman general Titus and his army did not end with the vast loss of life in Jerusalem itself. Throughout the whole of Asia Minor the Jewish population was put to the sword and the full tale of victims has never been calculated. It remains however that the principal part of the judgment was not the number of victims but the extinction of Jewish worship (never since restored, for with the destruction of temple, priest and altar the very heart of the nation was torn out and its peculiar testimony and privilege came to an end after 1,500 years of nationhood).

The calamity was suitably described in the Saviour’s words –
“no, nor ever shall be.”

The crime of the nation expended itself in fury upon the first martyr, Stephen. What a crime was that - after so great an exposition of the scriptures given by that young man to the Parliament of the nation - the Great Jewish Council - proving to them that, stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, they did always as a nation resist the Holy Ghost- “as your fathers did, so do ye!” They had received the law by the administration of angels and yet had not kept it (Acts 7:51-53). Finally, after God had given them 40 years of apostolic ministry in the power of the Holy Ghost, a prophetic era closed over the doomed city and the forbearance of God expended itself in the day of righteous indignation.

Such a fate! Such a tribulation! Such a woeful sight! Such high privilege, to end in such self-induced fury! Such a history of God's pleading and promises to a nation which had inherited such high promise from saints and patriarchs! Such a fate was not unworthy to be described as a tribulation surpassing anything this world had ever seen or would see.

Our Lord, in announcing the decree of vengeance over Jerusalem, used the language of the inspired Daniel - language which he who was the Eternal Word had given to that gracious and noble man of God six centuries before. So long had the destruction been slumbering; so long all warnings spurned; so long the patience of God waited. Now the scriptures they knew so well but never understood (such was their hardness and unbelief) had come to fruition. A thousand years and more of the nation's inveterate apostasy reached the conclusion. In the words of the holy martyr, Stephen,

“Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. As your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it.” Acts 7:51-53

The martyrdom of Stephen was followed in a short space of time by the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and the opening of the gentile era of salvation, of which Saul (who is also called Paul) was the chosen instrument. These two events brought to an end the seventieth prophetic 'week' of Daniel and introduced the full development of the Kingdom of God to which Daniel's great prophecy acted as a bridge over the gulf of time.

DIVIDING WHAT GOD HAS MADE ONE

Modern prophetic futurism divides what God has made one. It separates one 'week' from the unbroken seventy stretching from the decree authorising the rebuilding of Jerusalem, to the crucifixion of Christ midway through the last 'week'. By severing this 'week' from the prophetic bridge, they shatter a complete prophecy and boast that this is “rightly dividing the word of truth”.

Incredibly Mr. W. E. Vine (The Sealed Book, page 20), says, “The Seventieth Week of Daniel ... is severed off from the preceding sixty-nine ... a large portion of the Sacred Volume concentrates upon the period under review” (i.e., the Seven

Year period).

Equally incredibly Dr. Scofield (What Do the Prophets Say? -page 79) asks “Why did the fulfillment stop short with the cutting off of Messiah at the end of the sixty-ninth week?” and goes on to declare, “The seventieth week is cut off and separated from the sixty-nine, and the interval, already of 1,900 years duration, is the period during which the two great divine secrets, the outcalling of the church and the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, run their course”.

But Dr. Scofield unwittingly is betrayed into a misquotation. It is Messiah who is cut off, not the 70th week. Moreover Messiah is not cut off at the end of the 69th week, but ‘in the midst of the week’ that is, in the midst of the 70th week (Dan. 9:26). It is certainly inconvenient to have the crucifixion placed in the midst of the last week, for the theory of Mr. Vine and Dr. Scofield requires the whole of that week for the service of antichrist, or their entire futuristic edifice topples. Hence, when Daniel says (v.27) “He shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease,” the theory declares that the person referred to as confirming the covenant, is antichrist, who they allege, will at the beginning of the week make a covenant with the Jews at Jerusalem, and half way through the week will break the covenant and this will mark the beginning of one three and a half years of the Great Tribulation.

But this is an error of the first order. It is Messiah, not antichrist who ‘confirms’ the covenant with the Jewish nation. This He did from His baptism to the crucifixion 31 years later. That confirmation was made in His glorious ministry of the Word of Promise.

“This is my beloved Son. Hear ye him,” proclaimed the voice of the Father on the Mount of Transfiguration. By words and by mighty deeds Christ showed He was the Messiah, and by this means He confirmed the covenant of promise made to Abraham. But our friends have been forced to invent a hellish covenant made by the devil’s henchman, antichrist, to obtain the temporary allegiance of the Jewish people, in order finally to destroy them, whereas it was heaven’s covenant made by the king of heaven in Person, to obtain their faith in order finally to save them. It was the Jews who were the offending party, for they had a prior covenant with death and hell by which they rejected Christ’s covenant and crucified Him who made the promise. (See Isaiah 28:15)

CHRIST'S DEATH MAKES THE JEWISH SACRIFICES TO CEASE

“And in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease.” (Dan. 9:27) It was Christ who made the sacrifice and oblation to cease by fulfilling the types of redemption held forth in those sacrifices. By fulfilling them He rendered the entire Judaic system obsolete and ‘ready to vanish away’ (Hebrews 8:13: “In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away”). The rending of the temple veil in the midst of that last prophetic week was a divine sign that the Old Covenant had passed away and the New had begun, as the Lord symbolised at the last supper.

The remainder of Daniel’s prophecy looked forward to the factual and historical extinction of the Jewish era, for the destruction envisaged therein, of temple and city; the making desolate of the old order in the flames of Jerusalem, is clearly foreshadowed. Christ Himself warned of this in His Olivet discourse. (Matt. 24:15 compare Luke 21:20)

Futurism’s substitution of antichrist for Christ in this passage of Daniel is a major error, and the cause of widespread confusion. It is not the only place where a preconceived theory has exchanged God for Satan. We have already seen how the requirements of the non-church interpretation of Revelation have substituted antichrist for the Saviour Himself in the Rider of the First Seal of Rev. 6.

The eagerness to establish the mistaken interpretation does not and cannot stop there as we see when we attend to the main purpose of Daniel’s prophecy as expressed in v.24:

“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.”

This is one of the most comprehensive statements in the Bible and it can only refer in its entirety to the crucifixion of Christ and the benefits flowing therefrom. It is therefore a fundamental requirement of this great prophecy that the 70 weeks should terminate with the sealing of the eternal covenant at Calvary and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Futurism places the crucifixion outside these 70 weeks and leaves the entire prophecy suspended as it were in the air. What was intended to be one of the greatest demonstrations of the truth of the Bible, is totally

dismantled. The consolation of Daniel's prophecy is thereby denied both to Jew and gentile, and the interpretation handed over to antichrist. If the crime had not been committed we could not have believed it possible for it to have been invented.

DR. S. P. TREGELLES

Perhaps no man among the Futurist school of interpretation is entitled to more veneration for his gifts and true piety than Dr. S. P. Tregelles, a brilliant scholar in the ancient languages, and a man most gracious in all his dealings. Dr. Tregelles was among the early band of prophetic students from whom arose, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the school of futuristic interpretation of prophecy. We accord to him full honours for what he was as a scholar and a Christian. Yet mournfully we are bound to point out that this sincere man, was strangely caught up in the enthusiasm which arose following the prophetic aberrations of poor Edward Irving, and the contagion caught from him by Mr. J. N. Darby and developed into the Futuristic system. Dr. Tregelles applied the prophecy of verse 24 (above), not to the crucifixion of Christ but to Jewish restoration not yet accomplished, adjourning the whole prophecy in its significance to a day which has not yet arrived. Here are his words:

“The various things spoken of ‘to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness,’ are all, I believe, future. I do not regard any of them as referring strictly to the work of Christ upon the cross, but it rather appears to me that they all belong to the time of Israel’s blessing”

“Remarks on the Prophetic Visions of Daniel” pages 98-99.
Edition 1965 (Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony)

Dr. Tregelles goes on to say that the ‘anointing of the most holy’ is to be fulfilled in a new temple to be built at Jerusalem, and which will be “SET APART AND OWNED BY GOD AS PECULIARLY HIS” (Daniel, page 99). Instead of Christ Dr. Tregelles substitutes the stone and lime of a dead, material temple, with priests and sacrifices.

To such lengths will good men go when their minds are subject to a theory of interpretation even when it runs counter to the entire teaching of the New Testament. Christ said to the woman at the well of Samaria, “The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this, mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father The hour cometh AND NOW IS, when the true worshippers shall worship the

Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”
(John 4:21-25)

Whatever mysteries prophecy may yet unfold, it will never approve, as God its author can never approve, of the re-establishment of the old order, for a temple means the hanging again of the temple veil, the re-establishment of blood sacrifices which can never take away sin, and the raising up of a whole order of sacrificing priests whose ministry long ago terminated in the one true sacrifice of the true High Priest, who, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12 - read the whole chapter). To set up again the order of the Old Covenant is to dismantle the New. Paul’s argument always was that the two covenants could never stand together.

SUBVERSIVE OF THE GOSPEL

This temple heresy, revived in modern times, is subversive of the gospel, and is expressly refuted by the Lord’s own words, as also by the Pauline epistles from Romans to Hebrews.

The true teaching of Daniel’s prophecy is far otherwise. The ‘Most Holy’ truly derives its name from the earthly sanctuary, whether tabernacle or temple, in the legal order established by Moses, but in its New Testament fulfillment it refers to Christ and Christ alone, as He is the realisation of all the temple stood for in access to God the Father through that one sacrifice of Himself held forth and typified in the blood of bulls and goats and the ministrations of the priests of Israel. Having terminated in Him, prophecy and type have their end and can never be re-established without the subversion of the gospel. The Law, with its temple, priesthood and sacrifice was ‘added because of transgressions’ says Paul, and it can only be re-established by recalling the sin and guilt which met their end in Christ’s full atonement (see Galatians 3:19). Again, “If I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.” (Gal. 2:18)

In his treatment of Daniel Dr. Tregelles only exemplified the fact that the human mind in its best state has an unlimited capacity for self-contradiction. In the case of this excellent man, so justly noted even among the greatest savants of textual criticism, as a scholar of peerless worth - this good man, we say, in his enthusiasm for the revolution then taking place amongst prophetic speculators, lost the clear sweep of the great ninth chapter of Daniel. To this expansive approach to Daniel we must now apply ourselves, for here, if anywhere; we shall find the ultimate answer to THE GREAT TRIBULATION MYTH.

THE 70 YEARS AND THE 70 WEEKS

The ninth chapter of Daniel has as its starting point the ending of the 70 years captivity of Israel in Babylon. All are agreed upon this. Gabriel was sent by God to His servant Daniel to confirm that Jeremiah's prophecy of the 70 years captivity (Jer. 25:12) would be followed by another period of Seventy (prophetic) Weeks at the end of which redemption would be accomplished and complete and final deliverance brought in by the appearance of Messiah, the Anointed One, in whom all prophecy and vision would be consummated.

That period of 70 weeks (it is not seriously disputed), refers to seventy weeks of years - a day for a year, or 490 years. This new period of a Sacred Seventy was to commence not precisely at the termination of Jeremiah's 70 years, but from the actual time of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem. This decree was not promulgated till the 20th year of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2). Undoubtedly the remarkable book of Nehemiah was expressly written to fix this date, and in the providence of God this excellent man Nehemiah through the peculiar access he had to the favour of Artaxerxes, was able to obtain from the Persian monarch this great decree, hitherto denied by the Persian monarchs although they permitted the temple to be rebuilt and worship to be re-established under Ezra.

“Build” says Hengstenberg “is the watchword throughout the whole of the book of Nehemiah. There is no other book in the Bible in which the word occurs with the same relative frequency.”

Hengstenberg (Christology, Volume 3, pages 217-239) has settled for all time that the commencement of the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9 (490 years) lay in the decree of Artaxerxes in the 20th year of his reign, which was 455 BC. The 69th week of Daniel (483 years) therefore ran out at 28 AD. Allowing for calendar adjustments at the transition from BC to AD this brings us as precisely as any enumeration can allow to the baptism of Christ and the anointing of the Spirit at the Jordan, the actual commencement of Christ's ministry. The remaining prophetic week (seven years) divides into two equal periods. In the midst of the week (31 years) Messiah was ‘cut off’ - was crucified. It has always been recognised by calculation of the number of Passovers recorded during Christ's ministry, that His ministry lasted 31 years. The remaining 31 years concluded with the martyrdom of Stephen and the conversion of Saul, two related events which marked the end of the era of Jewish privilege and the commencement of gentile admission to the Abrahamic covenant (that Abraham should be the father of ‘many nations’).

The Seventy Weeks of Daniel have therefore run their course and there is no room for any calculation of a 70th week severed by 2,000 years from the 69. Moreover the nature of the prophecy itself will not tolerate such a severance, and for the following reason: THE VALIDITY OF THE PROPHECY DEPENDS UPON ITS UNITY. THERE IS NO PRECEDENT IN SCRIPTURE FOR THE DISMEMBERMENT OF THE UNITY OF THIS SACRED NUMBER. THE SEVEN OR THE SEVENTY OR THE SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN MUST ALWAYS BE UNBROKEN OR THEY LOSE THEIR SIGNIFICANCE.

THE UNDIVIDED SEVEN

Futurism does not appear to have been aware of the prophetic significance of the undivided seven. Why should the 70 be so prominent in Daniel's great vision of redemption's accomplishment? Why should there be concealed within this number of 70 'weeks' the, powerful prophetic number of 49 (seven sevens) increased by multiplication with that other number of perfection, 10, to the exact period of 490 day-years for the accomplishment of the entire programme of divine redemption - to finish the transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up the vision and prophecy, and anoint the most holy?

To take one only of these great cosmic purposes, "to seal up the vision and prophecy" - this can only mean that when the mystic period was consummated, that era would have arrived when all prophecy would cease.

Now if the 70 weeks have not yet ended, this age could not be described as 'the last days' (Heb. 1"2), for the design of that prophetic period was to bring us to the time when there would be no further need of prophetic vision which at 'sundry times and in divers manners' had been given to the human race ever since the Garden of Eden. We know there has been no vision or prophecy since Christ and His apostles, though some enthusiastic brains in these modern times imagine God is still speaking otherwise than by His Word.

But why 70? Why 49 (the seven sevens)? Why the 490 (7 x 7 x 10)? Why should the Lord in His unfathomable sovereignty, when determining the times and the seasons have vested the number seven with such power?

ORIGIN OF THE SACRED NUMBER SEVEN

Undoubtedly we are carried back to the number of days of the creation week terminating in the sabbath of rest. Seven is a sacred cycle spanning the whole of time and represents always the completeness of God's ways. It is the number of divine perfection and its recurrence throughout scripture must be followed with closest attention. John in particular, in his Gospel and the Book of Revelation, is wedded to the use of the number seven. His gospel begins and ends with a holy week of seven days (as we have shown in our commentary on the Fourth Gospel) and throughout that gospel John lays emphasis on this sacred number. The Book of Revelation revolves constantly around the same mystic number, and always it is an unbroken number.

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF CREATION

In Old Testament times the nation of Israel was regulated in its calendar by the observance of the jubilee years - every 50th year was a jubilee when land and property and servants reverted to their original ownership and everything began anew. It cannot be doubted that the grand jubilee of creation, the cosmic jubilee of redemption, was the prominent feature of Daniel's prophecy.

Daniel's 70 prophetic weeks were a bridge to span the gulf of time until the commencement of that great gospel jubilee brought in by the death and resurrection of Messiah. The jubilee is plainly to be seen in that sacred number. Each jubilee in Israelitish times was calculated by seven sevens of years (49 years); the fiftieth year was the jubilee. Daniel's prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (490 day-years) to the Messianic deliverance, showed by the tenfold multiplication of the 49 that THIS jubilee was the perfect and final jubilee to end all jubilees, for it has been fulfilled in one grand spiritual realisation of full liberty and deliverance. Of this jubilee Christ spoke in the synagogue of Nazareth when inaugurating His ministry with the reading of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted ... to set at liberty them that are bruised, **TO PREACH THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.**
(Luke 4. 16-21).

He closed the Book and declared "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." That 'acceptable year of the Lord' was the great jubilee of divine deliverance and it extends even to our day and will continue till the consummation of all things.

It is highly significant that the Pentecostal outpouring took place 50 days after the resurrection - another jubilee type fulfilled. The Saviour's exaltation to power and glory at the right hand of the Father was the signal for the opening of the heavens on the day of Pentecost and the outpouring without restraint of the divine Spirit marking the end of the long ages of bondage and the onset of the great jubilee year of grace, which began but will never end. The Futurist doctrine of the 'withdrawal' of the Spirit from the earth is a dishonour to the work of Christ as well as an unforgivable distortion of the nature of the Godhead.

It is so plain that Daniel's prophecy was designed to measure the time exactly till this great jubilee year that any attempt to interfere with the sacred unity of the 70 weeks must be considered a sacrilege. We may not divide what God has not divided, nor postpone that which God has not postponed. That theory which requires to shatter a prophecy in order to create for itself a period of time to accommodate the event which it has postulated, must be fragile indeed and scarcely worthy of a serious refutation.

NO PRECEDENT FOR BREAKING THE SACRED SEVEN

We conclude this section of our examination of the Futuristic theory of the 'postponed' 70th 'week' with a statement and a challenge:

There is no precedent anywhere in Holy Scripture for the dismemberment of the Sacred Jubilee. Nowhere do we find a sacred seven or a sacred week broken. Jeremiah's seventy year prophecy terminated at the appointed time, without any break (which would have implied that the prophecy was a failure and unreliable). The Seventy Weeks of Daniel were designed to be the counterpart of the 70 years of Jeremiah to bring in the everlasting righteousness wrought by Christ at His atonement. Daniel's prophecy was clearly intended to span the period of time to that fulfillment of which the restoration of Israel from the Babylonian captivity was as the type to the reality. The one could not be broken, neither could the other, or prophecy had failed. The 49 years of time elapsing from Jubilee to Jubilee, was expanded tenfold into 490 day-years (or seventy 'weeks'), and prophecy must have failed if the jubilee did not come with the termination of that time. To break off one week is to shatter the prophecy. Futurism has done just that, and at the same time has shattered all consistent interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, for it has been compelled to treat the Church as an irrelevant interlude, unforeseen by the prophets, inserted arbitrarily into that grand jubilee period, leaving the Church without any inspired prophecy to

account for her existence. The Bride of Christ has been hunted out of every nook and cranny of the Old Testament, and robbed of her renown and her place in the purposes of God.

We can only protest at this dismemberment of Holy Scripture, and call upon those who have done the deed to reply to the verdict stated above, and challenge it if they can.

THE NEXT EVENT

We have shown, from the statements of our friends, that if the Seventy Weeks of Daniel's prophecy expired with the death of Christ and the establishment of His kingdom, the interlude (which they require) of seven years from the so-called 'rapture' of the Church out of the world, to the real, visible coming of Christ, does not exist. If in fact it does not exist, the entire prophetic scheme of Futurism so ingeniously constructed last century, falls to the ground. The horrific forecasts of a coming Great Tribulation perish with the theory, and the Church must settle for the next event as being **THE COMING OF CHRIST IN GLORY AND POWER**, not to set up an earthly kingdom again; not to establish a new and actual temple in Jerusalem; not to build again the things which He destroyed by His death upon the Tree; not to preside over blood sacrifices and a sacrificing priesthood to the confusion of His own glorious words and His own imperial sacrifice of Himself once and for all; but to consummate His glorious office, given to Him by the Father before the world began, to subdue all to Himself and establish an eternal kingdom over which He shall reign for ever.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION EXPLAINED

What then is the correct view of The Great Tribulation? The tribulation of Revelation 7:14 is one through which the believer passes, not the world. Great play is made of the use of the Greek definite article in this verse, literally, "THE great tribulation", as though this were conclusive in itself of the theory that this is a special period of trouble covering all the earth, unprecedented in its character, though only lasting a mere 3 ½ years.

There is of course no ground for confining the use of the definite article to this interpretation. The Greek has no indefinite article, the absence of such a mode of speech being compensated by the non-use of the definite article. If John had been writing in English his use of the definite article might conceivably have borne the significance of some isolated event in history. But John was not writing in English;

he was writing in Greek, and the usages of that ancient language are not as in our modern speech. For example the sect calling itself “Jehovah’s Witnesses” tries to reinforce its denial of the true deity of Christ by alleging that the non-use of the article in John 1 verse 1, “The Word was God” signifies that Christ was only ‘a’ God in the sense that He was a ruler or highly distinguished person. In this they betray their great ignorance of the Greek language which has no word for our English indefinite article ‘a’. Dean Alford has shown in his work on the Greek Testament that had John not expressed the word for “God” without the article he would have contradicted his previous statement that “The Word was with God,” for the sense would have become, in the inverted nature of the Greek usage, “God was the Word” (which is the literal order if put into English). But John had already distinguished God from the Word in the preceding phrase, and to have imported into the next clause the idea that God was the Word in an absolute sense would have turned the Logos (Word) into an attribute of God and not a Person at all, as when it is said, “God is love”. John’s language is very profound as Alford clearly shows, and his use of ‘theos’ (God) without the article implies God in substance and essence, not ‘o theos’ implying the Father in Person.

We may now see the inexcusable simplicity of our Futuristic theologians who lay an altogether false emphasis on the use of the definite article in Rev. 7:14. Our translators in the Authorised Version (absolutely essential for English readers if they would truly understand the Word of God) - have correctly dropped the definite article from the English though it is found in the Greek, because they knew that its usage there defined a ‘species’ of tribulation and not a solitary event. Dean Alford correctly gives the sense as, follows, “To limit it to this only, is manifestly out of keeping with the spirit of the vision. I would rather understand it of the whole sum of the trials of the saints of God, viewed by the Elder as now complete, and designated by this emphatic and general name, namely ‘all that tribulation’ ”.

In any event we have shown that there is not the time available for our friends to establish their case, for their “week” of the reign of antichrist has already been swallowed up by the fact that there is no balance of time left over from Daniel’s prophecy.

With the fall of this part of the theory the whole must pass away. It is the Church, not a special category of ‘tribulation saints’ which is in view here, and indeed throughout the Book of Revelation. Who can doubt, from the very magnitude of this concourse of the redeemed that it can be anything less than the total number of the universal church from Abel to the consummation? We are asked by our opponents to believe that this uncountable multitude is the product of a mere seven

years of preaching on a world-wide scale after the Holy Spirit has been 'withdrawn' from the earth. We cannot do so. We find we cannot reconcile this view with the New Testament record. If we are asked to believe that in such a brief fragment of time, without the divine assistance which the apostle; had, more is done in seven years than in all the years of apostolic testimony in the full power of Pentecost, we cannot believe it. Nor do we think anyone else can.

THE CHURCH'S PILGRIMAGE

The remainder of our task is simple and pleasant. We have in this chapter the preservation of the church throughout the whole of her earthly story (under the figure of the sealing of the Spirit), and secondly her safe passage through her age-long testing and trial and affliction, to her grand and glorious entry upon her eternal felicity.

A COSMIC SCENE

The scene described in verses 9-12 is cosmic in its nature and extent and only a false and puerile prophetism could even imagine that such words could be used exclusively of the final triumph of a mere section of the redeemed collected out of the world over a period of not more than seven years. Let us ponder again these words:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

This is indubitably a scene in which all creation is involved - the climax of the ages; that for which all creation has its being; the final triumph of the Redeemer's work. We suggest with all gentleness that this is not a triumphant celebration of a

fragmentary interlude in the history of the world, but IT IS IN FACT the outcome of all history from beginning to end. All heaven assembles to acclaim His triumph. The angels are there in their countless, swirling circles of light; the cherubim are there whose business it always is to proclaim the cosmic glory of the King of Kings; the Elders are there, the representatives of the completed church in all ages, from Abel to the end of time, 24 in number symbolising the redeemed of both dispensations brought together in one body in Christ; above all, the Lamb is there on the eternal throne.

The army of the ransomed who have at last ‘come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads, having obtained joy and gladness and all their sorrow and sighing over’ (Isaiah 35:10) are there before the throne, in the centre of the entire angelic company and they proclaim with loud voice (the voice of final triumph, “Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb”. Thus they ascribe all their salvation to God and the Lamb - which is as clear an affirmation of the equal honour of the Son with the Father that we know.

Their declaration is echoed and confirmed by the angelic host, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever”. If this is not a full and final Amen to all the works of God in creation and redemption then our friends will have to tell us how often this same acclamation is to be repeated in heaven as other companies of the redeemed from all other ‘ages’ arrive and make their bow. This is a scene which can never be repeated, or heaven itself will be an empty charade of repetitious triumphs. What is there about THIS company which requires so ostentatious a flourish, if they represent only one seven-year period of world history?

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The figures in this description are clearly to be understood. The “great tribulation”, as we have seen, is the age-long suffering and trial of those who have been redeemed from the earth. John as usual dwells in the midst of Old Testament figures. His vision is based upon the deliverance of the people from Egypt under Moses, their long and arduous journey to Canaan’s Promised Land - shadowing the heavenly Canaan - and their triumphal entry upon the promised inheritance. Elevated into the inward experience of the church of he redeemed, we see their white robes denoting their heavenly character, the palms in their hands denoting journey’s end, for thus did the ancient tribes when they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles as a memorial of their journey through the wilderness. (Leviticus 23:40; Nehemiah 8:15)

The great tribulation through which all have passed and must pass on their way to heaven is symbolised in the rigours of the journey of the tribes, the trials they endured of hunger and thirst, of burning heat and wintry cold. The tribulation therefore is not confined to the occasional periods of persecution and opposition at the hands of the world, but those ever-present trials and temptations which are the common lot of all believers. This the Saviour foretold to His church on the dark betrayal night – “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33). Paul also, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (Rom. 8:35-39)

Greater than all the perils which are peculiar to our outward circumstances, are those inward trials which come through our daily conflict with the powers of evil - for we war not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (or, evil powers in the transcendental regions of the spirit).” (Eph. 6:12)

THE CONDITIONS OF THE HEAVENLY STATE

“They serve him day and night in his temple.” No, not a restored building of stone and lime on earth; that temple has gone for ever. But that which the earthly temple figured - the presence of God with His people, receiving their worship and

adoration, no veil to separate or forbid entry into the holiest, for we are all kings and priests unto God in Christ. The eternal state is one of endless worship - not the worship of formal religion, but the worship of love, wonderfully described in the worship of the bride for the bridegroom in the Song of Songs; the worship of admiration, gratitude, unity with the Beloved; worship which is the object of our created being and the realisation of the highest joy of which that being is capable.

“He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” This is a description of the permanence and graciousness of the heavenly state. The dwelling place of God will be everlastingly with redeemed mankind. This is the terminal point of creation. At last creation’s story is wonderfully consummated and the secret of all things disclosed. The crowning point to which the Almighty God has all along been working is that He should have a people - a redeemed people - in whom and with whom He should dwell, not only as their God and Saviour but as their brother-man who has shared with them the perils and trials, the fears and sorrows of the way, and has proved Himself in dying love upon the tree to be worthy of their love and worship.

Their bliss is eternal and unchangeable, for they shall hunger and thirst no more; no burning sun shall smite them by day, no, moon in the darkness and cold of night. All that is behind. The broad river of time and death has been crossed; henceforward, no death, no sorrow, no pain, no trial, no alternation of heat and cold, no old age to wither or time to decay, no cruel partings, only everlasting joy and felicity.

“For the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall feed them”

The description closes with this beautiful and exquisite pastoral scene. The Shepherd of Israel who knoweth all His own sheep and calleth them by name, so that no individual is ever lost in the crowd and no one sheep is more precious or less valued than another -this great Shepherd of the sheep - leads His flock in the pastures of heaven, in fields that are “dressed in living green” where their flower doth not fade nor the grass wither, beside fountains of living water which can never run dry, for they are the springs of eternal life taking their rise in the Spirit of Him who said, “If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink - the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life out of the depths of his being shall flow rivers of living water” (John 4:13-14; 7:37-39)

As all our springs are in Him, a fountain ever flowing, so shall our life be endless, pure, sufficient, full, satisfied - with the satisfaction of eternal love.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”