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REVELATION

SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART 7

REVELATION 7:1-8

The Mystery of the 144,000

BY: CHARLES D. ALEXANDER

REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD

PART SEVEN

THE MYSTERY OF 144,000

Revelation 7:1-8

This remarkable chapter is basic to an understanding of Revelation. Futurism has played havoc with its meaning. In its haste to make away with the Church as having anything whatsoever to do with Revelation, the modern prophetic heresies have excelled themselves in the confusion created and the inventions substituted for what ought to have been one of the simplest of chapters to understand. We hope to show convincingly that this chapter enshrines a consolation which belongs equally to the people of the Lord in all ages, and is exclusive to none.

The theme is the preservation of the elect Church of our Redeemer during the age-long judgments which God pours upon the hostile world. A key text would be, "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity". (Psalm 125:3)

The attempt to divide this chapter between the mystic company of the 'sealed' (144,000), and the 'great multitude which no man can number' as denoting two entirely different ethnic groups on the earth at the same time, the former being a tiny elite fragment of Jews and the latter a vast company of gentiles, has arisen because of an arbitrary interpretation which cannot be sustained by any consistent expository principles.

The theory that the chapter contains a description of the preservation of certain 'tribulation saints' (that is, people who are saved during the trouble supposed to fall upon the earth during a period of three and a half years at a time yet future, and having no relevance to the Church of Christ) - is based on nothing except a preconception widely accepted amongst good people, supported by an overwhelming flood of books and pamphlets of sensational title and nature, pouring from the printing presses on both sides of the Atlantic, and for which there appear to be unlimited finance and a Christian public hungry for sensations.

All parties agree that we are here in the region of symbol, and if at the very beginning we find ourselves in symbolic territory, by what rule do some writers

justify their departure from that territory when they come to the numbering of the tribes from verse 4 onward? Symbolism is sustained to the end of the chapter (and indeed throughout the Book of Revelation) even to the white robes and palm branches and the living fountains of waters so exquisitely described in the later verses of our chapter.

Four angels are seen, “standing on the four corners of the earth” holding in their hands the four winds. These are the agents of the holy judgments of God upon the wicked powers which oppose His kingdom. The number four, as everywhere in Scripture, denotes universality. The four winds are those judgments by which God has determined to break the power of evil.

The angels await the command to release the winds, but that command is delayed until ‘the servants of God’ are sealed in their foreheads. Hence the words of verse 1, that until the sealing is complete the winds may not blow on ‘the earth, the sea, nor any tree. These are common Biblical symbols.

The wind is used in scripture to denote the power of God exercised in His righteous judgments. In the preceding chapter (6:13) a mighty wind shakes the fig tree so that it sheds its ‘untimely figs’ in like manner as the stars in the same verse fall from heaven. Daniel (7:2) sees the ‘four winds of heaven striving upon the great sea’ and raising therefrom the four great beasts which represent the Four Monarchies which fill in the space of history till the first advent of Christ.

Perhaps the most important of the parallel passages from the OT is found in Jeremiah 49:36: “And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds, and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come.” Elam first appears in the days of Abraham (see Genesis 14, where Chedorlaomer, king of Elam took a leading part in the aggression). The disaster inflicted on the invaders by Abraham’s tiny army has a prophetic significance for the people of God in all ages. Elam was in the vicinity of Shinar, and Babel; and Babel (Babylon) typifies in the Book of Revelation the entire power of this world as it raises itself against the kingdom of God. The prophecy of Jeremiah looks beyond the great Euphrates empires represented by Elam, and reaches out to all which Babel and Shinar represent in the course of time. We shall see therefore, in the course of our interpretation of Revelation, that the reappearance of Babylon in John’s vision does not and cannot mean a revival of that ancient city as an enemy of the Jews (as Futurism in some of its starker moments visualises) but has to do with a much more subtle and dangerous foe.

Our chapter (Rev. 7) proceeds to state that the angelic powers controlling these 'four winds' are commanded to hold them from blowing upon the earth, the sea, or 'any tree' until the sealing of the elect is complete.

Earth, sea, and trees have a special significance all their own. The EARTH is symbolic of mankind as a whole. "He that is of the earth is earthly and speaketh of the earth." (John 3:31) The name ADAM, the progenitor of the human race, means in the Hebrew, "Red Earth". "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord," cries Jeremiah (Jer. 22:29).

The SEA, as we have seen from Daniel 7:2, represents the nations of the world, usually in their wicked state, as in Isaiah 57:20 – "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." This restless sea of the wicked is in contrast in Revelation with the SEA OF GLASS before the throne of God (Rev. 4:6), representing the kingdom of God, at rest, in the enjoyment of the ineffable, changeless calm and peace flowing from the divine Being.

TREES in the symbolism of prophecy represent kings, rulers, magnates, tyrants. David in the first psalm likens the righteous to trees planted by the rivers of water, ever flourishing and yielding fruit. Israel is a fig tree, the Church an olive tree. Christ is a great cedar (Ezekiel 17:24). Isaiah sees the flourishing of the kingdom of Christ in terms of the planting of goodly trees where wild briars and thorns once flourished (Isaiah 55:13) – "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off."

As a symbol of the power of this world, the tree is of high significance in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's terrifying dream, recorded in his own words of testimony (still in the Chaldean language preserved in the Hebrew Bible just as the great monarch wrote it himself in Daniel 4): "I saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great" the tree? "It is thou, O king," declares Daniel. (Dan. 4:22)

The humbling of this great man's pride, told in his own words, is one of the most dramatic scenes in Holy Scripture, and sets the pattern of the divine rule, in absolute sovereignty, over the kings and potentates of this world. Those preachers who deny, or are ignorant of, the divine sovereignty over all history and over all the powers of this world, do not know their Daniel and would do well to take counsel from that once heathen monarch Nebuchadnezzar who, when truly converted (as we believe him to have been) taught us and all the world that "the

heavens do rule.”

John the Baptist warned the Jews that “the axe was laid to the root of the trees, and every tree which brought not good fruit was to be hewn down and cast into the fire and burned.” (Matt. 3:10) Jude (v. 12) describes the ungodly as “trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots.”

THE SEALING

The process of sealing the servants of God is required to be completed before the divine judgments are loosed upon the earth. (Rev. 7:3)

The symbolism of the sealing is taken from Ezekiel 9. Six ‘men’, agents of God’s judgment against the rebellious city of Jerusalem are seen with slaughter weapons in their hands, but amongst them there appears a seventh figure, clothed with linen, having a writer’s inkhorn at his side. This man is ordered to go through the doomed city first, and set a mark on the foreheads of all who sigh and cry for the abominations done in Jerusalem. History records that when, shortly after this vision, Jerusalem was in fact destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, men like Jeremiah and Baruch, (Jer. 45) and Ebed-melech the Ethiopian (the king’s servant) all recorded in Jer. 39:15-18, were preserved. Indeed, in the case of Jeremiah himself, special charge was given concerning him that he was not to be molested in any way, but was to have liberty to go or to come as he pleased (Jer. 39:11-14). Many of the poor of the land, nameless people whose poverty was the mark of their election, were likewise spared in the overthrow.

As the Man with the Inkhorn symbolised the care of God for His elect, and as the mark he made on the foreheads of these faithful ones was as symbolic as his own inkhorn, so the sealing of the elect in their foreheads in Rev. 7 is symbolic or spiritual, and not physical. It is perhaps convenient also to say at this stage that the “MARK OF THE BEAST” stamped upon the foreheads or hands of the wicked in Rev. 13:16-17, is likewise symbolic and not actual. The fantasy, so widely held and believed by credulous evangelicals today, that a monstrous man is due to arise who will rule the earth and compel everyone under pain of losing their livelihood to wear his distinctive mark, is sufficiently refuted by the obvious symbolism of the righteous being stamped on their foreheads with the Father’s Name. (see Rev. 14:1) The Father has not a name which is capable of being stamped or written. His Name is His Being - incommunicable, ineffable, and known only to Himself in the unity of the Trinity.

The 'mark of the Beast' therefore can only refer to the rebellious state of those who reject the rule of Christ. The mark of sin, which is the mark of the Beast, is as invisible as the mark of the Father's Name on the foreheads of the 144,000, the mystic number of the entire host of the redeemed.

The story has been recently invented that a sinister plan has been devised at the Brussels headquarters of the European Common Market to have all citizens of the world marked in forehead and hand with invisible laser-tattoo, to be seen under infra-red scanners installed throughout the world on every check-out counter, so that all the world can be computerised and controlled. This is much more exciting, and far more likely to be believed by the sensation-hungry evangelical world than the plain truth that the mark of sin goes much deeper than skin and flesh and is a state of soul, just as the mark of Christ is the love which constraineth us.

In contrast with the prophecy of Ezekiel, the 'man with the inhorn' becomes an 'angel ascending from the east'. (Rev. 7:2) That this appearance is of Christ, is proved by the loud, commanding voice with which He orders the storm angels to hold the winds until He gives the final word; also the notice that He 'ascends from the east.' The east is the region of the sun rising, and with the incarnation of our Lord came the 'dayspring from on high'. (Luke 1:78) He is the bright and morning star which appears in the eastern sky (Rev. 22:16). Those who have seen in the dying year the luminous glory of the planet Venus in the eastern sky, heralding the dawn, will appreciate the figure. Malachi also declares, as night was falling on Old Testament prophecy (he was the last messenger from God for five centuries till the appearing of Christ): "Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." (Mal. 4:2) The rising of the new day begins in the east, and Christ is that golden dawn for which the world had waited long.

John records he "heard" that 144,000 of all the tribes of Israel, 12,000 of each of the twelve tribes, were sealed for preservation. Afterward he SEES (as distinct from his HEARING the number sealed) - he SEES a great number which no man can number from all the tribes and nations of mankind, standing in a state of eternal salvation before the throne.

Futurism claims that John is describing two distinct classes of people, the first of which is composed entirely of members of the Jewish tribes, and the second of gentile believers, variously understood as being the saved of the 'tribulation' period which is supposed to last a maximum of three and a half years. Opinion varies as to whether the 144,000 is a precise number, no more and no less, of Jewish 'missionaries' sent out after the Church has been 'removed' from the earth

to make way for the ‘deferred’ kingdom which Christ did not succeed in setting up 2,000 years before. The ministry of these ‘missionaries’ (unlike that of those of the Church period) will be exercised with a complete freedom from death, by reason of which their phenomenal success could hardly be compared with the sacrificial ministry of apostles and righteous men and women whose ministry so often has been sealed by their own blood.

We have no hesitation in heartily repudiating this ‘interpretation’ and expressing our own view that there is no distinction between the 144,000 and the ‘great multitude’ of the second part of the chapter; that the 144,000 is a symbolic or prophetic number, known only to God, and that the twelve tribes named are the spiritual ‘tribes’ of the new Israel, the Church, which has witnessed for Christ during the past 2,000 years of ‘great tribulation’ and will continue so to do till the return of the Lord in glory and power.

This conclusion we base on the following considerations:

1. John only ‘hears’ the mystic number of the sealed, because that number is enigmatic - it is known only to God, and is a perfect and complete number determined in the depths of the divine sovereignty before the world began. On the other hand he ‘beholds’ with his eyes the actual multitude of the elect and finds it so great as to be beyond the capacity of the creature to number. Sufficient attention has not been paid to the important distinction made between this ‘hearing’ and ‘beholding’.
2. Futurist writers have largely ignored the fact that all the twelve tribes are not here: two are missing, one absolutely and the other by implication.
3. The order of the tribes is deliberately disturbed to draw attention to the entirely symbolic nature of the vision.

THE SACRED NUMBER 12

First, then, we have the precise number of the tribes, twelve, with 12,000 allocated equally to each. As 12 is always in the Bible the number of the Church whether of Old or New Testament, there is no reason in scripture or in logic to suppose that the deliberate use of 12 and its exact multiples of 12,000 and 144,000, is other than symbolic, and is intended so to be understood. The absurdity on the other hand of an exact numbering of the tribes, two of which are, missing and all of which it is impossible in fact to identify since the entire Jewish race lost all record of its

genealogical origins 1900 years ago - the absurdity of this 'interpretation' ought to be self-evident to anyone whose mind has not been pre-conditioned to a popular view shared unhappily with non-Christian, heretical sects, such as Jehovah's Witnesses.

TWELVE is the number of the Church, and this is verified in the number of the patriarchs, the sons of Jacob, and in the number of the apostles ordained by Christ. The oneness of the Church in Old and New Testaments is seen in the double-twelve, the 24 elders of Rev. 4:4; 5:8, etc. , and the 24 courses of the priests for the service of the temple, described in 1 Chron. 24. The same principle of the true continuity of the Church with the earthly Israel is implied in the mystic name introduced by Jacob on the eve of his encounter with the Head of the Church at the ford Jabbok - MAHANAIM (or Two Armies), Gen. 32:1-2 . This name reappears in The Song of Solomon, in its description of the true bride of Christ, the Church of Old and New Testaments: "What will ye see in the Shulamite? As it were the company of two armies (margin, Mahanaim)". (Song 6:13)

DAN AND EPHRAIM

Secondly, we have the fact of the missing two tribes. These are DAN and EPHRAIM. Dan is missing absolutely and Futurism is at a loss to account for it, and in his reference Bible Dr. Scofield ignores it. Dan is purposely excluded from the numbering because his tribe was the first to set up a rival idolatrous worship in Israel, - an idolatry which persisted till the captivity of the land (see Judges 18). The terrible fact of Dan's apostasy was not enhanced by the appalling circumstance that the rival priesthood set up in that tribe was descended directly from Moses through his son Gershom (see Judges 18:30 - the name Moses is concealed in the use of the name MANASSEH as the father of Gershom).

A memorial of this apostasy is therefore made in the exclusion of Dan from the tribes named by John, and is an indication that the list is not to be taken literally, but spiritually.

The exclusion of the important name of Ephraim from the list is too easily explained as being included in the reappearance of the name of his father, Joseph (v.8). It is true that Joseph is here made to stand for his distinguished son, though his other son, Manasseh is included separately in his own right in verse 6; but the exclusion of Ephraim is not to be accounted for by a simplicity of this nature. We are dealing with that which is prophetic, and the reason for the exclusion is not far to seek. Ephraim from the beginning was the rival of the royal tribe of Judah and

took the lead in the great revolt against the House of David after the death of Solomon. The first king of the revolted province (Jeroboam) was an Ephraimite, and Ephraim, the most powerful and numerous of the tribes after Judah, throughout its history became the rival of that tribe from which our Lord, the true and universal King was to emerge.

It must be of high significance that these two tribes (Dan and Ephraim) are associated together from the days of the Judges, with idolatrous apostasy. It was Micah the Ephraimite who set up in his own home, with the help of a young Levite, a worship of his own, with the proceeds of a theft committed against his own mother.

This lady in her turn had intended the money to be used for the dedication of a graven image, and on its restoration it was devoted to the original purpose of idolatrous blasphemy, complete with a priest 'in search of a place'. (Judges 17:9)

In due course Micah lost both priest and graven image to a band of Danites who carried away both from Mount Ephraim to a new tribal territory plundered from the Zidonians. There they set up their own brand of religion, and their idolatrous worship continued 'until the day of the captivity of the land. (See Judges 17-18)

Any attempt to include Ephraim in John's enumeration (Rev. 7), by the easy device of associating it with the honoured name of Joseph, ignores the precedent of Numbers 13:11 where it is Manasseh, not Ephraim, which is included under the name of Joseph: "Of the tribe of Joseph, namely of the tribe of Manasseh" All indications are that the names of Dan and Ephraim were deliberately excluded from John's list not only as a memorial of their rebellion against God, but as a purposeful indication that Revelation 7 is not to be understood in literal terms of the Israelitish tribes but in prophetic language describing the completeness of the Church as the lawful successor of the earthly Israel, purged of all taint of sin and unbelief.

The 144,000 reappear in Rev. 14:1-5 in just this character of unblemished holiness, standing with the Lamb on Mount Sion, having the Father's name written in their foreheads, singing the new song which only they can sing, the virgins of creation, undefiled, following the Lamb whithersoever He leads, being the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb, redeemed from among men, in whose mouth is no guile, being without fault before the throne of God. If this is not a description of the whole Church of Christ, we do not know where to find in Holy Writ a description of that Church.

We find it equally impossible to give so lavish a description of spiritual excellence and exaltation to any limited collection of 'tribulation Jews' of the exact number of 144,000 with a separate enclave all to themselves. All the characteristics attributed to them in Rev. 14 are the precise characteristics which divine grace accords to all the redeemed from any and every age from the foundation of the earth, be they Jew, gentile, or whatsoever.

THE NEW ORDER OF THE TRIBES

From page 6: (3) The disturbance of the order of the tribes is also significant of the prophetic nature of the transaction.

The high privilege accorded to Ephraim in Jacob's prophetic act when blessing the two sons of Joseph, preferring the younger to the elder (see Gen. 48), disappears with his name. This is surely intended in our chapter to show the abolition of all distinction and privilege in the kingdom of God. Mary's Magnificat is also prophetic of this: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and exalted them of low degree". (Luke 1:52)

In John's list, Judah stands at the head of the tribes because royalty was established in him by the prophecy of Jacob in Gen. 49:10 - from him the Messiah would proceed. Reuben, the actual firstborn, is therefore placed second to Judah who was the fourth son of Leah. Then come entirely out of order, Gad and Asher, the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaiden. Naphtali and Manasseh come next, the first named being the son of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah, and the second the eldest son of Joseph. Each is without his brother. Dan was the brother of Naphtali and Ephraim the brother of Manasseh - both excluded from the list for the reasons stated above.

Verse 7 appropriately commences a second series of six tribes with Simeon and Levi (who in actual birth order come between Reuben and Judah and are the sons of the proper wife, Leah). Levi was the priestly tribe, but his relegation to the secondary list in John's vision indicates that his special function has ceased since the Eternal Priesthood passed at Calvary to One who came of the tribe of Judah. How say our literalists therefore that there will be a restored millennial temple with the Levites again going about their ancient business? Levi has lost his priestly prerogative for ever, in John's vision.

Issachar and Zebulon follow. These two are sons of Leah and were born as a consequence of the resumed cohabitation of Jacob with his primary wife. The list is concluded with Joseph and Benjamin (of Rachel), marking as we have seen, the

resumption by Joseph of his titular presence in the primal list of the tribes, to the eclipse of his great but apostate son Ephraim.

In the disturbed order of the tribes, therefore, we see a new prophetic purpose emerging, emphasising the oneness of the true Israel in Old and New Testaments. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children (Romans 9:6-7). Paul insists that Israel is to be reckoned not according to the flesh but according to the promise - and the promise is indifferent as to Jew or gentile (compare Romans 9:8 with Galatians 3:28-29). It is of high significance also that Ezekiel's listing of the tribes (Ezek. 48), though differing from that of John is equally prophetic of the spiritual state, and further, makes special provision for the inclusion of gentiles in the inheritance of the land.

“They shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel;
they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel.”
(Ezek. 47:22-23)

Literalism has never come to terms with the fact that all distinction of tribes was lost when the records of genealogical descent were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. No Jew today has any provable pedigree. He cannot tell for certain to which tribe he may belong - or to any at all. That all the tribes were present up to the time of the Dispersion is beyond doubt. The British Israel theory (followed by the Armstrong heresy) that the Ten Tribes which broke away from the House of David were 'lost' and may be found again in the Anglo-Saxon race (with other European blendings) is historical nonsense. The tribes were never lost. Asher was still represented in Jerusalem at the time of Christ's Nativity. (Luke 2:36) Simeon, the tribe which lay to the south of Judah, was incorporated with Judah when Samaria was overthrown by the Assyrians. Where two of the 'lost' ten tribes at least were identifiable at the time of Christ it is clear that the others were there also as Paul affirms before Festus and Agrippa: "Unto which (promise) our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night hope to come." (Acts 26:7) From the days of the divided kingdom pious Israelites from all the tribes, settled in the south to be near the temple, or fled there at the time of the great Assyrian invasion when Samaria was taken. Elements of all the tribes returned to Judea when the Persian Emperor decreed the restoration of land and temple.

But since the Roman destruction, all genealogical records have been lost and the tribes, though all existing today in Jewry, are no longer identifiable. There is no reason to suppose that God will miraculously resurrect the lost documents or otherwise intervene to supply their omission, in order to seal 144,000 Israelites for

preservation during the 31 years which Futurism has allocated, for them to fulfill their specialised function.

The absurdity of the literal theory of the 144,000 appears when it is seen how delicately that theory stands the pyramid upon its apex. We are introduced in this chapter to an immense cosmic activity, with the spectacle of the heavens standing still, four angels waiting at the four fundamental points of the compass with the winds in their fists, till the signal is given for them to let loose their raging hurricanes. During the unearthly interlude One comes from the sun rising, with the seal of the living God in His hands -and none can use that seal or bear it in his hands but He who is God Himself, with whom is the Eternal Spirit (“sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” - Eph. 1:13). He comes with loud voice, (v.2) - a voice which proclaims the determinate and absolute will of omnipotence - to command the powers of creation to obey the divine will.

All this cosmic activity, this total arrest of heaven and earth combined, for what? To procure time to seal a handful of men, 144,000 in number, for a meagre period of 31 years That when the rest of the nation of the Jews is being harried and slain, murdered and tortured, these few should survive to carry on their witness! The absurdity of the theory should be its own refutation.

Hengstenberg pointedly remarks, “How unlikely is it that the Seer should have obtained consolation only for a part of those that were in danger!”

NUMBERS IN REVELATION

The bearing which the use of symbolic numbering in chapter 7 has upon the understanding of other numerals in the Book of Revelation is clearly seen by Bossuet whom Hengstenberg quotes with approval as follows:

“This passage alone ought to make it manifest how greatly they deceive themselves who would always apprehend an exact and definite number in the numbers of the Apocalypse. For can it be imagined that there was in each tribe 12,000 elect, neither more nor less, to make up this total number of 144,000? It is not by such minutiae, nor with such scrupulous littleness of spirit, that the sacred oracles should be explained. It is necessary to understand in the numbers in the Apocalypse a certain mystical reason to which the Holy Spirit seeks to draw our attention. The mystery we are to learn here is that the number twelve, sacred in the synagogue and in the Church because of the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, is

multiplied by itself in order to make 12,000 in each tribe, and twelve times 12,000 in all the tribes together, that we may perceive the faith of patriarchs and of apostles multiplied in their successors; and in the solidity of a number so perfectly square, the eternal immutability of the truth of God and of His apostles.”

The 144,000 therefore is the total number of the redeemed, in its prophetic enumeration, and “the great multitude which no man can number” (v.9) is that same 144,000 as it appears to the human eye. That which John ‘heard’ was the divine numbering of the redeemed; that which he ‘beheld’ was their vast multitude, beyond the ability of man to count. The first view is that of God, the second is that of man. It is the same object seen first from the divine, and then from the human standpoint. The confusion which has attended the effort to sunder these two is its own refutation. The incredible exercise of some to invent from this chapter an exact number of Jews, totaling a mere 144,000 to be God’s witnesses in some future period of unexampled horror, world-wide in its extent, is estranged from all reality, and particularly it is estranged from the rest of Holy Scripture which everywhere uses the number twelve and its product to represent the whole Church of Old and New Testaments.

The entire consensus of Scripture is against the view now so popular amongst authors and teachers, concerning the nature of the Church, her continuance on the earth and her very existence as the lawful successor of the Church of the Old Testament, the inheritor of the promises, and the only kingdom promised through the prophets.

Her sacred number of twelve appears in the crown of twelve stars she wears in chapter 12. She appears as the city of God in chapter 21, with her twelve gates and twelve foundations engraved respectively with the names of the tribes and the names of the apostles. Her jasper walls are a square of 12,000 furlongs and the height thereof is 144 cubits.

Is there any commentator who will claim that the Church is in fact a literal city of those dimensions? If not, by what process of reasoning or on what principle of interpretation is it held that the figure of 144,000 in chapter 7 is to be literally understood? To place chapter 7 in the position of being out of step with the remainder of the Book is to disqualify those who do this from any serious part in the study of this Book. They must settle for actual stars on the head of the Woman of Chapter Twelve, and for the dimensions of the Holy City in furlongs, and set themselves to the hopeless task of interpreting every other image and symbol in the

Book, in stark literalism.

DEFECTIVE VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

Defective views of the Church lie at the root of most prophetic errors, and have played havoc with the holy art of Bible exposition. “Dispensations” have been invented to account for the insertion of the Age of the Christian Church where the kingdom of earthly Israel should have been established according to the literal interpretation of prophecy. So convinced are the dispensationalists that all prophecy is for the nation of Israel that they have introduced the extraordinary theory that the Church as such is nowhere envisaged in OT prophecy, but is hidden from the view of the prophets. This despite the fact that the Day of Pentecost was the subject of the main prophecy of Joel, as Peter asserts in his great Pentecostal sermon - and James’s subsequent verdict at the council of the Church at Jerusalem that the calling of the gentiles into the Church was the subject of the prophecy of Amos in his ninth chapter (see Acts 15:13-18). Paul teaches the Ephesians that the Church, so far from being an unexpected event in history was all along that to which God was working from before the foundation of the world, as the means by which He should make known to all creation His manifold wisdom (Eph. 3:9-10).

In Galatians Paul makes it plain that the Church in her NT form is the continuity of the Israel of the OT and the inheritor, as of right, of the promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:26 – 4:7).

There has been but one Church from the foundation of the world, and one faith (which Paul describes in its continuity from Abel down to his own day, and from then on to the end of time -see Hebrews 11). Faith does not change either as to its nature or its object. The object of faith is the promise of life in Christ Jesus, first made in the Garden in the presence of our first parents, around which promise clustered the worship and the hope of the human race from the beginning. The priesthood of Abel anticipated the sacrifice of Christ. Enoch’s translation was an assurance to the antediluvian world that immortality was pledged in the promise - death would be overcome. Abraham’s faith was sealed by the same anticipatory sacrifice as was Abel’s. Paul assures us that so far from the promise to Abraham ‘and his seed’ being the exclusive preserve of the natural seed of Abraham, it was in fact the promise of life to all who believe, be they Jew or gentile. Abraham’s altered name was a pledge of this – “The Father of Many Nations”. “They who are of faith are blest with faithful Abraham” declares Paul (Gal. 3:9).

The promise of life, made to Abraham, was not to be the prerogative of an earthly people who throughout their history thrust it from them, but was something which only faith could grasp. Hence “It is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all”.

(Romans 4:16)

Abraham’s seed was Christ: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one: And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) So the natural seed of Abraham was never the subject of the promise – only that spiritual seed which by faith and the new birth partakes of the new life in Christ. This is the only Israel which inherits the promises, and it is an Israel of Jew and gentile, on terms of absolute equality and right, indifferent as to ancestry, a people of faith and repentance.

This Church will continue unchanged as to its calling and nature, till the end of time. No assembly of the Jewish people in Palestine can be regarded as the fulfillment of any promise to Abraham. The land of Canaan was not in itself the fulfillment of the promise, but only a temporal pledge until the seed should come to whom the promise was made, even Christ. Any restoration of the nation of Israel to its ancient privileges would be a reversal of the divine order by which the temporal only foreshadows the spiritual. All the prophecies under the figure of the land of Palestine have been fulfilled in the Church, and are intended to be spiritually understood. The literal interpretation requires that the temple be rebuilt and a ‘most favoured nation’ be established; Christ must vacate His eternal throne to come down to earth as a temporal monarch at Jerusalem. The New Testament knows nothing of this -and the New Testament is the sole interpreter of the Old Testament - not the reverse.

Our readers should not be startled by the present Jewish occupation of Palestine. It may or may not be permanent, but it is certainly not the fulfillment of any prophecy as understood according to the New Testament. The only ‘nation’ to which the kingdom of God is given is one which brings forth the fruits thereof (Matt. 21:43). To avoid the force of this verse Dr. Scofield introduces a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven - a distinction which does not exist in Holy Scripture.

Literalism has sealed up large tracts of the Divine Word from any relevance to the people of God, and lies at the root of much defective preaching today. It also lies at the root of much commercialism in the writing and sale on an enormous scale, of

books which purport to foretell the future and read current events in terms of Bible prophecies. It is for this reason that we press on without hope of earthly reward, in our task of presenting our thesis –

REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD.

SPIRITUAL MEANING OF THE TRIBAL NAMES

We may not pass from our exposition of the sealing of the tribes without indicating the significance of the names of the tribes, which enshrines a spiritual value of incalculable worth.

Jacob and his wives, Leah and Rachel, named their sons according to the prophetic spirit which was upon them. In one instance at least Jacob altered the name given by the mother at birth - the case of Benjamin, born to Rachel who died in giving him birth. Even that was prophetic, including the very place of her burial- Bethlehem-Ephrath (Gen. 35:16-20). It became the subject of a great prophecy (see Jeremiah 31:15-17), cf. Matthew 2:17-18). How significant indeed, that this chapter of Jeremiah is the chapter which really marks the end of Jeremiah's ministry and the climax of it is the coming in of the New Covenant (verses 31-34). The names of the tribes in Rev. 7 are descriptive therefore of those aspects of the believer's new life in Christ by which the blessedness of that life is marked. Thus:

JUDAH. "Praise." The people of God are a praising people. It is this which marks them out among all the people of the world, and is the distinctive mark of all true religion. How rich in praise is the Church of Christ! Her music and the words she sings exceed all this world's art or thought. What is there to compare among the world's finest songs with such inspired stanzas as those of David? David wrote for all time and for all the people of God, anticipating in his great poems every phase of the believer's life, all his hopes and fears, all his unshakeable trust in times of trial and supreme peril. He sees Christ in His majesty, coming forth to reign until all His foes are made His footstool (the most quoted Psalm this - 110 - in the NT). David's 45th psalm (Yes, O ye critics only David could have written it!), which Paul found so quotable when proving the deity of Christ in Hebrews 1, is unequalled for its rolling eloquence as it unfolds the mystery of Christ and His Church; dare we mention Psalm 22 upon the comfort of which One was sustained who cried out on the cross the very Hebrew of its opening verse – "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani"? Or Psalm 72 which ended the prayers of David the son of Jesse, after he had exhausted his soul in feasting himself upon the glorious appearing of that Son who was at the same time His Lord and his God?

The Song of Songs, written by Solomon, surpasses all human art in its tender, startling, dramatic exposition of the relationship of Christ with His Church - perhaps that is the reason it has never been set to music, for the music does not exist on earth whose strings would bear the weight of the glory of that revelation of Christ.

When the Church first became a nation and a kingdom on earth David presented her with her book of praise - David who was the greatest prophet of them all. The Church impoverishes herself to this day when she ignores that heritage of praise which David bequeathed to her.

Those who surround the throne of God in heaven sing a new song which no-one else can sing save those to whom it is given -and its theme is Christ.

Let the Church remember her first function on earth, which is praise, exceeding all her duties and her activities. Let young men aspiring to the ministry and impatient to get to the pulpit, remember that prayer and praise and worship of the Lamb is the priority and nothing can be effectively done till they have graduated in that school.

TO US A SON IS GIVEN

REUBEN. "See! A Son!" For in every believer Christ is born anew. When Leah gave her son that name of Reuben she little knew what disappointment would come to her as her early hopes vanished with the unstable character manifest in her firstborn; but what godly parent is not beset by the same anxieties? Nevertheless Leah could see beyond the babe nestling in her arms. She spoke for every mother in Israel who cherished in her heart the hope of Israel - that her son would be the expected one, promised first to mother Eve, and long looked-for, till a maid at Bethlehem, highly favoured, first saw Him of whom the prophet wrote, "To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace". That cry has resounded through the Church ever since, and its strains will never die down till He comes again, who is the Son of Man, who is the Son of God. Has anyone on earth apart from the people of God any theme to equal that?

GAD. "A Troop." How small the Church seems: Jacob's family was little in the earth, but watch it grow Soon it will be a mighty army. Kings will spring forth therefrom. The King of Kings will appear (as appear He did) to make His troop

terrible as an army with banners. Like a mighty army moves the Church of God. The Church is indestructible. Often brought low, but always sure of the outcome. No army on earth is like this, for He who goes on the head of them (Micah 2:13) goes forth 'conquering and to conquer' till all His foes (and ours) are made His footstool.

YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED

ASHER. "Blessed." This is one of the great words of the people of God. "I have blessed him" says old Isaac to profane Esau who despised his birthright till it was taken from him; "I have blessed" declares the baffled father, "Yea, and he shall be blessed".

No matter what weapon or violence or trial or affliction is raised against Jacob, this word will hold good, for it is a divine decree which nothing can alter - YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED. That is what sustained Jacob when he was a desert fugitive, and "in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes" (Gen. 31:40). Let Jacob's critics (and he has never been short of them), especially among those who sleep in comfortable beds, who rise late, feast well, and occupy popular pulpits talking down to people like themselves who have never been to Bethel ("stones my pillow, earth my bed"), or wrestle with a Man till the break of day at the Ford Jabbok - let this man's critics, we say, lay their hand upon their mouth and consider what is written over great Jacob whom they despise - "Yea, and he shall be blessed".

NAPHTALI. "Wrestling." When our Scottish covenanting forefathers found a historian who would adequately describe their sufferings unto death for the cause of Christ, he entitled his book, "Naphtali, or the wrestlings of the church (of Scotland) for the kingdom of Christ". The Lord's people have always been a wrestling people, wrestling in prayer, wrestling, as Jacob wrestled, with his God. For the Church is always Naphtali in this world, and millennium or no millennium, will be Naphtali to the end. Dare we quote Charles Wesley when the sacred muse in him rose to the highest and lapped over the very rim of eternity?

Come, O Thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see:
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell Thee who I am,
My misery and sin declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name;
Look on Thy hands, and read it there:
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

My prayer hath power with God; the grace
Unspeakable I now receive;
Through faith I see Thee face to face,
I see Thee face to face, and live:
In vain I have not wept and strove:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
Jesus, the feeble sinner's Friend;
Nor wilt Thou with the night depart,
But stay and love me to the end;
Thy mercies never shall remove:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me
Hath risen with healing in His wings;
Withered my nature's strength, from Thee
My soul its life and succour brings;
My help is all laid up above:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Contented now upon my thigh
I halt, till life's short journey end;
All helplessness, all weakness, I
On Thee alone for strength depend;
Nor have I power from Thee to move:
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey,
Hell, earth, and sin with ease o'ercome;
I leap for joy, pursue my way,
And as a bounding hart fly home,
Through all eternity to prove

Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

The Christian life is always a warfare and a wrestling. We wrestle with our God in prayer, but against the powers of evil we wrestle without intermission. Says Paul, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high (heavenly) places,” (Eph. 6:12). This is a warfare, a wrestling, the world knows naught of, but it is a formidable part of the Church’s experience. No man-made religion talks like this.

MANASSEH. “Forgetting.” “And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. For God, said he, hath made me to forget all my toil, and all my father’s house.” The lonely exile in Egypt, cruelly torn from his father’s house by the envy of his brethren, is raised to the pinnacle of power, sets up home, and so names his firstborn son as a memorial of the favour of God towards him after years of suffering and of injustice. The favour of God toward the believer is greater compensation than all the years of sorrow and waiting. Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to the things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize, the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

“Hearken O daughter and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people and thy father’s house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty ...” So the King’s daughter is exhorted in Psalm 45:10-11, to forget the world and cleave to Christ in heavenly marriage. And when the child of God arrives at last in the heavenly country, all the trial will be ended and forgotten: It will seem as a passing moment when the waves of eternal joy roll over the soul in endless communion with the Beloved.

“Forgetting” is one of the highest privileges of the saint earth; the world cannot enter into this because only the Christian knows the heavenly secret of ‘forgetting’.

SIMEON. “Hearing”. “Blessed are your ears for they hear”, the Saviour tells the disciples. (Matt. 13:16). The Saviour sighed when He was about to open the ears of the deaf man, and looking up to heaven said, “Ephphatha, that is, Be opened”. Hearing is one of the most valuable of all gifts, and the Saviour’s sigh was a sign of coming judgment upon the sinful nation who had stopped their ears against the voice of God. The sigh was prophetic, and drew attention to the words found in the prophet Ezekiel: “Sigh therefore, thou son of man, with the breaking of thy loins; and with bitterness sigh before their eyes. And it shall be when they say unto thee Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh;

and every heart shall melt, and all hands be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be as weak as water” (Ezek. 21:6-7)

It is only as the soul in repentance and faith comes to its Lord and receives that spiritual hearing by which eternal felicities comforts, assurances, are heard, that the cause of sighing is taken away. The people of God have the name of Simeon among their many blessed names, because they are a hearing people, who love to hear the Word of God and are healed thereby.

LEVI. “Joined.” “Now will my husband be joined to me” said Leah as her third son was born, and so he received the name Levi. Let that name, given to the Church of God, be the token that she as the heavenly bride is eternally joined in mystic marriage to her Beloved. The days of separation and desertion are over, and communion with Christ established for ever.

ISSACHAR. “Hire.” Leah after a long interval meets Jacob and tells him, “I have hired thee (in love) with my son’s mandrakes” (the plant of love). So is Christ under contract of love to bless and receive the believing soul, and such is the nature of that worship which in all humility, yet with joy of love, knows that Christ is hers and she is His because of a covenant of hire which Christ will never refuse.

ZABULON. “Dwelling.” “Master, where dwellest thou?” were the first words ever uttered by the apostle John to Christ (John 1:38). “Come and see” was the Saviour’s reply, with deep - oh, so deep meaning. For “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory,” writes that same John. So the Lord left His throne and crown to dwell in some humble abode on earth that we might dwell with Him for ever in the mansions of glory.

RACHEL’S CHILDREN

JOSEPH. “Adding.” Poor Rachel had waited long for this son, but the Lord remembered her in her desolation, and with prophetic inspiration she declared, “The Lord shall ADD to me another son.” With the believing soul there is always more to follow. Mercies are new every morning and the Lord adds continually to our blessings from His inexhaustible store.

BENJAMIN. “Son of my right hand.” So Rachel’s prophecy was fulfilled, and the second son was born. Alas, she died in childbirth, but not without great consolation. There was but a little way to go to Ephrath (Bethlehem) when she had hard labour. Her dear life was ebbing away when the midwife comforted her with

the assurance, “Fear not; thou shalt have this son also”. And so it was. She lived long enough to see him and caress the little face and named him “Ben-oni” – “the son of my sorrow,” but Jacob changed the name to Benjamin, “the son of my right hand,” that all believing souls ought know that though we lament, yet shall our sorrow (like Rachel’s) be turned into joy. She has long since been re-united with her son, and Bethlehem, the place of her untimely death, became the place where He was born who has conquered death and mounted in triumph from the grave to the throne.

THE TRUE DOCTRINE OF “ISRAEL”

It is thus that the twelve mystic tribes of the Church, inheriting by prophetic right the name and the promises and the privileges of Israel by virtue of her union with the true seed of Abraham, which is Christ, are presented to us in our glorious Book of Revelation. John the Seer was well qualified to perceive through the inspiration of Holy Spirit, this true mystery of the Church as the child of the New Covenant which lay for ages in the matrix of the Old Covenant, and at last issued forth in its head, Christ, from the womb of the earthly Israel. For John had already placed his finger upon the truth in the first chapter of his gospel, when he took away the boasting of those who relied (and still rely) upon an earthly genealogy to secure the privilege of calling themselves the sons of God:

To as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, NOT OF BLOOD, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
(John 1:12-13)

John the Baptist uttered the same warning to the same people when he declared,

Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.
(Matthew 3:9)

But if we would understand the doctrine of the Church in all its grandeur, mystery and fulness, it is to Paul that we must go in his letter to the Ephesians.

The false and preposterous claim that the natural Israel has a divine preference over all people by right of birth and that this preference gives her a perpetual right to rule the earth - this claim the apostle Paul rends in a single sentence when

introducing the doctrine of the Church, the new and spiritual Israel, in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 and 4:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world....”

The election of the Church (Paul shows) is ANTECEDENT to the election of the earthly Israel, going back beyond Abraham and beyond creation, and is a heavenly thing as distinct from the purely temporary and earthly calling of the family of Abraham. Such an election renders all other elections secondary and subordinate, and governs all interpretations of the prophetic utterances in the Old Testament regarding the territorial destiny of Israel. The “mystery” of the Church in Paul’s great argument in chapter 3 of Ephesians is not as to the Church’s unexpected appearance in history, but as to the spiritual interpretation of those great prophecies relating to Israel, prophecies which were designed, through the figure of the land of Israel to mirror the heavenly establishment of the Church even while she is here on earth. Hence the oft repeated use of the description “heavenly places” in Ephesians. The Church of the New Testament is in fact the full realisation of what God promised to Abraham, and originates not with Abraham but with Christ in whom the people of God in all ages were chosen before the foundation of the world. (Eph. 3:9-11).