

Chapter IX

THE OPENING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

In our chapter on *The Revelation of the Antichrist*, we have observed that the seven-sealed book could not be opened by anyone in heaven, nor on the earth, save *the Lamb that was slain*. We have observed that the opening of the first four seals of that book has revealed four different aspects of the revelation of the antichrist. We have observed that the opening of the fifth seal has revealed a cry from those who have been martyred throughout the ages, for the avenging of their blood. We have observed that the opening of the sixth seal has given us a preview of the judgments that are contained in the seven-sealed book, but that these judgments will not be unleashed upon this earth until the one hundred and forty-four thousand servants of God have been sealed with the name of God in their foreheads. This brings us to the loosing of the seventh and final seal which has secured the contents of the seven-sealed book:

And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the

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prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. (Revelation 8:1-6)

We have referred numerous times throughout this book to the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy as *the time of Jacob's trouble*. This description is from the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied about the period of time the Jews would be in captivity in Babylon (Jeremiah 25:11). That particular judgment befell the Jews for their idolatry and their failure to keep the Sabbath (II Chronicles 36:21). Even so Jeremiah's prophecy extends beyond the Jew's exile into Babylon during the first of the four world empires to the judgment of the fourth world empire, which is called *BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH* (compare Revelation 17:5 with 17:18). Jeremiah has revealed (by comparing Scripture with Scripture) it is the judgment of Israel, as well as the judgment of the fourth world empire (which includes all of the nations of this world), that is anticipated with the opening of the seventh seal:

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it. And they shall drink, and be moved, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. Then took I the cup at the LORD's hand, and made all the nations to drink, unto whom the LORD had sent me: to wit, Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and the kings thereof, and the princes thereof, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, an hissing, and a curse; as it is this day; Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; and all the mingled people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the land of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Azzah, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod, Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, and all the kings of Tyrus, and all the kings of Zidon, and the kings of the isles [coasts, i. e., borders of nations] which are beyond the sea, Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all that are in the utmost corners, and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mingled people that dwell in the desert, and all the kings

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of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes, and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another, and all the kingdoms of the world, which are upon the face of the earth: and the king of Sheshach [Babylon] shall drink after them.

Therefore thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Drink ye, and be drunken, and spue, and fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at thine hand to drink, then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ye shall certainly drink. For, lo, I begin to bring evil on the city which is called by my name, and should ye be utterly unpunished? Ye shall not be unpunished: for I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth, saith the LORD of hosts.

Therefore prophesy thou against them all these words, and say unto them, The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the LORD shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung upon the ground.

Howl, ye shepherds, and cry; and wallow yourselves in the ashes, ye principal of the flock: for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are accomplished; and ye shall fall like a pleasant vessel. And the shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and an howling of the principal of the flock, shall be heard: for the LORD hath spoiled their pasture. And the peaceable habitations are cut down because of the fierce anger of the LORD. He hath forsaken his covert [his den], as the lion: for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger. (Jeremiah 25:15-38)

This is the beginning of the final judgment of *the mystery of the iniquity*. This mystery had its beginning in heaven when Lucifer was lifted up in pride because of his great beauty (Ezekiel 28:11-19). He sought to overthrow the throne of God in order to make himself God (Isaiah 14:12-17). This apparently led to the judgment of the earth as it was originally created, in verse one of Genesis chapter one, and produced the conditions of verse two:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved

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upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)

The Scriptures are very clear, God does not create anything with the language that we find in verse two, *without form and void* (Isaiah 45:18). It is spiritually logical to assume, then, that the earth was judged because of the fall of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:17). This makes sense because the apostle Paul used the re-creation of the earth as an example of the salvation of one who becomes a believer, a new creation in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 5:17):

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (II Corinthians 4:6)

It also makes sense because the devil is called *the god of this world* (II Corinthians 4:4). It makes even more sense when we realize that it was the devil (indwelling the serpent) who enticed Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, with the promise, *Ye shall not surely die. For God [Elohim] doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as the gods [Elohim], knowing good and evil* (Genesis 3:3-4). This reveals a similarity between the deception of Eve and the fall of Lucifer.

Thus, with the deception of Eve and the fall of Adam (I Timothy 2:14), *the mystery of the iniquity* had its beginning within the human family. The apostle John tells us (in the Greek text of his first epistle) *The sin is the iniquity* (I John 3:4). The word translated *iniquity* is a word which means *lawlessness*. It is singular and it is preceded by the definite article in the Greek text. Hence, it is the lawlessness. Consequently it was the singular lawlessness of Adam which produced the knowledge of good and evil, *a way which seemeth right unto a man* (i. e., *the mystery of the iniquity*) within the entire human family: because Adam is its federal head (Romans 5:12-

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21). Thus the judgments of the great tribulation period, along with the judgment of Satan at the end of the millennium, will bring *the mystery of the iniquity* to its end.

For the mystery of [the] iniquity doth already work: only he who now [hinders] will [hinder], until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe [the] lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in [the] unrighteousness. (II Thessalonians 2:7-12)

The mystery of the iniquity has produced the rejection of Jesus as the Christ by the nation of Israel; it has produced everything that is spiritually false inside and outside of the canopy of Judaism and Christianity; it has produced many false christs, and it will produce the antichrist; it has produced the *other gospel* of the apostate churches; it will produce all who will receive the mark of the beast during the reign of the antichrist; it will produce the final insurrection against God, when the devil deceives the nations at the end of the millennium. Even so it will find its final judgment at the great white throne, when all who have been deceived by it (and failed to receive its Remedy) shall be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15).

Our text (Revelation 8:1-6) seems to suggest some prayers of the saints (offered in times past) may seem to have gone unanswered, because they were offered by believers like some of those recorded in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews:

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were

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stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:33-38)

After the half-hour of silence, these prayers, with fire from the altar, shall be cast upon the earth. This will initiate the judgments of *the time of Jacob's trouble*. This will be followed by seven judgments from the seven-sealed book. Each judgment will be announced by the sound of a trumpet, blown by one of the seven angels in our text. Each judgment will be directed against the affect the mystery of the iniquity has had upon the inhabitants of the earth. Thus the prayers of these and others were not offered in vain. They have been held in remembrance before the throne of God until the opening of the seventh seal, which will allow the judgments contained in the seven-sealed book to be poured forth. Even so with all that is revealed in the Revelation, it does not reveal the details of all of the judgments that shall come upon the earth during the great tribulation.

And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. (Revelation 10:4)

As we have seen, *the mystery of the iniquity* has been directed against the sovereign purpose of God from the beginning. It embodies everything that is anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Holy Spirit, anti-truth, anti-gospel, etc. Consequently it has rejected the love of God that was manifested in the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (I John 4:9-11)

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The love, mercy and grace of God were satisfied in the first advent of our Lord by His vicarious life and by His vicarious death in behalf of sinners. In His life, He became a man through the virgin birth (*in the fullness of the time*), so that He could be man without a sin nature; so that He could be the one Mediator between God and man; so that He could fulfill every jot and tittle of the law as well as all righteousness; so that He could be a Man with no cause of death in Him, totally without personal sin or a sin nature; so that He could willingly offer His life as a ransom for sin (as the Lamb of God, without spot and without blemish, in the role of the Kinsman Redeemer); so that He could satisfy the righteous judgment of God for the sins of the whole world; so that by His resurrection from the dead He could provide the hope: ... *because I live, ye shall live also* (John 14:19); so that He could satisfy God's Holiness, His Righteousness, and His Justice.

Before our Lord's ascension into heaven He commissioned the New Testament church, *Go into all of the world and preach the gospel to every creature*. The gospel message is a message of grace because man is totally without merit. Therefore our Lord said:

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that [the] light is come into the world, and men loved [the] darkness rather than [the] light, because their deeds were evil.

For every one that doeth evil [i.e., is fully occupied with the evil] hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that [maketh the truth his own] cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God. (John 3:17-21)

Mankind does not have to do anything of an overt nature to be condemned, for it is condemned by virtue of its relationship with Adam. Mankind received its sin nature from Adam,

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and therefore it is the nature of men to sin. It is their nature to be blind to the truth of the Word of God, and it is their nature to think they can have a right relationship with God on the basis of their lifestyles.

This mind-set can be changed by the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God. This changing of man's mind-set is translated as *repentance* throughout the Old and New Testaments. Unfortunately repentance carries the idea of being sorry for something, while both the Hebrew and Greek words that have been translated, *repentance*, mean a change of mind. It is this influence from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that produced the almost immediate apostasy of the New Testament churches. Man thinks according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. So it does not take long for this natural way of thinking to corrupt the doctrine of salvation by grace, apart from the deeds of the law, by adding the necessity of law works and ritual into the doctrine of salvation. Paul fought this battle in virtually every book of the New Testament which he wrote, but the churches apostatized nevertheless. The last and greatest element of apostasy that shall come upon this earth will be the revelation of the antichrist. Therefore our Lord said:

For [with the revelation of the antichrist] then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. (Matthew 24:21-25)

Clearly, then, *the time of Jacob's trouble* is a time of judgment. It is a time that is vastly different than this present age, even though, through the preaching of the one hundred and forty-

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four thousand, vast numbers of Jews and Gentiles will be saved by the grace of God during these seven years (Revelation 7:13-17).

This present age of the New Testament church has been characterized by the great commission of our Lord, to preach the gospel in all of the world. In contrast with this, it seems that the preaching of the gospel during the tribulation period will be limited to the land of Israel, even though John wrote:

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (Revelation 14:6-7)

This text would seem to suggest that the gospel will continue to be preached in all of the world during the tribulation period, but it does not directly state that this is the case. Therefore this portion of Scripture must be reconciled with our Lord's instructions to the twelve (which extends to the twelve times twelve thousand). He said, *Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come* (Matthew 10:23). We must also consider the prophecy of Zechariah, *In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you* (Zechariah 8:23). In the light of these texts it appears that individuals out of the nations of the world will have to come to where the truth is during the seventieth week of Daniel in order to be saved. Considering these three portions of Scripture, and considering that this will be the seventieth week of Daniel, and the Jews will be the custodians of the truth, it seems that conditions during the great tribulation period will be as they were when the

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queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem during the reign of Solomon (Matthew 12:42).

The preaching of the one hundred and forty-four thousand will be during a time of judgment; whereas, the preaching in this present age is without the threat of immediate judgment. Consequently the emphasis of our message should not be upon judgment, but upon the unparalleled mercy and grace of God, through the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of sinners. Even so judgment is coming, and some of what is coming will be viewed in our next chapter, *The Contents of the Seven-sealed Book*.