

## The People of the Apocalypse

### "The Passing of the Torch"

#### [Part I]

From the beginning of Biblical history God has always prepared the next generation to represent Him and His word on earth before the preceding generation passed on into eternity. Joshua was trained by Moses and Timothy was trained by Paul and the Lord trained His disciples before they passed the torch to the next generation and went to be with the Lord, illustrating just a few instances of God's practice of working in the lives of successive generations of His servants.

And so it will be at the end of the age when the saints are removed from the earth by rapture. God will prepare the next generation to carry His word to those who will be redeemed during His Day of the Lord's wrath when He will judge Jew and Gentile alike, in the process purging the nation of Israel so that at the end of the 70<sup>th</sup> Week of Daniel "*all Israel shall be saved.*" (Romans 11:25,26)

Revelation chapter seven is the key section of Scripture showing "The Passing of the Torch" as the saints are raptured bringing an innumerable multitude to heaven (Revelation 7:9-17) after the 144 Thousand are sealed (Revelation 7:1-8) for protection (Revelation 9:4) during their coming Day of the Lord's wrath ministry.

Yes, the church will be "Raptured from Wrath", rescued from the persecution of the Antichrist just before the Lord brings His wrath upon those that remain on the earth, just as He promised, (I Thessalonians 1:10, 5:1-10) but, He will not leave the earth without a human witness.

This great company of Jews, the 144 Thousand, will "*follow the Lamb wherever He goes*" (Revelation 14:4) indicating their full surrender and total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and thereby being model disciples, witness of the Lord's redemption to those that do not know Him during the days of the devastating fiery judgments of the Day of the Lord's wrath!

But, how will this great company of the sons of Israel be chosen? Will they be saved before or after the rapture of the saints? Are they merely physical descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel who are sealed, or are they already believing sons of God before the sealing takes place?

If the Lord continues to operate the way He has throughout the ages, these who are sealed will already be mightily prepared "*servants of our God*" (Revelation 7:3) whom He has chosen and who will already have fully surrendered their lives to the service of the Lamb their King! Yes, the Scripture clearly indicates that they are: "*Sealed...servants of God...children (sons) of Israel...having His (the Lamb's) Father's name written in their foreheads...could learn that song...were redeemed from the earth...not defiled with women for they are virgins...follow the Lamb wherever He goes...were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb...in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the Throne of God.*" (Revelation 7:3-8, 14:1-5).

This impeccable group of God's faithful servants are duly called and qualified to be the Lord's faithful representatives during the most trying of circumstances ever experienced by a child of God! A choice group of God's bond-servants indeed, who fully know their position and calling and willingly give themselves to their precious Lord for His service whatever it might be!

These are not just a generic group of Jews mystically selected to be protected during the Day of the Lord in order that the physical seed of Israel survives the judgment of God. No, this is a prime group of men, chosen saints of God who have been called out of the twelve tribes for "*such a time as this*" (Esther 4:14) when the Lord will bring upon all of mankind His fiery judgment of planet earth and all it's inhabitants which is called

“the great and dreadful Day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:5) also described as the wrath of God (Isaiah 13:6-10; Zephaniah 1:14,15).

This group, because of the complete description given them in Revelation 7:3-8, 14:1-5, is clearly identified as first of all “sealed”. This indicates the protection of God in the midst of (Revelation 9:4) His Day of the Lord wrath. The Lord in the past has removed His own people prior to His judgment as shown during the worldwide cataclysmic flood when He rescued the family of Noah in the ark.

He also “delivered just Lot” and his family before the fiery judgment fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah. But, in this instance, the Lord gives the 144 Thousand His signature (Revelation 14:1) upon their foreheads to protect them in the midst of His judgment.

In Ezekiel chapter nine a number of parallels are recorded which are similar to what is going to happen just prior to His Day of the Lord wrath as described in Revelation chapter seven. First of all it must be emphasized that it is the Lord, the sovereign Ruler of the universe, the God of heaven and earth, Who is bringing this Day of the Lord’s wrath upon the earth and it’s inhabitants. The end of Revelation chapter six confirms this to be the case: “For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6:17)

This statement supplies us with the fact of Who is responsible for the impending judgment which will begin when the first trumpet is blown in chapter eight. Ezekiel chapter eight also verifies that the Lord is responsible for what occurs in chapter nine:

*“He cried also in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, Cause them that have charge over the city to draw near, even every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. And, behold six men came from the way of the higher gate, which lies toward the north, and every man a slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side: and they went in, and stood by the brazen altar. And the glory of God was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house of God. And He called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer’s inkhorn by his side; And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark (signature) upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young both maids, and little children: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark (signature); and begin at My sanctuary.” (Ezekiel 9:1-6)*

Here, in Ezekiel’s vision, the Lord commands His representatives to bring His judgment upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but, before the judgment falls, He supernaturally protects His own and sets His mark or signature upon their foreheads. In the midst of His judgment He protects His own!

In the book of the Revelation a similar event occurs:

*“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed and hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children (sons) of Israel.” (Revelation 7:1-4)*

God sends His representatives to place His protective signature or mark upon those He is going to protect. In Revelation 7:3 “The seal of the living God” applied by His angel is later identified as “His...name written in their foreheads” which is placed upon them.

In Ezekiel the word for “*mark*” could also be translated “*signature*” and therefore is identical with what will take place in Revelation chapter seven just prior to God’s judgment, the Day of the Lord’s wrath. Here again, the Lord supernaturally protects His own in the midst of His Day of the Lord judgment! Another parallel is recorded in Ezekiel 9:3:

*“And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house.”*

This action taken by God before the protection of His own, and the judgment of those in Jerusalem is illustrated by the promise of the Lord to the saints found in I Thessalonians 4:17:

*“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

The rapture of the saints, the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior to take His own to heaven illustrates the same event that took place in the vision of Ezekiel as God removes His glory [the church] from its place, which is similar to the saints departing earth by rapture, when His glory is then removed!

The timing of this great event is just before His wrath begins in Revelation 8. He promised the saints they would be delivered from the wrath to come (I Thessalonians 1:10, 5:1-10), and so He will rapture the saints just before it begins. Just before He seals the 144 Thousand with His signature, the saints will “Pass the Torch” to the 144 Thousand!

Therefore, five parallels or similarities to the Revelation are seen in Ezekiel’s vision:

1. The Lord is responsible for the judgment (Ezekiel 9:1-6; Revelation 6:17)
2. The Lord’s representatives bring the judgment (Ezekiel 9:1-6; Revelation 8-11, 15-18)
3. The Lord’s glory is removed before the judgment (Ezekiel 9:3; Revelation 7:9-17)
4. The Lord marks His own before the judgment (Ezekiel 9:4, 11; Revelation 7:1-8)
5. The Lord protects His own in the midst of judgment (Ezekiel 9:4-6; Revelation 7:1-8, 9:4)

In addition there are two other groups who have the Lord’s name written upon them. The overcomers of the church of Philadelphia (Revelation 3:12) and the “servants” of the Lamb in heaven (Revelation 22:3,4). Both of these groups are proven to be saints before they have the name of the Lord written upon them. These two groups of saints receive these blessings as eternal rewards for their overcoming lives and service to the Lord. Right after the sealing of the 144 Thousand (Revelation 7:3-8), the raptured saints are seen in heaven:

*“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 sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” (Revelation 7:9,10)*

This great multitude comes “*out of great tribulation*” indicating not the actual geographic location but the time period from whence they came. This just happens to be the right time period at this point in the chronology of the book of the Revelation for the saints to be raptured because we have come to the end of the great tribulation according to Revelation 6:12-17 and the Lord’s chronology in Matthew 24:29-31. We are right on schedule as the Lord indicated:

*“Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” (Matthew 24:29)*

This is exactly where we are in the sequence of events in the book of the Revelation, for this is the sign which occurs before the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:30,31), which is the wrath of God. It is about to occur with the removing of the seventh seal thereby opening the scroll which contains the wrath of God beginning with the first

trumpet judgment! Yes, the saints have been promised to be “*delivered from wrath*” (*I Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9*) by the God of heaven and the timing is perfectly exact!

But, before we can move from Revelation 6 which ends with the sixth seal and the announcement of “*the great day of His wrath*” (Revelation 6:17) “The Passing of the Torch” must take place!

The glory of God departs (The saints are raptured just before the wrath of God begins) and the 144 Thousand are sealed (Revelation 7:1-8) with the signature of God on their foreheads...now...1/2 hour of silence in heaven (Revelation 8:1)...all praise to the Lord of glory is silenced...for the first time in the history of heaven...all is quiet and still...the calm before the storm... the most prophesied event in the Scriptures, the Day of the Lord, is about to begin...and then the Lord initiates His fiery judgment of planet earth and it's inhabitants with the sounding of the first trumpet (Revelation 8:1-7)!

And so, “The Passing of the Torch” takes place, the saints are home in heaven and the 144 Thousand are sealed, protected and ready to serve the Lord during the coming Day of the Lord's Wrath when they will: “*follow the Lamb wherever He goes*” (*Revelation 14:4*) showing their complete dedication to His will and leading as they serve Him during the fiery and tumultuous days ahead.