

THIS IS THE END TIME! Pt. 4

This article will conclude the series covering the seven areas of proof that we are in the end-time. The first section of this issue is an inset to the story flow that was covered in Proof #6, and it continues with a closer focus upon where we are now concerning the opening of the sixth seal.

THE SIXTH SEAL & 6,000 YEARS

The sixth seal of Revelation marks an awesomely dramatic time for all human history. It sets the way for the conclusive events that must take place before the Kingdom of God can finally come to this earth. This seal establishes the fulfillment of a very specific work that God has been doing for the past 6,000 years. It is at this time that the calling and choosing of all who will be resurrected first into that Kingdom will have been fully determined by God.

This momentous occasion is unveiled amidst the backdrop of the revelation that the time of God's end-time wrath has now come and is about to be unleashed upon this earth. But before this final time of great trouble on earth is released, the finalized total of all who will be in the first resurrection is sealed.

"And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day

of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17).

The opening of the sixth seal is the announcement of a transition in time, when the moment for great physical tribulation has finally come, as the end of a great spiritual tribulation is finally concluding. The end-time has finally come for all mankind, toward the end of his allotted 6,000 years of self-rule, and the foundation of this earth will be shaken. Mankind is going to be brought face-to-face with an impending annihilation if God does not intervene.

This last section of Revelation 6 gives us an overview of the cataclysm that is about to follow and the result for all quarters of mankind who will be seeking to hide themselves and escape this wrath.

The Long Work of Pentecost

The sixth seal not only gives an overview of what is about to come upon this world, as a transition is about to take place (a focus from the Church to a focus on this world), but it also reveals the completion of a process that entails a work of God that has covered this span of 6,000 years. It is during the time span between the sixth and seventh seals being opened that this great event is finalized.

For nearly six millennia, God has called people to repentance from their own ways to the development of holy, righteous character. This has been the work of Pentecost, most of which has been done during the past 2,000 years within the Church. Firstfruits have been called by God to be in His Kingdom which will come when Christ returns as King of kings. God has worked for a long time to come to the opening of this sixth seal when this process will be finalized and all those who will make up His Kingdom will be sealed.

The seventh seal cannot be opened until this process is complete. Angels are actually held back from unleashing their phase of end-time devastation

until all who are to be in the first resurrection have been made ready, chosen of God and sealed.

"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" (Rev. 7:1 -3).

These four angels, who are being withheld from releasing devastation, are the first four angels who will sound their trumpets after the seventh seal is opened. The destruction that follows the blowing of these trumpets is what leads to the final period of three and a half years of great tribulation that begins when the fifth angel sounds his trumpet.

The first four angels of the seventh seal are held back from unleashing the beginning of physical tribulation upon this world until God has completed the final determination of all who will be in the first resurrection. All who are dead in Christ have already been determined and are in the count of Pentecost—firstfruits who will be in the first resurrection. Their destiny has already been sealed, and now, the destiny of those who are yet alive, who will have been chosen by God to be part with them, is about to be sealed. Those who return with Jesus Christ, in His Kingdom, make up the work of Pentecost—those who will be part of the temple that God has been building. Because God is the Builder, that structure is very exact! God made the blueprints and has shaped every stone. These stones are exact in number—not too many and not too few, and they will fit into the temple exactly as He

has fashioned them. The ability to accomplish such a feat is a glory to the awesome greatness of God and His power to perform it. This temple is exact in every detail, just as God had predetermined it, before the foundation of the world. *"According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated (Gk—"predetermined") us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"* (Ephesians 1:4-6).

The opening of the sixth seal reveals a time for awesome fulfillment in the Work of God over the past 6,000 years. All who will become part of His family, from the first harvest of all mankind, will have been determined and sealed before final tribulation comes on this world. But before these firstfruits can enter into that family, the world must first go through a time of trouble such as it has never encountered throughout all human history.

An Exact Number In Pentecost

Just as we must count an exact number of days to know when to observe Pentecost, there is an exact number of firstfruits that make up the work of Pentecost. God is perfect in all His ways, and what He builds is exact! God has been building upon a spiritual temple over the past 6,000 years. That temple comprises all who will be the firstfruits in His family when His Kingdom comes to this earth.

"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev. 7:4).

This number of 144,000 is exact and complete in perfection according to God's will. These are the only ones who will be resurrected as part of the family of God at the time of Jesus Christ's return. The number twelve for perfection is used as God describes these firstfruits as being 12,000 each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is

spiritual Israel—not the physical tribes of Israel.

Paul revealed to the Church that Gentiles (those of the uncircumcision) in the Church are spiritual Jews. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Rom. 2:28-29).

In like manner, the Church is sometimes referred to as being Israel, but in such cases that does not mean the physical tribes of Israel. Actually, Israelites and Gentiles will make up the family of God, but they must first become a part of the Church by being begotten of God's spirit. "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13).

Paul preached continually that salvation had now come to the Gentiles. When Gentiles are called and begotten of God's spirit, they become spiritual Jews by a circumcision of the heart.

It is important to understand these basic truths concerning all whom God calls. Regardless of one's background or nationality, we all become part of a spiritual family—not a national family. Yet all will bear the name of Israel spiritually.

God reveals that the spiritual temple, which is spiritual Israel, will bear the names of twelve tribes. Even as the holy Jerusalem is described in Revelation 21, it reveals that spiritual Israel is divided into four sides with three tribes listed on each side and each entrance containing the name of a tribe of Israel. That is why God mentions the names of twelve tribes, each containing 12,000 who comprise the full number of 144,000 who are resurrected first as firstfruits.

There has been some confusion in the past because, as the Church continued to grow much larger in the late 60's, 70's & early 80's, it was believed that 144,000 would come out of Philadelphia. Now we know this is

not true, and what God has now made obvious is that this number is the total of all who will be in the first resurrection. Some of this confusion has existed because of not understanding the story in Revelation 7.

All One And the Same

It is important that we fully understand the clearest account that speaks of the 144,000. *"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb where ever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God"* (Rev. 14:1-5).

The account is clear. The number is exact! These are called firstfruits who have been redeemed from among mankind. The process is complete.

The number of firstfruits should not be difficult to understand. These are all who have been redeemed from mankind over the past 6,000 years. This clearly sets the number of those who make up the work of Pentecost.

In reality, both accounts of the 144,000 (Rev. 7 and 14) are one and the same. At the point in time of Revelation 7:4, that number has not yet been fully achieved, but it is about to be. When we arrive on the scene in Revelation 14, that number is complete, and they are now with Jesus Christ, having been resurrected.

This group in Revelation 7 is not about a specific number of physical Israelites who are going to receive physical protection from the end-time

tribulation. Also, it is not about a specific number in the Church who are going to be protected.

After the twelve tribes are listed, notice what is said. *"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;"* (Rev. 7:9).

This is not some new mysterious group. This is neither a group of Gentiles, nor the Laodicean Church that is going to be delivered out of great tribulation in the end-time, as some still believe. This verse is simply projecting ahead in time and showing the outcome of the 144,000 that were earlier sealed in verse 3.

No man could "number" (Gk. word "arithmeo") these. The point being made is that only God knows the number, since it was God who brought this number together. We have no means of knowing how many God redeemed from each millennia, but He told us the total (verse 4) which only He knows. Even if this were an account of a physical nature, no man would be able to look out over such a great multitude and number them.

Yet this multitude clearly stands in the same place as those mentioned in Revelation 14—those redeemed from among mankind. These are the same because they are clothed in white and have *"washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Rev. 7:14).

The question is asked about who this multitude is. *"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, Who are these who are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they who 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 who sits on the throne shall dwell among them"* (Rev. 7:13-15).

This group makes up the temple of God. The following verses make it

clear that they have been changed from mortal to immortal. They are now spirit—in the spiritual family of God. They did not arrive easily. All who are called and begotten into the spiritual family of God must go through intensive refining, trial and testing in order to be molded and fashioned into stones for this temple.

With some of the final instruction that Jesus Christ gave us on Passover night, He said, *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (Jn. 16:33).

Paul later spoke of the same thing when he said, *"Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timothy, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions* (same Gk. word for "tribulation"): *for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know"* (1 Thes. 3:1-4).

Tribulation and suffering is not new to God's people. We understand that it is part of our calling. That is why the example of fire and the refining of gold and silver is so meaningful to us. We know it takes much fire to try us in order for us to be transformed—to mold and fashion holy righteous character within us. As Peter said, *"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:"* (1 Peter 1:7).

So when we are told, concerning this great multitude, that *"these are they which came out of great tribulation,"* we need to understand that all who are able to become a part of the family of God, in the first resurrection, must come through much tribulation in the world. That is the process whereby we are able to be transformed. So

those being spoken of as coming out of great tribulation are not restricted to only those who come out of the end-time physical tribulation that comes on the whole world. All 144,000 have had to come through great tribulation in order to be among those in the first resurrection.

Yes, before the seventh seal is opened and the end-time physical tribulation is unleashed upon this earth, the work of Pentecost will be concluded. All who are to be in the first resurrection will have been determined—all will have been sealed.

It should be profoundly sobering to understand that we are in the time when the sixth seal has been opened. We are at a transition in time when end-time spiritual tribulation upon the Church is about to conclude and end-time physical tribulation on this world is about to commence.

This time, between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, is when the final determination of all who will be firstfruits—the temple of God—is completed. When all have been sealed, then great destruction will come on this earth, as the first four angels of the seventh seal are no longer restrained. Time is short! Draw close to God.

7th AREA OF PROOF

The 7th area of proof, that we are in the end-time, will be the last proof we cover in this series. This last area contains fewer scriptures than the previous proofs, but it may very well prove to be one of the most important areas of scripture that needs to be understood by the Church today.

It is likely that most of the scattered Church today would not acknowledge this proof as being fulfilled prophecy, let alone acknowledge it as being critically important to our salvation, which it is, and that will be explained as we go through this last proof. Denying this proof would be tantamount to denying the truth that God has revealed to His Church in these end-times.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to

the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Malachi 4:5-6).

These verses, of and by themselves, are not sufficient to understand the importance of this prophecy. Other verses that speak of this fulfillment must be examined along with this prophetic announcement that is to be accomplished before the *"coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."*

Debate has fluctuated within the environs of the Church as to whether or not Mr. Armstrong fulfilled this prophecy of the end-time Elijah. Rather than get bogged down with all the arguments pro and con, it would be better to simply focus on what is true concerning these verses about this subject and to focus on what is true about our history that is in agreement with this subject.

Don't Confuse Scriptures

Sometimes people become confused with what is being stated in other related scriptures and this prophetic announcement in Malachi. A long-time evangelist in the Church recently gave a sermon on this subject and was himself confused about these scriptures.

Don't confuse this prophecy in Malachi with things said about John the Baptist. *"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist"* (Mat. 17:10-13).

John the Baptist was not involved in any restoration, but he did come in the spirit and power of Elijah to accomplish part of a dual fulfillment concerning this prophecy of an Elijah to come. It is really quite simple because John was to pave the way for the first-coming of Jesus Christ—doing so in the spirit and power of Elijah. But the prophecy is dual, because another

person was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the way for the second-coming of Jesus Christ.

Part of the purpose in this duality is revealed by Gabriel as Zacharias is being told about his future son, John. *"And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"* (Luke 1:17). John the Baptist would be involved with helping to make a people ready for Jesus Christ's first-coming.

This verse is simply showing part of the process involved as people are turned from their own ways, through repentance, to the ways of God. Those referred to as the "fathers" are those mentioned in the Old Testament who embraced the righteousness of God—whose hearts had been turned to God—whose lives are written in scripture as instruction and inspiration in the ways of God. The same spirit that worked with these men of old, "the fathers," was now working with their descendants, "the children," so that their hearts could now be turned to God and prepared for Jesus Christ.

And another person was to come before the end of this age who would fulfill the other part of the duality in these prophecies by preparing a people for the second-coming of Jesus Christ.

Another area of scripture that some confuse with these prophecies about an "Elijah to come" is found in Acts. *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that*

prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yes, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in your seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:19-26).

This prophecy concerning Christ should not be confused with prophecy concerning an "Elijah to come." The disciples asked Jesus about an Elijah to come. *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things"* (Mat. 17:11). When Jesus said Elijah would restore all things, he wasn't referring to himself or to the "times of restitution of all things" spoken of in Acts 3.

Acts 3 concerns the time when the Kingdom of God comes to this earth, when the government and law (way) of God is restored. That is something that will be accomplished by and through Jesus Christ as King of kings.

Don't be mistaken, as others have, concern-ing the Elijah to come. The times of restitution of all things spoken of in Acts is not the same account; instead, it refers to a time that begins when the Kingdom of God has come to this earth. Understand that there is duality involved as John the Baptist fulfills the first part of this prophecy concerning a people being prepared for the first-coming of Jesus Christ. But before the Kingdom of God would come to this earth, another person would come in the spirit and power of Elijah preparing a people for the second-coming of Jesus Christ.

The Elijah to Come

When the disciples asked about the Elijah to come spoken of in Malachi, Jesus added an important description about his function. It is the most important thing to understand in order to identify who this person would be.

The disciples had asked Jesus Christ about the prophecy of Malachi right

after the transfiguration when some of them witnessed a vision concerning the coming Kingdom of God. Before the Kingdom of God should come, they knew it was written that an Elijah was to come on the scene first. *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:"* (Mal. 4:5). The coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD must occur before the Kingdom of God is established.

This Elijah to come would fulfill a duality with John by helping to prepare a people for the coming of Jesus Christ—in this case the second-coming. These people would also have to come to repentance and have their hearts turned to the ways of God just as their "fathers" of old had done. This matter is a spiritual one, although the fruit of it should also help produce a similar result in a physical family as the hearts of parents are turned more to their children by living God's way.

So, in the end-time a person would come in the spirit and power of Elijah to help prepare a people for the second-coming of Jesus Christ. The "heart of the fathers"—that attitude of mind and spirit of righteous men of old who had a close relationship with God—was now being opened up to (turned to) those that God called in this end-time. As people responded to that calling, their hearts were turned to receive that same spirit of the "hearts of the fathers."

What did Jesus Christ add to this prophecy? *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things"* (Mat. 17:11). This Elijah would be involved in restoring all things. This did not apply to John the Baptist in any way. Nothing was restored through John the Baptist.

This is not a difficult matter to understand in the true Church of God. All who are led by the spirit of God—all who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ living in them—will understand the truth of this matter, for it is of vital importance to God's people. Those who have a right relationship with God will be led by God's spirit to see what is true. This is

absolute! If anyone cannot see this, then there is a reason why. It is because of a lack of God's spirit dwelling in them. One can be begotten into the Church, but can quench God's spirit in their lives and become weak, sickly and spiritually asleep.

The understanding of who fulfills this "Elijah to come" is most basic to the Church of God today. This will be understood by all who grasp our history as the true Church of God over the past few decades.

This matter was touched upon in Proof #4. It is needful that part of that be quoted again:

"As was mentioned earlier in this article, God told Sardis that it was spiritually dead and that the truth they had remaining was dying out. If God had allowed that to happen, the Church would not have survived to the return of Jesus Christ. But God has made it plain that the Church would be alive at Christ's return and that the gates of hell could not prevail against it. So the Church had to be revived. Truth that was dying out had to be restored.

This restoration of truth should be an easy thing to acknowledge—that it did occur during the leadership of Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and the period of time we know as Philadelphia. Yes, God revealed foundational truth to His Church once again. This era kept His word and did not deny His name. Sardis was known for just the opposite—letting the word of God die out as they themselves were dying spiritually—denying the life of God to live in and through them.

Our history is testimony to the truth that God used Mr. Armstrong to restore truth to His Church. Doors were opened by God that made this task possible—doors that no one could shut. Scriptures foretold of an Elijah to come who would restore all things. Today, people argue over this rather than acknowledge the truth of what stares them in the face—again, more proof that the word of God agrees with our history as being the true Church of God spoken of in prophecy.

... God revealed that the truth would die out toward the end and the Church would begin to die spiritually. In order to prevent that from happening, God restored all truth necessary for salvation that would once again give life to His Church. Truly, the Elijah would first come and restore that truth to the Church. Can anyone deny what God performed through His end-time apostle during the era of Philadelphia?"

To deny that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong was the Elijah to come before the end-time is either ignorance or willing denial of what is true concerning our history and what God did through him. It is God who restored necessary truth to the Church so that a people would be ready for the second-coming of Jesus Christ. God said that the "gates of hell" would not prevail against His Church. The Church could not die out before Jesus Christ returned, yet that was exactly what was happening toward the end of Sardis. God saw to it that His word remained true (the Church would not die out), because He restored truth to His people through an end-time Elijah. What could be more basic for God's people?

It is not a light thing for anyone in the environs of the Church to deny or be uncommitted in this matter of Mr. Armstrong being the end-time Elijah. The fact that foundational truth was restored in these end-times and that such a thing could only be accomplished by God is truly a matter of acknowledging (confessing) or denying God.

Why do so many refuse or resist the clarity of truth concerning this matter? The answer should be plain. It is all a matter of the spirit and our true relationship with God. Do you see it? If you do, thank God, because there is only one way you can.

This may well prove to be the most important of the seven proofs covered in this series showing we are in the end-time. The reason? ...Because it will reveal much about our attitudes toward the foundational truths restored by God Almighty to His people. Do we see a man or do we see God?