

REVELATION

*Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ
Today at the Edge of History*

Chapter 7

Text: Revelation 7:1-17 - Look! A Multitude Sealed for Reward!

144,000 Sealed

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea:³ "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

- ⁵ From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000,
- ⁶ from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,
- ⁷ from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
- ⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

The Great Multitude in White Robes

⁹ After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing

before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying:

"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

¹³ Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

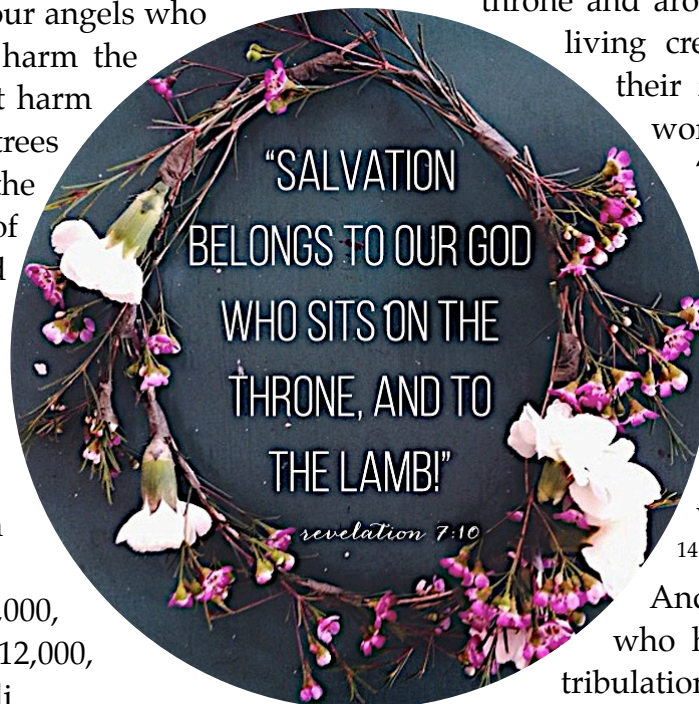
¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹⁵ Therefore,

"they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."



Read & Reflect - 7:1-17

First Reading/First Impression: Which of these responses best captures your thoughts as you read this Interlude section (ch.7) in John’s vision?

- What happened to the earthquakes? Things were just getting interesting!
- Please can we stay here for a while?! Do we have to go to the next chapter?
- What wonderful good news! It sounds better, but I still don’t get it.
- Other _____



Second Reading/The Big Idea: What part of these two pictures (Scene I = verses 1-8 & Scene II = vv. 9-17) do you find most comforting? Why?

Search

7:1 - After the “kings of the earth” have asked their question, “*Who can stand?*”, to conclude chapter 6, what does John see here at the beginning of chapter 7?

What significance do you think there might be to the numer 4? Where have you seen it before?

Whose strength prevails in this conflict of powers?

7:2-3 - Why are the destructive forces (four winds, etc.) being held back? What needs to happen before they are released?

Read Ezekiel 9:1-8 (p.3) - What purpose(s) does the “seal of God” serve in Ezekiel and here in Revelation?

7:4-8 - Compare the list of tribes here to Old Testament lists (Genesis 35:23-26 & 49:1-27 for example). What is different here? Who comes first? Who is left out?

Why do you think John’s list is different?

7:9 - Who is this "multitude" (see v.14)? How does their posture relate to the question in v. 6:17?

7:10-12 - What does the multitude do? Where have we seen this before?

7:13-14 - What does the multitude wear? (Symbolic of what?) How did they get their clothes to look this way? (What else does this multitude do?)

7:15-17 - What benefits does this multitude enjoy? When?

Revelation 7 answers the question posed at the end of Revelation 6. Rewind the video a moment. Revelation 6 shows the Lamb, the crucified and risen Jesus, breaking six of the seven seals of the scroll of history. At the end of the sixth seal, the seal preparing for the final crises, the unbelieving world asks, "Who is able to stand?" (6:17). Who indeed?... The vision of Revelation 7 answers: Those who make it are those who are sealed with the seal of the living God. (7:2-3)

- Darrell Johnson,
Discipleship on the Edge, p.182.

Apply

1. What would you do for God, what risk would you take, what fear would you defy, if you knew yourself to be "sealed" by God for ultimate protection from permanent harm and a destiny of heavenly blessings?

2. What evidence assures you that the Holy Spirit (God's "seal") lives within you?

Ezekiel 9:1-6 (Part of the Prophet's Heavenly Vision):

Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand."² And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar.

³ Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the Lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side⁴ and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."

⁵ As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion.⁶ Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.



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Summary...
Chapter 7 is an interlude between the openings of the 6th and 7th seals of the scroll (Note that there will be another

interlude between the sounding of the 6th and 7th trumpets--ch. 10-11). It consists of "two main scenes, arranged in a 'before' and 'after' pattern" (Aune, Revelation, p.434). The first scene takes place on earth and the second in heaven. The times and places are different, but many believe that both scenes place before us the same group of people, using different language and images: God's "sealed" multitude whom He empowers (as scene one reveals) to persevere and overcome every earthly trial and whom He blesses (as scene two shows) to enjoy every heavenly benefit. In the midst of the unstoppable calamities, John's vision pauses to comfort (and once this word meant to "give strength for the task"- *com* = *with*, *forte* - *strength*) those following Christ the Lord. Nothing is more unstoppable than our marvelous identity and glorious destiny sealed in Christ! So, look at Him and take strength! Have faith! Trust in our Lord! Don't compromise as you follow Him!

verse 1 - "After this I saw"... Here is another good place to remember that the question in interpreting John's revelation is "what did he see next" rather than "what happened next." The first half of this chapter happened before the first seal was opened. Before the horrors of chapter 6 began to happen, God's people were signed for victory and sealed for deliverance... "four angels... four corners... four winds"... the full force of creation is in view here... and probably also the "four horsemen" of chapter 6! (see Zechariah 6:1-8) where four groups of horses are related to the four winds/spirits and the four corners compass points). The winds don't blow and the

horses don't ride until God's people are safe and secure!

vv.2-3 - "seal"... like the mark an owner would put on his slave's forehead in 1st-century Rome... like the stamp of a ruling monarch upon his documents or property indicating their authenticity and his protection over them... The destruction on earth is held back until God's people are marked for His protection (see also Ezekiel 9:1-6-- a powerful picture of protecting seals in the midst of death)... There is good reason to believe that the real "seal of God" spoken of here is not a literal stamp on our skin but the Holy Spirit in our hearts (see 2 Corinthians 1:12 & Ephesians 1:13 & 4:30)

v.4 - "Then I heard the number"... here again we see the theme of "hearing" and then "seeing" (see 7:9 -- *After this I looked and there before me was...* "). This points to the inseparable connection between these two scenes (Same group? See above)... "144,000" ... symbolizes a very large number (12 x 12 - like the "24 Elders" in ch. 4 = 12 + 12 -- x 10 x 10 x 10), a number not meant to be counted

literally but believed to be absolutely complete! No one is missing...

vv.5-8 - "the tribe of Judah, etc..." Nowhere else in all the Bible do you find the list of the 12 tribes of Israel in this form. There are two significant adjustments made: 1) The order is changed so that Judah comes first (the line through which the "Lamb of God," Jesus the Christ, came). 2) The names are changed (Joseph is left in, Dan is taken out and one of Joseph's sons, Manasseh, takes his place). Why? To show that because of the Messiah "Israel" has been changed. Her purpose has been fulfilled. Israel is not replaced but fulfilled by the Church. (We see this imagery again in ch. 21:12 with the gates of the "New Jerusalem" inscribed with the names of the tribes of Israel but containing within them "a multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language" - 7:9). There is a New Israel, Multi-ethnic Israel! (see Romans 2:27, Galatians 3:29 & 6:16, Philippians 3:3 & James 1:1)... The choice of Dan for removal may relate to his tribe's association with idolatry (see Judges 18:30)...

vv.9-17 - "there before me" = "Look!" (IDOU)... "a great multitude"... a different way of referring to the "144,000" as the scene shifts to the "after" picture in heaven... "every nation, tribe, people and language"... The work of Jesus transcends every human boundary... "white" = symbol of purity... "who have come out of the great tribulation"... that time is over now!... "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"... "their present blessedness and their fitness to appear in the presence of God have been won for them by the sacrificial death of Christ... [but] the redeemed also have their part to play; they washed their robes." (Metzger, Code, p.61)... "in his temple"... the word for temple here refers to the inner shrine... God's sealed people enjoy intimacy with Him as their ultimate reward... "living water"... and the reward lasts forever...



**...before me was a great multitude...
from every nation...
standing before the throne.**

Revelation 7:9