

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Week 10 – Revelation 7 – An Interlude: The 144,000 and the Great Multitude

March 28, 2017

REVELATION 7

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

*⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;
⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;
⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;
⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.*

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” ¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and 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 dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

After these things – after everything John saw and heard through divine revelation (via a vision) under the control of the Holy Spirit. John saw the global impact from the judgments in those six seals which Jesus unloosed. John is going to receive a new vision which serves as a transition, an interlude. This interlude in Rev. 7 delays for a brief moment the judgment that will pour out when the seventh seal is unloosed from the scroll. And John is going to receive a new vision which will answer the question posed in Rev. 6:17 – *who will be able to stand?*

NOTE: The vision in Rev. 7, as an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, does NOT advance the chronology of Revelation. This interlude is a transition.

In Rev. 7 we see the two distinct groups who will *be able to stand*: the 144,000 servants of God on earth (Rev. 7:1-8) and those who come to faith in Jesus during the Tribulation...many coming to faith through the witness of the 144,000 (Rev. 7:9-17).

Before the sealing of the 144,000, John saw four angels positioned on the *four corners of the earth*. These four angels will be sent to restrain the four winds (agents of God's judgment) that will blow destructive fury over the earth. The "four winds" encompass all directions or the "four corners" of the earth: north, south, east, and west (Jeremiah 49:36; Matthew 24:31). When the phrase "four winds" is mentioned in the Bible, it's usually in reference to some remarkable, unusual, or devastating event. These events are being reported by some of the Lord's prophets, most often in the form of a vision (Ezekiel 37:9; Daniel 7:2; Zechariah 2:6).

Wind is also used to describe God's breath or Spirit (Eze. [37:9](#); Zec. [6:5](#)) which is often used in judgment. In Pharaoh's dream, the seven years of Egyptian famine were brought about by an east wind (Gen. [41:6](#), [27](#)). The plague of locusts brought upon Egypt came on the east wind (Ex. [10:13](#)).

The same east wind allowed the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea (Ex. [14:21](#)).

The east wind is often associated with God's judgment and deliverance (Ps. [48:7](#); [78:26](#); Isa. [27:8](#); Jer. [18:17](#); Eze. [19:12](#); Hos. [13:15](#); Jonah [4:8](#)).

It seems best to understand the wind in Rev. 7 as speaking of the *judgment and influence of God* which is about to "blow" across the land as it had in the past.

In Rev. 7 we see the winds being held back rather than being sent forth. Thus in Rev. 7 we have a respite from the outpouring of God's judgments.

When do we see the earth, the sea, and the trees harmed?

- With the sounding of the first trumpet, a third of the *trees* are burned up (Rev. [8:7](#)).
- At the second trumpet, a third of the *sea* becomes blood (Rev. [8:8](#)). At the pouring forth of the second bowl, the entire *sea* becomes blood as of a dead man (Rev. [16:3](#)).

- At the sounding of the first trumpet, a third of the *earth* is burned up (Rev. [8:7](#)) At the pouring forth of the sixth bowl, the *earth* is utterly shaken (Rev. [16:18-20](#)).

The *earth*, the *trees*, and especially the *sea* are all important parts of the system of nature which supports life on the planet. Because man will continue to idolize the creation rather than the Creator (Rom. [1:25](#)), God will set about to destroy this idol.

NOTE: the earth, sea, and trees are to be understood literally due to their context in the verses noted above.

Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God
Another angel – some have understood this angel as Christ, the Holy Spirit, an archangel, or some specially prepared messenger from God. Such views are highly speculative, having no Scriptural foundation. He is simply “another” (v. 12) of the same kind of angel, distinguished from the other four only by his exalted mission to seal the 144,000.

From the east - literally, *from the rising of the sun*. Within Scripture, *east* is often the direction of the deliverance or judgment of God (Gen. [41:6](#), [23](#), [27](#); Ex. [10:13](#); [14:21](#); Ps. [48:7](#); [78:26](#); Isa. [27:8](#); Jer. [18:17](#); Eze. [19:12](#); Hos. [13:15](#); Jonah [4:8](#); Rev. [16:12+](#)). God’s glory departed from Solomon’s Temple moving eastward (Eze. [10:18](#); [11:22-23](#)) and it is the direction by which He will eventually return (Eze. [43:2-4](#); [44:1-2](#)).

Having the seal of the living God - This is not a seal itself, but “the instrument with which one seals or stamps.” This angel carries the means by which the one hundred and forty-four thousand will be sealed.

sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads - The seal is the name of God the Father written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1). In the sealing, these 144,000 are noted as *the servants of our God*. These 144,000 will be protected from death under the antichrist’s persecution as well as protected from the natural disasters during the Tribulation.

Are we, as believers, sealed? [Eph. 1:13-14](#) - *In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

And I heard the number of those who were sealed – John did not see the sealing, but he *heard the number of those who were sealed*

The number – God’s details. This is part of God’s plan! This is not a random number!

Who were sealed - perfect passive participle, lit. *ones having been sealed*. The angel recounts the total number of individuals who, by this time, have been sealed.

One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed

This passage goes to great lengths to make the readers understand this as literally 144,000 – 12,000 from 12 tribes

And, who are the 144,000?

The tribes of the children of Israel – physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – national/ethnic Israel.

When taken at face value, *And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed*, nothing in the passage leads to interpreting the 144,000 as anything but a literal number of Jews – 12,000 taken from every tribe of the “sons of Israel.” And, then 12 specific tribes are listed!

The tribes of the children of Israel – lit. *sons of Israel*. These are the same twelve *tribes of the children of Israel* whose names are written on the gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. [21:12ff](#)). In the regeneration, Jesus said the apostles will rule over these tribes (Mat. [19:28](#); Luke [22:30](#)).

Some have wondered why the OT tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted from this list of Jewish tribes. Most scholars agree that the tribe of Dan was omitted in Rev. 7 because that tribe was guilty of idolatry on many occasions and, as a result, was largely obliterated (Lev. 24:11; Judges 18:1-30; I Kings 12:28-29). To engage in unrepentant idolatry is to be cut off from God’s blessing. The tribe of Ephraim was also involved in idolatry and paganized worship (Judges 17; Hosea 4:17).

BUT, Dan and Ephraim are included in Ezekiel’s prophecy of the land allotment to the 12 tribes during the Millennial Kingdom (Eze. [48:1-6, 32](#)), demonstrating God’s faithfulness to his covenant and promise (Lev. [26:44](#). Mal. [3:6](#). Rom. [11:29, 15:8](#)). Dan is named first in the future distribution of land among the tribes in the Millennial Kingdom (Eze. 48:2); however, it is the furthest removed from the Temple.

The sealed are said to be “servants of God” (Rev. [7:3](#)) and “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” perhaps indicating a unique dedication and obedience to God in the midst of the Tribulation on earth.

Rev. 7:3 - *Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.*

Isa. 41:8 - *But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham My friend*

Isa. 43:10 - *You are My witnesses,” says the LORD, “And My servant whom I have chosen*
God’s plan will never be thwarted! God chose Israel to be His witnesses – His servant – to share His truth

Isa. 48:1 - *Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth from the wellsprings of Judah; who swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness;*

Yes, Israel was called My servant by God. Note the comparison between Israel as God's servant in Isa. 48:1 and the Messiah as My Servant (Isa. 42:1 - *Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.*) The Messiah, "My Servant," is the Suffering Servant about which we read in Isa. 53!

Rev. 14:4-5 - *These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

Their ministry appears to be evangelistic in nature. Isaiah described a worldwide Jewish mission to the Gentiles.

Isa. 66:19-20, directly before the gathering of the Jews for the Millennial Kingdom, Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, speaks of the Jews declaring God's glory among the Gentiles.

The background to a proper understanding of the identity of the 144,000 during the Tribulation is that God had originally chosen the Jewish people, ethnic Israel, the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to be His witnesses. The Jewish people were God's redemptive tool during the OT. He chose them to share the truth about the one true God with the nations (Isa. 42:6b - *I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles; Isa. 43:10 - *You are My witnesses,* "says the LORD, *And My servant whom I have chosen.*) Biblical history documents for us that the Jewish people did not obey God in their witness role (i.e. Jonah. YET, God used Jonah in spite of Jonah...and all in Nineveh were redeemed!). God's plan is never thwarted. God will pick up with the nation of Israel during the Tribulation and use them as His witnesses!*

Rev. 14:4 - *These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.* During the Tribulation (time of Jacob's trouble), God is purging and preparing the nation of Israel for their Messiah – Jesus. The 144,000 are being used of God as His redemptive tool – as God originally intended. The 144,000 serve as the "firstfruits" – looking forward to the greater body of Jewish people who will be saved. Two thirds of the Jewish population will die during the Tribulation (Zech. 13:8-9); the one third remaining at the end of the Tribulation will be saved (Zech. 12:10). This explains Rom. 11:26 - *And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;*

I'm suggesting that the 144,000 are sealed in the beginning of the Tribulation. Perhaps they become believers after the Rapture before the signing of the peace covenant. Evidence of the sealing of the 144,000 at the beginning of the Tribulation is noted in the fruit of their labors as seen in the believers who were martyred in the fifth seal judgment.

How did the 144,000 survive the first seal judgments? Some believe that Israel will be protected under antichrist's peace treaty!?

The 144,000 along with the two witnesses will fulfill God's initial mandate to them.

AND, their evangelistic ministry will yield MUCH fruit

And, now we see their fruit when we read in v. 9...

After these things – here is a chronological link between the sealing of the 144,000 and the *great multitude*

John looks and beholds a...

great multitude which no one could number

Here is a second group who will be able to stand the time of God's wrath—the faithful who come out of the Great Tribulation (Rev. [7:14](#)). Like the saints under the fifth seal (Rev. [6:9-11](#)), the majority of these most likely die for their faith.

of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues

These are those from the Gentile nations. That the 144,000 of Revelation [7:4](#) cannot be symbolic of believers in general is seen by this verse. The 144,000 were from “all the tribes of the children of Israel” whereas these are from *all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*.

And this great multitude...

stood before the throne

The same throne introduced in Rev. 4. This multitude is in heaven, not on earth.

and before the Lamb

The Lamb is still in heaven in the midst of opening the seven seals.

clothed in white robes

Like the martyrs of the fifth seal (Rev. [6:9-11](#)), they will be clothed in white (Rev. [6:11](#)).

Like those martyrs, they have not yet been resurrected.

With palm branches in their hands

During the Feast of Tabernacles, the children of Israel were to take branches of palm trees, leafy trees (myrtle), and willows and rejoice before the Lord for seven days (Lev. 23:40). The children of Israel were to make booths/tabernacles/temporary dwellings in remembering their wilderness wanderings (Lev. 23:43) during which time God had provided everything they needed! The Feast of Tabernacles looks forward to the Millennial Kingdom. During the Millennial Kingdom, all nations will go up to Jerusalem each year to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16) to celebrate the King Messiah, Jesus, GOD, dwelling/tabernacling with them! Consider how the Jewish people were hailing Jesus during His triumphal entry into Jerusalem – hailing Him as King and *cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road* before Jesus (Matt. 21:8).

and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on “Lamb Selection Day,” He presented Himself as King in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah (Zec. [9:9](#)). The crowd laid palm branches under His path while crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matt. [21:9](#)). *Hosanna,*

an Aramaic word made up of the words “save” and “I pray,” originally meant “save, I pray.”

our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

God is *uniquely* the Savior. The Father spoke through Isaiah, *I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved* (Isa. [43:11](#)). Salvation belongs to the Father *and the Son* because the Son provided salvation through redemption (Rev. [5:9](#)) through His death on the cross.

Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?’¹⁴ And I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ So he said to me, ‘These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’
These are new arrivals in heaven. These were not among the redeemed souls we saw worshipping God in Rev. 5 when the Lamb took the scroll. Nor are these the redeemed we saw at the unloosing of the fifth seal.

The ones who come out – present participle which gives the lit. meaning, *continually coming out*. It appears that this great multitude is the result of ongoing persecution resulting in martyrdom (although the text does not explicitly indicate martyrdom).

The great tribulation – *great* is an adjective which speaks to a time of intense tribulation about which Jesus spoke (Matt. 24:21).

Washed their robes – spiritual cleansing (Eze. 36:25 - *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols*)

Made them white in the blood of the Lamb – [Isa. 1:18](#) – ‘*Come now, and let us reason together,*’ says the LORD, ‘*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*’ Forgiveness of sin!

Therefore – because their sins are forgiven
they are before the throne of God, - intimacy with God!
and serve Him day and night in His temple –

serve – to perform worshipful service

day and night – continually serving in God’s Temple without the physical limitations experienced by priests on earth.

And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them – *dwell* – lit. means to *live or camp in a tent*. God promised that He would dwell with His people ([Ex. 25:8](#) - *let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them*). See I Sam. 4:4; John 1:14.

They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat – this protection and fellowship will be in contrast to what they experienced during the Tribulation.

for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water – Jesus will nurture and sustain these saints, supplying and satisfying all their needs. Cross reference John 7:37-38)

and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes – might they have shed many tears during their affliction in the Tribulation? In the Eternal State (Rev. 21:4), there will be no tears.

What a picture of God’s divine grace and mercy in the midst of His wrath and judgment!
The glory of God in salvation through judgment!

NOTE: Those who are to be sealed are one of three groups who survive this horrific time of judgment. Two of the groups are described in this chapter: the 144,000 and the great multitude. The third group: those who come to faith during the Tribulation and survive. After Jesus’ Second Coming, the survivors who are believers will enter the Millennial Kingdom in natural bodies and procreate.

During the time of the Tribulation, it appears there will be three categories of people:

1. Those who are sealed and protected by God for special ministry (Rev. [7:4-8](#); [14:1](#)).
2. Those who accept the mark of the beast (Rev. [13:16-18](#)) and are doomed (Rev. [14:9-10](#)).
3. Those who refuse the mark of the beast, many of whom are martyred (Rev. [20:4](#)).

In the eternal state, God’s name will be on the foreheads of all the faithful (Rev. [22:4](#) cf. Rev. [3:12](#)).

QUESTIONS

Are the Bible study tools we’ve been discussing helping you to understand the book of Revelation? How?

Do you believe that the “144,000” are literally 144,000? Why?

Do you believe that the “144,000” are Jewish believers? Why?

Have you been utilizing your Bible timeline chart? Do you have questions?

What questions are you coming away with following Rev. 7?

HOMEWORK

Re-read the handout with the Bible references.

Review the chart.

Format questions for the last week of this semester.