

The Redeemed Of The Tribulation

(Revelation 7:1-17)

Rev. 7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out 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 or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

9 *After these things* I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

"Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying,

"Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." 13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?" 14 And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. 16 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst

anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Intro: We concluded last Sunday with the opening of the sixth seal judgment, which resulted in devastating physical disturbances on earth and in the heavens. The seventh seal, which introduces the 7 Trumpet judgments will not be opened until chapter 8. As we turn to chapter 7, the narrative sequence of judgment is interrupted by the first of four *literary parenthesis*, which provide the reader with parenthetical information. The severity of God’s judgment released by the sixth seal would suggest that no one could or would be saved. This prompted the question contained in the closing words of verse 17, “Who is able to stand?” This interlude in chapter 7 answers this important question, and demonstrates that even in the midst of judgment, God’s mercy is still available to anyone who will turn to Him in faith.

Chapter 7 focuses on two separate groups of people who will be saved during the Tribulation period. The first group is comprised of 144,000 Jews who are sealed and sent out to evangelize (vv. 1-8). The second group depicts the salvation of a great multitude from all nations who, although saved spiritually, are martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 9-17). The sealing and sending out of the 144,000 Jews in verses 1-8 takes place on earth. The salvation of the great multitude from every nation depicts Gentiles and Jews, who having been martyred for their faith, end up glorified in heaven (vv. 9-17).

Film clip: The Mission Field

I. Sealing Of The 144,000 Jews (7:1-8)

A. Four angels withholding judgment (vv. 1-3)

John next sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, who are commanded to temporarily suspend judgment on the earth, until the bond servants of God are sealed. The four angels are positioned at the four quadrants of the compass, north, south, east, and west. They are commanded to hold back or restrain the four winds of the earth, which are pictured as dispensing divine judgment on the earth. The “wind” is often used in Scripture as a symbol of God’s providential dealings, as in the case of Job (1:19), and in judgment (Jer. 49:36; 51:1; 2 Sam. 22:11).

We learn in Revelation 14:4 that these 144,000 Jewish evangelists are those “who are purchased from among men (redeemed) as the first fruits to God and to the Lamb.” This implies that these Jewish believers are saved and sealed at the beginning of the Tribulation. This is a good example of how the information provided in these *interludes* can flash backwards, forwards, or simply provide additional information on what is taking place in the immediate context.

In verse 2 John saw a fifth angel coming forth from the east (from the rising of the sun), crying out with a loud voice to the four angels saying, v. 3 “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads.” The seal guarantees that these Jewish evangelists will be protected physical and spiritually while they serve God on earth during this awful time. They are next seen in chapter 14:1-5 as standing victoriously with the Lamb on Mount Zion at the end of the Tribulation.

The seal is stated to be applied on the forehead, and in 14:1 is identified as comprising His (Christ’s) name, and the name of His Father written on these faithful witnesses’ foreheads. The seal may be a reference to the seal in Ezekiel 9:4-7 that the prophet Ezekiel saw God’s messenger apply to the foreheads of faithful Jews living in Jerusalem, who deplored the faithless idolatry practiced by the Jews in that day. Professor Alan Johnson explains: “Those so marked were the faithful and true servants of God in contrast to the professed but false servants who had abandoned him. The sealed would be spared the divine slaughtering of the rebellious inhabitants of the city. Interestingly, the seal or “mark” (*taw*) in the Phoenician script looked like a cross . . . and was later adopted by early Jewish Christians as a symbol of their faith in Jesus” (Alan Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, 478-79).

B. Identity of those sealed (vv. 4-8)

In spite of the clear teaching of Scripture, that the 144,000 in this passage are Jews representing the 12 tribes of Israel, many commentators reject this view and promote some of the most ridiculous interpretations imaginable.

1. The sealed are not Christians in the Church. As noted repeatedly, all the redeemed comprising the Body of Christ have been Raptured to

heaven at the opening of chapter 4. John sees the Church represented by the 24 elders surrounding the throne of God and of the Lamb.

2. The sealed are not the Seventh-Day Adventists. Proponents of this view believe that these 144,000 are members of their church who are found observing the Jewish Sabbath (held on Saturday), when the Lord Jesus returns.
3. The sealed are not the Jehovah Witnesses. JW's believe that the 144,000 are the faithful elect, who strive by their good works to be one of these so-called "elect."
4. The sealed are not so-called British "Anglo-Israelis." These folks contend that the ten tribes of northern Israel, once dispersed following the Assyrian captivity in 722 B.C. became the lost tribes of Israel that wandered through Europe, and eventually settled in the British Isles.

Let me just say, the 12 Tribes of Israel are not lost to God. When this time of sealing and sending out of these 144,000 faithful Jewish evangelists comes, God in His sovereign plan will call forth 12,000 Jews from each of the Tribes listed here.

Based on the clear, plain meaning of the text, the 144,000 are identified as Jews comprised of 12,000 Jews from the 12 tribes identified here. The 12 Tribes of the sons of Israel are listed in verse 5-8:

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

This list of 12 Tribes is not without its problems. As Dr. Charles Ryrie points out, there are three problems in the list as it is found in this text. He writes:

"The first is the inclusion of Levi among the twelve tribes. Normally

Levi, being the priestly tribe, was considered to have no inheritance among the twelve tribes. Perhaps he is included here because the priestly functions ceased with the coming of Christ.

The second is the mention of Joseph instead of Ephraim. Normally Manasseh and Ephraim are both mentioned since they both received an equal portion of territory along with the rest of the tribes. Of course, a double number is counted in this list, but under the names of Joseph and Manasseh rather than Ephraim and Manasseh.

The third problem concerns the omission of Dan from this list. . . . The usual reason given for this omission is that Dan was guilty of idolatry on many occasions (Lev. 24:11; Judges 18:1-2, 30-31; 1 Kings 12:28). . . . Whatever the reason for Dan's omission from the tribes from which 144,000 elect will come, this is not the end of God's dealings with that tribe. The Danites will receive a portion of the land during the millennial kingdom. Indeed, in Ezekiel 48:1 Dan heads the list of the tribes as the inheritance is divided to them (cf. also v. 32). So the exclusion of Revelation is not permanent, for the gifts and calling of God with regard to his people, including Dan are without repentance" (*Revelation*, 51-52).

The impact that these 144,000 Spirit-filled Jews will have on the people going through the Tribulation is reflected in the salvation of the great multitude described next in verses 9-17.

II. Salvation Of A Great Multitude (7:9-17)

A. Identity of the multitude (vv. 9-12)

Verse 9, which open with the words, "***After these things,***" introduces a new vision. 9 "John looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands"

John's initial vision of the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists at the beginning of the Tribulation, which takes place on earth, is replaced by a second vision that moves him to the end of the Tribulation, where he sees an innumerable multitude in heaven who have been saved through the Tribulation.

While this great multitude of redeemed Tribulation saints is made-up of people from every nation, all tribes, peoples, and tongues, it must certainly include redeemed Jews as well. Dr. Ryrie maintains that the mention of “tribes” is a direct reference to redeemed Jews from all 12 Tribes of Israel.

John sees this innumerable company of Tribulation saints standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, symbolizing their being covered with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. They have palm branches in their hands, which symbolize rejoicing and victory, and they continually offer up praise to God and to the Lamb. The content of their perpetual praise is recorded in verses 10-12,

v. 10 “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying,

“Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

As the Tribulation saints ascribe perpetual praise and worship and thanksgiving to God and to the Lamb for their salvation, they are joined by all the angels, the twenty-four elders (representing the church saints), and the four living creatures.

B. Questioned posed to John by one of the 24 Elders (vv. 13-14)

13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?” 14 And I said to him, “My lord, you know.”

One of the 24 Elders asked John who this great company clothed in white robes were, and where they came from. John responded, surely “my lord, you know.”

The elder responded in verse 14 that, “These are the martyrs who come out of the Great Tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” This vast company of Tribulation saints had received Christ by faith, and because of this God imputed the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ, to their accounts, symbolized by white robes.

C. Their position and privilege (vv. 15-17)

15 “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. 16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

This innumerable company of believers who come out of the Great Tribulation are granted access to the throne of God, and they will serve Him day and night in His temple. The fact that these believers will serve God day and night implies that the constraints of this earthly life have been lifted. In their glorified state men will no longer have a need to rest or sleep.

Notice their privileged rewards in verse 16 and 17,

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

The physical sufferings associated with life on planet earth will be nothing in comparison with the blessed privilege of being shepherded by the Lamb, who shall guide all of us to springs of the water of life, and God Himself shall wipe every tear away from our eyes.

Conclusion: The most important thought to take away from this morning’s message is this: **“Even In The Midst Of Judgment, God Is Merciful!”**

Perhaps you’re here this morning and you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior from sin and death. Judgment will come, but thank God there is still time for you to come to the Savior. Accept Christ as I close in prayer, so that you will not have to face the coming Tribulation. As I pray, speak to God in the quietness of your own heart, and invite Christ to come in to your heart and life, and He will.

Closing prayer — followed by the **Closing Song: *No Longer Slaves***

A fellow graduate from Dallas Theological Seminary, J. Hampton Keathley III, provides this helpful insight to the unfolding of the Book of Revelation:

“A fundamental factor in this book, too often passed over by commentators, is of great help in understanding these chapters when it is recognized. That is, many scenes of this book are located in heaven, while the judgments themselves take place on this earth; and the scenes in heaven always precede the earthly events to which they are attached. Thus, the messages to the seven churches are preceded by a vision of the ascended Lord. The opening of the six seals in chapter 6 is preceded by a vision of the Lamb in heaven, who alone is found worthy to open the book (chs. 4; 5). The judgments accompanying the blowing of the seven trumpets are preceded by a heavenly scene extending from 7:1 to 8:5. The dreadful events of chapters 11; 12; and 13 are again preceded by a heavenly scene of instructions to John. The devastations accompanying the seven plagues (chs. 15; 16) are preceded by the announcements of the angels and the showing of “the temple ... in heaven.” And, after the final judgment of the Great White Throne in chapter 20, the book concludes with a picture of the heavenly home of the redeemed” (J. Hampton Keathley, III, downloaded from his series on *Revelation*, available at Bible.org).