

The Sealed and the Saints

Revelation 7:1-17

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Rev 7:1-17 NKJV] 1 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?" 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. 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."

ILLUSTRATION

This week, I read a national weather service article on the anatomy of a hurricane. "

11:37



The size of the eye can vary but is generally 20–40 miles (32–64 km) across.

Surrounding the eye is the eyewall, which is the area of strongest winds, intense thunderstorms, and heavy rain. Imagine experiencing a hurricane: you withstand the first rotation of the eyewall, and the eye passes over. It's sunny, the winds are calm, and birds are in the air; it seems the storm has passed. Then the eyewall approaches from the opposite direction, and the chaos starts all over again.

APPLICATION

Chapter 7 is what's referred to as a parenthetical insert between the 6th and seventh seals. It's a bit of an aside describing particular attributes of the people of God who are caught up in this last period. It's a period of off stillness and quiet as God sets aside his servants and prepares the word for round two of the hurricane of His wrath.

- John records what many believe to be a break that separates the first half of the tribulation period from the second. Many believe that before that day of the Lord, as described in the 6th seal, is rolled out, God places a protective mark on a certain group of Jewish believers and divinely protects them against the wrath that will now devastate humanity.

- Chapter seven deals with two groups of people that are specific to the tribulation period:
 - The first is what we call "The Sealed." 144,000 blood-born Jews are divinely selected and protected for a special mission during the tribulation.
 - The second group is what we'll call "The Saints." These are the followers of Christ that come to faith during the tribulation period. From chapter 14, we seem to have the indication that the martyred saints from the tribulation period came to faith partially as a result of the 144,000 Jews coming first.

THE SETTING

[Rev 7:1-17 NKJV] 1 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.

Here we see three sets of four:

- Four angels
- Four corners of the earth
- Four winds

This very well could indicate an angelic force controls the weather patterns and wind circulation within the earth.

NOTICE, THE AUTHORITY GRANTED TO ANGELS! These Are Angelic Beings of a Completely Different Order From those we have been hearing about thus far.

- There are Rankings of Angels: There are Specific Angels Assigned to Nations. There are Specific Angels Assigned to Judgment. There are Specific Angels Assigned to Announcements. There are Specific Angels Assigned to Spiritual Warfare. There are Specific Angels Assigned to The People of God.
- Zechariah sees a vision of four chariots. He is told, "[Zec 6:5 NKJV] **5 And the angel answered and said to me, "These are four spirits (winds) of heaven, who go out from their station before the Lord of all the earth.**

Many have mocked the Bible for describing the earth with "four corners" and "four winds."

- First, this could be language describing the totality of the earth.

- The corresponding Hebrew word for corner - Means "the extremities." Or we could say, "to the ends of the earth."
- Second, this could be a way of John describing north, south, east, and west.
 - The Greek word "corner" is where we get our English word "quadrants or divisions." You can't have any idea of north, south, east and west without understanding this term.
- **Four winds** - Wind is simply the flow of air molecules from an area of low pressure to high pressure based on the uneven heating of the world from the sun. **Science today has identified four main cells** of air, or bands of atmospheric circulation, that create most of the major global wind patterns.

Symbolically, the old testament often uses the four winds as a reference to God's divine judgment.

- I believe it's safe to say that this image John sees is both an eerie stillness of physical disturbances and divine judgment. There is a momentary "calm before the storm."
- Literally, the Earth is stale and still as the angelic beings create a "global calm."
- It's as if God is saying, "No more until I seal my remnant." It's almost like one final breath is given before the final storm is unleashed.

1 The Sealed Remnant

A VERY IMPORTANT WORD TO REMEMBER AS WE STUDY CHAPTER SEVEN IS "REMNANT."

Remnant - that which remains

When we speak of a remnant, we refer to a biblical precedent in which God always has a group of people out of those He has chosen that stay true and loyal to Him regardless of what's going on in the world.

GENESIS 17:7 - "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you."

- Noah and his family were a remnant coming out of the condemned world.
- After the Babylonian captivity, God sent a remnant of His people back to Israel to reestablish His temple in that chosen region.
 - **[Ezr 9:8 NKJV] 8 "And now for a little while grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and give us a measure of revival in our bondage.**
- During the time of Elisha, when the people of God were banding the truth and turning to Baal, God still maintained a remnant of His people. Paul discusses this in Romans 11:
 - **[Rom 11:2-5 NKJV] 2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, 3 "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life"? 4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.**
- Paul goes on to describe that God will NEVER cast away His people Israel with whom he made an everlasting covenant. There will always be a remnant that God maintains until the very end.
 - Paul himself was evidence of this remnant. Paul was a Jew or the tribe of Benjamin, and God, in His grace, chose Paul to be part of the remnant of Jews who would trust in Christ in this age of grace and of the Gentiles.
- God's faithfulness to His people will not stop. Even in the tribulation period, God will establish another remnant of Jews, 144,000 specifically, who will ultimately be part of inheriting Christ's physical kingdom when he comes to reign, therefore fulfilling every promise he made to Abraham and David.

A. THEY ARE DIVINELY SELECTED

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.

Here we see the **seal of God** and the **servants of God**:

- The truth of this passage is that no one can really know who this angel is and what the seal is, but we do see some familiar language and a familiar concept when it comes to God sealing certain individuals.
 - In Ezekiel, God sealed the remnant of Israel with ink marks on their foreheads.
 - **[Eze 9:4 NKJV] 4 and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."**
 - In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit seals all those who trust Christ. God has put his mark on us that proclaims to the spiritual realm that we belong to Him.
- **Ephesians 1:13 & 4:30 tell us that we are sealed with the Spirit of promise until the day of redemption.**
- A seal (the mark of authority) would have identified these individuals as chosen by God.
- God chose these to be undefiled.
 - The forehead is a place of identification because it is one of the most visible places on the body. Also, in Jewish thought, it is indicative of the mind, thoughts, and intentions.
 - In Deut. 6, God commanded that his commandments be bound and worn on the hands and on the forehead (between the eyes) to be a constant reminder.
 - God seals these on the forehead as a means of ensuring their minds will not be defiled by the lies and deception of the antichrist.

B. THEY ARE DIVINELY PROTECTED

Divine protection

Concerning this divine election, notice God's protective heart for those who are His. He will not let one ounce of his judgment touch his elect.

- We saw this in Egypt when the angel of death came. He passed over all those with the blood of a lamb over their doorpost.
- We see this in what Christ has accomplished for us. We have passed from judgment into life by the blood of Christ.
- This is what we will see in this last period. God will divinely protect these that are sealed to bring the gospel.
- This seal seems to indicate that they are now untouchable by the antichrist and the plaques that will be poured out on the earth.

Revelation 9 describes a bizarre scene. Hell, the bottomless pit, opens up and empties out creatures that roam the Earth to torment the rebels who remain. Chapter 9:4 speaks to these demonic beings, “They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Notice the group who these tormentors can’t touch... the 144,000 Jewish servants of God from Revelation 7.

John Phillips paints a picture of the protection God provides. He writes,

“The concentration camps and torture chambers of the Beast’s fearful inquisition will leave them unscathed. The fire will not kindle upon them, nor the smell of smoke be on their garments... The secret police will have dossiers as thick as prison walls, but they will be unable to harm them. The seal of God rests upon them, and they are saved and secured, come what may. They will be living proof to the devil that not only is his power strictly limited by divine decree, but in the end he cannot win.”

If we take a step away from the prophetic for a moment and recognize that we have the same God who has sealed us by His Holy Spirit today, this ought to give us great confidence that the Lord can keep us in His perfect will while we are here on this earth.

- I believe this brings some encouraging application. You are untouchable. Anything that happens to us is first filtered through the hand and love of God.

C. THEY ARE OF JEWISH ORIGIN

Well, verse 4 makes it pretty obvious. Many believe these 144,00 represent the church on earth during the tribulation period. There are several religious groups that believe they are the 144,000. The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the 7th day Adventists are two of those groups.

- *This was highly problematic for the Jehovah’s Witnesses when their number exceeded 144,000 people! They have since changed their minds multiple times about*

how and who makes it into the 144,000 people who get to reign and live with Christ forever.

We could choose a better way to interpret this passage. Just believe what it says! I don't see any good reason to believe that they are anyone other than who the Bible says they are. The book of Revelation never has a problem identifying the church, the tribulation saints, and the Jews very clearly. The 144,000 who are sealed carry a very different designation and description than the multitude of gentile believers that come out of the tribulation period. Likewise, the tribulation saints have a different designation and description than the church that is raptured prior to the tribulation period. Regarding the 144,000, We learn from this chapter as well as chapter 14:

- **They have tribal designations - They are called from among the tribes.**
- **They are virgin men**
- **They are the beginning of a much larger harvest**
- **They have a special song that no one can learn except them.**

THE TRIBAL ORIGINS

Here he lists the tribal designations. 12 tribes @ 12,000 men per tribe = 144,000 men.

I won't go over all the tribes, but notice a couple of interesting things. In the Old Testament, there are several ways we see the twelve tribes designated. In this reading, two specific tribes have been removed and replaced with their more faithful counterparts.

- The tribe of Dan was taken out, most likely because they were responsible for introducing idolatry and high places into the nation of Israel. They were also the tribe that was not content with their allotment of land, and by the time of Solomon, had pretty much assimilated into their surrounding people groups. The tribe of Levi replaces the tribe of Dan.
- The tribe of Ephraim is replaced with his father Joseph most likely again due to its involvement in idolatry as well – Hosea 4:17.
 - **[Hos 4:17 NET] 17 Ephraim has attached himself to idols; Do not go near him!**

Some might point out, "haven't the tribes disintegrated after the captivity? Records stopped, and people groups intermarried. How is anyone supposed to know who's of what tribe?"

- Aren't you glad God keeps his own records? The bloodlines of each tribe have not been lost on the Lord. There are still people whose ancestry goes back to each tribe.

2 The Tribulation Saints

A. THEIR MAKEUP

Verses 9-17 now describe the other side of God's people during the tribulation period. First, we have the Jewish remnant, but we also see many Gentile believers who both choose Christ, then pay the ultimate price with their lives for following Christ.

[Rev 7:9 NKJV] 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,

First, notice their makeup:

- They are innumerable. Later, John will describe a demonic army that consists of 200,000,000. But when John sees the saints coming from the tribulation period, he can't put a number on them.

Consider some stats regarding the church in our age:

- Did you know that everywhere in the world today, apart from North America and Europe, Christianity and the Church are experiencing unprecedented growth? Not since the book of Acts has the Church grown at such a pace.
 - In 1900 Korea had no Protestant church. Today, there're 7000 churches just in the city of Seoul.
 - At the end of the 19th century the southern portion of Africa was 3% Christian. Today the population is 63% Christian. African churches add 34,000 members daily.
 - It's estimated that in China today, Jesus has more disciples than the Communist party has members. Very soon, more Christians will live in China than in any other country on Earth. It's amazing what's going on...
 - In India 14 million untouchables are now Christians.

- In Islamic Indonesia, the percentage of Christians has grown so high (somewhere around 15%) that the Muslim government refuses to publish the statistics. Even in the traditional Muslim world, more people are converting to Christianity than ever in history.
- Across the planet the Church is growing by an estimated 80,000 members per day. We start approximately 3500 churches every week.
- Yet understand, the largest and most sweeping spiritual awakening is still future. And ironically, it won't occur until the Church is raptured off the Earth. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus predicted, ***"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."***

After the rapture, an innumerable number of people will most likely recognize they were wrong and turn to Christ. After the antichrist comes, those who have rejected Christ will receive a strong illusion and believe the lie, but there will be countless who have not heard the gospel. Between the 144,000 witnesses, the two witnesses, and an angel that flies throughout the entire earth proclaiming the gospel, there will be more people that come to Christ in a few years than in most of Christian history combined.

Also notice their racial makeup:

- There will not be a nation, tribe, or language that will be excluded from the kingdom. By the end, there will be no unreached people groups.
- Heaven will be a beautifully diverse place!
- Despite their skin's various colors, every person will wear the same colored robe... white of course, representing Jesus's righteousness. It's the only white privilege that actually matters... are you covered in the righteousness of Christ.

But while there will be a great winning of souls, the final harvest, there will also be a greater price to pay for following Jesus.

- During that time, no one will be focused on new church-building projects. No one will be producing Christian music or making Christian clothing. No, to reject the antichrist and embrace the authority of Jesus in that time will be a death sentence.

B. THEIR MELODY

[Rev 7:10-12 NKJV] 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

worshipped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

- The saints sing a song, and the angels respond, as in Chapter 5.
- The song differs a bit from the song in chapter 5.
- I love the term Amen! It means, "Let it be so." The hosts of heaven hear this song from these saints, and they agree! They resound with a loud "Amen!"
- Hey, if you want to let out an Amen in church, I think heaven would be in accordance with that. Shame on us if we never expressed any excitement or agreement with God's word.
- It's interesting that whenever we see worship in heaven, it seems to be an emotional experience.
- Look at verse 10 – they were crying out. They weren't mumbling under their breath or singing around a yawn. When they saw their savior, they cried out with a loud voice!
- I think sometimes we get unnecessarily inhibited in our worship. Of course, we want to do everything decently and in order for the edification of everyone, but that doesn't mean it has to be boring or unemotional. Why do you think God created us with passion and emotion, to worship Him!
- If you want to get passionate about your worship and prayer, there is no better place to do it than right here.

C. THEIR MINISTRY

[Rev 7:13-17 NKJV] 13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

While John is taking this all in, it doesn't register that he should ask about what he is seeing, but the details were important so the elder speaks up for our sake.

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."

As we look at the special and unique rewards and placement of these saints, we begin to see the distinction between the saints that come from the tribulation and the saints prior to the tribulation.

The church today is saved from the tribulation | The saints here come out of the tribulation

The church today will rule and reign with Christ | The saints here serve God day and night in the temple

Washed white in the blood: Oxymoron

BIBLE PASSAGE

[Isa 1:18 KJV] 18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

APPLICATION

- Verse 16 – imagine spending seven years of your life suffering from hunger, enduring the scorching heat of the sun on an unprotected earth. You’ve starved and been dehydrated; you’ve seen everything and everyone dear to you be snatched away. You’ve been beaten, imprisoned, and eventually killed.
- These promises would be incredibly fulfilling. No more hunger, no more tears, no more sorrow, no more suffering. You will be led to everlasting fulfillment by Jesus Himself. No wonder they worship!