

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 7

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. ²Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

¹¹And 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, ¹²saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

¹⁴And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." [ESV]

Notes

Revelation 7:1

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

“**after this**” – (literally, **after these things**) This is from the Greek words *meta tauta*, which we talked about at the beginning of chapter four. The events described in this chapter occur after the things of the previous chapter. So, these events occur after the first six seal judgments. This chapter forms a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seal judgments. It features the sealing of the 144,000 and gives us a glimpse of their martyred converts. But, it starts off with a description of a world-wide calm of the winds.

“**four corners of the earth**” – The word translated “**corners**” is *gōnia*, which literally refers to “an angle or a corner” but can also mean “a quadrant.” This is most likely a reference to the four points of a compass (North, South, East, and West).

“**four winds of the earth**” – According to the Greeks and Romans, the winds were arranged under four classes – Zephyrus (West), Boreas (North), Notus (South), and Eurus (East). During the time described in this verse there will be no winds blowing on the earth. Therefore there will be no breeze or rustling of leaves in the trees, no weather in the form of clouds, rain, or snow, no waves on the ocean, just an eerie stillness. This, in a most literal sense, is the proverbial “calm before the storm.”

“**holding**” – is from the Greek word *krateō*, meaning “to use strength.” The implication is that the winds are struggling to break forth and are being held back by the great strength of these four angels.

Revelation 7:2

²Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,

“**another angel**” – The word translated “**another**” is *allos*, meaning “another of the same kind;” therefore, this can not be Christ as some have speculated. This is simply “another angel.”

“**seal of the living God**” – The word “**seal**” is the same as used to refer to the seven seals on the scroll. It implies ownership and it is of the “living God,” not of any idol or false religion. This seal is in contrast to the “mark of the beast” that unbelievers will later receive (**Revelation 13:18-18**).

“**the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea**” – These angels will be involved in the judgments yet to come. They will cause great harm to the earth.

Revelation 7:3

³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

“**Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until ...**” – This implies that after the sealing of the 144,000, the four angels **will** harm the earth, the sea, and the trees (see the first three trumpet judgments **Revelation 8:7-11**).

“**until we have sealed the servants of our God**” – This seal may be a physical mark but it may not. There is an Old Testament example of this “marking” of the faithful ones in **Ezekiel 9:1-11** where, in

Ezekiel's vision, a man (probably an angel) went through the city of Jerusalem putting a "mark" (meaning a mark or signature like a seal contains) on the foreheads of those who mourned over the abominable things being done in the Temple. Meanwhile other angels with battleaxes went through the city slaying all who did not have the mark.

Later in Revelation we will see that the False Prophet will require men to receive a mark in their forehead or right hand in order to buy and sell (**Revelation 13:1-18**). This may be a reaction or imitation of the mark that seals the 144,000 evangelists.

"**servants**" – This is translated from the word *doulos*, which refers to "a slave, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another, his will being altogether consumed in the will of the other." These who are sealed, therefore, are those who are saved at this point in the chronology of the Tribulation. Today, we who are saved, are sealed with and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a privilege that the Tribulation saints will not have. Like the Old Testament saints, those who are saved during the Tribulation will not be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Revelation 7:4

⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

"**144,000**" – This is the second largest specific number in the New Testament which is made up of 12 thousand from each of 12 tribes of the children of Israel. These are identified by some to represent the church, which they claim is on the earth during the Tribulation.

"They cite several New Testament passages that allegedly identify the church as Israel to support that interpretation. But the identification of Israel with the church in those passages is tenuous and disputed. Thus, they can offer no support for such an identification in the present passage." [John MacArthur]

"No clear-cut example of the church being called 'Israel' exists in the New Testament or in ancient church writings until A.D. 160. ... This fact is crippling to any attempt to identify Israel as the church in **Revelation 7:4**" [Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*]

These 144,000 are further described in chapter 14.

Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ... It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. (**Revelation 14:1, 4, 5**) [ESV]

Revelation 7:5-8

⁵12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

The first question that we have to ask ourselves is whether these numbers are to be taken as literal or as symbolic. Some say that since the surrounding text is all about symbols (they interpret angels,

winds, four corners of the earth, etc. as symbolic) then these numbers must also be taken as symbolic. This argument is most often proffered by those who believe that the church will be present on earth during the Tribulation. There is no reason, however, not to take these numbers as literal (along with the angels, winds, and four quadrants of the earth) especially since the 144,000 is divided up into 12,000 from each of 12 tribes.

The fact that there are 12,000 selected from each of the 12 tribes of Israel further indicates that these are not the church but are, in fact, physical descendants of Israel. The fact that there are exactly 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes indicates God's sovereign selection (election) of these 144,000 rather than random human choice or symbolism.

This is the only listing of the 12 tribes of Israel in the New Testament. There are at least nineteen different ways of listing the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament and there is no standard way of listing them.

“In the Old Testament lists, sometimes the order of birth is followed (**Genesis 29:32 – 35:18**). At other times, it is the order of Jacob's blessing them (**Genesis 49:3-27**), the order of encampment (**Numbers 2:3-31**), the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan (**Numbers 26:4-51**), the order of blessing and cursing (**Deuteronomy 33:6-25**), the order of “the princes” (**Numbers 1:5-15**), the order of inheritance (**Joshua 13:7 – 22:34**), the order by the wives and concubines (**1 Chronicles 2:1 – 8:40**), and the order of the gates of the city (**Ezekiel 48:31-34**). [Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*]

The twelve sons of Israel (in birth order) are:

1 – Reuben	4 – Judah	7 – Gad	10 - Zebulun
2 – Simeon	5 – Dan	8 – Asher	11 - Joseph
3 – Levi	6 – Naphtali	9 – Issachar	12 – Benjamin

The sons of Joseph are Ephraim and Manasseh

The list here in **Revelation 7:5-8**, however, excludes Dan (probably because of their penchant for idolatry (see **Deuteronomy 29:18-21**) and includes Manasseh who was one of the two sons of Joseph.

“This critical passage reinforces the biblical truth that God is not through with the nation of Israel (cf. **Romans 9-11**). Though Israel failed in its mission to be a witness nation in the Old Testament, that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish people will come the greatest missionary force the world has ever known. The result of their effort will be a redeemed Israel, as promised by God, and innumerable redeemed Gentiles.” [John MacArthur]

Revelation 7:9-12

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And 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, ¹²saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

“**after this**” – (literally, **after these things**) This once again indicates that the following vision is separate from the previous vision and occurs at a point in time after the sealing of the 144,000. It appears that John is now seeing all of the redeemed from the Great Tribulation (2nd half of Daniel’s 70th week) as explained by one of the elders in verses 13 & 14. These are apparently the ones saved as a result of the testimony of the 144,000 who are God’s witnesses during this time. It is apparent that these are not the same as the 144,000 because these are, “**of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**” whereas the 144,000 are all sons of Israel. This, perhaps, is another fulfillment (in addition to Christ, Himself) of the promise God made to Abraham:

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, **and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**" (**Genesis 12:1-3**) [ESV]

This also appears to be the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel which is often quoted by charismatics of our day and misapplied to the church age. Notice particularly that Joel says “**your sons and your daughters**” in a message given to Jews.

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; **your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.** Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls. (**Joel 2:28-32**) [ESV]

“**from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages**” – This appears to be the fulfillment of Jesus’ message to his disciples when asked about the signs of His coming and of the end of the age:

And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (**Matthew 24:14**) [ESV]

This prophesy indicates that all nations must hear the gospel message before Christ returns and since this innumerable multitude that John is seeing comes from all nations, this vision must be a picture of all the tribulation saints towards the end of the Great Tribulation.

“**clothed in white robes**” – This is the same description (*stolas leukas*) of the clothing worn by the martyrs of the previous chapter. It is possible, therefore, that these are also martyrs. But whether martyrs or not, they are ones who have died during the Great Tribulation.

“**palm branches in their hands**” – The palm branches are symbols of victory, celebration, deliverance, and joy.

“Branches of the palm-tree were carried by the victors in the athletic contests of Greece and Rome, and in triumphal processions. The palm-tree - straight, elevated, majestic - was an appropriate emblem of triumph. The portion of it which was borne in victory was the long leaf which shoots out from the top of the tree.” [*Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible*]

“Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” – This seven-fold doxology of praise to God is similar to that proclaimed to the Lamb in **Revelation 5:12** with one exception. To the Lamb was ascribed “riches” whereas to God is ascribed “thanksgiving.”

Revelation 7:13, 14

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

¹⁴And I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“Then one of the elders addressed me, saying” – We have shown that the elders represent the church (see notes on **Revelation 4:4**). The multitudes standing here before the throne must be separate and distinct from the church since they are introduced by the elder.

“These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.” – Literally, “these are the ones coming out of the tribulation, the great one.” The verb “coming out” is a present participle indicating that they are in the process of coming out of the great tribulation. It depicts a prolonged process, so this group keeps growing as redeemed people keep dying during the Tribulation. Hence, this scene must be taking place during the 2nd half of Daniel’s 70th week (the Great Tribulation), perhaps toward the very end. Also, note that since the form of this verb signifies prolonged action, this group cannot represent the raptured church since the rapture occurs in an instant for the entire church.

Also, remember the promise given to the faithful church of Philadelphia:

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.
(Revelation 3:10) [ESV]

The faithful believers will be kept out of the hour (time) of trial (the tribulation period); therefore, they never were in it. Whereas the innumerable multitude described in Revelation chapter 7 are coming out of the Great Tribulation indicating that they were in the Great Tribulation to begin with.

Revelation 7:15

¹⁵Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

“serve Him day and night in his temple.” – These who are saved out of the Tribulation will have a place of service in the temple. The word “serve” is a form of the Greek word *latreuō*, which is often used to describe priestly service. Thus they are performing a “spiritual service of worship” as **Romans 12:1** describes it. Also, notice from **Revelation 21:22** that there will be no temple in the eternal state nor is there day or night there, so this current verse must be describing their service during the millennial kingdom.

Revelation 7:16, 17

¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.” – This apparently is an allusion to some of the things that they have suffered during the tribulation. As a result of refusing the mark of the beast they suffered hunger and thirst, and as a result of the 4th trumpet judgment they suffered from extreme heat from the sun.

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