

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:15-17 NIV

Church on the Brink The Message of Revelation-Part 5

Introduction: The focus of attention today will be Chapter 7, the next scene of John's vision, which began in Chapter 4.

There are some certainties that have been established so far:

- ✓ The future for John's readers is in fact, looking bleak, but an all-seeing and all-knowing God who still sits on the throne in heaven and the slain but resurrected Lamb of God have prevailed over sin and hold the future in their hands and will enable their followers to overcome.
- ✓ Chapter 6 revealed the cycle of creation (conquests, war/bloodshed, famine, and death) which has always been a reality, marked John's day and will certainly be heightened in the last days.
- ✓ Martyrdom as well is a reality in the fallen world and would escalate in John's day as well as in the end.
- ✓ The 6th seal, however, declares boldly that God will avenge the enemies of His people and pour out His wrath on evil humanity.
- ✓ The martyrs wonder how long?
- ✓ The wrath of the Lamb will cause men to hide-believers need not hid from Him.

Text Again:

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:15-17 NIV

- Who can stand?
- Chapter 7-(in 2 sections) is an attempt to answer that question

(NOTE): This chapter is variously interpreted

I. The Sealing of God's Servants (7:1-8)

A. Impending Judgment

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. Revelation 7:1 NIV

1. Angels holding back the 4 winds of destruction

NOTE: In apocalyptic literature, forces of nature often under the control of angels

2. Winds often seen as instruments of divine judgment bringing destruction

✓ Hosea 13:15 speaks of "an east wind from the Lord."

B. Delayed judgment

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." Revelation 7:2-3 NIV

1. Before earth feels the effects of divine judgment-God must seal His servant to protect them.
2. 5th angel (with a seal) instructs the angels to hold their wrath until God's people have been sealed

NOTE: Seal is the stamp of divine ownership and authenticity. It is a divine commitment that His people will not experience the wrath that would soon be poured out

NOTE ALSO: The Beast will have his own seal or mark

C. Those spared judgment

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. Revelation 7:4-8 NIV

1. A challenge to identify
2. Mentioned again in Chapter 14 singing around the throne
3. Erroneous
 - a. Jehovah Witnesses-“the final number in the heavenly church.”
 - b. Saved from physical nation of Israel (list of 12 tribes-17 different lists in the Bible-not consistent with the New Testament)
 - c. Some say martyrs
4. Probably-whole of the Redeemed church (see Romans 9-11)

NOTE: There is a place for national Israel but the New Testament is also clear that in a very real way the church is the New Testament Israel

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28 NIV

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. Romans 2:29 NIV

Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. Galatians 6:16 NIV

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9 NIV

You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Exodus 19:6 NIV

- D. Likely scenario-entire body of the redeemed, purchased by the blood of Christ-sealed so the wrath of God would not touch them as they enter the time of final testing that will come at the end of human history

Consider

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Revelation 6:17 NIV

Sealed

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13 NIV

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30 NIV

Future Guarantee

- ✓ We may experience persecution
- ✓ But not God's wrath

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:9 NIV

Patience of God-holding back His wrath

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 NIV

Bridging the Worlds

- ✓ John's readers would experience persecution, even martyrdom
- ✓ But would not experience the wrath of divine judgment
- ✓ Neither will we-Jesus took it at the cross-at Calvary

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. 2 Timothy 2:19 NIV

II. The Great Multitude in White Robes (7:9-17)

NOTE: This scene is not unlike the transfiguration-a glimpse into the glory of eternity to encourage the readers in the great trial that is about to come. (Being battered by Rome).

A. The numberless multitude

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." Revelation 7:9-10 NIV

1. Heavenly scene-redeemed and victorious
2. Worship around the throne

B. Accompanying choir

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!" Revelation 7:11-12 NIV

C. The elder and his question

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. Revelation 7:13-14 NIV

NOTE: Great Tribulation-controversial

1. Fee: Referring to the great trial that the church of his own time is experiencing, something that will get far worse before it ever gets better
2. Mounce—"The definite article in the phrase 'the Great Tribulation' indicates that the angel is referring primarily to that series of woes which will immediately precede the end."

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. Revelation 3:10 NIV

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. Daniel 12:1 NIV

Explanation to bridge the worlds!

- ✓ Persecution has always been the lot of those who follow the Lamb

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33 NIV

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12 NIV

- ✓ The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will be so great and rise to such a pitch that it will be called the Great Tribulation!
- ✓ This multitude likely reflects all who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb-around the throne!

D. The privileges of the multitude

NOTE: Our salvation is assured not because of who we are but because of the blood of Christ!

God and the Lamb will reward us!

1. Continually before the throne in worship!

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. Revelation 7:15 NIV

NOTE: "He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence." (dwell with them NKJV)

Literally-Spread His tent over them-He is the ultimate divine ruler AND protector!

NOT JUST WITH US!

HE PROTECTS US!!-How relevant to the 1st century Christian

2. All earthly sufferings and sorrows will be taken away

Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. Revelation 7:16 NIV

3. The Lamb will become our shepherd, leading us to life-giving springs

Conclusion: How does this text speak to John's readers and to us?

- A. All who suffer for the Lamb will find that God will make up to them for all that have had to suffer
 1. Great encouragement to early church on the brink
 2. Great hope for the contemporary church on the brink
- B. So many struggle for earthly security with their sacrifice for it but sacrifice little for eternal reward
- C. Two pictures of the church are seen

1. Church militant-sealed by God-persevering in persecution
2. Church triumphant as followers of the Lamb may suffer but will ultimately triumph over the enemy

D. Rejoicing over the redeemed

1. Luke 15:10-rejoicing in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents
2. How unbelievable will be the joyful adoration of the heavenly host when all the redeemed stand before God!