

The 144,000 Sealed and the Great Multitude in White Robes (Revelation 7)

Although many describe chapter 7 as an interlude, the chapter is actually a continuation of the thought closing chapter 6. The sixth seal opens with a description of events leading up to the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb and the promise to the righteous in 3:21-22:

21 'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

It is logical to ask, "What about the righteous? What happens to them prior the great day of the Lord?" The fifth seal had opened to the question of what had happened to the souls of those slain because of the word of God and their testimony. They were given white robes to wear until the number of their fellow servants who were to be killed were completed [See notes on Revelation 6:9-11]. In chapter 7 we find that the great multitude that no one could count wore white robes [See notes to follow on Revelation 7:9 and 14]. Further, these stand before the throne of God in a state opposite to the evil ones of Revelation 6:12-17. Thus, chapter 7 continues the thought that closes chapter 6.

144,000 Sealed (Revelation 7:1-8)

Revelation 7:1

7 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree.

During the events affecting the wicked, a simultaneous set of events occurs among the righteous. Just as the Lord described the events affecting the wicked, he also described the status of his elect in Matthew 24:29 -31:

29 But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 30 and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he shall send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

These angels and those of Matthew 24:31 seem similar to those of horses and chariots of Ezekiel and the four living creatures, who control the four horseman in Revelation 6.1ff. That is, the coming of the end and the application of God's will are strictly under

His control. He is the Alpha and the Omega. In this case, the angels hold back the four winds in an effort to harm the land and the sea. However, the angel from the east commands them to stop.

Revelation 7:2-3

2 And I saw another angel ascend from the sun's rising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, "3Saying, "Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 4 And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel:

The command not to harm the land and the sea stays the destruction and harm until they put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God. Those sealed are clearly stated. They are the servants of our God; they were all from the tribes of Israel; and they are designated as being 144,000. We shall consider these in order.

At the Last Day, God will gather his servants. To these, described as from the tribes of Israel, God adds the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). This first group is definitely the group of Revelation 14:1:4, where they also are called 144,000. Revelation 14:1 teaches:

14 And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.

They had distinct characteristics:

They had the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father written on their foreheads.

They had been redeemed from the earth.

They kept themselves pure.

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

They are first fruits of God and the Lamb.

Chapter 14 calls them first fruits. As first fruits, they are the faithful of the Old Testament period and those first Christians, perhaps even prior to the Gentiles' conversion of Acts 10, sealed by the Holy Spirit as in Acts 2:38. In Acts 21:20, the number of Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are described as being in the thousands:

20 And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said unto him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of them that have believed."

Following the first- fruits of the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament (Jeremiah 2:3), the earliest Christians are separated from the huge number of those to follow in verse 16: Therefore, the 144,000 are those earliest Christians who followed the Lamb and accepted the savior, lived pure lives, and followed him without exception. Jeremiah reads:

3 Israel (was) holiness unto Jehovah, the first fruits of his increase: all that devour him shall be held guilty; evil shall come upon them, says Jehovah. (Jeremiah 2:3)

James extends this metaphor to the early Jewish Christians in James 1:1:

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion, greeting.

James further describes this group, adding to the designation of *twelve tribes* the name first fruits James 1:18:

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created."

The number 144,000 limits the size of this particular group of the saved to a finite but large number. One should compare this number to the huge number, which no one can count—a number also identified in the group of those sealed in verse 7:16.

Sealing and seals carried special meaning for the Jews. Symbolically, the word and meaning carried forward to the sealing of the servants of God in the New Testament. The sealing of the children of Israel occurred in Exodus 28:21:

21 And the stones shall be according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names; like the engravings of a signet (seal), every one according to his name, they shall be for the twelve tribes. [OT: chatham (khaw-tham'); a primitive root; to close up; especially to seal (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.).

In the New Testament, the seal of God's servants became the very Spirit of God in our hearts. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Paul said:

21 Now he that establishes us with you in Christ, and anointed us, is God; 22 who also sealed us, and gave (us) the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. [EARNEST: originally, "earnest-money" deposited by the purchaser and forfeited if the purchase was not completed. . . . In the NT it is used only of that which is assured by God to believers; it is said of the Holy Spirit as the divine "pledge" of all their future blessedness. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)ASV

We are also marked in him with a seal in Ephesians 1:13; “In whom, having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Ephesians 4:30 extends this

thought: “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption.”

This sealing is an event that is continuous and parallel to the other events characterized by the opening of the seven seals. One can contrast this marking with a seal by the Holy Spirit with that mark of the beast applied to the servants of the Satan discussed in Revelation 13:16-17; 14:9-11; 16:2. As the seal of the Holy Spirit marks the servants of God, so the mark of the beast seals the servants of Satan.

The symbolism is made complete by listing the 12 tribes where the 12,000 is a definite number representing an indefinite by rather small group when compared to the great multitude.

Revelation 7:5-8

5 Of the tribe of Judah (were) sealed twelve thousand:

Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand;

6 Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand;

7 Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand;

8 Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand;

Of the tribe of Benjamin (were) sealed twelve thousand.

The Great Multitude from the Tribulation: (Revelation 7:9-17)

Revelation 7:9-10

9 After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of (all) tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 and they cry with a great voice, saying,

“Salvation unto our God who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb.

who sits on the throne,

and to the Lamb.”

In addition to the first fruits who were sealed, an innumerable multitude was before the throne of God. The white robes are clearly those given to the slain for the word of God in Revelation 6:9:

9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

These would be the worthy ones described in Revelation 3:4-5:

4 But thou hast a few names in Sardis that did not defile their garments: and they shall walk with me in white; for they are worthy. 5 He that overcomes shall thus be arrayed in white garments; and I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

This group is broader than the first fruits and of an infinite number. They represent the *whole creation* (Mark 16:15) and *all the nations* (Matthews 28:19) as described in the Lord's great commission. As they cry out, they recognize that salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. The praise echoes the meaning of Peter in Acts 4:12: "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven ; that is given among men, wherein we must be saved."

Revelation 7:11-12

11 And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and (about) the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 saying,

"Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, (be) unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

In addition to the innumerable hosts, the angels and the elders still stand before the throne of God. The "amen" is attached to the praise of the multitude of the saved, which is the antecedent of *they*. They were falling down and worshipping God, recognizing Him as all-wise and all-powerful, and worthy of thanks and honor. God exists for ever and ever or into the ages of the ages. The difference in these attributes of God and the idols and philosophers of the world becomes clear.

Revelation 7:13-14

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, "These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence came they?" 14 And I say unto him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are they that come of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

An important question comes up. Who are the innumerable hosts? Where did they come from? The two-part answer given by the elders describes them as those who were slain for the word and testimony of the Lamb, discussed above. The innumerable hosts are the servants of God who have come out of the great tribulation. They came out of that tribulation with robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. John names the

specific tribulation in Revelation 1:9: “9 I John, your brother and partaker with you in tribulation and kingdom and patience (which are) in Jesus.” The great tribulation confronts all Christians who war against the flesh and the world.

In Acts 9:15-16, the Lord said of Paul, Acts 9:15-16:

15 But the Lord said unto him, “Go your way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel, 16 for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake.”

John himself identified the struggle in Rev 2:10,:

10 Fear not the things which you are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried; and you shall have tribulation ten days. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Of all Christians, Paul wrote in Rom 8:35-36:

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Even as it is written,

For your sake we are killed all the day long;

We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

The tribulation is upon us and is not some episode of the future as millennial sophistry would say. It is a spiritual struggle and continues in the lives of all Christians according to Paul in Ephesians 6:12:

12 For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual (hosts) of wickedness in the heavenly (places).

Revelation 7:15-17

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sits on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: 17 for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Isaiah spoke of these very same promises in these very same figures in Isaiah 49:10:

10 They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that has mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water will he guide them.

And in Isaiah 25:8:

8 He has swallowed up death for ever; and the Lord Jehovah will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the reproach of his people will he take away from off all the earth: for Jehovah has spoken it.

This episode of the Revelation ends with the complete victory of God and the Lamb. The servants of God who are sealed are before the throne. Each episode that follows, with its sequence of events, will end with this same victory.

This victory for the saints is the same as that with which the Revelation concludes in Rev 21:1-4:

21 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven of God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, (and be) their God; 4 and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away.

The opening of the seventh seal in chapter 8 will bring the wicked and righteous right up to the great day of the Lord. Through it all, God is the Alpha and the Omega. Revelation 21:6-8 teaches emphatically:

6 And he said unto me, "They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is thirsty of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcomes shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. 8 But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part (shall be) in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.