

Revelation Lesson 07

Revelation Chapter 7

Distributed by: KJV Bible Studies

Email: mail@kjvbiblestudies2.net

Website: www.KjvBibleStudies.net

Introduction: We continue our study of the book of Revelation this week as the seventh chapter introduces things John saw after the opening of the sixth seal and before he witnessed the opening of the seventh seal. John here was shown several events which parallel the main sequence of events.

These events are revealed adjacent to the greater context of the opening of the seven seals. Here, we find the first mention of the 144,000 Jews who are to receive the seal of God in their foreheads. Afterward, in a separate vision, John saw a great multitude that no man could number standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

I. John Sees Four Angels

(Rev 7:1) And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

John begins this chapter by noting, "And after these things". The last event in chapter 6 was the opening of the sixth seal, resulting in earthquakes and anarchy. All of mankind hid themselves begging for the mountains and rocks to fall on them and hide them from "the face of him that sitteth on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb". After these things" (literally, 'after this') indicates that what follows is separate from what took place in chapter 6. The events of the tribulation so far are preliminary to the Great Tribulation which will last three and one-half years and impossible as it may seem it will be far more intense than the first three and one-half years. (Read 6:17).

John saw four angels standing at these four corners who were restraining the winds for a season. Though the Bible does refer to the earth as a sphere (Isaiah 40:22), it was common among the ancients to refer to the four corners of the earth, and the four basic wind directions, north, east, south, and west.

(Isa 40:22) It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:

Implied in the following is that the winds these angels controlled were destined to wreak havoc on the earth. However, at this point they were held back in temporary abeyance.

(Rev 7:2) And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea,

(Rev 7:3) Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

John saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. Precisely who this angel is and why he came from the east is open for debate. He might, on the one hand, be an archangel. Others take the position that he is none other than the Angel of the Covenant, that is Jesus Christ. The rationale is, only He would have access to “the seal of the living God.” Though the focus in chapters 4-6 clearly has been the view from heaven, here it shifts to the earth for only on earth are winds and the direction of east.

Though not stated, apparently the reference point is the holy land and this mighty angel ascending from the east. If that be the case, the scenario might be of ascent to Jerusalem from the east. Further insight into the purpose of these four angels is found. They evidently were charged to damage the earth. It might be inferred that their damage would come through great windstorms. However, they were charged by this mighty angel to Hurt not the earth neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

This event appears to be taking place after the effects on the earth has been fulfilled resulting from the opening of the sixth seal. It may be still in progress during the calm after the seventh seal is opened. If the locale of the angel ascending from the east is in fact in the vicinity of Jerusalem and thus Israel, it may be that the damage to be done by these angels will begin there. As the next section will clearly note, those servants of God to be sealed are all Jews. This lends further credence to the location being Israel.

A general overview of the prophecy of the Tribulation seems to indicate that while the wrath of God and the antichrist rage across the gentile world during the first 42 months, Israel is at peace during this time. If in fact these four angels are forbidden to unleash their hurt against this area of the earth, it seems to therefore interlock with other hints that Israel does not suffer as the rest of the world during the first years of the Tribulation. In part, these mighty angels are precluded from unleashing their harm until the servants of God described below are sealed in their foreheads.

Revelation 14:1 indicates the seal itself was having God the Father’s name written in their foreheads. Implied is that Satan, the antichrist, or anyone else could have no power over these until their purpose is fulfilled.

(Rev 14:1) And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

Revelation 9:4 infers that the plagues of the trumpet judgments could not hurt those men who had the seal of God in their foreheads.

(Rev 9:4) And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

They carried in their very foreheads the name of God the Father. Even as the followers of the antichrist would soon have the mark of the beast upon them, these servants of God carry not only the seal of God, but His very name in their foreheads.

(Rev 7:4) And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

(Rev 7:5) Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.

(Rev 7:6) Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.

(Rev 7:7) Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

(Rev 7:8) Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

It is clear these 144,000 are Jews. Twelve tribes of Israel are noted: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Of each tribe, twelve thousand were sealed. Of significance is that the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. Why can only be speculated. It has been suggested by some that the tribe of Dan, so given to apostasy long ago simply ceased to exist. The tribe of Joseph is mentioned twice in Manasseh and Joseph. He surely received a double portion.

The purpose of these 144,000 Jewish men is not explicitly described. There are hints in several prophetic portions of Scripture that these men fan out across the world declaring the gospel of the Messiah to the Jews and to any Gentiles who will hear it. Revelation 14:1-5 makes clear they all were unmarried, virgin, Jewish, young men.

(Rev 14:1) And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

(Rev 14:2) And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

(Rev 14:3) And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

(Rev 14:4) These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

(Rev 14:5) And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Isaiah 66:19-21 is clearly an eschatological passage about the Tribulation and may hint at the 144,000. There, it is spoken of those who will be sent unto the nations to declare the glory of God to the gentiles and draw the Jews to Jehovah. Luke's account of the seventy being sent forth (Luke 10:1- 20), though certainly literal, may also have prophetic hints of the 144,000, particularly in verse 19.

In Matthew 24:14, which clearly is within the context of the Tribulation, Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." This seems to mesh with the ministry of the 144,000. Though again not precisely stated, the conversion of these may be the result of the two witnesses described in chapter 11. Paul makes clear the day is coming when all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26). It also is apparent that by the time that Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation that Israel will in fact have largely turned to Him.

It seems clear that the ministry of these 144,000 is to preach Christ to the Jews who are scattered throughout the world. Though the period of the Gentiles has ended, there may be some Gentiles who will listen. It would therefore seem that they fan out from Israel to wherever there are pockets of Jewish settlements across the world, preaching Christ to them.

They apparently will have not only the physical protection of God upon them, but will also have the pronounced power of the Holy Spirit to convince their brethren to turn to Christ. The 144,000 will again be mentioned in Revelation 14. However, it seems to be after their purpose is complete.

II. John Sees Great Multitude of the Saved

(Rev 7:9) After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

John's attention is now directed to another adjunct thought. He notes, "After this, I beheld". As in the preceding section pertaining to the 144,000, what he is about to see is parallel to, yet apart from, the sequence of events of the Tribulation.

Again, this is noted between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. Whereas the sealing of the 144,000 and their ministry quite evidently was on the earth, the focus now returns to heaven. This evidently is a view of parallel events taking place in heaven while the Tribulation rages on the earth. John records how he beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

Bible expositors have a great deal of difficulty in identifying this multitude. It seems each one has a different opinion. It is certain these are Gentiles from all over the earth, to this most agree but the time of their salvation proposes the difference of opinion. We will deal with these more in verse 14.

(1) The white robes signify they are under the blood of Christ.

(2) The palms are symbolic of praise and worship and of victory.

John will soon ask who this throng is and where they came from. That question remains. However, a number of facts can be ascertained. This great multitude was from every nation on earth. They are clothed in white robes. The significance of the palms in their hands is not clear.

In John 12:13 and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem the Sunday before His crucifixion, the crowds took branches of palm trees and strawed them in His way. The significance then was how the common people received Him as their King. That same thought may be in view here.

(Joh 12:12) On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,

(Joh 12:13) Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.

(Rev 7:10) And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

They praise God and the Lamb for the salvation which has been accorded to them out of the Tribulation.

(Rev 7:11) And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

(Rev 7:12) Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

Meanwhile, all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God. Though the elders and beasts (living creatures) are mentioned, it is the angels standing round about the throne which fall on their faces before God to praise Him for His salvation of men. Their chorus of praise is sevenfold. It begins with Amen.

They then praise God in seven ways by ascribing to Him: (1) blessing, (2) glory, (3) wisdom, (4) thanksgiving, (5) honour, (6) power, and (7) might. Moreover, this praise

was invoked to God “for ever and ever. Amen.” It seems apparent that before the throne of God in heaven, there is constant praise to God, whether by the living creatures, the twenty-four elders, or angels.

See also Revelation 4:8-11 and 5:8-9, 5:11-13.

(Rev 7:13) And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

(Rev 7:14) And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

John watched and wondered, no doubt in holy awe, of the proceedings in heaven. One of the twenty-four elders approached him and asked, saying to John, “What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” It is apparent from the following that the elder knew who they were. His question to John in effect was ‘Do you know who these are and where they came from?’ John is most respectful to this elder. He acknowledged that this elder knew the answer to the question.

The elder told John that these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Though the term tribulation might conceivably refer to trouble in general, the fact it is called “great tribulation” seems to indicate the latter half of the seventieth week of Daniel. There evidently will be a multitude of all nations which will be saved during the Tribulation, perhaps from the preaching of the 144,000 preachers described earlier. Keep in mind, that the vast majority of God’s chosen people are scattered throughout the world and have been since the Diaspora.

It also is apparent that the vast majority of these will be martyred for having trusted Christ. Revelation 20:4 speaks how many of these will be beheaded “for the witness of Jesus.” These may refer to the martyred under the altar in 6:9-11. However, there, white robes were given to them, while here their robes were washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. The allusion to them washing their robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb is allegorical to how sin stains the ‘robes’ of one’s life. Only the blood of Christ can make them clean.

As is noted in Revelation 1:5, we as well have been washed from our sins in His own blood.

(Rev 7:15) Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

(Rev 7:16) They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

Apart from a mention in Revelation 3:12, this is the first direct reference to the Temple of God in heaven. It apparently is distinct and apart from His throne. This great multitude, apparently for the duration of the Tribulation on earth, serve God in His Temple "day and night." Again, this group apparently is in distinction to either Israel or the church. The church has already been gathered as the bride of Christ. Israel is still upon the earth. These therefore are given special care and dispensation of God in heaven until the Tribulation is complete.

God in fact "shall dwell among them." They therefore "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat." Of interest is the 'earthly' and human context of these. Their time in heaven is noted as "day and night" which clearly is an earthly description. They neither suffer hunger, thirst, nor the discomfort of the sun and its heat.

(Rev 7:17) For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

The thought here is that the Lamb in heaven will shepherd them or take care of them and "lead them unto living fountains of water." The thought closely parallels Isaiah 49:10.

(Isa 49:10) They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.

The Lamb who is also the Chief Shepherd will lead and shepherd this flock in heaven. He will provide their every need. Moreover, the tender heart and compassion of God is seen, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. This does not mean there will be people crying in heaven. It means just the opposite, there will be nothing to cause one to cry or sorrow. All the weeping of the saints will be done here on earth.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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