The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 7**

* **7:1-8– Sealing of the servants of God**
  + Chapter 7 acts as an interlude between the sixth seal and the seventh seal. It pertains to the perseverance of God’s people and how in fact they are protected from the *“hour of trial.”* Thus, the first portion (7:1-8) discusses the sealing of the saints which occurs immediately prior to the events of 6:1-8.
  + The second portion of chapter 7 deals with the reward the persevering saints receive. The time period is probably after that of the final judgment or after the *“…number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also”* (6:11).
  + Chapter 7 also reveals the answer to the question asked by the idolaters in 6:17: *“Who is able to stand?”* Chapter 7 functions as a powerful resource of encouragement and motivation for the saints who are currently experiencing hardships and who will shortly face many tribulations the likes a lot of them will not physically survive.
  + **Verse 1**– John observes another vision (not chronologically after the events of chapter 6) in which four angels stand at the 4 corners of the earth. This is most likely a way of describing their sovereignty over the entire earth no doubt given by God (cf. Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2).
  + The four winds are indicative of God’s destructive agents or forces that carry out the execution of His wrath/judgment (Jer. 49:36; Dan. 7:2). With this in mind, the four winds the angels are pictured as holding back are probably the four horses in 6:1-8. In Zech. 6:1-8 (particularly v. 5), the horses are described as the winds/spirts of heaven.
  + That the four winds are the four horses is rather clear since the saints are about to be sealed and divinely protected from the *“hour of trial”* to come. This *“hour of trial”* is obviously the destruction and havoc caused by the four horses and the horsemen in 6:1-8.
* **Verses 2-3**– John observes another angel coming from the east. Some suggest this to be speaking of blessing and God’s glory (cf. Gen. 2:8; Ezek. 43:2-4) while others say it’s simply a way of point out a “picturesque detail.” The *“rising of the sun”* maybe a way of preparing us for the bright future for God’s people.
* This angel breaks forth with a loud voice commanding the other four angels not to release the four winds until the saints are sealed with the seal of the living God. Again, this would connect us to the events of 6:1-8 in that the saints are to be sealed just prior to the destruction of the four horses.
* Christ has previously promised protection from tribulation and the *“hour of trial”* to come upon the earth (3:10) and this sealing of His people before the events of 6:1-8 would fit with what this angel is speaking of.
* This seal or sealing of the bond-servants of God (cf. 14:1) comes primarily from the OT background of Ezekiel 9:4 and in Revelation it denotes spiritual protection for God’s people in relation to their faith and salvation. They will be preserved spiritually if they persevere and avoid eternal punishment.
* Sealing also denotes ownership or authentication of one’s identity. Thus, God seals those who are His and they are able to be distinguished from the earth-dwellers because they have His name and they belong to Him (2 Tim. 2:19). This seal also indicates a new spiritual status evidenced by their desire to trust and serve God.
* **Verses 4-8**– John states that the number of those who are sealed by God is 144,000. This number is not literal and it must not be taken that way. The number is gotten by the summation of the 12,000 of each of the tribes of Israel. The numbers 12 and 10 play an important role in the interpretation of this multitude and they usually pertain to completeness.
* From each of the twelve tribes of Israel, 12,000 servants are sealed. Many see this a literal group of the remnant of the physical Israelite nation. This would not fit well for several reasons. The likely meaning is that the 144,000 is a way of referring to the whole of God’s faithful people: Christians everywhere throughout human history.
* The twelve tribes of Israel is a way of stressing that the church is receiving the inheritance of God’s promises made to the nation of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:23-26; 11:24-26). The NT is the true Israel (Ezek. 47-48; Gal. 6:16; Rev. 2:9; 3:1). This is made possible through Christ (Ex. 19:6; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).
* There are some differences in the listing of the 12 tribes here as opposed to its mention in the OT. For example, Judah is listed first and both Dan and Ephraim are left out being replaced by Joseph and Levi.
* Judah is rarely listed first in the listing of the tribes in the OT but it is probably first here since Christ emanates from this tribe indicating His precedence over all nations and tribes and people including the saints (Gen. 49:10; Rev. 5:5). Some suggest that Dan and Ephraim are not named here because of their association with idolatry (Judg. 18:16-19; 1 Kings 12:28-30; Hos. 4:14-14:8).
* **7:9-17– Salvation for the multitude**
* **Verses 9-10**– John sees another vision that pictures the same group from 7:1-8 now in the heavenly state. This implies they have gone through the events of 6:1-8 and the *“number”* from 6:11 has been completed. The 144,000 is now stated as a multitude indicative of the promises made to Abraham fulfilled in Christ (cf. Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 22:17; Hos. 1:10).
* This is evidenced further that they are described in the same terms used in Rev. 5:9 which is also connected to Ex. 19:5-6. They are pictured as standing before the throne of God (cf. Psa. 24:3-4) which answers the question from 6:17. These are able to stand because they have persevered and maintained their faith in Christ (cf. 12:11).
* That they are clothed in white points to the fact that they have been purified and justified as righteous (cf. Rev. 3:4-5). The palm trees reflect the Feast of Tabernacles in which the Israelites would give thanks to God for their blessings but it would also serve as a reminder of their Exodus and divine protection (Lev. 23:40, 43).
* These saints are pictured with the palm branches giving thanks to God because they have been saved from sin and they were divinely protected and now comforted in the heavenly state. They appropriately laud God and The Lamb for Their salvific role in their state and the fact that They alone grant salvation (cf. Psa. 3:8; Psa. 45:21; Acts 4:12; Rev. 19:1).
* **Verses 11-12**– The heavenly host present around the throne fall prostrate and worship God in conjunction with the statement made by the saints. They agree with His salvific role and declare that all sovereign attributes belong to Him eternally (cf. 5:11-14).
* **Verses 13-14**– An elder turns to John to ask if he knows the identity of those clothed in white robes and where they came from. John does not know but asserts that the elder does. The elder responds by stating they have come out of the tribulation (cf. Dan. 12:1; Rev. 6:1-8).
* The washed robes implies their commitment and willingness to come to Christ but also to maintain their relationship with Him regardless of whatever circumstances they undergo. Their robes are made white because of The Lamb’s blood (cf. Isa. 1:18; Zech. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 12:11).
* Those who put constant effort into their relationship with God and endure with Him till the end are pictured in this state. This is rooted in the OT especially in Daniel 11-12 (Dan. 11:35; 12:10, 13). They are before God’s throne precisely because of their endurance and forward pressing like Christ.
* **Verses 15-17**– The elder further adds that because of The Lamb’s blood they are before the throne. Jesus reversed the curse of sin by dying in our stead (cf. Rom. 5:1-14). The saints take up their “priestly” roles by serving in the temple (cf. Ezek. 37:26-28; Rev. 1:6; 5:10) day and night forever.
* The temple and tabernacle imageries emphasize God’s presence and His absolute intimacy with His people (cf. Ex. 13:21-22; 40:34-38; 2 Chron. 7:1-3; Jn. 1:14). God has always desired this kind of relationship and while it is experienced now, it cannot compare to what it will be like in Heaven.
* In this eternal state, they will find ultimate comfort, satisfaction and security which God promised and Jesus makes possible (Isa. 49:10; Matt. 5:6; Jn. 6:35). This is painted further with the illustration of Jesus being the Good Shepherd (cf. Psa. 23; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:23; Mic. 5:4; Jn. 10:1-30; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:4).