

What A Day – Rev 7

Rev 7. After the 6th seal judgment of chapter 6, the Apostle John sees something different. Instead of judgment, as Jesus opens the scroll of God's plan, it's a vision of God's people. A parenthesis of sorts, where the final generation of believers is sealed and brought safely into heaven. That's the main point of this chapter. Despite The Great Tribulation, we will be delivered safely home.

And what a day it will be. With more and more people arriving every day to worship around the throne. A day of rejoicing when we all see Jesus. Yes, The Great Tribulation will include great suffering and persecution, but it will lead to great joy. Rev 7:1.

➤ *After this* [John says; after seeing 6 of the 7 seal judgments] *I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth* [the farthest reaches], *holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.* Wind in apocalyptic literature most often represents God's destructive means of judgment. While angels were thought to be in charge of such forces. And it fits. On God's behalf, the angels are holding back the coming judgment.

[2] *Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun* [the east; seen as the source of hope and blessing], *with the seal of the living God* [perhaps a signet seal on a ring or something], *and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,* [3] *saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God* [his people, his family] *on their foreheads* (ESV). Thank you, Lord. This is blessed assurance that . . .

The Great Tribulation will be . . .

A day of great protection. (v1-3)

We've seen it before and we'll see it again. From Rev 3 to Rev 19. Followers of Christ can expect great *protection* in The Great Tribulation. Because the angels will label us *with the seal of the living God*; v2. His means of distinguishing his people from everyone else, to protect them.

And Rev 14:1 tells us that the label is the name of Jesus and the Father written on our foreheads. Whether that's literal or metaphorical we don't know. What we do know, is that it's the antithesis of the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16-18), it's plain for all to see, and it conveys God's possession and protection.

That's the implication of v3. The angel said, *"Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."* Don't release the winds of judgment that will cause suffering, until we've set them apart for protection. The Great Tribulation will be a day of great protection.

Does that mean *no* harm will befall us? No. It will. But it does mean *some* harm will be withheld. It does mean we're exempt from God's *wrath*. It does mean our *soul* is never in peril. It means heaven is never in question.

If you're still living when The Great Tribulation ensues, protection is yours because your identity will be clear; there won't be any mistaking it. Held firmly in the grip of God's grace, your flag will fly high and your colors shine bright. All the more reason to hold fast now. The Great Tribulation will be a day of great protection.

Second, it will be . . .

A day of great salvation (v4-8, 13-14)

After the instruction to seal God's servants, John says in v4 – *And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: [5] 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, [6] 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, [7] 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, [8] 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.* 12 tribes of 12k each. 144k in all.

And based on v13-14, they're *new* believers. Take a look. After John sees a great multitude of believers in *heaven*, wearing *white robes*, in v9, he writes in v13 – *Then one of the elders addressed me* [one of the elders around the throne], *saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"* [14] *I said to him, "Sir, you know* [you know better than me; *you say*]." *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.* In the Great Tribulation. That's the implication.

They're coming out of The Great Tribulation into heaven, because they were saved and then *died* in The Great Tribulation. Saved, because they washed *in the blood of the Lamb*. Immersed themselves in the cleansing flood of God's grace. Placed themselves under the influence of Christ's death. And are now in heaven, clothed in white robes of righteousness to show it.

All of which means that the 144k in v4-8, represent those who are saved and sealed in The Great Tribulation. They're not the only ones sealed of course; all God's people are. But the focus here is on new believers. And no wonder. The number is massive. Large and complete. That's the symbolism of 144k. 12 represents fullness, or completeness; like the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 Apostles. And 1000 represents *a lot* in apocalyptic literature. Put them together, 12x12x1000, and you get a very large and complete number of people who are saved.

And it's not hard to see why. When 9/11 happened, people came to Christ in droves. They flocked to churches and sought the Lord. Can you imagine the response to world-wide events like that? Both manmade *and* natural? It will shake people to the core. Leading many to call on the name of the Lord and be saved. What a day.

➤ The question is, who? Who are they, this 144k? Some say ethnic Jews; only those with a direct bloodline back to Abraham; *sons of Israel*; descendants of Jacob and his 12 sons. Others say, no, the 144k includes everyone; people of *any* ethnicity. And I think that's correct.

I think the 144k represents people added to the church from *every* tribe, tongue, and nation. Just like people from all over the world are added to the church now. And I think that for 4 reasons.

• 4 Reasons the 144k represent the church

Men, women, and children from all walks of life and every corner of the world.

1. Some Jews are left out.

In the list. The list of tribes in v5-8 must represent someone other than ethnic Jews, because it leaves some out. Like the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. They're not there. Instead, Joseph and Levi are listed. But Joseph and Levi aren't among the final names of the tribes. And if you say that Joseph includes Ephraim because Joseph was his father, that still leaves Dan out; and begs the question as to why Manasseh would be included; his other son. Something else must be going on.

What's more, v4 says that the number was *sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel*. But once again, every tribe isn't listed. So the Bible is either in error, or something else is being conveyed. Especially since *Judah* is listed first, instead of Reuben, the firstborn; like normal. Emphasizing the influence of Jesus who was *born* of the tribe of Judah, and *started* the church. Something else is being conveyed. Namely I think, that the 144k represent the church.

2. **Ethnic** distinctions are no longer a *consideration* for inclusion in the people of God.

The New Testament argues that Jesus did *away* with such distinctions. Being a Jew or Gentile doesn't matter to God; Acts 10:34-35. We are *one* in Christ; Gal 3:28. Jesus has made a *new* people in the church; Eph 2:13-16. God did *away* with ethnic distinctions as a consideration.

That doesn't mean ethnic distinctions are moot. The very next paragraph in Rev 7 shows otherwise. Displaying and magnifying God's grace and greatness toward *all* people. But those distinctions are no longer a consideration for *joining* God's family.

So the 144k must represent *all* those who will be redeemed in The Great Tribulation, not just Jews. Otherwise, it's a reversion to the Old Covenant, and a contradiction to the New.

3. Israel in the New Testament refers to **all** believers.

Jew, Gentile, black, white, red, brown, you name it. The New Testament authors equate the church with Israel and Israel with the church. They don't distinguish. Saying that true Israel on this side of the cross is comprised only of those who believe in Jesus.

Rom 2:28-29a – *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. [29] But a Jew [an Israelite] is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter [not by the Old Testament Law].* A true Jew the Apostle Paul says, is one whose heart has been changed by the Holy Spirit. Which comes about only through faith in Jesus.

Or how about **Rom 9:6-8** – *[6b] For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel [they're not true Israelites], [7] and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring [his lineage], but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." [8] This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* The promise of salvation by virtue of their election. True Israel is comprised only of believers. Jewish ethnicity has nothing to do with it.

And **Gal 3:7** indicates the same. Very succinctly. *[7] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.* Faith in Jesus. True Israel, Abraham's true offspring, is comprised of those who believe in Jesus. And **[Gal 3:29]** *if you are Christ's [if you've been adopted into his family], then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to*

promise. Recipients of God's spoken word of blessing. Israel in the New Testament refers to believers. And at the *end* of Galatians, Paul even *refers* to the church as Israel; *the Israel of God* he says. Gal 6:16.

And then there's Peter who calls the church *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, [and] a people for his own possession*; 1 Pet 2:9. The exact same phrases God used in the Old Testament for *ethnic* Israel.

And last but not least, the Apostle James addresses the church as *the twelve tribes in the Dispersion* [the scattering]; James 1:1. He calls the *church* the 12 tribes, just like Israel of old was called *the 12 tribes*. Leaving no doubt that Israel in the New Testament refers to *all believers*, and only believers. Reason #3 the 144k represent the church.

4. John sees believers from **every** nation.

He *hears* the number sealed in v4, and *sees* them in v9. One and the same. Take a look. *[9] After this I looked [he says], 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.* He heard about 144k from every tribe of *Israel*, and saw a multitude from every *nation*.

It's the same thing that happened in Rev 5:5-6. Where he heard about a lion, the Lion of Judah, and *sees* a Lamb. One and the same. Leading to the conclusion that the same thing is happening here. He heard about the tribes, and saw the church.

For those 4 reasons, I think the 144k is the church. A large number of people from all over the world, who will receive Christ in The Great Tribulation.

➤ And if you're thinking, "Why didn't John just *say* it was the church?" I think it goes back to the underlying purpose of apocalyptic literature. It's meant to both reveal and conceal. In this case, reveal the truth to those who are his, but conceal it to those who aren't. Reveal it to give us hope, and conceal it to protect us from hate.

That said, the point is this: The Great Tribulation is going to be a day of great salvation.

And that, will lead to . . .

A day of great **worship** (v9-12)

Great rejoicing. When we all see Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, to sing and shout the victory. *[9] After 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 [symbols of purity and victory], with palm branches in their hands [expressions of praise], [10] and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* [In other words, salvation is yours to give and yours to complete, God. Yours to offer and yours to deliver.]

[11] And 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, [12] saying, "Amen!" [In other words, we agree. The salvation part is true!] *Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*

What a day. What an exalted scene in heaven as more and more believers give their lives to Christ, and die to the Lord in The Great Tribulation. Their souls immediately transported to the throne, to join the throng, in worship. Can you imagine? I hope so. Because every time we gather it's a little microcosm of that. Every time we add to our number and lift high the name of Jesus. Every time we say amen and amen.

But then, in The Great Tribulation, with a great influx of believers, the worship is going to swell like never before. Swell in number, swell in passion, and swell in volume. People of every color, culture, accent, and country standing coram Deo, before God, to exalt the one who saved us. What a day.

➤ And notice the Palm Sunday connections. Just like people came from all over *Israel* to *welcome* Jesus, people will come from all over the world to worship him. Just like *they* waved palm branches, we will too. Just like *they* cried out, we will too.

Only this time, there won't be a naysayer among us. Not a scribe, Pharisee, doubter, or otherwise. Every single person will be clothed in white and enter in. Joined by the angels who fall on their faces, affirm our words, and never stop. Amen and amen, forever and ever. Glory and honor forever and ever. Blessing and praise forever and ever.

As bad as The Great Tribulation will be on earth, in heaven it's going to be rapturous. A day of great worship like we've never seen.

And last, The Great Tribulation will be . . .

A day of great blessing (v15-17)

Look back at v13 – *Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” [14] 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.*

[15] “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 shelter them with his presence. [16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

For those the Lord takes to heaven in The Great Tribulation, it's going to be day of great blessing. A blessing of *nearness* to God before his throne. A blessing of *service* to God in adoration and praise. A blessing of *protection* in the shelter of his presence. And a blessing of *provision* with neither hunger nor thirst.

[17] For 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.” It's a small taste of what's to come for all eternity. And a blessing of *comfort* like no other. *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.* (Ps 23:1) What a day.

While the earth rages below, heaven will rock. Especially when we *all* get there. So whatever you do, hold fast. Hold fast, so that you don't miss out. Hold fast, to sing and shout with all the rest.

Prayer – Lord, we can't wait. From the protection and salvation to the worship and blessing, we can't wait. In the meantime, fill our hearts with these truths. Fuel our soul with this hope, this blessed assurance. And sustain our faith for the day when we all get to heaven; when we all see Jesus. In whose name we pray, amen.

You are loved