**Revelation - Week 6 (The 144,000)**

**January 20, 2021**

**Revelation 7:1-17**

Quick Recap of Last Week

* last week we walked through the opening of the 7 seals - chapter 6 and 8:1
* My view is that the opening of the 7 seals is not some strictly future event that has not happened yet.
* The riding of the 4 horsemen has been going on since Jesus died, resurrected and ascended into heaven
* What chapter 6 is describing is evil forces resisting and opposing the coming of Jesus’ kingdom
* Seal 6 brings us right up to the edge of history - the DAY of the Lord.
* We need to view that as ongoing - this in between time since Jesus ascended until he returns
* The church feels the crunch of this - seal 5 - not enough people have died for their faith yet (the church feels the pressure (thlpsis) - tribulation
* BUT, the centring vision of chapters 4-5 give us peace and certainty - the Lamb is on the throne
* Tonight we want to look at chapter 7 - which is a very comforting passage

**Read Revelation 7:1-17**

**Some Initial Thoughts**

* what a picture! Isn’t that a great breather - a comforting vision in the midst of really heavy stuff.
* So couple of initial thoughts to help us make sense of chapter 7
* Chapter 7 is split into two visions
  + Verses 1-8 takes place before chapter 6 - before the 7 seals are opened (we know this because in verse 3 the angel says “don’t harm the earth until the servants of God are sealed”
  + Verses 9-17 takes place after
* BUT these 2 scenes we are seeing in chapter 7 belong together - although they take place in different times and in different locations.
* This is really important for us to understand - just because John says in verse 1 “after this I saw” that doesn’t necessarily mean “after this it happened” (again remember there is movement in the book of Revelation to the return of Jesus, however we don’t read Revelation chronologically (it doesn’t read chapter 1 happens, then chapter 2, then chapter 3, etc.)
* Here’s what chapter 7 is - it’s like a parenthesis explaining how God will keep believers safe during the tribulation of the last days (and the comforting part is believers will not be harmed spiritually when we through the seals we read about in chapter 6)
* Chapter 7 is a call to radical discipleship (verses 1-8 being how God protects us during the tribulation and verses 9-17 being the reward we get for being faithful during the tribulation)
* verses 1-8 the servants of God are sealed so that they can persevere through the great tribulation and verses 9-17 is the picture of the heavenly reward for those who do persevere.

Verse 1

* John sees 4 angels standing at the 4 corners of the earth, holding back the 4 winds of the earth

Sometimes in scripture the phrase “4 winds” is meant to convey all of creation:

Jeremiah 49:36 - “And I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven. And I will scatter them to all those winds, and there shall be no nation to which those driven out of Elam shall not come.”

Daniel 8:8 - “Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns towards the 4 winds of heaven.”

Matthew 24:31 - “And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

* 4 winds I believe are the 4 horsemen mentioned in chapter 6

Zechariah 6:1-8 - “Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses - all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked to me, ‘What are these, my lord?’ And the angel answered and said to me, ‘These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.”

* so in Zechariah there is some connection between these 4 chariots and horses and the 4 winds.
* So I believe in verse 1 we are seeing these angels holding back the devastation we read about in chapter 6. Why? So that the people of God can be sealed.

Verse 2

* another angel rises with the seal of God and says “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until the servants of God are sealed on their foreheads.”
* So we are going to get to what the seal of God is, because we first need to know who this group of people is in order to know what the seal is.

Verses 4-8

* Now John says in verse 4 “he HEARD” the number of the sealed - 144,000
* Remember that!!! John heard this #, we will come back to that
* So then we get a list of 12 names, 12,000 people from each tribe

Judah

Reuben

Gad

Asher

Naphtali

Manasseh

Simeon

Levi

Issachar

Zebulun

Joseph

Benjamin

* ok so 12,000 sealed from each of these tribes and that equals 144,000
* A very popular way to read this is the left behind, rapture, premillenial way - so in that view the church has been raptured, the literal 7 year tribulation is happening and these 144,000 are a Jewish remnant saved immediately after the rapture of the church
* So this view would see the 144,000 as a literal, ethnic, biological Israel - brought to faith in Jesus immediately after Jesus raptures his church - and so this 144,000 is sealed.
* I don’t think that’s who this is - remember numbers in Revelation are not meant to be taken literally - Jesus doesn’t literally have 7 horns and 7 eyes - so this 144,000 is NOT meant to be read as a statistic
* Michael Wilcock - “a suspiciously tidy sort of number that is much more likely to be a symbol than a statistic”
* Do not take 144,000 with mathematical literalness (apocalyptic literature is not meant to be read that way - it is symbolic)
* The 144,000 are mentioned again in chapter 14:

Revelation 14:1 - “Then I looked and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

* so this can’t be literal Israelites or Jewish people because numbers are symbolic in Revelation
* Another reason I believe this is not literally Israelites is this list of tribes corresponds to NONE of the nearly 20 different variations of the list of tribes found in the OT. It is completely different and some of the changes that are in this list are massively symbolic and important.

1. Reuben is not listed first, but Judah is. Why? What line does Jesus come from? The Lion from the tribe of….JUDAH.

- Genesis 49:10 - “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him, and to him shall be the obedience of the people.”

1. Dan and Manasseh is included - so these aren’t all Jacob’s sons
2. Dan is omitted, Levi is included and Joseph is listed instead of Ephraim - so these aren’t the tribes that inherited Canaan - it doesn’t match that list
3. Gad, Asher, and Naphtali (tribes that came from concubines - Bilhah and Zilpah - are promoted) over the sons of Leah and Rachel

Here’s why this matters:

* when you start messing with a genealogical list, you are making a theological statement
* You have Judah first, even though he isn’t first (Jesus)
* You have tribes excluded from privilege who are included and promoted
* Numbers in Revelation are symbolic

So what does the 144,000 represent?

12x12 = 144 (12 tribes and 12 apostles)

10x10x10 = a complete # or a numberless number

So here’s what I believe John means - 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles = the people of God.

X10 = big

X10 = really big

X10 = really, really big

Meaning, you cannot number them all

* the 144,000 represents the complete # of God’s people now made up of Jews and Gentiles
* So I believe the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude in verse 9 are the same group of people
* Remember in verse 4 John “hears” the number of the sealed. In verse 9 he “LOOKS AND SEES” a great multitude
* We have seen this pattern of HEAR AND SEE before already

Chapter 1:10 - “I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet”

Chapter 1:12 - “Then I turned to see the voice”

Chapter 5:5 - “The Lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered”

Chapter 5:6 - “I SAW a Lamb standing as if slain”

In chapter 7 - John hears 144,000 and sees a great multitude

“Just as references to the Lion and the Lamb enable readers to consider the same person (Christ) from two different perspectives, the references to the 144,000 and to the great multitude allow readers to see the same community (Christ’s followers) from two different perspectives. The community of faith encompasses people from many tribes, nations and languages, yet this same community represents the fulfilment of God’s promises concerning the preservation of Israel. If the promises concerning ‘the Lion of Judah’ are not negated but fulfilled through the blood of the Lamb, the promises concerning ‘the tribe of Judah’ and the other tribes are not negated but fulfilled through the multitudes that are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.”

* Craig R. Koester
* this is really important - there is 1 people of God, made up of believing Jews and Gentiles
* The 144,000 represents God’s people from every age - those who follow the Lamb
* God does not need a separate plan for the church and for Israel - there is 1 plan of redemption and there is 1 people of God.
* Some have said oh well are you saying that the church has replaced Israel - it’s not about replacing Israel - the national boundaries of Israel have been abolished.

Even in chapter 21, there is lots of imagery concerning the number 12 and 144

* in chapter 21, 12 gates, 12 foundation stones, 12 angels, city is 12,000 stadia, the walls are 144 cubits in width, the tree of life has 12 kinds of fruit

Revelation 21:12, 14 - “It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed…And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

* what do gates do? Encompass and enclose. And now we see in this picture of the New Jerusalem, these gates encompassing and enclosing people from every tribe and nation
* Meaning, Israel’s reason for being has been fulfilled, the nations are coming to the Messiah - it wasn’t about just Israel! Even the promise to Abraham was Israel is going to bless the nations
* And then all throughout the New Testament, Israel language is used to talk about the church - meaning, there is a true Israel, the church, redeemed Jews and Gentiles together:

James 1:1 - “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion…”

1 Peter 1:1 - “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles…”

Romans 2:28-29— “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”

Philippians 3:3 - “For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God…”

Galatians 3:29 - “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

Galatians 6:16 - “And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”

* So I believe verses 4-8 we are seeing the people of God, being sealed before the tribulation and things described in chapter 6.
* And then in verses 9-17 were seeing the people of God, those who persevered and remained faithful receiving their reward
* I know this because in verse 14 it says - “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Again I want to stress:

* the tribulation is NOT strictly some future 7 years really really bad time.
* When it says these are the ones coming out….it doesn’t say these are the ones who came out or who will come out…it literally means “those who are coming out”
* So the great tribulation was happening in AD 96 and is happening even now

Great tribulation = mega thlipsis

Thlpsis = pressure or crushing pressure

* this is a pressure created when kingdoms collide - when the kingdom of God comes and advances it will collide with the kingdoms of humanity in rebellion to the Lamb
* This started when Jesus came into the world - Jesus brings the kingdom of God and is born and what happens? His kingdom collides with Herod’s - Herod kills all every male child in Bethlehem under 2. Kingdoms COLLIDING - Pressure - Thlpsis
* The pressure and tribulation will increase the closer we get to Jesus returning and bringing his kingdom in its fullness, but we have been living in the end times since Jesus ascended into heaven
* chapter 7 should be a very comforting passage - the people of God, those who follow the Lamb are sealed by God and if they endure, will receive a reward
* Chapter 7 answers the question posed at the very end of chapter 6: “for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”
* Who can stand? - those who have been sealed by God.

So what is this seal?

* it is a picture of ownership - we are owned by Jesus, we belong to him
* John 10:28 - “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”
* 2 Timothy 2:19 - “But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’”
* To be sealed with the Lamb is to have the character of the Lamb written into the fabric of our being - written on our minds and hearts (again, not a literal name written on our foreheads)
* The seal of the Lamb is the Holy Spirit:

Ephesians 1:13 - “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Ephesians 4:30 - “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

* there is also OT references to being sealed and protected as well

Ezekiel 9:4-6 - “And the Lord said to him, ‘Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.’ And to the others he said in my hearing, ‘Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children , and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark.”

Exodus 12 - the passover - the people were commanded to kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts and the angel of death would pass over them

* the seal of God in Revelation 7 protects the servants of God from the ultimate consequences of the seals and the trumpets and the bowls
* I say ultimate consequences the seal of God doesn’t mean we won’t suffer or experience persecution or pressure
* The seal of God enables people to respond in faith to the trials we pass through so that those trials strengthen our faith

Revelation 9:4 - “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

Revelation 9:20-21 - “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

So to recap:

* I believe verses 1-8 describe the people of God, followers of the Lamb, sealed with the Holy Spirit, sealed by God so that they can make it through the tribulation
* Not that this seal guarantees no suffering or persecution, but rather this seal enables and strengthens our faith and protects us spiritually
* I believe verses 9-17 are describing those who made it through
  + Every nation, tribe, people, language
  + Standing before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, waving palm branches and worshiping God
  + They are worshiping God WITH the angels and elders and living creatures
  + They are before the throne, serving God day and night
  + God shelters them in his presence, no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat
  + The Lamb shepherds them and guide them to living water
  + God wipes away every tear from their eye

Application

* be encouraged, if you follow Jesus, you have been sealed
* It is an encouragement to be faithful through the thlpsis - the tribulation, the pressure
* Because look at what’s on the other side