

THE TWO MULTITUDES

Chapter 7

The first six of the seven seals belonging to the scroll have been opened (Rev. 6), relating to the words of Jesus, *Mt. 24:7* nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. ⁸ *All these are the beginning of sorrows.* In chapter seven the breaking of the seventh seal details the story of the end. It contains a vision of two multitudes, Rev. 7:1-8 and Rev. 7:9-17.

At the beginning of the chapter, for the purposes of the vision, John recognises the earth as a large square with an angel at each corner, holding [*back*] the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree (v.1). The four angels were withholding the winds which otherwise would have unmercifully unleashed great devastation.

Another *fifth* angel was then seen arising out of the east (v.2) which from John's perspective on the island of Patmos, would have been in the direction of the land of Israel. This angel had with him the seal [*σφραγίς*] of the living God. The word for 'seal' [*σφραγίς*] often indicated a signet ring used by kings and officials to stamp into wax, affirming their authority and authenticity. This seal belonged to the 'living God', the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16), and was in the possession of this angel who instructed the four angels on each corner of the earth to withhold releasing their judgments till we have sealed the servants [*δοῦλοις, bond servants, devoted*] of our God in their foreheads (v.3). ... The four angels immediately comply with the order.

John then learned the number of those who were sealed ... twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel, altogether 144,000. This was the seal later referred to in Rev. 9:4, *Rev. 9:4* And it was commanded them [*the locusts and the scorpions coming out of the smoke which ascended from the bottomless pit, v.2,3*] 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. ... The seal was God's protection for His people against the judgments He would unleash.

So, in chapter seven God is preparing to inflict His wrath upon the global population of unbelievers. During this same time, as He had kept Noah and his family safe in the ark during the Flood, and the Hebrews in Egypt, He would protect these 144,000 Jews identified by their seal (cf. also Rev. 16:2). The seal can be compared to Paul's teaching, *Eph. 1:13* In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest [*the pledge, part of the purchase price given in advance as security for the remainder*] of our inheritance [*as heirs*]

until the redemption of the purchased possession [*payment in full*], unto the praise of his glory ... ^{4:30} And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption ... ^{II Cor. 1:22} Who hath also *sealed* us, and given the *earnest* of the Spirit in our hearts. ... The seal is the assurance of Divine ownership.

Many suggestions have been made as to the meaning of the number 144,000. The simplest is to accept the plain statement in v.4 of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes, 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*. ... However, even a cursory survey of the Old Testament listings indicates a variation of the tribes (e.g. Gen. 49, Ezek. 48, Rev. 7). Also, the tribe of Dan is omitted in Rev. 7, as is the tribe of Ephraim. However the twelve tribes are to be understood, the full number of *all Israel* at the time of the Messiah's return will be saved (Rom. 11:26; Zech. 12:8ff.) and during His Millennial reign the greatest missionary enterprise will flow from out of Jerusalem (Is. 2:2ff).

While the 144,000 are standing on the threshold of the tribulation, - before the tribulation *begins*, - the 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 (v.9). This multitude have come *out of* the tribulation, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (v.14) They are standing before our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb (v.10). ... After having faithfully stood for God during the tribulation, they have died and are in Heaven ... These are the saints against whom the 'beast' was permitted to make war and overcome (13:7), having been martyred for their faith in Christ.

Following their promotion to Glory, they were gathered before the Heavenly King and the Lamb, surrounded by the four angels who encircled the throne, in the company of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures who then, - overwhelmed by God's glory, - fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. (vv.11,12; cf. 5:13).

At that point, one of the twenty-four elders approached John (cf. 5:5) and asked him the identity of those who were arrayed in white, and where they came from (v.13). John replied, Sir, thou knowest (v.14), - you tell me! - and the elder explained, ¹⁴These are they which came out of [*the*] great tribulation *ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb [*Christ's substitutionary atonement ... they have remained sure and steadfast in their faith in Christ ... Proven!*]. ¹⁵Therefore are they before the throne of God [*Present with the Lord forever!*], and serve him day and night in his temple [*... no longer under the altar praying for Divine*

justice, for their prayer in 6:9-11 has been answered! and he that sitteth on the throne / ... 'shall spread His tabernacle over them' ... they enjoy unfettered and eternal access to the throne ... perfect fellowship with God! shall dwell among them /Protection/.¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat /Provision, cf. Is. 49:10/.¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed /shepherd/ them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters /Permanence/ and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes /Peace/. ... This is the scene John saw concerning the ultimate triumph of God's saving grace when God redeems His people, who will forever praise His glorious Name!