

## The End of the World Part 6: A Study in Revelation

Revelation 7:1-8:13

February 12, 2020

Wednesday Study Notes

### Revelation 7

**1** After this I saw **four angels** standing at the **four corners** of the earth, **holding back** the **four winds** of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

"The four corners of the earth" is a very common phrase referring to the whole world, as in the four corners of a compass. (An ancient phrase still in use today similar to "setting sun")

"The four winds from the four corners" is all of the wind, and winds are a symbol of destruction (Jeremiah 4:11-12; 49:36; 51:1-2).

So, here for a moment is a pause from the destruction that is about to occur.

**2** Then I saw **another** angel **ascending** from the rising of the sun, with the **seal** of the living God, 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 on their **foreheads**."

An angel carries a seal. This is not like the seals on the scroll that the Lamb has been opening. This seal is more like a stamp. This kind of seal was a symbol of ownership in that day and time especially when not everyone could read.

The fact that the mark is on the forehead gives an indication of an easy to recognize and easy to see mark.

The angels at the four corners of the world holding back the four winds are told not to allow destruction until those who are God's are marked as His with the seal.

Ephesians 4:30 calls the Holy Spirit the seal of God on the believers. This could be Holy Spirit or it could be some spiritually discernible mark. The seal is something that distinguishes believers as recognizable to those bringing the judgements. Revelation 14:1 refers to the seal as the name of God.

These four angels are the four riders going forth at the opening of the first four seals. So, the judgement does not begin on the earth until people coming to know Jesus are claimed by God. This informs us that during this period of time people are being saved.

**4** 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.

"The sealed" is used to mean a permanent sealing.

Are these numbers literal or figurative?

In every numbering and listing throughout the Jewish scriptures some tribes were always bigger than others. So, if these numbers in Revelation 7 were literal it would seem that some of the tribes would have more. In addition, to list a specific number who will come to Christ does not seem to match the rest of Revelation, let alone the rest of Scripture, which always ventures away from specific numeric inclusion of the saved.

The list of the tribes is odd. Judah is first, seemingly to indicate its importance as the royal tribe and producer of the Messiah. (However, in the Jewish scriptures there are about twenty tribe lists and eighteen different orders.) Dan is also left out, which could be implicative of its idolatrous past (Judges 18:30, 1 Kings 12:29). Levi is included, when he is usually not. Joseph is also subbed in for Ephraim. Ephraim would be apart of Joseph but so would Manasseh, which is itself included. The only obvious seemingly meaningful change is the use of Judah as the opener.

Some believe that the mention of the twelve tribes individually seems to emphasize the wholeness of the inclusion of all of the Christians.

Some others believe that this refers to a literal 144,000 biological Jews will be saved during this period of time.

144,000 is 12,000 for twelve tribes, twelve twelves.

James 1:1 uses the phrase “twelve tribes” as a figure of speech seemingly to refer to Christians scattered around the world.

In Romans 2:29 and Galatians 6:16, Paul calls Christians the real Jews and the Israel of God.

In addition,

**Hebrews 8:7** - For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second.

**Hebrews 8:13** - In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

“obsolete” - παλαιόω - no longer valid

Why would physical Jews be referred to here if scripture repeatedly speaks of the covenant of salvation through faith rather than ancestry?

I believe that the twelve twelves mean an absolute wholeness or completeness of people who will come to know Christ during this period.

So this passage would seem to be saying that the whole of Christianity alive will be sealed.

[We have to be extremely careful when we interpret scripture, to draw the meaning from scripture and not to bring the meaning with us when we read. In interpreting scripture we have to accept either a literal or a figurative form of interpretation. I tend to believe that scripture is to be taken literally unless it is obviously figurative. The visions included in Revelation use figurative language frequently, as do all prophetic visions of the future, and we can easily slip into dangerous territory when we begin to jump back and forth between a literal interpretation and a figurative interpretation whenever the interpretation does not fit within our previous thinking of a particular passage.]

**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, with **palm** branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “**Salvation belongs** to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

This "great multitude" has no number and is completely comprised of individuals from every existing people group, which would include Jews.

So, if the previous description from Revelation 7:4-8 had only been referring to physical Jews, then this multitude would be in contrast including everyone else, particularly only Gentiles. However, John is all inclusive in his hyperbolic description, meaning this group is representative of every people group to no exclusion, even a Jewish one.

Thus, it is my belief that the previous description of people, the twelve tribes, and this one, the great multitude, are one and the same.

They are wearing white robes and holding palm branches symbolizing victory and triumph.

Notice also, that the Lamb is, again, given a place equal to God, because salvation comes from them both.

**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! **Blessing** and **glory** and **wisdom** and **thanksgiving** and **honor** and **power** and **might** be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

All the angels present in this moment are encircling the entire scene and are praising God. 360° sound. Surround sound.

Notice also, that they praise God for seven specific characteristics. Each of the seven areas of praise that the angels declare to God are presented in the Greek with an article before it, for example: “the blessing” which implies "the blessing above all others."

**13** 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.

John tells the elder that only he knows who the people in white robes are.

They are the Christians who came out of the tribulation.

Some believe that this could refer to the 7 year period of trouble or because of the vast number of people it could mean the great tribulation of life in general. Not every believer will be alive during the great tribulation of the Revelation. So it would seem that since every angel is present that maybe every believer is also present. For the number of believers from the great tribulation of Revelation might not be great enough to be called a multitude.

Since John’s vision of the Revelation deals singularly with what is yet to come, I believe that this refers to those who will believe during the specific period of tribulation, of great judgement and difficulty, at the end.

The Roman counting system only went to 10,000, so it is easy to believe that this “great multitude” numbered more than 10,000, thus making it innumerable.

The elder says that these people are **coming out** of the great tribulation. So, Revelation 7:1-8 happens before the judgements begin and what follows is a time jump forward to after they have all concluded.

**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. **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.”

The whole of heaven seems to be God’s temple, because it is all within His presence. The temple symbolizes God’s presence.

The experience of God’s presence will be unlike anything for which we have a context.

Leon Morris describes it this way, the believers “will know no unsatisfied desire.”

## Revelation 8

**1** When the Lamb **opened** the **seventh** seal, there was **silence** in heaven for about **half** an hour. **2** Then I saw the **seven angels** who **stand** before God, and **seven trumpets** were given to them.

Now, time jumps back to the judgements of the seals.

The silence is remarkable considering there has not been any amount of silence since John was brought into God’s presence.

Throughout scripture silence is occasionally associated with severe judgement (Isaiah 41:1; Amos 8:3; Exodus 11:7; Habakuk 2:20; Zechariah 2:13).

As a point of note, “half an hour” is the shortest time frame mentioned in Revelation. It is a fairly short period of time.

Seven more angels in God’s presence are given seven trumpets to usher in more destructive judgement.

These seven trumpets are revealed at the opening of the seventh seal.

**3** And **another** angel **came** and **stood** at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given **much incense** to offer with the **prayers** of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, **4** and the **smoke** of the incense, with the **prayers** of the saints, **rose** before God from the hand of the angel. **5** Then the angel took the censer and **filled** it with **fire** from the **altar** and **threw** it on the **earth**, and there were peals of **thunder**, **rumblings**, flashes of **lightning**, and an **earthquake**.

Before any of the seven angels blow their seven trumpets, another angel comes forward. He has an offering of prayer.

The prayers of the saints usher in the wrath of God. The power of prayer knows only the bounds of the power of God, which cannot be contained or bound to any level or degree.

Prayer can and should be offered at any point, and here we see that judgement is paused so that believing prayers can be offered to God.

Then, the offered prayers along with the fire of God's presence are thrown upon the earth as an unstoppable force. Nothing can stand against the power of prayer.

**6** Now the seven **angels** who had the seven **trumpets prepared to blow** them.

**7** The **first** angel **blew** his trumpet, and there followed **hail** and **fire, mixed** with **blood**, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a **third** of the **earth** was **burned** up, and a **third** of the **trees** were burned up, and **all** green **grass** was burned up.

With the sound of the first trumpet come hail, fire, and blood. The fire is an indication of divine destruction.

“mixed” - μίγνυμι - is frequently used metaphorically to describe the means that brought about the blood. So, blood seems to be descriptive, not as bloody rain, but that the fire and hail will spill the blood of the people.

Joel 2:19 describes a similar catastrophe at the Day of the Lord.

And the impact of the terrible weather will directly impact a third of the world.

**8** The **second** angel **blew** his trumpet, and **something like a great mountain, burning** with fire, was **thrown** into the **sea**, and a **third** of the **sea** became **blood**.

**9** A **third** of the living **creatures** in the sea **died**, and a **third** of the **ships** were **destroyed**.

The first trumpet judgement impacted a third of the land, and now the second trumpet judgement impacts a third of the sea.

The burning mountain is imagery of the divine destruction in the sea.

This is not merely pollution, but something of divine origin as it effects both sea creatures in the sea and ships on the sea.

The idea appears to be something abrupt and violent.

**10** The **third** angel **blew** his trumpet, and a **great star fell** from heaven, **blazing** like a torch, and it fell on a **third** of the **rivers** and on the **springs** of **water**. **11** The name of the star is **Wormwood**. A **third** of the **waters** became **wormwood**, and **many** people **died** from the water, because it had been made **bitter**.

This time a star is burning; it poisoned a third of the world's water.

Wormwood is a very bitter substance that is mentioned seven times in scripture representing sorrow and judgement (Deut. 29:18; Prov. 5:4; Jer. 9:15; 23:15; Lam. 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7). The bitterness is symbolic of poison.

The previous trumpet judgement hit one third of the ocean, and now this one poisons one third of the fresh water.

It is, also, not specified how many people died, just that a whole bunch did.

**12** The **fourth** angel **blew** his trumpet, and a **third** of the **sun** was **struck**, and a **third** of the **moon**, and a **third** of the **stars**, so that a **third** of their **light** might be **darkened**, and a **third** of the **day** might be kept from shining, and likewise a **third** of the **night**.

Does this mean that a third of the light is gone (ex: the sun and stars shine a third less brightly) or that no light shines for a third of the day and a third of the night?

From the text it could mean either one. Either way, the fourth trumpet judgement removes one third of all celestial light.

**13** Then I looked, and I heard an **eagle crying** with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "**Woe, woe, woe** to those who **dwelt** on the earth, at the blasts of the other **trumpets** that the three angels are **about to blow!**"

The three "Woes" are for what is yet to come and not what has just happened.

The next judgements are going to be even worse than those that have already come.

This is a call of preparation and warning, possibly to give the hearers an opportunity to repent and believe.