

Sealed From Judgment  
Revelation 7  
by Dellen Ludwig

As I was preparing today's/tonight's lecture, I felt that chapter seven was like the eye of a hurricane. All around the eye stands the giant wall of destruction, caused by the fury of the seven seals of the Tribulation wrath. People who have witnessed the eye of a hurricane describe its sudden cessation of the 80 to 150 mile per hour winds, as an amazing silence and a sense of peace.

They are tempted to leave their shelter, thinking they've survived the whole storm, only to see the back side of the storm rapidly approaching. In reality, people will only survive the full force of the hurricane if they return to their secure shelter.

In our lesson last week the full fury of The Tribulation had not yet been felt on the earth. But as we study today, we step out of our shelter during the "eye of the hurricane", so we can view God's sovereignty even during the destruction His wrath had ordained.

Our view will show us The Seal of God's protection, The Salvation of believers and The Songs of praise to God that encourage the casualties of The Tribulation. It's good to know in the middle of this earth-wide catastrophe, that our God is intimately concerned with the protection of His own.

Let's set up the scene as we read the first few verses of Revelation chapter 7. "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.'" [Revelation 7:1-3]

When we read the phrase "After this", we need to address it by asking, "After what?" Last week we studied the answer in chapter six. The first six seals of the scroll described in chapter five had been opened by the Lamb. Each had revealed a calamity that was to come on the earth. In review, the 1<sup>st</sup> seal revealed a conqueror; the 2<sup>nd</sup> revealed war; the 3<sup>rd</sup> hyper inflation; the 4<sup>th</sup> death from the sword, famine, plague and wild animals; the 5<sup>th</sup> martyrdom; and the 6<sup>th</sup> a world-wide earthquake with astronomical events.

As the dust settled from the world-wide earthquake, the angels were already in position at the four corners of the earth, prepared to deliver the seventh serving of God's wrath. Verse 2 explained that they were prepared to "harm the land and the sea and the trees," as soon as the seventh seal was opened. But God sent out His angel coming from the east to halt the harm He had ordained.

Although the Lord's wrath would come on man at this time, His wrath is not the mindless rage that people might exhibit. It is measured. God does not change His mind about His judgment. But He is adamant about giving mankind time to repent. Peter in his second epistle said: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." [2 Peter 3:9]

### **The Seal**

In chapter seven of Revelation we see His amazing patience. He is not willing that the world should be destroyed without a witness to announce His purposes. Chapter 5 gave us a picture of the raptured church who worshiped God before His throne. But God's redemption was not held back just because His church wasn't there to proclaim it.

God would still have a witness to His redemptive plan on the earth, even while it endured this terrible tribulation. He appointed an angel that had God's seal, to mark those whom He ordained to be saved from the wrath still to come.

Who were chosen to be saved? We find the answer in verse 4: "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." [Revelation 7:4] Verses 5-8 lists those among Israel's descendants who would be sealed:

"From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed

From the tribe of Reuben 12,000

From the tribe of Gad 12,000

From the tribe of Asher 12,000

From the tribe of Naphtali 12,000

From the tribe of Manassah 12,000

From the tribe of Simeon 12,000

From the tribe of Levi 12,000

From the tribe of Issachar 12,000

From the tribe of Zebulun 12,000

From the tribe of Joseph 12,000

From the tribe of Benjamin 12,000” [Revelation 7:5-8]

There are three points that I would like to make about this list. The first is the order of the tribes listed. The actual birth order of Israel’s sons can be found in Genesis chapter 46.

Reuben was the first born, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. It was common to have the first-born son given prominence in genealogies, in this case Reuben, because the first born was traditionally the birthright heir.

But notice that Judah is mentioned first here in Revelation 7. God ordained that the promised Messiah would descend from Judah. In Genesis 49:10 Isaac blessed his son Judah by prophesying: “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his.” [Genesis 49:10]

Jesus was the Messiah from the tribe of Judah. We have already studied this year about His position on the throne of heaven. He is the King of Kings who reigns over the heavens and the earth. He is the One who holds back the wrath of God in the passage we study today. And it is Jesus Christ who ordered 144,000 Jews to be sealed from the wrath still to come.

Secondly, consider this number: 144,000. The commentary of Jamieson, Faucett and Brown explained the numerology. “Twelve is the number of the tribes and appropriate to the church: three by four: three, the divine number, multiplied by 4, the number for world-wide extension. Twelve by twelve implies fixity and completeness, which is taken a thousand-fold in 144,000. A thousand implies the world perfectly pervaded by the divine; for it is ten, the world number, raised to the power of three, the number of God. “

Thirdly let’s consider the tribes who were included in this list. You may have noticed that there is a difference in the two lists, besides their order. When Israel blessed his sons before his death, he gave a double blessing to Joseph as his favorite son, although he was not the eldest. Israel blessed Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. They became two tribes who inherited portions in the promised land.

God divided the land into twelve portions, but Levi was to be a tribe of priests and to live scattered into each portion to teach God’s word to all the tribes, serving as priests and scribes. Later however, Ephraim and Dan drifted as tribes into idolatry and helped infect the other tribes

as well. So, you may notice here in this list, Ephraim and Dan are missing. They lost their inheritance in God's kingdom because they turned their back on Him in favor of idols.

But the very fact that God placed His seal on 12,000 from each remaining tribe showed His plan from the very beginning was to save Israel. Romans 11:25 and 26 revealed God's plan for the Jews: "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited. Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved...." [Romans 11:25,26a]

This scene in Revelation 7 shows the fulfillment of His goal, and my third point. As every tribe of Israel's decedents are sealed, they are saved from God's wrath. But it will not be just because of their heritage. It will be a matter of faith as God has always ordained it should be. Paul wrote in Romans 4:13, "It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith." [Romans 4:13] Their witness in this terrible time will bring many more to salvation.

### **The Salvation**

Then John's attention was turned away from the earth toward the scene before the throne. "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

[Revelation 7:9]

Before we examine the worship of this huge crowd, let's consider who they were. One of the elders asked John this question: "These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?" [Revelation 7:13] John could tell that the elder knew the answer. He was just using the question-answer method of teaching John.

In verse 14 we read John's reply and the elder's answer: "I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" [Revelation 7:14]

The church had been raptured out of the earth. The wrath of God on the earth had begun. In chapter 6 we read that ¼ of the earth's population was killed in the 4<sup>th</sup> seal's violence alone! [Revelation 6:8] Verse 9 and 10 of chapter 6 revealed that the souls of those who had been killed because of their faith were already with the Lord in heaven, longing for the judgment to be over.

But now, we see in this chapter that this crowd from every nation who had believed and were killed, are in heaven praising the Lamb for His faithfulness wearing white robes. Matthew Henry commented on their white robes. “It is not the blood of the martyrs, but the blood of the Lamb, that can wash away sin, and make the soul pure and clean in the sight of God.”

John in his first epistle wrote “... the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” [1 John 1:7b] Now, in writing Revelation 7 he documented that the people of faith in Christ shall wear white robes, made white because they are washed in the blood of Christ. One commentary called this “amazing alchemy.” We would use the word “chemistry.” Our Lord would use the word justification: “Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him.” [Romans 5:9]

We all stand in awe of these and other martyrs we hear about. I ask myself: if I were given the choice of dying for Christ’s name, or living but denying Him, would I be brave enough to choose martyrdom? But these martyrs here are not applauded because of something they have done. They applaud the One who gave them salvation!

### **The Songs**

Verses 10, 12 and 14-17 record three songs that revealed the direction of their appreciation. In the first song, the unnumbered crowd standing before the throne cried out in a loud voice saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” They are fully aware that they are not there because of things they have done – not even their martyrdom.

This song is powerful because it recognizes that the hope of our salvation has nothing to do with us. Whether we go to be with the Lord in this present time of relative peace or during a time of persecution and trouble, our salvation is purely because the Lamb was sacrificed on our behalf. It is the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord that has made a way for us to be justified in God’s sight.

This song again, was so powerful that “All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’” [Revelation 7:11,12]

This second song in this chapter is very reminiscent of the song recorded in Revelation 4:11 which reads: “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

Notice that there are seven things mentioned in this song: 1. Praise, 2. Glory, 3. Wisdom, 4. Thanks, 5. Honor, 6. Power, and 7. Strength. The perfect number seven signifies that God is worthy of the highest kind of praise. His redeemed people are full of praise and thanksgiving because in this salvation, their Lord demonstrated His wisdom, power and strength. He showed the world His glory and honor as He kept His promises to save the world. In considering “so great a salvation” it is no wonder that every creature in heaven fell down in homage before the Lord on His throne.

Now, the final three verses may not sound like a song if you only listen to their words. “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. ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’” [Revelation 7:15-17]

But notice that these words are spoken by the elder in verse 13 who answered his own question about who these people wearing white robes were. He has seen the believers dressed in white. He has seen the martyrs kneeling in praise acknowledging all that the Lord has brought to pass for their salvation. He has experienced this salvation himself, in his life time. Therefore, he can’t help but join into the praise of his Lord, too.

He recognized that believers had been brought into the Lord’s presence before the throne, just as the Lord had promised. He brought them to the place God had prepared for them.

He recognized that in response to that fulfilled promise, believers desired to “serve him day and night in his temple.” There, before the throne, God’s people are in the very presence of the Lord God! All of heaven is His temple, just as the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple were the earthly location where God placed His presence for the people of Israel.

This is the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to the faithful in the church of Philadelphia found in Revelation 3:12. “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it...” Believers will in joy serve as priest and “pillars” in His temple.

The elder recognized that “he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.” The word we have translated into “shelter” was translated in older versions as “dwell”.

MacLaren defined this word saying, “It literally means ‘to dwell in a tent’, or if we may use such a word, ‘to tabernacle’.” He then applied this definition by suggesting, “We may see an allusion to that early symbolical dwelling of God with man. ‘He that sitteth upon the throne shall spread His tabernacle upon’ the multitude which no man can number...”

The elder is praising God because the Lord has kept His promise that believers would be with Him forever. God dwelling, or “tabernacling” with people for ever and ever! And what will that mean for us?

We will never again hunger!

We will never again thirst!

We will never again be left in the elements without shelter!

The negative in the original language is emphatic and is said to rise in force as the verse proceeds. [Ellicott] The elder is recognizing God’s supreme provision for all saints throughout eternity!

There will be no hunger in heaven, although you were deprived of food during the tribulation. There will be no thirst, although you were imprisoned and not given sufficient water on earth when you were persecuted as a believer. You will never again be banned from your home in heaven, although the enemy burned down your home and you were cast out to live in the heat of the sun when you claimed the Name of Jesus on the earth.

The elder recognized how perfectly the Lord performs as the Good Shepherd of His people. Our memory verse stated: “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (v.17)

How extraordinary that the Lamb becomes the Shepherd! God often used the analogy in which we are compared to being sheep in His Word. Isaiah 53:6 condemns us saying, “We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” [Isaiah 53:6]

John the Baptist announced to his disciples, referring to Jesus: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” [John 1:29] But Jesus Himself told his disciples, “I am the

good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” [John 10:11] So, at first it is confusing to consider our Lord Jesus as being both the Lamb and the Shepherd.

But in his commentary, MacLaren referenced this incongruity saying it makes perfect sense. “the very incongruity of making One, who bears the same nature as the flock to be the Shepherd of the flock, is part of the beauty of the metaphor....They follow Him because He is one of themselves, and He could not be the Shepherd unless He were the Lamb. He shall be their Shepherd, not coercing, not driving by violence, but leading to the fountains of the water of life, gently and graciously.” [MacLaren’s Commentary]

Of course, as His sheep, we would gladly follow Him who is our Good Shepherd. We know how much He cares for us. We know He was led to be slaughtered like a Lamb, on the cross to purchase our redemption. And we know He will bring us to the “springs of living water” that will sustain us for eternity.

Future hurricanes may frighten us by their howling, destructive winds. But as we paused here, in the eye of the hurricane, we can listen to these songs of praise and gain courage in their promises. Unlike an earthly hurricane, the other half of the storms in our lives need not be feared. Our Lamb will lead us through the storms here to the place He has prepared for us in heaven.

There He will wipe away every tear we have cried and turn those tears into praises for all He has done and who He is - we can sing our worship throughout eternity.