

Love Community Baptist Church

Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

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Revelation – Chapter 7 and 8

THE 144,000 AND THE GREAT MULTITUDE

A. The 144,000.

(Revelation 7:1-3) Holding back judgment until the servants of God are sealed.

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

The phrase four corners of the earth is an ancient (and sometimes modern) equivalent to the idea of “the four points of the compass.” The idea is that these angels effect the entire earth.

- These winds were a destructive force of God’s judgment, as they often are in the Old Testament.
- The four winds of the earth may refer back to the four horsemen of Revelation 6:1-8, after the pattern of Zechariah 6:1-8. In that passage, four chariots with horses of the same colors of Revelation 6:1-8 go out to all the earth, and are called the four spirits of heaven. Spirits in that passage translates the Hebrew word ruach, which can also be translated winds.

Another angel had a seal, and he sealed the people of God. In the ancient world, such seals were familiar. A king or a property owner could use a seal to show ownership or authenticity.

These servants of God will receive a protective seal on their forehead, containing God’s name in some manner (Revelation 14:1).

The servants of our God: We are not told what exactly their service is, but the 144,000 are sealed for a specific and unique purpose. However, the general idea of being sealed is not limited to them.

(Revelation 7:4-8) The number of those sealed.

And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed;

of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.

This is their general identification. They are of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Ethnically, they are Jewish, and there are 144,000 of these chosen ones.

This is their specific identification. The 144,000 are divided among the 12 tribes of Israel. Though only God may know their tribal ancestry, there are 12,000 from each tribe.

In this listing of the tribes, the tribe of Dan is left out. Some think this is because Dan is the tribe of the Antichrist, based on Daniel 11:37 and Jeremiah 8:16. This may or may not be the case, but without doubt, Dan was the tribe that introduced idolatry into the nation of Israel (Genesis 49:17; Judges 18:30).

- There is a wonderful redemption for the tribe of Dan. Dan is the first tribe listed in Ezekiel's millennial role call of the tribes (Ezekiel 48).
- This list is also interesting in the way that the tribe of Ephraim is referred to, but only indirectly. The tribe of Joseph is mentioned, but Joseph was represented by two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh. Since the tribe of Manasseh is mentioned, by elimination, the tribe of Joseph must mean the tribe of Ephraim — who is listed, but not by name.

Who are these 144,000?

Many different groups have claimed to be the 144,000. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses once said their entire group was, until they surpassed 144,000 in number. Now they say that the 144,000 are only a select group of Witnesses who go to heaven.

- Most Bible scholars either regard the 144,000 as the church or as converted Jews, who are still identified as Israelites in some manner.
- It is an important issue. If they are a symbol of the church, then the church is definitely in the Great Tribulation, but sealed for survival through the Great Tribulation.

Some facts about the 144,000 from Revelation 7 and Revelation 14 give us insight regarding their identity.

- They are called the children of Israel (Revelation 7:4).
- Their tribal affiliation is specific (Revelation 7:4-8).
- They seem to be protected and triumphant through the period of God's wrath, meeting with Jesus at Mount Zion at His return (Revelation 14:1).
- They are celibate (Revelation 14:4).
- They are the beginning of a greater harvest (Revelation 14:4).
- They are marked by integrity and faithfulness (Revelation 14:5).

Taken together, these facts make it difficult to say that the 144,000 are a symbolic picture of the church.

- Israel is a term never specifically applied to the church in the New Testament, and never by any Christian until a.d. 160.
- It is difficult to imagine the entire church surviving through the tribulation without martyrdom and remaining celibate through the period, something that was never required for the church as a whole (1 Corinthians 7:1-6).

It is best to see the 144,000 as specifically chosen Jewish people who come to faith in Jesus, protectively sealed throughout the tribulation as a sign.

- They are the beginning harvest of the salvation of Israel (Romans 11:1, Romans 11:26, Matthew 23:37-39).

B. The Great Multitude.

(Revelation 7:9-10) More worship at the throne of God.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The diversity here is evidence that the Great Commission will be fulfilled before the end, even as Jesus promised (Matthew 24:14).

- Because John knew they came from different nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, we know that there will be differences among people in heaven, just as there is on earth. We will not all be the same. We will be individuals.

Palm branches: These remind us of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-16), where Jesus was also praised as Savior and King. The word Hosanna means "save now!"

Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! Having an emblem of righteousness (white robes), they worship God for salvation. They recognize that God is the source of salvation, and no one else. **Salvation isn't something we earn, it is something God gives.**

- Sometimes believers on earth take their salvation almost for granted. This isn't true of this great multitude in heaven.

(Revelation 7:11-12) All heavenly creatures join in worship.

All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

*"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."*

As the great multitude worships God, the others in heaven are compelled to join their voices in praise. All created beings around the throne join in.

As these other created beings hear the worship the great multitude brings to God, they see more clearly the power and wisdom and majesty of God. They can worship God all the more by seeing the salvation He brought to the great multitude.

(Revelation 7:13-14) The identity of the great multitude.

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

It was important that John knew the identity of this great multitude. But he didn't know that he should ask, so one of the elders prompted him to ask.

These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation: This vast multitude, from every tribe and tongue and nation, are those rescued for God's kingdom in the period of the great tribulation.

- They had trouble on the earth during the great tribulation. In the ancient Greek grammar of this passage, "the" is emphatic. This was a time of great tribulation for this multitude. This leads many to believe that most, if not all, of these are martyrs from the great tribulation.
- The presence of so many tribulation saints is a powerful statement of God's grace and mercy. Even in this time of judgment and wrath on the earth, many are saved.

Those saved in the great tribulation are saved just like everybody else, by the blood of the Lamb. Even if they are martyred, their martyrdom does not save them. Only the work of Jesus can cleanse and save.

- White by blood is an interesting phrase; we don't think of things being made white by the application of blood. But the blood of Jesus cleanses us: Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. (Isaiah 1:18)

(Revelation 7:15-17) What this great multitude does, and how it is blessed.

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 dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

In heaven, the redeemed enjoy the immediate presence of God. They can come right into the throne room and be with God. There are no barriers, no waiting lists.

He who sits on the throne will dwell among them: In heaven, God will dwell with His people. This is the ultimate fulfillment of King David's great desire in Psalm 27:4: One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple.

The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them: In heaven, the redeemed will know the loving care and nurture of their Savior. He will protect them from every affliction (they shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat). He will also provide for their every need (lead them to living fountains of waters).

- It is interesting to note: Will there still be elements or events that will hurt us, but the lamb protects us from that? Reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes: In heaven, the redeemed will know no more sorrow or pain. The hurt and the struggle of this earthly life are gone, and tears are a thing of the past, because God will wipe away every tear.

CHAPTER 8

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS

The seventh seal is loosed.

(Revelation 8:1) Silence in heaven.

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The sealed scroll was introduced in Revelation 5, and the seals were opened one by one up to the sixth seal in Revelation 6. We waited for the last seal to be opened and the contents of the scroll to be

revealed — but then were given a pause with Revelation 7, the revealing of the 144,000 and the great multitude out of the great tribulation. Now the idea of a pause between the sixth and the seventh seal is emphasized by this silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Silence in heaven for about half an hour: A half-hour silence is not long, but things seem long or short in their context. If a preacher were to stop his sermon and remain silent for ten minutes, it would seem like an eternity. Since heaven is a place of constant praise and worship to God (Revelation 4:8-11), silence for about half an hour is a long time.

(Revelation 8:2) Seven angels with seven trumpets.

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

According to Jewish tradition, there are seven angels who stand in God's presence. Apparently, based on this verse, that traditional idea was accurate.

In the Old Testament, trumpets sounded the alarm for war and threw the enemy into a panic, or they called an assembly of God's people. These seven trumpets will sound as God's battle-alarm during the great tribulation.

(Revelation 8:3-6) The other angel with the golden censer.

Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

Some see this angel as Jesus, functioning as a mediator and because of Old Testament references to Jesus as "the Angel of the LORD." Others say it could only be a mere angelic being because the specific ancient Greek word for another means "another of the same kind."

Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth: As God's people pray for the resolution of all things, their prayers were touched by the fire from the altar in heaven, and then "thrown" back down to earth. All things will not be resolved on this earth until judgment comes, and when the prayers of God's people "come back" to earth, they bring the groundswell of judgment (noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake).

We waited for the seven seals to be opened and saw them loosed one by one. But when the seventh seal was finally loosed, the end did not immediately come. It set in motion seven trumpets that would sound upon the earth.

Since John brings a report from eternity, it is difficult to assign a chronological and sequential element to these judgments. It is most important to emphasize that they are real, even if their sequence is hard to pin down with certainty.

B. The first four trumpets.

(Revelation 8:7) The first trumpet brings a plague on vegetation.

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

Blood may indicate the color or the result of the phenomenon described here. We don't know if the hail and fire was red in color or if it brought forth red blood, but one way or another this should be understood straightforwardly, without escaping into a creative symbolism.

A third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up: Because of this hail and fire, trees and grass are destroyed — one-third of the vegetation of the planet is burned up during the great tribulation.

- God may use whatever method He desires to bring judgment, but people on earth know these events are from God, and do not think them to be merely natural disasters (Revelation 16:9, and 16:11, Revelation 19:19).

(Revelation 8:8-9) The second trumpet brings a plague on the sea.

Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

John carefully said that this is not an actual mountain (note the use of like), but it was a blazing mass as large as a mountain.

A third of the sea became blood: This disaster is a cataclysm, perhaps a meteor that crashes into the sea and results in great oceanic upheaval with residual pollution. Researchers today say that this sort of phenomenon has happened before in the history of the earth, sometimes resulting in great ecological upheaval and disaster. Here, the result is that a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The blood may be either the cause or the effect of the widespread death in the oceans of the world.

It is common to take this great mountain as a symbol for a nation that will be judged. It is true that mountains are sometimes used as figures of governments or nations (Jeremiah 51:25, 51:27, 51:30). But in this context, the symbol doesn't make sense. What does it mean that the great mountain is burning with fire? What does it mean that it was thrown into the sea? What does the sea symbolize? Who are the living creatures in the sea? What are the ships on the sea? What is their destruction a symbol of? All these questions make us say that the best solution is to see this as some literal mass of land with probably something like a meteor or asteroid falling into the sea and bringing ecological disaster.

(Revelation 8:10-11) The third trumpet brings a plague on fresh waters.

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter.

We may easily associate this with a comet or meteor crashing into the earth and bringing ecological disaster. But God may have something else in mind also.

Wormwood is a very bitter substance, and proverbial for bitterness and sadness.

A third of the rivers... a third of the waters: The proportion of ecological disaster stays the same. In each one of the trumpets, a third of an ecological system is destroyed in judgment.

(Revelation 8:12-13) The fourth trumpet brings a plague on the heavens, and darkness on the earth.

Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!"

This does not describe a one-third lessening of light, but one-third of the day and night are plunged into absolute darkness. As Jesus said: the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light (Matthew 24:29).

The angel's woes are well founded, because one-third of the earth's population will die in the next three trumpets.

5. Observations on the first four trumpets.

These first four trumpets reveal the severity of God's judgment. He attacks all the ordinary means of subsistence, such as food and water; and He attacks all the ordinary means of comfort, and knowledge, such as light and the regular rhythm of days.

Man has come to see these aspects of the created order as impersonal, perpetual forces. During the great tribulation, God proclaims His Lordship through their agonizing disruption.

We know the great humility that comes upon men in the midst of something like an earthquake, because they know that "nature" is not as reliable as they had thought. With these four trumpets, that effect will be multiplied greatly.

The first four trumpets also reveal the mercy of God's judgment; these are partial judgments striking only one-third, and are meant to warn and lead a rebellious world to repentance before the final curtain. For now, God spares more than He smites.