Revelation 7

The First Interlude Passage

- Having now read of the events surrounding the breaking the first six seals on the seven-sealed scroll in Revelation 6, in Revelation 7 we come to **the first of three interlude, or parenthetical, sections** of Revelation. **This parenthesis occurs, chronologically, before the events that occur with the breaking of the seventh seal**.

- The question we were left with at the conclusion of the sixth seal, in Revelation 6:17, is ***who is able to stand?*** Now, **here in Revelation 7 that answer is given in two new visions.**

    - The first vision pictures angelic actions of restraint and of sealing of a specific group of **144,000 Jewish evangelists in v. 1-8**, and the second vision pictures a heavenly multitude in v. 9-17.

- Revelation 7 accomplishes several purposes.

    - It separates the sixth and seventh seals (Rev 8:1 is the opening of the seventh seal)

    - It is a pause in the chronological progression of the seals

    - It contrasts the preparedness of God's people with the panic of the unprepared world.

    - Evidence is sufficient to place the sealing of the 144,000 witnesses at a point just before the midpoint of the tribulation, at the end of "the beginning of birth pains".

Part 1 (v. 1-8)— The 144,000 Witnesses

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, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

- Revelation 7:1 begins with the phrase ***after this I saw . . . .*** This phrase denotes the beginning of a new vision and a progression from the previous vision of the sixth seal that began in 6:12 with the phrase, ***and I looked . . . .***

- What does John see? He specifically states what he sees . . . ***four angels***.

- What are they doing?

    - They are ***standing at the four corners of the earth . . .*** The phrase ***four corners*** denotes the four points of the compass. The phrase simply means ***the whole earth***, as seen in Isaiah 11:12 and Revelation 20:8, and indicates the worldwide nature of their responsibility.

    - Specifically, John states that the ***four angels*** are ***holding back the four winds of the earth.***

- The term ***holding back*** (Greek: *krateō*) means "hold fast; hold firmly; detain." The term carries the idea that these winds are struggling to get loose and are being forcibly restrained.

- What are the ***four winds of the earth***?

  - Because the winds are not actually released but are replaced by the seven trumpet angels (Rev. 8:2 and Rev. 8:8-12), ***the winds*** **are a way of referring to the plagues which are about to fall upon the earth.** **In other words**, they depict destructive forces.

  - **Bottom line:** The trumpet judgments are restrained until the sealing of the 144,000.

- What purpose does the ***holding back*** serve?

  - ***So that no wind should blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree***. We will see in the next verse and in Revelation 8:6-9, when the 7th seal is unleashed, that **it will be granted to these angels to devastate the earth and the sea and the trees.**

  - **This is "the calm before the storm" of the 7th trumpet.**

    Revelation 8:6-9— 6 And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. 7 And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. 8 And 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; 9 and a third of the creatures, which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Another angel appears

Revelation 7:2-3— 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

- In v. 2 we see a fifth angel comes on to the scene . . . ***and I saw another angel***.

  - The word ***another*** (Greek: *allos*) means "another of the same kind" and expresses numerical difference.

    - **In other words**, this angel is of the same class of angels as the first four.

  - The use of the first-person plural, ***we***, in Rev 7:3 (***we have sealed***) identifies him as having a common task with the other four angels. In other words, ***we*** applies to this angel, but denotes their common goal with the previous four in the coming judgment.

- Where is this angel coming from?

- We see in v. 2 this ***angel ascending from the rising of the sun***. **In other words**, **he is coming from the east.**

- Relative to Patmos, where John was in exile, east is **the direction of Israel** and from where the twelve tribes are sealed (7:4-8).

- It is from Israel that God revealed salvation in the birth of Christ who is called ***Sunrise*** (Luke 1:78) and ***Morning Star*** (Rev. 22:16).

- What does the angel have?

  - In v. 2 we see that this angel has ***the seal of the living God***.

  - The word ***seal*** (Greek - *sphragis*) usually means "a signet ring to validate official documents or to mark property" (Genesis 41:42; Esther 3:10; 8:2,8; Dan 6:17; Mt 27:66).

  - In the New Testament the word ***seal*** indicates "ownership" (2 Cor1:22), "authentication" (John 6:27) and "protection leading to salvation" (Eph. 1:14; 4:30).

  - Revelation 14:1 suggests that the ***seal*** is **the name of the Lamb and that of His Father**.

  - The term ***living God*** stands in contrast to the **dead false gods and idols of the pagans**.

  - The ***seal of the living God*** is an allusion to Ezekiel 9:4-11, in which the impending judgment upon Jerusalem and the protection provided to the righteous by their sealing.

Revelation 7:3— saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

- In v. 2 we read that the angel ***cries out with a loud voice to the four angels to who it was granted to harm the earth and the sea***. And in v. 3 we learn what the angel says when he ***cries out . . . "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."***

  - The command to ***do not harm*** (Greek: *mē adikeō*) is a command to the four angels to continue their restraint of the four winds a little while longer.

- How long is this restraint to continue?

  - The angel reveals that this restraint will continue ***until we have sealed the bond servants of our God on their foreheads.***

- What is the purpose of the sealing?

  - The context of the angel's statement in Revelation 7:1-3 is the coming judgments contained within the seventh seal from which these bond servants would be protected in Revelation 8:8-12.

- Robert Thomas writes: "How God protects His own from such as the first four trumpets with their devastating effects on the world of nature is not disclosed. It can only be assumed He will do so."

- Who are being sealed?

  - ***The bond servants of our God***. The context of Revelation 7:4-8 indicates that the identity of these ***bondservants of our God*** is narrowly identified.

- Where are they to be sealed?

  - We see that they are sealed ***on their foreheads***.

  - This description hearkens back to Revelation 4:12, when John records that ***the faithful at the church of Philadelphia who are promised: " He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore, and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem…"***

  - The ***forehead*** is visible and it will become obvious to whom these slaves belong and whom they serve (Rev. 14:1).

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Revelation 7:4— And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

- In v. 4 John records that ***I heard the number of those who were sealed***.

  - The text doesn't say who discloses the number. Perhaps it is the fifth angel, who is identified in v. 2-3, that is the announcer.

- Then in v. 4 we learn the identity of those who are identified in v. 3 as the ***sealed bond servants of our God*** . . . ***one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel***

  - It is significant to note that the verb tense of ***sealed*** signifies that the sealing is done between v. 3 and 4.

- We learn in v. 4 that the number of those who are sealed is a specific number . . . ***144,000***.

  - While some see this number as symbolic, there is no reason not to see this number as a literal number of sealed witnesses.

- Who are the 144,000?

  - Revelation 7:3 tells us that they are ***bond servants from every tribe of the sons of Israel***.

- The phrase ***the sons of Israel*** is a phrase that identifies them as the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember, God changed Jacob's name to Israel in Genesis 32:28.

- Attempts to make the phrase ***the sons of Israel*** symbolic or represent the church cannot be supported biblically. The literal understanding of ***Israel*** is verifiable in the Scriptures through the literal understanding of the covenant promises to ethnic Israel in the Old and New Testament.

Revelation 7:5-8— 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

- In Revelation 7:5-8 John then specifically lists the ***twelve tribes*** from which these ***144,000*** come. The tribes of Israel are listed in various places in the Old Testament:

TRIBE in Order of Birth	Mother
Reuben	Leah
Simeon	Leah
Levi	Leah
Judah	Leah
Dan	Rachel - Bilhah
Naphtali	Rachel - Bilhah
Gad	Leah - Zilpah
Asher	Leah - Zilpah
Issachar	Leah
Zebulun	Leah
Joseph	Rachel
Benjamin	Rachel
Manasseh	Tribe of Joseph
Ephraim	Tribe of Joseph

Order in the Tribulation to be sealed
1 Judah
2 Reuben
3 Gad
4 Asher
Dan not present
5 Naphtali
6 Manasseh
7 Simeon
8 Levi
9 Issachar
10 Zebulun
11 Joseph
12 Benjamin
Ephraim not present

- the birth of Jacob's twelve sons is sequentially told in Gen 29:32-35:18
- the order of Jacob's blessings to each of his sons is told in Gen 49:3-27
- the order of encampment of each of the tribes of Israel is given in Numbers 2:3-31
- the order of the census of each tribe before the invasion of Canaan is recorded in Numbers 26:4-51
- the order of blessing and cursing of each tribe is given in Deuteronomy 27:12-13
- the order of Moses's blessing upon each tribe is given in Deuteronomy 33:6-25
- the order of the "princes" is given in Numbers 1:5-15
- the order of inheritance of each tribe is listed in Joshua 13:7-22:34
- the order of the wives and concubines 1 Chron. 2:1-8:40
- the order of the gates of the city Ezek. 48:31-34 (this order is closest to John's list if rearranged according to the direction in north, west, south, and east and if Judah's name is first)

- But, though **Reuben** was the eldest son of Jacob, here in Revelation 7:5 John lists ***Judah*** first. Why?

    - Because it is through Judah that the Messiah comes. As Revelation 5:5 states, Jesus Christ is ***the lion of the tribe of Judah***.

- **It is also significant that two tribes are omitted from this list** . . . **Dan and Ephraim**.

    - It is understandable that Ephraim would be missing. He was a son of Joseph and not a son of Jacob. But since Manasseh is <u>included</u>, why is Ephraim <u>excluded</u>? And why is Dan excluded?

- We learn in Judges 1:34 that the tribe of Dan, who originally received an inheritance from Jacob, failed to conquer its territory when Israel came into the land.

    Judges 1:34— Then the Amorites forced the sons of Dan into the hill country, for they did not allow them to come down to the valley;

    - Later, we learn in Judges 18:14-31 that the tribe of Dan turned away from Yahweh to worship pagan idols. So, the idolatrous tribe of Dan is **substituted with the tribe of Levi**, which as the priestly tribe, originally received no tribal lands from Jacob.

    - Note that the tribe of Dan is included in the future distribution of the land (Ezekiel 48), yet it is excluded from the protective seal prior to the trumpet judgments because of the blot upon Dan's history caused by idolatry. The other tribes were guilty of the same sin, but Dan was the leader in idolatrous practices.

- Regarding Ephraim's exclusion from the protective sealing in Revelation 7, we learn from history that **Ephraim played a role in leading the northern tribes into idolatry** (Judges 17:1-13; 18:2; 30,31; 1Kings 12: 25-29; Hosea 4:17). **Ephraim was foremost in the defection from the house of David** (2 Sam. 2:7-9; Isaiah 7:9,17) and was an ally of the enemies of Judah (Isaiah 7:2,5; Hosea 5:3).

- The fact that Joseph's name is included in the list of the 12 tribes of Revelation 7 also presents a problem, since Joseph's inheritance was passed along to his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

    - **The inclusion of Joseph in the present list accomplishes the purpose of including Ephraim without the unpleasant connotation that Ephraim's name carried.**

- But with inclusion of Joseph <u>and his son, Manasseh</u>, in the list, another problem emerges. Manasseh is not the son of Jacob, but of Joseph. **Why, if Joseph's name is added, is Manasseh's not removed?**

    - Robert Thomas writes that it is unacceptable to say that Manasseh was added merely to bring the number back up to 12 after the exclusion of Dan. **Manasseh did distinguish itself as a faithful son of Joseph. Because Joseph was given a double portion by Jacob** in recognition of his favoritism toward Joseph (Genesis 37:3; Joshua 17:16-17), the inclusion of Manasseh is a fitting tribute to Manasseh's previous faithfulness as a tribe of Israel.

- **Conclusion:** The exclusion of the tribes of Dan and Ephraim was because of their continual promotion of idolatry. The 144,000 represent those Jewish believers allied with Messiah and will be evangelizing the world.

Are we to understand that exactly 144,000 Jews are referred to in this passage?

- One of the questions that arises from Revelation 7:5-8 is, "are we to understand that exactly 144,000 Jews are referred to in this passage?" **After all, with the destruction of the Temple and all genealogical records, how is such a large group of Jews from each tribe to be identified?**

  - Unfortunately, this is one of the passages in which there is strong disagreement with many of our Christian brethren regarding how this passage should be interpreted. **Should this reference to 144,000 be understood literally or symbolically?**

    - For we who hold to a literal, grammatical, historical method of Bible interpretation, our response is, **"why not? Is God not able?"**

    - **There is no legitimate reason not to interpret this literally.**

  - For example, the biblical commentator, Joseph Benson, points out in his commentary . . . *"This single passage, says the bishop of Meaux, may show the mistake of those who always expect the numbers in the Revelation to be precise and exact; for* ***is it to be supposed, that there should be in each tribe twelve thousand believers, neither more nor fewer, to make up the total sum of one hundred and forty-four thousand?*** *It is not by such trifles and low sense the divine oracles are to be explained. We are to observe, in the numbers of the Revelation, a certain figurative proportion which the Holy Ghost designs to point out to observation."*

  - In other words, there can't possibly be 12,000 saved Jews from each of the 12 tribes. And this number of saved Jews being impossible, one must interpret this passage figuratively.

  - In his New Testament Word Studies, Vincent says . . . *"The interpretations, as usual, vary greatly, dividing generally into two great classes: one holding that only Jews are meant, the other including the whole number of the elect both Jew and Gentile. Of the former class some regard the sealed as representing Jewish believers chosen out of the literal Israel. Others add to this the idea of these as forming the nucleus of glorified humanity to which the Gentiles are joined.*

Question: What is the error in the first quote that there cannot possibly be found 12,000 saved Jews from each of the 12 tribes?

Question: What is the error in the second quote suggesting that Jews and Gentiles are included in the 144,000?

What is the role of the 144,000 sealed Jewish saints?

- While we learn that God will save and seal 144,000 Jews, we don't immediately learn the purpose the 144,000 will serve. But we get more information later in Revelation 14:1-5 . . .

  Revelation 14:1-5— 1 Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

What happens to these 144,000 witnesses? Will they be martyred?

- The fate of the 144,000 sealed Jews is an interpretive question that reputable scholars cannot agree upon.

  - Robert Thomas is of the opinion that **the sealing of the 144,000 is protection <u>only</u> from God's wrath**, which is described as being restrained in Revelation 7:1-3. But beyond that, Thomas is of the opinion that most, if not <u>all</u>, of the 144,000 will be martyred by the antichrist during the Tribulation.

  - On the other hand, John MacArthur is of the opinion that **the sealing of the 144,000 is God's supernatural protection that prevents their martyrdom** at the hands of Satan and the antichrist.

- Regarding the role of the 144,000 sealed Jews, most commentators agree that these 144,000 sealed Jews will form the core of an evangelistic army that will evangelize throughout the world.

  - While 144,000 seems like a small number, compared to the billions of unbelievers on the earth, we should remember how God used Gideon (of the tribe of Manasseh!) and his band of 300 to defeat the Midianite army.

  - Though not referred to in this way in Scripture, many people commonly refer to the 144,000 sealed Jews and **"the 144,000 witnesses,"** because that appears to be their primary function . . . to evangelize the world for Christ.

- Because they are present in the Tribulation, we know that the 144,000 were not saved until after the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. They are Tribulation Saints. And being Tribulation saints they might well be referred to as the initial group of Jews who receive faith that will come to the entire remnant of surviving Jews at the end of the Tribulation.

Part 2 (v. 9-17)— The innumerable multitude in heaven

- In Revelation 7:9-17 John sees a second vision and it can be contrasted with the first.
    - In Revelation 7:1-8 we see a definite number of people (144,000), and in this passage, an indefinite number
    - In the first vision, the group is from the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the second vision the group is from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
    - In the first vision the people prepared for imminent peril. In the second they are victorious and secure.

Revelation 7:9— After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

- The opening phrase of v. 9 . . . ***After these things I looked*** . . . indicates this vision is distinct from the first vision and does not advance the previous vision. In other words, the fruit of the ministry of the 144,000 does not equal the Gentile multitude of the second vision.
    - But, we should see this second vision as being <u>simultaneous</u> with the first vision and not consecutive. Those saved through the witness of the 144,000 are yet to be saved because their formal ministry has not yet begun. Both events, the sealing and the great multitude, are simultaneous.
- The phrase, ***and behold, a great multitude***, is a call to the reader's attention of the appearance of this great number of people.
    - The term ***great multitude*** (Greek: *polos ochlos*) refers to an extremely large group. This group of people is so large that John goes on to state in v. 9 that they are of such a large number ***which no one could count***. The hyperbole of this phrase emphasizes the magnitude of the size of this group of people, <u>not</u> the fact that they literally could not be counted. This implies millions of people, not thousands.
- **Who is the great multitude?**
    - To this question there are four predominant interpretations.
        - Some scholars believe that this ***great multitude*** is symbolic of all who are saved throughout the ages. But this view would seem to contradict Revelation 7:14, which identifies these as specific to the tribulation.
        - Some believe this group are the tribulation saints through the entirety of Daniel's 70th week. They represent all the saints of the tribulation. If correct, that would make this verse is **proleptic** (looking forward in time). The problem with this interpretation is

that the multitude would still have to be on earth. But this vision has them in heaven. It violates the chronological progression of the book.

- Some believe that they are the 144,000 of Revelation 7:5-8. This view is least likely since the differences between the 144,000 and this group are obvious.

- That fact that the 144,000 are numerable, while the ***great multitude*** are innumerable is the most glaring contradiction.

- The fact that this ***great multitude*** is comprised of Jews and Gentiles is also a glaring contradiction.

- Finally, while the 144,000 are preserved from God's wrath, the ***great multitude*** will face the period of God's wrath on the earth and not be spared.

- The best interpretation of the identity of this ***great multitude*** is that they are Jewish and Gentile believers who have died . . . violently or naturally . . . during the period in which the first six seals have been opened. Having died during the Tribulation, they stand before God as Tribulation saints.

- We see this ***great multitude*** described in several ways . . .

  - **Innumerable**, signified by the phrase, ***which no one could count***.

  - ***from every nation, and all tribes, and peoples, and tongues***, which speaks of the fact that they come from every people group on the earth, such as we see described in Revelation 5:9. We see similar descriptions and expressions in Revelation 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15.

    - The term ***from every nation*** indicates that only some from each grouping are represented. **In other words**, this is not teaching a universal salvation, but a limited salvation.

- The phrase ***standing before the throne and before the Lamb*** indicates that they are in addition to those already present in the throne room. Positionally they are in the throne room, but are probably more remote than the angelic orders.

- That they are ***clothed in white robes*** indicates that they have received both victory and righteousness through the death of Christ.

- The description of there being ***palm branches in their hands*** is associated in the Scripture with celebration, deliverance, joy. Also, in the Feast of Tabernacles palm leaves were used to construct the shelters on the housetops (Nehemiah 8:15-17).

  - This foreshadows Jesus Christ tabernacling with His own.

  - Note: Because John could see this great multitude and further describes them, it leads credence to the fact that the saints have some sort of intermediate body before receiving their resurrected bodies, as seen in opening of the fifth seal (***souls under the altar…given white robes to wear***)

Revelation 7:10— and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

- Verse 10 " And they cry out with a loud voice…"

    - In v. 10, the phrase ***they cry out*** (Greek: *krazousin*) is in the verb tense that denotes a <u>continuous</u> crying out. They do it with *phone mega*— ***a loud voice***, which reflects the depth of gratitude. The picture conveyed is the idea that **they never stop, nor are their voices subdued.**

- **What are they saying?**

    - Answer: ***Salvation*** (Greek: *soteria*).. – The context of the word, as it is used here is "**victory**."

    - This multitude is celebrating victory over their persecutors. For similar expressions of victory, we see in Revelation 12:10 that victory is declared over the dragon, in Revelation 19:1 we see victory celebrated over Babylon and the persecutors of the saints.

- In v. 10 we see to whom the victory is ascribed to . . . ***to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb***.

Revelation 7:11-12— 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."

- In v. 11 we then see that the song of the multitude prompts the angelic host to renew its worship.

- **What do they do?**

    - Answer: ***They fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God***. This is an endorsement or an "**amen**" of the multitude's song to God and the Lamb. It prompts a tribute of their own in v. 12.

- **What do they say?**

    - They say "***Amen.***" This is a confirmation of the redeemed multitude's tribute because of the victory He has brought.

- What follows is **a sevenfold doxology** similar to the one addressed to the Lamb in Revelation 5:12, by the innumerable multitude of angelic beings:

    - ***blessing*** (Greek: *eulogia*), which means "to praise or speak well of."

    - ***glory*** (Greek: *doxa*), which means "radiance of the divine." ***Glory*** is the summation of all of God's attributes

- ***wisdom*** (Greek: *sophia*), referring to "the divine knowledge of God as shown in His plan of salvation.

- ***thanksgiving*** (Greek: *eucharistia*), meaning "gratitude."

- ***honor*** (Greek: *time*), meaning "honor or esteem in recognition of God's provision of salvation."

- ***power*** (Greek: *dunamis*), meaning "omnipotence or absolute power."

- ***might*** (Greek: *ichys*), meaning "possessed strength, whether exerted or not."

- The doxology is addressed ***our God***. Like the redeemed multitude in Revelation 7:10, they claim God as their own and this exaltation is not temporary. It is, ***forever and ever***, with the "***Amen***" testifying to the faithfulness of their doxology.

Revelation 7:13— Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"

- v. 13 presents a clearer identity of the multitude in Revelation 7:10. An interview commences between one of the 24 elders and John.

- In the phrase, ***and one of the elders answered***, the word ***answered*** (Greek: *apekrithe*) indicates that a question has not been asked. In other words, the ***answer*** of the elder is in anticipation of a question by John.

  - This type of phrasing is frequent in the gospel of John and the Synoptics (see Matthew 25:45; Mark 15:19; Luek 3:16; John1:26; 12:23).

- With the attention now on the elder's "answer," the subject of John's attention is directed to the multitude in v. 10 . . . ***these who are clothed in white robes***.

- who are they?

- from where have they come?

Revelation 7:14— I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- In v. 14 we first see John's response: ***"I said to him, "My Lord you know"***

  - John's address to the elder as ***my lord*** shows a deep reverence and respect for the status of the ***elder***.

  - ***you know*** indicates a confession that John doesn't have the answer and is looking for the information to be revealed by the elder.

- The emphatic pronoun, ***you***, is emphatic and carries the idea that "it is you who know."

- **Why didn't John recognize the multitude?**

  - Possible explanations:

  - the location baffled him. Perhaps John expected to see a redeemed multitude on earth rather than heaven because of OT Testament teaching concerning the future kingdom.

  - he didn't understand the time period of the future Tribulation, he didn't recognize anyone because this was yet far into the future.

  - the sheer number may have perplexed him. Jesus taught only few would be saved (see Matthew 7:13,14; 22:14).

  - the variety of the nationalities represented, showing the advance of the gospel to regions John had not known.

  - In any event, John earnestly seeks to know the identity of this multitude, and the elder responds.

- The elder answers John, ***and he said to me, "these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation***.. The verb phrase ***those who are coming*** (Greek: *hoi erchomenoi*) is in the present tense, indicating continuous action, which signifies they are <u>still</u> coming.

- **From where do the come?**

  - Answer: ***out of the great tribulation***. Their point of departure is the earth, the scene of the great tribulation, ***the hour of testing*** (Rev 3:10); ***the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb*** (Rev 6:17).

- **Interpretive question: Are these saints coming out of the great tribulation as it is progressing or are these saints coming out from the great tribulation before it begins?**

  - There are two points that support that these saints are coming out before the great tribulation begins:

  - the point at which the vision occurs is between the sixth and seventh seals. The seventh seal coincides with the last 3 ½ years of Daniel's 70th week.

  - Christ specifically limits the great tribulation to the last half of Daniel's 70th week (cf Mt 24:15, 21). Since that portion of the 70th week has not yet arrived in the progress of John's vision, the deliverance of the multitude must come out before it begins.

- We see in v. 14 that John witnesses the emergence of this multitude from such strife at a point <u>just before</u> the abuse of the saints is to become worse when under the leadership of the beast out of the sea (cf. Rev 13:7).

- John sees them coming ***out of the great tribulation***. Robert Thomas states that "they have already suffered to a degree, but will be spared the worse times of those saints who survive the first half of the week."

- **How did this multitude gain the right to be part of this victory celebration in heaven?**

  - The elder declares that ***they have washed their robes***. . . . The verb ***washed*** (Greek: *plunō*) is in the aorist tense, indicative mood, representing the removal of sin and the attaining of spiritual purity (cf. Ps 51:1-7; Is 1:18).

  - The elder states that they have ***made them white in the blood of the Lamb***. The term ***made white*** (Greek: *leukainō*) indicates that the washing of the robes and them having been made white occurs while still on earth.

  - The washing and whitening are one act (regeneration) and the Lamb's blood made it possible.

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Seven promises made to the Tribulation saints

- Then, having identified who this ***great multitude*** is, in Revelation 7:15-17 we learn of **seven promises** made to them.

- **The first promise** is that they will enjoy the blessing of **being eternally present with God.**

Revelation 7:15— "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.

  - In v. 15 we learn that the white robes and the cleansing they picture are <u>the basis</u> for the position of the multitude before the throne.

  - The phrase, ***because of this*** (Greek: *dia touto*) prompts the interpretive question, **"because of what?" Because of the washing and whitening in vs 14**, they are able to be in the presence of God.

- **The second promise** is that ***they serve Him day and night in His temple***

  - The verb ***they serve*** (Greek: - *latreuō*) indicates continuous action.

  - ***in His temple*** **indicates priestly service** because it is connected with the temple. It is not external rites, but rather worship that is in view, which is spiritual service of worship to God.

    - For example, in Romans 12:1 we are instructed ***present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.***

- v. 15 is a verse of praise to and adoration of God, as seen in vs10. **It is worship!** As we see in v. 10, ***salvation to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.***

- **The third promise** is that **God will eternally protect them by *spreading His tabernacle over them.***

    - The immediate presence of God to shelter and protect from all harm is what is promised (cf. Is 4:5,6). It corresponds with the OT promise that God will dwell in the midst of His people (cf. Lev. 26:11,12; Ezk. 37:27; Zech. 2:10,11; 8:3; Rev 13:6, 21:3).

- The **fourth promise**, found in v. 16, is God's eternal provion that ***they will hunger no longer, neither thirst anymore.***

Revelation 7:16— "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;

    - The promises stated in Revelation 7:16 come from Is. 49:10.

      Isaiah 49:10— They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide them to springs of water.

    - This was the description of the exiles returning from Babylon. The deeper meaning of the verse is spiritual (i.e., in glory), there will be the absence of unsatisfied desire; our spiritual hungering and thirsting will be completely satisfied.

- **The fifth promise** is in regard to protection from harm, that ***neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down.***

    - In the Is. 49:10 passage, ***scorching heat*** (Greek: *kauson*) was the burning desert wind, also known as the "sirocco." This phenomenon was well-known to Isaiah's readers.

    - In the Rev. 7:16 passage, ***any heat*** (Greek: *pan kauma*) is a scorching heat of any kind that is without reference to geography (i.e.; the desert winds).

        - Later, in the fourth bowl, the heat of the sun will become more oppressive than ever (cf. Rev. 16:9), ***fierce heat*** (Greek: *kauma mega*). This multitude will not be subjected to it.

- **The sixth promise**, found in v. 17, is **Christ's promise of eternal care** . . .

Revelation 7:17— for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

    - The Lamb's relation to them will be to ***shepherd*** (*poimainō*). Jesus' designation, as **Shepherd**, is well known (cf. John 10: 11,14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:2-4). But here we have the idea of a <u>lamb</u> shepherding! As God's people on earth, we are prone to wander. But in heaven it will no longer be possible.

- In addition, the Lamb, ***shall guide them to the springs of the water of life.***

    - ***shall guide*** (Greek: *hodēgeō*) means "will lead."

- This verb is used in the LXX to describe God's guidance <u>of Israel</u> (cf. Ex. 15:13; Dt. 1:33) and <u>of individual lives</u> (cf. Ps. 5:8). In the NT it describes the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:33). It is used in a literal sense of leading or escorting the blind (cf. Mt. 15:14; Lk. 6:39) and is a combination of the Greek noun *hodos* ("road, path, or way") and the verb *hegeomai* ("to lead"). God, the fountain of life, is the One to whom the Lamb will lead the sheep (John 4:12,14; 7:38,39; Rev 21:6; 22:1,17).

- **The seventh promise** is that **God will provide eternal comfort . . . *and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.***

  - This phrase hearkens back to Is 25:8,

    Isaiah 25:8— He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord will wipe tears away from all faces and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth.

  - This promise is later restated in Revelation 21:4.

    Revelation 21:4— and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

- **Question:** We often wonder how it will be possible to no longer shed negative emotional tears, knowing the terrible wrath being endured by those whom we have loved in this life. How can we possibly not cry for what they are condemned to?

  - Lamentations 3:33 teaches . . .

    Lamentations 3:33— For He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the sons of men.

  - **In other words**, When God punishes, when God afflicts, He finds no joy in the infliction of punishment. That is not something that brings Him delight, but it is demanded by His holiness and justice. Sin must be punished, as He has declared He will do. Compare Jeremiah 32:41 and Ezekiel 33:11 . . .

    Jeremiah 32:41— "And I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.

    Ezekiel 33:11— "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.

  - But God promises that He will wipe away every negative emotional tear from every eye. The only possible way that we will be able to no shed tears for them will be if God gives us the ability to understand why these things are so and why they are necessary. When God gives us the ability to sin as He sees sin, only then will we be able to say, "even so, the Lord's justice is holy and good."

- Robert Thomas notes that "the ultimate fulfillment of the seven promises come in the eternal state described more fully in Rev 21:22, but John's "snapshot" of the innumerable multitude

catches them in heaven at a point just before the beginning of the last half of the seven years of Daniel's 70th week."