

BOOK OF REVELATION

Part 14 – First Parenthesis

140,000 Witnesses Sealed: Chapter 7

I. INTRODUCTION

We saw the Lord Jesus Christ, in heaven before God's throne, opening the seven sealed scroll, that was presented to him in Chapter 5. The First Seal was the arising of the Anti-Christ, the Second seal was world wide war against his kingdom or from within his kingdom. The Third Seal was famine, a result of the world wide war of the Second Seal. The Fourth Seal, the death of $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population, the residual result of the Second, Third, and direct result of the Fourth. The Fifth Seal showed us the large number of Tribulation saints that were martyred for their faith and had entered into rest to be persecuted no more and were clothed in white just like the Church Age saints. The Sixth Seal, the first supernatural judgment was massive upheaval on the earth surface and in the earth's atmosphere. These included a massive earthquake that was worldwide, massive meteor and or comet impacts, the sun being darkened, and the moon looking dark red, like blood. Then we see the majority of the earth inhabitants, acknowledge the supremacy of God, but reject his call to salvation and repentance.

Now we reach the first interval or “parenthesis” in the book of Revelation. God is calling a “time out” on the progression of the judgment upon earth, to put another event to bring our attention to two events: (1) The sealing of the 144,000 witnesses and (2) The multitude that have arrived before God's throne. The Seventh Seal will be opened in Chapter 8.

II. EXEGESIS – THE FIRST PARENTHESIS: SEALING OF THE 144, 000 WITNESSES

VERSE 1 “And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.”

Who were the four angels standing in four separate locations on earth. Who these angels are is not certain. They could be possibly the four living creatures that other scriptures say go to and from God's throne. They could be four angels assigned to this specific task. Only God knows for sure who these angels are. Notice more importantly, that these four angels were ordered to restrain the forces of creation (wind, storms, rain, etc.) so that calm weather prevailed. Restraint of the wind indicated very calm and stable weather conditions. This indicates a pause in the judgments of God for the next event here to occur. This also indicates that God is showing mercy to the inhabitants of the earth by giving them time to acknowledge their sin and repent.

*VERSE 2 “And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea,”*

We see the introduction of another angel, whose identity is not known. He is doing however God's perfect will which is appropriate for this calling, just like the four angels whose task it was to restrain the forces of creation, which indicated a pause in the judgments of God. Notice he does not make the next pronouncement softly but with high volume. He has a message for the four angels restraining the forces of creation.

*VERSE 3 “Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees,
till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”*

This angel has a special instruction from God. He is to halt in progressing in his assignment from God. Notice that God makes it clear that this angel is not to dispense any more judgments on any part of the earth for the time being. God is showing his mercy here by allowing this “interval” in judgments for the following purposes: (1) Giving man a chance to repent and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour during this pause in judgment and (2) Giving the believers more time to prepare for the upcoming judgments that they know are to come because they will have God's word.

*VERSE 4 “And I heard the number of them which were sealed:
and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand
of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

There has been much misunderstanding of this passage. The Jehovah's Witnesses, used to teach that the 144,000 mentioned here was their movement and then modified their teaching later to say that this represented some of their number, when they found out that their number was greater than 144,000. Many commentaries try to say this is not a literal number and is only representative of a large group.

The context tells you who these people are. They are 144,000 literal Jews, the descendants of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. There is no reason in the context here to believe that these are not 144,000 descendants of Abraham.

VERSES 5-8 *“Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. (6) Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. (7) Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. (8) Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.*

You will notice here that in mentioning the twelve tribes of Jacob here that to the non-believer that there would appear to be a discrepancy. You will notice that the tribe of Ephraim and the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. They are replaced by the tribes of Joseph and the tribe of Levi.

You do not see reference to the tribe of Joseph as a tribe in the Old Testament after the book of Numbers. The descendants of Joseph are referred to as the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of the two sons of Joseph.

(1) Replacement of the Tribe of Dan with the Tribe of Levi:

Numbers 1:32-35 *(32) Of the children of Joseph, namely, of the children of Ephraim, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; (33) Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand and five hundred. v(34) Of the children of Manasseh, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; (35) Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty and two thousand and two hundred.*

Also Levi was not numbered as a tribe of Israel but were reserved as a tribe to maintain the tabernacle and the priesthood. Moses and Aaron were both descended from the tribe of Levi.

Numbers 1:47-51 *(47) But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them. (48) For the LORD had spoken unto Moses, saying, (49) Only thou shalt not number the tribe of Levi, neither take the sum of them among the children of Israel: (50) But thou shalt appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of testimony, and over all the vessels thereof, and over all things that belong to it: they shall bear the tabernacle, and all the vessels thereof; and they shall minister unto it, and shall encamp round about the tabernacle. (51) And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.*

It is most likely that members of the tribe of Dan were not sealed for this purpose due to the iniquity that came out of the tribe of Dan. Dan had led Israel into idolatry on many occasions.

Judges 18:30 *“And the children of Dan set up the graven image: and Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.”*

Also Judge Sampson, who dishonored the Lord during most of his life was from the tribe of Dan.

Judges 13:2-5 (2) And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not. (3) And the angel of the LORD appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son. (4) Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: (5) For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.

(2) Replacement of the Tribe of Ephraim with the Tribe of Joseph:

King Jeroboam, whom had been an engineer for King Solomon and on the run from Solomon later was of the Tribe of Ephraim. Jeroboam would lead the Northern Kingdom against the Southern Kingdom, as was prophesied by the prophet Ahijah (1 Kings 11:29-39). The Northern Kingdom was led in rebellion against the house of David by the Tribe of Ephraim. The tribe of Joseph also was the original of the twelve sons of Jacob and would have included descendants of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

BOTTOM LINE: The scripture does not tell us for sure why the two tribes were replaced but the judgment of God upon those who sin often goes beyond the sinner and his generation.

*VERSE 9 “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude,
which no man could number, of all nations,
and kindreds, and people, and tongues,
stood before the throne, and before the Lamb,
clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;*

Now the scene being viewed by the Apostle John shifts back to heaven. He now sees another group of people that are different from the 144,000 witnesses who had just been sealed. The witnesses are on earth and now the scene is back in heaven. These saints are clothed with white robes and have palms in their hands. White robes indicate purity and the palms were used in times past to celebrate a great event or the arrival of a conquering king. Notice again the same description given here of these saints and that they knew how diverse they really were.

Revelation 5:9 “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;”

There is no distinction before the throne of God between the different people in this multitude, that man places upon people today. As far as God is concerned there is no distinction. The distinctions are mentioned to illustrate just how diverse this multitude of people is. On earth these people came from different nations, different ethnic descent, different languages, different financial incomes, and different occupations. They had different walks in life but had something in common. Their relationship and service to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*VERSE 10 “And cried with a loud voice, saying,
Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”*

Now you see that this diverse multitude of people engaging in praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. They did not sing or speak softly but loudly, with intensity and unity. Just like the others already before God's throne, they were sincere and intense in their praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. The expression “Salvation to our God” is the ultimate expression of praise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

*VERSE 11 “And all the angels stood round about the throne,
and about the elders and the four beasts,
and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,”*

Now we see that four “beasts” which we learned previously in our study were four seraphim angels and the 24 elders, join these Tribulation saints in their worship to God. The angels worship God because they are obedient and were created to do so. The 24 elders and the saints worship God out of gratitude and sincerity, because they have been saved from their sins for all eternity.

*VERSE 12 “Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving,
and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*

Notice that the praise given by these Tribulation saints is also identical to the praise given by the Old Testament and Church Age saints already in heaven.

Revelation 5:12 “Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

The saints of all the ages will have the same purpose in heaven, regardless of what dispensation they come from: to glorify the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ for all eternity.

*VERSE 13 “And one of the elders answered, saying unto me,
What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?”*

The Apostle John was wondering in his mind who this multitude of people. The elder was well aware that John did not know the answer or else he would not be wondering who this multitude of people were. Therefore one of the 24 elders asked John a question, so he could give him the answer. Which one of the 24 elders who gave John the answer is not revealed nor is it important.

APPLICATION: It is not important in the ministry who does what task, but that the task is done and God receives the glory.

*VERSE 14 “And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me,
These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes,
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

We see here a reoccurring principle throughout scripture and prophecy. If you read a passage and do not understand it, just continue to read and the scripture will in many cases interpret itself for you. The context of the passage is very important. The question posed in verse 13 is answered in verses 14 through 17.

These are the Tribulation saints that had accepted Christ as Saviour after the Rapture. It is obvious here that many have already been saved and have died, either as a consequence of the judgment upon the world that God has already “orchestrated” or from persecution. No doubt many of still alive on earth. Many will have accepted Christ after the Rapture due to “testimonies” left from the Church Age (books, audio, video, websites, etc.), the testimony of the Two Witnesses, and now the testimony of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses who could not be killed or hurt either by the judgments or persecution.

Notice that the number of these Tribulation saints has grown tremendously since the opening of the fifth seal in Revelation chapter 6:

Revelation 6:9 “(9) And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:”

The number of these Tribulation saints had continued to grow:

(11) And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

This multitude is different, I believe, from the saints already before God's throne, which consisted of the Old Testament and Church Age saints. This is called a multitude that are numberless and the Church Age and Old Testament saints are described as “a sea of glass like crystal”. This description also leads one to believe that they have been there for a longer period of time.

Revelation 4:6 “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.”

*VERSE 15 “Therefore are they before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple:
and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*

Their purpose from now on will be much more pleasant. Instead of dealing with the difficult circumstances of survival on an earth under the judgment of God and enduring persecution, they are now before God's throne giving Him the glory he deserves. They are no longer distracted by the circumstances that we face in life everyday. These circumstances are elaborated upon in verse 16.

*VERSE 16 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more;
neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.*

The tribulation saints who are now with the Lord cannot be afflicted anymore with human suffering or harsh conditions of any kind. The scripture here details the kind of afflictions that we can endure: hunger, thirst, sunburn, or excess heat. They will have glorified bodies, just as the Church Age saints already have. This is why they cannot be bothered by the elements anymore.

*VERSE 17 "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them,
and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters:
and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

We see that any needs that these Tribulation saints may have will be met by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. They shall eat and not be hungry, they shall be led to water and not have to find water or purify it. Most of all, God will remove all tears, by removing all their sorrow that they have experienced previously in the Tribulation.

III. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATIONS

In our next study, we will see the seventh and final seal of the seven sealed scroll opened which will lead to the next set of judgments, the Trumpet judgments. The period of God's mercy is about to come to an end.

Let us remember the following applications:

- **The Church Age believer will not go through the Tribulation!! Praise God.**
- **This interlude is in the middle of an ongoing period of judgment. Only these 144,000 believers will be spared from the consequences of this judgment. The other believers will have to go through these judgment because they did not accept Christ before the rapture.**
- **God shows mercy by giving extra time for the lost to repent**
- **God has his witnesses for every generation and every time.**
- **These believers will join the Old Testaments and Church Age saints in praising God.**
- **Our suffering in his life is only temporary but our reward is eternal.**
- **When we are in heaven, we will no longer suffer from the elements or any pain.**