

## **Bright Lights in a Dark World** **Revelation 7:1-8**

Revelation 6-19 describes that period of time which the Lord Jesus Christ called Great Tribulation when God's wrath will be poured out upon the world. As we study this important portion of God's Word we see that the judgments of God come in a series of sevens. First, there are seven seals that are opened. Following those judgments there are seven trumpets that are sounded. Lastly, there are seven bowls that are poured out.

In Revelation 6 we see six of the seven seals opened one right after another. When you turn to chapter 7 you expect to find the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal. That is not what you find however. In fact, you do not find the opening of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal until the first verse in chapter 8.

What we find between the last verse of Revelation 6 and the first verse of Revelation 8 could be described as an interlude. Revelation chapter 7 is a pause between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals. Like the intermission between acts of a play, or the seventh inning stretch at a baseball game, there is a temporary pause in the action but the Day of God's wrath is not over. The time of Tribulation is not complete. There are more judgments to come. There is more darkness, destruction and death to come.

Let me ask you a question. How many of you would like to be a storm chaser like the ones you see on TV sometimes or in the movie twister? Storm chasers are people who spend their time traveling throughout the Midwest in the spring and summer primarily, watching the weather, scanning the skies, checking the latest radar so that they can find a tornado and then deliberately place themselves just as close as they can to the storm in order to photograph it and collect scientific data. Talk about a rush! At the risk of absolutely convincing you that your pastor has a screw loose somewhere, I have to confess that I would like to do that sometime. As you may know at the center of a tornado or a hurricane it is dead calm. If you could climb into the top of a tornado or a hurricane and suspend yourself in the very center of it, you would find absolute calm. All around you would be death and destruction, but in the center it would be peaceful and quiet. That calm quiet area at the center of the storm is known as "the eye" of the storm.

Revelation 7 could be called the eye of the storm of God's judgment. When the seventh seal is opened it will usher in a series of judgments so terrible that the Lord Jesus said "*unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved*" (Matthew 24:22). In between is the eye of God's storm of judgment. That is what we have here in chapter 7.

There are two visions here. The first vision found in our text for today is a vision of the saints of God witnessing on earth. The second vision, which we will consider next Sunday Lord willing, is a vision of the saints of God worshipping in heaven.

Revelation 7 should serve to remind us that the two great tasks of the church are to worship and to witness. We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that we might worship our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ and bear witness to His soul saving, life changing power with our lips and our lives.

Let's begin reading at verse 1. John writes, "*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*" (Rev. 7:1).

After the sixth seal is broken in Revelation 6 and its accompanying judgments are revealed the Apostle John sees "*four angels standing at the four corners of the earth.*" The four corners of the earth are symbolic of the four points of the compass; north, south, east, and west. These four angels are given authority over the powerful forces of nature; specifically they are given authority over the winds that blow from the north, south, east, and west. John goes on to say in verse 1 that he saw four angels "*holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree*" Wind in the bible is often used as a symbol of the judgment and the wrath of God, and so it is here. For the duration of this interlude described in chapter 7 the winds of God's judgment are going to be restrained. But why?

God is going to temporarily suspend His judgment on this sinful, fallen world just long enough to save, seal, select, sanctify, and send out a special missionary force of 144,000 born again Jews. They will be bright lights of salvation and hope in a very, very dark world.

I want to make four observations about this special group of saints who are the focus of Revelation 7:1-8. First of all...

### **1. They will be saved by the grace of God**

The terrible judgments of God will accomplish a two-fold purpose. It will cause multitudes to turn to God in this period, and it will cause another multitude to turn against Him. It is just like the effect of the sun shining down on a piece of soft clay. What will the sun do to the clay? It will harden it. What is the effect of that same sunlight on wax? It will melt it. The sun has the opposite effect upon clay and wax. The judgments of God are the same. The judgments of the Tribulation will harden the hearts of some and soften the hearts of others. It will drive some further away from God and draw others to Him.

The same thing could be said about the trials that we face in our lives. When the trials of life come it will either draw us to God or drive us from Him. It will either harden our hearts toward God or cause us to humbly open up our hearts to Him.

The Lord will use the judgments of the Tribulation to bring many lost souls to salvation, including the 144,000 of Revelation 7. Let me show you why I know they are saved. To properly and fully understand Revelation 7:1-8 we must also consider Revelation 14. Turn there with me and let's begin reading in verse one. "*Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth*" (Rev. 14:1-3).

How will the 144,000 be saved? The very same way all men are saved. You see, there isn't one plan of salvation for Jews and another for Gentiles. There isn't one plan for those living before the Tribulation and another for those living during the Tribulation. God has only one plan for our salvation. What is it? We are saved by God's grace through faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Not only will the 144,000 be saved by the grace of God...

## **2. They will be sealed by the Spirit of God**

Look at verse 2. *"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'"* (Rev. 7:2-3).

Why will these 144,000 servants of God be sealed?

In ancient times kings often wore a signet ring. After an official document had been sealed with hot wax the king would press that signet ring into the wax leaving the impression of his royal ring upon it. A great example of this is found in Esther 8:8, *"You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."*

Now, the king's seal was a sign of three things. First, it was a sign of possession. Any document containing the king's seal belonged to the king. God's seal on the 144,000 will be a sign that they belong to Him, that they are His special possession.

Second, the king's seal was a sign of power. Any document bearing the king's seal carried with it all the king's authority and power. God's seal on the 144,000 will be a sign that His divine power is upon them.

Third, the king's seal was a sign of protection. Any document that carried the king's seal was guaranteed the king's full protection. When God places His seal on these special servants it will be a sign of His promise to protect them from and preserve them through the terrible judgments that will *"harm the earth and the sea"* (Rev. 7:2) when the first four angels blow their trumpets.

When God destroyed the world in a flood, He protected and preserved Noah and his family. When He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, He protected and preserved Lot and his daughters. When the Lord destroyed Jericho, He protected and preserved Rahab and her family. When He sent judgment upon the land of Egypt, He protected and preserved Israel. In a similar way during the darkest days of the Tribulation God will protect and preserve this special group of 144,000 Messianic Jews.

The Bible says that all born again believers in Jesus Christ are sealed by the Holy Spirit. You may have been saved as a child in VBS. You may have been led to Christ in your home by a friend or relative. You may have been saved in a revival meeting as I was.

Regardless of how old you were or where you were, the Bible says the moment you turned from your sins and trusted Jesus as your Savior you were sealed by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 1:13 says that when we were saved we were *“sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”* When you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are sealed forever. You belong to God and you will be His for all eternity. You are saved, sealed and secure.

The 144,000 will be saved, sealed, sanctified servants of God who...

### **3. They will be selected according to the sovereign will of God**

These sealed servants of God will be selected from a very specific people group. John writes in verse 4 *“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”* (Rev. 7:4).

This verse should leave no doubt as to the identity of the 144,000. John tells us they are from the *“tribes of the children of Israel.”* They are not Gentiles. They are not Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians. And they are certainly not Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are Jews. *“Israel”* means Israel. There is no good exegetical reason not to interpret the references to Israel in verse 4 and to the specific tribes mentioned in verses 5 through 8 to mean anything other than the literal, physical descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Not only do we see that these sealed servants of God will be selected from a very specific people group, the Jews, we also see that God will select a very specific number of people from among the Jews. Verses 5 through 8 tell us that God will select 12,000 from among the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. That doesn’t mean only 144,000 Jews will be saved during the tribulation. It means that God will only select 144,000 from among all the Jewish people who will come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation to be His special sealed servants.

Dear folks, there are many well meaning but misinformed bible teachers and preachers who will tell you that the church has replaced Israel in God’s plan. They claim that the church is spiritual Israel and all of the Lord’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are being fulfilled in the church.

Listen, Israel is still God’s chosen people. God is not through with the Jews. Romans 11:2 declares, *“God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.”* The Apostle Paul makes it abundantly clear in Romans 11 that the church has not replaced Israel, we have been grafted in. We are reminded hear is Revelation 7 that the Jewish people still have a special place and purpose in the plan of God. The Bible is saying that during this Great Tribulation time, there will be 144,000 Jews who will be saved, sealed, set apart, and sanctified for a specific ministry of the Lord, which brings me then to the final point of my message.

### **4. They will be sent as witnesses to the Son of God**

These 144,000 saved, sealed, sanctified Jews will become bold witnesses for their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. Can you imagine 144,000 Jews, every one of them with the zeal of an Apostle Paul, preaching the good news of Jesus Christ?

From His chosen people God will save, seal, sanctify, and send out the greatest missionary force the world has ever known. The result of their witness will be a redeemed Israel and a multitude of saved Gentiles. You ask, "How do you know that Pastor?" Just look at verse 9. Oh, I can't wait to preach the rest of this chapter. John writes in verse 9, *"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'"* (Rev. 7:9-10).

God is going to use the witness of the 144,000 to bring many precious souls from every nation, tribe, people group, and tongue to faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord wants to use our witness too.

You and I live in a very dark world, spiritually speaking. Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

Let me ask you a question. When was the last time you shared your faith with someone who doesn't know the Savior? Are you willing to be a bright light for Christ in a dark world?

In wrath there is still mercy (Hab. 3:2). The Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in the midst of the Great Tribulation when God is pouring out His righteous wrath upon a wicked world He will be merciful. He will send forth an army of missionaries to proclaim the good news that "Jesus saves!" so that every lost soul might have the opportunity to turn from their sins and be saved.

God wants you to be saved. He is led you here to this church today to hear this message today so that you might be saved from your sins today.

Redeemed--how I love to proclaim it!  
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;  
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,  
His child, and forever, I am.

Let me ask you something. Have you been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Have you turned from your sins and trusted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? Dear friend, there is no other way to be saved.