

14. A heavenly interlude

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A good movie director does not put all the intense scenes back to back without any break. Our God who made us and knows our comprehension capacities, wanted to give a time to take a breath from the disasters after disasters that witnessed in last chapter.

As the Lamb of God prepares to open the scroll, whenever He broke the seals, there were enormous disasters happened on the earth. By the time the fourth seals was broken, 1.6 billion people on the earth were dead. The sixth seal brought a major cosmic disturbance and affected the earth greatly.

To allow us to catch our breath, God is giving us to have another glimpse in heaven as well as the things He prepares for the future during the Great Tribulation period.

The chapter 7 can be divided in two sections for two group of people:

Rev 7:1-8

Jews

Numbered—144,000

Sealed on earth

Rev 7:9-17

Gentiles from all nations

Not numbered, nor could be

Standing in heaven before God

A. THE SEALED OF ISRAEL

Revelation 7:1-4 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. 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, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 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:

After all that disaster, suddenly it is eerily silent. It is nothing more than a calm before the storm. God controls all of nature. During the day of His wrath, He will use the forces of nature to judge mankind.

In Bible typology, wind speaks of the judgment of God.

Jeremiah 49:36 Against Elam I will bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, And scatter them toward all those winds; There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go.

B. 144,000 FROM ISRAEL

Revelation 7:5-8 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; 6 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; 7 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; 8 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.

In Scripture, a seal indicates ownership and protection. Today, God's people are sealed by the Holy Spirit. This is God's guarantee that we are saved and safe, and that He will one day take us to heaven. The 144,000 Jews will receive the Father's name as their seal, in contrast to the "mark of the beast" that Antichrist will give those who follow him.

When you call FedEx to send an overnight letter, a courier puts together a FedEx label that has their company logo. That is a seal by FedEx. That seal means that the entire FedEx company is going to get behind your letter and see to it that it is delivered overnight. They may be a little expensive in delivering it, but they guarantee that they are going to deliver it. They even say, "Absolutely, positively delivered overnight" in their advertisement. That is what "sealed" means here. The Holy Spirit guarantees that these 144,000 will be delivered through the Great Tribulation.

2 Cor 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Many groups claim to be the 144,000. Jehovah Witnesses once said they were. Now they say that the 144,000 are only a select group of Witnesses who go to heaven. Historical Mormonism also claimed to be the 144,000. Ellen G. White and the Seventh Day Adventists claim to be the 144,000. Ted Armstrong and his Worldwide Church of God claim to be the 144,000.

This 144,000 is the Israel virgin males according to the Rev 14. No other people and no other group. That is what the Bible says clearly. The Bible has the final authority over any men and it settles, period.

Why would these cult groups want to be these 144,000?

Because in so doing, they not only conveniently write the Jews out of prophecy, but also make them to be God's chosen.

Throughout history, many misinformed Christians and cult members alike have attempted to take Israel out of the eschatological equation. Doctrines such as "Replacement Theology," "Reconstructionism," and "Kingdom Now" propound that all of God's promises to Israel were passed on to the church because the Jews rejected Jesus.

As a matter of fact, this is not anything new:

Following emperor Constantine's so-called conversion in A.D. 312, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. Origen, a heavyweight Bible teacher and philosopher of the day said, "All of the promises given to Israel are simply allegories and illustrations." Origen was followed by Augustine, who was such a gifted proponent of the case for the allegorizing of the Old Testament.

Augustine was eventually followed by Great Reformer Martin Luther. Luther, although a giant of the faith, was terribly wrong on one issue: He hated the Jews. That's why many Protestant pastors supported Hitler's anti-Semitic movement well into his regime of the WWII. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

"But Israel failed," you might say. So do I.

"But Israel was fickle," you might protest. So are you.

"But Israel faltered," you might whisper. So do we.

Remember what the Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 12:3?

Gen 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Some may say that no Israel man knows his genealogy. That is absolutely true. The Israel genealogical records have all been destroyed. Even the fact that ten of the tribes were taken by the Assyrians. However, the "lost" genealogy is no problem to God. He knows His people and their whereabouts exactly.

I asked you to underlined each tribe's name that mentioned here. If you are familiar with the list of the tribes which crossed Jordan river to the Promised Land, you would have noticed a couple of the differences in the name of the tribes. The tribe of Dan and Ephraim are missing.

There are not less than 20 different ways of listing the tribes of Israel in the OT. Just because a list is different doesn't mean it is fanciful symbolism. It is proper to regard each of these lists as legitimate, and to consider that each specific variation serves a purpose, meaning to emphasize something.

Some Bible commentators think it is because Dan is the tribe of the Antichrist, based on Daniel 11:37 and Jeremiah 8:16. But without doubt, Dan was the tribe which introduced idolatry into the nation of Israel in Genesis 49:17 and Judges 18:30. However, there will be a wonderful redemption for the tribe of Dan. Dan is the first tribe listed in Ezekiel's millennial role call of the tribes in Ezekiel 48.

Why is Ephraim eliminated? It is because the tribe of Ephraim was also associated with great idolatry in Hosea 4:17.

C. A SERIOUS WORSHIP SERVICE IN HEAVEN

Revelation 7:9-12 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, 10 (1) and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 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, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

This great multitude and the angels are having a heavenly hallelujah toe-tappin', knee-slappin', hand-clappin' hoe-down worship, adoration, thanksgiving and praise to our God.

D. THE TRIBULATION SAINT WHO MARTYRED IN HEAVEN

Revelation 7:13-17 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" 14 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. 15 Therefore (2) they are before the throne of God, and (3) serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17 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 chapters 4 and 5, John recognized the church, the Bride of Christ. Yet he doesn't recognize this multitude before the throne. Obviously, they are not the church.

Who is this great multitude? These are people who were lost, but who have come to believe in Jesus during the Tribulation. Be faithful in sharing, even if you're not presently seeing people respond. Keep proclaiming the Word because the greatest revival in world history will take place after the Rapture.

Apostle John gave a beautiful description of these people:

1) They were joyful.

They sang praises to the Father and to the Lamb. And their worship was joined by all those who surrounded the throne.

2) They were accepted, for they stood before God's throne and the Lamb.

No doubt they had been rejected on earth, because they stood for truth at a time when lies were popular and Satan was in charge. Their white robes and palms symbolize victory. They were true overcomers! They were holding palm branches which represents victory.

3) They were rewarded.

They had the privilege of being before God's throne and of serving Him. When God's people get to heaven, there will be work to do!

Let's compare the differences between the Great Multitude and the Church:

The Great Multitude

They stand before the throne (verse 9).

They serve the Lord (verse 15).

The Church-the Bride of Christ

They sit on the throne (Rev 3:21).

They are served by the Lord (Luke 12:37).

A great multitude is going to be saved during the Tribulation. This reveals that these judgments will accomplish a purpose for God. It will cause multitudes to turn to Him in this period, and at the same time it will cause another multitude to turn against Him.

The same sun that softens wax, will harden clay. It is not the sun's fault that clay gets hard. It is clay's nature. Some people harden their hearts when they hear the Word of God, but some people melt their hearts to receive it with exceeding joy. It is not the Word of God's fault that those people's hearts get hard. It is their choice.

As we study this book, we'll see angels flying across the sky, and two witnesses preaching in Jerusalem. Then suddenly, a "great multitude which no man could number" will turn to the Lord. But their repentance could very well cost them their lives, as the Antichrist declares war on those who refuse his mark.

"I'll wait to get saved until I see the Tribulation really happen," some might say. "So what if I'm martyred in the process? It will be worth it." Why do you want to take a chance? You may not have a chance to change your mind. You may not even live until the Great Tribulation starts.

Today is the day of salvation. Don't wait until you see everything happen with your physical eyes. Be a man or woman of faith, and come, be part of the bride of Christ.

The opening of the seventh seal will introduce the seven “trumpet judgments” in Rev. 8-11 and the wrath of God will increase both in intensity and scope. But before that occurs, we are assured that in His wrath, God will remember mercy. Despite the wrath of God and the terror inspired by satan, his demons and human helpers, multitudes will be saved through the blood of Jesus Christ. No matter which the age, God’s way of salvation has always been the same: faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Your hearts might harden when you hear the Word of God, or your hearts might melt to receive it with exceeding Joy. It is your choice.

The same sun that softens wax, will harden clay. It is not the sun’s fault that clay gets hard. It is clay’s nature. It is not the Word of God’s fault that your heart get hard. You decide. I am not only talking about salvation, but also obeying God’s Word in your life. Don’t ignore His commands through His Word, the Bible.

Heb 3:15 while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

2) Do not be discouraged because the people you have witnessed didn’t accept Christ as their Savior and Lord. You did what you were told to do by the Lord. Stay at it.

We must remember that we do our share and God will bring the harvest.

1 Cor 3:6-7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.