

Who Will Be Able to Stand? (Revelation 7)

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Chapter 4 opened this vision with a picture of God on His throne and being worshipped by all creation. Chapter 5 introduced Jesus Christ as the one worthy redeemer, qualified to reveal the will of God and likewise being worshipped. Chapter 6 is the picture of our redeemer revealing the coming of the redemption and righteousness of God, followed closely by the enemies of it and a step by step progression which brings us to the point at which God's fearful judgment upon the earth is imminent.

In times past, God's wrath upon nations such as Sodom and Gomorrah, or in the case of the great flood, the destruction was sudden and total. But in these examples and many others, we see a period of time given where any who would be righteous had the opportunity to avoid destruction. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had an opportunity to be spared if only a handful of righteous could be found. Noah was a preacher of righteousness all during the time he constructed the ark on which the entire hope of mankind relied (2 Peter 2:5). It took a hundred years to build the ark and during that time he preached to the masses. The unrighteous who lived at the time of the great flood had a hundred years to repent.

We see from a study of the deliverance of the promised land to the Israelites that God would not let the Canaanites be destroyed until after there was no hope of any of them being found righteous. In Genesis 15:16 and context, we have God speaking to Abraham in a dream where He was giving Abraham certain facts surrounding the land his descendants would inherit: *"But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full."* Backing up to Genesis 15:13, we see God telling Abraham his descendants would be enslaved for 400 years while this was taking place. The word "Amorite" was used there as a term for the pre-Israelite population of Canaan. When the Israelites arrived at the Jordan river after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Amorites of old were then identified as the Canaanites of the time.

What we see in Revelation chapter 7 is a parallel of God's actions toward a people who are about to be destroyed. God will wait to utterly destroy a nation until there are no more souls among them who can be saved. God is longsuffering and is not willing that any should perish. In this we see the tremendous love that God exhibits towards the lost. Inspiration teaches us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We also see that God places a high priority on the souls of the lost. He left the Israelites in bondage for four hundred years while the Canaanites degraded themselves completely into idolatry. Only after the Canaanites had utterly abandoned God's righteousness and there was no more potential for the salvation of souls were they driven out.

If the people of Canaan had been destroyed while there was yet any potential for righteousness, then souls would have been lost that otherwise would have been saved if God would not have destroyed them.

As evil and idolatrous as the Roman Empire was, there were souls among them that were righteous and there were those who would eventually turn to righteousness before everything was said and done. The faithful Christians, despite the persecution against them, were spreading the gospel, reaching the lost and helping people find their way out of idolatry and into the truth of God's righteousness. We must keep in mind that God has a much broader perspective on things than we do. We are limited in our knowledge of the here and the now and what has been. God sees all that plus what will happen in the future. He knows if someone will respond to the truth tomorrow, or the next day, or the next. He knows who is going to respond to the opportunity for salvation and He wants them to be saved. And if God had swept in and utterly destroyed the Roman Empire while there were yet souls who would turn to God, then He would have destroyed their hope for salvation.

God so loved the world that He sacrificed the fleshly life of His only Son that whosoever sought righteousness could have eternal life. John 3:16 does not limit God's love to only the saved, but encompasses all of His creation. He loves the sinners and the saved alike. And we who are Christians must realize this and realize also that God who was willing to sacrifice the life of His Son, is willing also to sacrifice the lives of His saints to the purpose of the salvation of man. Saving the eternal souls of the lost is more important in the eternal purpose of God than the fleshly lives of His Son and the saved.

And with that thought in mind, we are going to use that as the backdrop for how we look at the 7th chapter of Revelation. Yes God is in charge, Yes He will punish and eventually destroy the Roman Empire for all the evil, pain and suffering they inflicted on the Christians, but not until their work on earth was complete and all the souls that could be saved were, *"And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled (their course)."* (Revelation 6:11).

Who will be able to stand against God's judgment? *"Wherefore take up the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand"* (Ephesians 6:13). While this is a picture of the last day when all of the creation is judged, the answer is still applicable; the righteous will stand in the end.

Revelation 7:1

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth, or on the sea, or upon any tree."

Here we have the number [four](#) used multiple times which was symbolic of the world in which we live. We see the four corners of the earth, the four winds coming from all directions being overseen by four angels. This is figurative for the entire world which in the minds of the 1st century readers encompasses all of the Roman Empire and the nations it was unable to conquer such as the Parthians. The [winds](#) are an Old Testament symbol which was a figure of divine retribution. The winds being held back by the angels was the wrath of God on the enemies of righteousness. And we have a vivid picture in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah what can happen when the winds of God's retribution are released.

We also notice that God's wrath is aimed at natural things of the earth. We learn in later accounts of John's visions that God used natural calamities to pour out His retribution on the persecutors of the Christians. History

records many devastating earthquakes and other natural disasters which occurred in the first century which can be associated with the Revelation. For example great earthquakes destroyed several cities in Asia Minor at different times and let's not forget the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius which utterly obliterated the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum in the first century. Dealing with the consequences of these natural disasters seriously depleted the resources of the Roman Empire and were contributing factors to its ultimate downfall.

Revelation 7:2-3

"And I saw another angel ascend from the sunrising, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we shall have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

The angels who have the power to bring God's retribution upon the earth are told to wait until the servants of God are sealed. The word "sealed" is translated from the Greek word *sphragizo* (sfrag-id'-zo); which means to stamp (with a signet or private mark) for security or preservation (literally or figuratively). This is the same word used in John 6:27; *"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed"*, and in Ephesians 1:13, *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise"*. When any person believes and obeys the gospel, they are said by scripture to be "sealed" or "marked for preservation". God's retribution on the earth was to be postponed until all of God's servants were marked for preservation. As we saw in Ephesians 1:13, this sealing occurs at the moment of one's conversion, so the servants of God who are to be marked for identification include those who will respond to the gospel and become Christians as well as those who already had.

Being sealed on the forehead is not to be taken literally. Paul taught in 2 Timothy 2:19, *"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."* All Christian have the assurance that God knows who His children are and that they are in fellowship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ, (1 John 1:3), so it follows to reason that God knows His children on a personal level. Anyone whom God knows and fellowships is identified for preservation. Being sealed on the forehead therefore means to be recognized by face on sight.

Revelation 7:4

"And I heard the number of them that were sealed, a hundred and forty and four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel"

The number 144,000 is the number 12, which is a symbol for organized religion, multiplied by the number 1000 which is the number 10 multiplied by itself three times. The number 10 is the number for completeness and the number 3 was symbolic for God. This brings the number to 12,000. This number is then multiplied again by 12 which is the number for organized religion which brings it to 144,000.

Another way of expressing this figurative number is "the total sum of all God's children from all nations."

Some religious organizations today try and literalize this number saying this is all that will be in heaven. They fail to read just a few sentences onward where John sees the same group of people in this same vision, *"a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of (all) tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."* One must ask why anyone would literalize the 144,000 and then turn around and ignore the innumerable multitudes of the saved out of every nation of the earth standing before the throne of God. So often it is the case that Revelation explains itself but one has to look at the whole vision, taking

into consideration all of what is happening, not just isolated components of them and then trying to build a doctrine out of it. The symbolic language in Revelation must be interpreted in light of what the rest of scripture says, not the other way around.

Revelation 7:5-8

"Of the tribe of Judah (were) sealed twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand; Of the tribe of Benjamin (were) sealed twelve thousand."

Of interest here is that verse 4 closed with the words *"sealed out of every tribe of the children of Israel"*. The twelve tribes listed are not the complete list of the actual patriarchs of the 12 tribes of old Israel. Ephraim and Dan are not mentioned. They were replaced with Levi who did not receive a land inheritance and Joseph, the father of Manasseh and Ephraim who were two of the Patriarchs. So we can rule out the original tribes of Israel and the original children of Israel as being the subjects of this vision. The Israel in view here is the spiritual house of Israel, not the old Israel. the term *"house of Israel"* occurs in the old testament 146 times in reference to old Israel. The New Testament Israel is referred to as a spiritual house in 1 Peter 2:5 so we see a contrast between the old Israel and the new. The Israel in view here in John's vision is the Israel of the new testament which included all the gentiles. *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit"* (1 Corinthians 12:13). The *"children of Israel"* under the new covenant is the body of Christ. Also known as the kingdom of Christ (Ephesians 5:5, Colossians 1:13), the body of Christ (Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:27), and the church of Christ (Romans 16:16).

Revelation 7:9

"After these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation and of (all) tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes, and palms in their hands"

As soon as John is finished describing the sealing of the children of Israel under the new covenant, the scene switches immediately back to the throne room of God where we get a vision of all the saved of all the ages.

Keeping in mind this is the answer to the question *"who will be able to stand?"*, this is a picture of the souls who will be preserved and will be able to stand through God's retribution on the unrighteous. The fact that every single one of them came from what was referred to as a *"tribe of Israel"* indicates that only the children of God will be preserved. This effectively leaves out everybody else.

Those who are arrayed in white robes is explained fully in verse 14. The palms they are holding is an Old Testament symbol taken from the Feast of Tabernacles and represents the joy resulting from deliverance and the peace which comes from assurance of future preservation.

Revelation 7:10

"and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God who sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb."

The persecution of the Christians living under the Roman Empire was horrendous. They were starved, discriminated against, beaten, enslaved, captured and killed just for being Christians. It looked like oppression

was coming from every conceivable direction and nothing could save them. The immediate application for them was that there was indeed salvation from the persecution, but only through God's plan of redemption. The application for all is that the terms for salvation of all mankind is only through God and the sacrifice of the Lamb, His Son for the sins of all. The first century Christians were needing saved from their immediate circumstances, but that was secondary in importance to being saved from eternal destruction. This is the salvation which is of the utmost importance.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). "And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Revelation 7:11-12

"And all the angels were standing round about the throne, and (about) the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, (be) unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

This is another vision of the worship of God in His throne room. Interestingly, there are seven attributes given to God here in praise. Likewise in the throne scene in Revelation 5:12, there were seven given by the angels to Jesus as well. This cannot be a mere coincidence and serves to symbolize the sevenfold perfection of God.

Revelation 7:13

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These that are arrayed in white robes, who are they, and whence came they?"

One of the elders in John's vision asked him who those in the white robes were and where they came from. This question was asked so that it would be answered. This is one of those times when the visions explain themselves. The forthcoming answer will serve to identify the 144,000 as those who were of the great innumerable multitude clothed in white and standing before the throne of God. The words used to explain these victorious saints make up some of the most beautiful imagery in all of the Revelation. This is a wonderful and comforting picture of what awaits not only the 1st century Christians, but all who come through the trials of life and emerge triumphant over the evil influences of sin.

Revelation 7:14

"And I say unto him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they that come of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

The great tribulation in view here is the persecution of the saints under the Roman Empire. Those who shall stand are the ones who come through the great persecution, faithful unto death. The sacrificial blood of Jesus washed away all their sins and they are clothed in righteousness, having their garments without spot, white and free of the darkness of sin.

Revelation 7:15

"Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them."

And because they were arrayed in white robes they are envisioned before the throne of God where they serve him constantly. There is no day and night in heaven as we know it. This is merely a figure of speech meant to form a picture of perpetual worship to God.

The tabernacle spread over them by God is an old testament figure of the old tabernacle where the Israelites worshipped before the first temple was built. The tabernacle was where God dwelt among the Israelites. Having His tabernacle spread over them would then mean that they are sheltered in the dwelling place of God. *"LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart"* (Psalms 15:1-2). The entire 15th Psalm is a description of who will dwell in the tabernacle of God.

Revelation 7:16

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat"

These are pictures of various persecutions under which the Christians were living as described in the fourth seal. The hunger and the thirst they went through was very real. Christians were denied the ability to work good jobs and to buy or sell in the Roman Empire. Hunger was a very common trial for them. The sun or heat spoken of is probably an illusion to the fact that many of them were burned to death. History records that Nero would douse Christians in a flammable substance and set them on fire in his garden at night, using their burning bodies as night lights while he drove his chariot among them. We don't know this for a certainty but tradition has it that Antipas, God's faithful martyr was publicly burned to death in the streets of Pergamum.

Revelation 7:17

"for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus described Himself as the *"good shepherd"* that *"giveth His life for the sheep"* (John 10:11). The Psalmist wrote, *"The Lord is my shepherd"* who leads me *"beside the still waters"* (Psalm 23). Jesus is well known in the minds of His children as the lamb and the shepherd who gave His life so that His sheep could live.

There will be no tears in heaven, God having removed all cause for sorrow. Consider not only the tears of those who were martyred for Christ, but also the tears of those whose loved ones died leaving them without their fathers, or mothers, or wives or husbands. Think about the destitute survivors whose husbands and fathers were slain, all their possessions taken, leaving them bereaved, alone and without any means of support. Think about the families who saw their loved ones torn to shreds by wild beasts in the Coliseum for the entertainment of the Romans. Think about the families whose fathers were forced to fight the gladiators and die in front of tens of thousands of jeering Romans. Imagine how hard that would be and imagine the tears of grief and despair. All of this sorrow will be forever gone for those who overcome and emerge triumphant. God Himself is pictured here as wiping the tears from the eyes of His children. What a beautiful and comforting picture this is for any Christian but especially to those who are suffering greatly because of their faith.

The fountains of the waters of life. Fountains suggest that the living waters are plentiful and the waters of life is reminiscent of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman He spoke with at Jacob's well: *"Jesus answered and said unto her, Every one that drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life"* (John 4:13-14).

So many times in Revelation, John sees the faithful in the throne room of God. There are those in the world today who try and use these visions to set forth the teaching that all Christians who have died are presently in heaven. We must keep in mind that the Revelation is purposefully symbolized for the

protection of the first readers who were living during the great persecution of the Roman Empire and therefore the language is obscured. Biblical teaching elsewhere in scripture places the souls of the faithful dead in a place of paradise within the Hadean realm where they await the coming of Jesus. The saved thief on the cross joined Jesus in paradise (Luke 23:43) and we know from other scripture that Jesus went to Hades after His death on the cross (Acts 2:27). Lazarus and the rich man likewise went to Hades upon their deaths (Luke 16:23). The rich man was in torment while Lazarus was pictured in a place of comfort in Abraham's bosom. Inspiration records a conversation between Abraham and the lost rich man. Nowhere in scripture does it even remotely hint that those in their final destination of Hell will be engaging those in Heaven in conversations. Hell, (Gehenna), is described in scripture as eternal and total separation from God forever.

In Acts 2:34 we read that *"David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand"*. Jesus Christ is the only one who has been resurrected from the Hadean realm and has ascended to Heaven. The faithful dead have not yet been resurrected and are therefore awaiting this event in the paradise section of the Hadean realm.

John 5:28-29

"Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment." This event has not yet occurred therefore nobody but Jesus has ascended to heaven.

It is often the case in Revelation that events which are to happen in the future are visualized as having already been accomplished. This is to give the impression of the absolute surety of the event. Notice later on in John's visions that an angel declares, *"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication"* (Revelation 14:8). The Babylon here is a figure for the Roman Empire and God's angel declares it's downfall as having already occurred. The downfall of the empire is so sure that it is spoken of in past tense terms. Likewise the gathering of God's saints about Him in Heaven is so sure that it is spoken of in the same past tense terms. It is also significant to note within the vision itself that the scene switches from the saints on earth under the persecution immediately to the throne room where they were again pictured in the presence of God while in reality many of the 144,000 were still living on earth, some who were yet to respond to the gospel and come into fellowship with God.

Summary Paraphrase

Revelation 7

And after these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back God's retribution like the wind so that it would not descend on the earth nor the sea nor on the trees. And then I saw another angel ascending from the direction of the rising sun with a message from God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels who were commanded to bring God's judgment upon the earth, saying, "Do no harm to the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, until all the faithful servants of our God are saved."

And I heard the number of God's children which were redeemed: and there were great multitudes of them from among all the corners of the earth. From each and every nation of the earth, both Jews and Gentiles, all of those

who would be redeemed were found and saved. And after this I saw them all again in a vision before the Throne of God and there were so many that no man could number them. They were standing before the throne of God, with the Father and with Jesus, clothed with righteousness, having been delivered from their persecutors and now at peace.

And they all cried in unison, "Salvation comes only from God on His throne and from His Son." And then all the angels standing round about God's throne and all the elders and all the redeemed fell on their faces and worshipped God saying "Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Be it so."

And one of the elders asked me, "Who are these which are clothed in righteousness and from where did they come?" And I answered him, "Sir, you know these things" And then he said to me, "These are they which were faithful unto death through the great persecution, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the sacrificial blood of the Son of God. And now they are the only ones of earth who will be able to stand and they shall serve God day and night in His temple: and He shall shelter them where He dwells. They will never again go hungry or thirsty, neither will they ever again suffer under the persecution of the unrighteous. Because Jesus, the good shepherd who is enthroned at the right hand of God shall make sure they are fed and He will lead them to fountains of the waters of life and God Himself shall wipe all the tears of tribulation from their eyes.

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