

### BOOK OF REVELATION

#### Lesson 17 - Chapter 7 Continued

We addressed the first 8 verses of Revelation chapter 7 last time and we'll not quite conclude the chapter today after reviewing. At the same time I'm going to add some more information about last week's topic before moving forward with Revelation 7 verse 9.

If we assume that the chapter order of Revelation as we find it in our Bibles is correct, then what we read in chapter 7 happens either coincidentally with, or just after, the 6th seal of chapter 6 being opened. However if we agree with the Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist viewpoint (the one championed by most Evangelical churches), then we have to conclude that chapters 6 and 7 are out of order; reversed, actually. That is, chapter 7 should come before chapter 6. No ancient Greek manuscript of the New Testament has it that way, which is why it is not that way in the Bibles you all hold in your hands. There is also no scriptural proof for this supposition; rather it is that in order for the Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist doctrine to work chapters 6 and 7 MUST be reversed.

There was no notion of this particular theological theory until early in the 19th century when Darby invented the Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist doctrine that is widely accepted today. The gist of the doctrine is that prior to an event called The Tribulation, the Rapture occurs that supernaturally whisks Christ Believers away and into Heaven before they can die as martyrs or suffer painful persecution. This doctrine was popularized in the Left Behind series by Tim LaHaye. One of the main problems with this doctrine is that there is no such named event in the Book of Revelation or anywhere else in the New Testament called The Tribulation. It was a term first coined by Darby. The other main problem is the one we just discussed; this doctrine only works if we reverse the chapter order of Revelation 6 and 7, which (to me) attacks the credibility of the book as it has been transmitted to us. So I would like to offer a different reason that I see as not only plausible, but actually conforming to an established God-pattern, for why there is an interlude in the biblical text between the happenings of Revelation chapters 6 and 8. That is, that there is a pause between the opening of the 6th seal that ends chapter 6 and the opening of the 7th seal that begins chapter 8. And that pause or interlude is what we read in chapter 7.

Prior to God's wrath in Revelation beginning to be poured out on the entire planet that ends with global catastrophe, there was one other time that Yehoveh determined to inflict His wrath on a destructive, world-wide basis: the Great Flood. And if we go back to Genesis chapters 6 and 7 (which you can do on your own) we find that there was an interlude, a pause, in the biblical account after God announced His determination to destroy the world. During that interlude we read about Noah's history and of his family. We read about how God gave Noah instructions to build an Ark to survive the flood waters, and that Noah was also to rescue hundreds of species of animals from extinction. It is interesting that we find that later authors of Jewish religious literature saw this same pattern and used it in the construction of the book of 1 Enoch chapter 66 (which is also about the Flood) and in II Baruch 6 regarding the destruction

of the Temple, for example.

The purpose of the interlude that we find in Genesis is to secure God's people (Noah and his righteous family) before the catastrophe begins in earnest. And in the same pattern we see in Revelation an interlude for the purpose of God securing His people (especially the 144,000 who are said to be "sealed", but also the countless millions of Believers of all peoples and languages) before the God-ordained catastrophes begin in earnest.

We also discussed the identity of the 144,000 Believers who would be sealed for God, and thus protected in some way. Being sealed means to receive a mark of ownership. So these 144,000 are being protected either from physical harm or from spiritual harm (or perhaps both); at this point that is not clear.

While what I'm about to tell you is new information, and not part of the review, it is meant to point out something important. Although nearly the entire Book of Revelation is about the End Times and God's wrath as part of His plan of redemption, the issue of personal salvation is not to be found except in chapter 7 where we read about the saved martyrs under the Heavenly altar, the 144,000 sealed Believers, and then the countless millions who have been saved; and then also in chapters 12, 14, 19 and 21. Thus the theme of a remnant that is delivered from God's wrath (saved people) that we find in the story of Noah is depicted similarly in Revelation. Only a remnant is saved through trust in Christ, and we find that remnant identified in chapter 7.

Interestingly neither is repentance nor turning from sin a significant topic outside of the 7 letters to the Churches of Asia. Once we enter the final phase of the End Times (starting with the Seal judgments of chapter 6), repentance for the purpose of salvation is dealt with only by implication. No mention of repentance is found in the opening of the first 6 seals. Even as the global destruction increases and gets more horrific in chapter 9 (where the Trumpet judgments are announced, and then God's wrath is further heightened in chapter 16 with the Bowl judgments) there is only a stupefied wonder by John about why the people of the earth can't see (or admit) that they are suffering God's judgment. And also why since this is self evident they won't turn from their sins as a logical response; instead they only blaspheme God all the more and increase their levels of sin and evil.

**CJB Revelation 9:20-21 <sup>20</sup> *The rest of mankind, those who were not killed by these plagues, even then did not turn from what they had made with their own hands- they did not stop worshipping demons and idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk. <sup>21</sup> Nor did they turn from their murdering, their involvement with the occult and with drugs, their sexual immorality or their stealing.***

**CJB Revelation 16:9-11 <sup>9</sup> *People were burned by the intense heat; yet they cursed the name of God, who had the authority over these plagues, instead of turning from their sins to give him glory.***

**<sup>10</sup> *The fifth one poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom grew dark. People gnawed on their tongues from the pain, <sup>11</sup> yet they cursed the God of***

***heaven because of their pains and sores, and did not turn from their sinful deeds.***

What does this mean for us? I've often been asked what happens to Believers who come to salvation only after the Rapture; those who resisted the Gospel until those biblical prophecies that explained what was going to happen, happened. And what we will find is that the Book of Revelation is not terribly concerned about them. No doubt a significant number of people will see what occurs and change their minds; but for them it will be too late to avoid the wrath of God that will now be poured out indiscriminately upon all humans.....including those who come to faith after the Rapture.

Picture it this way: it could not have been otherwise that upon the deluge beginning and those on Noah's Ark beginning to bob around on the ever rising waters that thousands of people suddenly realized what evil they had done and pled with God to have mercy upon them. But it was too late; their drowning was now certain regardless of their newfound enlightenment. So it may be for those who repent and come to Christ AFTER the Rapture. While they will receive the mercy of eternal life, they will not receive the mercy of deliverance from the earthly torments that are being thrown down from Heaven. Christian bible scholars are nearly unanimous in believing that the New Testament implies that even the eternal status of Raptured Believers, and those who died before them, will be different and higher and more privileged than those who come to believe after the Rapture. So the conclusion is that while there is hope for those who remain pagan up and through the Rapture, and only believe afterward, their hope is not the same as for those who believed beforehand. While I cannot say that is the case for certain, it is indeed how I see it as well.

The identity of these 144,000 in chapter 7 is controversial mainly because various Bible commentators cannot decide if, as specifically written down, these are indeed 144,000 saved Israelites from the 12 tribes of Israel, or whether their tribal identification is merely symbolic and instead means to indicate the entire gentile Church. As with Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalism the only rationale for assuming the 144,000 to represent the gentile Church is in order to uphold that rather new manmade Church doctrine. Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalism inherently embraces the Replacement Theology doctrine that says that God has replaced Israel with the gentile Church such that all the blessings promised to Israel now goes to the Church; however all the curses threatened against Israel remain with Israel.

The scriptural evidence is overwhelming that the 144,000 who are sealed by a mark on their foreheads are Israelites. First is that those are the undisputed words of the passage; and second is because even the individual Israelite tribes from which the 144,000 come are identified tribe by tribe, name by name. This is not how biblical symbolism works; so there is no evidence for symbolism. Very likely the basis for the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation is taken from the Ezekiel prophecy of Ezekiel 9.

<sup>CJB</sup> ***Ezekiel 9:4-6 <sup>4</sup> ADONAI said to him, "Go throughout the city, through all Yerushalayim, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who are sighing and crying over all the disgusting practices that are being committed in it."***

<sup>5</sup> ***To the others I heard him say, "Go through the city after him and strike! Don't let your***

***eye spare; have no pity! <sup>6</sup> Kill old men, young men, girls, little children, women-slaughter them all! But don't go near anyone with the mark. Begin at my sanctuary."***

That said, the listing of the particular Israelite tribes is problematic to a degree. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are left out of the list while the tribes of Joseph and Levi are added back in. Why this is we are not informed. What we do know, however, is that the composition of the list of tribes of Israel has changed a few times over history. Originally there were 12; then down in Egypt that number increased to 14; then just before Jacob's death that number decreased to 13; then out in the wilderness the number returned to 12 but it was a slightly different 12 than the original 12. Now in Revelation it is still 12, but the list of which tribes are included in the 12 has changed once again. Some biblical scholars and teachers try to imagine a reason why Ephraim and Dan were removed (even though Holy Scripture gives us no reason) while others owe this to an error by John or to a later scribal error. However the earliest Greek New Testament manuscripts that we have uphold this particular list. So it is my conclusion that the list is correct, but the reason for the change is a mystery. So it is best for us to simply accept it as we find it and in time the unfolding of redemption history will make the reason for the list, as it stands, clear.

Let's continue with Revelation 7 by re-reading the remainder of the chapter.

### **RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 7:9 - end**

Verse 9 begins with "after this". "After this" either means that verse 9 begins another and separate vision or that it begins a different theme within the same vision than what was written in verses 1 - 8. However Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalists generally say that what begins in verse 9 is but a continuation of verses 1-8 with the purpose of further identifying the 144,000. This verse explains that the crowd that John sees is too enormous to be counted, but that they consist of people from every nation, tribe, and language. I will again quote extensively from Beale who makes the case for the Pre-Tribulation Dispensationalist doctrinal viewpoint.

***"Whereas verses 1 - 8 have portrayed the church in its symbolic significance as the true Israel, in verses 9 - 17 John receives a glimpse into its actual dimensions.....They are said to be a certain number of people because God has determined exactly who will receive His redemptive seal, and only He knows the precise number of His true servants.....This second picture in verses 9 - 17 understands the same host now from the viewpoint of their actual vast number. Although they are a saved remnant, they are also those who have been gathered from all over the face of the earth and have lived throughout the era of the church age. Therefore they are a multitudinous throng."***

In my opinion Beale's interpretation is straightforward allegory. That is, for him all in this passage is symbolic and therefore should not be taken in its plain meaning. And, by the way, I doubt Beale would argue with my labeling his interpretation as allegory because that has become a generally acceptable method of Bible interpretation in the academic world, and especially for the New Testament, and that is at least partly because allegory is the method required in order to uphold the Pre-Tribulation doctrine or some other rival doctrines. However if we take the words of verse 4 - 8 as literal, then clearly the precisely numbered group of

144,000 that is said to be Israelites from 12 named Israelite tribes must be a different and separate group from the generic vast horde of people from every nation, tribe, and language spoken of in verse 9. Taken literally the first group is speaking of Hebrews; the second group is speaking of gentiles. In both cases these are saved Believers.

These saved people (speaking of their souls or spirits, of course) were in Heaven, standing before the throne of God, and in front of the Lamb. I'll add a brief parenthesis that we need to constantly keep in mind; John describes two distinct divine individuals in his vision: the One sitting on the throne, and the Lamb. God sits on the throne; the Lamb stands before Him. This is consistent throughout John's visions and continues to place the One on the throne (God the Father) as preeminent to the Lamb. The consistency of the vision matches the consistency of the Holy Scriptures in this same regard. But what it doesn't match are manmade Church doctrines such as the co-equal Trinity Doctrine.

The countless Believers from every people group on earth are dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. The white robes mean absolute ritual purity. The palm branches relate most likely to Psalm 118, which itself relates to **Sukkot**.....the Feast of Tabernacles. The pertinent verses from Psalm 118 are:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Psalm 118:24-29<sup>24</sup> This is the day ADONAI has made, a day for us to rejoice and be glad. <sup>25</sup> Please, ADONAI! Save us! Please, ADONAI! Rescue us! <sup>26</sup> Blessed is he who comes in the name of ADONAI. We bless you from the house of ADONAI.**

**<sup>27</sup> ADONAI is God, and he gives us light. Join in the pilgrim festival with branches all the way to the horns of the altar. <sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I thank you. You are my God; I exalt you. <sup>29</sup> Give thanks to ADONAI; for he is good, for his grace continues forever.**

It is my opinion that the Messianic prophetic nature of the Feast of **Sukkot** is what is being played out here in John's vision as palm branches are placed at the altar in the Temple and they are central to **Sukkot** ritual. That is, the 7 named Biblical Feasts in the Torah are, without doubt, prophetic of the redemptive works of Messiah. The first 4 of these prophetic biblical feasts have already been fulfilled. **Pesach**, Passover, was the day when Yeshua paid the price for our sins through His blood spilled upon the cross. **Matza**, Unleavened Bread, was the day when Yeshua's sinless body was placed into the rocky tomb. **Bikkurim**, First Fruits, was the day when Yeshua arose from the dead. And **Shavuot**, Pentecost, was the day when the Holy Spirit came to indwell men.

Three of the feasts remain to be fulfilled: **Yom Teruah**, The Feast of Trumpets; **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement; and the final one, **Sukkot**, the Feast of Tabernacles. So unless other evidence is made available to me, I can find no other explanation for the scene that we find with the palm branches in Revelation 7:9 than it is the moment of the prophesied fulfillment of The Feast of Tabernacles.

In verse 10 the millions of Believers in Heaven shout "Victory to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" God the Father and God the Son are praised separately. But what "victory" is being praised? It is the victory of the Lamb being able to open the seals and



therefore to begin the process of judgment that brings to fruition God's will to redeem the earth from Satan. But it is also crediting God and the Lamb with the victory of Believers over sin and evil in our lives. The overcomers' victory is really God's victory, and here that reality is being acknowledged by praising God for it. So the victory is twofold: first it is the victory of Believers to persevere in our faith so that we may have eternal life; and second it is the victory of God to restore a fallen world such that our eternal life will be in a place in which sin and evil are eradicated once and for all.

And just as the souls of the human Believers worship God, so now starting in verse 11 do the millions of angels surrounding the inner circle of the throne fall down in worship first by saying "Amen" to what the Believers have shouted. And then add their own praise that acknowledges God's unapproachable glory, wisdom and power that is from everlasting to everlasting.

Verse 13 then goes into further depth about who the millions of Believers dressed in white are (from verse 9). One of the 24 Elders asks John if he understands who they are and John replies that he doesn't. The Elder tells him that these are the people who have come out of the great tribulation. I have mentioned on a few occasions that neither Revelation nor any New Testament book ever speaks of the named events of The Tribulation or of The Great Tribulation. Yet the Pre-Tribulation timeline relies on the existence of these two named events, and their argument seems to gain some credibility with the words "the great tribulation" that we find in this verse. Indeed, the Greek word **ton** (the) is there. However, by no means does this make "the great tribulation" a particular named event. If I said to you that these Saints came out of the great chaos that currently haunts American politics and society would you think that a particular event was being spoken of? Or would you think of a general time when the chaos was greater than other chaotic times?

When something is a proper name, in English we capitalize those words. The KJV and most of the major, reliable Bible translations do NOT capitalize the term great tribulation because they acknowledge that this is pointing to an unspecified time and not to a specified event. The CJB is in error to capitalize it. So all we are to take from this is that these Believers in white robes came to Heaven, taken out of a period of great tribulation. John's vision in this regard is a direct allusion to Daniel 12.

**<sup>CJB</sup> Daniel 12:1 *"When that time comes, Mikha'el, the great prince who champions your people, will stand up; and there will be a time of distress unparalleled between the time they became a nation and that moment. At that time, your people will be delivered, everyone whose name is found written in the book."***

The only other place outside of Revelation that a similar term as "great tribulation" is found is in Matthew 24. The CJB translates it this way:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Matthew 24:21 *For there will be trouble then worse than there has ever been from the beginning of the world until now, and there will be nothing like it again!***

However almost all other Bible versions translate it this way:

**<sup>KJV</sup> Matthew 24:21 *For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.***

So while despite Darby's insistence of a specified event called The Great Tribulation, what we have in all 3 of these passages is the mention of a global social condition of upheaval continuing for an unspecified time that involves open persecution of Believers, and of nearly unrestrained human evil perpetrated upon other humans, which is beyond any that has ever happened in human history.

Verse 14 concludes by saying that these folks have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. Clearly this a metaphoric saying that involves an irony. The irony is that these Believers are wearing robes of brilliant white, but they accomplished this by washing their robes in blood. Obviously blood stains and would have turned their robes red. White robes means absolute purity. In both testaments of the Bible to wash garments means to purify and it is often associated with immersion (that Christians call baptism). However the term "the blood of the Lamb" refers to the atoning effect that Christ's death on the cross causes on the one who believes in Him. So the term "the blood of the Lamb" is an expression that means the atonement that Yeshua provides. Thus by washing our robes in the atonement that Christ provides, the total and absolute purity that He possesses is also invested in us.

So the question then is, does this verse refer to people who died during that great persecution and then their souls went to Heaven? Or does this refer to people who were taken alive....delivered from being killed.....from the time of great persecution? So called Mid-Tribulation Believers think this is referring to a Rapture of Believers that occurs at the mid-point of a 7 year period of tribulation. The first 3 1/2 years are named The Tribulation, and the second 3 1/2 years are named The Great Tribulation. So the doctrinal theory is that while all Believers will suffer some persecution (tribulation) for a 3 1/2 year period, they will not suffer GREAT persecution for the following 3 1/2 year period because just before the time period of the greatly increased persecution begins Believers will be whisked away to Heaven. So the Pre-Tribulation doctrine folks see it that before ANY tribulation starts, Believers are raptured away. And Mid-Tribulation doctrine folks see it that before the worst tribulation starts Believers will be raptured away.

In my opinion it is always of value to see what the Early Church Fathers have to say about such matters since they are so many centuries closer to when these words were written than are we. Primasius of Hadrumentum (which is in Northern Africa) had some very interesting comments on this passage of Revelation because he leans heavily on the Revelation commentary of Ticonius (which, sadly, has been lost to history and so all we have are snippets of it provided by later Church Fathers). While Primasius lived during the mid-500s A.D., Ticonius lived almost 2 centuries earlier. I'm going to quote extensively from Primasius's Commentary on the Apocalypse regarding Revelation 7:13-14 because the question of the circumstances that he thought brought these Believers out of the great tribulation matter; those Believers just might be us who are living today. I also happen to think that Primasius, a highly regarded Bishop in his day, nailed it. So listen carefully to what he has to say, please.

***When it says that a number of faithful had come out of the great tribulation, what else is***

***indicated except what we read elsewhere, "Through many tribulations we must enter the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Therefore, the apostle (Paul) also said, "Brothers, let us not grow weary, for in due time we shall reap" (Gal. 6:9). It is through the endurance of struggles that the number of faithful are sifted out, just as by the weight of the press oil is prepared with diligent care, and grain that is to be stored in a barn is collected through the threshing machine.***

***That they wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb reveals their reward, so that the labor of the aforementioned struggle might be endured with equanimity. And he rightly adds that they made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. It is as though he said that the robes that some had befouled after the grace of baptism through neglect, ignorance or contempt, these had made white in the blood of the Lamb, this is, in the grace of Christ, or even in undergoing martyrdom.***

***This reward is to be assigned especially to those in the church who have spilled their blood for Christ and have returned the robe of baptism with a greater brilliance by a better service of blood. But if this grace is to refer to all the faithful generally, we must finally conclude that if anyone is cleansed by the fount of the Lord, is fed by his flesh and is enflamed by the call of the Spirit, he is in this manner made white as snow. For there are those who are proven to be martyrs before God by their inner character, even though they are not martyrs by way of public act.***

So Primasius is saying that there is no need for debate, or to have strong rigid views one way or the other. When Revelation 7:13 speaks about those who have come out of the great tribulation it is a generality that means all those who have died and gone to Heaven for whatever reason. They could be martyrs, killed for their faith. They could be folks who held some small amount of faith, and had fallen so far away from God and yet because of tribulation had returned to Him. They could be those who merely lived very Godly lives and served God in any number of ways during this time of great tribulation and then died of disease or old age. But while some of these Believers might receive greater rewards in Heaven than others because of the level of faith they displayed, the meaning of this passage is not to identify some specific circumstance (such as being martyred) that defines this group.

I also want to add the issue of Rapture. Primasius doesn't even consider the Rapture as a possibility so there is nothing here that speaks of the Rapture in any definitive way. Rather the event of the Rapture has to be superimposed into the Scriptures by the modern Theologian rather intrusively in order to say that those being spoken of arrived in Heaven and received their white robes by means of Rapture. I'll say it in a little different way: Rapture as the mechanism for getting these Saints into Heaven out of this great tribulation only works if there is already a predetermined doctrine for when the Rapture must occur.

We'll finish up chapter 7 and get well into chapter 8 next time.