

## **“Will People Be Saved During The Great Tribulation?”**

Revelation 7:1-17

### **Introduction**

When we think about the end of history, the Great Tribulation, the rapture of believers and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus, several important questions can easily grab our attention:

- 1) If the Holy Spirit is taken out as many believe 2 Thess. 2:6-7 teaches, how will anyone be saved?
- 2) If believers are raptured before the Tribulation begins, per 1 Thess. 4:13-18, who will witness for Jesus during this time?
- 3) Is God really through with the Jew?

To question #1, I would simply note that 2 Thess. 2:6-7 teaches it is the Spirit as restrainer of sin, not convictor of sin, who is removed.

To questions #2 & #3, Revelation 7 provides the answers, and what wonderful answers they are. Will souls be saved during the tribulation? Yes, and by the millions. Who will witness for Jesus? At the very least, 144,000 Jews sealed for service by our God. Is God through with the Jew? Perish the thought!!!

- 1) From the Old Testament we read in Jeremiah 31:35-37
 

“Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; the Lord of hosts is His name; “If this fixed order departs from before Me,” declares the Lord, “Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever.” Thus says the Lord, “If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out below, then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done,” declares the Lord.”
- 2) From the New Testament we read in Romans 11:25-29
 

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, “**THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.**” “**AND THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.**” From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

## **Transition**

What is it then, which our God will be doing during these terrifying and troubling days? In 2 magnificent visions (vs. 1-8, 9-17) God's Word gives the answer.

### **I. God has a plan for salvation in the Tribulation. 7:1-8**

Our God is a soul saving God who has all of humanity on His heart. This is never more evident than in Revelation 7. This chapter is something of an interlude, a parenthesis, a break in the action separating the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals. The first 6 seals have been broken in chapter 6 with cataclysmic and catastrophic results. The chapter ends with an ominous question, "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (6:17) To this question chapter 7 provides an answer, for in the midst of judgement, grace and mercy flow like rivers of water.

#### **1. We should thank God for suspending judgement. 7:1-3**

##### Verse 1

After this – after the seals of chapter 6.

4 angels, 4 corners – a figure of speech, noting the 4 directions of the compass, hence the whole of the earth. They are holding back the 4 winds which are ready to blow further judgement and wrath upon this wicked world. But no, their hand is stayed, judgement is delayed. "At each of 4 points of the compass one of the 4 winds is held prisoner by an angel" (Thomas, 465).

##### Verse 2

John sees another (*allon*, of the same character) angel ascending from the rising of the sun, from the east, east of Patmos. In the Bible good things, wonderful things come from / are in the east. Paradise was in the east (Genesis 2:8), the glory of God comes to the temple from the east (Ezekiel 43:2), the Magi came from the east (Matthew 2:1), and God's salvation likewise comes from the east, for our Savior is the "Dayspring" or the "Sunrise from on high" of Luke 1:78 and in Revelation 22:16 He is the "bright morning star."

Seal – possession and protection; c.f. 14:1; 22:4; the seal is the name of the Lamb and the Father, or as 7:2 says the living God (c.f. Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2; Hosea 1:10; 14 times in the New Testament). An angel "with a loud voice" shouts to the 4 angels that judgement is delayed on the earth "until we have sealed the bond-servants (*doulous*) of our God on their foreheads. (c.f. sealing in Ezekiel 9:4).

Do not harm – is a command of prohibition. The loud voice denotes the urgency of the situation. The angels must restrain the winds a while longer. Destruction must wait. These select servants will be sealed and protected as servants of God from the devastating judgements to follow. They will have an assignment to fulfill for the Lord, and no one or no thing will stop them.

### **Transition**

We should thank God for temporarily suspending judgement.

## **2. We should thank God for permanently sealing Jews. 7:3-8**

Verses 4 – 8 are some of the most remarkable, abused and misinterpreted verses in the Bible in my judgement. What should be a basic and simple understanding of the text has been subjected to some of the most fanciful and far-fetched interpretations imaginable.

On face value the text is clear. During the Tribulation God will seal as His select servants 144,000 “from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” While there are a couple of peculiarities in the list which we will note, the meaning seems clear and without controversy. However, that has hardly been the case. John Polhill, of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, points out that Bible interpreters have often opted for a symbolical interpretation. What do these include? The 144,000 represent:

- 1) 144,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses whom will reign in heaven.
- 2) Select individuals who worship on the Sabbath (7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist groups).
- 3) 144,000 true preachers who would follow the radical Anabaptist reformer Melchior Hofmann in 1533. He died in prison and his army of 144,000 never materialized.
- 4) The Church, as the “new Israel,” i.e. the redeemed of all the ages.
- 5) Literal Jews saved and sealed for special service during the Tribulation. \*

\*This last view is the best view. As God reserved 7,000 in the days of Ahab (1 Kings 19:8), He will reserve 144,000 for Himself during the future Tribulation. In 1800 there were only 3,300,000 Jews in the World and only 6700 in their land. By 1996, in spite of losing 6 million in the Holocaust, there were 14,000,000 worldwide and 4,600,000 in their land! God never forgets His promises!!! I agree with MacArthur, Jeremiah, Swindoll, Wiersbe, Rogers, Vince and Patterson that:

- 1) These are Tribulation “apostle Pauls” who will engage in missionary and evangelistic work around the world.
- 2) As Revelation 14:1-5 teaches, they will be utterly faithful, committed and zealous in their work for the Lord.
- 3) They are only the first (14:5) of a vast multitude who will come to Jesus during the time of Tribulation.

\*What about the peculiarities in the list, specifically 1) Judah appearing first, 2) Levi included, and 3) the absence of Dan and Ephraim?

- 1) There are 19 different arrangements of the names of the Tribes in the Old Testament, and this list is different from all of them.
- 2) Judah is listed first because Messiah, our Lord Jesus, comes from Judah.
- 3) Levi, though not allotted a portion of land, is rightly involved in the worldwide priestly and prophetic assignment of the Tribulation.
- 4) Ephraim is replaced by Joseph because of its history of idolatry and its allying with the enemies of Judah (Isaiah 7:2,5; Hosea 5:3). Yet the inclusion of Joseph allows for the inclusion of Ephraim, but without the mention of his name.
- 5) Dan is omitted, replaced by Levi, because of its practice of gross idolatry. Further, a pre-Christian Jewish tradition said Antichrist would come from Dan!

Genesis 49:17, “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse’s heels, so that his rider falls backward.”

*Testament of Dan* (5:6) said Satan is the prince of Dan.

Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century) noted the tradition that Antichrist would come from Dan, and Hippolytus wrote, “As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan.” (Mounce, 169-170).

Ezekiel 48 and Matthew 19:28 makes it clear all the tribes will be honored and share in the millennial reign of Christ, yet during this time 144,000 specific Jews from 12 specific tribes will receive the Father’s name as their seal (14:1) and for His service, standing in stark contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast and follow Antichrist (13:17; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20). In every age God has His faithful servants, His faithful witnesses. It will be no different in the Tribulation.

### **Transition**

We should thank God for permanently sealing Jews.

- 1) Mohammed may say, “The last hour will not come before Muslims fight the Jews and the Muslims kill them.”
- 2) Liberals may say they have their own way to God. A prominent church theologian has told Christians they need to re-evaluate their views toward Judaism and the idea that the New Testament supersedes God’s covenant with the Jews.

Early in 2001, the Reverend W. Eugene March, speaking at a recent three-day symposium at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, said Christians need to stop thinking that Jews and other non-Christians are outside of God's plan of salvation. "God does require of us exclusive allegiance, but that does not automatically define or limit God's relations to others. We simply do not know how God relates to that theoretical person all alone on an island who has never had any opportunity to learn of God." March said Christians should be sensitive to Jewish history by referring to the Old Testament as the "Primary" or "Early" Testament, and using calendar terms such as "B.C.E. - - Before the Common Era" instead of "B.C. - - Before Christ." March called for a radical rethinking of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, noting that Jews have been doing God's work "far longer than we." "We are in a context now of religious pluralism, and our theology needs to be reconsidered in that light," March said.

- 3) Jewish leaders may decry over witness to them, and
- 4) Some Christians may wrongly argue the Church is the new Israel and that God is through with the Jew, but God says I have big things, great things in store for them at the end. Only 25% of Israeli Jews may know that December 25 is the day we celebrate Christmas now, but there is coming a day when there will be an explosion of "Jews for Jesus." It will be during the time of the Tribulation.

## II. **Heaven has praise for salvation during the Tribulation.** 7:9-12

John now sees a 2<sup>nd</sup> vision in heaven. It complements the 1<sup>st</sup> vision, but it is significantly different.

- The first is on earth, the second in heaven.
- The first concerns 144,000 Jews, the second a great multitude from everywhere.
- The first are sealed for service, the second are secure in their salvation.

### 1. **Men should worship because of what God has done.** 7:9-10

John sees a great multitude, a crowd of many that no one could count, lit. "to number it no one was able." They indeed come from every place and every people: from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues. This 4-fold division emphasizes the universality of this multitude. In heaven there is not the slightest hint of prejudice, bigotry or racism. In every direction, as far as the eye can see, like the stars of heaven (Genesis 15:5) and the sand of the sea (Gen. 32:12), stands a great throng.

\*Note their location – before the throne and before the Lamb. Now the question of 6:17 is answered as to who can stand. It is the redeemed.

\*Note their clothing – clothed (W.A.R.) in white robes of victory and purity, they stand before God in the imputed righteousness of Jesus.

\*Note their instruments of worship – palm branches of joy and celebration.

\*Note their confession – they cry (continually) with a loud voice (c.f. verse 2), saying “Salvation ...” Deliverance from sin and victory over Satan is ours because of Father on the throne and the Son (Lamb) at His side.

## 2. Angels should worship because of who God is. 7:11-12

“All” the angels were standing ...” This looks back to the myriad and myriad in 5:11-14. Like the elders in 5:14 the angels fall on their faces before the Lord. This scene is holy, this time sacred. Like the saints in verse 10 they speak, not of what God has done but to who God is. Sandwiching a 7-fold blessing is the word “Amen.” They affirm what the saints have said and then add their own words of adoration.

- 1) Blessing (*eulogia*) – a good word, a praise.
- 2) Glory (*doxa*) – honor derived from a good reputation; it is the radiance or outshining of the divine person.
- 3) Wisdom (*sophia*) – divine knowledge and perspective on all things, especially in the outworking of His plan of salvation.
- 4) Thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) – we get our word “Eucharist” from it. It speaks of gratitude and is the appropriate response to the God of all good things.
- 5) Honor (*time*) – esteem, public recognition (c.f. 4:11; 5:12, 13).
- 6) Power (*dunamis*) – God’s omnipotence, his ability to act as He wills.
- 7) Might (*ischus*) – strength as a quality one has. Often related to God’s mighty acts in salvation history.

All of this has one focus, one direction, one and only one deserving object: to our God forever and ever. This word of worship is not temporary, it is eternal. It is not for a moment, but forever.

*\*What a mighty God we serve. Angels bow before Him, heaven and earth adore Him.*

## III. Man has promises of salvation out of the Tribulation. 7:13-17

Observing this awesome scene in heaven, one of the 24 elders (c.f. chapter 4), one of the redeemed, puts a question to the apostle John, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they and where have they come from?” In a sense he anticipates the question which was on John’s mind.

Indeed, John throws the issue back to the elder in verse 14 by saying, “My Lord, you know.” What unfolds is a glorious description of the promises of salvation this group enjoys, and 5 different facets or aspects are highlighted. Though these promises are particularly for this group, these promises also belong to us as well.

1. **We are promised sanctification.** **7:13-14**  
 These come out (pre. tense) of the Great Tribulation (c.f. Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21). Though it is not specifically stated, it would seem then martyred believers are in view, though all who die in Christ during the Tribulation cannot and should not be excluded. Note they come out (pre. tense) continually. They are still coming. Sacrificed on earth, they are sanctified in heaven, for their robes were made white in the blood of the Lamb. Wash and made white (aorist) indicates once-for-all actions. Take our ugly, sinned, soiled garments and plunge them into the blood of the Lamb and miraculously, supernaturally, they come out white. We are promised sanctification.
  
2. **We are promised service.** **7:15**  
Serve (cont.) – priestly or worshipful service.  
Day and night – continually, unceasingly, without interruption.  
In His temple – the present heavenly dwelling place of God. But in eternity (21:22), He is Himself our temple.
  
3. **We are promised security.** **7:15**  
Spread his tabernacle (his tent) over them – calls to mind the memory of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Leviticus 26 ff.), the pillar of cloud and of fire (Exodus 13:21-22), the Shekinah Glory of God’s radiant presence in the midst of His people (Exodus 40:34-38) and the incarnation of the Son (John 1:14). God is with them, right there in their very midst. Never again will they feel forsaken, never again will they be tortured and tormented. They now enjoy the supreme presence and protection of the Lord God Himself.
  
4. **We are promised satisfaction.** **7:16**  
 Hunger and thirst were constant obstacles and threats in the ancient world. They remain so for much of our world today, but not so in heaven. Starvation, thirst, and the burning heat of the hot sun will find no place in heaven. This is almost a direct contrast with what the 4 Horsemen bring in 6:1-8. They curse, but God blesses. They bring suffering and sorrow, but God gives us satisfaction.
  
5. **We are promised a shepherd.** **7:17**  
 The Lamb will be our shepherd. From Lamb to Shepherd! (c.f. John 10; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. He will guide (lead) us to (lit.)

“life fountains of water,” emphasis falling on “life,” a stark contrast to the thirst the world offers but which it can never satisfy.

Finally, even the sorrowful memories of pain and suffering are removed as our God gently and graciously will wipe away every tear from their eyes (c.f. 21:4).

### **Conclusion**

In that place between wakefulness and dreams, I found myself in “the room.” There were no distinguishing features save for the one wall covered with small index card files. They were like the ones in libraries that list titles by author or subject in alphabetical order. But these files, which stretched from floor to ceiling and seemingly endlessly in either direction, had very different headings. As I drew near the wall of files, the first to catch my attention was one that read “Girls I Have Liked.” I opened it and began flipping through the cards. I quickly shut it, shocked to realize that I recognized the names written on each one, and ashamed at some of my comments and thoughts recorded on each. And then without being told, I knew exactly where I was. This lifeless room with its small files was a crude catalog system for my life. Here were written the thoughts and actions of my every moment, big and small, in a detail my memory couldn’t match.

A sense of wonder and curiosity, coupled with horror, stirred within me and I began randomly opening files and exploring their content. Some brought joy and sweet memories, others a sense of shame and regret so intense that I would look over my shoulder to see if anyone was watching. A file named “Friends” was next to one marked “Friends I Have Betrayed.”

The titles ranged from the mundane to the outright weird. “Books I Have Read,” “Lies I Have Told,” “Comfort I Have Given,” “Jokes I Have Laughed At.” Some were hilarious in their exactness: “Things I’ve Yelled at My Brothers.” Others I couldn’t laugh at: “Things I Have Done in My Anger,” “Things I Have Muttered Under My Breath at My Parents.” I never ceased to be surprised by the contents. Often there were many more cards than I expected. Sometimes there were fewer than I hoped.

I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the life I had lived. Could it be possible that I had the time in my brief life to write each of these thousands or even millions of cards? But each card confirmed this truth. Each was written in my own handwriting. Each signed with my signature.

When I pulled out the file marked “Songs I Have Listened To,” I realized the files grew to contain their contents. The cards were packed tightly, and yet after two or three yards, I hadn’t found the end of the file. I shut it, shamed, not so much by the quality of music, but more by the vast amount of time I knew that file represented.

When I came to a file marked “Lustful Thoughts,” I felt a chill run through my body. I pulled the file out only an inch, not willing to test its size, and drew out a card. I shuddered at its content. I felt sick to think that such a moment had been recorded.



An almost animal rage broke on me. One thought dominated my mind: “No one must ever see these cards! No one must ever see this room! I have to destroy them!” In an insane frenzy I yanked the file out. Its size didn’t matter now. I had to empty it and burn the cards. But as I took it at one end and began pounding it on the floor, I could not dislodge a single card. I became desperate and pulled out a card, only to find it as strong as steel when I tried to tear it.

Defeated and utterly helpless, I returned the file to its slot. Leaning my forehead against the wall, I let out a long, self-pitying sigh. And then I saw it. The title bore “People I Have Shared the Gospel With.” The handle was brighter than those around it, newer, almost unused. I pulled on its handle and a small box not more than three inches long fell into my hands. I could count the cards it contained on one hand.

And then the tears came. I began to weep. Sobs so deep that the hurt started in my stomach and shook through me. I fell on my knees and cried. I cried out of shame, from the overwhelming shame of it all. The rows of file shelves swirled in my tear-filled eyes. No one must ever, ever know of this room. I must lock it up and hide the key.

But then as I pushed away the tears, I saw Him. No, please not Him. Not here. Oh, anyone but Jesus. I watched helplessly as He began to open the files and read the cards. I couldn’t bear to watch His response. And in the moments I could bring myself to look at His face, I saw a sorrow deeper than my own, deeper than I had ever seen on any face. He seemed to intuitively go to the worst boxes. Why did He have to read every one? Why did He have to know?

Finally He turned and looked at me from across the room. He looked at me with pity in His eyes. But this was a pity that didn’t anger me. I dropped my head, covered my face with my hands and began to cry again. He walked over and put His arm around me. He could have said so many things. But He didn’t say a word. He just held me, flooding my soul with a love words could never capture.

Then He got up and walked back to the wall of files. Starting at one end of the room, He took out a file and, one by one, began to sign His name over mine on each card. I noticed that each signature was in red.

“No!” I shouted rushing to Him. All I could find to say was “No, no,” as I tried to pull the card from Him. His name shouldn’t be on these cards. But there it was, written in red so rich, so dark, so alive. The name of Jesus covered mine. It was written with His blood.

He gently took the card back. He smiled a gentle smile and began to sign the cards. I don’t think I’ll ever understand how He did it so quickly, but the next instant it seemed I heard Him close the last file and walk back to my side. He placed His hand on my shoulder and said, “It is finished.”

Suddenly I felt clean, clean on the inside in a way I had never known. As I looked at myself I saw that miraculously my clothing was now a glorious white robe, brighter than any material I had ever seen. Then I remembered what God's Word, The Bible, said in Revelation 7:14, "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." God indeed "will wipe away every tear from their eyes."