

## Chapter 7

As we examine the seventh chapter we come to an interlude between the Seals and Trumpets. It is a much-needed rest and chance to breathe after the devastation of the first six Seals. It won't be until chapter 8 that we unveil the seventh Seal and begin to look at the Trumpets. As we dive into chapter 7 we see two groups of people that are described in fairly great detail composing our content for this study. These two groups are the 144,000 in the first half of the chapter and the great multitude from every nation in the second half. We will look at each of these sections in greater detail after our introduction.

One of the issues that we will try and address first though is the definition of the great tribulation and how it is categorized. Talking about the second group of the great multitude we see John say in verse 14 "I said to him, 'sir you know.' And he said to me, 'these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" This great tribulation that the Elder identifies for John is where all of these people that are now in heaven have come from. What is the "great tribulation" and how long is it? This is a topic of much debate, but I am hopeful that by looking at Scripture we can begin to see part of God's revelation on this subject.

One of the most obvious realizations to establish is that there will be a period of *great* tribulation as opposed to regular and cyclical distress, suffering, and persecution more commonly referred to as tribulation. Certainly, throughout the history of the church there have been periods of tribulation and suffering and some that have even appeared "great" at times but no abbreviated time frame where we see the complete fulfillment of all of the judgments that are in the book of Revelation at the end of time. This *great* tribulation is mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:21-22 "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." Jesus also mentions an "hour of trial" in chapter 3 of Revelation. "Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth." (Rev. 3:10) In the Old Testament we see this time ultimately referred to as the "Day of the Lord". Although it is referred to as a *day* we are able to see in the numerous references and examples throughout the Old and New Testament that there will be a period of *great* tribulation culminating in cataclysmic events like a final battle, a worldwide earthquake, signs in the heavens, and the return of Christ often referred to as "the day". [What is the day of the Lord? | GotQuestions.org](#)

The question that I would like to pose for our consideration is how long should we expect this great tribulation to be? This is certainly relevant for us as we consider and think about three groups of seven judgments that are described as being part of this time. Even though this reference to the great tribulation in chapter 7 comes after the Seal Judgments we should understand their ultimate fulfillment in this final time of great tribulation. The martyrs we find in chapter 7 are coming out of something that has already begun. Certainly, these judgments have been typified in prior times and events but in what time period are their ultimate fulfillments concluded? We do not know the day or the hour but is there Scriptural information that provides us more detail about this time frame. Those who believe in a pre tribulation rapture (Jesus comes back for the church before the tribulation) would typically define the time frame as a seven-year period which begins with the revelation of the Antichrist, who signs a treaty with the

Jews. After three and a half years this Antichrist betrays the Jews culminating in the abomination of desolation in the third temple. The final three and a half years are then defined by persecution, martyrdom, and judgments culminating in a final battle and Christ returning to reign in the millennial kingdom with the Jews leading the way. What are the Scriptural verses that define these time frames and is there sufficient evidence for these conclusions? We will talk more specifically about some of the other beliefs in future chapters but let us examine the length of great tribulation.

As we discussed in the first chapter there are four primary interpretive understandings regarding the book of Revelation - Idealist; Preterist; Historicist; and Futurist. The importance in discussing this is primarily in understanding the not yet completion of these events and their ultimate fulfillment. As we discussed in the first chapter it appears evident that many of these events have foreshadowed or typified their final significance which will culminate with Jesus' return. We can certainly see how the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Black Death, the French Revolution and even more recently how World Wars 1&2 could be typified by the breaking of the Seal Judgments. But it would be inconsistent with Scripture to conclude that these events have been completed in their ultimate fulfillment. If we examine the Day of the Lord, the hour of trial, or the great tribulation as described in Scripture we get a much more comprehensive culmination that is still yet to come and completing the end of all things in this world. As Jesus himself said "All these are but the beginning of the birth pains." (Matthew 24:8) As any woman knows birth pains only get worse until the baby is born or until in our case the new heavens and earth are birthed. There may be times of rest and intermittent silence but there is a final culmination that will transpire bringing forth the new birth. Certainly these seals and all the judgments released in the book of Revelation can be understood to be partly complete from their past foreshadowing from Jesus ascension onward but it must be understood that there will be a culmination or consummation of all things. Jesus said that He is making all things new.

In the book of Revelation there are several specific time frames mentioned, but it is also a consideration of whether they are literal or symbolic as well. Revelation 13:5 "And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months." Revelation 12:14 "But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time." (which means 3 and a half years) Revelation 11:2-3 "But do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." (3 and a half years) Since Revelation does have symbolic language in it - are there other places in Scripture that talk about this three and a half year period? Daniel 7:25 "He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time." (Daniel's dream of four beasts with the last beast foreshadowing the Antichrist) Daniel 9:27 "And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." (one week is routinely interpreted as seven years) Daniel 12:11-12 "And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days." All of these verses reference a time period of 3 and a half years both in the book of Daniel and in Revelation. While the great

tribulation is more commonly understood to be composed of seven years total which is inferred from Daniel chapter 9 the time frame of three and a half years is included in both books. In addition to these references Jesus adds credence to the time frame of the last three and a half years by mentioning Daniel and his prophecy in Matthew 24:15,21 "So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place..for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be."

Jesus' reference to the tribulation of the end times in conjunction with Daniel seems to indicate Jesus' approval of these inferences made by Daniel. Regardless of your perspective there is certainly much more evidence for the final three and a half years than there is for the entire seven years. Whatever the total time is of the great tribulation according to these verses the ultimate fulfillment appears to at least contain these final three and a half years. This does not mean that we are necessarily required to be in agreement with a pre tribulation rapture because of this time frame but if we are letting Scripture interpret Scripture then we should be alert to these verses about the time frame of the end. The main point of the great tribulation is not how long it will last - it is in how distressing it will be and the patient endurance that will be required by Christ's followers. There have been many times of tribulation throughout the history of the church and there will be a final culmination of that tribulation which will be great indeed.

## **V.1-8 The 144,000**

Who are the 144,000? At face value John says these people are Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel. There is a mighty angel who appears and declares that there should be no further tribulation until the servants of God have been sealed. Some interpretations indicate that this scene precedes the Seal Judgments but I believe the plainest understanding of this declaration being before the Trumpet Judgments makes the most sense. This is because we see the four angels at the beginning of the chapter holding back the winds from the four ends of the earth preventing further tribulation. This seems to coordinate with the Trumpet Judgments because those judgments are the ones affected by nature instead of by the acts of men which we saw primarily with the Seal Judgments and the horsemen of the apocalypse.

These angels are holding back further judgment until the servants of our God are sealed. Without knowing completely if this will be a literal visible seal or not we now look at more information about these 144,000. The basic difference between the two most common interpretations are that they represent the literal 12,000 people from each of the Old Testament tribes or that they represent the entire church on earth. It appears that either scenario would be possible and I would contend with many of the different interpretations about Revelation that both are true. It is very possible that John heard and saw a literal 144,000 Jews being sealed and that they represent the entire church on earth. One of the things for us to remember about the New Testament church is that it was composed of a large percentage of Messianic Jews. Because the Gentiles have been grafted into the faith of Abraham, we will be sons and daughters of Abraham. Any Jews who become believers in Yeshua become part of the bride of Christ. Both of these realities are true and you can emphasize one over the other but any attempt to do so minimizes the other. I would not hesitate to believe that God can understand this group to be both/and instead of either or. John is very specific about the number and about

the tribes and doesn't just make a general reference to the 12 tribes of Israel or the people of Israel.

As far as the tribes go there are a couple of interesting considerations that we will look at next. Regardless of your view of the 144,000 this list of the Israelite tribes in Revelation 7 is unique. For one we see that the list begins with the tribe of Judah instead of the normal birth order. In addition, there is a combination of the tribe names between birth names and land names. (See below)

| <u>12 Sons Of Jacob</u><br>(Genesis 35:23-26) | <u>12 Tribes Of Israel</u><br>(Numbers 1:4-16) | <u>12 Tribes Of Revelation</u><br>(Revelation 7:5-8) |
|---|--|--|
|   |  |  |
| Reuben  | Reuben   | Judah  |
| Simeon  | Simeon   | Reuben   |
| Levi  | Gad  | Gad  |
| Judah   | Judah  | Asher  |
| Dan   | Issachar                                       | Naphtali   |
| Naphtali                                      | Zebulun  | Manasseh   |
| Gad   | Ephraim  | Simeon   |
| Asher   | Manasseh                                       | Levi   |
| Issachar                                      | Benjamin                                       | Issachar   |
| Zebulun                                       | Dan  | Zebulun  |
| Joseph  | Asher  | Joseph   |
| Benjamin                                      | Naphtali                                       | Benjamin   |

Interestingly, there really isn't a good list of the land tribes collected in a concise place and there isn't a consistent order either. Some of the best information for this list is found in Numbers 1 where there is a census taken of the tribes; Numbers 2 where the arrangement of the camp is prescribed (Judah is first in this list); and Joshua 18 & 19 where the land allotments are given to the tribes. Most Christians are familiar with the tribe of Levi receiving a special portion from the Lord and not being included in the number of tribes for the land disbursement. And most are aware that Joseph was given a double portion for his inheritance that was split between his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim thus restoring the number back to 12 after the exclusion of Levi. These are the distinctions between the sons of Jacob and the tribes of Israel list but the list in Revelation is different still. In the Revelation list Levi is back in and Dan is not included. Joseph is named instead of Ephraim (which does happen in other lists as well). Some commentators purport that Dan is excluded because of the thought that the Antichrist would come from this tribe but there is no Biblical evidence of this. To complicate matters even further there is a list of the tribes in Ezekiel 47 & 48 where there is a future land allotment described for some future eschatological setting which includes the original 12 tribes plus Levi and also the sons of Zadok for their faithful service in the temple. Finally, Ezekiel describes what appears to be the gates of heaven in Revelation 21:12 with the names of the original 12 sons of Jacob. (Ezekiel 48:30-35)

## V.9-17 The Great Multitude in Heaven

The second group of people that we see in this chapter are known as the “great multitude from every nation”. John says it is a group so large that no one could number. We see that they are from every nation, tribe, and tongue and that they are back before the throne as we return to this scene in heaven with God on the throne and the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes and waving palm branches to worship God. This great multitude cries out “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Then John sees the angels around the throne and they cry out and worship: “saying, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.” John then gets approached by one of the elders from the throne room who asks him about this great multitude of people. The elder then proceeds to tell John that these people have come out of the great tribulation. We have already talked about the great tribulation in the introduction but what is interesting to note here is that there is such a large number of people. This is significant because it is not all people who are in heaven, it says specifically that this group is coming out of the tribulation. This indicates that they weren’t there before, but now they are. There are at least three different ways to interpret this group depending on your view of Revelation. A pre tribulation understanding of this group would mean that it is a large group of people that have been converted to Christ since the rapture and now they have died most likely through martyrdom. The mid tribulation understanding would be that this group is connected to the rapture of the church since this is the first time that we see a large group of people in heaven. The post tribulation understanding would be that these are martyrs who have died in an intense period of persecution in the tribulation.

More pertinent than who is this group of people is how they got there. As it says in verse 14, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” That is the only way to get to heaven regardless of being martyred like the second group of people that we are talking about or being sealed like the first group. Everyone must be washed in the blood of the Lamb. It is only faith in Jesus that saves regardless if you are a Jew or if you are a martyr. It is still by and through the blood of the Lamb. There is no other way. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. We are then given a great list of promises that are prepared for all those who have made their robes white in verses 15-17.

**“Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”**

We need these promises as followers of Jesus in these last days and in the days of tribulation to come. God calls us to patient endurance and one of the ways that we fuel our patient endurance is by focusing on these precious promises. When we hear about the judgments and wrath in the book of Revelation, we are reminded that they are very real but they are only temporary. These promises from Revelation 7 are forever. When you are tempted to despair or when you are suffering and in pain remember these words because God will fulfill them all. There will be no more tears. Amen.