

Revelation 7- Who Can Stand?

As we move from the sixth seal that brings judgment on those who rebel against God and their cries to be covered by the rocks and hills, we hear the question, "Who is able to stand?" In Chapter 7 we now have a heavenly interlude, and we get an answer to the question as John describes the 144K who are able to stand.

In this pastoral and prophetic letter, John uses the phrases, "I saw" or "I heard" as transition statements or a new vision. They don't necessarily indicate chronology in terms of time.

Beale and Campbell point out that the events of the vision of Chap 7 likely took place prior to the unleashing of the four horsemen in chap 6.

The events of 7:1-8 precede those of 6:1-8, and 7:9-17 focus on the time after the final judgment initially portrayed in 6:12-17.

This section stands as a kind of parenthesis explaining how God will keep believers safe during the tribulations of the church age. As a result, the believers will not be harmed spiritually when they go through the trials unleashed by the four horsemen of 6:1-8.

REVELATION 7 An Interlude 7:1-3

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

Much of this chapter is open to various interpretations, so I'll give you what I've settled on.

V. 1-3 Who are the first four angels and the four winds?

You have four "good" angels at the four corners of the world holding back the four winds of the earth, i.e. the four horsemen.

This restraining action is only temporary, i.e. until **we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**

The seal is protection from the harm that God's judgement will bring on the earth. This points to what we'll see in ch 9:4 **4 The locusts were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.**

We have a similar thing in Ezekiel 9 where in a vision Ezekiel hears the Lord say to a man **'Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in [Jerusalem].'** The mark would protect them from the judgment that was about to befall the city as the Passover blood on the doorpost protected the Israelites from the avenging angel of the Lord the night of the exodus from Egypt.

The seal of protection does NOT guard against ALL physical suffering per se. Its purpose is to provide spiritual protection to strengthen the faith of believers. We know that Christians suffer under the ravages of the horsemen as do non-believers, but they are kept secure nonetheless. (Rayburn) God uses the same trials to purify and strengthen the saints that He uses to bring judgement on the ungodly.

At the end of chapter 6 those opposed to God were crying out to be hidden from Him. Now in chapter 7 there is a change. Now John sees four angels restraining the winds of destruction UNTIL God's seal is applied to the foreheads of his bond servants.

This echoes 3:12 – the letter to Philadelphia

12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name

The next time John sees the 144K is in chapter 14...

1 Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

This seal is like a brand that marks them out for divine ownership and authentication. Those who are sealed are described as “bond-slaves” of our God. As such they also receive divine care and spiritual protection. There is no indication in the text or in church history that this is a physical seal or marking. It does echo the language of Paul in 2 Cor 1 and Eph 1 and 4 where he speaks of the Holy Spirit as the seal of God’s ownership of believers and is the guarantee of our eternal safety until the day of redemption.

Eph 1:13-14

having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

The divine seal and name represent the spiritual power that God gives believers to stand firm in their faith in the midst of trials and not succumb to the idolatrous temptations of the present age. While the saints may lose their physical lives (6:9), the seal protects them from losing their spiritual lives. (Beale)

v. 4-8 Census of the 144,000 SPOILER ALERT V. 9 tells us that there is a multitude standing that no one could count. So, the 144k is representative of ALL THE SAINTS.

4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand *were* sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand *were* sealed.

This list does not match any OT record of the 12 tribes or Jacob’s 12 sons. The names in this list are not in birth order. Judah is listed first but was not the oldest son of Jacob. That is likely to show that the focus is on Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The covenant people are symbolically numbered in the 12 thousand from each tribe. $12 \times 12,000 = 144K$

The descendants of concubines and formerly excluded strangers are included because the plan of God WAS always to bring in gentiles as “fellow citizens and saints.” (Eph 2:19 Acts 10-)

v. 9-12 A multitude IS ABLE TO STAND and give PRAISE

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

12 saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

“more than can be counted”, i.e. more than 144K WHO ARE STANDING in white robes because they have been called, sealed, and qualified to stand before the throne. HOW?

Col 1:11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

NOTE the first word of this global multitude is “Salvation”. That is what the Bible is all about – the SALVATION that God designs, accomplishes, and applies.

The angels were not the objects of salvation, but they are there to celebrate it. The amazing grace of God is one of the things into which the angels longed to look (1 Pet1:12). It had to be a source of much heavenly speculation among the angels – “How is God going to pull this off? How will he do justice and display mercy?”

I doubt they would have come up with the actual plan devised by the Triune God.

v. 13-17 Display the Blessed state of those serving before the throne.

What has been a comfort to Christians for 2000 years? What has given hope to weary souls, some of whom are HERE TODAY? Where have believers found the motivation to “be steadfast immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil in the Lord is NOT in vain.” (1 Cor 15:58)

The motivation has been found in passages such as Revelation 7:13-17

13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

“From the great tribulation”... this phrase is the subject of various interpretations.

Is it the time right before the return of Christ or is it the broader period from the time of his suffering to His return? YES AND YES.

The phrase “the great tribulation” occurs in Matt 24:21 and here in Rev 7. They both refer to Daniel 12:1 “There will be a time of tribulation, such tribulation as has not come about from when a nation was upon the earth until that time.” Beale, G. K.; Campbell, David. Revelation: A Shorter Commentary (p. 157).

The entire period is described as the tribulation and the earth experiences wars and rumors of wars, etc. in Matt 24 Jesus describes these as the beginnings of birth pains.

WHAT HAPPENS WITH BIRTH PAINS as the time of delivery approaches? The pains get more intense and closer together.

So, while the saints of God will long endure tribulations, there will be an intensification of the pains as the time of Christ’s return approaches.

All Christians experience some degree of tribulation, and all Christians should have their hope fixed on the grace to be revealed at the return of Christ (1 Pet 1:13). The greatest motivation for living a faithful life in the face of opposition of the world, our own flesh, and the Devil is so that we may at last be found serving around the throne where God is dwelling with His people 7:15; .

“Does God intend to dwell again with us?” “HE DOES.”

John 1:14

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Dwell = tabernacle = 'pup tent'

This scene is repeated again in Revelation 21...

Rev 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.

The call to endure and persevere is given because by God's grace those who endure will also be able to join the multitude, the great cloud of witness who wave the palm branches and sing praises around the throne.

The expression "No pain, no gain" finds its ultimate manifestation in the lives of the saints who keep their eyes on eternity. Paul describes it this way ...

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Sadly, for too many Christians, especially in the prosperous parts of the world, heaven doesn't seem that enticing. We strive to have a comfortable life and in so many ways we have exercised dominion in many positive ways. We can live in cold climates because of indoor heating and we can live in tropical forests like Florida because of AC and bug spray. Just about anything we want can be delivered in 2 days and many of our basic problems can be in the process of resolution within hours.

WE EXPECT THAT in this life, here in the States.

Because we don't give eternity much thought, nor do we really grasp the reality of our own brokenness, we seek to make life here the end all be all. The mindset of this world is that we try to create a life where we can say, "It just doesn't get any better than this."

With that mindset, we may agree with Somerset Maugham that heaven "is apt to be dull."

But the scene described in Revelation 7 goes far beyond external personal comforts.

and He who sits on the throne will dwell with them.

16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

You can hear clear echoes of biblical promises: Ps 23; 121:6;

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

This is ALSO talking about our core desires and need for Shalom, a deep sense of well-being.

There is a scene, early in Sheldon Vanauken's BOOK, *A Severe Mercy*, in which Vanauken, now an older man, remembers his father's house, the home of his youth.

"Glenmerle, he thought, had been a place to come home to. He pictured coming home from boarding school, perhaps for the Christmas holidays, perhaps with snow all about - the woods full of snow. It would be a winter dusk with the big blue spruce -twinkling with tiny white lights like stars. Then his mother's cry of welcome and her kiss, his father's handshake, and his brother grinning in the background. And of course, as always, the cheery fire in the drawing-room, and through the French doors the dining room alight with preparations. Upstairs, waiting, would be his own room, just as he had left it. Heaven itself, he thought, would be - *must* be - a coming home." [19]

Heaven is a place of restoration and reconciliation of relationships.

There's not a person in this room who doesn't need to know the reality of reconciliation.

We can know the fullness of it because of the work of God.

SALVATION BELONGS TO OUR God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

This salvation means that we get ushered into our heavenly home. We have THE FATHER dwelling with us. There's not a person in this room that doesn't have what some have called a "father wound". Heaven is where that wound is healed.

A Heavenly Home means that all our past will be behind us forever. All will be well; all will be healthy; death will flee...there will be no need for "tears".

Tears have more to do with the soul than with the body. Often tears are of regret or loss. Often they are tears of joy or relief. EX: Super Bowl winners and losers can be found in tears.

Think about something. There will come a day when...

.we will never hurt

.we will never fear

.we will never fall

.we will never sin

.we will never hate

.we will never lose a loved one

.we will never worry

.we will never have hurt feelings

.we will never hear an unkind word

.we will never hear God's name in vain

.we will never hear about war

We will always know the love of the Father.

Either intentionally or unintentionally, that is what the makers of Field of Dreams tapped into – relational pain and the healing that is found in heaven.

A son and his dead father are reunited at a most unusual ballfield.

"Is this heaven?" "it's Iowa"

"Is there a heaven?" "It's the place where dreams come true."

"Hey, dad; wanna have a catch?"

That question and that longing are pointers to the eternal longing in our souls, and Revelation 7 describes it. It is the fulfillment of all our deepest longings: God dwelling in the midst of us, and the Lamb is our shepherd.

The letter of Revelation unveils the truth that we all long for – In Christ, we have an eternal HOME.

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