

THE APOCALYPSE – A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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THE COMFORT OF THE SAINTS – (Rev. 7:1-17)

(A Parenthesis)

a. Introduction

This is the beginning of the end for mankind. After the end of the time when the antichrist rules on earth for a brief moment, the wrath of God will descend upon man in ways that man will have no choice but accept like Pharaoh in the days of Moses and the ten plagues. The destruction of the heaven and earth will soon bring about a world of total and complete destruction. Air, water and the food chain that we have been enjoying for millenniums will be destroyed worldwide.

Man will experience the full might and impact of the vengeance of God Almighty on a global scale. Unlike the first global destruction by water, this destruction by fire will be final. The conclusion of this destruction will usher in the period of the millennium where Jesus Christ will rule on earth for 1,000 years.

Chapter seven of Revelation begins with a comforting explanation of the LORD's protection of believers. There will be two groups of believers, the first will be those who are alive at the end of the great tribulation and the second will be those who are killed for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

“Chapter 7 forms a parenthetical section between the sixth (6:12-17) and seventh (8:1) seals to answer that question, introducing two groups who will survive the fury of divine judgement. The first, those described in verses 1-8, and the Jewish evangelists who will be preserved on earth. They will survive the holocaust of divine wrath unleashed by the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgements. God will also protect them from the murderous effort of Antichrist and his henchmen to wipe out believers in the true God. Having survived the wars, famine, unprecedented natural disasters, rampant unchecked sinfulness, and savage persecution of the Tribulation, they will enter the millennial kingdom alive. The second group to escape divine fury (vv. 9-17) are those who will be martyred and thereby ushered into the blissful rest of heaven, where they will be preserved. After the horrific events of the sixth seal, and before the opening of the seventh seal in chapter 8, the Holy Spirit provided this chapter as an interlude for the reader to catch his breath. It is also a reminder that in the midst of His

wrath, God will remember mercy (cf. Hab. 3:2) [MacArthur, 312].”

That God protects and preserves His children is taught throughout the Bible. David was providentially watched over by God through his many years as a fugitive, fleeing from the wrath of King Saul. Psalm 34 attests to this truth.

The words of Malachi confirms this truth in **Malachi 3:16-18**, *"Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not."*

So too are the last few words of the Old Testament in **Malachi 4:1-6**, *"For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."*

6750310. A Momentary Restraint – 7:1

Revelation 7:1, *"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree."*

“After these things” – refers to the shift from the scene of judgement of the ungodly to protection of the godly.

“Four angels standing on the four corners of the earth” – this is not a reference to the wrong notion that John believed that the earth was flat and that it has four corners! This is a reference to the four primary points on the compass (north, south, east and west), from which the direction of the four winds of the earth originates. As the late Dr Henry Morris correctly observed, “This verse has long been derided as reflecting a naïve ‘pre-scientific’ concept of earth structure, one that supposedly viewed the earth as flat with four corners. . . . In terms of modern technology, it is essentially equivalent to what a mariner or geologist would call the four quadrants of the compass, or the four directions. This is evident also from the mention of the ‘four winds’ which, in common usage, would of course be the north, west, south, and east winds. Parenthetically, accurate modern geodetic measurements in recent years have provided that the earth actually does have four ‘corners.’ These are protuberances standing out from the basic ‘geoid,’ that is, the basic spheric shape of the earth. The earth is not really a perfect sphere, but is slightly flattened at the poles.

Its equatorial bulge is presumably caused by the earth's axial rotation, and its four 'corners' protrude from that. [**The Revelation Record**, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale, 1983), 126]."

The act of standing means that the four angels were ready to unleash the wrath of God upon sinful man.

“and holding the four winds of the earth” – The four winds often refers to the judgement of God.

Jeremiah 49:36, *"And upon Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and will scatter them toward all those winds; and there shall be no nation whither the outcasts of Elam shall not come."*

Daniel 7:2, *"Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea."*

Hosea 13:15, *"Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels."*

The wrath of God was held back for a brief moment of time. The angelic beings are all ready and willing to unleash the impending wrath the moment God gives the signal. What should be done before the great day judgement begins!

6750311. The Sealing of the 144,000 – 7:2-8

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud 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 have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.”

“another angel” – the word for another is the word “*allos*” which means another of exactly of the same kind. The use of “we” in verse 3 argues to the “team” effort in this judgement of God that will be unleashed in a matter of moments.

“from the rising of the sun” – This is a poetic way of saying from the east. “From John’s perspective on the isle of Patmos, the east would be toward the land of Israel, the land where God’s promised salvation came through Jesus the Messiah, and from where the twelve tribes of Israel came – members of which are about to be sealed [MacArthur, 217].”

“having the seal of the living God” – The word for seal is “*sphragis*.” This word refers often to a signet ring. “A seal as impressed upon letters or books for the sake of privacy and security (Rev. 5:1, 2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9; 8:1). Also a seal impressed as a guarantee of something’s genuineness (Rev. 9:4); as a motto, inscription (2Timothy 2:19). Figuratively, a promissory token, pledge, proof (Rom. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:2) [New Testament: The Complete Word Study Dictionary].”

This was the seal of the living God. The purpose was to stamp on believers of their true ownership, that they belong to God and that they are under His divine protection.

“sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” – The word for servants is the word “slaves.” Note how the angels identify themselves with the God of the believers by the use of “our” in God. The word for “seal” is the same word that was used in Rev 5.

How many types of slaves are there in the Bible?

- A. born slaves;
- B. sold as slaves because of debt or other reasons;
- C. captured as slaves;
- D. willing slaves;

The number sealed were 144,000 – 12,000 from each tribe. Only two tribes were not mentioned, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim.

Why was Dan omitted? Does this mean that no Danite will be saved? Cf. Ezekiel 48:1-2, 32.

Ezekiel 48:1-2, *"Now these are the names of the tribes. From the north end to the coast of the way of Hethlon, as one goeth to Hamath, Hazarenan, the border of Damascus northward, to the coast of Hamath; for these are his sides east and west; **a portion for Dan**. And by the border of Dan, from the east side unto the west side, a portion for Asher."* [Emphasis added]

Ezekiel 48:32, *"And at the east side four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of Joseph, one gate of Benjamin, **one gate of Dan**."* [Emphasis added]

From the description of the millennium Temple in the book of Ezekiel, we see that there will be Danites in the millennium. But their number might possibly be smaller. They will not be given the kind of divine protection (sealing) from God like the rest of the 144,000 Israelites.

What could be the reason? One of the possible reasons would be the Danites despised their God appointed "lot" in the Promised Land. A large group of them left and chose for themselves another piece of land up north. (Cf. Jud. 17-18; Deu. 26:1; Josh. 14:9)

Why was the tribe of Ephraim not included? Cf. Joshua 16:4; Genesis 48:5-6.

Genesis 48:5-6 teaches that the children of Joseph will live in the Promised Land under the Names of either Ephraim or Manasseh. Joshua 16: 4 seems to imply that the other children of Israel probably chose to live in Ephraim rather than Manasseh. In Rev. 7:8, the tribe of Joseph is mentioned implying that the 12,000 is made up of both the Ephraimites and the rest of the descendants of the children of Joseph. Hence the tribe of Ephraim is not mentioned.

What about the Gentiles? Will there be Gentile believers in the millennium? [cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-5; Zech. 8:20-23]

Isaiah 2:2-4, *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; **and all nations shall flow unto it**. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."* [Emphasis added]

Micah 4:1-5, "But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And **many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD**, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever." [Emphasis added]

Zechariah 8:20-23, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, **many people and strong nations** shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." [Emphasis added]

Who are the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46?

The sheep are the Christians with this present corporeal body that will enter the millennium.

Who are the saints that will be allowed to enter the Millennium?

- saints with glorified bodies after the rapture and first resurrection – 1 Cor 15; 1 Thess. 4:13-18;
- saints with mortal bodies who are saved during the Great Tribulation – Matt. 25:31-46; Rev 7:1-8.

The saints with mortal bodies are the saints who will procreate and can still die in the millennium. There will still be sin and many of their children will sin. Therefore death will still exist in the millennium – Isa. 65:17-25. Isaiah 65:20 says, "**There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.**" [Emphasis added]

The Bible reveals that Israel as a nation has not been cast aside permanently. They will be restored as a nation of believers whose witness will glorify God which they managed to do sporadically in the Old Testament during the days of Joshua, and perhaps including the reigns of David, and Josiah.

What is Israel's witness like today, if any?

This passage in Rev 7:1-8, argues categorically against the doctrine of a-millennialism. How?

MacArthur says, "This critical passage reinforces the biblical truth that God is not through with the nation of Israel (cf. Rom. 9-11). Though Israel failed in its mission to be a witness nation in the Old Testament, that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish people will come the greatest missionary force the world has ever known. The result of their effort will be a redeemed Israel, as promised by God, and innumerable redeemed Gentiles."

e. The Unnumbered Multitude – 7:9-17

1. The Praise of the Unnumbered Saints – 7:9-12

Revelation 7:9-12, *"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne 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. Amen."*

The first group in 7:1-8 could be numbered. It was also made up of Israelites only. In stark contrast, this second group of saints could not be numbered and they were made up of all nations, kindreds and people and tongues. This is direct reference to Gentile Christians. This must have given a tremendous lift to the aged John's spirit who was not only the last surviving apostle but was in exile on a lonely island. The revelation of the seven churches in Asia Minor with their respective state of sin and persecution must surely have compounded John's loneliness.

Here he sees the millions and millions of saints triumphantly praising God standing before His very presence in assured victory! MacArthur writes, "This vision must surely have renewed his joy and hope, as he realized that the church would survive and, in the end, people from the nations would be saved in great numbers." (MacArthur, 225).

"clothed with white robes" – "white (*leukos*)" – refers to a dazzling, shining, glittering white. "In ancient times, such

clothing was worn for festivals and celebrations.” (MacArthur, 226) This is the same word used in mark 9:3 to describe the whiteness of Christ’s garments at the transfiguration.

“Robes” refer to a long, full-length robe. “These long, radiant white robes are the same ones worn by the martyrs in 6:9-11. That fact suggests that the group in view in this passage is part of that earlier group martyred believers.” (Ibid.)

The white robes are of course both real and symbolic. It speaks of purity, holiness and victory.

“palms in their hands” – “palm branches are associated in Scripture with celebration, deliverance, and joy. They were especially prominent during the Feast of tabernacles, the Old Testament commemorative celebration of God’s provision for Israel during their wilderness wandering (Lev. 23:40), being employed in the construction of the booths lived in during that feast (Neh. 8:15-17). During Jesus’ triumphal entry the joyous crowd waved palm branches as they welcomed Him into Jerusalem, shouting, “. . . , Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord (Jn. 12:13).” The palm branches in the hands of these redeemed saints are a fitting celebrative symbol of the unequalled provision of salvation from the world, Satan, Antichrist, sin, death and hell provided for them by the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ibid.)

The word for palm in Hebrew is “*tamar*” which means “tall and willowy.” This was the name given to Absalom’s sister. It is very leafy and perhaps it is due to this leafiness that it is used in this spectacular manner to welcome a king who returns from conquest. It is symbolic of victory, great joy and happiness from the people to their king.

This entire incident occurred before God’s throne of grace and in front of the Lamb.

“The loud voice” – used nine times in the book of Revelation. (cf. 5:12-- worship; 6:10-- prayer; 11:12—resurrection of the two witnesses, 15—immediately after the sounding of the 7th trumpet; 12:10—proclaiming salvation after casting down Satan from heaven; 14:7-- worship; 16:1—beginning of the opening of 1st vial judgement; 19:1—worship and victory; 21:3—at the beginning of the new heaven and new earth).

Acknowledging that salvation belongs to God and the Lamb alone is the proclamation of the voice of the saintly multitude in heaven. He shares it with no one. He seeks no one’s help in bringing about His rich and eternal salvation for it is due entirely to His faithfulness alone that men are saved.

Can man be saved by seeing miracles? Can man be saved when they go through very difficult times like persecution, famine, drought, terminal illnesses, etc.?

What part did God play in man’s salvation? What about the Son?

“God sits of the throne” – This highlights the continuation of the revelation of the judgement of God that is to come and with the appearance of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, the one who is in ultimate control is still God and will always be God. He sits on the throne whilst all the saints in heaven and the angelic beings standing ready to see the impending wrath that is to come!

Can I say that God is sovereign but Satan is the one in control of the happenings in the world such as evil, rampant wickedness, sin, deaths, diseases, etc.? Does Satan control the earth at will? NO. Satan is nothing but another created being. God is always sovereign and as Creator always way above the Evil One.

This is a salvation worship that involves only believers. The angels stood by and joined in worship with a song that did not include salvation.

Comparing 5:12, 13 and 7:12

5:12 – Power – **riches** – wisdom – strength – honour – glory – blessing

5:13 – Blessing - honour - glory - power

7:12 – Blessing – glory – wisdom – **thanksgiving** – honour – power – might (strength)

Note the difference and state the reason why?

2. The Question of the Elder – 7:13-17

Revelation 7:13-17, *"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For*

the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"The identity of the ones in white robes" – Do they refer to the believers who have been taken up in the rapture and first resurrection? Or do they refer to the ones who have died have not heard the gospel during their lifetime and were given the opportunity to receive Christ after death? The answer to both questions is no.

"And where did they come from?"

They are the ones who came out of the Great Tribulation and have washed their robes and made white in the blood of Christ. The ones who died during the Great Tribulation will experience immediate resurrection.

Does it mean that they participated in the 1st resurrection? This reveals to us that the First resurrection is like a long straight line. It has a beginning and the impact of that beginning is a continuous one. Any saint who dies after the first resurrection will be given a resurrected body immediately.

It is not the mere going through the Great Tribulation that saved them but rather they had their robes washed in the blood of Christ. This reveals to us that many will come to believe in the Lord during the Great Tribulation. This list will continue to increase as more and more saints die during the Great Tribulation. This does not include the 144,000 Israelites mention in verses 4-8. They are the ones who will be sealed by God for protection and for entrance into the millennium.

"before God's throne and serving Him" – They will be serving God day and night in the temple. The word "serve" is used "only in carrying out religious duties (cf. Lk. 2:37)."

"What temple is this?" – How many temples have been spoken of in the Bible?

- F. Solomon's Temple
- G. Post exilic Temple
- H. Post exilic Temple given an extreme make-over by Herod
- I. Tribulation Temple that will be desecrated by the abomination of desolation
- J. Millennium Temple

It appears from the text that presently there is a temple in heaven where the saints of God will dwell in and worship God. There

will also be another temple on earth in the millennium as depicted by Ezekiel in chapters 40-48.

Will there be temple in the new heaven and new earth? Answer is found in Rev. 21:22.

The protection of the Lord over His children will be complete in heaven. No more hunger. No more thirst. No more heat of the sun to torment them. All these three experiences affect mankind greatly today. This will afflict the earth when the wrath of God is poured down upon sinful man.

God will feed them and keep them. He will lead them to fountains of living water. This is in direct contrast and opposition to how God would deal with Satan, the Antichrist, false prophet and their myriad of followers.

God's children will experience divine feeding and protection whereas the enemies of Christ will experience divine judgement that the world has never seen before.

He will also wipe away all tears for there will be no sorrow, pain or suffering in heaven. The word "wipe away" means, "to erase." In 3:5, the word is translated as "blot."

Why, in your opinion, would believers cry in heaven such that the Lord has to wipe them away for us? Regret would be a most likely reason in many hearts where they would moan and wish that they had lived better Christian lives and bear a better testimony for Christ.