

# Apokalypsis – Preserving His Own!

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**Text: Revelation 7:1-17**

**Theme: The Book of Revelation, End times, Prophecy, Salvation, Preservation**

- Last week we overviewed the seals, the trumpets and the bowls – this series of 3 seven’s that form the bulk of the divine judgments John saw coming on the earth – the “things that are to come”. These judgments are not easy things to read about, considering the disasters and the destruction still to come on the earth. The picture Revelation paints is that human history, in between the first and second comings of Jesus, will be a time of “violent disturbance and suffering” (Stott).
- As you read the seals, and the trumpets and bowls all together like we did last Sunday, you can be tempted to fear. I remember every “End Times” movie I watched when I was kid scared the day-lights out of me! But is that really what is intended by this book? I don’t think so. Warn us? Yet. Prepare us? Yes. Cause us to be watching, discerning, waiting? Yes? Cause us to be prayerful? Yes. But fearful? No.
- And so I mentioned there is much hope in Revelation and to come back this morning. So let’s get to it. It is a beautiful prophecy.
- Following the first 6 seals of chapter 6 and the trumpets of chapter 8, comes an interlude where John sees a vision of angels and a vision of a great multitude before the throne of God. Let me say this: In between chapter 6 (the seals) and chapter 8 (the trumpets) – we NEED chapter 7!
- If you remember chapter 6 ended with a sobering question: 6:17- **“For the great day of [God’s] wrath has come, and who can stand?”** Well chapter 7 is going to answer that question. I’m calling this text a picture of preservation!
- Notice with me a few **preservation points** from the text:
  1. **The seal of the Redeemed.** (Redeemed meaning those who have been liberated, set free because a price has been paid for us! We have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus and so are “Redeemed”.) **Vs. 2-3.** The angel comes up to seal God’s own. Verse 3 indicates that these are all the “servants” of God. Like documents or

merchandise sealed and stamped to guarantee their contents and prevent tampering, God's servants were to be marked off as his. **His very own!** Isaiah 44:1–5 (NIV84)

**44** “But now listen, O Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen.

<sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD says— he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you:

Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant,  
Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

<sup>3</sup> For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground;  
I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.

<sup>4</sup> They will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams.

<sup>5</sup> One will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; another will call himself by the name of Jacob; still another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’ and will take the name Israel.

Here the seal on the forehead in Rev. 7:3 is most likely taken directly from Ezekiel 9:4–6, where judgment could not begin until the foreheads of the righteous (those who mourned over the sin of their land) were marked. The forehead and the hand (Ex 13:9, 16; 28:38; Deut 6:8; 11:18) were the most natural and obvious parts of the body for this marking because they were most directly exposed to view. <sup>1</sup>

And so here in chapter 7, servants of Jesus are sealed in the midst of tribulation. I think of **Ephesians 1:13–14** - <sup>13</sup> **And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,** <sup>14</sup> **who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.**

John Piper, writing on these verses wrote this: “God’s great desire for his people is that we feel secure in his love and in his power. Everything else in life may be unstable—our health, our family, our job, our education, our society, our world. At any of these levels you may feel as if you are out on a ledge forty stories up in an unpredictable wind. You feel yourself losing balance and falling, and every brick you grab pulls out of its mortar. So let’s make sure we understand this from the outset: when you swore allegiance to Jesus Christ, you signed up for the most dangerous mission in the world. How did Paul describe it? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword—we are

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<sup>1</sup> Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:3). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

regarded as sheep to be slaughtered (Romans 8:35–36)<sup>2</sup>. And yet, equally true at the same time is the fact that we are known and loved and sealed by God’s Spirit.

- 2. The number of the Redeemed.** – Vs. 4-8. 144 000 sealed. Remember numbers are symbolic in apocalyptic literature. 12 000 sealed from 12 tribes of Israel. In Jewish texts 12 is the symbolic number for the people of God.  $12 \times 12\,000 = 144\,000$ . This is a symbolic number for completion. I believe this number symbolizes the totality of the redeemed. In Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem is described as perfect cube – another symbol for perfection. The city will have 12 gates and 12 foundations, the walls are 144 cubits in height (12X12), and guess what the population of the city is? 144,000! And so the number 144,000 is not to be taken literally. “It symbolically represents the perfect number of the saved. Everyone who belongs to Jesus is part of that 144,000.” (Steve Brown, *Hebrews-Revelation through the Eyes of Grace*, pg. 51).

Let scripture interpret scriptures: Turn to chapter **14:1** – **“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads...vs. 3** – **“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144 000 who had been redeemed from the earth”**

So the 144 000 are the full number of God’s people redeemed in Jesus – the elect both Jew and Gentile – who He knows. They are the Father’s kids! You and me! They are who the apostle Paul calls the “true Israel of God.” (See Rom. 2:28, 29; 9:6, 7; Gal. 6:16; Philip. 3:3.)

- 3. The gathering of the Redeemed!** The great multitude of **verses 9-12**. (I believe this is another picture of the 144,000). Uncountable! International! Multi-lingual! Standing where? Before the throne and in front of the Lamb! What are we wearing? White robes – the robe of his righteousness! The robes He gave us! Waving Palm branches! Victory! And look what we cry out: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” And the angelic world and all of Heaven join in!
- 4. The identity of the Redeemed. Vs. 13-14!** So here we have the answer to the question: “Who can stand on the day of God’s wrath?” Who can stand? These can stand! “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; (is this a specific

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<sup>2</sup> Piper, J. (2007). *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)*. Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God.

period of time or a reference to the Christian life in general?) Either way for me, Jesus told us we will have trouble to but take heart – in Him we overcome! They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”! Oh the precious paradox! We are made white by blood! Blood normally stains a garment, but Jesus’ blood washes all our stains away! We will in a few minutes taste again the wine – the juice - that celebrates the very blood of Jesus! What can wash away your sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

5. **The future of the Redeemed!** Look at what is in store for the redeemed – **verses 15-17**. What is to come?

**Eternal service** – vs. 15

**Eternal preservation and protection** – vs. 15 – “...and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them”.

**Eternal satisfaction** – vs. 16 – a reference back to the tribulation they have come through!

**Eternally led by Jesus!** – Vs .17 - Living water!

**Eternal joy** – Vs. 17 - “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”!

See! There is a lot of hope in revelation! It is not just doom and gloom. These are the future blessings of Christ followers. **Which one of these speak most to you at this time in your life? It is the joy of Jesus and the joy of what is to come that will see through tribulation.**

All of this because of the work of the Lamb on our behalf! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb! This is His table before us! The Table for the Redeemed.

This is our story – this is our song!