

The Light of Israel to the Nations

📖 Revelation 7:1-17

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Q: Please expand on praying against evil-doers. I'm praying that God will either save or kill Isis.

A: (Answer in audio lesson)

We have worked through Revelation 6. The first four seals are clearly distinct from the fifth and sixth seals and almost everyone recognizes that when they refer to the four seals as the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. It's not five or six. I think the difficulty is explaining what these four seals represent and what makes them distinct from the fifth and sixth seals. What they represent seems to be the anti-Christ's career path. He's got to climb the ladder, so to speak, and even at the beginning he is pretty powerful, because he's able to broker global peace agreement by disarmament. But this quickly fails and war breaks out. He then implements economic policies that bring about a global recession. What he is doing is trying to reset the system so he can rule the world. Then people begin to die in mass, 1/4 of the world's population, no trivial number. Those are the four seals. What makes these four seals distinct from the fifth and sixth seals is that they have historical precedent, peace, war, economic hardship, famine, death, they have all been seen before under other rulers of the world; Cyrus the Persian, Alexander the Great, Caesar, Napoléon and now the anti-Christ. But when you come to the fifth seal everything is different. The fifth seal is very strange. What's so strange about the fifth seal, that no one talks about, is there is no judgment that falls on the earth at that time. It doesn't even seem to be a judgment. It's just a vision of martyrs under the altar in heaven crying out against their killers on earth. It's hard to know what to do with it and it's hardly touched by anyone. My solution was to say that it's a delayed judgment. They cry out for God to execute justice but God says, it's not time yet, wait a little while longer for your brethren to be killed even as you, then I'll get rid of them. So the fifth seal is a judgment, but it's a delayed judgment. Then you come to the sixth seal and the judgment is out of this world. There has never been anything even close to this. People read this and think it's an earthquake. An earthquake, no matter what the size, doesn't affect the sun, moon and stars. Some people say it's just smoke and ash from an earthquake that is blocking the sun and moon. But that doesn't explain the stars falling. I think the point of this is to say that this is a supernatural judgment of God in contrast to the first four seals which appeared natural. At the end of the sixth seal the kings, the powerful, the generals of armies, the rich and everyone else is hiding in caves and rock crevices and crying out to hide us from the

presence of the Father who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. You think about that and you realize they are very afraid. They don't even have homes anymore, much less all their little things that make them so happy. The point of the destruction is that they might believe so as to be saved but instead they hide from God. So you can't say God didn't try to reach out to them. He's trying to get their attention and He gets their attention but they still don't want to come to Him through the Lamb. They're going to do their own thing.

Now when you come to chapter 7 we have a very difficult chapter. This one is tough to figure out and I'm not saying I have figured it out. There are so many issues involved. Most commentators are sure they are right. I don't think you can solve all the issues. There's just not enough information. There are things we can know here; but there are things we can't know. One thing we know is that the 144,00 are not the Jehovah's Witnesses. They started that interpretation till their membership reached 144,000 and then they had to up it to 288,000. Needless to say, when it reached 288,000 they had to change it again. Also we know the 144,000 are not the Church. And yet in the 18th century there was no commentator who did not view the 144,000 as the Church. You might find that strange but that is true. What we know is that the 144,000 are Jews from the twelve tribes. That tells you something. There are no ten lost tribes. There never have been and there never will be. They may be lost to man but they're not lost to God. He knows who they are and where they are. You see, telling you what's here is easy, but putting it in these 144,000 in the big picture, that's another story. Nobody may have this story right. We know this is the only book in the Bible where they are mentioned directly. So this is it folks. What we find are 144,000 Jews who are sealed. As to timing, some people have them sealed in the first half, others in the second. As to extent of life, some people say they die at the midpoint, others saying they live to the end and enter the kingdom alive. As to their relationship to the martyrs, some say they are causally related to the martyrs and some that say they are not related at all. There are so many combinations and permutations that it is virtually impossible to sort it all out. Add on top of this that some people think the sixth seal is the mid-point of the tribulation and you have a lot of issues on your hand. I'm not sure anyone has it right.

I'll tell you what I've done. I've ditched all of that. I have views on some of these ideas, but I think something else is going on. I thought about this for six days and if you just read this chapter you discover these things. There are two groups; one group are Jews; the other group are Gentiles. The group of Jews are numbered, 144,000; the group of Gentiles are unnumbered, a multitude which no one could count. The 144,000 Jews are sealed; the multitude are not sealed. The 144,000 are on earth; the multitude are in heaven. There is something here that is very clear when you put all these things together. God always has a people who are given a stewardship responsibility to be a light to all nations. The Church is presently given that stewardship responsibility. But when the Church is gone that stewardship responsibility will be given to these 144,000 Jews. They will be sealed to protect them from the devastating judgments in that time and the Gentile nations respond to the light, believe in Jesus and are killed. That's what the chapter is about.

Let's try to put this all together. When the rapture of the Church occurs, that's the first truly global event. I think that will have major ramifications on Jewish thinking. If you go to Israel today there are a lot of Gentile Christians over there. I wouldn't say that many of them are orthodox in theology but maybe they're believers. If they are they're going to be raptured. What do you think the Jews are going to think about that? They're going to easily notice that their Muslims neighbors and orthodox Rabbi's didn't disappear, only the Christians. Well, what does that mean? It means that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him, just like Christianity says. They're going to start believing that Jesus is the Messiah. Not all of them, but many of them. I would think primarily from among the orthodox. Here's 144,000 of them. They believe the gospel before they are sealed. From that you can reason very quickly that these 144,000 aren't sealed in the second half of the Tribulation. The only people that do that are people who make the sixth seal the midpoint of the Tribulation. And that is not acceptable to me. I've read the arguments and they connect five passages into a scheme that makes the sixth seal the midpoint and the abomination of desolation at that point. But the abomination of desolation doesn't occur until Rev 13, and it is just too early in the proportions of Revelation to put the midpoint at the sixth seal. It's much better to put the seals and trumpets in the first half. This is early in the first half, probably 1 ½ years into the Tribulation. Now I don't think you can be definitive about whether they are sealed at the beginning of the tribulation, with the first seal, or after the sixth seal. But I think it's more reasonable to say that they are sealed after the sixth seal, about 1 ½ years in, as we will see. What is happening is John saw the six seals and in 6:17 the earthdwellers asked, **Who is able to stand?** And John is given two more visions that give us information about who will be able to stand so as to enter the kingdom and find rest. In short, 144,000 Jews who are sealed will be able to stand and the result of their ministry is a great multitude from every Gentile nation on earth will be saved.

In 7:1 John sees a vision of this. John begins saying, **After this I saw four angels.** After what? **After** the previous vision. He's marking off a new vision. These words **After this** in the Greek language, are *μετα ταυτα*, and they set off John's visions. He had several visions on the island of Patmos. This one comes after the previous one. When was the previous one? 4:1. What was in that vision? The throne room, the seven sealed scroll and the first six seals. It was all in the same vision and it was all chronological. In 7:1 we see the next vision. This one is telling us about God's commissioning of the 144,000 Jews for ministry on earth. So verse 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.** When it says **four corners of the earth**, it's not saying ancient men thought the earth was flat. This was their way of describing the four points of the compass; north, south, east and west. And each of the **four angels** is seen as being in control of the **four winds of the earth** that come from those four directions. **Wind** can be a very destructive force. And that is what they are seen as controlling; destructive forces that will take their toll **on the earth...the sea...and the trees.** Sometimes people make these symbolic of Israel, the nations and important people, but that is really not so. They are to be taken literally, especially when we turn to the first three trumpets in chapter 8 and we see that they burn up a third of the earth,

a third of the trees and turn a third of the seas to blood as well as destroying a third of the ships in the sea and a third of the creatures in the seas. Rev 8:7, "The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.⁸The second angel sounded, and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood,⁹and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed." We could go on, but you see that the early trumpet judgments are destroying the earth, the sea and the trees and so I take 7:1 very literally. These four angels are holding back the destruction that is about to be released upon them and a third of the men and creatures that live in them.

In 7:2, **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, 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.** See, there is a very great danger that they would be killed by these destructive judgments. So they have to be given some kind of seal of divine protection before those judgments come. That puts their sealing between the sixth and seventh seals. Also notice that they are already **bond-servants** before they are **sealed**. The term **bond-servant** is the equivalent of saying in our day that someone is "sold out for Jesus Christ." Paul was a **bond-servant**. He was sold out for Jesus Christ. The 144,000 are bond-servants, sold out for Jesus Christ. 144,000 apostle Paul's. So they became believers after the rapture. They are sold out for Jesus Christ. And at this time they are sealed. Now it would be a sight to behold 144,000 apostle Paul's because the apostle Paul has had a great influence on the world. So what do you think 144,000 apostle Paul's will do? Well, I think we're going to find out in vv 9-17 that there is a little bit of fruit from their ministry, a great multitude that could not be counted from all the nations. Now again, I point out that this is 144,000 Jews and a multitude of nations. What is strangely missing? The Church. Why is the Church missing if the Church is still on earth at this time? Isn't it the Church that is supposed to go unto all nations? Yet I don't see anyone from the Church doing that in this passage. I see 144,000 Jews doing that. Why? Because the Church has already been raptured. This is another evidence of the pre-trib rapture. Alright, so 144,000 apostle Paul's, sold out for Jesus Christ. Note the end of verse 3, sealed where? **On their foreheads**. Some say they're sealed with the Holy Spirit. That sounds spiritual, but it doesn't make sense. Chapter 14:1-5 talks about these guys and says they are sealed on the forehead with the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. If it says written on their foreheads I think it's sufficient to communicate this is a visible seal. A seal in the ancient world signified ownership and authority. Since the seal is the name of the Lamb and His Father then they are owned by the Lamb and the Father.

So because there are more judgments to come, the trumpet judgments, and the 144,000 are given a responsible stewardship of being a light to all nations, they have to be sealed, given some protection. The judgments that come next are going to kill believers and unbelievers on the earth. But not the 144,000. They are the only one's

who are protected from death. Now some think they will die. They think Rev 14 is viewing them in heaven as being victorious. But I think they are being viewed on earth as being victorious in the kingdom. Why I think that is because if they die the seal didn't work. Someone broke the seal other than the Lamb or the Father. The whole purpose of the seal is to give them divine protection from the judgments that are coming so that they can minister from this time to the end of the Tribulation, so that they enter the kingdom in their mortal bodies and are part of re-populating the Jewish people during the millennium.

In 7:4 John says, **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.** People go bonkers with 144,000. They don't want to take this literally. But if you don't take this number literally how can you take any number literally? But if it's not to be taken literally, upon what basis do you say that? When you are going to take something symbolically, you have to have good justification in the context for doing so. There is no good justification. So a literal 144,000 and note **from every tribe of Israel.** Then it mentions twelve tribes; **from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.** Now if you look at those twelve tribes you notice one is missing. Who? Dan. Well, how can there still be twelve tribes? Because in verse 6 you see **Manasseh**. Who was **Manasseh**. He was a son of **Joseph**, who is in verse 8. So Dan got cut out and **Manasseh** got put in. The way this happened was Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, so in a way Jacob lost a son. Then at the end of his life he re-found Joseph, so it was like getting another son. So he blessed Joseph by blessing Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. So that introduced 13 tribes. People want to criticize Dan for not being in this list, and make some unwarranted explanations. The most common one is that the anti-Christ is from the tribe of Dan. They think the Jews would not accept a Christ who was not a Jew. But they have before. So that dog won't hunt. Furthermore, the anti-Christ in the Book of Daniel is portrayed as being of Gentile descent. So he's not a Jew and he's not from the tribe of Dan. Well, why is Dan not listed? For the same reason that in all 19 listings of the 12 tribes one tribe is left off. We don't really know except to say that there are always 12 tribes listed and always one tribe left off. And we really shouldn't say that Dan's absence means something negative about Dan because Dan is mentioned in the tribal list of those allotted a portion of land in the millennial kingdom. So why they are not included, I don't know, maybe there are not 12,000 of them alive at this time, maybe it's because of idolatry, they were the tribe that first went into idolatry. But we really don't know.

Now what's more important is vv 9-17, the result of their ministry. Notice, **After these** indicates another vision. It's not a sequence of the events so much as it is the sequence of vision. John is seeing something else and I do think what he sees is related to what the 144,000 do. I think they are the result of their ministry to all Gentile nations. **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; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." So these are saved Gentiles from all nations. It's been said that there will be more salvation during the seven year Tribulation than the entire Church age. That may be. **No one could count** all these people. They're all **clothed in white robes**, which is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and they have **palm branches in their hands**, like some did at the Triumphal Entry, which was really the non-Triumphal Entry, but these are prepared for the real Triumphal Entry. **And they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation..."** So they have enjoyed salvation. They came to know about it by the ministry of the 144,000. I don't think they're the same as the martyrs under the sixth seal and I'll say now because in verse 14 they come out of the great tribulation, and if the great tribulation is the second half of the tribulation then that means they will die under the anti-Christ's reign of terror, which is only the second half.

Now in verse 11 you see **all the angels** and **the elders and the four living creatures** and they are doing what they were doing before, falling on their faces before the throne and worshiping God. Verse 12 is a seven-fold ascription of praise. But we want to move on to see who these great multitude are.

In 7:13 **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?"** In verse 14 John didn't have enough guts to answer so he said, **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.** That's how we know the robes are the imputed righteousness of Christ. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. Blood doesn't usually make things white but in the spiritual realm it does, it clothes the one who believes with the pure white righteousness of Christ. Now these are said to **come out of the great tribulation.** I think that the 144,000 begin their ministry in the first half, about 1 ½ years in, but the results of their ministry seen here are those who are killed by the anti-Christ in the second half. And I think you are seeing them in heaven in preparation for their resurrection at the Second Coming and entrance into the kingdom. So they will be killed by the anti-Christ, unlike the 144,000, but they will be resurrected to enter the kingdom at the Second Coming.

At this time 7:15 says that as a result of their pure righteousness of Christ **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.** I think this is taking us all the way forward to the new heavens and new earth. The language of tabernacling or dwelling with them is language of the new heaven and new earth. The language of 7:16 is also new heaven and new earth. **They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd,** notice the future tenses, **and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.** What John is given vision to see is the results of the 144,000 Jew's ministry to the nations and how these nations continue into the new heaven and new earth, which is described in Rev 21-22. In other words, he is launched into the

distant future to see the end. Turn to Rev 21:3. This is John's vision of the new heaven and new earth and it's strikingly like what we saw in chapter 7. "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"" There it is, that tabernacle language is the same as chapter 7. And verse 4, "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will be no longer any death; etc....This is also the same as chapter 7. So I think John was permitted to see far into the future. Why? Because the question that introduced chapter 7 was Rev 6:17 **Who is able to stand?** And the answer is **those whose robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb**. They will stand for all eternity. Nothing can ever separate them from the love of Christ. I don't know anyone who really puts it like that. But that's my take away from Rev 7. And I think it's a good take away.

Summarizing, after the rapture these 144,000 will come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. After living through the first six seals they will be sealed on their foreheads with the name of the Lamb and His Father, in order to be protected from the following trumpet judgments. There are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes listed. They are Jews because the Church has already been raptured and the stewardship responsibility of being a light has come to them. They will minister to the world and many Gentiles from the nations will come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They are killed under the reign of the anti-Christ during the second half of the Tribulation, which is the great tribulation. They will stand forever as they have had their robes washed white and pure in the blood of the Lamb.