

Notes on Revelation 7

Intro: As Jesus breaks the seals we are being given a progressive glimpse into the content of the scroll taken by him from God's hand. Simply stated, we see the kinds of things that are to shortly come to pass. The first four seem to symbolize the judgments of God by which he brings his enemies to repentance or by which the day of the Lord is precipitated. We might call them the preludes to the day of the Lord. The sixth seal reveals that the day of God's wrath has arrived. This day of wrath is not the end of time, but rather a historical judgment of God's enemies as will become clearer as we proceed. Thus we expect in this chapter to see the final outpouring of wrath in vengeance upon those who have killed God's people. However, there are two questions that must first be answered: 1) What will be the fate of those who serve God faithfully? Must they be destroyed in these judgments? 2) What about those who have already suffered the fate of death at the hands of God's enemies? Do God's judgments come too late for them? Have they missed the blessings of the "new Jerusalem" of prophecy?

The 144,000 sealed on earth--v. 1-8

The four angels holding back the blowing winds (Jer. 49:36; 51:1; Zech. 6:5).

They seem poised to execute the wrath of God and the Lamb.

The winds are to blow on earth, sea, and trees (these judgments are comprehensive, nothing is left untouched).

This has been "granted" to them by God; it is God's providential judgments.

Thus, the picture of one of impending wrath about to be unleashed on the wicked by God. This is what we expected from 6:17. But first,

The angel with the seal of the living God

Cf. Eze. 9:1-8. Note those who are marked for deliverance from the destruction. The message is that God will not destroy the whole of Israel by pouring out his wrath upon Jerusalem. The concept suggested is that God's people are to be delivered from the judgments upon the wicked and restored to their place in due time. So we have a similar idea here.

The angel beckons the destroying angels to wait until God's bond-servants are sealed. The significance of sealing is that of identifying as belonging to God. The action is that of signing one's name on them, showing ownership.

On their foreheads indicates that identification with Christ is a public and overt thing that all can see.

But also there is the element of protection. Just as the blood on the doorposts of the ancient Israelites protected them from the vengeance of God on Egypt, so God's name protects them from God's vengeance now (Cf. Eze. 9:1-8).

Since this judgment is for the wicked, the message is that God's people shall be protected from it.

The 144,000

We already know who they are, bond-servants of God. They are those who belong to him. Let's compare also what we may learn from other passages: (14:1-5)

They have the name of the Father and the Lamb written on their forehead (They belong to God and Christ); not the mark of the beast (13:17).

They have been purchased from the earth (14:3); not those "whose name has not been written in the Lamb's book of life" (13:8).

They are morally pure (not defiled with women); but are virgins. They have remained true to their husband to be, Christ. Not those who worship the beast.

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes; not the beast (cf. 13:3).

They are first-fruits to God and the Lamb; there are others to come.

They are honest (they speak the truth); not deceived (cf. 13:14).

They are blameless (they live in truth).

We may readily see that this is not the physical nation but a spiritual nation.

This is not the ordinary means of identifying physical Jews for tribal identity. The Jewish tribe of Dan is not mentioned. Instead Mannaseh is added in addition to Joseph.

This is not how physical Jews were numbered for allocation of land purposes. The tribe of Levi would not be included. So, what are we to make of this? God's bondservants are not numbered for occupation of Palestine, nor for the purpose of identification as physical Jews.

The tribe of Dan had gone into idolatry; it was not a fitting symbol of God's true Israel. Though the tribe of Levi had no physical inheritance; these people are heirs of the Abrahamic promise; thus, Levi could be included.

Here they are numbered from among the tribes of Israel. The nation of Israel was numbered by tribes for one main reason--warfare. Sometimes numbered for occupation of land or city.

They are numbered for warfare. They are the spiritual army of God. They are not to be destroyed by God but rather they are the true Israel of God.

Thus, the 144,000 are a fitting symbol of the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16; Phil. 3:3)--God's spiritual army (the church militant). There does not seem to be any compelling reason to restrict them to Jewish Christians, especially in view of the contrast between these and those who worship the beast and his image in chapter 14. It would seem the 144,000 represent all the saved of earth, whether Jew or Gentile; but as the Israel of God, a point of special significance, if the destruction of old Israel and the physical nation are presented. This figure reminds us that though Jerusalem and Israel may be destroyed, God's true Israel is not to be destroyed but delivered from the destruction to dwell in the "new Jerusalem". This is very similar to the use of Ezekial's prophecy.

Perhaps they are numbered for occupation of the "new Jerusalem" which is their inheritance.

The number seems symbolic 12 x 12 x 1000. It is the full number of all the redeemed; no one is missing.

But what of those who have already died? Have the judgments of God against his enemies come to late for them?

The great multitude in heaven--v. 9-17

This the Israel of God in its final glory, inhabiting the new Jerusalem. The church triumphant.

Innumerable (Here is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, Gen. 15:)

From every nation (The Israel of God is made up of people of "many nations", Gen. 17:)

Before the throne

In celebration

Their robes are white because they washed them in Jesus' blood (v. 14)

They celebrate with palm branches, because they have come out of the great tribulation (v. 14).

They sing praises to God and the Lamb.

They have come out of the great tribulation. It is for the sake of Christ (It involved hunger, thirst, the heat of sun, tears).

In heavenly blessing

Before the throne

They serve in his temple

God spreads his "tabernacle" (tent) over them.

They do not hunger, thirst, nor suffer from sun and heat; for the Lamb is their shepherd and he guides them to waters of life.

God wipes all tears from their eyes.

Cf. this picture with Is. 4.

Cf. this picture with the "new Jerusalem" in Rev. 21-22. The parallel to Revelation favors the idea that this is the future glory of the redeemed. Though they are too late to see God's wrath against the enemies, they won't miss the blessings of the "new Jerusalem".