

**The Revelation to John**  
**Chapter Seven**  
**An Interlude Prior to the Last Seal**  
**Sealing of God's Bond-Servants**

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There is now an interlude as John is informed that the children of God will persevere and that God will protect them from His wrath and will eventually comfort them with the reward of His great love forever. As we have seen in my comments, millions of God's children have suffered greatly for their allegiance to Him. Why should we think that we will then be protected from the wrath of man in any future tribulations? Our perspective must be reoriented to His perspective and we must then think long-term. By long-term I mean infinity! We know that there will be real justice meted out and that Jesus has already taken our justice away so that we will receive mercy. So whatever happens to us as a result of our perseverance of faith, we can have the assurance that God will keep us in His arms.

I know this study can be very addictive and that is why I resisted teaching it for a long time. Our charge is to: Phil 2:12-13 NASB *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; (13) for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. "Work out your salvation" means to totally turn your life over to God and let the Holy Spirit mold you into the image of Jesus Christ as you walk in the world. So please don't let your attraction to this study take you away from that command from our Lord. I believe Satan loves for Christians to be fascinated with "end times" stuff so that we do not obey God now. The last words of Jesus relate to the disciples wanting to know more about the "End Times":*

*Act 1:6-8 NASB So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; (8) but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

In effect, Jesus told them to mind their own business and not speculate about the End! I believe that is the same advice He is giving to His disciples today. So spend most of your time becoming more like Him in every way and leave the End to Him.

Paul gave some excellent advice concerning our behavior that should be affected by our expectation of His return:

*Rom 13:12-14NASB The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (13) Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. (14) But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

Paul also gave good advice to Titus regarding such behavior:

*Titus 2:11-14 NASB For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, (12) instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, (13) looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (14) who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.*

Living between the two comings of the Lord Jesus Christ gives us great responsibilities that we must never neglect. Peter also gave us needed advice on this living:

*1Peter 1:13-16 NASB Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (14) As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, (15) but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; (16) because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."*

John also wrote of our behavior as we look forward to His Second Coming:

*1John 3:2-3 NASB Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Knowing of the future coming of the Lord should drive us to many actions here and now:

- 1.) Faithful to the commission God has given us as it did for Timothy (1 Tim 6:14).
- 2.) Faithful and wise managers of what God has entrusted to our care as we wait (Luke 12:41-48).
- 3.) We should work diligently for Him with the gifts and abilities He has given us (Matt 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27).
- 4.) Continually show love for other brothers of Jesus Christ (Matt 25:31-46).

The above is not a complete list but should give us some guidelines for how to spend our time waiting for His return.

**Rev 7:1 “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 should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”**

We do not take the four corners of the earth literally to mean that the earth is flat! Of course many of those people first reading this did think that the world was flat. The meaning is that the angels' influence is over all the earth during this interlude. Winds are often referred to as sources of great troubles and we have witnessed the destructive power of tornados and hurricanes many times in our history. We have seen many trees destroyed violently by such winds for they are particularly vulnerable to high winds. That the destructive forces would not prevail over the earth or sea completely limits their possible actions. The picture simply is that all the destructive forces will pause during this interlude.

**Rev 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,”**

Another angel enters the scene and he has the authority of God as indicated by His seal of God. Many people have speculated as to his identity but that is not necessary or even worthy of any time. The point is that God has sent a messenger directly from Him to give an important message. His loud voice is indicative of his authority as he commands the angels who have the abilities to heap much destruction upon the earth and its inhabitants. Sunrise is a spectacular event and it would be even more so to see an angel arising from it. [The black sun of Rev 6:3 was a temporary event and also not literal.]

**Rev 7:3 “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."”**

His message is simple as he commands the angels to hold their destructive talents until all the servants of God have been sealed. The Greek word for servants is “doulos” and it means a person with absolute devotion to his master. We also know the term bond-servant from previous studies. A bond-servant is one who was once a servant to someone and then has purposefully become a servant to someone again. Such a terminology perfectly describes the children of God for we were once servants of Satan and now we have given ourselves as servants of God.

- *Eph 2:3 “Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”*
- *1Cor 4:1 “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”*
- *2Cor 3:6 “who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*
- *2Cor 6:4 “but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,”*

In Rev 7:3 there is no limit placed on the number of God’s bond-servants but all of His children are to be sealed. This sealing does not mean from worldly tribulations but from the wrath of God. From our perspective it seems that God has been waiting for about 2000 years already as many new disciples of Jesus Christ have been added since Jesus ascended to Heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father. This interlude is then continuing as God continues to seal His children. Even from 2 Cor 6:4, 5 we see that God’s children are expected to endure affliction, hardship, and distress:

*2Cor 6:4-5 “but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,”*

But we are sealed as His possession so that we will persevere and then eventually be in His loving arms forever (the day of redemption is the end judgment day):

- *2Cor 1:22 “who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.”*
- *Eph 1:13 “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,”*
- *Eph 4:30 “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

The sealing of Rev 7:3 is to keep us **from the wrath of God** that is about to be unveiled on the world. We know that we are free from the wrath of God:

- *Rom 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*
- *Eph 5:6 “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”*
- *1Thess 5:9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*

God is then waiting for His children to be sealed so that the coming pouring of wrath will ~~not destroy them~~ but allow them to persevere and never deny Him. The World Christian Encyclopedia estimates that more than 45 million men and women were put to death for their faith in Jesus Christ during the twentieth century! In recent years the estimate has averaged between 160,000 and 171,000 per year. That is more than 400 Christians dying for their faith each day! It is impossible to deny that many tribulations for Christians has been occurring for 2000 years since the ascension of Jesus. There is no Scriptural verification for stating that Christians will be spared from tribulations in the world but only from the wrath of God for their sins since such wrath has been taken by Jesus for our sins.

The Old Testament analogy is when the angel of death went forth to kill the first born in Egypt but not from the families of the Jews:

*Exodus 12:23 “For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you.”*

The bondservants to be sealed include all the children of God and would include all born-again Gentiles and Jews but unsaved Jews would not be included. The pre-tribulation, pre-millennial people would say that the church had already been raptured so the church would not be included in the sealing. But we have already pointed out that the church had not been raptured and we will see later that people will be redeemed in the tribulations to come so they would be included as bondservants from God’s vantage point.

**Rev 7:4 “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:”**

So if the bond-servants are not numbered, what does this number mean? The earth time since the vision was given to John is about 2000 years and many Christians continue to be added to God’s family each day so what does this number mean? The numbers cannot be literal since so many people have been added in the last 2000 years. Many interpretations have been given to this number. The Jehovah Witnesses and the Seventh-Day Adventists claim that this number is for their explicit protection. Other cults also have laid claim to being the only ones included in this number. Some people say that these are a special set of Jews to be witnesses later as seen in chapter 14. However when we get to that chapter we will see that such an interpretation is not certain. Also if these people who are sealed are only Jews then that means that the Gentile Christians will receive the outpouring of the wrath of God and we have already seen that such is not allowed by Scripture.

Another way to look at this number is to multiply 12 (tribes of Israel) times 12 (number of Apostles) times 1000 (number for completeness) to arrive at the number. The number then may be used to refer to the complete, full inclusion of God's People in the new Israel of Christ's Church and not meant as a literal 144,000. These would be all the bondservants of God as stated in Rev 7:3. † There is a precise number but only God can give the exact number. For those who object to calling this group the spiritual Israel, we can repeat a number of Scriptures to back up that claim:

- *Rom 2:29 “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.”*
- *Rom 9:6 “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel;”*
- *Gal 3:6-7 “Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.”*
- *Gal 3:29 “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”*
- *Gal 6:15-16 “For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”*
- *1Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;”*
- *Rom 4:11 “and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them,”*

The church is surely the New Israel in a spiritual sense.

**Rev 7:5 “from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,  
Rev 7:6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,  
Rev 7:7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,  
Rev 7:8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.”**

If the number is not just for literal Israel then why did John see these numbers from the tribes of Israel? There are several mysteries associated with this list and some people have spent a lot of time trying to squeeze out the meaning. However there may not be any deep meaning associated with the list. It is probably important that Judah is mentioned first since this is the tribe of the Messiah. It is interesting that Dan is omitted and that Joseph and Manasseh are listed as tribes since Manasseh is included in Joseph. Manasseh was the faithful son of Joseph. Dan may be omitted because it is associated with idolatry (Judges 18:30, 1 Kings 12:29, Deut 29:18-21). Ephraim may be omitted because he defected from the house of Judah (Isaiah 7:17) and it practiced idolatry (Hosea 4:17). Concerning the order, it has been known for a long time that out of 20 lists of the tribes, there are 18 different orders of the lists so it would be best to not dwell on the order.

If the number 144,000 is not meant to be an exact number from our perspective then why does he give the above listing that would make someone think that the total is just from physical Israel? These numbers cannot be literal either for many ethnic Jews are being redeemed each year as they accept Jesus as the Messiah and His sacrifice is accounted to them. The reason is that God is not finished with Israel even though all members lost their tribal identity at AD 70 when all records were destroyed. God still knows who is a member of the tribes and He will seal some number of people from all the tribes of Israel ~~included above~~ AND an unspecified number of Gentiles, all of whom are His bond-servants.

**Rev 7:9 “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;  
Rev 7:10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."”**

John saw a huge number of people spread out before him. It would be impossible for a man to count these people even as it would be impossible to count the number of grains of sand on the seashores although that number is also a precise number. That people from every tribe, people, and tongue are mentioned certainly excludes the concept that these people are only from physical Israel, but rather that the meaning is for spiritual Israel. They were all standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb, giving Christ the place of honor also since He also is God. The Greek word for robes indicates a

long gown and that they are white indicates justification. Our black sins covered in the red blood of Jesus yields the white of purity – not very scientific, as far as I can tell – but nevertheless correct. Palm branches are often symbolic of victory as we remember the entering of Jesus into Jerusalem:

*John 12:12 “On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,*

*John 12:13 took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."”*

I like to think of this scene as one that again is giving praise to Jesus Christ for providing the justification for His chosen people and for the ultimate victory of the King. The huge throng of people then gives praise to God for His salvation that is provided through His Son, Jesus Christ. Seeing this great number of people who are bond-servants of Jesus Christ also lends credence to the understanding that the numbers given above are not literal but symbolic. Nobody is left out! All those saved before the advent of Jesus were saved by looking forward with faith to that coming and they are included in the number. Also everyone saved after the ascension of Jesus are also included in the number to be marked so as not to receive the wrath of God that includes judgment. It seems that the meaning of this revelation becomes clearer as the years advance from the time of its writing. We are indeed blessed to be so far removed that we can better understand the visions.

**Rev 7:11 “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,**

**Rev 7:12 saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."”**

What a scene! They had been standing around the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures but at the cry of the redeemed, they prostrated themselves before the throne to worship God! The first thing the angels say is amen to signify their agreement with all that has been said and done. They then ascribe seven attributes to God, which are the same as given in 5:12 except that the word “thanks” replaces the word “wealth”. We can go back to that chapter to read some comments about those words. It is important to note that in the Greek a definite article precedes each of the words so that we should read a blessing, a glory, etc. The meaning is that a particular kind of each word is applied only to God. That they indicate the time of application of these tributes to be “forever and ever” gives them their timeless nature. They end their tribute with a loud Amen to again indicate their agreement with everything.

**Rev 7:13 “And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?"”**

**Rev 7:14 And 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.**

John must be astonished that one of the elders would ask him a question! The question is obviously rhetorical! John quickly throws the question back to the elder since he knows that the elder knows the answer to the question. The article in front of the word "tribulation" has made many people conclude that he means the final tribulation but that is probably not the meaning. There have already been many tribulations, as I indicated in my introduction and elsewhere in this commentary, in which God's people have been horribly treated and killed. Such times are also stated in New Testament times:

- *John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*
- *Acts 14:22 "strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.'"*
- *Matt 24:9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name."*
- *Rom 5:3 "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;"*
- *Rom 8:35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"*
- *Rom 12:12 "rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,"*
- *1Thess 1:6 "You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit,"*

The fact that John is told that these people have had their robes turned white by the blood of the Lamb tells us that these are **people from all ages** for the only means of salvation for all people during all time is that Jesus received the wrath of God on the cross for His people. The verb form is aorist, which tells us that this **one action lasts for all time**. The great tribulation then means the tribulations that all people of God have suffered.

The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology had an Atlanta meeting at Midway Presbyterian Church in Powder Springs, Georgia and it was on the Blood of Jesus. It was an amazing conference as all aspects of the blood of Jesus were presented. The Lamb of God offered the perfect sacrifice that permanently imputes the sin of the chosen people onto Him and imputes the righteousness of Jesus into the account of those same people. All Old Testament blood offerings were temporary but His blood offering is permanent!

**Rev 7:15 "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 shall spread His tabernacle over them."**

Here we have a "therefore"! For all of the reasons stated above they are serving God all day and all night. The "they" in this verse are all of the angels, living beings, elders, and



children of God. Heaven is not just a place of rest! There is no temple in heaven but we infer from this verse that the temple in heaven is not just one place although there is a definite place for the throne in heaven. That He spreads His tabernacle over them all is a reference to the protection and love spread out by God over all His worshipers. Although we might have expected a present tense verb here, John uses the future tense to indicate this total time of love and protection for all His worshipers is yet in the future.

**Rev 7:16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;”**

This verse reminds us of the Old Testament verses:

- *Isaiah 49:10 “They will not hunger or thirst, Neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them, And will guide them to springs of water.”*
- *Psa 121:6 “The sun will not smite you by day, Nor the moon by night.”*

The symbolism indicates complete freedom from any source of discomfort or illness. We all look forward to that day! No wonder Paul could say:

*Phil 1:21 “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

**Rev 7:17 “for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”**

Rev 21:4 gives similar comments on this final state to help us understand that this is the time of the new city of God. Now he gives us the reason for this everlasting time of bliss, worship, and service. Jesus is in the center of the throne and He, as our shepherd, will guide us to those wonderful times. The Lamb will be our shepherd! What a role reversal to make the point that His sacrifice not only provided for our justification and glorification, but it also was the precursor to His provision of our every need in heaven. We shall live forever for He will guide us to the springs of the water of life that was withdrawn from man earlier:

*Gen 3:22 “Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’”*

We also are reminded of the following:

*Isaiah 25:8 “He will swallow up death for all time, And the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, And He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; For the Lord has spoken.”*

What a wonderful chapter of praise! What a great interlude to set the stage for the next seal to be opened.