

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

INTRODUCTION

- Grant Osborne, *Throughout the judgment scenes of chapters 6–16 there are three interludes: 7:1–17; 10:1–11:13; and 12:1–14:20. These are scenes that interrupt the flow of the seals, trumpets, and bowls.*
- Mark Hitchcock, *In the book of Revelation the seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls move the action forward. Sprinkled between these series of judgments are interludes or breaks that allow glimpses of the key players and events that are part of the unfolding drama of the ages . . . This chapter falls between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals and describes two groups of people whose activities and ministry will begin during the time the seals are being opened. These two groups are the 144,000 and the innumerable host.*
- This interlude gives another response to the question, *Who can stand?* John gives a vision of the sealed company of 144,000 from the sons of Israel and of the great multitude from every nation emerging from the Tribulation. In the midst of the devastating events of the Tribulation, God graciously calls people to Himself as they turn to the Savior.
- Charles Ryrie, *The narrative sequence is interrupted at this point in Revelation, for chapter 6 closed with a description of the sixth seal, and the seventh seal is not opened until the beginning of chapter 8 . . . From the severity of the judgments under the sixth seal, it would appear that not a single person could or would be saved . . . But even in the wrath of the Tribulation, God remembers mercy. So the scene of judgment is interrupted by the scene of mercy in this chapter.*
- Thomas Constable, *God led John to record what he saw, between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, in order to explain how He would be merciful during this period of judgment . . . this chapter serves as a dramatic literary interlude that delays briefly the disclosure of what will follow in the seventh seal in order to heighten expectation.*

AN INTERLUDE, REVELATION 7:1-17

- A. The sealing of the 144,000 (1-8)
1. The use of angels in suspending judgment (1-3)
 - a. Four angels (1), *After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.*
 - 1) The context
 - a) Warren Wiersbe, *Angels are associated with the forces of nature: the wind (Rev. 7:1), fire (Rev. 14:18), and water (Rev. 16:5). Stopping the winds implies a “lull before the storm.” God controls all of nature. During the day of His wrath, He will use the forces of nature to judge mankind.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *The general chronological progression of the visions suggests that the events that John saw here in chapter 7 will happen at the end of the first half of the Tribulation. What John saw in this vision supports that conclusion.*
 - c) Charles Swindoll, *Throughout history the people of Israel have been conquered, delivered, devastated, exiled, and restored, over and over again, as military threats bombarded them from every side. Yet at the beginning of the tribulation, just as the land of Israel is about to endure the most devastating war in all of history, God’s intervention reminds us that He will keep His promises to Israel.*
 - 2) The four angels’ assignment
 - a) Charles Ryrie, *John first saw four angels standing at the four “corners” of the earth (i.e., at the four quadrants or directions of the compass). They apparently control the winds (cf. the angel of fire, 14:18; and the angel of the waters, 16:5), preventing them from blowing on the earth, which would result in a lack of rain on the earth.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *The four angels described here were God’s agents (cf. Heb. 1:14). They appear to be different from the four living creatures and the 24 elders (if those elders are angels) . . . The winds probably represent God’s judgments coming on the world (v. 3; cf. Jer. 49:36–38; Dan. 7:2; Hos. 13:15), specifically those about to follow during the remainder of the Tribulation (cf. Ezek. 9:4–8).*
 - c) Kendell Easley, *These powerful beings appear nowhere else in Revelation. They are servants of God created to obey him in this specific way—to cause judgment winds to blow at certain times and in certain ways . . . The four winds are personified as agents of God’s judgment, much as in Jeremiah 4:11–12 . . . When all four of God’s judgment winds blow, the ruin will encompass the whole world, as the mention of wind . . . blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree makes clear.*

- b. Another angel (2-3)
- 1) His command (2-3a), ***Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees,***
 - a) Charles Swindoll, *An angel then rushed onto the scene, holding "the seal of the living God" to mark the "bond-servants" of God on their foreheads (7:3).*
 - b) Charles Ryrie, *This fifth angel appears to be superior to the other four. This is not strange, for other Scriptures demonstrate that there are ranks among both the good and evil angels ((Eph. 3:10; 6:12). He instructs the four to suspend judgment, but he also associates them with him in the sealing . . . His crying with a loud voice may emphasize the urgency of this project.*
 - c) Thomas Constable, *This angel possessed the seal of the living God, the title living God adding solemnity and vitality to the seal. A seal was a symbol of ownership (2 Cor. 1:22), authentication (John 6:27), and protection leading to final salvation (Eph. 1:14; 4:30; cf. Gen. 4:15; Exod. 12:7).*
 - 2) The purpose of the suspension (3b), ***saying, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."***
 - a) John Walvoord, *The seal on their foreheads symbolizes protection and ownership and God's intention to protect the 12 tribes that are mentioned, much as He protected Noah from the Flood, Israel from the plagues of Egypt, and Rahab and her household in Jericho.*
 - b) Charles Ryrie, *They are Jews from each of the twelve tribes, and they do a particular service for God. In some way they are sealed on their foreheads . . . a seal does not have to be visible to be real (Eph. 4:30). It is principally a guarantee of ownership and security, and both these ideas are evident in the sealing of these 144,000 . . . They are owned by God, which must indicate that they are redeemed people . . . It is commonly assumed that their service includes evangelism, though this is not specifically stated.*
 - c) Thomas Constable, *The angel instructed the four angels to withhold their judgment on the earth until he had finished sealing God's bond-servants on their foreheads (cf. Ezek. 9:4) . . . Their sealing marks these believers as God's redeemed people and guarantees their protection from divine judgment while they carry out their service for God on the earth during the Great Tribulation (14:1, 3-4; cf. 13:16-18; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Their seals probably do not protect them from harm that other people inflict on them (cf. 13:7, 15; 20:4) but from the divine judgments sent on unbelievers in the last half of the Tribulation (cf. 16:2). Evidently God will give these 144,000 believers special protection in the last half of the Tribulation because its calamities will be much more severe than those in the first half.*
2. The sealed from the tribes of Israel (4-8), ***And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.***
- a. Identification
 - 1) Mark Hitchcock, . . . *the 144,000 are male Jewish believers who will be saved and sealed by God for service during the Tribulation . . . Clearly, there will be Jews saved during the Tribulation other than the 144,000. Many of them will be martyred. The 144,000 is a special group God will use to spread the gospel and that He will protect and preserve to the end of the Tribulation.*
 - 2) Charles Swindoll, *These 144,000 Hebrews will serve as faithful, courageous, and diligent witnesses for Christ during the darkest period of earth's history . . . God will use them to fulfill the ancient Old Testament calling of the Hebrew people to be God's witnesses among the nations (Isa. 43:1-12). God's plan for Israel was always for the people to serve as the light of truth for the Gentiles. In the tribulation they will serve as Christ's servants who finally fulfill this mission. This believing remnant from ethnic Israel will not only be sealed for power and protection, but they will also survive the tribulation period and become the firstfruits of the nation of Israel when it is restored to the land during the coming millennial kingdom.*
 - 3) Kendell Easley, *The precision of the number suggests the doctrine taught elsewhere: God's election of a precise number of individuals. He knows the exact number of Gentiles chosen for salvation (Rom. 11:25); he knows the exact number elected to martyrdom (Rev. 6:11). Thus, we would expect him to predetermine the exact number elected for this special sealing.*

- 4) Thomas Constable, *The sealing of these 144,000 witnesses probably indicates God's special selection and protection of them during this time of unprecedented global catastrophes.*
 - 5) John Walvoord, *Nowhere else in the Bible do a dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the church. Obviously Israel will be in the Tribulation, and though men do not know the identification of each tribe today, certainly God knows.*
- b. Concerning the list of the tribes
- 1) Notes
 - a) Kendell Easley, *The New Testament's only list of the twelve tribes of Israel is here.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *The specific references to Israel and the names of the 12 Israelite tribes (vv. 5–8) strongly suggest that the nation of Israel is in view, rather than the church . . . There are at least 19 lists of Jacob's sons in the Old Testament (Gen. 35:22–26; 46:8–25; 49:3–27; Exod. 1:2–5; Num. 1:5–15; 2:3–31; 13:4–15; 26:4–51; 34:19–28; Deut. 27:12–13; 33:6–25; Josh. 13:7–22; Judg. 5:12–18; 1 Chron. 2:1–8:40; 12:24–37; 27:16–22; Ezek. 48:1–7, 23–28, 31–34). Not one of them is the same as the list here. Therefore the fact that this list is unique, though consisting of 12 tribes, should not lead us to conclude that it does not describe the Israelites.*
 - c) Robert L. Thomas, *Though admittedly ingenious, the case for symbolism is exegetically weak. The principal reason for the view is a predisposition to make the 144,000 into a group representative of the church with which no possible numerical connection exists. No justification can be found for understanding the simple statement of fact in v. 4 as a figure of speech. It is a definite number in contrast with the indefinite number of 7:9. If it is taken symbolically, no number in the book can be taken literally.*
 - d) Charles Ryrie, *The identification of these people imposes no obstacle if the language is understood plainly. But there are three problems in this list.*
 - 2) Differences of this list to those in the Old Testament
 - a) The inclusion of Levi among the twelve tribes.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *The tribe of Levi (v. 7), which was often listed separately in the censuses of the Old Testament, is found here on equal footing with the other tribes, perhaps "since the Levitical ceremonies have been abandoned."*
 - 2] Charles Ryrie, *Normally Levi, being the priestly tribe, was considered to have no separate inheritance among the twelve tribes, though they were given cities among all of the other tribal areas. Perhaps Levi is included here because the priests were the spiritual leaders of the nations.*
 - b) The mention of Joseph instead of Ephraim.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *Joseph represents Ephraim . . . Ephraim was the head of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that apostatized under King Jeroboam I's leadership . . . Perhaps the reason that Ephraim's name does not appear in this list, though he is assumed in the reference to Joseph, is to avoid the unpleasant connotations of his name.*
 - 2] *Normally Manasseh and Ephraim are both mentioned since they both received an equal portion of territory along with the rest of the tribes. Of course, a double number is counted in this list, but under the names of Joseph and Manasseh rather than Ephraim and Manasseh.*
 - c) The omission of Dan from this list.
 - 1] Thomas Constable, *The tribe of Dan is absent from this list, perhaps because that tribe was the first to establish idolatry in Israel (Judg. 18:30; cf. 1 Kings 12:29–30).*
 - 2] John Walvoord, *Perhaps Dan was omitted here because it was one of the first tribes to go into idolatry (Jud. 18:30; cf. 1 Kings 12:28–29). However, Dan is mentioned in Ezekiel 48:2 in the millennial land distribution.*
 - 3] Charles Ryrie, *The usual reason given for this omission is that Dan was guilty of idolatry on many occasions (Lev. 24:11; Judg. 18:1–2, 30–31; 1 Kings 12:28–29). The same reason is often given for Ephraim. Some have suggested further that the Antichrist may come from this tribe and that that accounts for its omission from the list (cf. Gen. 49:17; Jer. 8:16).*
 - 4] Mark Hitchcock, *Many in church history have speculated that the omission rises from the fact that the Antichrist will be a Jew from the tribe of Dan. The chief problem with this view is that the Antichrist will more likely be a Gentile, as we will discuss later in conjunction with Revelation 13.*

3) Comments

- a) Charles Swindoll, *Though we may not be able to fully explain why these particular tribes were selected to make up the 144,000 sealed in Revelation 7, we can be certain that God has His reasons.*
- b) Thomas Constable, *References such as the one in this passage argue strongly for the continuance of Israel as a nation in the future and for God's dealing with ethnic Jews again as His chosen people (cf. Rom. 11).*
- c) John Walvoord, *The most important fact taught here is that God continues to watch over Israel even in the time of Israel's great distress. There is no justification whatever for spiritualizing either the number or the names of the tribes in this passage, to make them represent the church.*
- d) David Jeremiah, *Prophecy students have frequently said that the whole world needs to hear the gospel before Christ returns. This is true, but it is not a condition that needs to be met before the Rapture. This hearing must occur before the second coming of Christ [cf. Matt. 24:14]. If the whole world needed to hear the gospel before the Rapture, there would be no reason for the 144,000 evangelists during the Tribulation, and there would be no Tribulation saints."*
- e) Warren Wiersbe, *This is not to say that our literal interpretation of this passage is not without problems . . . Many suggestions have been made, but we do not know the answers. Even if we interpreted this passage in a spiritual sense (i.e., Israel is the church), we would be no more certain. We must permit God to know "the secret things," and not allow our ignorance of them to hinder us from obeying what we do know (Deut. 29:29).*

TO BE CONTINUED, LORD WILLING!

B. Grace in the midst of judgment (9-17)