



## Revelation 7

### Intermission Time

Think of Jesus' Revelation as theatre, in which the drama of God's blessings and punishments unfold. In Revelation 6, John witnessed the breaking of the first 6 seals of God's scroll. God the Father's Last Will and Testament is opened by Jesus, who alone is qualified to serve as executor. By the end of chapter 6 and the breaking of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, things look quite bleak. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals, the scene changes from earth to heaven. The reader gets a refreshing breather, as John shows us in Revelation 7, a fuller explanation of 6:9-11. In Revelation 6:17, Christ's enemies ask, "Who can stand?" Revelation 7 answers that question, "God's people can stand because God protects them! In vv. 1-8, God's people are protected from the punishment that will be poured out on God's enemies. Jesus himself promised in Luke 21:16ff that though some of them would be put to death, not a hair of their head would perish. Death cannot harm the community of the redeemed, who are forever secure in Christ! In vv. 9-17, God's people receive their greatest reward, God himself!

### To be sealed is to be secure!

Things are not always what they seem to be. Even though Christians know what it means to hurt as they go about their day-by-day encounters, they must know that the suffering is not a sign that God has abandoned them. There are two sides to the Christian's experience. The security must be as real as the suffering. Revelation 7 helps to get this point across. (Friskney, 1986, 75)

*7:1, "Four angels . . . holding back the four winds of the earth."* This is another way of talking about the four horsemen of chapter 6. These are winds of destruction, which the angels are holding back until God's people are "sealed"; the point is that God is in control and He is caring for His faithful followers.

*7:2, "Having the seal of the living God."* The "seal" was like a mark or a tattoo, which was a sign of possession, consecration, and ownership.

*7:4, "144,000."* How one interprets this number is critical to interpreting other matters in Revelation. I'm convinced that this is a symbolic number of completeness and perfection.  $144,000 = 12^2 \times 10^3$ . It's a perfect number! I'm persuaded that *144,000* in v. 4 and the "*great multitude that no one could count*" in v. 9 describe the same group. In other words, the entire people of God—Jewish and Gentile—are protected. Jesus said in John 17:12, "*While I was with*

*them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” See also, Jude 24-25, “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” God will keep ALL of His people secure!*

### **To be secure is to be with God forever!**

7:9, *“A great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language. . . wearing white robes and holding palm branches.”* In Christ, God’s promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3—*“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”*) has been fulfilled. Paul said in Ephesians 2:14ff, *“For He himself is our peace, who has made the two (Gentile & Jewish races) one . . . His purpose was to make one new man (i.e., race) out of the two, thus making peace.”* Out of the many races, God in Christ has made ONE RACE. If you are in Christ, you are God’s chosen people. Keying off of Israel’s Feast of Tabernacles (the annual feast kept by God’s people (Leviticus 23:40) to commemorate God’s protection during their 40 years in the wilderness), God’s people are holding palm branches as an act of celebration and worship. “John applies this imagery to people of all nations, who rejoice at their latter-day exodus redemption, their victory over their persecutors, and God’s protection of them during their wilderness pilgrimage.” (Beale 1999, 428)

7:14, *“The great tribulation.”* “The tribulation consists of pressures to compromise faith; these pressures coming both from within the church community through seductive teaching and from without through overt oppression. The tribulation has begun in the present and will be intensified in its severity at the end of history” (Beale 1999, 433-4). Like a mother giving birth, the labor pains are hardest at the end (Romans 8:22).

7:15, *“He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.”* This is another image from the Feast of Tabernacles. God’s own tent will shelter God’s own people! What a beautiful image of protection and community!

7:17, *“The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd.”* The slain Lamb standing is now our shepherd!

### **The Big Idea: God, our security in this life, will be our reward in the next!**

If you saw the motion picture, *The Matrix*, you’ll appreciate this quote:

“Everything in this modern world is somehow inexplicably geared to inducing sleep in our souls. Modern society is a veritable cave of Morpheus — the mythical place where men forgot reality and succumbed to dreams.”<sup>1</sup>

In Revelation 7, John awakens us from our sleepy, dreamy world, to another world, more real in existence; a world exploding in worship to the One at the center of all that exists! When Christ is the center of our world, there is . . . no more thirst, no more hunger, no more tears.

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Roberts, *The Thought of God* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 105.