

In the previous chapter John saw the first six seals opened and their judgments revealed. However, the opening of the seventh seal is temporarily put on hold so that God can demonstrate the preservation of His people even during the tribulation period. Even those who will be martyred will be able to praise God for the salvation they have in Jesus Christ.

¹ And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

“And after these things” - After watching the Lamb open the first six seals, John now sees the events of this chapter. This chapter serves as an interlude between the 6th and 7th seals, describing God’s mercy on His servants in the midst of pouring out His judgment on the earth.

“I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth” - This could be the four points of the compass (N, S, E, W) or, as some commentators suggest, the four quadrants of the compass (NE, SE, SW, NW). The point seems to be that these angels are positioned to exert their influence over the entire world.

“holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree” - Not many commentators directly address the meaning of the winds, but of the ones that do, some suggest that the winds represent the judgments of God being poured out on earth while others believe the winds to be literal and that the angels are controlling the winds no matter which direction they would blow. In either case, God has placed these angels in charge of the winds and were not allowing them to blow on the earth. If the winds are literal then these angels have full control over the earth’s weather patterns.

² And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, ³ Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

“And I saw another angel ascending from the east” - A fifth angel is seen rising in the east like the rising sun. It’s unclear what significance (if any) there may be in the fact that the angel is ascending from the direction of the east. Perhaps this is an allusion to the times in scripture when God’s deliverance is pictured as coming from the east.

“having the seal of the living God” - This seal is most likely a signet ring that was pressed into hot wax to seal documents. The imprinted image left behind indicated the ownership and protection by the owner of the signet ring. This angel has been given the authority to use the signet ring to place the seal upon the servants of God, showing that they belong to Him and are under His protection.

“and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea” - The angels controlling the four winds have been given permission by God to use that control to inflict harm on the earth as part of the judgment of God. It’s unclear if the holding of the winds is the judgment or if the holding of the winds is the preparation to the releasing of the winds which will harm the earth and sea. The weather systems of the earth will be manipulated to execute God’s judgment.

“Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” - The four angels are commanded to pause before unleashing the harm by the four winds until the sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads. We are not told if the seal is visible or can only be seen in the spiritual realm, but it sets these people apart from the rest of humanity. They are under the special protection of God because they belong to Him.

⁴ And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

The Jehovah Witnesses have liked to claim that they were the 144,000 sealed by God, although they had to adjust their theology once they grew to more than 144,000 members. Now they believe that the 144,000 are the most faithful of their number and the remainder will live on the earth. However, in addition to the contextual issues with this belief of the Jehovah Witnesses, this verse and the next four make it clear that the 144,000 are Jews only. They are described as being “of all the tribes of the children of Israel.”

In chapter 14, John sees these 144,000 again, this time standing on Mt. Zion with the Lamb in what could be a picture of Christ having returned, singing a new song in praise to the Lamb. **Rev. 14:1** “*And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*”

⁵ Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. ⁶ Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. ⁷ Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. ⁸ Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

If the previous verse stating that the 144,000 come from “all the tribes of the children of Israel” is not enough to convince us that the 144,000 are Jews, vs. 5-8 should clinch it. The twelve tribes are enumerated, with 12,000 being sealed in each one, totaling up to 144,000. The list of tribes are unique, for one of Joseph’s sons, Manasseh is listed but Joseph seems to be listed in place of his other son Ephraim. Also, the tribe of Dan is omitted even though Dan is listed among the tribes receiving a portion of land during the Millennium (Ezek. 48:1-2). Commentators vary in their theories of why Dan is missing and Joseph is substituted for Ephraim.

⁹ After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; ¹⁰ And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

“After this I beheld” - Commentators debate whether the phrase “after this” connects this great multitude to the 144,000 Jews sealed in the previous verses as a consequence or if it merely signals a change in what is being shown to John. Those who believe there is a connection often describe the 144,000 as Jewish evangelists, although there is no direct statement in the text to that effect. They believe the great multitude that John sees are those who have come to Christ through the witness and preaching of the 144,000.

“and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” - This multitude of people came from all nations and ethnic groups, so they are obviously human. It’s interesting that John was able to give an approximation of the number of angels praising God in Rev. 5:11 (“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands”), but here he tells us that this great multitude was greater than any man could number. Either John had help in numbering the angels or this multitude was a larger group than the multitude of angels that he saw previously.

“stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” - Their location (in heaven before the throne and the Lamb), clothes, what they hold in their hands and what they proclaim indicate that these are redeemed human beings. Their white robes speak of the righteousness they have been given the palms were emblems of victory. Verses 13-17 confirm this assessment.

“And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” - The multitude gives praise to God and the Lamb for their salvation, for they recognize that their salvation was a divine accomplishment.

¹¹ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, ¹² Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

In chapter 5 John had described how the millions of angels surrounded the 24 elders, who in turn surrounded the throne. In the midst of the throne were the four beasts. This vast multitude of redeemed people are praising God for their salvation and the millions of angels respond by falling on their faces and worshipping God, giving Him a 7-fold praise much like they did in Rev. 5:12.

¹³ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

¹⁴ And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me” - As John is watching this great multitude, one of the 24 elders asks him a question with the purpose of revealing the identity of the great multitude.

“What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?” ¹⁴ **And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest”** - The elder brings up the question of who are the people in this great multitude in white robes and where did they come from. John admits that he has no idea, but that the elder was in a better position to know.

“These are they which came out of great tribulation” - This answers the question of where the multitude came from: they were suffering persecution for Christ’s sake on the earth during the great tribulation and now they are celebrating the victory with Christ. At least some of these people were likely martyrs and they are probably included in the number spoken of later in chapter 12 where it describes Satan’s access to heaven being terminated: **Rev. 12:10-11** *“¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, he who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives so as to shy away from death.”*

“and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” - They did not wash their robes in their own righteousness but they used the only cleansing agent that is capable of washing away our sin: the blood that Christ shed on the cross to redeem us.

¹⁵ Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

“Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple” - Because they have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb, they are able to stand in the presence of God before His throne and serve Him day and night in His temple. Some commentators point out the white robes also speak of priestly service.

“and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them” - Commentators generally agree that the preferred translation of “shall dwell among them” is “shall spread his tent over them” which is consistent with the next verses. God will protect and care for His people.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more” - All of their needs will be met under God’s care and they will never have to do without.

“neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat” - They will never have to deal with the scorching heat of the desert sun for they will be under the protection of God.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters” - The Lamb will be the Shepherd. Everything they need will be provided by Christ, the One Who died to redeem them. Everything we need today from God comes through Christ, our Redeemer, Shepherd and Lord.

“and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” - All of the tears they have shed on earth will be forgotten and they will be replaced with the joys of being in the presence of God. He will comfort them and replace all their sorrows they had on earth. **Rom. 8:18** *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*