

**The Interlude**  
**Revelation 7**  
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Chapter seven of Revelation begins with great anticipation of the seventh seal around the document of great concern. The two preceding chapters have served to create a sense of drama around the breaking of the seventh seal which will allow for the opening of the document. The drama increases with a picture of four angels holding back the winds that blow across the earth. As we have seen so many times in the first six chapters, the extent of God's sovereignty again shines brightly as the angels answer His commands and exert control over circumstances on the earth. The winds need not be taken literally nor should we assume John considered the earth to be a flat square. Remember this is apocalyptic literature with many symbols. The picture of the four winds is actually poetic and builds a more powerful mental picture than some kind of wording acknowledging a round earth and multiple wind changes.

The holding of the four winds represents an interlude in the legal proceedings of opening the document. The final preparations are about to take place for the judgments of God to fall upon the earth. Again the drama increases with an angel ascending from the east or the rising of the sun crying with a loud voice to the four angels holding the winds. We are told there must be a sealing of believers prior to the opening of the document. The language of verse three reminds the reader that great danger is ahead and harm is coming to the earth. The sealing of believers is a written commitment of God's protection of the saints. In the midst of great tribulation and persecution, these believers will maintain their faith. It is important to note that this sealing will not only protect their faith, it will also serve as a shield to prevent the outflow of God's wrath which will encompass the earth from falling upon those who are here referred to as God's bond servants.

### **144,000**

John calls attention to the number of those who are sealed as well as identifying them as from the 12 tribes of Israel. The number is 144,000 which is a multiple of the square of 12 and the square of 10 which represents completeness or wholeness. One of the great questions concerning Revelation is the interpretation of this number and those who are the constitution.

The dispensationalist interpretation takes a literal approach. The number 144,000 is viewed as a literal number and the tribes identified in the text literally describe their heritage. This is certainly a simple view but it is not without its problems. Hal Lindsay sees this 144,000 as Jews who will be saved during the great tribulation and then become witnesses of the Gospel to all the Gentiles. He believes there will be great evangelistic success during this period of time and through these Jews God will fulfill the promise to Abraham of his descendants being a blessing to all nations. He teaches the remnant will be martyred by the Antichrist and depends upon a belief in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church.

The primary problem with this literal approach to interpretation centers around the 12 tribes listed. Of all the listings of the tribes in the Old Testament, the list in Revelation does not

match any of them. The absence of the tribe of Dan is consistent with the idea of the Antichrist coming out of that tribe. A Christian writer would be compelled to omit that tribe. The inclusion of Manessah is also problematic. He is not one of the twelve sons and it seems as if he is included then his brother Ephraim should also be included. It also becomes inconsistent to classify believers by racial distinction in the new covenant.

The historical pre millennial view acknowledges two visions in Revelation 7. The first is the sealing of the 144,000 and the second is the blessedness of the great multitude before the throne. Both of these visions affirm the church. The number identified in this passage is not seen as a literal number and the genealogy found in verses 5-8 is seen as symbolic as well. The symbols represent the completeness of God's kingdom and identify the church rather than genealogical descendants of Abraham. This view of the real Israel in the New Covenant is based upon Gal. 3:29 which says, "... if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." Another supporting Scripture is Romans 2:28-29, "He is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal." The issues with the lists of tribes pose no problem because the number and tribal listing are seen as symbolic of the completeness of the church.

### **Heavenly Multitude**

The scene shifts back to heaven as the story unfolds in verse 9. The second vision clearly shows a large gathering of people standing before the throne clothed in robes of white. The scene is reminiscent of God's promise to Abraham of descendants who will number as the sand of the sea. The vastness of this sea of people is described as a number no one could count. On that great day in heaven, this multitude is made up of every nation and every tribe and of every language. The fact that they are in robes of white is testimony of their faith in Christ and the redemption given to them in the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ.

The order of the day is worship. Palm branches are found in the hands of the multitudes signifying the same kind of reverence to the Lord as was found in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This is a high day of worship. Not only is there reverence but there is shouting of joy and thanksgiving and praise directed toward none other than the Lord. There will be no worship of self in this place and no worship of other humans. No Hollywood star worship and no star athlete worship. Worship in heaven will be given to no one but the living God. No allegiance is given to human accomplishment and Satan is not even thought about. It is God who harvests His rightful place among those who have been saved through the sacrifice of His own blood.

The angels are included in this grand time of worship. The celebration is universal for the angels have been involved in this struggle against evil for centuries. They have seen firsthand the sacrifice of our Lord, His holiness, and His compassion for the human race. The elders join in with the angels in humility before the Lord. Jesus is the center of attention and the focal point of the festivities. The heavenly hosts respond to His glory, His wisdom, His power, His might, and verbally proclaim Him to be God forever. Never in this place where they are gathered will anyone or anything be given the mental or spiritual place of God.

## **The Identity of the Multitude**

From his historical Premillennial position, John Newport emphatically states that the multitude here cannot be the Gentiles saved during the great tribulation because that would exclude Jews. The text records that every nation and tongue and tribe are included in the multitude. On the contrary, he sees the 144,000 as John's symbolic language to include all believers. He correlates those mentioned in verses 4-8 with this multitude and asserts that this multitude refers to Christian people after their entry into heaven. Such a view highlights this group as the church triumphant gathered around the throne for their first joint celebration of salvation which has been delivered by Jesus Christ.

In contrast to Newport, Warren Wiersbe sees this multitude as limited to those who are to be saved during the final tribulation period. He calls on the fact that John did not know these people as evidence they were neither Old Testament Saints nor Saints from his own life period for supposedly he would have known them. He goes on to point out three observations about this multitude which are significant and well worthy of note.

1. They were accepted when they stood before God's throne and the lamb.
2. They were joyful
3. They were rewarded.

This chapter has taken us to earth and back to heaven. It has shown us the prelude to the tribulation period and the postlude. We have seen the time immediately preceding the tribulation and the scene in heaven at its conclusion. The final verses show us the shepherd heart of the Lord and give us a glimpse into glory.

Verse 15 pictures this multitude before the throne of God. They are standing and they are without blemish or blame. Their sins have been forgiven having been thoroughly washed in the blood of the lamb. It is important to note that they are serving God. This picture alone could transform the vision many have of heaven. Her citizens will be busy. Serving the Lord takes on many forms and practices in this world why would we not expect the same in the next. I believe the most soothing, glorious, and magnificent music you have ever heard you will hear in heaven. Service will be accomplished with great perfection and the purist of motives. Time and labor will not be of the essence. The work will go on night and day and in my estimation no one will grow weary.

John goes on to address hunger and heat. Neither will be present in heaven. Everyone will be satisfied with food and drink and the climate. No sun worship will be going on although everything will be joyful and every heart will be full of joy. The reason for this atmosphere of bliss will be because of who is leading them and what He supplies according to verses 16-17. The lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will guide all citizens to the springs of the water of life. There will be no unmet needs. Tears will be wiped away by the Lord himself as the great counselor and the great consoler. The water of life represents the completeness of God in addressing the inner and most intimate needs of all humanity on a personal basis.

The interlude gives us two visions. The first is a vision of protection of the servants of God during the tribulation period. The second is a victorious church in perfect harmony with Christ. In this harmony there is evidently an absence of evil and distractions. The place is busy and joyful and one where everyone who contemplates truth would surely want to live.