

Revelation
Lesson V
Revelation 7:1-17

The 144,000 of God's Israel

Introduction:

1. When the sixth seal was opened (Rev. 6:12-17) the fate of Rome was forecast.
 - a. Earthquake, darkened sun, and moon turned to blood all symbolize doom.
 - b. Impenitent Caesar and his followers were due to feel the wrath of heaven.
2. The cry went up: "Who is able to stand?"
3. Before opening the seventh seal, the Lord showed John who would be able to stand in the day of Rome's judgment and downfall.
 - a. 144,000 would be sealed for protection.
 - b. These re assured that they will be able to stand.
4. Note: Revelation has three series of sevens – seven seals (6:1-8:1), seven trumpets (8:2-11:19), and seven bowls (15:1-16:21).
 - a. Each series leads to the next: the seventh in the series contains the series following.
 - b. Seven seals show God's concern for the church; seven trumpets show partial judgments of Rome and give the opportunity of repentance; seven bowls show Rome's final doom for her impenitence.
5. Chapter seven is a parenthesis period between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals.

Body of Lesson:

I. The Restraining Angels: Rev. 7:1-3

A. The "four winds of the earth" point to God's punitive wrath against the wicked.

1. Common figure in apocalyptic literature.
2. Even non-apocalyptic books use this figure to represent judgment and wrath. Jer. 23:19; 30:23

B. For the time being, those winds are held in check by four angels.

C. The restraining angels hold back heaven's wrath until God's servants have been "sealed (i.e. marked)...on their foreheads".

1. Old Testament background helps one understand this scene. Ezek 9
2. A mark on the forehead indicated those who were to be spared utter desolation.

D. Those with the mark of God will be able to stand. Cf. Rev. 9:4; 14:1; 16:2; 19:20; 22:4

1. Notes that Satan's followers also will be given a special mark in the drama of the Apocalypse. Rev. 13:16-17; 14:9; 16:2; 19:20; 22:4
2. Each leader knows his followers.

E. The punishments of the Apocalypse are not allowed to begin until God's people are identified for the sake of their protection.

II. **The 144,000 of the Apocalypse: Rev. 7:4-8**

A. **The total number sealed is 144,000.**

1. 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes in Israel.
2. How shall we identify this group?

B. **Three possibilities suggest themselves.**

1. All the saved under the Old Testament system.
2. Jewish Christians about to suffer persecution under Rome.
3. The entire faithful church of God (i.e. New Testament Israel) on earth.

C. **The first two possibilities are most unlikely.**

1. To show that God protected his Old Testament people is not directly relevant to the flow of the message of our book at this point.
2. To show that God would protect Jewish Christians would offer little comfort to Gentile believers.

D. **The 144,000 are those believers who will remain faithful under Rome's persecutions begun under Domitian.**

1. 144,000 = 12 squared and multiplied by 1000; a graphic way to refer to the totality of the faithful church on earth.
 - a. Twelve is the number for organized religion in apocalyptic literature.
 - b. One thousand is the number for completeness and wholeness.
2. Write 2 Tim. 2:19: _____

E. **The church is often signified in the New Testament as the Israel of God.**

1. Cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; Rom. 2:29; Gal. 6:16; Jas. 1:1; et al.
2. John uses this figure in the Apocalypse. Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 21:2,12

F. **The sealing of the saints does not guarantee their exemption from physical harm or make it impossible for them to apostatize.**

G. **This sealing serves two purposes.**

1. It guards them against overbearing trials which could quench their faith. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13
2. It guarantees that losses here will not affect their heavenly reward to diminish it. Cf. 2 Tim. 4:7-8

III. **The Great Multitude: Rev. 7:9-17**

A. **The 144,000 are on earth; the great multitude is in heaven (i.e. "standing before the throne").**

1. The 144,000 are the suffering yet faithful saints on the earth; the great multitude in heaven has already triumphed and entered into the blessed state of reward and triumph.
2. The latter group was an assurance to the former, for the same God who had seen the great host through its time of trial was now keeping watch over the church on earth. Cf. Heb. 12:1-3

B. **The multitude in heaven praises God for salvation. Rev. 7:12 (note seven qualities ascribed to God).**

C. To draw John's attention to the group, one of the 24 elders questioned John as to who these people were. Rev. 7:13

1. They have endured "great tribulation" and remained pure by virtue of the "blood of the Lamb". Rev. 7:14-15
2. They experience no unsatisfied desires in their glorified state. Rev. 7:16-17

Conclusion:

1. As the drama unfolds from this point forward in the book, the enemies of the church will come under increasingly severe judgment.
2. Chapter seven has assured us that the faithful church will be kept securely in the hand of God through it all.
3. The entire faithful church (i.e. the 144,000 of spiritual Israel) will stand!

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:

Read Rev. 8 & 9 very carefully. As the seven trumpets begin to sound, notice 1.) their limited scope of one-third of the object identified, 2.) the implicit possibility of repentance by Rome, and 3.) the reaction of wicked mankind to these warning judgments from heaven.