

I. BKGRD.

Ch. 1 sets the stage as we find the apostle John exiled to the island of Patmos. He sees a vision of the glorified Christ and is told to dictate letters to 7 churches in Asia Minor.

Chs. 2-3 are the seven letters to the seven churches, ea. letter starting w/ a unique description of Christ, followed by His analysis of their strengths and weakness, words of commendation and/or condemnation, corrective action to take (if necessary) and a final exhortation. These churches were not only specific 1st c. churches with strong and weak points, they also seem to epitomize different churches today AND the Church as a whole down through the ages from the 1ST century to the present.

Ch. 4 John taken into Heaven; sees the throne of God surrounded by the worshiping angels and the 24 elders (representing OT and NT believers: 12 tribes of Israel; 12 apostles) as they respond to that worship.

Ch. 5 We see the scroll sealed with 7 seals in the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne, apparently the title deed to the earth. An angel proclaiming, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose the seals?" We see that no man is worthy; no man can redeem the planet or its people from the curse of sin. John begins to weep uncontrollably until one of the 24 elders consoles him and says *"Don't weep; behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah has prevailed and is worthy to take the scroll and loose the seals."* As Jesus steps forward to take the scroll, we first see the reaction of the redeemed, the Church, who sing of their redemption through the blood of the Lamb and His worthiness to take the scroll and loose the seals. The angels, over 100 million strong, join in the joyous song.

Ch. 6 The seals, one by one, are opened by the Lord Jesus, as the judgments pour forth upon the earth; the great and awesome Day of the Lord is begun!

- 1st seal: The Antichrist, the rider on the white horse;
- 2nd seal brings forth war and desolations;
- 3rd seal: Famine;
- 4th seal: Death.

As the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse pour out the wrath of God on the earth, we see 1/4 of the earth's population destroyed (over 1.5 billion perish).

- 5th seal introduces us to the multitude of souls of those Tribulation saints and martyrs, asking how long before God will avenge their deaths; they are told to wait until their number be complete, are given white robes, symbolizing their redemption.
- The 6th seal unleashes cataclysmic, catastrophic judgments prophesied by Joel, Isaiah, and by Jesus: stars falling from heaven; poss. asteroids and/or meteorites impacts:

More than 1600 asteroids have been followed as they move around the sun, mostly between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Several hundred separate comets are cataloged. Countless smaller bodies exist as stony and metallic meteoroids --

II. TEXT

Before the 7th seal is opened in ch. 8, we have in ch. 7 a parenthetical passage which describes four angels holding back the winds of the earth while other angels seal the 144,000 Israelites with the seal of God.

v. 1 "After this" (μετὰ τούτα, lit., "after these things;" i.e., after the seal judgments have rained down upon the earth and unrepentant earthly rulers attempt to hide from the "wrath" of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16).

"Four angels" - fallen or good? Doesn't say...BUT, v. 2 says "another angel" (ἄλλος: another of a different kind), giving the idea the first group are perhaps fallen angels; the angels doing the sealing, are good guys, then. Also the second angels gives orders to the 4 holding back the winds. Is

not Satan called "*the Prince of the power of the air*"? (Eph. 2:2 KJV). Who can we blame for destructive windstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes and cyclones? SATAN!!!

"Four corners of the earth" refers to the 4 points of the compass, N, S, E, and W and their associated winds. Critics have, over the years, sought to discredit the Word of God by pointing out the earth is ROUND, thus has no "corners..." It is a simple euphemism that is still in use today: Army, Air Force, Marines and Navy on their websites refer to the "4 corners of the earth" or similar phrases. In fact, out-going Sec. of Defense Robert M. Gates, in a recent commencement address used the exact same verbiage! I guess they all need to go back to school because they all think the Earth is FLAT – preposterous!!!

E.g., the jet stream that blows across America ALWAYS blows from the west to the east, generally above 20,000 ft, varying in velocity between 35 mph in the summer, up to over 250 mph in the winter.

"Four corners of the earth" used by critics to accuse Biblical writers of scientific inaccuracies (e.g., flat earth w/ 4 corners). The Greek is best translated 4 quadrants, indicates the 4 points of the compass are in view: north, south, east and west. Look at the power of these angels! They are able to stop all wind in the earth!

Wind drives the Hydrologic Cycle – **SHOW SLIDE #1** -- explain:

evaporation/transpiration/sublimation places water in the atmosphere >>> clouds form >>> move over cooler land masses as the wind blows >>> moisture condenses to form rain/hail/snow >>> drains into rivers which flow into oceans and cycle starts all over). The precipitation cools the air, making it cooler, denser and falling to the ground (low pressure); high pressure drawn to it. High pressure rotates clockwise; low pressure (as seen from the top) rotates counter-clockwise! **SEE SLIDE #2** of a rotating tornado... All is REVERSED in the southern hemisphere due to the Earth's rotation and something called the Coriolis Effect. No cyclones/tornadoes can occur at the Equator for that reason!

v. 2 "Seal" – *sfrag-ees*; a signet; the stamp impressed as a mark of privacy. Ancient documents were folded and tied, and a lump, usually of clay, was pressed over the knot. The sender would then stamp the hardening clay with his signet ring or roll it with a cylindrical seal usually worn around the neck of the owner, which authenticated and protected the contents.

The sealing here results in the name of the Lord being visibly stamped on the forehead of His followers; its primary purpose is to protect the Tribulation saints from the judgments to follow... Hitler had the Jews similarly "marked" with a Star of David, or later, a tattooed number on the inside of their forearms...even infants, babies and children.... Ridiculous to think either was an INVISIBLE mark!

- **Rev. 14:1** "*Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*" This is the counter to the mark of the Antichrist which he forces all his followers to bear: Rev. 13:16ff.

The Church today is MARKED as well!

- In his 2nd epistle to the Corinthian church Paul said, "*...it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is yet to come*" (2 Cor. 1:21f).
- To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "*...having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession - to the praise of His glory*" (Eph. 1:13f).
- **Ephesians 4:30** "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*"

SEAL = SPIRIT = EMPOWERING!!!

v. 3 Trib. saints protected from judgments like Israel in Egypt (Ex. 8-11). Those that worship the Antichrist are also sealed/marked (Rev. 13:16f); mimics the seal of God we find here and in 9:4 ("foreheads"); 14:1 *"the 144,000 who had his name and His Father's Name written on their foreheads."* In Rev. 22:4 we see the redeemed of the Lord *"with His Name on their foreheads,"* as promised the church at Philadelphia (3:12).

v. 4 Some take this passage as symbolic, though it appears very straight-forward; why do some suppose it means something else other than what it SAYS?

- How many are sealed? 144,000.
- Who are they? Jews from the 12 historic tribes of Israel. Rom. 11:25-26a *"All Israel shall be saved."*
- Additional details in Rev. 14:1-5 *"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they **sang** a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."* Ultra-Orthodox Jews?

The **Jehovah's Witness's** claim THEY are the 144,000 going to Heaven, though they've changed their stance a bit since their numbers grew past 144,000. But the context isn't in Heaven: these are sealed **ON THE EARTH!** The context is tribulation and wrath, **NOT HEAVEN!**

Herbert Armstrong's group, the worldwide Church of God, say THEY are (The Plain Truth of the World Tomorrow); you can become part of this elite group if you double and triple tithe to his church.

Historical Mormonism at one point claimed to be the 144,000. Ellen G. White and the 7th Day Adventists said they were. But...why would you WANT to be on the earth when these cataclysms are happening???

vv. 5-8 Lists the tribes so as to avoid any confusion as to their identity; the text itself says they are **Jews!** We are not "spiritual Israel," as some maintain (the 10 'lost tribes of Israel'), nor do we "replace" Israel since their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. The text reinforces the idea of a literal interpretation of the passage by enumerating the number from each individual tribe! If God intended these verses to represent Israel literally, He would have used this verbiage. Nowhere else in the Bible do the dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the Church.

Number of tribes? The tribe of Levi often not mentioned because they had no allotment in the land. Here the tribe of Joseph mentioned; Dan and Ephraim missing. Dan was the first of the tribes to go into idolatry. At the tell extant today, archaeologists have uncovered extensive idolatrous ruins throughout their history. Some feel Dan is omitted because the Antichrist shall come from that tribe:

- Gen. 49:17 *"Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward."* Doubtful...
- In Ezek. 48 Dan is the first tribe to inherit its millennial tribal allotment; **THAT'S GRACE!**

The idolatrous shrine set up by Jeroboam had as its southern site, Bethel, the southernmost part of Ephraim. Judah listed first because Rueben lost his birthright for sleeping with his father's concubine. Also fulfilled the prophecy of Gen. 49 (*"The scepter shall not depart Judah until Shiloh [the one to whom it belongs] comes."* Jesus IS the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

vv. 9-10 "A great multitude..." - similar to the crowd on the road from Bethany to Jerusalem where the crowds cried out, "Hosanna!", meaning 'save now!' Who are these? cf. v. 14. They are NOT the Church:

1. They came out of the Great Tribulation (martyrs);
2. John didn't recognize them as the Church, a group of which he was a part; couldn't be OT saints because he would have recognized at least Moses and Elijah, as he had seen them at the Mount of Transfiguration.

v. 11 "Elders" – cf. 4:4 (24 in number: OT and NT believers). **"Four living creatures"** (ζωον) we've previously identified as the angelic order of *seraphim* (4:6; cf. Isa. 6:2-6 they have 6 wings; Ezek. 1:6-10; 10:1-22 describes *cherubim*: 4 wings, wheels; multi-sided faces).

vv. 13-17 This group is **before** (in front of) the throne of God as servants; the Church is in the exalted position of the Bride, **at His side!** The Church was told that they would rule and reign with Him, not function as servants: our servanthood was completed on earth...

- To Thyatira: *"to him who overcomes...I will give authority over the nations."*
- To Laodicea: *"to him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne."*
- This group had also known hunger, thirst and heat in the Great Tribulation; they now find peace and rest, as the Church had in 4:1-6.

v. 14 "The Great Tribulation" – 2 methods of interpretation we need to be careful of:

- the preterist view says all this has been historically fulfilled...but when in history has ¼ of the earth's population been decimated by war, famine, plague and the wild beasts of the earth (Rev. 6:8)? In Rev. 8-9 the Trumpet judgments devour 1/3 of the remaining Tribulation survivors, also not historically fulfilled. Never has the earth (until the 1960's) seen a 200 million-man army (Rev. 9:16). Strict preterists will be forced to adopt the allegorical method of interpretation as more of the biblical record is found NOT to have been historically fulfilled (if taken literally).
- The symbolic or allegorical method of interpretation is to say "nothing means what it says, or says what it means." However, the majority of Revelation's text appears very literal and matter-of-fact. To say it is all symbolic language is a convenient excuse that arbitrarily decides who, when, what and where is "symbolic" or literal and is often without biblical precedent.
- The best method of biblical interpretation is the literal grammatico-historical method; "if the plain sense of the passage makes sense, seek no other sense." Though some passages of the Bible are symbolic, we must avoid the temptation to say ALL is, or even all prophetic scripture is...

v. 15 "Temple" – all 16 references to the Temple in Revelation use the word that designates the inner shrine (Greek: *naos*) rather than the larger outer courtyards and precincts. This is the place where God's Presence dwells!

v. 16 Never again would they experience "**hunger... thirst, or scorching heat,**" with the implication that this was their experience of suffering on earth.

III. SUMMARY / application / response -- Revelation 7 tells 3 incredible stories:

1. One is about the ancient people of God, the Jews, who are given One Final Chance to obey/fulfill His purposes in and through them. The 144,000 sealed and empowered to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth (finally).

2. The 2nd amazing story in Rev. 7 concerns the converts of these 144,000 Jews, faithful through persecutions, famine, and martyrdom; from every ethnic group on earth. They inherit God's rich blessings in eternity.

3. The 3rd and perhaps most remarkable story here is of God's graciousness even in the midst of judgment! While punishing the world, He offers Jews and Gentiles alike yet another opportunity to be saved! Sermon title: "What's Your Identity?" YOU can decide YOUR identity right here today! The choice is yours! Heaven or Hell? Life or death? Do you want to go through the Great Tribulation . . . or not?