

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expositional Explanation of Revelation Chapter 7 – Part II

Dr. Paul Cannings
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A. General Background Information:

1. Like documents or merchandise sealed and stamped to guarantee their contents and prevent tampering, God's servants were to be marked off as his (cf. Is 44:5). God had previously protected his people in Goshen during the plagues (Ex 8:28; 9:4; 11:7; see comment on Rev 5:6); the idea of a protecting sign is also an Old Testament image (Gen 4:15; Is 66:19). Here it is taken directly from Ezekiel 9:4–6, where judgment could not begin until the foreheads of the righteous (those who mourned over the sin of their land) were marked. The forehead and the hand (Ex 13:9, 16; 28:38; Deut 6:8; 11:18) were the most natural and obvious parts of the body for this marking because they were most directly exposed to view.¹
2. Therefore, the sealing of the saints explains further how Christ will “keep them from the hour of trial” which is “to test the earth-dwellers” who have persecuted them (cf. 6:10; see on 3:10 and 7:14 for the Dan. 12:1 background concerning the tribulation). All these connections concern matters that precede the final judgment and reward, so ch. 7 must function as an interlude or parenthesis in its placement after ch. 6. Yet the chapter also has a future aspect, especially toward the end (vv 15–17). From this perspective the chapter is also an answer to the concluding question of 6:17, “who is able to stand” before God and not suffer the wrath of the last judgment? This is the definitive answer to 6:17 and the main point toward which the visionary narrative of 7:9ff. drives.²
3. In this respect the “great multitude ... standing before the throne” may be an explicit answer to the question of 6:17. This is so because (1) 6:17 and 7:9 are close to each other and both use ἵστημι (“stand”); (2) both refer to people standing before the throne and the Lamb; (3) the picture of the Lamb “standing” before the throne in 5:6 is closely associated with his resurrection existence, suggesting that those “standing” before the throne in 7:9 (who are called “sheep” in 7:17) are the resurrected saints; and (4) that the saints are said to stand “on the sea of glass” close to a later mention of the “Lamb” (15:2–3) also reflects the Lamb's resurrection existence from 5:6. ἵστημι (“stand”) could refer to resurrection elsewhere with regard to Christ (10:5, 8; 14:1), saints (11:11), and all of humanity (20:12).³

¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:3). InterVarsity Press.

² Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 405). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

³ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 405). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

B. Key Words and Apocalyptic Definitions:

1. “Four angels standing..”

- a) “The four winds of the earth” that the angels hold back are best identified as the four horsemen of 6:1–8, which were clearly modeled on the horsemen of Zech. 6:1–8, which are also identified as “the four winds of heaven” (Zech. 6:5; for this phrase in Ezek. 37:9; Dan. 7:2; and Zech. 2:6 in relation to Zech. 6:5 see above on Rev. 6:8).⁴
- b) This identification becomes clearer from understanding that the sealing of believers in vv 3–8 explains how they can be protected spiritually from the woes of the four horsemen, which they must endure.⁵
- c) The angels must restrain the four winds so that they will not “blow on” and “harm neither earth nor sea nor trees” (vv 2–3). They thus prevent the horsemen from wreaking the havoc described in 6:1–8, which is likewise to be identified with the woes affecting the earth, sea, and trees in 8:7–8 (which recapitulate some of the woes of the first four seals [see on 8:7–8]).⁶
- d) The introductory ΜΕΤÀ ΤΟῦΤΟ (“after this”) does not mean that the events of 7:1–8 are chronologically subsequent to those of ch. 6 but only that this vision appeared to John after the vision in ch. 6 (see further on 4:1). He sees first “four angels.” That they are “standing on the four corners of the earth” refers to their sovereignty over the whole world (so Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2; Rev. 20:8; cf. 2 Bar. 6:4–7:2; Test. Asher 7:1–7; Greek Apocalypse of Ezra 3:6; cf. also 3 En. 48A:10).⁷

2. “Four corners” of the earth:

- a) The latter are “hurtful winds” that “bring destruction on all the earth and the water on it, on all who dwell thereon, and on everything that is in the water and on the land” (76:4; see similarly *1 En.* 34–35). This destruction, as in Rev. 7:2–3, 15–17; 8:7–9:21, etc., includes “drought,” “heat,” “locusts,” “burning,” and “plagues” (*1 En.* 76:5–14). Cf. likewise *Pseudo-Revelation of John* 15 (The Ante-Nicene Fathers VIII, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson [reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 582–86). Note the association of “the quarters of the winds” with “the spirits of the winds,” who are angelic beings, in *1 En.* 69:22. For “winds” in general as agents of divine

⁴ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 406). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁵ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 406). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁶ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 407). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁷ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 406). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

judgment elsewhere in the OT cf. Pss. 18:10; 104:3–4; Isa. 19:1; 66:15; Jer. 4:11–12; 23:19; 51:1; Hos. 13:15–16; *Jub.* 2:2.⁸

3. “Four winds of the earth”

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4. The angel with the seal:

- a) Both 12:5 and John 20:17 feature Jesus’ ascension from the land of Israel, and he has already been portrayed as an angel in the sense of a human messenger (1:1) and will yet be portrayed as such (see especially chapter 10). So the recent depiction of Jesus as a lamb has changed. He now appears as the “angel ascending from the rising of the sun” who “shouted in a loud voice” to be heard by the angels standing far away at the four corners of the earth.¹⁰
5. “Seal” refers to the impress of a signet ring; an official who wished to delegate his authority for a task to a representative would allow that subordinate to use his signet ring.¹¹
- a) This seal will protect these chosen Jews from the judgments that will “hurt the earth and the sea” (Rev. 7:2), and occur when the first four angels blow their trumpets (Rev. 8). The judgments are intensified when the horrible locusts are released from the pit (Rev. 9:1–4). Protected from these awesome judgments, the 144,000 will be able to do their work and glorify the Lord.¹²
- b) **The seal as it relates to their ‘foreheads’:**
- Sealing them means marking them as his property so as to protect them from the winds of his and the lamb’s wrath (see Ezekiel 9:1–11 for background, and John 6:37, 39; 10:4, 12, 14, 16, 26–30; 17:2, 6, 9–10, 24 for Christians as the property of Jesus and his Father). “On their foreheads” makes the mark a brand (figuratively speaking) so easily visible that there’s no chance of the four angels’ mistakenly allowing divine wrath to blow against a slave of God (see 14:1; 22:3–4 for the mark

⁸ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 407). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

⁹ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 407). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

¹⁰ Gundry, R. H. (2010). *Commentary on Revelation* (Re 7:2–3). Baker Academic.

¹¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:2). InterVarsity Press.

¹² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 590). Victor Books.

as the names of the lamb and of God his Father, and 13:16–18; 14:9; 16:2; 20:4 for the contrastive mark of the beast, consisting in either his name or his number [666]).¹³

- Inclusion of the sea along with the earth and its trees means that not even unbelievers on the high sea will escape the winds' destructive force. On the other hand, John's description of the seal as "of the living God" not only strikes a contrast with lifeless idols (for which see 9:20) but also implies that God imparts his own life to his sealed slaves, so that they'll not suffer the second death under his and the lamb's wrath (compare 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).¹⁴

6. 144,000:

- a) The question was raised in 6:17 whether any would be saved in the Tribulation. This is answered in this chapter, and two classes of the saved are mentioned specifically: (1) those who are saved in Israel, (2) those of all nations who, though saved spiritually, are martyred. **Four angels** were told to withhold judgment on **the earth** until the **servants of ... God** were sealed (v. 3). The seal on their foreheads symbolizes protection and ownership and God's intention to protect the 12 tribes that are mentioned, much as He protected Noah from the Flood, Israel from the plagues of Egypt, and Rahab and her household in Jericho.¹⁵
- b) Attempts have been made to identify the 12 tribes here with the church, mostly to avoid the implication that this is literally **Israel**. The fact that specific tribes were mentioned and specific numbers from each tribe were indicated would seem to remove this from the symbolic and to justify literal interpretation. If God intended these verses to represent Israel literally, He would have used this means. Nowhere else in the Bible do a dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the church. Obviously Israel will be in the Tribulation, and though men do not know the identification of each tribe today, certainly God knows.¹⁶
- c) The normal Jewish understanding was that the twelve tribes would inherit the land together (Ezek 48). Yet by counting Joseph and Manasseh (the tribe of Joseph was usually broken down into two tribes, represented by his sons Manasseh and Ephraim) without omitting Levi, Revelation has to omit one of the tribes, and omits Dan, the first in Ezekiel's list (48:1), in order to maintain the number twelve. (Jewish commentators as early as the second century associated Dan with idolatry, but no emphasis on that special association can be documented this early. Dan's sins [Judg 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29; Amos 8:14; cf. Jubilees 44:28–29] are not the only ones mentioned in the Old Testament, and the association with the serpent [Gen 49:16–17] is too remote here.) This omission may underline the symbolic nature of

¹³ Gundry, R. H. (2010). *Commentary on Revelation* (Re 7:2–3). Baker Academic.

¹⁴ Gundry, R. H. (2010). *Commentary on Revelation* (Re 7:2–3). Baker Academic.

¹⁵ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). *Revelation*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 949). Victor Books.

¹⁶ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). *Revelation*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 949). Victor Books.

John's point in the whole passage; one tribe may be omitted to indicate the danger of apostasy even among the people of God (cf. Jn 6:70; 1 Jn). The sequence of tribes itself is probably not significant—it varied considerably in the Old Testament.¹⁷

7. White Robes:

- a) White robes were appropriate for worship in the temple and were also used for the worship of gods in Asia Minor. Palm branches were especially used in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. In the future, the remnant of all nations would go up to Jerusalem to worship at the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16); as in apocalyptic texts, the earthly future realm is in some sense presently fulfilled in heaven.¹⁸
- b) Special emphasis is given the robes in their being mentioned three times (9, 13, 14). The color reflects how God views them, as righteous, holy and fitting to be in His presence. This is true from the standpoint of the merit they have through Christ's blood (7:14; cf. 1:5). It is also appropriate in view of their manifestation of a holy life as in 3:4–5, and this through grace God has given (19:8).¹⁹

8. Palm branches:

- a) The palm tree is indigenous to the warm Mediterranean climate, and to the ancient Greeks and Romans the palm served as a symbol of victory. The Greek author, Pausanias, provides the background: "But at most games they use a wreath of palm, and everywhere the winner has a palm branch put in his right hand. The reason for the tradition is this: they say when Theseus came home from Crete he held games at Delos for Apollo, and crowned the winners with palm." In the third century B.C., the Romans began to award palm branches to the winners at the games, a custom taken over from the Greeks. Palm branches are depicted on many coin types from Asia, and a particular favorite was a standing Nike with a wreath and palm. The palm branch also became a symbol of victory for the Jews.²⁰
- b) Palm branches celebrated the victory of Israel's exodus from Egypt, and the feast commemorated God's faithfulness to them during their wanderings in the wilderness, when they were totally dependent on him.²¹
- c) Palm branches were used on occasions of festivity (Leviticus 23:40, Nehemiah 8:15). They were regarded as tokens of joy and triumph. Kings and conquerors were welcomed by having palm branches strewn before them and waved in the air. Thus they were waved before the Messiah on the occasion of His entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13). Conquerors in Grecian games returned to their homes triumphantly

¹⁷ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:5–8). InterVarsity Press.

¹⁸ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:9–12). InterVarsity Press.

¹⁹ Rosscup, J. E. (2008). *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God* (p. 2757). Lexham Press.

²⁰ Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*. (Vol. 4, p. 296). Zondervan.

²¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 7:9–12). InterVarsity Press.

waving palm branches in their hands. Thus in the New Jerusalem, John sees the triumphant followers of the Messiah with “palm branches in their hands.”²²

9. The Great Tribulation:

- a) “THE great tribulation”; “the tribulation, the great one,” namely, the tribulation to which the martyrs were exposed under the fifth seal, the same which Christ foretells as about to precede His coming (Mt 24:21, *great tribulation*), and followed by the same signs as the sixth seal (Mt 24:29, 30), compare Da 12:1; including also retrospectively all the tribulation which the saints of all ages have had to pass through. Thus this seventh chapter is a recapitulation of the vision of the six seals, Rev 6:1–17, to fill up the outline there given in that part of it which affects the faithful of that day. There, however, their number was waiting to be completed, but here it is completed, and they are seen taken out of the earth before the judgments on the Anti-Christian apostasy; with their Lord, they, and all His faithful witnesses and disciples of past ages, wait for His coming and their coming to be glorified and reign together with Him. Meanwhile, in contrast with their previous sufferings, they are exempt from the hunger, thirst, and scorching heats of their life on earth (Rev 7:16), and are fed and refreshed by the Lamb of God Himself (Rev 7:17); an earnest of their future perfect blessedness in both body and soul united (Rev 21:4–6; 22:1–5).²³

C. Meaning of Verses 11-15:

The introductory ΜΕΤÀ ΤΟῦΤΟ (“after this”) does not mean that the events of 7:1–8 are chronologically subsequent to those of ch. 6 but only that this vision appeared to John after the vision in ch. 6 (see further on 4:1). He sees first “four angels.” That they are “standing on the four corners of the earth” refers to their sovereignty over the *whole world* (so Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2; Rev. 20:8; cf. 2 Bar. 6:4–7:2; Test. Asher 7:1–7; Greek Apocalypse of Ezra 3:6; cf. also 3 En. 48A:10). That “four winds” refers figuratively to the entire known world is clear from the use of the same phrase in Jer. 49:36; Dan. 8:8; 11:4; 1 En. 18:2; 4 Ezra 13:5; Matt. 24:31; and Mark 13:27; Targ. Isa. 11:12 renders the MT’s “four corners of the earth” as “four winds of the earth.”²⁴

Rev. 7:1–8 explains how believers are sealed so that they can persevere through the first four tribulations enumerated in ch. 6. The vision in 7:9–17 reveals the heavenly reward for those who do persevere. It amplifies the brief picture of the saints in 6:9–11, who have finally entered into God’s presence, after having successfully completed their course of suffering (see esp. 7:13–15). 7:9–17 also describes the kind of rest that the exalted saints were told to enjoy (6:11)

²² Freeman, J. M., & Chadwick, H. J. (1998). *Manners & customs of the Bible* (pp. 551–552). Bridge-Logos Publishers.

²³ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 570). Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²⁴ Beale, G. K. (1999). *The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 406). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

“until the number of their fellow servants” who must endure yet further sufferings “should be completed.” This section also expands on when and how God will begin to vindicate Christians from the wrong verdict rendered against them by the world, a theme likewise introduced in 6:9–11. Saints who suffer in the tribulation are encouraged to persevere as they reflect on the divine protection they have through God’s sealing of them and as they recall the promise of their future heavenly reward.²⁵

The purpose of the seal is to identify God’s people so that the wrath of God will not affect them. Satan’s seal identifies his people, who are the object of God’s wrath. In Revelation “tribulation” (i.e. *thlipsis*) is always unbelievers persecuting believers, while wrath/anger (i.e. *orge* or *thumos*) is always God’s judgment on unbelievers so that they might repent and turn to faith in Christ. This positive purpose of judgment can be seen in Deut. 27–28.²⁶

They utter “Amen” both at the outset and at the end. This conveys the same idea as John’s “Amen” in 1:7, and that of the four creatures in 5:14. It voices support and confirming concord with the salvation God has effected, and the aroused tribute the human multitude has expressed. As if to say, “That is our sentiment exactly,” they are exclaiming with all their beings, “Let it be so” that God receive praise.²⁷

²⁵ Beale, G. K. (1999). [The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text](#) (pp. 404–405). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

²⁶ Utley, R. J. (2001). [Hope in Hard Times - The Final Curtain: Revelation: Vol. Volume 12](#) (p. 64). Bible Lessons International.

²⁷ Rosscup, J. E. (2008). [An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God](#) (p. 2760). Lexham Press.