

## THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE VICTOR

A Great Multitude

Revelation 7

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*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev. 7, ESV).*

Today we are going to look at Revelation chapter 7. But I want to start by reminding you about how the sixth chapter ended. Do you remember the rhetorical question that hung in the air?

Here's the question: "Who can stand?" It was the culmination of the effects of opening the seals of judgment as pictured in the four horsemen of the Apocalypse: false messiahs, war, famine, and death. The rhetorical question is asked after the kings, the great ones, the generals, the rich, the powerful—everyone slave and free—are running for their lives.

The Message says it like this: “They hid in mountain caves and rocky dens, calling out to mountains and rocks, ‘Refuge! Hide us from the One Seated on the Throne and the wrath of the Lamb! The great Day of their wrath has come—who can stand it?’”<sup>1</sup>

The answer to the rhetorical question is no one. The point of Revelation 6 is the overwhelming judgment of God. It’s designed to make you tremble. What you read should create some emotions in you. Revelation shouldn’t be read from an emotional distance. You can expect to feel some unique emotions or even physical reactions as you read this book. Traumatic events should have that effect, right?

I was watching a documentary on the 2015 earthquake in Nepal and the story of hikers who were halfway up Mt. Everest when it struck. As I connected with the story and watched an avalanche on a GoPro camera, I had to remind myself to breathe. The story caused me to hold my breath. You might find Revelation doing the same thing.

Who can stand? That’s an important question. How do Christians process that question? It’s a question that surfaces when we really reckon with the effects of sin in the world. You could ask it this way: “If this is what happens to the world, how are Christians going to make it?” Revelation asks that question at a macrolevel, but I’m sure you’ve asked it at a personal level. If you’ve lived long enough, you’ve surely said, “I don’t know how we’re going to make it.” “I’m not sure if I can live like this.” “I don’t know what’s going to happen, and I’m really scared.”

All of these questions and concerns are why Revelation 7 is in the Bible. This particular chapter is designed to encourage believers that **God protects his people**. Let’s explore this hopeful section in Revelation.

### 1. Divine Protection (vv. 1-8)

In verses 1-8 we find what you might consider an interlude. This is the next vision John sees, which is why he says, “after this I saw. . .” However, one of the many challenges with interpreting Revelation as apocalyptic literature is not always thinking in chronological order. This is the next vision, but it goes back to the previous one with the judgments.

You might think of this as looking at the same event but from a different angle. These verses are designed to focus our attention on God’s protection of his people as these judgments are unleashed. We see that while everything is falling apart, God still has a plan to take care of his people and lead them safely home.

Verse 1 highlights four angels, four corners of the earth, and four winds of the earth. These angels are standing at the four corners of the earth, which is meant to communicate that they are providing ruling authority over the entire created order. They are holding back the four winds “that no wind might blow

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, [\*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language\*](#) (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Re 6:15–17.

on earth or sea or against any tree” (v. 1b). These are not soft, gentle breezes. These are the winds of destruction. The angels are holding back judgment.

Last week I mentioned the connection between Revelation 6 and Matthew 24. Well, there appears to be another connection here between Revelation 7 and Zechariah 6.

*Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” And the angel answered and said to me, “These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth” (Zech. 6:1-5).*

This is important because it would seem that there are many Old Testament prophetic parallels in Revelation. These must have been important to John and his readers. John’s vision is connected to the Old Testament while helping us understand the message about the future.

Verse 2 presents us with another angel. His location and what he possesses are highlighted. He ascends in the east perhaps indicating something new—like the dawning of a new day. But notice what he possesses. He has “the seal of the living God,” an important image. The mighty angel has the royal ring which meant ownership, protection, and privilege in the ancient world.<sup>2</sup> This particular seal is designed to be a mark of protection for God’s people with the coming judgment. Verse 3 makes that clear: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads.”

The idea of sealing God’s people as judgment looms is yet another familiar Old Testament concept. The most obvious is probably the marking of the door posts with the blood of the Passover Lamb. But even more specifically, Ezekiel 9 records the marking of God’s people on their foreheads:

*Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist. And the LORD said to him, “Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.” (Ezek. 9:3-4).*

So, the idea of divine protection isn’t new. It’s woven throughout the Bible in a variety of ways. The point is simple and important: God protects his people. What’s more, his protection often looks like helping them to endure through suffering, but not always delivering them from suffering.

What happens next is fascinating, complicated, and debatable. Verse 4 tells us that John hears the number of those who are sealed: 144,000. There are some people who take this number literally, and

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<sup>2</sup> Grant R. Osborne, [Revelation](#), Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 307.

since it is connected to the tribes of Israel, they see this as the number of national Israelites who are followers of Jesus.

Others take this number to be more figurative, symbolizing perfection. They might point to the fact that the list of tribes is intriguing because it starts with Judah, replaces Ephraim with Joseph, and doesn't include Dan. If we look to Revelation 21, we'll find that new Jerusalem has twelve gates inscribed with the twelve tribes and the whole city is built on twelve foundations which are inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:9-14). What's more, the measurements of New Jerusalem are 12,000 stadia wide and 12,000 stadia long (Rev. 9:16).

Another view is that this collection of 12,000 could be seen as a collection of forces arrayed for battle. But they wage their war differently. Like their Savior and King, this army is ready to give their lives and to worship their way to victory.

Regardless of who the 144,000 are in your view of eschatology, this overall spiritual point still stands. Namely, that God protects his people. He always has. His deliverance looks like helping them in their struggle with the promised assurance of both his presence and their identity in relationship with him. God doesn't promise his people the complete absence of suffering, but he does promise them that their hardship will not change their identity. He does not promise that the road ahead will be easy, but he does promise us that evil will never separate us from his love. Eugene Peterson says, "We are protected from God-separating effects of evil even as we experience the suffering caused by evil."<sup>3</sup>

Christian, this is how God works—at the end, at the beginning, and even now!

With that in mind, just consider how the apostle Paul talks about salvation in light of the Holy Spirit:

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:13-14).*

And how he talks about assurance in Romans 8.

*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom. 8:33-37).*

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, (New York: Harper One, 1988), 83.

What a promise! What an assurance! But sadly, it only applies to those who are his. Nancy Guthrie believes that Dan and Ephraim aren't listed because of their unrepentant idolatry. They were Jewish, but they weren't part of God's people. And she suggests that:

"John is demonstrating that not everyone who is part of the visible church on earth will prove to have received the mark of God that is given to all who embrace his covenant from the heart. It was true in the days of ancient Israel. It was true in Jesus' day, as we know that one of the twelve, Judas, was really a pretender. It was true in the first century. . .and it is true today."<sup>4</sup>

Oh, be careful that you're not a pretender. God is the protector of *his* people.

## 2. Sustained Worship (vv. 9-17)

Do you remember that the book of Revelation is about the revelation of Jesus Christ? The exaltation of Jesus is central to the book, and worship is an essential part of this book. It's everywhere! Remember in Revelation 6 how worship exploded from the throne? Well, we see it again in chapter 7.

In verse 9 John moves from merely hearing about the 144,000. Now he sees a multitude. The text is clear about two things. First, this was an innumerable number of people. Before it was 144,000. Now it's impossible to number. Secondly, this group is global in its composition—every nation, tribe, people, and language. This is the same kind of description that we saw in chapter 5.

This vast assembly all have white robes and palm branches. We saw these robes in chapter 6, symbolizing purity and reward. The palm branches harken back to the Triumphal Entry of Jesus or the Feast of Booths where the people of Israel celebrated God's provision while they were in the wilderness.

Notice what they say:

*"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* (Rev. 7:10).

Don't miss the focal point here! Their divine protection leaves them stunned with gratitude for God's graciousness. James Hamilton says,

"They do not credit themselves for overcoming. God sealed them. They state plainly that salvation belongs to God. This means that their salvation is not due to the right choices they made, the virtue of their character, the superiority of their wisdom, or the strength of their will. Salvation belongs to God. God saved them. So they praise God."<sup>5</sup>

And, once again, we see this praise of God and the Lamb echoed throughout the throne room. The angels, elders, and living creatures fell on their faces and worshipped (v. 11). And they returned to the string of praises that we heard in chapter 5: "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 117.

<sup>5</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., [\*Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches\*](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 193.

and power and might be to our God forever and ever” (7:12). This is incredible worship. It’s massive in scope. It’s loud and overwhelming. And it’s repeated.

In our human experience, repetition can make something feel less significant. Instant replay allows you to see a play happen over. But how many times until you are tired of it? Consider a good movie. How many times can you watch it without an internal eyeroll? As you get older, you can even have the mindset that very little captivates you. “Seen one, you’ve seen them all,” you might say. Not so with children. They are constantly saying, “Do it again!” Their enthusiasm and joy are not tainted with comparison, disappointment, or cynicism.

That’s what’s happening here. It’s pure, unadulterated delight! There’s nothing forced about the worship. No one needs to provide instruction and training in adoration. It’s spontaneous because it’s obviously deserved. This is worship that happens because it is so fitting.

Something interesting happens in verses 13-14. John and one of the elders have a conversation while all of this is happening. The elder asks John who the white-robed people are, and John replies that he knows who they are. The elder identifies them as those who have come out of the great tribulation and whose robes are made white by the blood of the Lamb (v. 14). Some people see this as those who suffered in the great seven-year tribulation, and others see this as a more general description of all Christians.

The point here is that this massive group of redeemed people are worshipping before the throne of God. But the elder isn’t done. Notice the quotation marks for verses 15-17! It seems that he breaks into some kind of hymn that rehearses the promises of God to his people:

- God and his people are together
- God shelters his people with his presence
- All the needs of God’s people are satisfied
- The Lamb is their shepherd
- They will have ongoing provision
- God will remove everything sad and painful

That’s quite a list, and isn’t it remarkable that it’s a song? This is where the protection of God is meant to lead. God seals us so that we can worship. This will be our experience in the age to come. But could I suggest something more?

Christian, think of worship as a way to fight your battles now. The worship that we see in Revelation 7 isn’t a temporary service. It’s not eighty minutes out of your week. It’s not something that you “go to.” This kind of worship is what is real, true, and right. When we gather on Sundays, we don’t head back into the real world. Sundays are the real world! We’re just not fully there yet.

During World War II after the evacuation at Dunkirk and as the looming threat of a German invasion seemed to grow, Winston Churchill addressed the world with these famous and courageous words:

“We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”<sup>6</sup>

I was thinking of this speech when I read these words from Eugene Peterson:

“These people are not only secure, they are exuberant. . .the most frightening representations of evil (Rev. 6) are set alongside extravagant praise (Rev. 7). Christians sing. They sing in the desert, they sing in the night, they sing in prison, they sing in the storm. How they sing!. . .Any evil, no matter how fearsome, is exposed as weak. . .before such songs.”<sup>7</sup>

God protects his people.

God protects his singing saints.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/winston-churchills-historic-fight-them-beaches-speech-wasnt-heard-public-until-after-wwii-180967278/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CWe%20shall%20fight%20in%20France,in%20the%20streets%2C%20we%20shall>

<sup>7</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination*, (New York: Harper One, 1988), 84.