

Suburban Bethlehem Lutheran Church & School
Revelation Bible Study
Chapter 7
Part 1

Introduction (1:1 - 3:22)

(Including Seven Letters to the Seven Churches - preparation / call for repentance)

The Inaugural Vision of Heaven, Introducing the Message (4:1 - 5:14)

The Prophecy (6:1 - 16:21)

1. First Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End - Seven Seals (6:1 - 8:5)
 - a. The first six seals: tribulations and the end (6:1-17)
 - b. Interlude: The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant (7:1-17)
 - c. The seventh seal introduces the second sevenfold vision (8:1-5)
2. Second Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End - Disorders in nature accompanied by sufferings of evil afflict humanity - Seven Trumpets (8:6 - 11:19)
3. Interlude - The Cosmic War between Christ and Satan, between God's saints and the forces of evil (12:1 - 14:20)
4. Third Sevenfold Vision of History from the Cross to the End: Plagues of God's Wrath as God's Judgment is poured out on the human race (15:1 - 16:21)

The Conclusion: The End and the New Heaven and New Earth (17:1 - 22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-21)

Some Preliminary Thoughts on Chapter 7

1. This chapter is an "interlude" between the 6th and 7th seal of the first sevenfold vision of history from the cross to the end. In this chapter there are two scenes:
 - a. The 144,000 are sealed (church militant?)
 - b. John sees the glorious picture of the saints before God's throne in heaven. (church triumphant?)
2. This chapter is especially comforting to John - just take a look at what has previously been said.
3. Before the coming challenges the church on earth (church militant) will undergo, she is "sealed" by God's protection. The church militant will suffer and die in the Lord's mission, but she will not lose faith, for her God will defend her in that faith.
4. Revelation 7 is closely connected with the theology of the millennium. While the "millennium" will exclusively come up in Revelation 20, how one views the millennium influences how one views the 144,000 in Revelation 7. This influence is due to the fact that how one understands the meaning of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20 will impact what we are to make out of the "144,000" in Revelation 7. Therefore, we need to do a little introduction to the various views of the millennium.
5. There are basically four ways of understanding the millennium of Revelation 20:
 - a. Dispensational Premillennialism
 - b. Historic Premillennialism
 - c. Postmillennialism
 - d. Amillennialism

[The following is a condensation of pages 3-8 of the report on "Eschatology" (study of the end times) issued by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in 1989. The full text is available online at

<http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/endtme-2.pdf> A reminder that you can find this study guide electronically...and follow the link...on the church's website - navigate under "Ministries" to "Bible Studies" to the download page for the Revelation study]

- First View: Dispensational Premillennialism
 - o Various "dispensations" of God's revelation throughout history. According to dispensationalists we are in the 6th of 7 "dispensations."
 - o The Old Testament, it is said, promises to the Jewish people an earthly kingdom ruled by the Messiah. When Christ came, He offered this kingdom to the Jews. The Jews at that time, however, rejected Him and the kingdom. This kingdom, then, was postponed until some point in the future. In the meantime, Christ introduced the "mystery form" of the kingdom (Matthew 13) and established the church. This "parenthesis" of God's program will end at the "rapture" when all believers, exclusive of Old Testament saints, will go to heaven to celebrate with Christ "the marriage feast of the Lamb" for seven years. Then God's promised purpose for Israel resumes. During this seven-year period, a number of events will occur on earth (Revelation 6 -19):
 - 1. The "tribulation" begins, the latter half of which is called the "great tribulation."
 - 2. The Antichrist begins his cruel reign and in the midst of the seven years he proscribes Jewish worship at the temple.
 - 3. Terrible judgments fall on the earth.
 - 4. A remnant of Israel (the 144,000 of Revelation 7) believes in Jesus as the Messiah and preaches the "Gospel of the Kingdom."
 - 5. Through their witness a multitude of Gentiles is saved (Rev. 7:9).
 - 6. Toward the end, a number of military battles take place leading up to the Battle of Armageddon.
 - o At the end of this seven-year period, dispensationalists teach, Christ (together with the church) returns in glory and destroys His enemies. The vast majority of Israelites will be converted. Satan will be bound for 1000 years. Believers who die during the tribulation and Old Testament saints will be raised and join the church in heaven.
- Second View: Historic Premillennialism
 - o In contrast to dispensational premillennialism, those who hold the historic premillennialist view argue that Christ's second advent will be a one-stage event after the tribulation. Either at this time or before, the vast majority of Jews will be converted (reference the 144,000). Believers who have died will be raised, those alive will be transformed, and all believers will meet Christ in the air and then descend with Him to earth. Christ will then slay the Antichrist, bind Satan, and set up His millennial kingdom on earth. Christ and His redeemed, both Jews and Gentiles as one people of God, will reign visibly over the unbelieving nations still on earth. People in resurrected bodies and natural bodies will live together on the earth. Sin and death will still exist, but external evil will be restrained. The 1000 years of the millennial kingdom will be a time of social, political, and economic justice and great prosperity. After these 1000 years, Satan will be loosed in order to deceive the unbelieving nations into making a final assault against the redeemed. Satan will be destroyed, and the resurrection of the dead unbelievers will occur. Then will come the judgment of all, both believers and unbelievers, and eternity.

- Third View: Post Millennialism
 - o In contrast to the above, the less common postmillennial view places Christ's second advent after (post) the millennium. Only then will the rapture, the general resurrection, the general judgment, and the eternal states occur. The millennium is not understood to involve a visible reign of Christ in the form of an earthly monarchy, nor is the millennial period to be taken literally as necessarily 1000 years long. In these respects postmillennialism corresponds closely to the amillennialist position (see below). But the postmillennial view does posit a recognizable millennial period, a golden age of prosperity and peace among all at the end of which Christ will return. The millennium will arrive gradually under the increasing influence of Christianity, leading to the pervasive reduction of evil and to greatly improved conditions in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres. In fact, the entire world will eventually be Christianized to the point that the Christian belief and value system will become the accepted norm for all nations. Matthew 28:18-20 will become a reality.
- Fourth View: Amillennialism
 - o An eschatology which does not teach a literal thousand-year earthly reign of Christ may be called "amillennialist". Although the detailed exegesis of the pertinent texts may vary somewhat among amillennialist Christians, those who adhere to this position agree that the "thousandyear" reference in Revelation 20 is a figurative expression for the present reign of Christ which began upon His ascension into heaven and will be fully manifested at His second coming. Christ's second coming will be one event at which time He will, in the words of Martin Luther, "raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life" (Explanation to Third Article of the Apostles' Creed). The eschatology presented in The Lutheran Confessions is clearly amillennialist (AC XVII).
- In the CTCR document there is also this key insight about how we connect the Old and New Testaments. This has direct bearing on how we understand the 144,000 of Revelation 7 (from page 12 of the CTCR document on Eschatology):
 - o These observations presuppose that since God is the one Author of all Scripture, an organic unity exists within and between the Old and New Testaments, both with respect to their content (the doctrine of the Gospel in all its articles) and their function of making people wise unto salvation. The hermeneutical principle that Scripture interprets Scripture necessarily presumes this unity. Thus, we may look to the New Testament to clarify what the persons, institutions, and events mentioned by the prophets typify. Hans LaRondelle, in *The Israel of God in Prophecy*, states the matter well:
 - The New Testament has been written as the ultimate norm for the fulfillment and interpretation of Israel's prophecies. A Christian would deny his Christian faith and Lord if he reads the Old Testament as a closed entity, as the full and final message of God for Jews irrespective of the cross and resurrection of Jesus, the Messiah, and apart from the New Testament explanation of the Hebrew writings.
 - o All of this is to say that the Scriptures themselves, and not twentieth century commentaries on current events, must provide the normative interpretation of Old Testament prophecy.

7:1) "Four corners"

- not a reference to a flat / square earth but all the regions of the earth.
- See Zechariah 6:1-8 - the four winds are identified with the four horsemen of Revelation 6. [A reminder that in the language of the Old Testament "spirit" and "wind" come from the same word. The NRSV and ESV translate "four spirits" of Zechariah 6:5 as "four winds."] The angels prevent the destruction of the four horsemen while the 144,000 are sealed.

7:2) The winds of eschatological wrath are restrained so that the work of sealing God's people may be accomplished

- See Ezekiel 43:1-4
- See Malachi 4:2

7:3) "servants of our God" - literally "slaves of our God"

- "Seal" - a signet ring.
- Signet rings were used by kings of the ancient world to authenticate documents and protect people in their service by marking them as their property. Here the "slaves of our God" are thus sealed so that they are marked - identified and signed with God's own signature - as God's personal property and under His authority, care, and protection.
- See 2 Timothy 2:19 - the Lord knows who are His. The Christian can be absolutely certain and sure of his/her salvation because it rests on the truth of God's Word.
- Consider the "means of grace." God's Holy Spirit uses various "means" ("instruments / elements / visible-tangible things") to communicate God's love and forgiveness to us.
- The close connection of "seal" and "forehead" and the later reference of the name of God upon the forehead (Revelation 14:1,3) can easily lead to the understanding of Baptism here in Revelation 7.

7:4-8) 144,000 from "all the tribes of Israel"

- It is not uncommon for NT authors to refer to the church of Jesus Christ - both Jews and Gentiles - in OT language:
 - o Jesus promised the disciples they would "sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28 and Luke 22:28-30).

- Paul says that the believers in Jesus, both Jew and Gentile, are the true Israel of God and the true sons of Abraham (Romans 4:1-12; 9:6-8; 11:11-27; Galatians 3:26-29).
 - James addresses his epistle to the "twelve tribes of the diaspora" (twelve tribes scattered among the nations] (James 1:1).
- In Christ is the new Israel of God.

144,000?

- Multiple of 12: 12 x 12,000
- It suggests that God's Israel, the church of Jesus Christ, as it advances to battle in the mission given it, is a perfect and complete arm, fully equipped and ready to do God's work.. This is a picture of the church militant throughout the entire period of the prophecy of Revelation and at any given moment in this time period.
- To the human eye the church is ugly and stained....ah, but in God's eyes the church is beautiful as the bride of Christ (see Ephesians 5:27)

List of Twelve Tribes

- Nowhere in OT does this exact list appear. Some possible conclusions:
 - Judah is mentioned first because from Judah would come the Messiah.
 - Dan and Ephraim are not mentioned because they were guilty of idolatry (Judges 17:1-13; 18:1-31)
 - Levi and Joseph take the place of Dan and Ephraim because of their continued faithfulness.
 - The list in Revelation 7 has been cleansed of any association of apostasy and idolatry - a list that emphasizes faithfulness to God.

What difference does this make for us today?

What can Revelation 7:1-8 tell us about living our faith in Jesus Christ in these early days of the 21st Century?

Reminder:

- 1) Email your questions to Pastor Bill: billm@deeplyrootedtogrow.org
- 2) You can access these study guides on the church website. Navigate under “Ministries” to “Bible Studies” to the download page for the Revelation study.