



The Book of Revelation

*“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ,
and He shall reign forever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)*

High Level Outline of the Book of Revelation

- Introduction (1:1-8)
- Jesus Among the Seven Churches (1:9-20)
- Letters to the Seven Churches: (Chapters 2-3)
- The Throne of God and the Lamb (Chapters 4-5)
- **Three** Sets of Divine Judgments (6:1-16:21)
 - **Seven Seals** (6:1-17; 8:1)
 - Interlude: Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8); and Great Multitude Before the Throne (7:9-17)
 - **Seven Trumpets** (8:2-11:19)
 - Interlude: Persecution, Deliverance and Judgment (Chapters 12–14)
 - **Seven Bowls** (Chapters 15–16)
- The Fall of Babylon (17:1-19:10)
- The Last Battle (19:11-20:15)
- The Marriage of Heaven and Earth (21:1-22:5)
- Epilogue (22:6-21)

Brief Review of the Seven Seals (Rev. 6:1–8:1)

- When we last looked at the book of Revelation, we looked at the first six (out of seven) “*seals*” described in Rev. 6:1-17.
- John (writing between A.D. 65 and A.D. 66) tells us that the judgments described in these “*seals*” are among the events that “*must soon take place*” (1:1) for “*the time is near*” (1:3).
- We also saw that the judgments described in these “*seals*”, appear to be the ***same events*** that Jesus described in Matthew 24:4-33 of the Olivet Discourse (given in A.D. 30) which he told his audience would:
 - Lead to the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem
 - Take place within “*this generation*” (within 40 years).

Comparison of The Seal Judgments and Olivet Discourse

The Six Seals of Revelation	The Olivet Discourse
Seal #1: War	<i>And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars (Mat 24:6)</i>
Seal #2: Violent Conflict, Loss of Peace	<i>nation will rise against nation (Mat 24:7)</i>
Seal #3: Famine	<i>there will be famines (Mat 24:7)</i>
Seal #4: Pestilence	<i>there will also be plagues, terrors (Luke 21:11)</i>
Seal #5: Persecution	<i>they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake (Mat 24:9)</i>
Seal #6: <i>I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth (Rev 6:12-13) everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and... calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from... the wrath of the Lamb” (Rev 6:15-16)</i>	<i>there will be... earthquakes in various places (Mat 24:7)</i> <i>there will be signs in sun and moon and stars (Luke 21:25)</i> <i>people fainting with fear... of what is coming on the world (Luke 21:26)</i>

Introduction To the Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- Revelation 7:1–17 forms a reassuring interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals.
- Chapter 6 ends with the terrifying question: “*The great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*” (Rev. 6:17).
- Chapter 7 **answers** this question: those whom God recognizes, seals, and preserves as **His own people** will be able to “*stand*” when the day of wrath has come.
- This passage therefore shifts attention temporarily **away** from the coming judgments that will “*soon*” be taking place, and gives the persecuted believers to whom John is writing a picture of God’s sovereignty and the plans that he has for **them** when this time arrives.

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

7:1 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. ² 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, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. (ESV)

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- We're told that John sees "*four angels*" at "*the four corners of the earth*," holding back the "*four winds*" (7:1).
- "*winds*" are often used in scripture to symbolize **judgment**:
 - *And I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven. And I will scatter them to all those winds... I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger, declares the LORD. I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them...* (Jer 49:36-37)
- The "*the earth or the sea or the trees*" are natural objects most obviously affected by powerful winds. The three together serve as apocalyptic imagery to picture widespread destruction.
- Given the **preceding context** (the judgments poured out in the six seals of chapter 6), I believe the "*wind*" here is an apocalyptic description of God's destructive judgment against Jerusalem in the events leading up to A.D. 70.
- "*earth*" can be translated "*land*." So, in this context, "*the four corners of the earth*" might be **better** translated "*the four corners of the land* [i.e., Israel]", as in Ezekiel 7:2 where that **exact same phrase** is used.

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- Another angel approaches “*from the rising of the sun* [i.e. the east],” carrying “*the seal of the living God*” (7:2).
- The east was associated with the rising sun, light, life, and hope.
- The four angels orchestrating the destruction (symbolized by the “*wind*”) are told by the angel carrying “*the seal of... God*” to put the destructive judgments on hold “*until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads*”.
- The sealing imagery comes from Ezekiel 9:4–6 which describes a vision of God’s judgment upon Jerusalem shortly before the city was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.
- Before the Lord brought judgment on Jerusalem, a mark was placed on those who grieved over its sins so that they would be distinguished from the wicked.
- The seal is not necessarily visible. It signifies God’s ownership, recognition, and protection: “*The Lord knows those who are his*” (2 Tim. 2:19)
- As a result of receiving this “*seal*” the righteous (who grieved over the sins of the city) were ***spared from the judgment*** that was poured out on the rest of the wicked men, women, and children in Jerusalem.
- Revelation uses the same picture before Jerusalem’s destruction by ***Rome***.

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- In the Olivet Discourse Jesus told believers in Judea to flee when they saw Jerusalem “*surrounded by [the Roman] armies*” (Luke 21:20–21 cf. Mat 24:15–20).
- Eusebius (A.D. 260–339), the early Christian historian records that Jerusalem's Christians, heeding this very warning, fled to the nearby city of Pella (60–70 miles northeast of Jerusalem) before the Jerusalem fell, escaping the catastrophe that claimed over a million Jewish lives.
- Given the preceding context, I believe the “sealing” described in Rev. 7:3 pictures God providential preservation of those who heeded Jesus’ warning.
- The passage specifically identifies those who are saved as Jews.
- They are “*sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel*” (Rev. 7:4).
- I believe “*144,000*” is a **symbolic** number of completeness. It combines twelve squared with one thousand: $12 \times 12 \times 1,000 = 144,000$.
- **Twelve** represents Israel’s tribes, while **one thousand** commonly symbolizes fullness.
- Thus, I don’t think this is an **exact head count**, but a **symbolic number** that represents the **complete number** of the Jewish believers that God intended to preserve.

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- They are Israel's faithful remnant.
- Throughout Scripture, God preserves a believing remnant within an apostate nation—for example, the 7,000 who had not worshiped Baal in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19:18).
- These Jewish Christians were the “*remnant according to the election of grace*” (Rom. 11:5).
- They were the true Jews within unbelieving Israel.
- Revelation distinguishes **faithful** Christians from those who “*say that they are Jews and are not*” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).
- True Jewishness is inward and spiritual, expressed through faith in Christ (Rom. 2:28–29).
- The Jerusalem church was Christianity's original Jewish center.
- Acts begins with thousands of Jews believing the Gospel in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 21:20).
- Preserving this church from Roman destruction protected the original nucleus from which the worldwide Christian movement grew.

The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

- The same 144,000 appear with the Lamb in Revelation 14:1–5 and are called “*firstfruits for God and to the Lamb*.”
- “*firstfruits*” belong at the **beginning** of the harvest, which best fits the first-century Jewish converts—not a Jewish group appearing at the end of history as the futurists would have us believe about this passage.
- The unusual tribal list given here reflects allegiance to Christ.
- “*Judah*” appears first because Jesus is the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5).
- Dan and Ephraim have been omitted. Perhaps this is because of the historical association of those tribes with idolatry.
- The “*144,000*” become the seed of the worldwide church.
- They are a relatively small but completely Jewish remnant that grows into the innumerable multitude that we will be looking at next in Revelation 7:9ff.
- Acts follows this **same trajectory**: the gospel begins in Jerusalem and spreads outward to “*the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

The Great Multitude Before the Throne (7:9-17)

7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

The Great Multitude Before the Throne (7:9-17)

7:13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ 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 spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NIV)

7:9 *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... (ESV)*

- John's introductory phrase "*After this*" marks a new vision.
- In this new vision, I believe John presents us with a **consequence** of God's protectively sealing the 144,000 (the seed of the new covenant church in the remnant of Israel, as represented by the mother church in Jerusalem).
- The consequence of God's protecting the 144,000 the Jewish-Christian "*firstfruits*" (Rev 14:4) in Jerusalem is that the gospel goes out from "*Jerusalem... to the end of the earth*" (Acts 1:8 cf. Mat 24:14,31)
- This results in a "*great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*" who enter into heavenly glory in the presence of God and the Lamb.

7:9 *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... (ESV)*

- In other words, the **first** part of Revelation (7:1-8) addresses the immediate danger facing the early church:
 - The 144,000 represent Jewish Christians.
 - They are living on earth, particularly in Judea and Jerusalem.
 - God seals and preserves them during the crisis surrounding Jerusalem's destruction in A.D. 70.
- Beginning here in verse 9, however, John sees a **different** scene.
- Here he sees "*a great multitude that no one could number*" standing before God's heavenly throne.
- Therefore, John is no longer simply watching Jewish Christians escape Jerusalem.
- Instead, he is being shown what the church will **ultimately** become.

7:9 *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... (ESV)*

- This vision therefore gives the first-century Christians a preview of the ***final outcome*** of their faithfulness.
- At that time, Christianity was small, persecuted, and closely connected with Jerusalem.
- Its future might have appeared uncertain.
- Between the destruction of Jerusalem and the persecution of Christians, it may have seemed like the early church was about to be wiped out.
- John's vision assures them that this will not happen!
- The Jewish-Christian remnant will survive.
- The gospel will spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).
- God will gather people "*from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*".
- Ultimately, all these redeemed people will stand together before God in heaven.

7:9 *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... (ESV)*

- This innumerable “*multitude*” fulfills the Abrahamic Covenant promises, where God promised offspring as numerous as “*sand that is on the seashore*” or “*the stars of heaven*”, expanded to include “*all the families of the earth*” (Gen 12:2–3; 15:5; 16:10; 17:4–6; 22:17; Rom 4:16–18).
- The “*white robes*” represent both righteousness (Rev 3:4; 19:14) and historical victory achieved through Christ (Rev 19:11).
- Their “*palm branches*” also signify victory, as in Christ’s triumphal entry (John 12:13), but particularly brings to mind the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34–43).
- That feast celebrated the completed harvest and prophetically pictured the Gentile nations coming to worship God (Zech. 14:16–19).

7:9 *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... (ESV)*

- The Feast of Tabernacles—also called the Feast of Booths or Feast of Ingathering—was celebrated after Israel’s crops had been gathered: *“You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.”* (Exodus 23:16).
- It reminded Israel of the temporary shelters in which they lived after leaving Egypt: *“I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt”* (Lev. 23:43).
- Palm and other leafy branches were used to construct the booths.
- Worshipers also carried and waved a bundle of branches traditionally called the *lulav*, in which *“palm branches”* were prominent.
- The branches therefore became symbols of rejoicing, deliverance, provision, and a completed harvest.

7:10 and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (ESV)

- The multitude loudly declares, *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*
- Their salvation is entirely God's work, accomplished through Christ.
- Placing the Lamb alongside God also demonstrates Christ's divine status.
- The cry may reflect Psalm 118:25 (*"Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!"*), which was sung during the Feast of Tabernacles while worshipers waved palm branches.
- The feast celebrated a completed harvest; here the international multitude celebrates the great harvest of salvation.
- Their praise also looks back to God's preservation of the Jerusalem church, whose survival allowed the gospel to continue spreading throughout the world.

7:11 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, ¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."(ESV)

- John observes the heavenly hierarchy encircling the throne:
 - “*angels*” on the outer ring
 - the twenty-four “*elders*”
 - “*the four living creatures*” closest to the center
- Their sevenfold praise – “*Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might*” – expresses the fullness of God’s worthiness (cf. Rev 5:12).
- The two “*Amens*” emphasize complete agreement with the multitude’s declaration.
- Heaven here acknowledges that God wisely and powerfully preserved the infant church, advanced the gospel, and gathered a redeemed people from every nation.

7:13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" (ESV)

- One of the elders asks John who the white-robed people are and where they came from.
- This is a teaching device rather than a request for information.
- We see a similar question asked of Ezekiel:
 - *The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."* (Ezek 37:1-3)
- The question directs attention to the identity of the multitude and prepares John to understand the meaning of their victory.

7:14 *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. (ESV)*

- John answers respectfully, *"Sir, you know."*
- The elder identifies the multitude as those *"coming out of the great tribulation."*
- *"the great tribulation"* refers to the unique first-century crisis surrounding Jerusalem's destruction.
- Jesus connected it with the temple's fall, Judea, and His own generation (Matt. 24:2, 16, 21, 34; compare Dan. 12:1; Mark 13:19, 30; Rev. 3:10).
- The first-century tribulation threatened the young Christian church as a whole.
- Jewish persecution, Roman hostility, and the Jewish War created a crisis through which Christianity had to survive.
- The Jewish believers represented by the 144,000 were preserved through that crisis.

7:14 *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. (ESV)*

- From this faithful first-century remnant came the worldwide church represented by the countless multitude.
- Therefore, the multitude are the ones “*coming out of*” the tribulation in the sense that the worldwide church emerged from the group that survived it.
- Later Christians did not **personally** endure the “*the great tribulation*” of A.D. 70, but they belong to the redeemed community that **grew out of** those events.
- Their robes became “*white*” through the Lamb’s “*blood*”.
- This paradoxical image (for blood actually stains garments rather than making them white) teaches that Christ’s sacrificial death cleanses sinners (Rev. 1:5; 5:9; compare Isa. 1:18).
- Their **suffering** did not earn their salvation; **Christ’s blood** secured it.

7:15 *"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. (ESV)*

- Because they have been cleansed, they stand before God's throne and serve Him *"day and night."*
- Christians once dragged before Jewish and Roman courts (Matt. 10:17–18; Mark 13:9) now stand accepted before God's heavenly throne.
- Their service is priestly and constant, since Christ has made His people priests (Rev. 1:6; 5:10).
- *"day and night"* means continually, not necessarily literal earthly time.
- The heavenly *"temple"* represents God's immediate presence, not a physical building (Rev. 21:22).
- God *"will shelter them"* signifies intimate fellowship and complete protection, fulfilling the promise of Ezekiel 37:27: *"My dwelling place shall be with them"* – God's redeemed people, gathered from every nation under the Davidic Messiah to enjoy His presence, protection, and fellowship.
- It also continues the Feast of Tabernacles imagery as it could literally be translated: *"[God] will spread His tabernacle over them."*

^{7:16} *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.* (ESV)

- They will never again experience “*hunger*”, “*thirst*”, “*sun*”, or “*scorching heat*”.
- This draws directly from Isaiah 49:10, originally a promise of Israel’s restoration after exile.
- John applies it to the final heavenly security of God’s people.
- The language is figurative: every need will be supplied, and every form of suffering will end.
- Those who endured deprivation and persecution during the great tribulation now enjoy perfect protection.

7:17 *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.*" (ESV)

- The Lamb at the center of God's throne becomes "*their shepherd*".
- This continues John's high view of Christ: the sacrificed Lamb shares God's throne and performs God's shepherding work.
- Jesus is the "*Good Shepherd*" (John 10:11), the "*great Shepherd*" (Heb. 13:20), and the "*Chief Shepherd*" (1 Pet. 5:4).
- He leads His people to "*springs of living water*," combining Isaiah 49:10 with Jesus' promises of living water (John 4:14; 7:38–39).
- Hunger, thirst, danger, and death have ended.
- Finally, God "*will wipe away every tear from their eyes*", fulfilling Isaiah 25:8.
- These are tears of relief after tribulation.
- The first-century crisis could not destroy Christ's church.
- It led ultimately to worldwide gospel victory and everlasting joy in God's presence.

Class Discussion Time

- As we have noted previously, how you understand a given passage in Revelation, depends in large part on your overall approach to the book.
- The four main ways of in which these 144,000 are identified:
 - **Futurist:** They are 144,000 ethnic Jews whom God will seal and protect during a future Great Tribulation, possibly to preach the gospel.
 - **Historicist:** The 144,000 symbolize true Christians preserved during major historical troubles, especially barbarian invasions after Constantine.
 - **Idealist:** They symbolize the whole church—God's true spiritual Israel—in every age. The sealing means that God knows and spiritually protects His people during judgment, although they may still suffer persecution.
 - **Preterist:** They are the complete number of first-century Jewish Christians who escaped Jerusalem before its destruction in A.D. 70.
- What I presented today was the Preterist view, which I have strong leanings towards because I think it makes the most sense.
- Which of these views do you lean towards and why?

Class Discussion Time

- The four main ways of in which the “great multitude” is identified:
 - **Futurist:** The multitude generally represents people saved during a future Great Tribulation—especially Gentiles converted through the 144,000—though futurists disagree about their identity and location.
 - **Idealist:** The multitude represents all believers throughout history, having passed through earthly suffering and now glorified, purified, and victorious in heaven
 - **Historicist:** The multitude represents the church—especially countless Gentile believers—shown victorious in heaven after enduring the church’s historical struggles.
 - **Preterist:** The multitude represents the vast Gentile church that emerged because of God’s providential preservation of the faithful believing Jews (represented by the 144,000), despite Jerusalem’s fall in A.D. 70.
- What I presented today was the Preterist view, which I have strong leanings towards because I think it makes the most sense.
- Which of these views do you lean towards and why?

Class Discussion Time

- When we examined a parallel passage (Ezekiel 9:4-6) when talking about the 144,000 who were “sealed”, we saw that the righteous who were protected by a seal in Ezekiel’s day were identified by the fact that they grieved (“*sigh and moan*”) over the sin that was taking place in the society around them.
- This reminded me of another passage where Peter describes Lot (who I never thought of as being all that righteous) as “*righteous Lot*” because he was “*greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that **righteous** man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his **righteous** soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard)*” (2Pet 2:7-8)
- We often think of righteousness as not personally **committing** sins.
- Have you ever thought about the fact that righteous people not only seek to **avoid committing** sin, but are **grieved** even when they see **others** sin? In other words, genuine grief over sin is, in itself, an act of righteousness.