



# The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

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## SESSION 6. WHO CAN STAND? PART II (7:1–17)

### I. Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Seal... a Pregnant Pause.

#### A. The six seals.

In chapter 6 the first six seals of the scroll in God's right hand were opened. As the destiny of the world unfolded one seal at a time, there was a growing crescendo of wrath, judgment and catastrophe on the earth:

1. The first four seals released the four horsemen of the apocalypse:
  - The white horse (6:1–2). The imperialistic **Antichrist**.
  - The red horse (6:3–4). **Militaristic** politics.
  - The black horse (6:5–6). Economic **injustice**.
  - The pale horse (6:7–8). **Death** and suffering.
2. The 5<sup>th</sup> seal (6:9–11). **Persecution** of Christians.
3. The 6<sup>th</sup> seal (6:12–17). **Cosmic** calamities and the wrath of the Lamb.

#### B. Before the 7<sup>th</sup> seal is opened (8:1), there is an interlude, a pregnant pause.

Remember that this book is written by a pastor concerned for his flock. The question that is begging to be answered is therefore this: what is going to happen to **Christians** during this coming period of wrath and judgment upon the earth?!

### II. Preparing for Tribulation (7:1–17).

Pastor John wants his congregation to **experience** two realities as they anticipate the horror about to be unleashed on the world: 1) The need to be **sealed** (7:1–8), and 2) the **hope** of a glorious future (7:9–17).

#### A. The sealing of the saints (7:1–8).

1. Four angels, four corners, and four winds (v. 1). The 4 destructive winds may be another way of describing the 4 horsemen. The angels are “holding back” the disastrous events about to be unleashed until something of great importance occurs.
2. Another angel explains the reason for the delay (vv. 2–3): “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”
  - God is apparently concerned about the **ecological well-being** of the planet (earth, sea and trees). The Bible has much to say about creation care.
  - As the scroll is **unsealed** the servants of God are **sealed**. The choice of wording cannot be accidental.
  - See part III for more discussion of this important matter.



3. The number of the sealed (vv. 4–8). The number 144,000 is a “suspiciously tidy sort of number that is much more likely to be a symbol than a statistic” (Wilcock, p. 80). The number is attained when 12, the number of tribes, is both squared and multiplied by a thousand, a twofold way of emphasizing **completeness** (Mounce, p. 158). Further underscoring the symbolic nature of the 144,000 number is:
  - The list of the 12 tribes (vv. 5–8) is somewhat irregular. Joseph and his son Manasseh are included but his son Ephraim is not. Dan is omitted entirely. Thus it seems the list is meant to indicate “**all Israel** will be saved” (Rom. 11:26). But be careful: defining “Israel” may be harder than you think!
  - In the rest of the passage the 144,000 seem to morph into the “great multitude that **no one could number**” (7:9).

*Conclusion:* People have debated the number of those who will be saved for centuries (see Luke 13:23). Though the question is important it is apparently something that God does not intend for us to know... or fret about! Rather, he wants us to simply rest in the fact that “**the Lord knows** those who are his” (II Tim. 2:19).

C. Salvation belongs to our God! (7:9–17).

It is difficult to determine whether this scene in heaven is in the future or whether it is going on right now. Perhaps the answer is both! God is eternal and not subject to time (an eternal **now**), so John’s description of heaven is something we are to simply embrace and experience. Earlier when John had looked into heaven, the focus of his attention was **the throne** and the Lamb (ch. 4–5). In this vision the throne and the Lamb are still center stage, but his focus is on **the multitude** around the throne.

1. Their *number*. The multitude was vast, innumerable (v. 9).
2. Their *origin*. Those around the throne came from every **ethnic group** on earth. These were not just Jews (the 12 tribes) but men and women from every nation, tribe, people, language (v. 9).
3. Their *dress*. John is struck by the **white robes** the redeemed are wearing.
  - In heaven we will not revert back to an Eden-like paradise where we need no clothing (Gen. 2:25). Even forgiven sin still has consequences. Though the death of the Lamb of God makes us pure, it does not make us **innocent**.
  - The whiteness of the robes is due to the fact that they have been washed (they were dirty once) in **blood** (v. 14)! It takes sanctified imagination to understand how red blood can make garments white. But the imagery points to Christ’s atoning work on the cross (**justification** by faith).
4. Their *journey*. When asked from where this multitude has come, John is told: “These are the ones coming (present tense) out of the (definite article) great tribulation” (v. 14). The Lamb suffered and those who follow him will likewise experience times of trial and tribulation. NOTE: God’s people are saved **through** tribulation, not **from** it!

5. Their *activity*.

- Perhaps most startling of all, these people were **standing** (v. 9. See 6:17) in the very presence of Almighty and thrice-holy God!
- They are **serving** God day and night (v. 15). The Greek word *latreuo* refers to works of various kinds that are done out of devotion to God.
- But primarily they are **worshipping** God... loudly, enthusiastically, with palm branches and songs of praise (vv. 9–12) Two songs are mentioned:

*Salvation belongs to our God  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb! (10).<sup>1</sup>*

*Amen<sup>2</sup>! Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever! Amen! (12).*

6. Their *blessed state*. Heaven is described as a place of **shelter** (v. 15) from the judgments and punishments ravaging the earth as the seals are being opened. The Lamb will **shepherd** his sheep (v. 17). Note the reversal of roles! But especially, heaven is described as a place where certain realities are absent: no hunger, no thirst, no scorching heat, no tears... no unmet desire, no danger.

D. Does being heavenly minded mean that we are of no earthly good?

Many pretend that Christians believe in **pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by** and thus have no concerns about life here below. But John believes just the opposite. It is the hope of heaven that enables his congregation to be of service here, now, in this world.

1. Only when we know the destination does our **journey** make sense!
2. Only when we know the destination do we have a real reason to take care of the **highway**! Christians care about Babylon and seek her well-being (Jer. 29:7). (Illustration: the road to nowhere).
3. Hope for tomorrow makes it possible to live in **victory** today.
4. We are saved **in hope**... and hope that is seen is not hope! (Rom. 8:18–25).

### III. The Sealing of the Saints.

To be able to “stand” when tribulation comes, we must first be sealed (7:1–4).

A. The *nature* of the sealing.

In the ancient world a seal was a mark or a visible sign that was placed on an object (letter, will, bill of sale, etc.) or a person (a servant or slave) to denote **ownership**. When it involved a person, the seal was often put on the **forehead** (Rev. 7:3; cf. 14:1) which meant it was sometimes more evident to others than to yourself! Satan loves to **counterfeit** God’s work. He too has a form of marking and sealing those who belong to him! (See Rev. 13:16–18). NOTE: Our eternal destiny will be determined by whose seal marks us; to whom do we belong?

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<sup>1</sup> This is a song that only the redeemed can sing! Because angels have not experienced redemption, they are not singing this hymn. But they will join wholeheartedly in the next song of worship ( vv. 11-12).

<sup>2</sup> Jesus often began his words with “Amen, Amen, I say unto you...” The word means to affirm that which is certain and reliable, that which can be trusted. Thus it can begin a prayer as well as end it!

- B. The *background* for understanding the sealing.
- Exodus 28:36–38. The gold plate on Aaron’s forehead: “**Holy to the Lord.**”
  - Ezekiel 9:1–6. Killer angels mark with a “taw” the foreheads of those who **grieve over Jerusalem**. These only will be spared. Begin at the sanctuary!
- C. The *purpose* of the sealing. This sealing is intended to do two things:
1. Designate those who belong to him and make them **secure**.
  2. **Protect** them from judgment and wrath... but not from tribulations. They will be saved **through** trials, not from them. Charles Spurgeon said it well:
 

*It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain. (quoted in Wilcox, p. 83).*
- D. *How can I be sealed?*
1. Come to **the Lamb** and let his blood forgive your sins and purify your heart (white robes). The verb tense of Rev. 7:14 (aorist) means that this is a **once-for-all** action.
  2. Be **filled** with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit **is** God’s seal on our lives; the mark of his ownership, the **guarantee** of his protection and provision.
 

*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 (down payment) of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.(Ephesians 1:13–14).*

#### TABLE TALK

1. This study claims that Christians are saved through tribulation not from it. Describe your reaction to this statement. Does this fit your experience.? your theology?
2. How do you envision heaven? Does your vision of heaven make you want to go?
3. Have you known any Christians who were so heavenly minded they were no earthly good? What about you? Do your thoughts of heaven make you less concerned for the physical needs of those around you or more concerned? Explain.
4. How do you understand the “sealing” of the Holy Spirit? Has this lesson changed your thinking or confirmed it?
5. Do you have assurance of your standing before God?

## Bibliography

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