

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

Chapter 6 ended with the opening of the sixth seal: The world thrown into chaos. There were earthquakes, the sun turned black, mountains and islands moved out of their places, the heavens were rolled back like a scroll. As the most powerful men on earth cowered in fear, John wrote: ***“For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?”***

It is at this moment that chapter 7 begins with the words ***“And after these things...”*** Remember, there were no chapter and verse divisions in the original manuscripts. This text is the very next line after John asked that powerful question. So, with the words ***“and after these things,”*** chapter 7 ties what is about to happen to what just happened. John is still describing what transpired when the sixth seal was opened. And as far as his question is concerned: ***“...and who shall be able to stand?”*** It is here that we get our answer. Let’s continue with the text of chapter 7.

Revelation 7:1-8 *The sealing of the 144,000*

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel: Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.”

A few commentators feel this chapter is an “interlude” or a “pause between acts” that separates the opening of the sixth and seventh seal, but I disagree. The text says the four angels are *“holding back the wind.”* These few commentators consider that to be a “pause” in the action – they are holding the impending destruction at bay. I don’t believe that is what is happening here at all. Think about it. Whenever that “last day” does occur, there will still be Christians living among the rest of the people on the earth. Those Christians will be saved from the destruction. Therefore, I see the wind being held back not as a pause in the action, but as a “delaying” of the onset of the destruction described at the end of chapter 6 – delayed until every one of the righteous is saved!

In this chapter we’re going to read about two extremely large groups of people who will be saved from the destruction of the world. These two groups are so intrinsically connected to each other and the events that occur at the opening of the 6th seal that Spence says, *“...the two must be regarded practically as one!”* I agree with that statement. The incidents of the seventh chapter obviously harmonize with the closing events of the sixth, and the two important visions John sees in this chapter will show us *“who shall be able to stand.”*

Let’s go back to the four angels. Notice that John says he saw them *“standing on the four corners of the earth.”* We have discussed this phrase previously: “The four corners of the earth” represent the entire earth. Notice it says the four angels prevented the wind from blowing *“on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.”* (3 things) Simply put, there was no wind anywhere on the face of the earth, which would be a very unusual circumstance amid the chaos of earthquakes, mountains moving, etc. In verse 2, where it is written, *“to whom it was given to*

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

hurt the earth and the sea,” it is readily evident that these angels were sent by God to bring the destruction to the entire earth. And they were prepared to begin carrying out that task when the voice of the fifth angel reached their ears... *“Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads!”* If I understand the first three verses of chapter 7 correctly, the devastation described when the sixth seal was opened – the great earthquake and all else – was about to be carried out by these four angels. We should visualize them “standing on the four corners” of the earth, poised to bring the destruction to all they behold when the fifth angel says essentially, “WAIT!” Certainly we can accept that they were “paused” in their task, but the scene was not paused, it continued to be revealed – John saw something happen: The arrival of the *fifth* angel, rising from the east like the morning sun.

The direction “east” symbolically carries the idea of an awakening or arising, probably because the sun rises from the east, welcoming a fresh day. In the past, it also has carried the implication of “glad tidings” or “good news,” which seems to fit well in this instance. While we are talking about events contained in verses 2-3, I want us to focus more closely on what is written there. The text from the King James Version reads: *“And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.’”*

Did you notice in verse 2 that John does not say the angel ascending from the east was holding or carrying the seal (mark) of the living God, but instead that he had (in his possession) the seal? Also, did you notice in verse 3 that the servants of God were to be sealed in their foreheads and not on their foreheads? I point this out because somehow it has come to be understood by many that this angel is carrying in his hand a seal, perhaps similar to a rubber stamp, and he goes around “stamping” a mark on the foreheads of all servants of God. Indeed, there are others who believe it to be more like a “branding iron” and that an irremovable seal is

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

burned into the forehead of all servants of God. I don't believe the seal to be a physical mark placed on the foreheads of Christians. Later in this book we will see another mark referred to – the “Mark of the Beast.” We will discuss that more when the time comes, but rest assured I don't believe it is literal, either.

Remember the time frame represented in this writing: It is from the establishment of Jesus' kingdom on earth (His church) in 34 AD to the end of the world. You and I are among many Christians living in this time frame and I, for one, have never encountered such a seal. There are religious groups with marks on their forehead. Muslims often have what is known as a “Zabibah,” a mark similar to a callus formed from the friction generated by repeated contact of the forehead with a prayer rug. The small dot on the forehead of Hindu women is a tradition that dates back into the third century, I believe. Neither of those is what we are talking about. I do, however, believe all true servants of God (Christians) are sealed, and have a mark that identifies them as children of God.

You see, I believe the fifth angel, the one with the “seal of the living God,” either is or represents the Holy Spirit and the seal the angel possesses is the gospel, the word of Christ, the “good news!” We know without doubt that Jesus told His apostles – the ones who were to begin preaching the gospel in Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth – to spread the Word and plant the seed. We also know they did that because Paul, in three different places in his letters, states that the Word has been preached in ALL the world:

Romans 10:17 & 18 **“...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, ‘Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.’”**

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

Romans 16:26 “...but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

Colossians 1:23 “... which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister...”

John says in verse 3, the “seal” (mark) was placed in the foreheads of Christians, and I take that to mean our minds, because what lies behind the forehead is the brain. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles perfect recall of the things Jesus spoke, and through inspiration guided them to preach it eloquently and boldly. We know it was done quickly because Paul was killed in Rome in late 65 or 66 AD. Among his instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul said “...*the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*” I feel certain that instruction was followed and passed down from generation to generation, thereby allowing the church to grow by leaps and bounds.

Paul said the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). As the Word was spread, its influence caused many to believe and turn from living worldly lives in order to become more Christ-like. They no longer cared for worldly ways and ideas, and that got them noticed! I believe this “new character” – the noticeable change in their way of life – is the seal or mark of a Christian that the fifth angel refers to in Revelation 7:3.

Now that we’ve established what this seal of the living God is, let’s return to the fifth angel holding it. In verse 3 he essentially told the other 4 angels to stand down “*till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.*” Then in verse 4 John says he “*heard the number of them which were sealed.*” We are not shown how the sealing takes place, but we do know from this verse that it has been accomplished. Then, in verses 4 - 8, we are told the

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

number sealed was 144,000 *“of all the tribes of Israel.”* The tribes are listed by name: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Aser, Nephthalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph and Benjamin, and we are told that 12,000 were sealed in each.

Then, in verses 9 and 10 we are told John beheld *“a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, kindreds, and people, and tongues stood before the throne...”* When reading this segment it is easy to arrive at the following conclusion: Verses 4-8 tell us that 144,000 Jews were sealed, and verses 9-10 tell us the number of Gentiles sealed was so large it was innumerable.

Hit the “Pause” button again! That is an incorrect understanding of these seven verses and we definitely need to take the time to understand these passages.

I will begin by addressing the number 144,000 in regard to verses 4-8. We have already talked at length about the symbolic significance of numbers in the book of Revelation, with emphasis so far on 3 and 7. In chapter 6 we learned that when the number 4 is used, it often refers to the “whole world” (four corners of the earth). Now it is time to add the numbers 10 and 12 to our list of significant numbers in order to grasp the full meaning of the 144,000 in chapter 7. It is not a literal 144,000!

Some quick math will reveal that $12 \times 12 \times 1000 = 144,000$, but I’ve already said that this number is not literal. We must understand the symbolic meaning of 144,000, and to do that we must first understand the symbolic meaning behind the base numbers used to arrive at it. The truth is, the number 12 is considered the *“religious number”* but I don’t want you to just accept that at face value – I hope to help you understand why it is so considered. To do that we need to determine the “foundation” of this so-called “religious number.” Mathematically speaking, you can arrive at the number 12 in various ways. But, to arrive at the symbolic number 12, there is only one way: 4×3 .

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

We already know that “3” is symbolically “perfectness in the sense of enough.” Now, consider that description applied to Deity – the Holy Trinity. The number 3 becomes the symbol of the Godhead: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, which is considered ALL of Deity, that is to say **“perfectness...in the sense of enough”**.

Recently we saw the number “4” used to refer to the whole earth as the four angels waited at its “corners.” Our discussion ultimately led us to see that the “4 corners of the earth” represent the Whole of Creation. So then, the “3” = **“whole of Deity”** and the “4” = **“whole of creation.”** Nothing else exists! Everything either is Deity or has been created by Deity. So, those two numbers pretty much encompass everything. Now you can see why “12” is considered the “religious number.” By the way, I might also mention that $3 + 4 = 7$, the same two base numbers added, provide the number 7, which of course symbolizes **“perfect in the sense of completeness.”** The number 7 appears 735 times in the bible (54 times in this book) and is one of, if not the, foundation of God’s teaching. It starts at the end of Creation when God rested on the 7th day! The symbolism of the number 7 is applied to both spiritual as well as physical things.

So, it appears both numbers “7” and “12” might be considered “perfect” numbers. The number 12 (also called “God’s number”) is frequently used in regard to people, often representing governing authorities or heads of families or nations. The 12 tribes of Israel and Jesus’ 12 Apostles no doubt spring to mind. This number occurs 187 times in the bible, 22 of those in this book we are studying.

Obviously, the number 144,000 is arrived at by “squaring” (multiplying the number 12 by itself) and then multiplying by 1,000 again. In the language of apocalyptic symbolism, when a number is “squared,” it multiplies the *power* of the number. You may be thinking, “Wait...if the number 12 already represents the whole of Deity and the whole of creation... how can it be

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

made any stronger?” That question can only be answered symbolically: stronger in the sense of being more inclusive. It’s like taking extra effort to ensure that ALL does, in fact, mean ALL, nothing having “slipped through the cracks” so to speak. So then, the number 144 (times 1,000) in these verses sends us the symbolic message that ALL of those deemed righteous are being sealed – no one slips through the cracks.

So where does the number 1,000 come from? Let’s do another quick math problem: $10 \times 10 \times 10$ (*notice the 3 tens*) = 1,000. The symbolism here is “fullness to a superlative or unlimited degree,” which serves to embolden the word **ALL**. The bottom line with the number 144,000: **no one will be overlooked!** Every individual worthy of being sealed will be sealed, and there will be NO mistakes because the God of Heaven, His Son, and the Holy Spirit, perfectness in the sense of completeness, are directing the sealing!

Okay, put your calculator away and let’s hit the play button again. The number sealed was 144,000 “*of all the tribes of Israel*”, 12,000 in each one. These verses are, however, NOT talking about literal Jews. There is a glaring clue embedded here that would have flown right over the head of the Romans but immediately noticed by those first century Christians. Look at the list again: *Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Nephthalim, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin*. Notice anything unusual? The tribe of Dan is omitted! In Old Testament scripture, we see versions of this list in which Joseph is omitted and his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh inserted. In some versions, Levi is omitted because this tribe was not portioned a parcel of land like the others. But when it is written “*all the tribes of the children of Israel*” like in verse 4, for it to really mean “Israel” it would not omit Dan because he was one of the sons of Bilhah.

The twelve tribes of Israel **are** the twelve sons of Jacob born to him by Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah. When a listing of these 12 tribes varies from those 12 sons, there is always a reason. I believe the reason here is to show it is NOT talking about literal Israel, but spiritual

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

Israel. I base that conclusion on what Paul wrote in his letter to Ephesians in chapter 1:13: ***“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.”*** Later in that same letter (4:30) Paul says, ***“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*** That includes you and me! I believe the specific wording of this section in Revelation 7 is to show that the 144,000 is speaking of ALL the **righteous**. Remember the symbolism: no one slips through the cracks! Throughout the book of Revelation when you see the terms “Israel,” “Jew,” and “Jerusalem,” it is not the physical nation, person, or city, but those terms are used in the spiritual sense and are referring to the faithful, or God’s nation, or people. Of course we will see the New Jerusalem descend in chapter 21 referring to our home in Heaven. One further point to make before leaving: All these that were being sealed are still on the earth, because the four angels are holding back the wind until all are sealed!

And then we have the text of verses 9 through 12...

A Great Multitude from Every Nation

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

John begins verse 9 with “After this...” I am compelled to begin this section by asking “After what?” The only practical answer is “after the sealing.” This chapter opened with the four angels about to release the destruction that would obliterate the entire earth and everything in it. They were told to hold back until everyone was “sealed,” with great care taken to ensure

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

that every single righteous person on earth was included. At this point there is no longer a reason for the four angels to continue holding back the winds, so the destruction has commenced. All has been destroyed! Verse 9 reads, ***“...I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”***

If this great multitude ***“stood before the throne, and before the Lamb,”*** where were they? In Heaven, of course! And the fact this great multitude was ***“clothed with white robes and had palms in their hands”*** leaves no doubt that they are the Saved. Furthermore, they ***“cried with a loud voice saying, ‘Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.’”*** They shall serve Him day and night within His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence. They shall neither hunger nor thirst anymore. Doesn't that sound like Heaven? I believe it does.

Let's review the various groups (non Deity) we have encountered in the visions so far.

1. The 24 elders in chapter 4: they represented the faithful who lived under both the Old and New Covenants.
2. Those under the altar at the opening of the 5th seal in chapter 6: they were those who had been killed (sacrificed) during the persecutions of Rome.
3. The 144,000 in chapter 7: they were those who were alive on earth just before the end of the world and its destruction.
4. The innumerable “great multitude” here at the close of chapter 7. One of the elders tells John they are all the faithful who have made it through the great tribulation.

What we have here are ALL the faithful! We need not worry about whether our God will save us if we are indeed His. He will not forget a single one of us.

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Nine

The Seventh Seal — Revelation 8:1

“And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

This is Heaven, the fulfillment of the Promise! It is the reward that all the faithful have longed for! This is the peace that makes earthly suffering worthwhile, a rest from all our toils. And, we get to join God and His Son with ALL the faithful that ever lived on the earth for eternity. This silence for half an hour mentioned at the beginning of chapter 8 might be a short “pause” from all praises that we saw in chapter 7 by that great multitude of the saved, the angels, and the four living creatures.

But all has been fulfilled. The world has ended, the Saved are in heaven (more about this in chapter 20) so God’s plan has gone full circle. More is left to be said, though, about things that happened during the earth’s existence, so we will in the next section “rewind” and see it all again, but from a new perspective. We know that a Christian’s life on earth is a constant battle between right and wrong, the forces of evil vs. our faith in God’s word. Satan continues to place stumbling blocks in our paths to entice us to evil. So, this new perspective is meant to give us even more assurance as we strive to withstand the wiles of the devil. It begins with the sounding of the seven trumpets we will discuss next.