

11.17.2019

Revelation 7:1-8:

Verse by verse notes:

- Verse 1:
- After this, or could be better translated “with this.”
- This is an interlude between the sixth seal (chapter 6:12-17), terror and the seventh seal, trumpets. The seventh seal will begin in chapter 8. There are three interludes ([vv. 1–17](#); [10:1–11:14](#); [20:1–6](#)) explaining the place of the saints in the events of Revelation.¹
- 4 angels are standing at the four corners of the earth.
- Dr. Mulholland writes: *This was a typical way of speaking of the bounds of the world* (cf. 20:8; Isa 11:12; Ezek 7:2).²
- It always must be asked how much of this is literal.
- If this is after the tribulation period, or with the tribulation period, this could be literal. Certainly, John is describing the indescribable and he is stretching the language. How don’t think John saw a flat earth, though he could’ve. **Maybe God showed him the earth as if it were flat, like looking at a world map.**
- They are holding back the 4 winds of the earth. There is more detail given too. No wind on the earth, the sea, or any tree.
- This is like being in the eye of a hurricane.
- ESV Study Note: *The sixth seal (6:12–17) showed an earthquake and a wind that shook the stars from the sky. God’s cringing enemies asked, “Who can stand?” (6:17). The answer is, those “sealed” (7:4) with the seal of the living God (cf. Ezek. 9:4–6). Therefore John sees four angels charged to hold back those winds of judgment until all of God’s servants have received his seal.*
- Again, Dr. Mulholland adds insight: *Trees: These not only represent the bounds of the world (Ezek 37:9; Dan 7:2; 8:8; 11:4; Zech 2:6), but also God’s judgment upon those opposed to him. For example, Jeremiah saw the four winds coming from the four corners of the sky upon Elam and scattering the people across the world (Jer 49:36). It is obvious that the latter image is the one John is employing here since, when they are released, they will harm the earth, sea, and trees.³ The angels were holding back the wind from destructive action, as is confirmed in 7:3. We have noted that **“earth” and “sea” are two of the vision’s ways of representing the rebellious order** (see note on 3:10 for discussion of “earth,” and note on 4:6 for discussion of “sea”). The vision is revealing a delay in the consummation of God’s judgment against fallen Babylon. But what is the role of the trees? As early as Deut 12:2, trees had become a place of idolatry, and Israel was warned not to plant any tree near the altar as a sacred pole (Deut 16:21). The prophets fulminated against the*

¹ ESV Study Bible

² M. Robert Mulholland Jr., [“Revelation,”](#) in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 478.

³ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., [“Revelation,”](#) in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 478.

idolatry Israel had committed under every tree (Isa 57:5; Jer 2:20, 27; 3:6, 9, 13; 17:2; Ezek 6:13; 20:28). **The image of the tree might well function, with earth and sea, to denote the idolatry of fallen Babylon against which God's judgment will come.**⁴

- We see this idea of the 4 corners of the earth in: Is 11:12; Ezek 7:2; Rev 20:8⁵
- This idea of the 4 winds is repeated throughout the Bible as well: Jer 49:36; Dan 7:2; Zech 6:5; Matt 24:31⁶
- Verse 2:
- Now, there is another angel.
- This angel is ascending (rising up) from the rising of the sun, this means the East.
- So picture the angel coming up from the East.
- *For many Jews, this would have messianic connotations. Balaam's prophesy, "I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the distant future. A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel" (Num 24:17), became part of the messianic expectations of the Jewish story*⁷
- This angel had the seal of the Living God. This means that He is an angel from the Lord, possibly Jesus.
- This angel speaks, cries out, to the other 4 angels, the other 4 angels were granted to harm the earth and the sea. Maybe a reference to the seals in the previous chapter.
- Verse 3:
- Do not harm...
- They are not to harm the earth or the sea or the trees until they seal the bond servants of God.
- Moody Bible Commentary: *These can withstand the wrath of the Lamb because they are rightly related to the Father and bear His seal upon their foreheads. They appear in stark contrast to those who are later seen as identifying with the beast by accepting his mark (13:16).*⁸
- Dr. Constable (Dallas Theological Seminar) helps us take apart the angels, wind, sea: *The angels described here were God's agents (cf. Heb. 1:14). They appear to be different from the four living beasts and the 24 elder-angels. Four of them received the task of keeping the wind from blowing. God stationed them at the four "corners" (i.e., compass points) of the earth for this purpose (cf. 20:8; Isa. 11:12; Jer. 49:36; Matt. 24:31). The winds represent God's judgments coming on the world (v. 3; cf. Jer. 49:36–38; Dan. 7:2; Hos. 13:15), specifically those about to follow during the remainder of the Tribulation (cf. Ezek. 9:4–8). The threefold repetition of "four" probably stresses the universal control of these angels.*²⁷⁶

⁴ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., "[Revelation,](#)" in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 478.

⁵ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁶ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁷ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., "[Revelation,](#)" in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: James, 1–2 Peter, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 478.

⁸ The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 82796-82798). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

²⁷⁶ 276. Scott, p. 163; Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 128.

We should probably understand the “sea” and any “tree” literally in view of what follows (cf. v. 3).⁹

- The servants of God are to be sealed on their foreheads.
- Dr. Mulholland talked about the significance of the forehead:
- Verse 3 references seal on their “foreheads.” This is the first place where John uses the forehead. The Forehead represents perception, particularly perception with respect towards God. This was from the Jewish pool of images.
- When Israel worships idols, the prophet describes them as having a harlots forehead. They have broken their marriage bond with God and are committing spiritual idolatry.
- When they are not living by Torah they have a hard or stubborn forehead.
- King Uzziah wanted to be king and high priest and he goes into the temple to offer incense. His forehead was leprous. See 2 Chronicles 26.
- The forehead means that these are the ones who have the seal of God on their forehead. We will see this again in chapter 14 and 21 or 22. This means that God is the center of their life.
- This is another way of describing the people of Jerusalem. They are also described having the name of God or the nature of God on their forehead.
- Here is an image that describes a group of people whose orientation was God focused as opposed to fallen Babylon.
- This idea does connect with Ezekiel 9:4-6: The Lord said to him, “Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst.”⁵ But to the others He said in my hearing, “Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare.⁶ Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.” So they started with the elders who were before the temple.
- This seal comes from God, we cannot save ourselves.
- Dr. Constable shares more:
- *Another (Gr. allon, another of the same kind) angelic messenger appeared in the East. **In Scripture divine salvation often comes from the East** (cf. Gen. 2:8; Ezek. 43:2; Matt. 2:1). He possessed a seal from “the living God,” the title adding solemnity and vitality to the seal.²⁷⁷ A seal was a symbol of ownership (2 Cor. 1:22), authentication (John 6:27), and protection leading to final salvation (Eph. 1:14; 4:30).*
- **The seal could be visible (Ezek. 9:4) or invisible (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), but the mention of their foreheads suggests a visible seal (cf. 14:1).**
- *“It was not uncommon for a soldier or a guild member to receive such a mark as a religious devotee. The mark was a sign of consecration to deity . . . The forehead was chosen because it was the most conspicuous, the most noble, and the part by which a person is usually identified . . .”²⁸⁰*

⁹ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 7:1.

²⁷⁷ 277. Alford, 4:623.

²⁸⁰ 280. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, p. 473. Cf. Lange, p. 189.

- *Their sealing marks these believers off as God's redeemed people and guarantees their protection from divine judgment while they carry out their service for God on the earth during the Great Tribulation (14:1, 3–4; cf. 13:16–18; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Their seals may not protect them from harm that other people inflict on them (cf. 13:7, 15; 20:4) but from the divine judgments sent on unbelievers in the last half of the Tribulation (cf. 16:2). Evidently God will give these 144,000 believers special protection in the last half of the Tribulation because its calamities will be much more severe than those in the first half. Antichrist will also mark his followers in a similar way (13:16–18; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20).¹⁰ [he obviously seems to take 144,000 in a literal way.*
- Verse 4 begins the 144,000.
- John hears the number of those who are sealed. 144,000 from every tribe of the sons of Israel.
- Verses 5-8 gives more detail about the 144,000.
 1. Judah= 12,000
 2. Reuben=12,000
 3. Gad=12,000
 4. Asher=12,000
 5. Naphtali= 12,000
 6. Manasseh=12,000
 7. Simeon=12,000
 8. Levi=12,000
 9. Issachar=12,000
 10. Zebulun=12,000
 11. Joseph= 12,000
 12. Benjamin= 12,000
 - Dr. Mulholland shares: We just saw in the previous verse the servants of God being sealed on their forehead. By an Old Testament pool of imagery, the servants are the covenant community, Jewish. Up to verse 8 John's Jewish readers can stay with Jewish understanding, but starting in verse 9 it changes things.
 - 144,000= 12*1000
 - When you want to emphasize numbers in the Jewish pool of imagery you either multiply them by 1000 or square them and here, we have both.
 - 12 tribes squared time 1000
 - In chapter 14 we will see the Lamb standing on Mt Zion with 144,000 redeemed from the earth.
 - There we see John morphing his imagery from the Old Covenant community to the new covenant community using the same numbers.
 - The number appears one more time but masked.
 - In the measuring of the New Jerusalem, chapter 21. He sees that the New Jerusalem is 12,000 stadia.
 - A cube has 12 edges. 4 bottom edges, 4 top edges, vertical.

¹⁰ Tom Constable, [*Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 7:2.

- The dimensions of the New Jerusalem add up to 144,000.
- John plays with his imagery.
- Chapter 7 he comes up with 144,000 and then modulates it in chapter 14 and then chapter 22.
- John lists the 12 tribes.
- 12 tribes are significant in the restoration of the Kingdom. In the New Testament there are only 2 tribes left: Judah and Benjamin.
- The other 10 tribes, the Northern Kingdom were taken away into captivity in 722 BC by Assyria. But the understanding was that when God restores the Kingdom, the 10 other tribes are brought back.
- This is restoration imagery.
- The tribe of Dan is not mentioned:
- There is no discernable pattern for the listings of the tribes in the Old Testament and inter-testamental period. There are multiple orders.
- They vary from book to book. From the minds of the writers there may have been a significance.
- Here there is one element of order: Judah is first.
- Judah the tribe of David and Jesus is the lion of Judah. We have seen that in chapter 5.
- That is probably intentional by John.
- Dan is missing: one theory is that there is an inter-testamental writing that lists the tribe of Dan with satan.
 - That is tenuous evidence.
 - In the Jewish listings sometimes we do not get the same 12.
 - We really do not know why Dan is missing.
 - Dan was the northern most part
- Benjamin is last, maybe bracketing.
- Dan was replaced by Manasseh.
- Dr. Constable (Dallas Theological Seminary) breaks this down in a very literal way:
- *There are at least 19 lists of Jacob's sons in the Old Testament (Gen. 35:22–26; 46:8–25; 49:3–27; Exod. 1:2–5; Num. 1:5–15; 2:3–31; 13:4–15; 26:4–51; 34:19–28; Deut. 27:12–13; 33:6–25; Josh. 13:7–22; Judg. 5:12–18; 1 Chron. 2:1–8:40; 12:24–37; 27:16–22; Ezek. 48:1–7, 23–28, 31–34). Not one of them is the same as the list here.*
- *The tribe of Judah was usually first in such lists, as it is here, due to the prophecies that it would lead the other tribes and that Messiah would come from Judah (Gen. 49:10; 1 Chron. 2:3–4:43). “The lion that is from the tribe of Judah” is the Lamb (5:5; cf. 6:16–17; Heb. 7:13–14).*
- *The tribe of Dan is absent in this list perhaps because that tribe was the first to establish idolatry in Israel (Judg. 18:30; cf. 1 Kings 12:29–30). However the Danites will receive a portion of land in the Millennium (Ezek. 48:1–2).*
- *“Joseph” represents Ephraim (v. 8; cf. v. 6). Ephraim was also “notorious for . . . fickleness and proclivity to idol worship.”²⁸⁶ Ephraim was the head of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that apostatized under King Jeroboam I's leadership. Ephraim will*

²⁸⁶ 286. Smith, *A Revelation . . .*, p. 130. Cf. Deut. 29:18–21; Hos. 4:17.

also be in the millennial kingdom (Ezek. 48:5). Perhaps Ephraim's name does not appear in this list, though he is included in the reference to Joseph, to avoid the unpleasant connotations of his name.²⁸⁷

- The listing of Manasseh's name (v. 6) is unusual since his father Joseph's name also appears. Perhaps this honors Manasseh's faithfulness in contrast to Ephraim's unfaithfulness.
- References such as the one in this passage argue strongly for the continuance of Israel as a nation in the future and for God's dealing with ethnic Jews again as His chosen people (cf. Rom. 11). This is a major assertion of dispensational theology. Jehovah's Witnesses or any other Gentiles who claim to be part of this group today fail to recognize that these witnesses will be the physical descendants of Jacob. When God seals them they will know their tribal roots. The sealing will take place after the Rapture.¹¹

²⁸⁷ 287. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, p. 481.

¹¹ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Re 7:5.