

# NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 7

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AS WE WORKED THROUGH OUR LAST CHAPTER, WE SAW THAT REVELATION 6 PARALLELS MUCH OF WHAT JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES IN MATTHEW 24 (LUKE 21, MARK 13). MATTHEW 24 IS IN MANY WAYS A KEY TO UNLOCK REVELATION 6. REVELATION 6 VISUALLY REPRESENTED WITH OPENING SEALS AND GALLOPING HORSES THE TROUBLE THE EARTH HAS SEEN AS WE WAIT FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST. FALSE CHRISTS (WHITE HORSE), WAR & HUMAN CONFLICT (RED HORSE), INEQUALITY AND FAMINE (BLACK HORSE) AND DEATH AND THE GRAVE (PALE HORSE) ARE ALL THINGS THAT CHRIST TOLD HIS DISCIPLES WOULD HAPPEN UNTIL HE RETURNS. CHAPTER 6 TELLS OF THE OPENING OF THE FIRST 6 OF THE 7 SEALS OF THE SCROLL THAT FIRST APPEARED IN CHAPTER 5.

IN THE MIDST OF THIS REVEALING TWO QUESTIONS ARE ASKED. FIRST, THE QUESTION FROM GOD'S WAITING PEOPLE: "HOW LONG, O LORD, HOLY AND TRUE, WILL YOU REFRAIN FROM JUDGING AND AVENGING OUR BLOOD ON THOSE WHO DWELL ON THE EARTH (REVELATION 6:10)." THE WICKED OF THE EARTH ASK "WHO IS ABLE TO STAND IN THE DAY OF THE GREAT WRATH OF HIM WHO SITS ON THE THRONE AND THE LAMB (6:16-17)."

AND SO WE ARRIVE AT REVELATION 7 WHICH SERVES AS A BIT OF AN INTERLUDE BEFORE THE OPENING OF THE 7TH AND FINAL SEAL IN REVELATION 8. REVELATION 7-8 IS GOING TO MOVE US CLOSER TO AN ANSWER TO THE FIRST QUESTION ASKED REGARDING "HOW LONG?".

ULTIMATELY THE DEEP LONGING OF GOD'S PEOPLE IS RELATED TO UNDERSTANDING WHEN CHRIST WILL COME TO BRING JUDGMENT ON THE WICKED AND SALVATION AND VINDICATION TO THE RIGHTEOUS. THE QUESTION "HOW LONG" IS A GOOD AND RIGHT QUESTION TO ASK AS WE LOOK AROUND AND SEE EVIL AND WICKEDNESS THRIVE AND INCREASE. WHEN TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN IN THIS WORLD - INJUSTICE, WAR, CORRUPTION, THE SLAUGHTER OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN - WE SHOULD WONDER "WHY?" AND "HOW LONG?"

**REVELATION 6:11** FORESHADOWED THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION:

AND THERE WAS GIVEN TO EACH OF THEM A WHITE ROBE; AND THEY WERE TOLD THAT THEY SHOULD REST FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER, UNTIL THE NUMBER OF THEIR FELLOW SERVANTS AND THEIR BRETHREN WHO WERE TO BE KILLED EVEN AS THEY HAD BEEN, WOULD BE COMPLETED ALSO.

THERE IS SOMETHING THAT STILL MUST HAPPEN BEFORE THE RETURN OF CHRIST. REVELATION 7 WILL TELL US WHAT IT IS WE ARE ALL WAITING FOR.

**REVELATION 7:1-3**

THERE SEEMS TO BE A TENSION THAT IS PRESENT BETWEEN GOD'S PLAN TO BRING JUDGMENT UPON THE EARTH AND HIS PLAN TO RESCUE AND VINDICATE HIS PEOPLE. IF HE BRINGS JUDGMENT BEFORE HIS PEOPLE ARE PROTECTED THEY CAN BE COLLATERAL DAMAGE. SO HE IS WAITING. BUT HE IS ALSO IDENTIFYING WHO HIS PEOPLE ARE THROUGH THIS SEALING PROCESS.

"JOHN SEES **FOUR ANGELS** CHARGED TO HOLD BACK THOSE WINDS OF JUDGMENT UNTIL ALL OF GOD'S SERVANTS HAVE RECEIVED HIS SEAL. "THE SEAL OF THE LIVING GOD" EVOKES A PICTURE OF A ROYAL SIGNET RING BY WHICH KINGS AUTHENTICATED DOCUMENTS OR MARKED

OWNERSHIP OF AN ITEM (SEE NOTE ON JOHN 6:27). THIS SEAL IS THE NAME OF THE LAMB AND OF GOD (REV. 14:1), A GIFT PROMISED TO ALL WHO CONQUER BY FAITH (3:12)." (ESV STUDY BIBLE, REVELATION 7:1-3)

THE IDEA OF A MARK IS FOUND IN OTHER PLACES IN SCRIPTURE AS AN OBVIOUS IDENTIFIER OF THOSE WHO ARE GOD'S (OR NOT) AND THOSE WHO ARE TO BE SPARED (OR NOT). THINK OF THE BLOOD THAT WAS PUT OVER THE DOORWAYS OF THE ISRAELITES IN EGYPT ON THE NIGHT OF THE PASSOVER (EXODUS 12) OR A VISION OF AN "X" BEING MADE BY AN ANGEL ON THE HEADS OF PEOPLE WHO DIDN'T WORSHIP IDOLS IN JERUSALEM DURING EZEKIEL'S DAY (EZEKIEL 9:4-6). THE IDEA IS THAT THIS IS SOMETHING THAT GOD SEES INDICATING THAT HE KNOWS THOSE WHO ARE HIS.

"THE CREATED ORDER NEEDS TO BE PURIFIED, IT SEEMS, IN THIS CASE BY A VIOLENT WIND WHICH WILL SCORCH THE EARTH, STIR UP THE SEA AND UPROOT TREES. LIKE THE OTHER SYMBOLS OF DIVINE JUDGMENT, THESE IMAGES FROM THE NATURAL WORLD ARE TAKEN SYMBOLICALLY IN TERMS OF THE GREAT SHAKING THAT WILL PASS THROUGH THE WHOLE WORLD OF HUMAN AFFAIRS AS GOD'S JUDGMENTS START TO TAKE HOLD. WHILE THAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN, GOD'S PEOPLE NEED TO BE REASSURED THAT THEY WILL COME SAFELY THROUGH, MARKED ON THEIR FOREHEADS WITH THE SPECIAL SEAL THAT DECLARES THAT THEY BELONG TO GOD AND ARE NOT TO BE HARMED...(THIS DOES NOT MEAN HOWEVER, AS WE WILL SEE) THAT THEY WILL ESCAPE SUFFERING. (NT WRIGHT, "REVELATION FOR EVERYONE", PAGE 70)

GOD IS WITHHOLDING HIS WRATH AND JUDGMENT UNTIL THOSE WHO ARE HIS ARE MARKED OUT AND IDENTIFIED BY HIM. THIS DOESN'T JUST MEAN THE FINAL GROUP OF PEOPLE IN THE "END TIMES" BUT GENERALLY SPEAKING THE FULL NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT WILL BE SAVED OR AS REVELATION 6:11 SAID "THE COMPLETE NUMBER". AND WHAT IS THAT FULL OR COMPLETE NUMBER? WE READ ON.

## REVELATION 7:4-8 - 144,000

THIS IS A PASSAGE WHICH IS THE SUBJECT OF MUCH SPECULATION AND DISCUSSION. LET'S DO OUR BEST TO UNDERSTAND IT ORIGINALLY AND LOGICALLY.

FIRST OFF WE SHOULD BE MINDFUL OF THE PARALLELS THAT ARE UNFOLDING BETWEEN THE REVELATION VISIONS AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL'S FINAL DAYS IN EGYPT. WE WILL READ IN THE NEXT CHAPTERS THAT GOD'S JUDGMENT IS GOING TO COME IN THE FORM OF VARIOUS PLAGUES, JUST LIKE IN EXODUS. A NUMBER OF THESE PLAGUES WERE EXPERIENCED BY BOTH EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELITES. HOWEVER, THE FINAL PLAGUE IN EGYPT WAS THE DEATH OF THE FIRST BORN, A PLAGUE WHICH THE ISRAELITES WERE UNIVERSALLY SPARED FROM, PROVIDED THEY PLACED THE BLOOD OF A LAMB ON THEIR DOORPOSTS. THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING TO THE EARTH AND THE ENTIRE EARTH IS GOING TO BE AFFECTED - HOWEVER, GOD'S PEOPLE WILL BE SPARED FROM THE ULTIMATE CONSEQUENCES OF THE TROUBLES, NAMELY DEATH AND JUDGMENT.

SO WE'RE READING NOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE BEING SEALED AND THUS SPARED FROM THE JUDGMENT OF DEATH TO COME. AND WE READ OF 12,000 MEMBERS OF "EVERY TRIBE OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL", EQUALING 144,000 IN ALL. SOME SUGGEST THAT THIS IS AN EXACT NUMBER OF JEWS THAT WILL BE SPARED AS A REMNANT IN THE LAST DAYS.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE SOME HOLES IN THAT THEORY. FIRST OFF, THE ACTUAL LISTING OF THE TWELVE TRIBES IS UNUSUAL. IT'S NOT LISTED IN BIRTH ORDER (REUBEN WAS FIRSTBORN, NOT JUDAH), JOSEPH IS MENTIONED BUT SO IS ONE OF HIS SONS (MANASSEH), ONE OF THE TRIBES IS MISSING ALTOGETHER (DAN)!

AS WE HAVE SAID IN OTHER PLACES, REVELATION USES NUMBERS AND SYMBOLS FROM THE BIBLE TO REPRESENT THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING IN THE OVERALL PLAN OF GOD. THROUGHOUT HISTORY THERE ARE MORE THAN 144,000 PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SAVED. AND WHY WOULD THERE BE A

12,000 PERSON CAP ON THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL THAT ARE GOING TO BE SAVED? AND WHY ISN'T ANYONE FROM THE TRIBE OF DAN SAVED? AND WHAT ABOUT EPHRAIM?

COULD IT BE THAT THIS NUMBER REPRESENTS THIS CONCEPT OF THE "COMPLETE NUMBER" THAT WAS ALREADY REFERENCED IN 6:11. THERE IS A NUMBER OF GOD'S BOND-SERVANTS (7:3) AND IT'S A PERFECT AND COMPLETE NUMBER (LIKE THE IDEA OF 12 X 12 COMMUNICATES). AND WITH THAT WE ARE BEGINNING TO GET CLOSE TO THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION: "WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?" WE ARE WAITING FOR THE COMPLETE NUMBER OF GOD'S ETERNAL PEOPLE TO BE SAVED. AND THE POINT OF THESE CHAPTERS IS THAT, THERE IS STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE.

THERE WILL BE BIOLOGICAL DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM THAT WILL BE SAVED BEFORE THE END OF THE AGE. PAUL EXPRESSES HIS HEART FOR THE NATIONAL ISRAEL IN ROMANS 11. HE WRITES THAT GOD IS WORKING TO SAVE THE LITERAL DESCENDANTS OF ISRAEL - THROUGH THE GOSPEL, OPENING THEIR EYES OF JESUS AS MESSIAH. HE REMINDS THE GENTILES NOT TO GET ARROGANT AS IF THEY HAVE REPLACED THEM AS GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE. BUT PAUL ALSO BELIEVED THAT GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE WERE NOT PEOPLE MARKED OUT BY ETHNICITY OR CULTURE, BUT THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH IN CHRIST AND HAVE RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT - REGARDLESS OF BACKGROUND.

FOR ALL WHO ARE BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD, THESE ARE SONS OF GOD. (ROMANS 8:14)

ANOTHER HELPFUL TEXTUAL NOTE ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF THIS SEALED NUMBER WHETHER A LITERAL 144,000 OR A SYMBOLIC NUMBER OF COMPLETENESS - REVELATION 7:3 SIMPLY STATED WHO IT WAS THAT WAS GETTING SEALED:

**REVELATION 7:3** - DO NOT HARM THE EARTH OR THE SEA OR THE TREES UNTIL WE HAVE SEALED THE BOND-SERVANTS OF OUR GOD ON THEIR FOREHEADS."

THE GROUP GETTING SEALED IS THE "BOND-SERVANTS OF GOD." THAT IS A LABEL GENERALLY APPLIED TO GOD'S PEOPLE IN GENERAL. THE GROUP THAT IS GETTING SEALED ARE GOD'S BOND-SERVANTS, NOT JUST A SELECT GROUP OF JEWISH BELIEVERS.

FINALLY, THE LISTING OF THE 144,000 IS WHAT JOHN "*HEARS*", BUT AS WE WILL SEE IN THE NEXT SECTION, HE IS GOING TO "*SEE*" SOMETHING NEXT WHICH HELPS BOLSTER THE THINKING THAT THIS IS LIKELY A REPRESENTATIVE FIGURE OF THE FULL AND COMPLETE NUMBER OF GOD'S PEOPLE THAT WILL BE SAVED.

## REVELATION 7:9-12 - WHAT JOHN SEES

WE GET A PICTURE INTO THE GREAT MULTITUDE OF GOD'S PEOPLE WORSHIPING AND PRAISING HIM FOR HIS SALVATION. IT APPEARS THAT THIS GREAT MULTITUDE IS STANDING EAGER TO CELEBRATE THE WORK OF SALVATION COMPLETED BY GOD (HE WHO SITS ON THE THRONE) AND THE LAMB. AS A RESULT OF THEIR CELEBRATION, THE HEAVENLY COURT OF REVELATION 4-5 REJOINS TO WORSHIP!

THIS GROUP IS WHAT JOHN "SEES" AFTER HEARING OF THE 12,000 X 12 COUNT. ULTIMATELY THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE SAVED IS A GREAT MULTITUDE AND NOT JUST 144,000. IN FACT AS JOHN SEES THIS HE RECORDS THAT IT WAS A GREAT MULTITUDE WHICH "NO ONE COULD COUNT" AND MADE UP OF PEOPLE FROM "EVERY NATION AND ALL TRIBES, PEOPLES AND TONGUES". SO NOW THIS NUMBER, INITIALLY DESCRIBED THROUGH THE LENS OF THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL (GOD'S FIRST CHOSEN PEOPLE), IS NOW FROM EVERY NATION AND ALL TRIBES, THE COLLECTIVE OF GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE IN THE END.

## REVELATION 7:13-17

THE CHAPTER IS CONTINUING TO IDENTIFY THE PEOPLE "SEALED." HERE'S WHAT WE'VE GLEANED:

- 1 - THE BOND SERVANTS OF GOD TO BE RESCUED FROM THE WRATH (7:1-3)
- 2 - A PERFECT NUMBER OF GOD'S PEOPLE (7:4-8)
- 3 - A LARGE NUMBER FROM EVERY NATION, TRIBE AND TONGUE (7:9-13)
- 4 - AND THIS NUMBER IS MADE UP OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE OVERCOME AND ENDURED THROUGH THE AGES, AND PARTICULARLY IN THE DIFFICULT TIMES TO COME. (7:14-17)

THE TEXT REMINDS THE READER (THOSE WHO ARE AND WILL SUFFER TRIBULATION) THAT THERE IS A REWARD IN THE END FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME. BUT THE TEXT IS ALSO REMINDING THEM (AND US) THAT THERE IS TROUBLE TO COME AND OUR LIVES MIGHT BE ON THE LINE. THESE TWO THINGS MUST BE HELD IN BALANCE. THERE IS TROUBLE, BUT THERE IS REWARD. THERE IS PAIN, BUT THERE IS HEALING. THERE IS MARTYRDOM, BUT THERE IS ETERNAL LIFE AND REWARD.

THIS IS SOMETHING THAT JESUS TOLD US ALREADY AND NOW WE ARE HEARING IT AGAIN IN REVELATION. MATTHEW 24 TOLD US THAT THERE WOULD BE A "GREAT TRIBULATION" BEFORE HE RETURNED AND THAT IN THE DAYS BEFORE HE COMES, HIS PEOPLE WOULD SUFFER AND BE KILLED:

**MATTHEW 24:9** - "THEN THEY WILL DELIVER YOU TO TRIBULATION, AND WILL KILL YOU, AND YOU WILL BE HATED BY ALL NATIONS BECAUSE OF MY NAME.

**MARK 13:12-13** - "BROTHER WILL BETRAY BROTHER TO DEATH, AND A FATHER HIS CHILD; AND CHILDREN WILL RISE UP AGAINST PARENTS AND HAVE THEM PUT TO DEATH. 13 "YOU WILL BE HATED BY ALL BECAUSE OF MY NAME, BUT THE ONE WHO ENDURES TO THE END, HE WILL BE SAVED.

**LUKE 21:16-19** - "BUT YOU WILL BE BETRAYED EVEN BY PARENTS AND BROTHERS AND RELATIVES AND FRIENDS, AND THEY WILL PUT SOME OF YOU TO DEATH, 17 AND YOU WILL BE HATED BY ALL BECAUSE OF MY NAME. 18 "YET NOT A HAIR OF YOUR HEAD WILL PERISH. 19 "BY YOUR ENDURANCE YOU WILL GAIN YOUR LIVES.

**JOHN 16:1-4** - "THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU SO THAT YOU MAY BE KEPT FROM STUMBLING. 2 "THEY WILL MAKE YOU OUTCASTS FROM THE SYNAGOGUE, BUT AN HOUR IS COMING FOR EVERYONE WHO KILLS YOU TO THINK THAT HE IS OFFERING SERVICE TO GOD. 3 "THESE THINGS THEY WILL DO BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN THE FATHER OR ME. 4 "BUT THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, SO THAT WHEN THEIR HOUR COMES, YOU MAY REMEMBER THAT I TOLD YOU OF THEM.

SO WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? WHY IS GOD WAITING? THE ANSWER HAS BEEN WOVEN INTO THIS TEXT ALL ALONG. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE TO BE SAVED AND KNOW GOD'S MERCY HASN'T COME.

HERE'S HOW PETER ANSWERS THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION:

2 PETER 3:1-15 - THIS IS NOW, BELOVED, THE SECOND LETTER I AM WRITING TO YOU IN WHICH I AM STIRRING UP YOUR SINCERE MIND BY WAY OF REMINDER, 2 THAT YOU SHOULD REMEMBER THE WORDS SPOKEN BEFOREHAND BY THE HOLY PROPHETS AND THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD AND SAVIOR SPOKEN BY YOUR APOSTLES.

3 KNOW THIS FIRST OF ALL, THAT IN THE LAST DAYS MOCKERS WILL COME WITH THEIR MOCKING, FOLLOWING AFTER THEIR OWN LUSTS, 4 AND SAYING, "WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING? FOR EVER SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL CONTINUES JUST AS IT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION."

5 FOR WHEN THEY MAINTAIN THIS, IT ESCAPES THEIR NOTICE THAT BY THE WORD OF GOD THE HEAVENS EXISTED LONG AGO AND THE EARTH WAS FORMED OUT OF WATER AND BY WATER, 6 THROUGH WHICH THE WORLD AT THAT TIME WAS DESTROYED, BEING FLOODED WITH WATER. 7 BUT BY HIS WORD THE PRESENT HEAVENS AND EARTH ARE BEING RESERVED FOR FIRE, KEPT FOR THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND DESTRUCTION OF UNGODLY MEN. 8 BUT DO NOT LET THIS ONE FACT ESCAPE YOUR NOTICE, BELOVED, THAT WITH THE LORD ONE DAY IS LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS, AND A THOUSAND YEARS LIKE ONE DAY.

9 THE LORD IS NOT SLOW ABOUT HIS PROMISE, AS SOME COUNT SLOWNESS, BUT IS PATIENT TOWARD YOU, NOT WISHING FOR ANY TO PERISH BUT FOR ALL TO COME TO REPENTANCE. 10 BUT THE DAY OF THE LORD WILL COME LIKE A THIEF, IN WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL PASS AWAY WITH A ROAR AND THE ELEMENTS WILL BE DESTROYED WITH INTENSE HEAT, AND THE EARTH AND ITS WORKS WILL BE BURNED UP.

11 SINCE ALL THESE THINGS ARE TO BE DESTROYED IN THIS WAY, WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE OUGHT YOU TO BE IN HOLY CONDUCT AND GODLINESS, 12 LOOKING FOR AND HASTENING THE COMING OF THE DAY OF GOD, BECAUSE OF WHICH THE HEAVENS WILL BE DESTROYED BY BURNING, AND THE ELEMENTS WILL MELT WITH INTENSE HEAT! 13 BUT ACCORDING TO HIS PROMISE WE ARE LOOKING FOR NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH, IN WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLS.

14 THEREFORE, BELOVED, SINCE YOU LOOK FOR THESE THINGS, BE DILIGENT TO BE FOUND BY HIM IN PEACE, SPOTLESS AND BLAMELESS, 15 AND REGARD THE PATIENCE OF OUR LORD AS SALVATION:

WE LONG FOR CHRIST TO COME, BUT UNTIL HE DOES IT IS A CHANCE FOR PEOPLE TO BE SAVED. WHY HASN'T HE COME, BECAUSE THERE ARE MORE WHO GOD LOVES AND DOESN'T WISH TO PERISH. AS MUCH AS WE WRESTLE WITH THE LONGING FOR CHRIST TO RETURN, WE OUGHT TO REJOICE THAT HE DID NOT COME WHEN REVELATION WAS FIRST WRITTEN, OR ELSE WE WOULD NOT BE SAVED. OR IF HE HAD COME BEFORE YOU HEARD AND BELIEVED THE GOSPEL - FOR YOU WOULD NOT BE SAVED. AND THIS TRUTH SHOULD MOTIVATE US TO NOT JUST LONG FOR THE KINGDOM TO COME, BUT ALSO TO SPEAK THE MESSAGE SO THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER MAY BE COMPLETED AND CHRIST MAY COME.

WE LONG FOR CHRIST TO RETURN AND THERE WILL BE HARD DAYS AHEAD. BUT FEAR NOT, THERE IS REWARD IN THE END AND THE DELAY OF THE KING IS BECAUSE HE LOVES THE WORLD AND LONGS FOR THEM TO TURN BACK TO HIM.

AND SO WHILE WE WAIT WE MAY SUFFER. WE MAY BE KILLED FOR OUR WITNESS.

BUT THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY. THE END OF THE STORY IS THAT THE LAMB OVERCOMES AND WE WILL BE SHEPHERDED BY HIM INTO LIFE EVERLASTING. IT IS WELL WORTH LIVING FOR HIM TODAY.