

October 5, 2010

The Church Militant and Triumphant

Text: Revelation 7:1- 17



¹After 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.

²Then 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, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

⁵12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

+ What is the context from Chapter 6? What did the 6th seal contain?

v.1 "four angels standing at the four corners of the earth"- the expression encompasses the whole earth
"holding back the four winds of the earth"- Zech 6:1-8 the 4 chariots are said to be the 4 winds of heaven, sent out by God over the earth. Here, they're held back by the 4 angels (Dn 7:2-3)

So what do the four winds mean if we connect them with Revelation 6?

v.2 "the rising of the sun"- an idiom for "the East," but with more symbolic meaning in Revelation

1- Rev 16:12-16- the enemies of God's people will come from the "rising of the sun"

2- Rev 19:17-21- an angel "in the sun" calls on birds of prey to feed on the corpses of the enemies of God's people who have been vanquished

3- Malachi 4:2- Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings

4- Ezk 43:1-4- after the Glory of the Lord left (Ezk 10:18-19), it returns from the East

Thus, the East ("the rising of the sun") is symbolic in two ways:

1- It indicates the work of God's permissive will to judge the peoples of the earth.

2- It reminds us of the motion of God's grace in the One who would bring back YHWH's glory

"the seal of the living God"- could be a reference to a "signet ring" of God, marking ownership

- Where/when/how does this sealing take place?

2 Tim 2:19, Eph 1:13-14, 2 Cor 1:21-22

- And what might this mark/seal look like? Ezekiel 9:1-6

Brighton: Thus, the Spirit of God, in his gracious activity through God's Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, seals God's people so that they know they belong to God and that he will protect them in their faith in the midst of all the tribulations they endure. (p. 186)

v.4 "the number of the sealed, 144,000"- Let's do the math – $12 \times 12 \times 10^3$

+ So what might this composite number tell us about the sealed people? (cf. Num 31:1-6)

+ Does the phrase, "from every tribe of the sons of Israel" mean this is only Jews?

vv.5-8 Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin → this is a VERY perplexing arrangement

- It is not by birth order (Gen 35:23-26) NOR by land allotment (Num 34:1, 19-29)

- Joseph and Levi are sons of Israel, but did not directly receive land

- Manasseh (son of Joseph) received a tribe as did his brother Ephraim (not listed here)

- Dan, a son of Israel who received a tribe, is not listed either! (Judges 18:1-31)

- Why are Ephraim and Dan omitted? Judges 18:1-31

SCENE SHIFT: ⁹After 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, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹And 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, ¹²saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." ¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who are coming 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 shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will shepherd them, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

- v.9 "clothed in white robes"- the same priestly robes seen in 6:11
 "with palm branches"- John 12:13, on the temple (1 Ki 6:29, 32-35; Ezek 40:16, 22, 26)
 - used in Israelite worship for celebration and at the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:40)
- v.12 "Amen! Blessing & glory & wisdom & thanksgiving & honor & power & might"
 Remember chapter 5- where are these singers located? (7:11)
Verses 9-12 teach us about what is most important in Heavenly worship. What is it and how should that affect OUR earthly worship?
- v.14 "these are the ones who are coming out of the great tribulation"- Matt 24:15-31 (21)
 - There are MANY tribulations, but this is "THE GREAT" one
 - John already experienced tribulation (Rev 1:9)
 - Jesus says the Church was and would continue to experience tribulation. (2:9-10)
 - the GREAT one → when Satan will be let loose for a short time (20:7) which takes place at the end of the "1000 years" (which we understand as the age of the NT)
 - Yet it includes everyone who "is coming" out of all the tribulations of the four horsemen
 "washed their robes"- Ex 19:10; Num 19:8, 10, 19, Leviticus 16- DAY OF ATONEMENT!
 "made white in the blood of the lamb"- righteousness through the *atoning* blood of Christ!
With the Lamb's blood washing us and atoning for us, and being sealed in His name, we are ordained as priests to serve in Heaven! (Ex 29) Do you need more proof this is a PRIESTLY text? Let's read vv15-17
- v.15 "shelter them with his presence"- shelter is the word for Tabernacle! John 1:14, a family tent!
- v.16 -No hunger, thirst, sun-struck, Isaiah 49:8-10, also like receiving manna and water in wilderness
- v.17 "the Lamb... will shepherd them"- Jn 10:11-14, Ezek 34:11-16
 "Springs of living water"- Is. 49:8-10. Jer 2:13. Jn 4:14, 7:38-39

How would the hearers respond to the Sealed Church Militant and the Shepherded Church Triumphant?

How should we respond to these words?