

NOT YOUR DAD'S END TIMES STUDY

Session 7 - Revelation 1, 4-7

Tonight we'll begin with our actual study of the book of Revelation. We'll look at chapters 1, which is the introduction and then chapters 4-7, which are one unit. My goal through this is to hit the highlights of each chapter and the main teachings based on what is presented. We'll compare it to the clear teachings we've already seen elsewhere in the New Testament to come out of this with a unified, accurate, and cohesive teaching of the Word.

I. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the book of Revelation. [Read Revelation 1:1-3]

A. The word "revelation" means unveiling or disclosure.

1. It is Jesus Christ unveiling the end times to His faithful followers.

Q: Who communicated the visions and truth found in the book of Revelation to John? (*v.1 - Jesus Christ . It was communicated through His angel to the apostle John for the benefits of all His bond-servants.)*

Q: When will the events in this book take place? (*v.1 - The events revealed in this book will take place shortly. Remember, these words were spoken 2,000 years ago.)*

2. This is the only book in the Bible where an explicit blessing is given to those who read this book, hear the message and heed the instructions contained within it.

3. What is interesting about this is the John saw the entire revelation of Christ as a unit or whole. He witnessed it much like we'd sit down to watch a movie - all at one time. One of the keys to accurately interpreting the book of Revelation is to take it as a whole rather than a group of disjointed visions. These visions build upon each other and link to each other. As mentioned last week, sometimes we'll see the same event described twice - once from heaven's (God's) perspective and then from earth's (humans) perspective.

II. Christ Greet the churches. [Read Revelation 1:4-8]

A. These churches were actual, historical churches that existed in Asia Minor. If you count them, there are seven of them. Seven is the number of divine completeness or wholeness. Thus, these seven churches don't just represent those first century churches but rather all the churches or put another way, the universal body of Christ. These seven churches addressed by Christ as types of churches which will be found throughout this age. Many of the problems, strengths, and weaknesses will be the same in churches throughout history as found in those primitive churches of the first century. Jesus' messages to the seven churches are Jesus' messages to all true churches throughout the age of grace.

1. The Trinity is expressed in the greeting.

- a. The Father is the One who was, is and is to come. This is another way of saying, to the eternal One. The Hebrew thought was that if something was eternal, it was all-powerful. Thus when you read of God being eternal, you can link with it the notion that God is also omnipotent.

- b. The Holy Spirit is the seven Spirits. This is a constant reference in Revelation. Anytime you see the seven Spirits - it is speaking of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit

of God and the perfect Spirit or the Spirit who completes God's will.

c. Jesus Christ - He is shown as the faithful witness (during His incarnation), the One who was resurrected first and will be the pattern for our eventual resurrection, and supreme ruler over the world. Yet, despite these lofty titles, He is the One who loves us and released us from our sins by His own death.

1) One of the interesting points is that Christ made us, His bond-servants, to be a kingdom of priests to God. A priest is a person appointed by God to minister to God and to minister to man on behalf of God.

[I Peter 2:9]

Q: What are the various identities or new traits given to Christians upon their salvation according to this verse? (*chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, people for God's own possession*)

What is important to recognize that these were the functions ethnic Israel held initially in God's plan under the Law of the old covenant.

[Exodus 19:5-6]

Notice the similarities between the two groups. This is not an accident that Peter used this verse to describe the function of God's people under grace.

3) In the New Testament, the church is the New Israel. The function spoken of Israel in the Old Testament is now spoken of as the church in the New Testament and in Revelation. The church, the universal body of believers, is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. It's not an exclusive club of any one ethnic group but rather of everyone who has made their profession of faith in Jesus Christ and been born-again. I bring this up because in Revelation, when you read of Israel, you are reading about God's redeemed people, those who are serving the function of a chosen race, a holy nation and a royal priesthood - you are not reading about ethnic Israel of the old covenant. **[Ephesians 2:14-15]**

B. So if we are going to see Revelation as a movie, here in this introduction, we see the list of "good guys" listed here: God, in the Trinity, and His true followers.

1. Just as Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection (Acts 1:11), He will descend with the clouds upon His return so that everyone will see Him.

2. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In other words, Jesus exists in the past, present and future. It is similar to God revealing His name to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3) with "I AM". He is self-existent. The importance of this for believers is that they are all authoritative in nature and assure all believers that Jesus will be the One who triumphs victoriously in the end. So here at the very beginning of the book we are told the outcome by these titles. We know the One with all power will prevail in the end. They give us hope and assurance, even though the path to the end will be at times dark and unknown.

III. The first vision of John [Read Revelation 1:9-20]

A. John gives us his situation as to where he was and what he was doing when Jesus gave him these visions.

Q: Where was John when he received this vision? (v.9 - *the island of Patmos*)

Q: What was John doing on Patmos (v.9 - *he had been exiled to Patmos for preaching the gospel. It was on a Sunday and he was worshipping God when these visions were given to him. This lets us know that John saw these visions all at "one sitting"- not over the course of several days or weeks.*)

1. Even in the toughest times, like John was experiencing, we can worship God. He is always worthy and glorious so no matter what our circumstances are, we can worship the Lord.

2. John was in the Spirit when heard Jesus speaking to him.

3. These two verses foreshadow the most important themes in Revelation: the tribulation the church will experience and the coming fulness of God's kingdom.

4. John saw a symbolic representation of Jesus Christ - not the suffering servant but rather the exalted risen Lord who will soon return.

a. Look at what Christ is wearing in the vision.

Q: What was the appearance of the resurrected Lord Jesus? (vv. 13-15 - *standing among seven golden lampstands, long robe, golden girdle, pure white hair, fiery eyes, feet like burnished bronze, voice like many waters, seven stars in His hand, two-edged sword coming from His mouth, face shining like the sun*)

1) long robe - those are what was worn by priests and judges. He is coming on God's behalf to administer justice to the world.

2) girded with a golden girdle - this is another priestly garment but His is gold instead of cloth - it is pure, undefiled and lasting

3) head of hair that is pure white - white indicates Christ and righteousness but also in this context, since it is speaking of His hair, white hair symbolizes that Christ is the ancient of days. This is similar to the title of Eternal Father given to Christ in Isaiah 9:6.

4) eyes of flaming fire - fire is a tool of God to test and refine objects. As a testing tool, fire determines the true nature of all people and things. The impurities are burned out and all that is left is the pure element. It also hardens iron into steel. As a tool of divine judgment it reduces all things to ash. In other words, Christ's vision is such that it sees things as they truly are and as such His gaze reduces things to ash or hardens and strengthens them.

5) feet like burnished bronze - strength to crush anything beneath it without fear. Like the eyes, the burning nature shows their ability to mete out divine justice to mankind. Hebrews 1:13 mentions the Father making Jesus' enemies a footstool for Him. Nothing and no one will be able to resist being crushed by the force of His feet.

6) voice like many waters - symbolizes His irresistible power and fulness when He speaks. He will leave nothing out from this vision to John.

7) Seven stars in His right hand - this is a reference to the church. This element is defined in v. 20. Since these stars are in Christ's hand, they are secure and in His complete control. Nothing can snatch them from Him and they are safe.

8) two-edged sword from His mouth

Q: Why do you think the sword coming from His mouth is two-edged? Go back to what a sword symbolized in Revelation - divine judgment. *(He has the judicial might both inside and outside the church. His Word strips away all hypocrisy and sham and lays all things bare. His judgment isn't just for the lost or for the church - it's for both as He has the authority to judge both.)*

9) face shining like the sun - This is similar to how Jesus appeared to Peter, James and John on the mountain of transfiguration - full of God's glory. More than just justice, Jesus brings the light of righteousness with Him to the world. He brings God's grace that overcomes darkness.

B. The importance of the church to Jesus

1. The golden lampstands are the churches in the world. This symbol is explained by Christ in v.20). They are lighthouses to the dark world showing them God's light, glory and hope for salvation. The church is God's vehicle for getting the gospel, the only good news about salvation, to mankind.

2. The stars are said to be the angel of the churches. Each church has a spiritual side which is the church's true life and is kept in heaven with Jesus. This is the element in the church which relates the will of God and Word of God in spirit to the church body. It's the supernatural character that all genuine churches possess. A church is not merely what we see in this world. Since the members or parts of a church are in Christ and their spirits are already in heaven, there is a spiritual, heavenly side to the church that transcends the world's view of the church.

3. The fact that the stars are in Jesus' hand and He is walking among the physical church bodies shows us Christ's immediate presence to His body. Churches are more than social gatherings. They have a heavenly character that is heavenly. It is Christ who calls churches into existence. He also rules, leads, holds it together and judges each church. He gave His life for the church and spent His time while on earth developing the men who would some day lead His church. While the church has a universal component to it, it is rare in the New Testament when the word "church" is used that it's speaking of the universal church. All but a handful of times, church means the local body of believers. (Universal church is referred to in Matthew 16:18 and it is alluded to in Revelation after chapter 3, though the word "church" is not used.) The church is that important to Christ because it is His agent and plan for reaching the lost world to Himself.

IV. One vision with two parts

A. Chapters 4 -6 comprise one vision with two main parts. As mentioned before, we are looking at the same thing from a heavenly perspective (chapters 4 & 5) and then from an earthly perspective (chapter 6). In the heavenly portion of the vision John is shown two main objects/symbols: the throne of God with God sitting on the throne and holding a scroll in His right hand and then the Lamb who had been slain who takes the scroll from the right hand of God. The heavenly vision is linked to the earthly vision and actually affects it, too.

1. [Read Revelation 4:1-11] - The throne of God.

a. "These things" in v.1 refers to the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2 & 3.

b. In the spirit, John is whisked up to heaven. The phrase "in the spirit" just means that John's body is not affected or moved from Patmos. However, his spirit is moving between heaven and earth freely while in this state which lasts the rest of the book. *(While some have used 4:1-2 to indicate the pretribulation rapture, they fail to note that John is only in heaven*

until the end of chapter 9. In chapter 10 he is back on earth until 11:13 when his spirit returns to heaven only to return to earth in chapter 12 but then in chapter 14:18-20 he's back in heaven. To believe that 4:1 is a reference to a secret pretribulation rapture not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture (at least the clear passages), to be consistent in their interpretation, they would have to see the raptured church returning to earth and then ascending back to heaven multiple times to be in synch with John's spirit throughout the rest of Revelation. This brings up one more point which needs to be made. Many will say that the word "church" is not used after chapter 3 and the letters to the churches and thus the opening of 4:1 is a pretribulation rapture of the church. While it is technically true that the word "church" is not used later in the book, the church is present but different words are used to describe it. The church is the fulness of all the redeemed and is mentioned as the 144,000 at one point and called "Israel" in chapter 12.)

c. As with any vision, the main thought idea is what did John see?

Q: What was mentioned first? (*vv. 2-4 - the God and His throne*)

Q: What does a throne symbolize? (*The symbol of a throne represents a king or sovereignty to rule and judge. While this kingdom isn't visible to the naked eye yet, it will be by the end of the book.*)

1. God is described with translucent precious stones of various colors. This describes God's holiness and beauty. Also, there is only one being on the throne. The rainbow around His throne represents the covenant promise of God not to destroy the world again by water. It's a reminder that God is a promise-keeper. The flashes of lightning and peals of thunder are symbolic of God's presence and power and this theme will be repeated several more times in Revelation (5:8, 11:17-18, 19:1-4).

a. There are 24 thrones around God's throne and there are beings called elders who sit upon these thrones.

Q: What does the number 12 symbolize in Revelation? (*12 is the number of divine administration and also God's redeemed people.*)

Q: What is significant that 24 is two groups of 12? Who are the two groups of people administered by this group of elders? (*The fact that there are two groups of twelve, God's administrative number, can be taken that there are 12 elders overseeing the redeemed under to Old Covenant and 12 overseeing the redeemed under the New Covenant. The elders are not people but are some special class of angel. These beings are ALWAYS before God's throne and are best taken as a class of angel mentioned in Colossians 1:16.*)

b. The seven lamps which are burning before the throne is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon the initial believers at Pentecost in the form of flaming tongues.

c. The area before the throne is a sea of glass, in other words, it's like a window to the world below and God can see everything. Nothing is concealed from His sight.

d. There are four living creatures. These are heavenly creatures of the highest order who participate in some way in the worship and government of God and the affairs of the earth. Four is the number for the earth so these beings deal with earth in heaven in some way. What is

special about these creatures is that each one represents the chief of its class. The lion is king of the beasts. The cow/ox is the chief burden bearer. Humans are God's highest creation. Eagles are the chief of the birds. The six wings shows they have unlimited mobility - like the Seraphim of Isaiah 6. The fact that they have eyes all around them means they have incredible insight and wisdom. They ceaselessly proclaim the absolute holiness of God.

e. There is movement in worship. The four living creatures worship and then the elders worship and toss their crowns to God. This is a way to express that all that we do and all authority that we exercise comes from God! Notice that everything up to this point in the vision revolves around God and His throne.

Q: What do the four living creatures constantly say? (v.8)

This is important to note that these beings are not robots programmed to repeat a phrase over and over again. These are living beings who are always in the presence of God. This is their response to being in the presence of the one true living God.

Q: What does their praise tell us about God? (v.8 - *He is holy (different from the world), He is eternal, His is almighty.*)

Q: What is the praise of the 24 elders around God's throne? What are they praising God for? (*That He is able to receive glory, honor and power and that He created all things because He willed for them to exist.*)

This praise is foreshadowing. Like mentioned before, Revelation is like a movie or drama and it shares some aspects of drama. Of all the character traits or actions of God to praise, creation is chosen because creation will be front and center starting in the next verses when discussing the scroll. These beings have been around for most if not all of God's creative work in creating the universe. Now they want to see how things unfold towards God's conclusion.

2. There is one more major element of the throne scene and that is the scroll in God's right hand. **[Read Revelation 5:1-5]**

Q: How is the scroll described? What is its placement and appearance? (5:1 - *it is in the right hand of God, it is written on both the inside and back. The fact that it is completely full of writing means that it has everything included. It's full of what God intended it to convey. It is sealed up.*)

Q: Why can no one open the scroll? (vv.2-3 - *no one was found worthy to open the seals and read the scroll*)

a. We need to examine the contents of the scroll. The clear teachings and some simple detective work will give us the answer to the genuine nature of the scroll.

1) Think of this: If it were judgments, then anyone could open it. That's because all are worthy of judgment. John could have opened it because it would have been his destiny as one who had participated in the sins of the world.

2) However, it's contents are not judgment. The scroll contains the announcement of the consummation of history. It contains the knowledge of how things will end for all people and creation - the judgment of the lost and the rewards of the saints. Not only does it contain the revelation of history to come but also the implementation of that history. The contents of the scroll are briefly outlined in chapter 6 (on earth) but are detailed in chapters 7-22 (the rest of the book).

3) The reason that it is sealed is because no one in all of creation is worthy to break the seven seals. The number seven means that the book is sealed perfectly by God Himself. There are none like God who are sinless and perfect with full knowledge of God's plan and has been working with God in cooperation with God to bring human history to completion.

b. The implications of the scroll being sealed as it was and that it could only be opened by the Lamb (Christ) means that all of human history, apart from the person and work of Christ, is an enigma. The problems of the purpose of life, the goals of history and the difficult questions of this world are all impossible to know without knowledge of Jesus Christ who is the only being who can open the scroll. If you leave Christ out of the equation, all you get for creation's existence is a cosmic accident. If you leave Christ out of your calculations for man's purpose in existing, all you get is another cosmic accident. Without Christ there are no answers to life's biggest questions. This is another reason only Christ is worthy to unseal this scroll of human destiny.

c. This is why John is so upset that no one can open it. (Who would be upset if it were about judgments to come? That would be a good thing if it never got opened.) He believes there will be no one to answer the question of what is the meaning of life? What is my purpose in life? What is the purpose of creation and what is its future? Man can know nothing of the answers to these questions apart from Christ.

2. Now we come to the second portion of the heavenly vision: the Lamb who had been slain. **[Read Revelation 5:6-14]**

a. What is the description of Jesus given in v.6? *(a lamb standing, as if it had been slain. The lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. In John 1:29 John the Baptist called Jesus the "lamb who takes away the sin of the world." To make this happen, Jesus had to die - to be the lamb that was slain. However, He didn't stay dead but rose again. Thus the description of a lamb who had been slain but is now alive.)*

Q: What does the number 7 symbolize in Revelation? *(It is God's perfect number. It deals with divine completeness or Satanic counterfeit, thus the completeness of evil.)*

Q: What do the seven eyes symbolize? *(v.6 - this one is given to us at the end of the verse. The eyes represent the seven Spirits of God - the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ - Romans 8:9. Jesus is one with the Holy Spirit and knows all that the Spirit knows. The lamb is omniscient.)*

b. What does the seven horns mean? *(Horns represent authority. This lamb has God's authority, or all authority of God. Matthew 28: 19-20.)*

c. The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll from God and immediately the four living creatures and twenty four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb. Only after the Lamb was

slain was He worthy to take the scroll and open it since it contains, not judgments but the truth concerning the end human history and how it's going to play out. Jesus's death on the cross made it possible for God's plan to unfold. Since only God receives worship, we know that the Lamb is God.

1) The content of the new song sung by the 4 living creatures and 24 elders is the content of the prayers of the saints - for God's kingdom to reach all the earth.

Q: Why is this song sung by the 4 living creatures and 24 elders a new song? *(It's a new song because Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead and that is new - nothing like this had ever happened in heaven before. The Lamb was slain to bring mankind to God, people from every tribe were purchased with the blood of the slain Lamb and now there could be true peace between man and God and those who took His peace became God's priests and will reign upon the earth. These beings know that the scroll contains God's will and purpose for mankind and creation within it.)*

2) The next song sung was by many angels - a number too large to be counted.

Q: What are the traits the Lamb is worthy to receive? *(v. 12 - power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing)*

Q: How many traits are there listed? (7)

2) All these traits in the magnitude listed here are reserved for God alone. So we again see that the Lamb is the Son of God.

3) The third song is sung by all created things. All created life now joins the chorus to the Lamb as all owe worship to Him for His finished work. (Similar to Philippians 2:9-11.) Thus, history is not as ominous as it sometimes seems as the One who loves us and gave Himself up for us is the same One who holds history in His hand (the scroll). This vision is happening "out of time" or not in linear human history. It's indicative of what is happening throughout the end times (since the death of Jesus on the cross).

B. The next part of the vision - from earth's perspective - the overview of human history during the end times. **[Read Revelation 6:1-17]**

1. Jesus starts opening the seals from the scroll so that the things of the scroll are witnessed by those on the earth. Notice that Christ is the initiator of history as He opens the seals Himself. It is important to note that the seals themselves do not represent the content of the scroll. Instead they represent what must take place first for the contents of the scroll to be enacted fully. The first five seals are preliminary seals. They represent events which are to take place that set the stage for the end times. The first four are represented by riders of horses.

a. White horse - This is the dynamic proclamation of the gospel message. It is the message of Christ, thus it is conquering souls for the kingdom of God. Notice the white horse. The word "conquering" is the same word used in Revelation 2-3 in the letters to the church translated "overcome". According to Jesus, those who overcome will inherit the reward for their faithfulness. In this age the gospel is overcoming sin by God's grace as it's being proclaimed. Also, if you note in Revelation 19, when Christ returns, He is riding a white horse. Nowhere in

Revelation is white used for evil or falsehood or the devil.

b. red horse - war

c. black horse - famine

d. grey horse - death

e. These four go together as they are all on horses. It's to be taken as a set - they are taking place concurrently. So while the Christ's gospel is winning souls for heaven, there are wars, famines, and death happening simultaneously. These are four things which will be happening until Jesus comes a second time. These four are arranged like the "little apocalypses" of Matthew 24 (and Mark 13).

1) the period of false Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, death all called the beginning of birth pangs (Mt. 24:8)

2) the period of the great tribulation (Mt 24:21)

3) the period immediately following those days when Christ will return - the day of the Lord (Mt. 24:29-30) (Notice Christ does not come until after the Great Tribulation.)

f. The fifth seal deals with martyred saints. These are people killed because of their faith and being kept by God Himself until the return of Christ.

g. There is no time frame or order to these first five seals being broken. They are indicative of events that happen throughout this time called the end times.

2. Now something new happens with the sixth seal. There is no event in history that corresponds to this description. All of these events from vv.12-17 are mentioned in the Old Testament as horrific things related to God's judgment. It is best to take these events as a group as they symbolize a time of great terror and distress falling upon the earth.

Q: What do earthquakes symbolize in Revelation? (*God's judgment*)

Q: What do you think is the significance of the sun going dark? (*This is a time when gloom will overtake the earth.*)

a. If the first five seals were birth pangs, then the sixth seal is the labor happening. While the language is figurative and symbolic and not to be taken in stark literalness, it is describing a genuine, real event which has yet to happen. None of the wicked will be able to stand against the Lamb. We see the paradox of God here. Lambs are usually mild and tame yet this Lamb that they killed is now pouring wrath upon the unrighteous.

b. Everything in the book of Revelation has been introduced to this point. The end of history and the beginning of eternity will be the substance of the rest of the book as the seventh seal is broken and the contents of the scroll are revealed and play out in history.

Q: What is the question asked at the end of chapter 6? (the sixth seal, ends with a question asked by lost mankind experiencing the wrath of God. "*Who is able to stand against the wrath of the One who sits on the throne and the Lamb?*") *Whenever a question is asked in Revelation, there is an interlude or side-discussion that explains the answer to that question.*)

V. Who can stand against the wrath of God? [**Read Revelation 7:1-17**]

A. This chapter begins with the words "after this". In other words, this vision is separate from the other two, though its placement lets us know that it is the answer to the question just

posed. It will tell us who will not face the wrath of God. In Revelation, this is called an interlude. It is a literary device used to answer a question and though they appear as a break in the action, they are actually a continuation of the story-line from another perspective. After reading chapter 7 and knowing the question from chapter 6, there are three huge questions we have to be able to answer BEFORE we can know the truth about the answer to the question in chapter 6.

1. Who are the 144,000? (v.4)
2. What is the Great Tribulation ? (v.14)
3. Who are the great multitude which no one can count? (v.9)

B. The preparation of God's people before the wrath of God

Q: How many angels are mentioned in v.1? (4)

Q: What does the number 4 represent in Revelation? (the earth)

3. So the earth is about to receive God's wrath and these angels represent God's work of some sort in the world - in this case - justice and wrath. Notice that there is no wind blowing on the earth at this point for a time. It's a dramatic hush or pause that heightens the sense of what is about to happen. Remember that since the creation, these heavenly beings have been watching God's work unfold. Though they have seen it all so far, they are anxious to see God's plan fully unfold and for God to fulfill human history. This is similar to us using the phrase, "sitting on the edge of our seats". It also shows that the judgments will in no way be enacted before everyone who God wants sealed is sealed.

Q: What does the angel of v.2 have in his hand? (a seal)

Q: What is this angel sealing? (people)

c. This is a symbolic way of saying that the opening judgment upon mankind will be withheld until this group of 144,000 people are saved - thus they are safe from the judgments of God. Sealing is a spiritual act (done by angels - not people) and is similar to what Paul discussed was the work of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 1:13-14 (where He seals all believers guaranteeing them eternal life). One way to look at this sealing is Jesus keeping His promise to the church of Philadelphia by keeping them from the hour of testing (3:10). Those sealed must be those who are already saved.

Q: Who are the 144,000? *(They represent the whole body of Christ both saved Jews and saved Gentiles. Remember the church is the New Israel, the spiritual Israel. In Revelation 21: 9-21, the church is called the "bride, the wife of the Lamb" and is identified with the New Jerusalem. The twelve gates of the city are inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the foundation stones are inscribed with the twelve names of the apostles. The names of the twelve tribes is used to describe more than just the physical, ethnic tribes of Israel. Rather, they are being used to describe the entire body of believers.*

This number comes from adding 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes together. 12 is God's administrative number and full number of redeemed while 1,000 is the ten cubed or completeness. This number represents those who will be brought safely through the Great Tribulation into God's kingdom. There are two notes here: safely does not mean that their

physical lives were spared. It means that they were kept safe for eternity, even if they lost their lives. Second, this is not a physical number but a symbolic number. It is the total number of God's servants who will face the Great Tribulation. It is the total number of the last generation of Christians (and humans for that matter).)

The question pops up frequently that if this number doesn't represent only ethnic Jews, why is each tribe mentioned? What is important isn't the tribes mentioned but the one tribe not mentioned.

Q: Can you identify the one tribe that was not on this list? (*Dan - Dan was associated with idolatry in the Old Testament as it was the tribe most north and closest to the pagan world. It was the most distant from Jerusalem which was the center of worship for the Jews. [Judges 18:30-31] John is seeking to expose Christian idolatry and beast worship by excluding Dan from the list. Remember the very last verse of I John, he warns us to guard ourselves from idols.*)

d. So the answer to the question of who can stand is answered by those who are sealed and divinely protected from the wrath of God and the Lamb. Those who engage in idolatry, no matter what form, will not be sealed. Only the true servants of God will be sealed.

5. Who is the great multitude?

a. This is the same group of people mentioned earlier in the chapter. On the earth, they were the 144,000. That was the symbolic number that meant something in earthly terms. Now, they are seen from the heavenly perspective and from the future perspective. The great multitude are those who have been killed by the beast through his persecution. Notice that people from every tribe and tongue on earth make up the great multitude. (This is in fulfillment of Christ's words in Matthew 24:14.)

b. What do all of these people have in common? They came out of the Great Tribulation (v. 14). The phrase "came out" means that they came out of the world and came out of the persecution by dying. They were sealed for everlasting life and will now enjoy the comforts of the Lord forever but their faith and witness cost them their lives.

6. What is the Great Tribulation?

a. General tribulation is inseparable from Christian living. Any time a believer lives by faith in this world, that person will be persecuted (II Timothy 3:12).

b. An intense persecution will come upon the final generation of Christians and will be a climax to all previous persecutions. This time of persecution is mentioned in Daniel 12:1 and Matthew 24:21. It will be set apart from all other persecutions by the level of intensity and the nearness to the return of Christ. In other passages, this event is called the "day of the Lord" or the "great day of wrath" or "hour of testing which will come upon the whole earth". This wrath comes from and is described in the coming trumpets and bowls which are about to be described. The Great Tribulation is the final conflict between Satan and God/ Antichrist and Christ. This time is directly linked to the second coming. Despite its severity, there will still be at least a handful of Christians left in the world when Christ returns.

c. The final condition of the great multitude is described in vv. 15-17. Once this time is over, the Lamb will shepherd them, all their tears will be wiped away and they will know no more pain or thirst or hunger. God will dwell with these forever. Notice they are wearing the familiar white robes associated with the Lamb and His victories. This sounds a lot like

Revelation 21:4. Remember, the interlude answers the question but the seals give an overview of what is to come all the way to the end.

7. So why is there an interlude here?

a. It shows that God has a purpose for His people. Though they will be persecuted and martyred in the Great Tribulation, their reward is eternal and great in nature. This scene is to give them double hope. First, they now know that everything that follows in these visions, they will be spared God's wrath. Second, they know that even though the world will hate them and mistreat them, God will keep their souls secure for all eternity - far beyond the grasp of the beast to come.

b. Think about it. If you were about to face death for your faith, you'd want to possess a powerful hope and comfort that God was able to keep His promises to you despite what the world does - including torturing or mistreating you or even killing you. Remember the rainbow over the throne - it means God is a promise-keeper. This interlude not only answers the question posed in chapter 6, it gives those reading this note the comfort and hope that God will prevail on their behalf in the end.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?