

## Revelation Chapter 7- John Karmelich

1. This lesson is called, "Who's who in heaven". I also call it "Preservation". More on this later.
  - a) The good news about this lesson is we take a break from the earth's destruction.
  - b) The even better news about this lesson is nobody gets killed. ☺
  - c) The focus of this lesson is not on earth, but in heaven.
  - d) If you recall, John the writer of Revelation is standing in heaven. He's been there since Chapter 4 and he won't move until the end of the book. John goes back and forth between describing what is happening in heaven and what is happening on earth.
  - e) Chapter 7 focuses on the scene in heaven. We get back to earth destruction in Chapter 8.
2. Chapter 7 focuses on different groups that are saved. Thus the title, "who's who in heaven".
  - a) Let's face it, if we are going to heaven, we're going to be there a long time. We might as well get to know our new neighbors. ☺ We'll be living next to them for a good while!
  - b) A related issue to this lesson is "why" are these people saved. With all of this earth judgment and death happening in the surrounding chapters, some natural questions arise: Is anybody going to heaven during this process? If they are saved, who are they?
    - i) In the last lesson, my title was "last call". My view of Revelation is that it is a futuristic single time span where God is giving a "last call" to get saved before He winds up the salvation offer program. Others see the Revelation judgment is spanning human history since Jesus. In this view, the last 2,000 years (since Jesus) as one-big "last call for salvation" time frame before His second coming.
    - ii) In both views, Christians agree that some people get saved and some do not. The issue of this lesson is just "who" gets saved. Are they just "anybody" who accepts Jesus? What about people who accept Jesus prior to this tribulation? Do they get any special bonus privileges? ☺ What about the Jewish people? Do any religious Jews get saved during this time frame?
3. OK John, I have enough problems with my life right now. Why should I care who will be next to me in heaven? Can't we just have a "meet your new neighbor" party when we get there? ☺
  - a) One reason to know who is in heaven is to understand the nature of God. For example, we get a lot of Jewish people singled out in this lesson. We don't know why they are chosen, but they are chosen. The point is a lot of Jewish people get saved in this chapter.
  - b) Understand that despite all the bad things that happen during this "Great Tribulation" period, some positive comes out of it as well. We will read of multitudes of people getting saved. These people may have had to suffering during this specific time era, but that is nothing as compared to the reward of eternal salvation.
  - c) Another application is about never giving up praying for our unsaved friends. We as Christians have a tendency to give up on people too easily. We think those around us "don't get it" and will never be saved. God doesn't write people off as easily. I'm convinced we're all going to be shocked who is and who is not in heaven one day. When there is tremendous pressure, that is when you find out who is really trusting in God and who is not. Let's face it, the "Great Tribulation" sounds like a pressure-cooker block of time. ☺ This chapter speaks of "innumerable multitudes" being saved in this time frame.
    - i) This chapter is full of people who come out of the tribulation. With that said, never stop praying for the unsaved person on your heart. I believe God designed this unknown block of time just so we would keep praying for them.
    - ii) Pray to God to open their heart to the truth. It may not happen in our lifetime, but there may come a day, especially when "tribulation" comes, that our prayers maybe answered and that person commits their life to serving Jesus.

4. It's time to summarize the chapter:
- a) John is in heaven. In the last chapter, John was looking "back and forth" between two separate locations: The first location he was watching was at heaven. In particular, John was looking at Jesus taking off seven seals of a scroll. After each seal is taken off, John then looks at "location #2" which is the planet earth. Six seals are removed in Chapter 6. There are also six "visions" focusing on planet earth. In summary, much of the earth is judged and punished. There is lots of war, famine and death mentioned in Chapter 6.
  - b) What is important to mention is the seventh and final seal is not removed in Chapter 6.
  - c) Chapter 7 is a "break" from the seal-removal and earth judgment process.
  - d) Chapter 7 focuses on what is happening in heaven during this time.
  - e) One has to remember that heaven is a "timeless" place. God is not someone with lots of time on His hands. God is someone who exists outside of time as we know it. Therefore, one has to read the heaven passages in context of a timeless location.
    - i) In other words, Chapter 6 is chronological, and is also an overview sweep of the "Great Tribulation". The next few chapters coming up give us more details of what is happening on earth during this time frame.
  - f) Chapter 7 is a break from the earth action and discusses who is in heaven.
    - i) Among the "who" is of course, references to God the Father and Jesus the Son.
    - ii) There are references to angels.
    - iii) There are references to the 24 "elders" as discussed in Chapter 4.
  - g) The chapter focuses on two new groups in heaven. Both are important and both are saved for eternity. They are only new to John, who is the one describing the action in all of the visions of Revelation.
    - i) The first new group is a 144,000 "Jewish Christians" for a lack of a better term. They are people from Jewish backgrounds who are called by God to be His witnesses. We'll spend a good amount of time discussing this group in this lesson.
    - ii) The second new group is those who are saved out of this Great Tribulation. It consists of an innumerable multitude. The text says they come from all nations. Again, we'll discuss the "who, what, when and why" of this group in this lesson.
  - h) The last half of the chapter has both of these groups praising God. The other "groups" in heaven, the ones discussed in earlier chapters, join in the action and also praise God. This includes the 24 elders, the four "creatures" and the angels in heaven.
5. Chapter 7 is full of word pictures that don't have any explanations. In order to discern what they mean, first, we need to discuss a few bible study methodology rules. In other words, this chapter is full of strange stuff and the chapter spends very little, if any time explaining what it means.
- a) In order to understand the meaning of the symbols of this book, one has to know their "bible study methodology" rules. For example:
    - i) 1) Try to read the text in context of the surrounding verses.
    - ii) 2) Look elsewhere in Revelation to cross references to the same "characters".
    - iii) 3) Look elsewhere in John's writings for clues. John also wrote the Gospel of John, 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. For example, if John used the word "elder" elsewhere in his writings, the same word should have a consistent use here in Revelation.
    - iv) 4) We look elsewhere in the bible. One of the keys to understanding the bible is that the word-pictures used are fairly consistent from book to book. For example, Chapter 4 mentioned a "rainbow". Well, the only other rainbow discussed in the bible is the one after the Noah's ark story. Therefore, we look elsewhere in the bible for clues as to how to interpret a verse or a phrase.
  - b) Using these rules, one can get a "most likely" explanation of the text. Revelation has lots of word-pictures. Yes, there are some things to take literally and one can go too far with word pictures. The secret to understanding Revelation is to cross-reference those word-pictures to other parts of the bible.

6. Now the important question: Why is Chapter 7 here?
- a) Here was God "busy" causing destruction and havoc on the earth in Chapter 6. ☺
  - b) We read of wars, famine, and death in Chapter 6. The action continues in Chapter 8.
  - c) Yet, Chapter 7 gives a chapter long interruption to tell us who is in heaven.
  - d) Remember, when we are stuck on a bible question, the first thing to consider is the context. Look at the surrounding verses. That often gives the context of the issue at hand.
  - e) I say that because the answer to the "why" question is the last two verses of Chapter 6:
    - i) "They (nonbelievers on earth) called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"
    - ii) In other words, those on the earth somehow knew that God was judging them and causing all of this havoc. The last phrase of the last verse of Chapter 6 ends with the phrase "who can stand"? In other words, the people of the earth are wondering can anyone survive all this "stuff" happening on earth?
    - iii) The answer is yes. The answer is Chapter 7. Chapter 7 gives two specific groups that do survive (at least in terms of eternal life in heaven) from this time era.
    - iv) Therefore, one needs to see Chapter 7 as God answering the question posed at the end of Chapter 6 that says, "Who can stand"? It is God giving the reader of Revelation an opportunity to be saved! It is saying one can have salvation and be part of those in heaven if one is willing to ask Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.
    - v) That the key point to this chapter!
  - f) Getting back to the title of this lesson, "Who's who in heaven", a purpose of the chapter is to offer hope to those going through the Great Tribulation. It is to let those living in the Tribulation that it is not too late to be saved. Yes, they have to go through this period and may die during this time frame, but death in this life means "life" in the next life.
    - i) Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10:39 NIV). That will literally come true during the Great Tribulation.
    - ii) The application to you and I today is despite "whatever" is going on around us, we need to have that eternal perspective that we do live forever. There is a hope and a joy that is far greater than whatever "tribulation" we have in this lifetime.
  - g) On that positive note, we can start Chapter 7.
7. Chapter 7, Verse 1: After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.
- a) Hey John, I thought you said Chapter 7 focuses on what is happening in heaven? Here we are describing "earth-stuff" again. The key is the first words of Verse 3. It says, "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until". Chapter 7 is a "pause" in the earth-judgment process until this "until" is completed. The "until" happens in Chapter 8.
  - b) In other words, these angels are about to do some "damage" to the earth, sea and trees.
    - i) God is saying in effect, "Whoa there boys; ☺ don't start the show until I, God preserve some specific people to be saved."
  - c) Now that I have the perspective of Verse 1 explained, it is time to talk about the verse itself. The verse starts by saying there are four angels at the four corners of the earth.
    - i) As I stated, Revelation works in word-pictures. Obviously, the earth does not have four corners. This is a poetic way of saying the entire world is affected.
    - ii) If one stands on the earth anywhere, the wind can blow from (essentially) one of four directions (i.e., north, east, south or west). The idea of holding back "the four winds" is to say no wind is blowing from any of the four classical directions.
    - iii) To understand Verse 1, all one has to do is look at Verse 3: God says to not harm the land, sea or trees until God "preserves" those who are called to salvation.

- d) So why single out the land, sea and trees? Visualize a strong, hurricane-like wind blowing: It causes high waves to blow in the seas and cause damage to any ships. It destroys man made structures and it knocks over trees.
    - i) Some take these word pictures a bit further. One can read the bible and know that the "land" is a focus on the Promised Land. Therefore, the "land" refers to the nation of Israel and the Jewish people. Later in Revelation, the "sea" is often a word picture for the rest of the world, or the Gentile (a.k.a., non-Jewish) people. (See Revelation 17:15). The word "tree" is often associated with leaders over the people. Just as trees are the tallest of the plant life, many see "trees" as references to the great leaders of the world. (Examples: Judges Chapter 9, Daniel 4)
  - e) This is the first of many examples in Revelation 7 where we have some information given, but no significant information given as to "why". In other words, we don't know exactly know why God used this "four wind" picture to harm land, sea and trees, other than the direct information on the text. One has to use "bible rules" to properly interpret the text, which includes looking elsewhere in Revelation and then looking elsewhere in the bible.
  - f) I believe God wants us to focus on what is written versus what is not written. What is written is that there is no "winds (of judgment)" until certain people are saved.
    - i) The application has to do with God's perfect knowledge. If God knows all things, God knows who is saved for eternity. We may not know, but God does. Therefore, God says, "You, you, and you over there" are going to be saved for eternity despite all of the horrible things that happen". If you recall, I also call this chapter "Preservation". It is about those who are preserved during this time era.
    - ii) Is God being fair? After all, God is not picking everyone out to be saved. The short answer is we are not God and we as humans, with our limited knowledge, can't answer that question. The short answer is to "get saved" and then know, from God's perspective that He "already knew" you were saved!
8. Verse 2: Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: <sup>3</sup> "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."
- a) In Verse 1, we had four angels "holding back the wind".
  - b) In Verse 2, we have another angel with the power to put "God's seal" on those who are saved. This 5th angel says to Angels #1-#4 in effect, "Hold your horses there cowboys, let me go brand my saved cattle before you stampede them all around the place". ☺
  - c) Let's talk about angels for a moment. The word "angel" means, "messenger". In other words, they are sent by God to go perform certain tasks. I get the impression that, for example, there are not selected angels with the specific power to stop the wind. It is God and God alone who can control the wind and then, at this specific moment in time, God "channels" that power through angels in order for God to accomplish His mission.
  - d) If you recall, Jesus was on a boat in a windstorm with His disciples. Jesus "rebuked" the wind and then it got calm (Ref: Mark 4:39, Luke 8:24). Does that mean Satan is granted the power to control the wind at times? It appears so, based on these verses. It doesn't mean every windstorm is demonic or God inspired. It does mean God is in control of all things and God "allows" certain things to occur, ultimately for His own glory.
  - e) Remember that this "show" is being done for John-the-writer's understanding as well as your understanding and my understanding. God could have just "done" all of this judgment and preserved people through the Tribulation without having to explain it all.
    - i) Remember the title of this book is "Revelation". It is the same root word as "revealing". The idea is God is revealing His game plan to us. God is letting us know that a big, bad destruction is going to happen to the world, and that certain people do get saved through the process.

- f) Back to the word-pictures of Verse 2: We have "An angel coming up out of the east".
  - i) Why the "east"? The logical answer is to think of what else comes up out of the east: The sun. No matter where you are on the earth, the sun rises from the east. (Except the north and south poles for all of you geography buffs. ☺ )
  - ii) When we think of a sunrise, we think of a "new day". It is a word picture of hope. It is the "light shining in the darkness". Despite all of the misery that is happening on the earth, there is a "new day" for those who are saved.
  - iii) That is why (in my opinion), it is mentioned that this "5th angel" is described as "coming up from the east". Again, the exact reason for "the east" is not given.
- g) The main idea of Verse 3 is this 5th angel yells out to the other four angels to not start the destructive wind process until those who are "sealed" by God, well, actually get sealed.
  - i) I should point out the word "destructive" is not in the text. The text just says the "winds" are held back by the four angels until this "sealing" process is done. It is logical to assume that these winds refer to destructive winds, given all of the destructive-judgment that takes place in the previous chapter and the next chapter. Remember, a key to interpreting Revelation is to read it in context.
- h) OK, time to discuss "sealing". What does that mean?
  - i) The word picture would be like God "branding" cattle (i.e., people) that are His. Only in this case, the brand is not visible and does not hurt when applied. ☺
  - ii) At major sporting events or amusement parks, when one wants to exit that place and come back later, one often gets their hand stamp with an "invisible" mark. When that mark is shown under an ultraviolet light (or "black light"), the mark is visible. That is the closest illustration I can think of to describe this sealing. God puts a mark on people that only He can see.
  - iii) The only difference is God's mark does not wash off. ☺
- i) Since we're discussing "sealing", we should ask, "How do we really know we are saved?"
  - i) My favorite answer is "That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9 NIV). It is that simple act that causes one to be saved.
  - ii) Notice this verse doesn't say anything about how "loud" you yell out Jesus is Lord. There is nothing about how often you go to church or how much you sin in your life. Grant it, other things are "signs" that one truly believes Jesus is God, but the simple act of believing itself is what counts.
    - a) The proof of one's salvation is how one acts after they are saved. Salvation comes from faith. The proof of one's salvation is how one acts after they are saved.
  - iii) The point is if one simply says or thinks Jesus is Lord and believes it, and believes God raised Jesus from the dead, one is saved, period. At that moment in time, God "seals" us for eternal salvation. As long as one believes that, one is saved.
    - a) What about periods of doubts? All Christians go through that. It is not encouraged, but it happens, especially during difficult times. I find that when the moment counts, even during those times of doubts, we still hold true to these facts and are eternally saved and secured.
    - b) One can spend a lot of time on the debate of "eternal security". The simple answer is as long as one believes those two things (Jesus is Lord and God raised Jesus from the dead) then one is eternally secured.
  - iv) When we get to chapter 13, we'll get to the famous "seal of the antichrist" which is the "666" number. My point here is that Satan "imitates" God. Just as God as His permanent seal on those who are saved, Satan puts his own seal, which is called "the mark of the beast" on those who declare their allegiance to Him.

9. Verse 4: Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, <sup>6</sup> from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, <sup>7</sup> from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, <sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.
- a) In Verses 4 through 8, we now get to the first of two "groups" that are sealed through this Great Tribulation period. (By the way, we'll get into that expression, "The Great Tribulation" later in this lesson, as it is specifically used in Verse 14 of Chapter 7).
  - b) Let me start by using my favorite illustration to describe the 12 tribes of Israel: Suppose there was one man named the "United States of America". Let's call him "Mr. USA" for short. Let's suppose God told Mr. USA that he was going to have 50 sons and he would also inherit a piece of real estate that is now the United States. Each of his 50 sons were allotted an area within this territory and the total territory is what belongs to the 50 sons. Each of the descendants of the 50 sons then lived in their respective territory.
    - i) Let me continue by saying after a few generations, the descendants intermarried and not all descendants of "Mr. California" lived in California. It eventually got to a point where even though there is a territory of "California", not all the residents of California are the descendants of "Mr. California".
    - ii) This crude illustration is how the nation of "Israel" eventually existed. God promised Abraham that the land, we know as Israel belonged to his descendants. Abraham's grandson was Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons. Those 12 sons were the 12 tribes of Israel. Each had their own "territory" many generations later when their descendants divided up the land. Eventually, the residents intermingled, but the names of the territories (similar to the American "states") were still named after one of their 12 ancestors.
    - iii) By the way, the ancestral records of the Jewish people were lost when the Jewish Temple was destroyed in 70AD. With the exception of some Levi families, the Jewish people today do not know what tribe they originally come from.
    - iv) Now let me get back to "Mr. United States of America". Suppose he only had 49 sons and one of them was named "Dakota". Mr. Dakota had two sons named, "North Dakota and "South Dakota". Mr. USA then says to daddy-Dakota, I'm going to adopt your two sons as my own "instead of you". Your two sons will have equal stature along with the 49 brothers of daddy-Dakota". That way, instead of having 49 sons, I now have "an even 50" when I divide up the territory.
    - v) The reason I give this "Dakota" illustration (with my apology to the Carolina's for not choosing that state ☺) is because that is what happened to the 12 tribes of Israel. One of them, Joseph, had two sons. Joseph's father, Jacob "adopted" Joseph's two sons as being equal with the father Joseph.
    - vi) All of this is important, because even though there are 12 tribes of Israel, there are "13 names to choose from". For example, sometimes the bible wants to list "all 12 tribes", but wanted to exclude Levi. The bible then uses the two "grandsons but are now sons" as part of the list in order to keep the list as a perfect 12.
  - c) Now that my page-long background is complete, we can now actually get to these verses.
  - d) In Verses 4-8, we have some descendants of the "12 tribes of Israel" listed. What is specifically listed is 12,000 descendants of each of the 12 tribes. The point of these verses is that these (12,000 x 12 =) 144,000 people are preserved through the tribulation.
  - e) Now we get into lots of questions: For example, why have 12,000 from each tribe? Why not 139 from each tribe or 27 million from each tribe? Why this specific number?
    - i) I believe it is because the number "thousand" in the Old Testament is God's way of saying a large "perfect" number.

- ii) For example, God said in the 10 Commandment passage, "But (God) showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." (Exodus 20:6 NIV). Does that mean there are exactly 1,000 generations of people that God will show love to? No. It is a "word-picture" designed to teach about God's infinite love.
  - a) Suppose a mom says to a child, "I've told you a thousand times to go clean up your room and it is still a mess". Does that mean the mother said that phrase exactly 1,000 times? No. It is a word picture designed to teach that she said it lots and many times.
  - b) I believe God is using that same sort of word picture when He uses the phrase "a thousand generations", which occurs several times in the Old Testament. It is not to literally convey a thousand generations of life.
- iii) So are you saying there are not "exactly" 12,000 from each tribe in heaven?
  - a) I believe in the bible rule, "If the plain text makes perfect sense, seek no other sense". The text says 12,000 and most likely, God means 12,000. Given Revelation's love of word-pictures, one can speculate there is more or less preserved from each tribe. At the least, one can say there is "lots of lots" of people who are preserved from each tribe. Personally, I take the number literally, but we'll find out ourselves one day.
- f) I have to admit that I wondered, "How did John know it was 12,000? Was there a big scoreboard in heaven? ☺ Did an angel make an announcement saying, "And now, presenting the 12,000 persevered from the tribe of Levi"? ☺ How did John know who was from what tribe? Did they have name tags with their names and tribal affiliation?
  - i) This reminds me of the story of when Jesus appeared on a mountaintop with Elijah and Moses. Three of Jesus 12 apostles were with them. They apostles knew it was Elijah and Moses. How did the apostles know that? Were there nametags?
    - a) (Source: Matthew 17, Mark 9 and Luke 9).
  - ii) My answer to both situations is that in heaven, "somehow" we too are given perfect knowledge of names and information. Given the fact I have trouble remembering names, this is a very good thing. ☺ I suspect that John just "knew" there were 12,000 from each tribe and John didn't have to count. John just knew that these were Jewish descendants and knew they were from different tribes. Take comfort in the fact we don't have to recall names and information about people in heaven. God will give us that "knowledge" in heaven.
- g) Which leads to a key point of Verses 4-8: Two of the 12 tribes are missing from this list!
  - i) If you recall the illustration of "North Dakota and South Dakota", imagine if God just listed "Dad-Dakota and "South Dakota" among the 50 states, but not "North Dakota". That is a concept that occurs in these verses.
  - ii) In Verse 8, we have the tribe of Joseph listed. Joseph had two sons named Manasseh and Ephraim. The tribe of Joseph is listed in Verse 8. The tribe of Manasseh is listed in Verse 6. However, the tribe of Ephraim is not listed at all. The tribe of Ephraim is indirectly included as Joseph's son, but that's it.
    - a) It is as if God purposely left out "North Dakota", but "sort of" mentioned that state because "Dad-Dakota" is listed as one of the 12 tribes.
  - iii) The other tribe that is missing is the tribe of Dan. One of the 12 original sons of Jacob was named Dan. He is not listed at all among these 12 tribes.
- h) OK John, I get all of this. I understand 2 of the 12 tribes are "missing". What's your point?
  - i) It's time to pay attention. ☺ The text is going through all sorts of time and trouble to take this text literally. Let's face it, if this text about "12,000 saved from this tribe and that tribe" were generic or just word pictures, God would not have specified all the details about the tribes.

- ii) I state all of this because you will find commentaries that claim the "12,000 from each tribe represents the Christian church". There are also cults that claim "they" are the 12,000 from each tribe.
      - a) For example, the Jehovah Witnesses believe they are 144,000 as described in Revelation. The problem is their numbers are now larger than 144,000 and they now argue that the 144,000 get to be in heaven and the rest are saved on earth. Whenever I encounter a Jehovah Witnesses, I like to ask, "What tribe they you from?" When they look at me puzzled, I take them to Chapter 7 and point out the tribes.
    - iii) This text went to "a lot of time and trouble" to indicate that these people are of Jewish background that became Christians.
  - i) OK, I get the fact these are Christians of Jewish background. Why should I care? ☺
    - i) The point is God made unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel. God told Abraham that the Promised Land would permanently belong to his descendants. We'll, that would be a "problem", unless a good size group of them was saved. God still has to deal with the sin-issue as well as keep the unconditional promise. Therefore, God needs a "good sized group" of saved Jewish-Christians to inherit the Promised Land one day. Thus, here are the "144,000".
    - ii) By the way, the final chapter of the Book of Ezekiel is about the dividing up of the Promised Land. That book was written during the Babylonian captivity. Since it was written, the land of Israel has never been divided up this way. Remember that here in Revelation, the tribe of Dan is omitted and the tribe of Ephraim is "semi-omitted" (e.g., the "North-Dakota's Dad" illustration). Yet in Ezekiel's prediction, both the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are listed as given part of the Land.
  - j) So why are these two tribes omitted? The answer has to do with idolatry.
    - i) The tribe of Dan was the first to go into idolatry during the time of the book of Judges. (Ref. Judges 18:30.) When the Nation of Israel went through a time era of a split kingdom, the "Northern Kingdom" went into idolatry and set up two golden calves. Yes, one was in Ephraim and one was in Dan. (2nd Kings 10:29)
    - ii) The subtle point is God takes the sin of idolatry seriously. That sin caused some "long term punishment" for the tribe, and there is some omission here in Revelation. Those two tribes are still part of God's unconditional promises, and they are listed in Ezekiel's "reward" list in Chapter 48 of Ezekiel.
  - k) What does all of this mean to you and me? We can count on God's unconditional promises to you and me. If we can't count on God's unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel, how can we "count" on God's promises to us through Jesus?
  - l) The other thing to get out of these verses is "If God says you are preserved, you are preserved, period". Did the "144,000" deserve this blessing? No more than you or me. For whatever reason, God decided, out of His own grace to save this particular group. For whatever reason, God decided out of His grace to save you and me. We spend eternity showing gratitude for that fact, along with these 144,000 Jewish-Christians.
10. Verse 9: After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."
- a) We actually move on to "somebody else" being saved in this chapter. The good news is this group does not require three pages of analysis. ☺ Verse 14 states who they are.
  - b) Let's focus on what Verses 9 and 10 say about this group. First of all, it was big. John specially states in Verse 9 that it was so big, no one count them.



- c) John specifically says he doesn't know how big this group is. Compare that to the "144,000" of the previous verses. That's a significant size group all unto itself. You get the idea that in comparison, this group has to be in the millions or even greater.
  - i) I believe one reason that John was not told the specific number of people is so we don't "rule out" anyone being saved. Keep praying for that person you think is beyond hope! If the group is this big, your odds are pretty good. ☺
  - ii) The next thing John notices is that they are from all different nations. Again, maybe they had name tags. Somehow, John just knew. John also pointed out they spoke in different languages. This gets me to believe (just my view) we each speak our own language, but somehow, everyone understands us. It's kind of like watching Star Trek, where the human race encounters all sorts of aliens, but everyone speaks English. ☺
  - iii) John then points out they all have white robes. My first thought was, "Gee, God must have a big wardrobe department. ☺ In reality, if God could create the universe with the "snap of His fingers", He could instantly give us new robes.
  - iv) John also points out this multitude has palm branches. In the Middle East culture, people would wave palm branches at a king when he passes. Christians should instantly think of "Palm Sunday" when we think of palm braches. Palm Sunday is the day we remember when Jesus presented Himself as king and his followers waved palm branches at Jesus as He went by. (Ref. John 12:13)
  - v) Finally, this group cries out to God in a loud voice that "Salvation belongs to God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (Jesus)."
    - a) In other words, this group knew they were saved. They understood the Gospel message. They knew who was at the center of the throne.
- d) Notice in Verse 9 the word "standing". This group is standing before God's throne.
  - i) This leads to the speculation of who is this group. When we get to Verse 14, we will learn that this group "comes out of the Great Tribulation". In other words, these are the people who get saved during this Tribulation period.
  - ii) There is a theory based on the word "sit" in Chapter 3, Verse 21. To the church in Philadelphia, Jesus made a promise to those Christians who are saved: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne." (Revelation 3:21 NIV)
  - iii) The point is Jesus told the Christian church in Chapter 3 that if they are saved, they have the right to sit with Jesus on the throne. Here in Chapter 7, this group is standing around the throne.
    - a) For those of us who believe the rapture of the church happens prior to this Great Tribulation period, we love this "sit and stand" reference.
    - b) The view is that the church is represented by the 24 elders. Those 24 elders, as described in Chapter 4, sit on 24 thrones around God's throne.
    - c) Here is this multitude, that comes out of the Great Tribulation (again, Verse 14 of this chapter) and they are standing around the throne.
    - d) In other words, if you are Christian prior to Great Tribulation, you get a good seat. For everyone else, its standing room only. ☺
  - iv) Obviously, those who don't hold this view on the rapture have different views about who are the 24 elders and who gets saved. Those who argue that the "Great Tribulation" cover all of Church history will say this "innumerable multitude" represent all who get saved over the last 2,000 years. This view is that the 24 elders represent some sort of angelic creatures and all Christians are the ones who get saved out of the 2,000-year and still counting "Tribulation of life" on earth. There are variations of that view, but that is the main one.

- e) Tying these verses to Verse 14, the important thing is lots of people get saved out of the Tribulation. Remember that Chapter 7 is in effect an answer to a question posed at the end of Chapter 6. The last verse of Chapter 6 asks in effect, "Who can survive all of this judgment?" Apparently, millions or billions do, in the sense of salvation.
    - i) There is also a speculation that the "144,000" are "Jewish witnesses" the world, and the results of that witness are the multitude that come out of the Tribulation.
11. Verse 11: All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"
- a) If there is one thing I know for sure about heaven, is that when one group decides to start praising God, it is like a contagious disease that spreads! ☺
    - i) Back in Chapter 4, when the four "creatures" started praising God, the 24 elders "cast their crowns" before God and essentially joined in the praise. Chapter 4 said they did this on a regular basis.
    - ii) Here in Chapter 7, when this "big multitude of people" started praising God, everyone else in the room joined in. The included the angels, the "24 elders" and the "four living creatures". Again, praise is contagious in heaven!
  - b) The way I look at it, if we're going to spend a lot of time praising God in heaven, we might as well get used to it now and do it regularly!
  - c) Why we do spend so much time praising God? For starters, it is out of gratitude. Try to visualize living say, 100 years. Try to picture 1,000 years, or even longer. What's the longest time frame one can think of? Now think of "eternity". It makes one all the more grateful for one's salvation. Also, the more we realize what sinful creatures we really are, the more we appreciate God all the more and the more we want to thank Him!
    - i) At the least, praising God gives us a good attitude. We can tolerate whatever life throws at us much more if we can have this eternal perspective.
  - d) So is that all we do in heaven, praise God? Won't that get boring after awhile? ☺ I think there is lots more to do in heaven. At the least, there are lots of new people to meet! The bible does not spend a lot of time describing what heaven is like. The main purpose of the bible is to teach us how to live here and now. My view is that if God is going to save us for eternity, He must have an eternity-long set of plans for us!
  - e) Getting back to the verses, notice the praise is focused on God alone. Nobody in heaven is praising themselves! Nobody is congratulating each other for making it through the tribulation! All the credit goes to God Himself. That's the idea to get out of this verse.
12. Verse 13: Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know."
- a) Do you know when somebody is just dying to tell you something, and then they put that information in the form of a question? That is what is happening here. One of the 24 elders takes a break from praising God to pose a question to John-the-writer.
  - b) This elder is saying to John in effect, "Hey John, I know all of this is overwhelming to you, but I want you to really understand who is this great "innumerable multitude" is.
    - i) Again, the elder knew the answer to the question before he asked it to John. This elder just wanted to make sure John knew who this multitude was.
    - ii) That is why John responded in Verse 14 by saying, "Sir, you know". In other words, John was saying, "I don't know who they are, tell me."
  - c) This tells us a few other things about heaven:
    - i) The 24 elders are capable of acting individually. Just one of the 24 stopped to ask John a question. It also tells us John did not have "perfect knowledge" when He got to heaven. Obviously John knew a lot of other things, based on what is written so far in the text. Still, John had to be told who "is" this great multitude of people.

- ii) Another thing John did not know is the exact number of this multitude. John did know there were 144,000 Jewish Christians, but John was not given the exact number of this multitude. My theory on this is that only God the Father knows the exact number of people who are saved.
- d) The specific answer to the question of "Who are these people" is the rest of Verse 14: Verse 14 (cont.): And he (the elder) said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
- 13.
  - a) Remember that when studying the bible, when the text itself explains the passage, there is no need for any further explanation. The text says that this "multitude" consists of people who have come out of the "Great Tribulation".
  - b) OK, so now onto the big question: What is the "Great Tribulation"?
    - i) Let's define the word first. The word "tribulation" means a time of great trouble.
    - ii) This is actually the first time that phrase "Great Tribulation" is used in Revelation. Even though I've been describing it since the early chapters, the official term comes from here in Chapter 7.
    - iii) In the original Greek text, there is an emphasis on the word "the". In other words, it is not "a" Great Tribulation, it is the Great Tribulation. It is a specific event.
    - iv) As I stated in earlier chapters there are two major views in Christianity on the Great Tribulation. One view among bible scholars is that it refers to a literal, futuristic time frame. The view is that it is a literal 7-year period. The "bad stuff" happens in the last half of this 7-year period. Why seven years? The answer is based on text in Daniel 9 and Revelation 11. I'm saving the details when we get to Revelation Chapter 11.
    - v) The other view, which is popular among many "traditional" denominations is the Great Tribulation is either 1) a historical event and ties to Christians who have been martyred for their faith or 2) is a continual event that marks all of human history since the Christian church was born. Those that "overcome" this sinful world get saved. This latter view is that all of human history since Jesus' resurrection is one big tribulation.
    - vi) Regardless of the time frame, Revelation describes the Great Tribulation in Chapters 6 through 19. All of the judgment, death and destruction that happens on earth as described in these chapters is the Great Tribulation.
      - a) That is why it is important to understand that Revelation is not perfectly written in chronological order. Here in Chapter 7, we see all the saved people who come out this Great Tribulation. Yet, we still have many chapters to go to describe more details of the Tribulation itself.
      - b) That is why I describe heaven as a "timeless" place. In heaven, all the "results" are already in heaven. From the perspective of planet earth, which is stuck "in" time, the event is still occurring.
  - c) Let's get back to the Verse: Verse 14 then says, "They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb".
    - i) This sentence is not describing a literal laundry process. ☺ Notice that their robes were made white by washing them in Lamb's blood. That wouldn't work in reality. Obviously this is a word picture of people being made "sinless" because Jesus himself paid the price for everyone's sin with His blood. The picture is that of people being made "pure" (i.e. white-clean) by the shedding of Jesus' blood.
    - ii) Isaiah said, "Though your sins are like scarlet (red), they shall be as white as snow;" (Isaiah 1:18 NIV). That is the same idea being taught here.

14. Verse 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 spread his tent over them.
- a) In Verse 15 we now have the function and location of those multitudes of people who get saved out of the Great Tribulation:
    - i) They "stay forever" at the throne of God and serve Him day and night.
    - ii) In other words, God's throne room becomes their permanent home.
    - iii) How do they "serve" God? What are God's needs anyway? ☹ The text doesn't say. All we can do is focus on what the text does say.
    - iv) If you read Verses 15-17 in context, you get the impression the focus is to comfort those people who come out the Great Tribulation. Reading these three verses over and over again, one gets the idea that these people have gone through a lot of suffering and now they are just glad to not be going through it anymore.
    - v) In other words, the focus of the text is not on what these people actually do in heaven, but the fact that they made it to heaven in the first place, and they no longer have to suffer through that Great Tribulation.
  - b) If you recall from earlier lessons, God's temple is often compared to the original "Tabernacle" structure as described in the last half of the Book of Exodus. Remember the original tabernacle had an indoor structure located within an outdoor fenced area. God's presence was within the indoor section. This covered area is "one big tent". Getting back to Verse 15, the text says, "He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them".
    - i) In other words, God's tent is adjustable in size. ☺
    - ii) It is now big enough to cover and fit this multitude of people.
    - iii) I've also stated in earlier lessons that I believe people exist in more than three dimensions when we get to heaven. If you recall, after Jesus was resurrected, He was able to enter a locked room. (Ref.: John 20:26) At the same time, people could touch Jesus and see He was "real flesh". This is how I see billions coexisting in a single throne room. We exist in more than three dimensions. Confused? That's ok, just wait until we get there. ☺
15. Verse 16: Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- a) As I stated a few paragraphs back, you get the impression the focus of these last three verses is that this great multitude has gone through a lot of suffering, and now God is comforting them and saying in effect, "It is all over, you won't have to suffer anymore".
  - b) There is a natural human reaction to not actually break down and cry during suffering, but after it is all over. During crisis times, we're busy "dealing" with it. It is often during moments of reflection after the event where the frustration of all causes us to break down.
    - i) Notice the last sentence "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".
    - ii) This tells me we have the ability to cry in heaven. It also tells me that even though there are millions or billions of people, God can wipe away individual tears.
  - c) This group did suffer from hunger and thirst on earth. I suspect this hunger ties to the "famine" references from the last chapter (Revelation 6:8). Remember this group goes through this Great Tribulation. Part of that time frame included famine.
  - d) When we get to Revelation 16, one of the judgments describes "intense heat", as if there is a world-wide heat wave with no relief. Here in Chapter 7, Verse 16, we read that this multitude no longer suffers from scorching heat.
  - e) Again, the key point is this group is persevered through all of this suffering.
    - i) Despite the fact they had to suffer through the Great Tribulation and despite the fact they had to die during that period, they are preserved for eternity.

- ii) The application is that you and I are preserved. No matter what you and I go through in this life, we too are "marked" in a way by God so that we are saved. Having that perspective helps us to get through whatever life throws at us.
- 16. OK, let's wrap up this lesson:
  - a) The lesson focuses on two specific groups that get saved. One is the "144,000" and one is a large multitude of people from all nations. You get the idea that God is emphasizing the fact that people from both Jewish backgrounds and non-Jewish backgrounds get saved during this Great Tribulation period.
  - b) My title for this lesson was, "Who's who in heaven". This chapter focused on different groups that are saved. It gives us an understanding that people do get saved during this time frame and that number is huge.
  - c) Since a large percentage of people think there is a literal "final period of time" in which one can get saved, there are some who won't commit their lives to Jesus, but say in effect, "If I see this time frame come along, I'll know when it happens and commit my life to Jesus at that time".
    - i) The classic response is, "If you won't live for Jesus now, what makes you think you will be able to die for Jesus "then"?"
    - ii) If this Tribulation is a future, single event, and I do believe it is, personally, I'd rather avoid it. ☺ I'd rather watch the thing from heaven than from earth.
  - d) My other title for this lesson was "Preservation". A key point of this chapter is that there are a very large number of people who are permanently persevered for salvation.
    - i) If one has given their lives to Jesus, one has to accept the fact that one is "permanently sealed" by God. That seal may not be visible to us, but it is to God. We are permanently preserved to spend eternity with Him.
    - ii) The idea is to take comfort in that fact. Life is difficult and life is not fair. If one can stop every now and then and think about the eternal perspective, the pain of life can be more bearable. At the least, it should cause us to be more grateful for God's salvation and to praise Him some more.
    - iii) Since praise is contagious, let's do a little of that in our closing prayer! ☺
- 17. Let's pray: Father, Praise You for our salvation. Praise You for choosing us to spend eternity with You. All glory and honor belong to You, and not to ourselves or each other. Thank You for the comfort You give to us now and the comfort You will give to us for eternity. Help us to remember You are always there to wipe every tear from our eye. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.