

General Comments on Revelation 7

Chapter 7 is an interlude, the theme from ch. 6 resumes in ch. 8. The purpose of the ch. 7 interlude is twofold. First, it indicates the Lord will keep His covenant with Abraham by selecting the righteous out from among the wicked. Second, it explains why the harsh judgements visited upon the wicked in the first four seals are held until the very end for the last three seals.

First, despite the destruction described in ch. 6 and 8-10 the righteous will be preserved (v. 1-2) in a deliberate fashion (v. 3). Particular emphasis is placed upon gathering out the natural remnants of the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. v. 4-8), as would be expect given the Abrahamic Covenant. However, people from all nations are found rejoicing in heaven (v. 9-12). These are they that accepted Christ and are therefore made righteous by the Atonement (v. 13-14), and so they enjoy God's presence in heaven (v. 15) and all of the blessings and comforts that entails (v. 16-17).

Secondly, the first set of four seals see punishments handed out upon the wicked within the time span of the seal. However, with the second set of seals judgement and punishment is forestalled. So much so the martyrs complain to the Lord in the fifth seal (cf. 6:10) and ask when their blood will be vindicated. This interlude explains the necessity of forestalling judgement in order to gather out the elect. Thus, a shift in covenant theology is revealed. Whereas God was more willing to punish the wicked immediately in during the first set of four seals, the complete scattering of Israel results in a change in how divine judgement will be pursued. Rather than the policy of corporate worldwide intervention seen in the first four seals, in the last three seals God pursues the covenant at the individual level and saves judgement for the end.

Comments on Revelation 7

1 AND after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

v1-3 Angels of God are given power over His creation to do His will upon it. God's will is to chasten the wicked, so angels are sent who have power over the elements and use those powers to afflict the inhabitants of the earth (v. 1). But, God's desire to keep His covenant with Abraham is greater, and so an angel is sent to forestall (v. 2) the natural disasters until the elect are identified (v. 3).

v1 D&C 77:8 comments on these four angels and their various authorities as follows:

8 Q. What are we to understand by the four angels, spoken of in the 7th chapter and 1st verse of Revelation?

A. We are to understand that they are four angels sent forth from God, to whom is given power over the four parts of the earth, to save life and to destroy; these are they who have the everlasting gospel to commit to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people; having power to shut up the heavens, to seal up unto life, or to cast down to the regions of darkness.

v2 D&C 77:9 comments on this angel from the East, see also D&C 77:14. D&C 77:10 informs us the events from v. 1-2 take place during the sixth thousand years.

9 Q. What are we to understand by the angel ascending from the east, Revelation 7th chapter and 2nd verse?

A. We are to understand that the angel ascending from the east is he to whom is given the seal of the living God over the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, he crieth unto the four angels having the everlasting gospel, saying: Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And, if you will receive it, this is Elias which was to come to gather together the tribes of Israel and restore all things.

10 Q. What time are the things spoken of in this chapter to be accomplished?

A. They are to be accomplished in the sixth thousand years, or the opening of the sixth seal.

v3 "sealed...in their foreheads", imagery derived from Ezek. 9:4. To the Semitic reader, the forehead represented the thoughts and determination of the individual, and therefore their behavior, cp. Exod. 28:38, Jer. 3:3, Ezek. 3:8. That the angels go about marking the faithful in the forehead indicates their ability to discern the thoughts and desires of an individual.

4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: [and there were] sealed an hundred [and] forty [and] four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. 5 Of the tribe of Juda [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad [were] sealed twelve thousand. 6 Of the tribe of Aser [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses [were] sealed twelve thousand. 7 Of the tribe of Simeon [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar [were] sealed twelve thousand. 8 Of the tribe of Zabulon [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph [were] sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin [were] sealed twelve thousand.

v4-8 These verses expand on the comment of the sealing of the elect in v. 3 to emphasize God's commitment to keeping His promise to Abraham.

D&C 77:11 informs us these 144,000 are 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel who are called as high priests to go and preach the gospel to all the nations of the earth, as follows:

11 Q. What are we to understand by sealing the one hundred and forty-four thousand, out of all the tribes of Israel--twelve thousand out of every tribe?

A. We are to understand that those who are sealed are high priests, ordained unto the holy order of God, to administer the everlasting gospel; for they are they who are ordained out of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, by the angels to whom is given power over the nations of the earth, to bring as many as will come to the church of the Firstborn.

Note the comment in D&C indicates "they who are ordained out of every nation" are those who are among the 144,000. These people are associated with the tribes of Israel, but are not necessarily of that literal lineage. At least some of them are there by adoption.

v6 "Manasses", this tribe replaces Dan. Why Dan is omitted and replaced by Manasseh is unclear. The traditional interpretation is the beast comes from this tribe, or the tribe is somehow affiliated with the beast. There is nothing in the present text suggesting this idea, and so the proponents of this reading use the external proof text of Gen. 49:17, which is not particularly persuasive.

Another explanation might be that John is omitting Dan to hold them up as a bad example. History indicates the tribe turned idolatrous quite early in Israel's history, cf. Judg. 18:30-31. They apparently had open dealings with their Gentile neighbors in Tyre, cf. 2 Chr. 2:14. And later on, the city of Dan became the center of idolatry in the Northern Kingdom, cf. 1 Kings 12:27-31. Thus, those of natural Israel who are idolatrous are not part of this elect group of high priests. Or, in other words, lineage is less important than personal righteousness. While the Lord wants to gather out Natural Israel, if they are rebellious and wicked like Dan historically was then they are not elect.

Regardless of John's intentions in omitting Dan, it is unlikely the tribe of Dan was altogether banished or excluded from Israel. Ezekiel's eschatological vision of the restored Jerusalem has the tribe of Dan being apportioned land (cf. Ezek. 48:2) and a (gate cf. Ezek. 48:32) the same as all other tribes.

Curiously enough, Dan is also omitted from the genealogy appearing in 1 Chr. 2-8. The original Dan is mentioned as a son of Jacob in 1 Chr. 2:2, but no genealogy. It is not because the tribe is extinct, because in 1 Chr. 12:35 we learn they have 28,600 trained soldiers, and later in 1 Chr. 27:22 the prince of Dan is mentioned. The reason for this may be 1 Kings 12:27-31. The city Dan, which was established by the tribe of Dan, was one of the two cities Jeroboam established golden calves in an effort to politically divorce the Northern ten tribes from Judah's control by eliminating their need to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem. From the passage it appears the idol located at Dan became the more popular and priests were established, ones not of the lineage of Levi. As the book of Chronicles is a priestly history, the priests may have deliberately omitted or subsequently removed the genealogy of Dan in retaliation for setting up an alternate worship site and encroaching upon the Priesthood. After this, all we have is references to the city Dan (cf. 1 Ki. 15:20 [2 Chr. 16:4], 2 Chr. 30:5, Jer. 4:15, Jer. 8:16, Ezek. 27:19, Amos 8:14), and no

more references to Dan as a tribe.

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. 11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and [about] the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12 Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, [be] unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, what are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? 14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

v9-17 John sees the result of this gathering out (v. 3) of the elect (v. 13-14). There are so many people he cannot number them. People from all nations enter into heaven (v. 9) and praise the Father and the Son (v. 10) with all the angels and exalted beings (v. 11-12). All of them enjoy the peace and love of God (v. 15-17).

v9 "palms in their hands", the predicted events of John 12:13 are finally realized. Palm fronds are a symbol of victory and triumph representing the Davidic King. Anciently, those at Jerusalem saw Jesus as a physical deliverer rather than a spiritual one. Here, the righteous in heaven hail him as both.

v13-14 "white robes...blood of the lamb", cp. Isa. 1:15-17, ct. Jer. 2:22.

v16-17 These verses are a series of covenant blessings, cp. Lev. 26:3-12, Deut. 28:1-13. For protection from the sun, cp. Isa. 4:6, Isa. 25:4, Isa. 51:16. For the Messianic banquet, cp. Isa. 55:1. Those who enter in God's presence enjoy all of the promised blessings.

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