

“The Seven Seals, Part II (Chap. 7:1-8:5)”

VIEWS OF “THE RAPTURE”

1. It is written in I Thessalonians 4:17 that the believers on earth “will be caught up together with them (members of the church who have died) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” The concept of a “rapture” of the church is not directly referred to in Revelation. Many Christians believe that the faithful church will be removed from the earth prior to Christ’s Second Coming. However, they disagree about how long before.
2. **PRE-TRIBULATION** - Many premillennialists (cf. last week’s handout for views of the millenium) believe that that the church will be raptured just before the beginning of the Great Tribulation described in Revelation. Their departure will cause many non-Christians (including the 144,000 Jews) to place their faith in Christ.
3. **MID-TRIBULATION** - Other premillennialists believe that Christians will be raptured in the middle of the seven-year tribulation period.
4. **POST-TRIBULATION** - Still other premillennialists think the church will be raptured at the end of the tribulation, just as Christ is returning to begin his thousand-year reign on earth.

NOTES ON 7:1 - 8:5

1. The seven seals are the first of three sets of seven events (the “trumpets” occur in chaps. 8-9 and the “bowls” occur in chap. 16). The seals hide the precise contents of the scroll which the “Lamb” (Jesus crucified, risen and glorified) is alone worthy to open. The discussion of the 144,000 and the “great multitude” interrupts the progression from the 6th to 7th seals (a similar interruption occurs with the trumpets).
2. A seal was a lump of clay pressed over the knot around a scroll or important document. The sender would press a ring or cylinder seal in the clay to authenticate and protect the contents. Here in chap. 7, the seal stamps the name of the Lord on his followers (cf. 9:4, 14:1; 22:4), in order to protect them from coming judgements. Ezekiel 9:4 suggests that the mark was the Hebrew letter “taw”, which looks like an “x” or cross.
3. The 144,000(7:4) can either be an actual number of Jews who convert in the days of judgement and tribulation, or the number can be interpreted symbolically. 3 is seen as the number for God, 4 stands for creation or the world; $3 \times 4 = 12$, which stands for the church (founded on the 12 disciples); $12 \times 12 = 144$, the church squared, or the whole church; 10 denotes completeness; $10 \times 10 \times 10$, three-dimensional completeness; $12 \text{ squared} \times 10 \text{ cubed} = 144,000$, ‘the whole church in all its completeness.’ So many Christians think the 144,000 are all Christians in all generations, sealed by the Holy Spirit and protected from destruction.
4. The Great Multitude (7:9) is interpreted variously. Those who believe in the rapture of the church (see above) see these as Gentiles and Jews converted during the tribulation by the witness of the sealed Jews. Others say the 144,000 and the great multitude are one and the same.
5. Notice in 7:11 that the setting for this action is still the same it has been since 4:1, the

- throne room of heaven populated by “The Lamb”, the elders, angels, and the “four living creatures” (cf. 4:6-8); and the primary activity is still worshiping God (7:10, 12, 15-17).
6. The transition between the “seals” and “trumpets” in 8:1 occurs with the opening of the seventh seal: in which “silence falls on heaven.” The silence can either signify foreboding and expectancy, or can signify the silence in which God hears “the prayers of all saints” (8:4).
 7. In many religions, including Christianity, the burning of incense has been associated with the act of lifting up prayers. Incense was burned in a censer, a firepan holding burning charcoal.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is it important for us to know that God’s servants will be sealed before the coming judgements, made pure and holy, and given the opportunity to worship God in His throne room?
2. Do you find any comfort or significance in the words of 7:16-17?
3. Why is the opening of the last seal interrupted by the visions of chapter 7? What purpose do they serve at this point in the story? Does this feel like a negative or positive development to you?
4. Why is the seventh seal a pause for silence and prayer? What purpose does this have in the story? Do you sometimes need to pause for silence and prayer in your life?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Do some research to decide for yourself who you think the 144,000 and the great multitude are.
2. What can we learn about these in 6:1-8:5?
 - i. The Father
 - ii. Christ
 - iii. the Kingdom of God
 - iv. suffering and endurance