



## river west church

No Fear

Revelation 7

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### **Who Can Stand?**

Revelation chapter 7 is known as an “interlude” chapter. The flow of the book is interrupted to give us a special thematic message. There are several chapters like this in Revelation and they are a key to its profound meaning for our lives.

Revelation 7 is an interlude set between two terrifying pictures. Chapter 6 ends with the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal, accompanied by cataclysmic events so frightening that people cry out to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” Chapter 8 lays out the terrifying “trumpet judgments” of God.

It is amazing and extremely important that right between these two pictures we are given one of the most beautiful and comforting visions in the Book of Revelation! Revelation 7 is a chapter of comfort. It is designed to give us hope and strength. The power of this chapter is in the answer it gives to the fearful question at the end of chapter 6, “who can stand?” This chapter teaches us to have a faith that is far greater than our fears.

### **Two Visions, One Message**

There are actually two visions in Revelation 7. The first is about the 144,000. The second is about the vast multitude that no one can number. People have long speculated on the identity of the 144,000. Some people think this is a literal group of 144,000 Jews who will miraculously come to Christ during the time of great tribulation. But there is a better explanation.

It's important to remember that the numbers as well as the images in the Book of Revelation are symbolic. We have seen this before, “the seven Spirits of god” and “the seven eyes of the Lamb of God.” The number – 144,000 – is 12X12X1000. As one person put it, it's a number that's just “a bit too tidy to just be a statistic.” This is far more likely to be a symbolic use of a number. In our study of Revelation 7 we will see that this number is an intentional “amplification” of the number 12, which is an Old Testament symbol for the fullness of God's people.

Then, in the next vision we see a vast multitude that no one can number. This is also a vision of the fullness of God's people, a group that includes Israel, but goes beyond national Israel to include people from every tribe and nation! So it turns out that the two visions are different angles on the very same message.

Two images that merge together to become one message – it's a pattern that we encountered before in Revelation chapter 5. And in both cases it started with something John heard and then moved to what John saw. In John 5, John “heard” a message about a Lion of the tribe of Judah, but when he turned and looked, he “saw” a Lamb. The Lion and the lamb, two different images, but both had the same identity: Jesus! Likewise, in chapter 7, John “hears” the number of those who are sealed, 144,000, but then he “sees” a great multitude in heaven. Both of these groups have the same identity: God's redeemed people who belong to Him, are protected by Him, and ultimately stand before Him in the glory of Heaven!

### **God Will Take Care of You**

God seals those who belong to Him. That is the key to the message of this chapter. He seals them as His own. Those whom God seals He protects. He keeps them. He makes them stand. He exempts them from ever having to experience His wrath. This is a really important theme in the Book

of Revelation. The judgment of God and the wrath of God are indeed going to come upon the earth. This is a fearful thing. But those who belong to Christ don't ever have to live in fear of that. I Thessalonians 5:9 puts it like this, "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Israelites experienced this during the plagues of Egypt as God supernaturally protected them from His acts of Judgment (Book of Exodus). Christians should be confident in just the same way. Indeed we have learned through the Gospel that we will not experience the wrath of God, because Jesus has already taken our place in judgment, taking the full impact of God's wrath in our place. This is the deep meaning of the Cross of Christ. It should be a source of unlimited comfort, security and strength for every believer in Christ! No fear!

Nevertheless, the wrath of mankind still exists. Nowhere in scripture are we promised that we will be spared the difficulty of persecution for our faith. How comforting then, that Christians are given a picture of ultimate victory in Christ. That is what the vision of the multitude in chapter 7 is all about. These are believers who have come out of the great tribulation. We have already seen that tribulation is an ongoing pattern throughout history in our world. But the pattern will increase until it reaches a pinnacle in the things described in the Book of Revelation. As that pattern increases and reaches its climax, Christians are persecuted and even put to death. But that is NOT the end of the story. The story ends in absolute victory. The story ends with each believer safely home, before the glorious throne of God! It is this vision that sustains believers through all things. So take some time and take it all in. Get the picture firmly planted in your mind before proceeding in the Book of Revelation. Live in faith and hope in Christ at all times, no matter what! No fear!