

Midweek Focus Group
A Study in the book of Revelation
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Part 4 – Heaven is in Control! (Chs 4-7)

Having addressed the needs of His Church in the letters to the seven churches, Jesus now turns His attention to events that will occur at the end of the Church Age. In this section, we will see activities in Heaven that initiate events on earth. The message of these chapters is clear: “Heaven is in Control!”

The Activity of Heaven (Chapters 4 and 5)

Before showing John the horrific calamities about to be visited upon the earth, the Lord lifts him into the heavenly throne room. The amazing sights and sounds of that vision are the subject of chapters four and five. Some see in chapter 4, verse 1 a possible reference to the “Rapture” of the Church: *“After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.’”* This might suggest that the Rapture will end the present Church Age and initiate the “Day of the Lord”—the time when God completes His dealings with Israel and begins His ultimate judgment on the nations.

In chapter 4, John catches a glimpse of the majesty and glory of God’s throne. In chapter 5, the focus shifts to a scroll held by the One on the throne. Some believe the scroll is the title deed to man’s eternal estate—lost by Adam—but redeemed by Christ. The scroll is sealed with seven seals, indicating that it is totally inaccessible to humanity. At first, no one in heaven or earth is found worthy to open the scroll, and thus restore man’s lost estate. John weeps over this incalculable loss. Then, he is told not to weep, because the Lion of Judah has prevailed and is worthy to take the scroll and break its seals, thus accessing its contents. When John looks up, he sees not a lion, but a Lamb still bearing the marks of its slaughter. The Lamb takes the scroll, evoking a song of praise to the Lamb. This powerful imagery declares the totality of Jesus’ redemptive work for humanity and Jesus’ sovereign control over the events about to unfold.

John’s vision of Heaven reminds the reader to keep a “heavenly” perspective on earthly events. It clearly portrays God’s majesty and sovereignty over all created things—nature, human beings, and angels. John sees all of them worshiping the One who sits on the throne as well as *“the Lamb who was slain”* (5:11-14). Such worshipful adoration of God by all creation is the ultimate goal of redemption and the vision persecuted Christians should keep before them.

From this point forward, the plot line of Revelation alternates between actions in heaven and events on earth. This alternating action serves as a continual reminder that Heaven has ultimate control over events on earth.

Two Simultaneous Movements on Earth (Chapters 6 and 7)

Chapter six opens a section of Revelation that deals primarily with the “Tribulation,” a seven-year period of great calamity and judgment. Also known as “Daniel’s 70th Week” (Daniel 9:24-27), the Tribulation will result in the restoration of the nation of Israel to their Messiah and will bring God’s final judgments

on unrepentant humanity. These divine judgments come in three series of seven: the “Seven Seals,” the “Seven Trumpets,” and the “Seven Bowls.” Dreadful as they are, these judgments are “true and righteous” (Rev. 16:7; 19:2). That is, they are God’s appropriate and righteous response to man’s unrepented sin. It seems that God provides merciful pauses between some of these judgments in the hope that people will repent and turn to Him. Yet, four times we are told that “*they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries¹ or sexual immorality or their thefts*” (9:21; see also 9:20, 16:9, and 16:11).

Chapters Six and Seven appear to be summaries of two major movements that will occur simultaneously throughout the Tribulation. The two movements are in conflict with each other. The first is man’s rebellious attempt to rule the planet without God. The second is God’s redemptive activity in saving the remnant.

1) The Seven Seals (6:1-8:2)

The “Seven Seals” refer to the wax stamps sealing the scroll now held by the Lamb (5:6,7). As Jesus breaks each seal, a corresponding event occurs to advance God’s kingdom purposes on earth. These seven events appear to be a broad summary of the entire Tribulation period covered in chapters 6-18, and therefore, they include the Trumpet and Bowl judgments.

The first four of the Seals are the infamous “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” (6:1-8). The first of these—the rider on the white horse—should not be confused with the white horse rider in chapter 19. The rider in chapter six is not Christ. His appearance on a white horse (suggesting peace and good will) is a ruse. He is an imposter who seeks world dominion at any cost. He is “*given a crown*” and he rides forth as a “*conqueror bent on conquest*” (6:2). Following him are the other horsemen representing War, Famine, and Death—very suggestive of the malignant fruit of Anti-Christ’s reign. We will meet the Anti-Christ again in chapter 13, where John depicts him as a monstrous “beast” gaining global control.²

These four horsemen and the mayhem they unleash suggest the catastrophic nature of the Tribulation period. Bear in mind that, by breaking the seals, Jesus Himself releases the four horsemen. “While horrible things will soon come to test all the believers, none of them would happen without God’s knowledge and command. ... They cannot move by themselves. They are under God’s complete authority.”³ The lesson is that, for a season, God will allow man to have his way and to reap the ultimate, tragic consequences of humanism (man’s attempt to run things without God).

2) The Salvation of the Remnant (7:1-17)

While these catastrophic events are occurring, another movement is also underway—a major, spiritual revival that will sweep millions into the Kingdom of God! This revival begins with the sealing of 144,000 Messianic Jews (7:1-8), who become missionaries to the nations of the world.⁴ As a result of this Spirit-empowered missionary activity, millions of Gentiles from all over the world

¹ The word “sorceries” translates the Greek word *pharmakeia* and probably refers to the use of mind-controlling drugs.

² He is the same individual the Apostle Paul refers to as “the man of sin” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12.

³ Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg and Pichas Shir, *Hebrew Insights from Revelation*, p. 158

⁴ In his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Hal Lindsey refers to the 144,000 as “Jewish Billy Grahams.”

will come to faith in Christ. Due to severe persecution from the Anti-Christ regime, many of these new believers will suffer torture and martyrdom for their faith.

In the second part of chapter seven, John sees a vision of this martyred multitude:

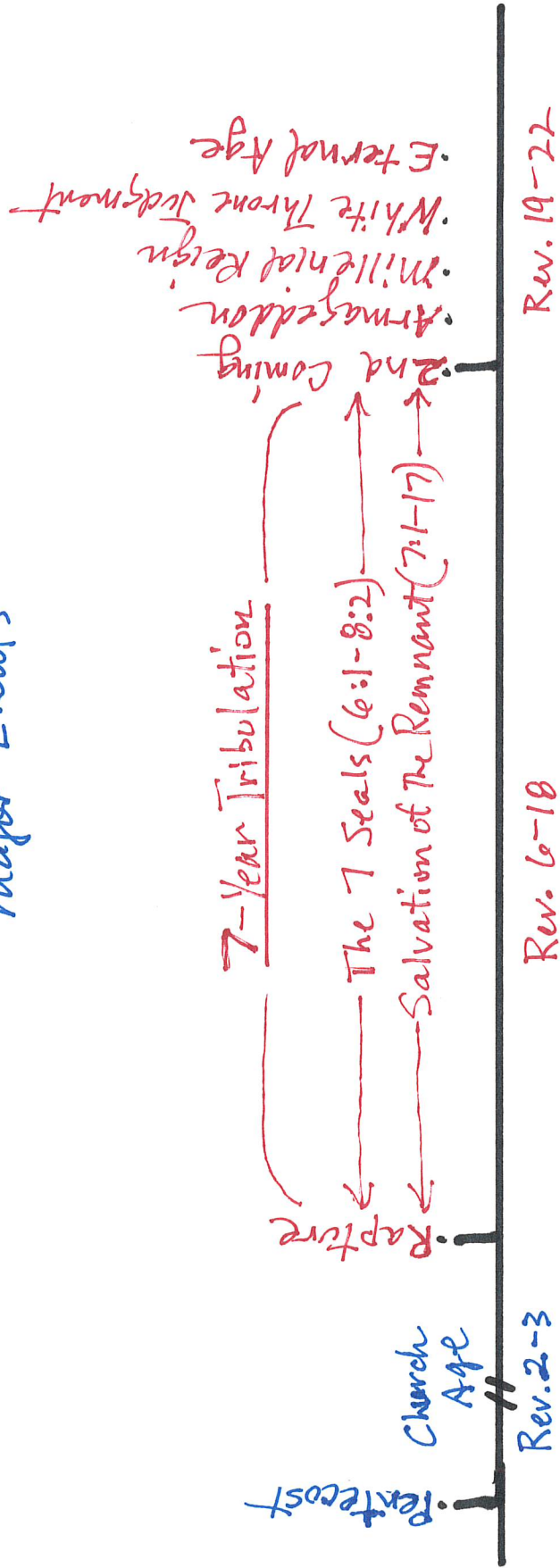
“After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they were shouting with a great roar, ‘Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9-10)

“Then he said to me, ‘These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. ¹⁵ That is why they stand in front of God’s throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter. ¹⁶ They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. ¹⁷ For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.’” (Revelation 7:14-17).

This multitude saved out of “every nation and tribe and people and language” is the fulfillment of the Mission of God (*Missio Dei*) which we often call “the Great Commission.” It is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (“*All the families of the earth will be blessed through you*”). It demonstrates that God’s heart has always been for the nations. Imagine His joy over this vast, diverse family that will own Him as their Redeemer! May we also rejoice in this vision and join God in His mission to disciple the nations!

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Revelation - Part 4

Simple Outline of Revelation
Suggested Timeline of
Major Events



Legend:

Blue - Past or Present Events

Red - Future Events

(Not drawn to scale)