

A minister was travelling on a train in Europe where he was sharing a riding compartment with a young man. The two spent some time conversing with one another and the minister learned that the young man was also a Christian, but he was very weak in his faith, and struggling with many hardships and temptations, so much so, that he told the minister he did not think he could stand life any longer.

The minister took his Bible and a small pocket knife and said, “I want to show you something. I will make this knife stand up on the cover of this Bible, in spite of the rocking of the train.”

The young man, thinking that this was some trick, watched the minister open his pocket knife and hold it up on his Bible. The minister said, “See, I’m doing it” to which the young man replied, “Yes, but you are holding it up.”

“Why of course” said the minister. “Did you ever hear of a pocket knife standing up on its end without being held up?”

Then the young man understood and said, “I see you mean to teach me that I cannot stand unless Christ holds me up. Thank you for reminding me of that.”

The last time we were in the book of Revelation, some four weeks ago, we were looking at the Tribulation period, and we finished with the question – **“Who is able to stand?”** This morning, I want to answer that question, but before I do, I want to give you a review of what we have covered thus far to get us back into the mindset of the end times.

As you know, the Apostle John – the last surviving apostle, was the author of this book under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He’s the one who put pen to paper, and if you recall, John, who was likely in his 90’s, found himself on Patmos, which was a Roman penal colony situated on a barren volcanic island. John was exiled there by the Roman authorities – subjected to forced labor in the marble mines for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. John was doing what God wanted him to do. John was in the center of God’s will, and yet, John was suffering for it. The Roman authorities wanted to shut John up and stop his ministry, so they put him on that rock surrounded by water, but we know that didn’t work out too well, for we are studying the result of that exile – the book of Revelation.

Now if you remember, we learned this book is actually a letter, a very long letter, written to seven real churches in Asia Minor. These churches faced intense persecution, they were pressured to compromise their faith, and these churches

needed encouragement to stand. They needed to be challenged to live godly lives in an ungodly world, and these churches needed hope for the future. They needed to know that in spite of their present reality – as difficult as it may be, God was still on the throne, Jesus will return just as He promised, He will be victorious, good will ultimately triumph over evil, and in the end, it will all be worth it for those who overcome by putting their faith in Jesus Christ.

So, this letter was written to seven churches in Asia Minor, and even though these churches were from a different place, a different culture, and a different time – we saw that the characteristics of these churches were very relevant for us even today, and so I believe these seven churches also represent all churches, throughout all times, worldwide. Collectively, they represent the church age that we are currently in.

Now after **Chapters 2 and 3**, after the Lord spoke extensively about the churches, the church is no longer mentioned in the book of Revelation until we get to **Chapter 19** – after the Tribulation period has come and gone. The church is not referenced during the Tribulation period, and I believe this is one of the reasons to suggest that the church will not be present during the Tribulation period. The church will be raptured, caught up into heaven with the Lord before He pours out His judgment and wrath upon the lost inhabitants of the earth. I find it hard to accept that the church will experience God’s judgment and God’s wrath when Jesus took it upon Himself.

After the Rapture of the church, the Tribulation period on the earth actually begins with activity in heaven by the breaking of seals fixed on a scroll. If you remember, Jesus took a scroll that had seven seals on it from the Father’s hand. The scroll was like a title deed to the earth – and given as an inheritance, ownership was transferred from the Father to Jesus, and it is Jesus who breaks these seals.

Now, the last time we were in **Revelation**, we were in **Chapter 6** and I began that chapter with some crucial context provided to us by the prophet Daniel.

If you recall, Daniel was praying for his people – the Jews, for they were in captivity in Babylon, and while he was praying, God sent His angel Gabriel to give Daniel some comforting words, and this is what Gabriel said in **Daniel 9:24**,

“Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy place.”

If you remember, **seventy weeks** literally means *seventy sevens*, and in context, we are talking about 70 seven-year periods which adds up to 490 years. The angel Gabriel told Daniel this period was focused on Daniel's people – the Jews – not the church. The church is not in focus here and that's important. Then Gabriel described the purpose of this 490-year period, and taken as a whole, he speaks to Israel's eventual repentance and forgiveness of sin by turning to Jesus as their Messiah and the establishment of the Lord's earthly kingdom at His Second Coming where everything is made right. That's the eventual outcome after the 490 years have run their course. So, Gabriel tells Daniel what the end looks like, **but what about the beginning? When would this 490-year period start?** Well, Daniel tells us. Let's look at the next verse – **Daniel 9:25**.

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”

Here, Gabriel reveals two out of the three segments of this 490-year period. The first segment, is **seven weeks**, or we could say “*seven sevens*” which equates to 49 years and it begins with the **decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem**. This decree was made in 445 B.C. when King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah permission, safe passage, and the necessary supplies to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

The second segment given by Gabriel is **sixty-two weeks** or “*sixty-two sevens*” or 434 years. It begins after the first segment and it extends up to the triumphal entry where Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem and publicly declares Himself to be the **Messiah**. So, adding these first two segments together, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the Lord's triumphal entry into that same city would be “*sixty-nine sevens*” or 483 years.

We started with 490 years, and 483 years have come and gone, so that leaves us with only one week, the seventieth week or seven years. **So, what happened to the remaining seven years?** Well, we are given the answer in the first part of the next verse – **verse 26**.

“Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing,”

So, after the second segment is completed, we are told the **Messiah** will be **cut off** – executed, crucified, and it's at that point the calendar stops with seven years remaining.

The Jews rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and as a consequence, they would be set aside for a season to usher in the church age, and the church would now carry out God's mission to reach a lost and dying world who does not know Him. Israel had hardened its heart towards the Lord, and so the church would be front and center, but after the church is raptured, after the church age has come and gone, then the calendar starts back up again with the remaining seven years. The Apostle Paul speaks to this in **Romans 11:25** where he says,

“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

In other words, when God has accomplished His purposes through the church, He will again turn His attention to the nation of Israel, and the calendar starts back up again with the remaining seven years called *“the time of Jacob's trouble,”* or what we refer to as *“the Tribulation period”* – a time where God's judgment and wrath is poured out upon the world – literally hell on earth, but it will serve a divine purpose – that being to bring those who are lost, and more specifically the Jewish people – Daniel's people, to repentance and salvation. That is the outcome after the 490 years have run their full course.

So, that was the context for **Chapter 6** where Jesus began to break the seals, one at a time, on the scroll. The Tribulation period starts with the breaking of the first seal by Jesus, and surprisingly we are presented with peace facilitated by a counterfeit Christ. It's the Antichrist who brings about a peace treaty between Israel and her neighbors, but it's a false peace and it's a short-lived peace. Following the false peace, there is war, then famine, and the culmination is death – these are first four seals broken on the scroll – often called the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.”

The fifth seal was broken, which represented persecution against those who become believers during the Tribulation period, and we will talk more about that in a moment.

Then Jesus broke the sixth seal, and it's a doozy. This seal represents the events occurring in the last half of the Tribulation period where John describes a world that appears to be unraveling at the seams. It's literally earth shaking and earth shattering, it's catastrophic, it's terrifying, and the question is asked at the end of **Chapter 6** – *“who is able to stand?”*

That's a good question and we might answer, "*Well, nobody will be able to stand*" but in **Chapter 7**, we learn there are actually two groups of people who will. So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Revelation 7** and we will begin with **verses 1-3**.

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. ²And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."

In this passage, the Apostle John describes a momentary pause in the action between the sixth and the seventh seals.

We are told that **four angels** stand on the **four corners of the earth**, which for some might give the idea that the world is actually flat – and I know there are those "*flat-earthers*" out there who believe the globe description of the earth is an elaborate hoax – but it's a globe and these four corners are just a figure of speech for compass points – north, south, east, and west.

Anyway, these angels are commanded to hold back **four winds** – winds which are symbolic of the destructive force of God's judgment that is about to blow across the earth from every direction. These angels that have been given the power to execute this judgment – but for the moment, they are taking a time out because of a command given by a fifth angel.

This fifth angel comes from the direction of the sunrise and tells the other four angels to hold until the **bond-servants** have been sealed. The word "**seal**" refers to an official stamp, but it's different than the seven seals on the scroll that Jesus holds. Those seals were meant to hide the contents of the scroll, but this seal is meant to signify possession and protection. God's love is such, that He will not do anything in the way of His judgment and wrath until His people are secured.

Then John gives us a description of these bond servants beginning with **verse 4**.

⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, ⁶from the tribe of Asher

twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, ⁷ from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand ⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

This is the only list of the tribes in the New Testament, and out of these tribes, a believing remnant will be chosen and protected from the wrath of God for they are marked as belonging to God. These are Jews, specifically identified as Jews by their tribes – not the church and definitely not the Jehovah’s Witness. Remember, the Tribulation period is primarily focused on Daniel’s people – the Jews.

Now if you noticed, the tribe of Dan is not listed. We are not told why they are not listed, but I suspect it’s because of their history of deep idolatry. If you remember in our study of **Judges** way back when, the tribe of Dan did not take possession of their portion of the Promised Land, instead they moved way up north, and when the kingdom was later divided into the northern and southern kingdoms, Dan became one of the two centers for idolatry in the northern kingdom. This could explain why Dan is not mentioned in this list and the half-tribe of Manasseh – one of Joseph’s sons, is counted instead.

So, the 144,000 are special Jews, they are sealed and protected, and we are told later in **Revelation 14**, that these men are completely dedicated to the Lord. They are faithful and courageous, they follow the Lord, and they do His bidding without question during the Tribulation period. They will also meet Jesus on Mount Zion when He returns to set up His earthly kingdom.

The question was asked – **“who will be able to stand?”** and the first answer is these 144,000 Jews. They are special – but they are not alone. There is another group who are able to stand as well, and they are numberless. Let’s read on beginning with **verse 9**.

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; ¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” ¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and

honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, **who are they, and where have they come from?**”¹⁴ I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹⁵ For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.¹⁶ They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;¹⁷ for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

One of the questions asked in regard to the Tribulation period is whether anyone will come to saving faith in Jesus Christ during this terrible time – and the answer is *yes* – that’s what this is all about. This is a last-ditch effort to bring people to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles.

In this passage, we are told there is a great multitude of people, so vast that John makes no attempt to even declare a number – they are numberless. Now if you noticed, John said they came from different **nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues**. Let’s talk about that for a moment. Some may think that once we get to heaven, we are all the same – formed into some cookie cutter mold, but this is not what John sees. John tells us there are differences among people in heaven, just as it is here. We will not be the same – we will be individuals, and we will recognize each other as individuals in heaven.

So, who is this great multitude of people? That was a question asked by an **elder** of John, to which John replied, “*I don’t know, I thought you’d know.*” Well, the elder did know, and he answered,

“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

During the Tribulation period, the gospel will be preached worldwide – I believe by these 144,000 who are like Jewish Billy Graham’s, and a vast multitude of people will be saved by God’s grace and mercy.

These are tribulation saints who repented and turned to the Lord, and John sees them in heaven because they will be killed for identifying with Jesus Christ and refusing to worship the Antichrist.

The worst thing the Antichrist could do to these people was to physically kill them, and it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to them. They gave up the pain, and the suffering, and the sorrow of a world gone mad for the safety, and the peace, and the joy of an eternity in the presence of God. They may *fall* on the earth, but as believers, they will be *standing* in heaven and **God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**

On this earth, in the here and now, we have our share of heartbreak, and pain, and sadness, and tears – but one day – in heaven, not now – God will personally wipe every tear from our eyes forever. One translation reads, “And God will make glad their eyes forever.” I like that.

Many things about heaven are a mystery to us, but some things are clearly revealed – we will not hunger and thirst, we will not suffer, there is no death, no sorrow, no pain, no curse, no disputes, no misunderstandings, no goodbyes, and no tears. The things that trouble us in the here and now will be totally absent in heaven, and for those who believe, that’s a motivation to *stand* in Christ.

Source Material:

Holman New Testament Commentary, Revelation – Kendell H. Easley, Max Anders
The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament – Walvoord & Zuck
Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
Pugh, G. (2010). Commentary on the Book of Revelation. In R. E. Picirilli (Ed.), 1, 2, 3 John & Revelation (First Edition). Nashville, TN: Randall House.
Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., . . . Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
Swindoll, C. R. (2011). Insights on Revelation. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
Enduring Word – David Guzik