

**Protecting the Servants of God, Part Three**  
**The True Israel (Revelation 7:9-17)**  
**By Pastor Jeff Alexander (8/30/2015)**

**Introduction**

1. While many mark a difference between the sealed (Israel) and the multitude (the church), we hold that both are different views of the same people.
  - a. The *sealing* of Israel (7:3, 4) explains how Christ will keep His church in the hour of trial (3:10; 6:1-8).
  - b. The multitude *standing* explains how Christ made it possible for sinners to appear before a holy God and not be consumed by His wrath (6:17).
2. Both groups are the same people.
  - a. The first is a symbolic descriptive of the restored remnant, the true Israel; the second focuses on the actual number of the redeemed.
  - b. The first reveals that a fixed number will be sealed (note 6:11); the second shows that this number will be gathered from every people-group on earth.
3. The distinction between the two groups has to do with the time of their appearance.
  - a. The sealed make their appearance before the judgments come on the earth (chapter 6).
  - b. The multitude makes its appearance after the final judgment of the sixth seal and answers the question, "Who can stand" (6:17).

**The list of the tribes of Israel:**

In Genesis (35:23–26) we have the sons of *Jacob*:

The sons of wife, Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun

The sons of wife, Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin

The sons of Rachel's slave Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali

The sons of Leah's slave Zilpah: Gad and Asher

In Revelation 7, we have the sons of *Israel*:

(1) Judah, (2) Reuben, (3) Gad, (4) Asher, (5) Naphtali, (6) Manasseh (replacing Dan), (7) Simeon, (8) Levi, (9) Issachar, (10) Zebulun, (11) Benjamin, (12) Joseph

Gad, Asher, Naphtali, and Dan (replaced by Manasseh) were sons of the Gentile slaves, Bilhah and Zilpah, showing God's intention to include Gentiles in true Israel.

Judah, not Reuben, is first because Judah is the tribe of Messiah. Dan is omitted because of his idolatry.

Christopher R. Smith, "The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Nantes and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7.5-8," cited in Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Kindle Location 4465). Kindle Edition.

4. The vision of the multitude demonstrates God's faithfulness to His promises of restoration in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel (vv. 16, 17).
  - a. The multitude represents the preserved who persevered through the great tribulation (Dan. 12:1).

- b. This multitude is also seen as fulfilling numerous promises made to Israel in the OT, as we shall see next week.
5. That both groups refer to the same people is also strengthened by observing the pattern used here; comparing what John hears with what John sees (5:5 with 5:6; 9:13–16 with 9:17, 18; here, 7:4 with 7:9).

## I. The Multitude's Description

1. These are *glorified* saints appearing before the throne of God in heaven (vv. 9-12).
  - a. As to their *number*, they are the innumerable seed promised to Abraham (Gen. 17:5, 6; 16:10; 32:12). Nevertheless, their number is fixed by the Lord but known only to Him (2 Tim. 2:19).
  - b. As to their *attitude*—
    - 1) They are *standing* before the throne, imitating the Lamb (5:6), which reveals their identification in Him.
    - 2) They are *dressed* in white robes of purity, the result of their redemption, being forgiven of sin and thereby received and accepted by God.
2. As seen by their *celebration*, they are holding palm branches, alluding to the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:40–43).
  - a. That feast commemorated God's protecting the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings.
  - b. The church now receives that divine protection in her latter-day exodus, being victorious over her persecutors (12:6. 14).
3. As seen by their *overcoming*, their victory being truly God's victory (12:10, 11) over those who sought to destroy their faith.
  - a. God's sealing protected their faith in the midst of their trials.
  - b. Their celebration also includes the joy of knowing that the just God judged those who, through persecution, sought to destroy their faith and stifle their testimony.
  - c. Finally, their celebration is joined by heaven's representatives in ascribing worth and worship to God and the Lamb in their seven-fold attributes.

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

## II. The Multitude's Identification

1. They came out of *“the great tribulation”* (vv. 13-17).
  - a. The only other time this phrase occurs in the NT is Matthew 24:21 and refers to Daniel 12:1.
  - b. Daniel's tribulation describes the oppression of the latter-day people of God for their faithfulness to Him (Dan. 11:30–39, 44; 12:10).
  - c. Those who fall away, as some in the seven churches did, evidence that they do not know God (11:32, 34).
2. The NT clearly shows that tribulation (*thilipsis*) is not confined to a short period at the end of the age before Christ comes again.

- a. Daniel's tribulation prophecies reference Christ's first coming through His second coming (Rev. 1:1, 13, 19).
- b. Revelation shows tribulation to be a present reality (1:9, 2:9, 10, 22; note 3:10 *cf* 2:22).
- c. Jesus spoke of tribulation as a present reality (John 16:33).
- d. Twenty-one of the 23 uses of the term in Paul's writings refer to a present reality (e.g. Acts 14:22).

Thus, the use of *tribulation* in Revelation 7:14 is wholly compatible with the other NT uses of the term.

- 3. The importance of their being identified is seen in the elder's question directed to John (v. 13).
  - a. An elder directed John's focus to the Lion of Judah who also came out of the great tribulation of the cross (5:5).
  - b. His followers are called upon to take up their own crosses and to endure as He endured (Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:8–11; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 3:2–5).

Rom. 8:17: *"And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."*

2 Cor. 1:5: *"For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."*

Phil. 3:8–11: *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."*

Col. 1:24: *"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."*

1 Thess. 3:2–5: *"We sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain."*

## Use

- 1. Why do you suppose that the doctrine of the pretribulation rapture is so popular? Have American Christians failed to understand this fundamental principle of sanctification?
- 2. How strong is your faith in the face of fierce opposition? Our natural response to resistance is survival via compromise. Grace is essential to counter this tendency, establish obedience, and glorify God.