



Sunday School Lesson for May 16, 2004.
Released on: May 14, 2004.

Study Revelation 5:1-12. The Lamb as Shepherd
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 96
PLACE: from Patmos

Revelation 7:1-3, 9, 10, 13-17

1 And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

2 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea,

3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

.....

9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

.....

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

14 And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

17 For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Lesson Background

Sealing is Mentioned several times in the Scriptures. Those who trust in Christ after hearing the gospel are "sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph.1:13). When the antichrist comes, he will require all who want to buy or sell to receive his "mark

in their right hand, or in their foreheads" (Rev.13:16). In this week's text we learn that the seal of God will be put on the fore-heads of His servants in the future tribulation period (7:2,3).

The sealing of the remnant from the twelve tribes in Israel (Rev. 7:4-8) is not in this week's lesson text, but after seeing this in his heavenly vision, the Apostle John saw a great multitude from all parts of the world stand before the throne of God.

As John watched and listened, the great multitude, along with all of heaven's angels, praised and worshiped God and the Lamb of God. When one of the elders asked John who the white-robed people were, John turned the question back onto the elder. He was told that they had come out of the Great Tribulation.

They served God day and night, and He dwelt among them to make sure they did not suffer from hunger, thirst, or excessive heat. The Lamb was there to feed them and lead them to fountains of water. God wiped away their tears.

Restraint and Seal (Revelation 7:1-3)

1. How is the vision of the four angels standing at the four corners of the earth most likely to be understood (v. 1)?

We should realize that chapter 7 of the book of Revelation is parenthetical and comes between the breaking of the first six seals of the scroll opened by Christ as found in chapter 6 and the opening of the seventh seal as found in chapter 8. It gives us a glimpse into how God will take care of His own people during the tribulation period when the antichrist reigns.

John looked at his vision and saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. We know that the earth does not have four literal corners. It is likely that John meant he saw angels standing to the north, east, south, and west from where he was positioned.

The winds blowing from all four directions apparently represent the destructive judgments about to come upon the earth. At that time they were calm because they were held in check by four angels. Although the language is full of symbolism, this reference makes it clear that angels play an important role in God's plan for the end times.

2. What does the act of sealing represent (vs. 2,3)?

As John watched, he saw another angel ascending from the east. He had in his possession the seal of the living God, something he apparently had been given to use on behalf of God through bestowed authority.

The angel cried with a loud voice to the four other angels. They had been commissioned to let loose the winds upon the earth and the sea to bring about destruction. The fifth angel told the others not to hurt the earth, the sea, or the trees until "we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (v. 3). The use of the plural pronoun reveals that this arriving angel was not going to work alone. A seal was a mark of ownership. Those about to be sealed would be set apart as belonging to God.

Revelation 7:4-8 mentions that the number sealed in Israel was 144,000. This involved 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. There are a couple of interesting things to note in this list. Joseph and one of his sons, Manasseh, are included, but not his other son, Ephraim. Dan does not appear, but Levi does, although the tribe of

Levi never had a land inheritance in ancient Israel but was spread throughout the nation to serve in religious work. There is no clear explanation for these variations in the list of the tribes.

3. Knowing that you have been "sealed," how secure and protected do you feel? How do we manage those times of trial when God seems distant?

Feelings are deceptive! In our Christian understanding of suffering we must realize that God is there even when we don't feel His presence. Through our sufferings He is working things to our good (Romans 8:28), refining us (1 Peter 1:6,7), and making us better (James 1:2-4). Perhaps we should tape these Scriptures on our mirrors!

God has promised to deliver us from the trial (2 Corinthians 1:10), to give us strength to endure the trial (1 Corinthians 10:13), or to use the trial to bring us to the ultimate safety of Heaven (2 Timothy 4:18). Security and suffering are the "two sides to the Christian experience." God has us covered, whether we feel like it or not.

Multitude and Proclamation
(Revelation 7:9, 10)

4. Who made up the great multitude John saw standing before the throne of God and before the Lamb (v. 9)?

This great multitude that John saw was made up of individuals who were clearly owned by God. This was a multitude without number. Scriptures state that they included all nations, kindreds or tribes, people or races, and tongues or languages.

Praise the Lord that nationality and language are irrelevant! As we see them "before the throne, and before the Lamb," they are ready to worship. These are the martyrs who will come out of the Great Tribulation (v. 14).

5. What did the white robes of the martyrs represent?

The great multitude stood before the throne of God in heaven and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes, which represented imparted righteousness. They carried palms in their hands, which represented victory and joy.

John heard the multitude cry with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (v.10). In this way they will acknowledge God as the source of their redemption and Christ as the one through whom it was secured. They were soon to be joined in their praise and worship by angels, who had never known the blessing of being redeemed but who also were ready to worship and praise God (vs. 11,12).

Identity and Service
(Revelation 7:13-17)

6. What question did one of the elders ask John (vs. 12,13)?

John must have asked a question, for one of the elders answered him with a question. It is as if he were seeking John's opinion on who these people arrayed in

white robes were and where they had come from. John replied respectfully, "Sir, thou knowest." He clearly wanted it told to him.

The elder said that they had come out of the Great Tribulation. In saying that they had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, the elder was saying that they had been cleansed of their sins by the redemptive blood shed by Christ in His atoning sacrifice at Calvary. In place of their spotted or soiled garments, they had been given robes of righteousness to wear.

There are differences of opinion regarding what the Bible teaches about the Great Tribulation, when it will occur, and whether Christians will go through it or be spared from that time of wrath.

The position taken here is that Christ will come to catch up the saints into the air and into heaven for judgment of their works (I Cor. 3:12-15) and celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 9:7-9). This will occur prior to the seven-year time of tribulation on the earth, when people will be deluded by the antichrist. Great persecution will fall upon all who turn to Christ during that time. Thereafter, Christ will come with His armies from heaven down onto the earth to defeat the antichrist and his armies (Rev.19:11-21). He will then set up His millennial kingdom on earth (20:4-6 resurrection of tribulation saints).

7. In what ways might the martyrs serve God night and day in heaven (v. 15)?

In appreciation for what God has done for them, the martyrs of the Great Tribulation will serve Him day and night in His temple. This service is "day and night" -a picture of continued service, growth, and appreciation of the presence of God. The use of the word "temple" needs to be clarified here as well. Revelation 21:22 says, "I (John) saw no temple therein (the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven): for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." The "temple" in 7:15 probably is not to be taken literally, but as a reference to being in the presence of God.

If we are going to reign with Christ as stated in II Timothy 2:12, there will be many other activities as well.

8. What types of suffering will be absent from heaven (v. 16)?

Those who come out of the Great Tribulation will surely have suffered much, including hunger, thirst, and exposure to excessive heat from the sun or some other source. John was told by the elder that they would not have to experience this suffering ever again.

This verse also sets forth figures that express the reality of hurt, trials, or suffering common to Christians. The very necessities of physical life can be the occasion for trial. Food, water, clothing, shelter-all are basic.

There are times when it may seem that we don't have much assurance of these physical necessities. In such times we can find ourselves put to the test as to whether we will stay faithful amidst our suffering and lack. When we hurt, the presence and the protection of the Lamb can seem far away and not quite real. The image from our next verse gives us something to hold on to in such times.

9. What will the Lamb of God provide for His people in heaven (v. 17)?

The figure that we have become familiar with from chapter 5 onward is the metaphor of Christ as the Lamb. In a way, it may seem paradoxical that the Lamb is also a Shepherd who shall feed them. But remember that when we first saw the Lamb in last week's lesson He stood ready to minister even though He appeared to have been slain. The hurt brought to the Lamb may have caused the onlooker to wonder whether there might be someone greater than He.

But being able to overcome His own ordeal means that He is the very One who has the power to help us in our time of trial. The Lamb's ability to help us is no assurance that we shall bypass trial and suffering. It is a guarantee, however, that we shall triumph because of our relationship with the Lamb.

Because He lives, we live. Heaven has already started for the Christian. Eternal life (the Lamb's kind of life) began for the new Christian when he or she became united with Christ and was raised to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-5). As a result, Christians know what it is to live and reign with Christ even now.

In verse 17 we see God described as wiping away all tears from the eyes of His people. A similar statement is found in 21:4, which also mentions some of the things that produce tears: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

The contents of chapter 7 in the book of Revelation is encouraging with positive purpose for God's servants.

CONCLUSION

God's Presence in Suffering

Because of God's salvation provided in the Lamb, Christians have the assurance of a right relationship with God. His dwelling place brings protection. Where God is and what results from His presence are the necessary things to understand.

We need not worry about why Christians suffer, or the timing of the Lord's return and the end of the world. Our relationship with God is restored and real right now, and any trial is temporary and bearable. His presence makes it that way!

We shall not, and dare not, let anything interrupt this relationship. Thus, our hearts are kindled for praise, and we echo the words of the great multitude: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!"

PRAYER

Thank You, God, for being the loving, caring Father that You are. Because of the Lamb we know You have seen our needs and are able to meet those needs. And because of the Lamb we are never alone, no matter what kind of situation tests our faith.

Father, it is because of the Lamb that we understand both sides of our Christian experience: our hurting and our protection. We know that testing is very real, but we are thankful that Your provision strengthens us. Because of Christ we smile amidst our tears. In the name of the Lamb we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Our hurt is real, but so is the Lamb's power.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson previews more terrible events transpiring during the tribulation. The saints of that time are called upon to endure to the end. Study background Scripture: Revelation 14.

I hope you enjoyed this week's lesson !

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