



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 29, 2007
Released on Wednesday, April 25, 2007**

"Christ Is Our Protection"

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 121.
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 7.
PRINTED TEXT: Revelation 7:1-3, 9, 13-17.
READ: Revelation 5:1-14.

TIME: about A.D. 96
PLACE: from Patmos

GOLDEN TEXT: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14).

HOW TO SAY IT

APOCALYPSE. Ah-*pock*-uh-lips.

LESSON TEXT

Revelation 7

1And 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.

2And 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,

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

.....

9After 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;

.....

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

14And 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.

15Therefore 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.

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

17For 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 AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student will be able to:

1. Detail the salvation of 144,000 Jews and a great multitude of Gentiles during the coming tribulation period.
2. Hold out hope that those who fail to be saved in this present age will-if they survive-have an opportunity to be converted during the tribulation.
3. Make sure of our salvation now and to urge others to do the same.

LESSON OUTLINE

- I. GREAT ANGELS (Rev. 7:1-3)
- II. GREAT MULTITUDE (Rev. 7:9)
- III. GREAT TRIBULATION (Rev. 7:13-17)

INTRODUCTION

The History of Blood

Blood is a "hot commodity" today-the Red Cross always seems to need blood donors. Yet blood is a dangerous fluid because of medical risks. Diabetics who travel frequently experience the discomfort many people feel at the thought of blood touching them if they have to deal with another's blood-soaked testing strips. Basketball players are ordered off the floor because a little blood is seen. The HIV/AIDS crisis has made us wary of contact with anything tainted by blood. Yet there is no substitute for whole blood and blood derivatives for many medical procedures. We are scared by blood, but we need it.

In the religions of the ancient world, blood was viewed as sacred. Some ancients saw blood as containing the life principle, even the soul. They did not understand the function of blood in the body. The fact that blood circulated in the body was not well understood until William Harvey's conclusions in about A.D. 1615. [Harvey: An English physician, anatomist, and physiologist who discovered the circulation of blood in the human body in 1628; (b. 1578, d. 1657).]

Blood was widely consumed as a food in the first century A.D. This practice was abhorrent to the Jews (Leviticus 7:26; 17:12, 14; 19:26) and was forbidden by the early church (Acts 15:20). Like many of their contemporaries, ancient Jews believed a person's blood contained his or her life. If the blood drained from a person, they knew that that person would die.

Thus life and blood were tightly linked (Deuteronomy 12:23). This helps us understand the frequent phrase *innocent blood*. From our modern, scientific point of view, we cannot imagine blood itself being guilty or innocent any more than hair can be. Yet *innocent blood* conveys the idea of the violent death of an innocent person. To slay an innocent person would bring "blood" or "bloodguilt" upon the perpetrator (see Deuteronomy 19:10; compare Psalm 106:38).

The Old Testament taught that human blood was not to be shed in violence (see Genesis 9:6, part of the covenant with Noah). Murder was more than a criminal act; it was an offense against God. There was a sense, then, that all the human blood belonged to God and that humans had no right to abuse it (see Genesis 4:10).

Yet animal blood was an integral part of the Jewish religious system. A dramatic example of this is found in Exodus 24:3–8, Moses' ceremony of the blood of the covenant. In this ceremony of commitment, Moses took fresh animal blood and sprinkled it on the crowds of people (*Warning: don't try this at your church!*). Thus, their vow was sealed. The Old Testament taught that blood purifies, as summarized in the New Testament passage Hebrews 9:22: "without shedding of blood is no remission [of sins]."

Blood—on the one hand, so abhorrent; on the other hand, so important. Today's lesson looks at Revelation 7, which gives a spectacular picture of the importance of the blood of Jesus for John's readers and for us today. [Note that although *none* of the Bible was written *to us*, *the entire* Bible was written *for us*.]

LESSON BACKGROUND

Last week's lesson (Revelation 5) saw a crisis in Heaven resolved by the appearance of the redeeming Lamb of God—the risen Christ. He was deemed worthy to break the seven seals of the mysterious scroll held by God. Only the Lamb could unroll the book to reveal its contents.

Revelation 6 is the account of the breaking of the first six seals. When a seal is broken, various symbolic things happen. The first seal, the white horse, represents the lust for conquest; a good example of this is the Roman Empire (Revelation 6:1, 2). The second seal, the red horse, symbolizes war; this is both the ancient and modern plague of humanity (6:3, 4). The third seal, the black horse, stands for famine; this is a usual consequence of war (6:5, 6). The fourth seal, the pale horse, denotes death; this is the ultimate result of war (6:7, 8). These four seals are a distinct set, sometimes referred to as the "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse."

The fifth seal (Revelation 6:9–11) presents a question from the people of God, "How long, O Lord?" (6:10). The answer is that they must wait "for a little season," that is, *a little longer* (6:11). While they wait, their confidence is found in the way they address God: "O Lord, holy and true" (6:10).

The sixth seal (Revelation 6:12–17) is summed up in the statement, “wrath is come” (6:17). It presents a frightening picture of cosmic upheaval when the wrath of God and of the Lamb is unleashed on sinful humanity. Those caught in this cataclysm (disaster or tragedy) ask, “Who shall be able to stand” against it? (6:17). The answer is not given but is obvious: *no one* can withstand the unleashed fury of God. This is the day of God’s final vindication of His righteousness (see Amos 5:18–20).

The seventh seal does not come until Revelation 8:1. It does not have a distinct event attached to it. Rather, it is the beginning of the next series, the seven trumpets. Chapter 7, our focus in this lesson, is an interlude between the terrifying images of the first six seals and that next sequence. It comes back to answer for the people of God the question, “Who shall stand?”

The people of God are the saints pictured in the fifth seal. While no one can withstand God’s wrath, there is a *protection* for the people of God so that they will not have to face it. This protection comes through the blood of the Lamb, our blessed Savior, Jesus Christ. *Now, this is good news indeed! Thank God for the blood-covering of Jesus Christ!*

QUESTIONS

I. GREAT ANGELS (Rev. 7:1-3)

1. What is meant by the “four corners of the earth” (Rev. 7:1)?

The number *four* symbolizes the whole *earth* in Revelation. This may be represented by the *four angels* charged with the earth, *the four corners* or quarters of the land (See Rev. 20:8), or *the four winds* that blow upon the earth (compare Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 37:9; Daniel 7:2; Mark 13:27).

Four corners simply means the four points on the compass. It has also been suggested that the *four winds* represent the four horsemen in Chapter 6.

2. Why were the angels holding four winds back? (vs.1)

The four angels seem to be stewards of the earth. Their actions of holding four winds back demonstrate a pause in the furious activities of the previous chapter.

Instead of bringing immediate destruction to earth, strong angels hold the winds in check, preventing them from blowing upon the earth, sea, and trees. The four winds are the symbols of God’s judgments (cf. Jeremiah 49:36). The angels who are about to let them loose are bidden to pause.

Note that during this time another angel enters the scene (Rev. 7:2). God’s servants are sealed to protect them from the approaching wrath. “Like as, the last judgment came upon Egypt, there was time given to enable the people of God to sprinkle the lintel and door-posts of their houses with the blood of the Paschal lamb, which was God’s seal of preservation for them, so it is here.” *The Pulpit Commentary* (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, Ed.)

3. What might be the significance of the “angel ascending from the east” (vs. 2)?

That the angel in John's vision rises from the east is noteworthy. In Ezekiel, the glory of the Lord came from the east (43:2, 4). The wise men who came to worship the infant Saviour also came from the east (Matt. 2:1). The sun also rises in the east-giving us a new day.

4. What are some other examples of seals or marks mentioned in the Bible?

The idea of a seal, or mark, is used numerous times in Scripture. Cain was marked by God (Gen. 4:15). Israelite homes were marked by blood on the night of the Passover (Exod. 12:12-13). In a vision given to Ezekiel, a mark was to be placed on the foreheads of those who grieved over the detestable practices of Jerusalem (Ezek. 9:1-6). In Revelation, not only are the servants of God marked with a seal (9:4; 14:10), but those who follow the Beast are as well (13:11-18).

5. How many were sealed? What are some possible interpretations of this number (vs. 3)?

The precise identity of the servants who are sealed has been a matter of considerable speculation. The number of servants is 144,000 (7:4), which some take as a literal number. Others, however, consider it purely symbolic, saying that it "refers to that generation of faithful believers about to enter the final turbulent period that will mark the end of human history" (Mounce).

Since the 144,000 are from "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (vs. 4), many believe they are Jews, although some think the number is a symbol for all true believers. "These are Jews from the 12 tribes (12,000 each) who are protected in order to perform some service for God during these days. Perhaps they are evangelists" (Ryrie, ed., *Ryrie Study Bible*, Moody).

II. GREAT MULTITUDE (Rev. 7:9)

6. How is the "great multitude" (vs. 9) different from the 144,000 (vs. 4)?

Unlike the 144,000, this great multitude is one "which no man could number." Also, in contrast to the sealed servants, this numberless multitude is made up of "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (vs. 9: see 5:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; and 17:15). Whereas the 144,000 are portrayed as Jews, the "great multitude" is made up of all nations.

We later discover that this great multitude has come out of the "great tribulation" (7:14). "This multitude is composed of many racial and geographic groups who will be redeemed during the tribulation period... In these difficult days, many will find Christ as Savior" (Ryrie).

7. What do the white robes and palm branches signify?

The redeemed ones wear white robes, symbolic of their cleansing through the blood of Christ (Rev. 7:14). It is not through their own righteousness that they stand before the throne but through the imputed righteousness of Christ. They extol neither their goodness nor their works, but the salvation God planned from eternity for them (vs. 10).

The "palms in their hands" (vs. 9) symbolize victory. Just as Jesus was met with palm branches when He arrived in Jerusalem, so it will be when the redeemed stand

before Him in the New Jerusalem. "Standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb' signifies their position of acceptance and honor as God's true servants" (Barker and Kohlenberger, eds., *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan).

III. GREAT TRIBULATION (Rev. 7:13-17)

8. What is the Great Tribulation? When will it occur (vs. 13, 14)?

While there are some commentators who view the Great Tribulation as a symbol for the entire church age, a large number of interpreters see this a seven-year period just prior to the Second Coming. There is, however, a considerable amount of debate concerning whether the church will be raptured prior to, during, or after the tribulation period. Many believe that everything in Revelation 6 through 19 depicts the period of the Great Tribulation on earth after the church is removed. This being so, studying what awaits planet earth is intriguing, to say the least.

9. What kind of imagery is given of heaven (vs. 15, 16)? How is this related to what is said later in Revelation?

Verse 15 is not simply a picture of future bliss in Heaven. This can also be seen as a possibility for us today. Worship is our acknowledgment of the Holy God and submission to Him.

The imagery used in verse 16 is quite similar to that in Isaiah 49:10, whose primary reference is to the return from Babylonia: "They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."

While most of us rarely hunger or thirst, such images would have been very inviting to ancient peoples, who frequently faced such prospects on a daily basis. During His ministry, Christ used similar images to portray Himself as the one who could satisfy both hunger and thirst (John 4:14; 6:35). Toward the end of Revelation, some of these same images are repeated (see 21:3-6, 25; 22:1, 5, 17).

10. How can God wipe away all tears? (vs. 17)

This means that in God's presence, there will be no crying, sorrow, or suffering and pain.

As in John's Gospel (see 10:1-16), the Lamb in Revelation 7:9-17 is both sacrifice and shepherd. That the Lamb will "feed" God's people means that He will supply all their eternal needs. As all of our present needs are met in this world, so our future needs will be met in the world to come. Whatever hurts we have experienced in this life will be healed, for "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." (John Alva Owston, *Bible Expositor and Illuminator*)

CONCLUSION

Many people know they ought to *get right with* God, but they put off making a decision. There will be conversions to Christ during the Great Tribulation, but if a person intends to wait until that time, there is no guarantee he will even survive until then. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). Are you prepared to spend eternity with God?

Paul put it very plainly when he said "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). As Robert Lowry (1826–1899) wrote in the hymn "Nothing But the Blood,"

*What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.
Oh! precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Without the blood of Jesus, we would be overwhelmingly dirty because of our sin. As we consider God's marvelous provision, may we offer thanks to the one who still sits on the throne and to the Lamb who gave His blood for us.

"Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its pow'r. Till all the ransomed Church of God be saved, to sin no more." -William Cowper (1731-1800)

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. When God's judgment comes, it will encompass the whole earth (Rev. 7:1).
2. God's people experience His mercy daily, even in time of divine judgment (vs. 2-3).
3. We must never place national, ethnic, or racial limits on salvation, for that would violate God's plan and practice (vs. 9).
4. Our service does not end with death, but will continue forever before the throne of God (vs. 13-15).
5. The promise of eternal blessing helps us remain faithful to God in trying times (vs. 16-17).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Our eternal protection is the blood of the Lamb.

PRAYER

O Jesus, Your blood, Your blood, Your cleansing blood! It is a mystery and a marvel to us; what power it has! Father we thank You for providing our salvation through the blood of Your only Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

In preparation for the May 6, 2007 lesson, you should study Revelation 19; the devotional reading is Psalm 148:1-14. The time is about A.D. 96, and the place that John-Revelation's author-is writing from is Patmos still. This lesson begins a new unit focus of study: "Living in God's New World." The Golden Text is Revelation 19:6, and the subject is "Taking Our Place at the Table." While studying, make note of the four alleluias of the glorified saints, and then meditate on the marriage supper of the Lamb described in verses 7-10. Make sure that you can identify the groom and bride. And finally, answer the question: In what way might you consider this heavenly *event* to be the culmination (finale, peak or climax) of your walk with God-beginning with conversion and continuing with your growth in grace? *Good studying!*

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