

36. The Book of Revelation—7:4-8

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(4-7-21)

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In our study in the Book of Revelation, we have entered into Chapter 7—which is a parenthetical chapter.

As we came to Chapter 6, we said it contained the 7 Seal Judgments.

As I have already pointed out—the seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments (8:1–11:19) and the seventh trumpet (11:15) contains the seven bowl judgments (16:1–21).

Again, I believe that the 7 seals contain all the judgments of God poured out upon the earth—all the way to the end when Jesus Christ returns.

- After the 6th Seal Judgment there is a break—a parenthesis in ch.7.
- After the 6th Trumpet Judgment there is a long break, a parenthesis from ch.10-14 to review and amplify what has taken place on the earth during the Tribulation Period up until that point of time.

So, Revelation 7 is a parenthesis or pause, if you will, to help us catch our breath in preparation for the greater and more catastrophic Trumpet Judgments that are about to be unleashed on the inhabitants of the earth.

Revelation 7:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed:

Who are these 144,000?

Many different groups have claimed to be the 144,000—*Jehovah Witnesses, Historical Mormonism, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Worldwide Church of God etc.*

Most Bible scholars regard the 144,000 as either the Church or as converted Jews, who get saved during the Tribulation Period—i.e., 'Tribulation Saints'.

This is not a small issue in that—if these 144,000 are symbolic of the Church it means that the Church is definitely going into the Tribulation period—which I firmly reject!

We've already covered this in some detail but let me just repeat that I really don't understand the confusion—I think the Holy Spirit makes it crystal clear who these people are—

Revelation 7:4 (NKJV)

⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

One hundred forty-four thousand Jewish believers will be marked and sealed by God as His servants (evangelists) during the Tribulation Period.

To further clarify for all those who still might have some doubts as to the identity of the 144,000—the Holy Spirit goes on, in tedious detail, to list them—

Revelation 7:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed; ⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed; ⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed; ⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

These are 144,000 Jews—not Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons or the Worldwide Church of God people—or any other group or cult.

One of the most important issues that Revelation 7 deals with is God’s future plans for Israel.

There are many groups that promote the idea that since Israel rejected her Messiah, she forfeited the promises God gave to the nation under the Old Covenant—and now the Church has taken her place and has inherited those promises under the New Covenant.

Israel, they say, is out of the picture and has been replaced by the Church in the plan of God—something called “*Replacement Theology*” (also “Reconstructionism” or “Kingdom Now”).

However, the main problem with this view is that—if you study the O.T. covenants that God made with Israel—4 out of 5 were unconditional (Abrahamic, Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenant).

The Mosaic Covenant was a *conditional* covenant—that is, this covenant was based on Israel’s faithfulness to obey God’s laws—obedience would result in blessings and disobedience would result in cursings upon the nation (see Deuteronomy 28).

Of those 4 covenants that were *unconditional*—it meant they were not dependent upon Israel’s faithfulness in doing anything—that’s the definition of an unconditional covenant.

The fact that they were unconditional meant they couldn’t be broken because Israel had no conditions or terms to keep—the only faithfulness required was God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises to them laid out in those 4 unconditional covenants (as is often the case with a will—).

Genesis 15:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I *am* your shield, your exceedingly great reward." ² But Abram said, "Lord GOD, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house *is* Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" ⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." ⁵ Then He

brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ **And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.**

This verse is without a doubt one of the greatest in the Bible—for it lays the foundation for the greatest doctrine of the Christian faith—justification by faith apart from works.

Martin Luther said this was the foundational doctrine of the Church—without which *"the Church wouldn't last a single hour"*.

This verse is quoted three times in the New Testament in full (Romans 4:3, Galatians 3:6, and James 2:23)—in fact, all of Romans 4 is an exposition of Genesis 15:6.

Romans 4:3 (NKJV)

³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

The word *accounted* in Romans 4:3 is the Greek word 'logizomai'.

This same word is used eleven times in Romans 4—translated "*counted*" (Rom. 4:4); "*accounted*" (verses 9–10, 22) and "*imputed*" (Rom. 4:6, 8, 11, 23 and 24).

It is a banking term that means *"to put to one's account."*

Now this becomes the crux of Paul's argument not to mention the foundation upon which our salvation is built—that the righteousness that gets a person into heaven is not *earned* by good works but is *imputed* (put to their account) by God in response to their faith in Who Jesus is and what He did for them on Calvary's Cross.

Genesis 15:7-12, 17-18 (NKJV)

⁷ Then He said to him, "I *am* the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." ⁸ And he said, "Lord GOD, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" ⁹ So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹ And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. ¹² Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror *and* great darkness fell upon him....¹⁷ And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. ¹⁸ On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates..."

So here we see in Genesis 15 God entered into a formal covenant with Abram (Abraham) by cutting animals in two—which is how they did it back then.

The word '*covenant*' comes from a Hebrew word that means "to cut"—which meant it was a covenant of blood or as we would say a 'blood covenant'.

The idea was that once the animal or animals were killed and cut in two—to ratify the covenant both parties would walk through those animal parts—it was a bilateral covenant (2-party).

It was a serious commitment that brought with it a self-imposed curse should either of the covenanting parties break their pledge—in essence they were saying, *"If I break my word, may I become like this severed animal!"*

The **smoking oven** and **burning torch** represented the presence of God—His Shekinah Glory.

The important thing to understand is that verse 18 tells us that God made a covenant with Abraham—not that God and Abraham made a covenant with each other.

This was a unilateral (one party), unconditional covenant that God made with Abraham.

It was unilateral because—only God passed through those animal parts while Abraham was asleep.

Which meant, Abraham (and his descendants) didn't have any terms to fulfill, they didn't have any promises to keep—it was a promise that God basically made with Himself to give the land of Canaan to the Jewish people.

The covenant couldn't be voided or annulled because of unfaithfulness on the part of Abraham or his descendants because—this wasn't a bilateral (two party) contract (like the Mosaic Covenant)—it was a unilateral and therefore an unconditional contract.

One author put it well when he said,

"This was an unconditional, unilateral covenant. God (with astounding condescension) was symbolizing that if He were to break his word, He would be sundered (cut in two) like the butchered animals. It was an acted-out curse, a divine self-imprecation guaranteeing that Abram's descendants would get the land or God would die. And God cannot die!"

Or as another author said,

"This covenant God signed alone; Abram did not haggle with God over the terms. God established and Abram accepted. Abram could not break a contract he had never signed!"

Something I must bring up here and then we'll move on—the writer of the Book of Hebrews in Chapter 6 tells us that the covenant God made with Abraham has brought hope to us who are Christians—in fact, he tells us that this hope for those in the New Covenant is an *"anchor for the soul both sure and steadfast"*—How?

Well the New Covenant is connected with the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants (the "Abrahamic Covenant")—*"In what way?"*—

Galatians 3:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

So, by our faith in Jesus, we are now spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promise God gave to him and his children. The ultimate 'land' God promised to all Abraham's children (who believe in the promises of God)—is the land of heaven—the ultimate 'Promised Land'.

Although during the Millennial Kingdom they will inherit and possess all the land that God promised them—roughly 300 thousand square miles (from the Euphrates River to the east, to the Mediterranean Sea to the west—from Lebanon to the north down to the Negev in the south).

The important thing for us as Christians to understand is that just as the covenant God made with Abraham was unilateral and unconditional—so is the New Covenant He made with us (both Jew and Gentile—the Church) through Jesus.

If the New Covenant was a bilateral covenant dependent upon God to keep His part (give us eternal life) if we keep our part of the covenant (keep the law perfectly)—none of us would be saved.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Romans 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

The point is that in the New Covenant we receive God's promise of eternal life by *believing* in and *receiving* Jesus as our Savior. If the promise of salvation was based on our keeping the law the promise would be worthless because it would be based on conditions that no one would be able to meet.

If God said, "*I promise to give you eternal life—if you jump across the Grand Canyon*" that promise would be worthless because no one could meet that condition.

The same would be true if God promised to give a person eternal life if they lived a sinless life (kept God's law perfectly)—again that would be a worthless promise because no one could meet that condition.

But if God said (which He did) to you and me, "*I promise to give you eternal life—if you believe in My Son, based on what He did and not on what you do.*"— that promise then is attainable by everyone. That's why Paul said in Romans 4:16 that the promise is "sure" (a sure thing for all) because *anyone* can believe in Jesus to be saved.

That's why God could promise us eternal life the moment we put our faith in Jesus (1 John 5:13)—because it's based on what He did for us and not on what we do for Him (which is why Jesus said, "*It is finished*" from the cross right before He died).

If it was by our works He couldn't have promised us eternal life (uninterrupted life for all eternity) from the moment we put our faith in Jesus—

All He could have done was to say, "*We'll see if you live a good enough life to earn the eternal life I'm offering—and if you're good enough and work hard enough when you die you'll receive it*".

You see the fact that God promised it to us instantly and forever the moment we put our faith in Jesus testifies to the fact that—eternal life is a gift of God's grace and not a reward we earn through our good works.

So, all of that (Genesis 15) was to say that God isn't through with the nation of Israel. If that wasn't enough—Paul, the apostle spends 3 Chapters in the Book of Romans (Chapters 9-11) telling us that God's plans for Israel were not nullified when she rejected her Messiah, and that God has a future plan for the Jewish people—

Romans 11:1-2, 29 (NKJV)

¹ I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew... ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God *are* irrevocable.

This is what we are studying in Revelation 7—how God has not cast away the Jewish people.

How He is still going to use them during the Tribulation Period (after the Church is raptured off of the earth) to bring the light of the gospel to the people of this world before Jesus returns.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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