

## Sinners and Saints (*The 7 Seals*)

Revelation 6-7 on October 2, 2022

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*Please read Revelation 6 before going further in this transcript.*

Last week we spent some time looking into God's throneroom in heaven, described in Revelation 4-5.<sup>1</sup> Today, as we come to Revelation 6-7, God continues to rule and reign from His throne. Jesus has been found worthy to open the scroll, and today we'll consider what happens as He breaks open the 7 seals that hold it shut. As these seals are opened, one by one, they'll reveal a stark contrast between "Sinners & Saints," between those who remain unrepentant and those who've put their trust in Christ's sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> To be clear, all of us are sinners, but not every sinner has been transformed into a saint. (Saints are a subset of sinners.) The Bible teaches us that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We all stand equally in need of salvation. We find this salvation by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Revelation 6-7 sets up a contrast between unrepentant SINNERS who continue in their sin and SAINTS, who've repented of their sin and found shelter from God's wrath and blessing from the Lord.

Revelation 6:1-8 begins by describing the first 4 seals, which, when broken open, release "The four horsemen of the apocalypse."<sup>4</sup> Each rider has a different colored horse:

1 White horse: Bow and a crown, "bent on conquest."

2 Red horse: Sword, takes "peace from the earth, people kill EACH other."

3 Black horse: Scale, "two pounds for a day's wages" (famine/inflation)

4 Pale horse: Death, with Hades following. "power to kill ¼ of the earth"<sup>5</sup>

In many ways, God's judgment begins not with outright wrath, but simply by allowing human sin to take its course.<sup>6</sup> These first four seals in particular, reveal the depravity of our own human hearts.<sup>7</sup> In other words, these first four seals, reveal how our human sinfulness implodes upon itself. For example, this rider on the white horse, who is "bent on conquest," represents humankind's propensity to be at war with one another.<sup>8 9 10 11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There we saw God the Father, seated on His throne, and God the Son standing at the center of the throne looking like a Lamb who'd been slain, and God the Holy Spirit symbolized by 7 lamps blazing in front of the throne.

<sup>2</sup> By saints, we're referring to every believer in Christ. So we're not limiting this word just to those who've been canonized by certain faiths. By saints, we mean every man, woman, and child who has put their trust in Jesus' death and resurrection. So you might say that "saints are a 'subgroup' of sinners," sinners who've repented of their sin and been made new.

<sup>3</sup> See Romans 3:23 and Ephesians 2:1-9.

<sup>4</sup> Zechariah 6:1-8 may give some insight into John's imagery in Revelation 6:1-8.

<sup>5</sup> We aren't told that this rider is carrying anything, but I envision a sickle or a scythe.

<sup>6</sup> "God's judgment is to allow human depravity to run its course.... This would be especially poignant in the first century, when the Pax Romana was no true Roman 'peace' at all, but a façade built on the Roman sword." See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 277.

<sup>7</sup> Consider Romans 1:24a

<sup>8</sup> This particular rider on this white horse is likely NOT the conquering Christ, who shows up later in Revelation 19:11 riding a white horse, as do His armies of heaven in 19:14. See *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2598 footnote on Revelation 6:2.

<sup>9</sup> At this time in history, the bow would have been understood as a battle weapon. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:2.

We're often "bent on conquest," taking from other nations, or taking from other people in general, whatever our greed and lust desire. James 4:1-2 talks about this, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight...." Does this sound like any humans you know? If someone else has something they want, then they just take it, by force if they have to.

That's what the 2<sup>nd</sup> rider, on the red horse, reveals. He "takes peace from the earth" which leads to people killing each other.<sup>12</sup> But even before this seal was opened, and this rider came out, people have already been killing each other since the dawn of time. As far back as Cain and Abel in the early chapters of Genesis.<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> The word "kill" in Revelation 6:4 means "to slay one another."<sup>15</sup> So this is referring to killing another human being, violently.<sup>16</sup> But again, it's not like this is a rarity in human behavior. If you've listened to the news lately, there are plenty of examples of this in our own day and age. So, this 2<sup>nd</sup> horsemen didn't really need to nudge humanity, all that much.

Revelation 6:5 tells us the 3<sup>rd</sup> rider was, "...holding a pair of scales in his hand." This is referring to an old-fashioned scale, where a person would place the product being purchased on one side and the weights and measures on the other side. The point of the scale is that food had gotten VERY expensive due to all of the warring and infighting and murder. Basic food staples had become terribly expensive, something like 10-fold inflation.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> Once again though, this is not all that different from conditions in our world today. Human sin and selfishness have led to starvation and malnourishment all around the globe, much of which is preventable. The impact of human depravity is not difficult to find.



Revelation 6:8 says, "...there before me was a pale horse!<sup>20</sup> Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the

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<sup>10</sup> Arrows are "a widely used metaphor for God's judgments." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1347 footnote on Ezekiel 5:16. Also see an intriguing footnote on Genesis 9:13 on page 24, suggesting that the symbol of a rainBOW is pointing away from the earth, symbolizing God's judgment pointed AWAY from the earth.

<sup>11</sup> A mounted cavalry that could shoot arrows from horseback represents some of the strongest weaponry of its time. See discussion of the Parthians by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, p. 277.

<sup>12</sup> The wording of the *ESV* in Revelation 6:4 makes this more clear, "Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another...."

<sup>13</sup> See Genesis 4:6-8.

<sup>14</sup> So it only makes sense that God would make one of the 10 Commandments, "thou shall not murder."

<sup>15</sup> See the *ESV* translation. σφάζω = "slaughter... of the killing of a person by violence." (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 979.)

<sup>16</sup> John's original audience lived in particularly bloody time in history, when killing was sometimes with bow and arrow, but oftentimes up close and gritty with things like swords and daggers.

<sup>17</sup> See *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:6.

<sup>18</sup> Mercifully, this rider on the black horse was commanded to use some restraint. He was not allowed to damage the oil and the wine. "The roots of the olive and vine go deeper and would not be immediately affected by a limited drought." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:6.

<sup>19</sup> "In AD 92 [arguably about 3 years before the book of Revelation], Domitian ordered half of Asia Minor's vineyards to be destroyed to increase grain production, which caused such outrage that Domitian repealed the edict." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2599 footnote on Revelation 6:6.

<sup>20</sup> "Pale" "describes the ashen appearance of the dead." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:8.

earth.”<sup>21</sup> When the 4<sup>th</sup> seal is broken open, the final rider is personified as “Death,” with Hades trailing right behind.<sup>22</sup> Hades is kind of like death’s assistant; an undertaker of sorts.<sup>23 24 25</sup> Now, there’s much more that could be said about these four horsemen, but I appreciate how New Testament scholar Robert Mounce puts it: “Instead of discussing the probable significance of each of the four colored horses, those first listeners would undoubtedly have recoiled in terror as war, bloodshed, famine, and death galloped furiously across the stage of their imagination. Visions, at best, are to be experienced rather than analyzed. Those who approach Revelation with a sympathetic imagination are most [likely] to understand its true meaning.”<sup>26</sup> With that sympathetic imagination in mind, let’s stop to consider the ramifications of one fourth of the earth’s population being killed.<sup>27</sup> Today’s current population is approaching 8 billion souls. So if the 4<sup>th</sup> seal were opened today, that means 2 billion people on planet earth would die.<sup>28</sup> The terrible consequences of our sinful depravity should take our breath away; it should cause us to consider this world’s great need for salvation.

When Jesus breaks open the 5<sup>th</sup> seal, we see something vastly different than the four horsemen, but no less disturbing... Revelation 6:9-10 says, “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar<sup>29</sup> the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth<sup>30</sup> and avenge our blood?” When verse 9 uses this word slain, it’s the same word used back in Revelation 5:6 to describe the Lamb who looked like it had been slain.<sup>31</sup> In other words, these dear saints of God had participated in Christ’s sufferings and become like Him in His death.<sup>32 33</sup> We see here an even deeper display of human depravity

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<sup>21</sup> Consider Ezekiel 5:16-17.

<sup>22</sup> “Hades is generally equivalent to Hebrew Sheol.” (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:8.) To learn more about “sheol,” consider reading the extensive article by Matthew Y. Emerson, Professor, Oklahoma Baptist University. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-sheol> Revelation 1:18 reminds us that Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades. See Hosea 13:14.

<sup>23</sup> This picture of Hades following close behind death is grim indeed. Osborne suggests that “The imagery of ‘following behind’ pictures Hades on foot gathering up the corpses left by...Death as they struck victim after victim.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 282.

<sup>24</sup> Again we see that this judgment is restrained by being limited to ¼ of the earth. Later on the 7 trumpet judgments will have an increasing impact to 1/3 of the earth (See Revelation 8:7f), and then the 7 bowl judgments will intensify even more, to the whole earth (For example, note Revelation 16:3, “EVERY living thing in the sea died.”). (*NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2599 footnote on Revelation 6:8.)

<sup>25</sup> Regarding the progression from the 7 seals, to the 7 trumpets, and then the 7 bowls, a scholar named Caird explains the structure in the book of Revelation this way: Revelation isn’t so much chronological as artistic “like that of a musical theme with variations, each variation adding something new to the significance of the whole composition. ...each new series of visions both recapitulates and develops the themes already stated in what has gone before.” Referenced by Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 270.

<sup>26</sup> Earlier he begins, “Reviewing the various interpretations assigned to the Four Horsemen tends to rob the contemporary reader of the dramatic nature of the vision itself. It is good to place oneself back in one of the seven churches and listen to the visions as they are being read...” (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 145–146.)

<sup>27</sup> For the 1st century readers, there were approximately 200 million people in the world at that time. So if the 4th seal had been opened in their day and age, it would have meant the death of some 50 million people.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

<sup>29</sup> “In Old Testament ritual the blood of the slaughtered animal was poured out at the base of the altar.” See Exodus 29:12. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:9.

<sup>30</sup> “Inhabitants of the earth” is the way that Revelation refers to humans who are hostile toward God. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2158 footnote on Revelation 6:10.

<sup>31</sup> And the same word used in Revelation 6:4.

<sup>32</sup> See Philippians 3:10 and Revelation 2:10.

demonstrated by the senseless killing of these dear saints. They were slain for no other reason than their faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 9 says they were slain “because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained.”<sup>34</sup> Once again though, even today, believers are being persecuted for their faith all around the world, sometimes even killed for it.<sup>35</sup> You’ll notice here that these martyrs aren’t asking if God will judge these unrepentant sinners, but when. “How soon will you avenge our blood Sovereign Lord, holy and true?”<sup>36 37</sup>

This idea of vengeance may make some of us a bit uncomfortable. After all, aren’t we called to love our enemies? Didn’t Jesus tell us to pray for them?<sup>38</sup> A key distinction here is that they are not taking matters into their own hands; they’re calling out to God for His justice. Romans 12:19 comes to mind, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.” In other words, “avenging is GOD’S prerogative, not ours,” ...although oftentimes we’d like it to be ours!<sup>39</sup> That’s why SO many of us love the Marvel Avenger movies!<sup>40</sup> We absolutely love our superheroes who come to our aid and avenge the wrongs in this world. However, despite their appeal, Scripture’s clear and consistent teaching is that God, and God alone, is the One who we should trust to avenge the evil in this world. And as He does this, (*in the REAL world by the way*), He will receive worship for it, in heaven and on earth. Revelation 16:5-7 later says, “Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: “You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.” And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”<sup>41 42</sup> The book of Revelation emphasizes “the law of retribution” which defends God’s right to judge humanity justly.<sup>43</sup> So we don’t need to feel unsettled by this call for vengeance. This is well within the holy confines of what it’s appropriate to pray for.<sup>44 45 46</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Also consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:28.

<sup>34</sup> Revelation 12:11 says, “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

<sup>35</sup> Hebrews 10:37-39 says, “For, “In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay.” 38 And, “But my righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.” 39 But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.”

<sup>36</sup> “The question here is not whether God will judge the transgressors but how soon. ...the martyrs would like it to be sooner than later.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 287.

<sup>37</sup> “How long until you judge” is a further indication that God’s judgment hasn’t even really begun, at least not in earnest. The damage from the first four seals was self-inflicted, humans destroying one another with raw depravity.

<sup>38</sup> See Matthew 5:43-45.

<sup>39</sup> Romans 12:19 is quoting Deuteronomy 32:35. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 302 footnote on Deuteronomy 32:35.

<sup>40</sup> The financial stats underline all the more just how strongly we humans feel about avenging evil. “In total the Marvel Cinematic Universe has earned more than \$25 billion worldwide, making it the biggest movie franchise ever.” <https://www.businessinsider.com/marvel-movies-ranked-how-much-money-at-global-box-office-2021-11>

<sup>41</sup> See Psalm 79:10.

<sup>42</sup> Our triune God is present everywhere. He is all-seeing, all-knowing, and perfect in knowledge. This enables Him to judge with perfect justice every time. Unlike us.

<sup>43</sup> “lex talionis” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 284.

<sup>44</sup> “Like the imprecatory prayers of David, however, this cry does not constitute an ethical low in the book but rather a call for divine justice...much like Jesus who ‘entrusted himself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). In other words, this is not a low point for ethics but a high point for divine justice and for the centrality of the sovereignty of God in the life (and death) of the saints.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 286.

<sup>45</sup> Let’s also keep the immediate context here, their souls are crying out from under God’s altar in heaven. “The martyrs are asking for judgment against those who have slain them.” Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 287.

Verses 12-17 then describe what happens when Jesus opens the 6<sup>th</sup> seal. There's a great earthquake, the sun turns black, the moon turns red, the stars fall, and so on.<sup>47</sup> It's as though God shakes the entire cosmos in order to give these unrepentant sinners a stern WAKEUP CALL. For John's original readers, this would have likely brought to mind multiple other Bible texts, including Joel's prophecy from the Old Testament. Joel 2:31-32 says, "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls."<sup>48</sup> You see, when God shakes this world, it's not just in preparation for His wrath, it's also in warning for unrepentant sinners: There's still a little time left!<sup>49</sup> Revelation 6:15 says, "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains."<sup>50</sup> My *Study Bible* puts it this way: "God's judgment will terrify unrepentant humanity, regardless of social, political, or economic status."<sup>51</sup> <sup>52</sup> In other words, the God of heaven now has their FULL attention!

Revelation 6:16-17 says, "They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!"<sup>53</sup> For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"<sup>54</sup> What a startling adjustment to our picture of the sacrificial Lamb! Christ, who was slain for the sins of the world, is also the Lamb who shakes the world awake with His righteous wrath; it is kindled and ready.<sup>55</sup> Verse 17 asks, "who can withstand it?" "No one" is the

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<sup>46</sup> Revelation 6:11 goes on, "Then each of them was given a white robe [Recognizing and honoring their purity and virtue. See 1 John 1:7 and Revelation 3:4.], and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been." That word "wait" can also be translated "rest." [ἀναπαύω = "② to bring something to a conclusion, end, conclude, finish.... ③ to take one's rest." (William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 69.)) In fact the *ESV* says, they were "...told to rest a little longer...." (See Revelation 14:13, "...Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor....") The last half of verse 11 kind of takes your breath away, "...until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been." "Until the full number" is a number known only by God; it reminds us once again that God is sovereignly ruling and reigning from His throne. No matter how things may look from our earthly perspective, from God's heavenly perspective, everything is running right on time with His plans. This offers a sobering note for those of us believers who are reading this text today: There are still more saints yet to be martyred...

<sup>47</sup> See Isaiah 13:9-13 and 34:4.

<sup>48</sup> Joel's reference to "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance...." is intriguing in light of Revelation 7:1-8.

<sup>49</sup> Peter refers to Joel's prophecy in his own sermon on the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:20-21 Peter declares, "The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Joel calls it a "great and DREADFUL day," while Peter says, "great and GLORIOUS day." I suppose that depends on your perspective, whether you're an unrepentant sinner, or a sinner who has been transformed into a saint. Either way, both of them declare, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The full text is Joel 2:28-32 which the Apostle Peter references in Acts 2:17-21.

<sup>50</sup> All of the cosmos is being shaken by its Creator, which was more than enough to get humankind's attention. Maybe even the attention of the Jewish nation which had rejected Jesus...

<sup>51</sup> See Isaiah 2:19-21. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2599 footnote on Revelation 6:15.

<sup>52</sup> "Terror is a great equalizer." Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 294.

<sup>53</sup> Let's not miss the fact that the Father and Son are equally feared as they share in this judgment upon sin. They are working in unison; God the Father sits on the throne and God the Son is the Lamb before the throne (See Revelation 5:6.), and now the whole world stands on the brink of their shared wrath.

<sup>54</sup> Romans 1:18 says that God's wrath is already being revealed, and the upcoming chapters of Revelation make it clear that there is still much more wrath to come. God's wrath "is both present and future." *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 2158-2159 footnote on Revelation 6:16.

<sup>55</sup> See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002, top of p. 296.

clear answer.<sup>56</sup> What this means, is that God's love doesn't contradict His wrath. They're not mutually exclusive. In fact, divine love and divine wrath are inextricably woven together and dependent upon each another.

Revelation 7 makes it clear that God's wrath is only for unrepentant and unbelieving sinners.<sup>57</sup> That's why it reports the sealing of God's saints from the coming tribulation. Revelation 7 records two different groups of saints who've repented of their sin, and found salvation through the Lamb.<sup>58</sup> These two groups include the Jewish servants of God, as well as the multi-ethnic great multitude who come out of the great tribulation. What happens next, in Revelation 7, seems to be a salvation response, or at the very least, a salvation reminder regarding the various saints who've come to faith in Jesus Christ the Messiah. Revelation 7:1 begins, "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees UNTIL we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> [Contrasting the 7 seals on the scroll, God now puts His protective seal on His saints. This shelters them from the very wrath that is being unsealed in the scroll. So, God's seal "symbolizes God's ownership and protection of his people from coming judgments."<sup>61</sup>] Revelation 7:4-8 declares their ethnic identity: "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, [and 12,000 from] Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin."

Now, admittedly, the number 12 is another highly symbolic number in the book of Revelation. This 144,000 is twelve 12,000s. My *Study Bible* notes that "Some find here a reference to members of actual Jewish tribes, the faithful Jewish remnant of the 'great tribulation' (verse 14). Others take the passage as symbolic of all of the faithful believers who live during the period of tribulation."<sup>62</sup> Frankly, I'm still working my way through a lot of this, so I'm continuing to study and learn. But overall, verses 1-8 do seem to be a compelling indication that the nation of Israel will eventually come to accept Jesus as their Messiah.<sup>63</sup>

Be that as it may, the remainder of Revelation 7 expands to include a multi-ethnic great multitude. Revelation 7:9-10 says, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great

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<sup>56</sup> To put it another way, the Lion of Judah is no purring kitty cat, He's a fierce, roaring lion... with teeth!

<sup>57</sup> See Ephesians 5:3-6, "God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient."

<sup>58</sup> So then, Revelation 7 answers this question, "who can withstand it?" In a way, all of God's servants can withstand it, because these saints are sealed and sheltered from it (See Revelation 7, verses 3 and 15.). "John sees the redeemed multitude standing before God's throne (7:9)." *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2599 footnote on Revelation 6:17.

<sup>59</sup> At the 5th trumpet, Revelation 9:4 says, "They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads."

<sup>60</sup> See Ezekiel 9:4 for some background insight on this mark, "those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things...."

<sup>61</sup> *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2599 footnote on Revelation 7:2.

<sup>62</sup> *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2159 footnote on Revelation 7:4.

<sup>63</sup> This also makes sense in light of Romans 11:1-32, which talks about a Jewish remnant.

multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”<sup>64</sup> God continues to reign from His throne. And He continues to be a God of salvation! Even in the midst of coming wrath, God is worshipped for His salvation. One of my favorite verses in the entire book of Revelation comes much later in the book... Revelation 14:6-7 proclaim, “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” We tend to think of Revelation as a book about End Times judgment, and it is. But, last week we discovered that it’s also a book of worship. Today, I’m here to tell you, Revelation is also a book of salvation. Even as God seals and shelters His saints, He has still NOT given up on unrepentant sinners! God’s desire is that every sinner would come to faith and be transformed into one of His saints.

Revelation 7:11-17 ends with these words, “All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” [You see, these “who have come out of the great tribulation,” may include some of the formerly unrepentant sinners, who took God’s wakeup call to heart, back in Revelation 6.<sup>65</sup> In other words, they came out of the tribulation by repenting of their sins, by having their sinfulness washed away by the blood of the Lamb. These are sinners who’ve become saints.] 15 Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,’ nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’<sup>66</sup> ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ ”

The scroll is still not quite open yet, the 7<sup>th</sup> seal still holds it shut... We’ll have to wait until we get to chapter 8. Until then, let’s close with this question: Do you consider yourself a sinner or a saint? Now I said at the beginning that we’re all sinners, but not all of us have necessarily become saints yet. Only God can forgive our sin and

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<sup>64</sup> “The first vision stresses God’s protection (vv. 1-8); the second, God’s salvation (vv. 9-17).” *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2600 footnote on Revelation 7:9-17.

<sup>65</sup> These people have come “from the great tribulation.” Some assume that the people are a select group who have been martyred for their faith because they have died during the tribulation. But it is not clear that martyrdom is in mind. (G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 432–433.)

<sup>66</sup> Consider Revelation 21:16 and 22:17.

transform us into one of His saints. Verse 17 ends with a beautiful promise of God wiping every tear from their eyes > That's the hope of heaven! If you want that hope today, we'd love to tell you more. Please contact our church to set up a meeting with one of the pastors or elders.