

## THE CHRISTIAN'S ASSURANCE

*7 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 against any tree. 2Then 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 were given authority to harm the land and the sea, 3“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees, until we have put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” 4I heard the number of those who were sealed. [Coming] from every tribe of the children of Israel, [the total number of those who were sealed] was one hundred and forty-four thousand. 5From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, and from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.*

*9After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation and from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were dressed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. 10They cry out with a loud voice, “[We attribute our] salvation to our God—the one who sits on the throne—and to the Lamb!” 11All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces and worshiped God, 12saying, “Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanks and the honor and the power and the strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!”*

*13Then one of the elders addressed me, asking, “These who are dressed in white robes—who are they, and from where have they come?” 14I said to him, “My lord, you know.” Then he said to me, “They are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb. 15That is why they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tabernacle over them. 16Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down upon them, nor any scorching heat; 17for the Lamb who is at the center of the throne shall be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Rev. 7:1-17)*

### **Introduction**

Elaine and her husband traveled down to Quito, Ecuador, to spend some time with their missionary daughter and her family. During the course of their stay in Quito, their son-in-law, Dan, took them along on his trip to a jungle hospital in the interior.

A short way out of Quito their jeep left the paved highway behind and traveled up a slippery, muddy path that ribboned its way along a mountainside high above the Pastasa River. In the late afternoon they arrived at their destination, the hospital at

the jungle outpost of Shell. Upon completion of Dan's business the next day, they would all climb back into the jeep for the trip back to Quito.

At this point, Elaine picks up the story:

That night it rained torrents. It made me pray all the more, "Lord, give me courage to return on that road tomorrow afternoon." There was no choice in the matter—that road was the *only* road out of the jungle.

The morning brought more rain, and bad news about the road. That week there had been 85 mudslides on that road, due to the heavy rains. The host and hostess of the guest house returned via the road shortly before we left and informed us, "The road is the worst we've ever seen it."

Dan was in a hurry to return to his responsibilities in Quito, so we packed up and were ready to go by 3 o'clock that afternoon. If everything went as planned, we could get through the worse part of the trip before dark. We met our first slide ten minutes into our journey. It wouldn't be our last!

A few minutes later, I looked at the gas gauge and noticed that we had less than a quarter of a tank of gas. "Dan," I said, "you forgot to get gas!"

It didn't take him long to say, "It's too late now. But, I think we can make it to the next station." True, it was only 50 kilometers away, but it was all uphill, on a narrow, winding, muddy road. Would we?

This gave me something else to pray about besides butterflies and mudslides. "Lord, give us enough gas to get to the next station."

Just around the corner, we panicked ... Another slide and log jam caused a raging waterfall to flow over the road with such a swift current, we thought it might take our jeep and its entire contents right over the cliff's edge—several hundred feet to our death. Some workers on a road construction crew motioned for us to proceed. Dan geared down, and we went through the torrent with a prayer ...

Waterfalls aren't choosy about where they fall. The road is just as good a place as any, and then they continue their fall 1,500 feet straight down over the edge of the road. As the water tumbled down, we kept creeping up in elevation, and the gas gauge kept creeping down to empty. We lost track of the number of waterfalls we went *through*, let alone saw ...

Just five kilometers from the city of Banos, Dan and Sheryl's friends met us as they were heading for the jungle. We gave them a quick warning about what to expect, but they never made it. They passed two more cars after us, and the people in the last one said, "You have to turn back. A big mudslide took the road

down the mountain.” It took several days before anyone could travel that road again.

With our car running on fumes, we passed a hydroelectric dam that had all the power it needed from the swollen river. I was awestruck with a God whose power controlled that raging river and the fear that raged in my heart all at the same time.

“Praise the Lord, we made it,” I said with relief as I saw the first signs of civilization in the form of a gas station. (*POWER*, 4/28/91, pp. 6-7)

For Elaine and her family, it was a rough ride, but they had a safe arrival at their final destination—the Lord proved Himself faithful to protect them and bring them safely to their appointed destination. What she and her family experienced well illustrates the message of the seventh chapter of Revelation: The Lord is faithful to protect His people and bring them safely through even the greatest of trials to their divinely appointed destination.

In order to understand this chapter it is important to appreciate its location in the book: it is situated just after the opening of the sixth seal where the question is raised, *“Who is able to stand?”* (vs. 17.) Chapter seven of the Revelation addresses that question, providing comfort and assurance for the believer in Christ. In verse 9 John reports that he saw a great multitude *“standing before the throne.”* In verses 13-14 he is told that this multitude consists of those who have *“washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb.”*

The purpose of this chapter is to minister encouragement and assurance to the believer in Christ amidst the awesome scene of first temporal and then final judgment depicted in the opening of the first six seals. Because of the Lord’s great faithfulness, be assured that as one who has entrusted yourself to Christ, you possess a blessed assurance.

## **I. Be Assured that the Lord will Preserve You from Judgment**

In verse one we learn that the apostle John saw *“four angels ... holding [back] the four winds of the earth.”* Note: The wind and the whirlwind are used in Scripture to depict God’s judgment as it sweeps away the ungodly out of His presence: *“[The wicked] are like chaff that the wind blows away”* (Psl. 1:4b.) The LORD declares concerning the sinful nation of Elam, *“I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam’s exiles do not go”* (Jer. 49:36.)

The angels restrain the four winds *“to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea, or against any tree”* (vs. 1b.) The mention of the land, sea, and trees corresponds to Genesis 1:9-11, representing the various natural elements of this present creation:

*And God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear; and it was so. <sup>10</sup>And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathered waters he called Seas; and God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>And God said, Let the earth produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants, and trees on the earth that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds; and it was so. (Gen. 1:9-11)*

These four angels restraining the four winds represent God momentarily restraining His final judgment upon this present creation.

In verse two we are told that John next saw another angel *“coming from the east,”* or, *“ascending from the rising of the sun.”* This great angel may represent the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: His presence brings comfort, assurance and protection to God’s people. This angel has *“the seal of the living God.”* A seal was the mark of ownership that a master imprinted upon his bondservants. When this angel applies the seal it indicates that those who are sealed belong to the LORD and are, therefore, spared from His judgment. Note Ezekiel 9:3-6a, where the servants of the LORD are sealed in order to identify them and spare them from the judgment that was about to come:

*Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then Jehovah called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing instruments at his side, <sup>4</sup>and said to him, “Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over the detestable things that are done there.” <sup>5</sup>As I listened, he said to the others, “Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. <sup>6</sup>Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark.” (Ezek. 9:3-6a)*

The seal the Christian bears is the Holy Spirit, as the Apostle Paul teaches in Ephesians 1:13-14,

*You also [were allotted] to him—having heard the word of truth, that is, the gospel by which you are saved, and having believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. <sup>14</sup>He is a “deposit” guaranteeing our inheritance, until the redemption of [God’s] possession, to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:13-14)*

Now John hears this angel cry out in a loud voice to the four angels, commanding them to refrain from carrying out their work of judgment, *“until we have put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God”* (vs. 3.) The designation, *“servants of our God,”* indicates commitment to the Lord, as well as ownership by the Lord, these two aspects of the Christian’s identity are brought out in 2 Timothy 2:19,

*... God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." (2 Tim. 2:19)*

The seal on the forehead indicates that they exhibit a holiness and devotion to the LORD, like the Old Testament high priest:

*Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as a seal: HOLY TO JEHOVAH. <sup>37</sup>Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. <sup>38</sup>It will be on Aaron's forehead. (Ex. 28:36-38a)*

Now the apostle hears the number of those who have been sealed: *"one hundred and forty-four thousand,"* which, as we shall see, is the number of completeness.

The message of verses 1-8 is the assurance that the total number of God's people shall be saved. Note that John *"hears"* the number of those who have been sealed, he is not left to count (and perchance miscount) the number for himself. The number is *"four hundred and forty-four thousand,"* the symbolic number for completeness: 12x12x1000. The individual listing of the twelve tribes of Israel is still another testimony that all of God's redeemed are safely accounted for, not one of the redeemed is missing, not one of them is left to perish.

But why are the twelve tribes of Israel listed? Where are the Gentile believers?

The answer: to say that the complete number of God's Israel have been sealed is the most certain way of speaking about the salvation of **all** God's people, Jewish and Gentile believer alike. Christ initially came to call Israel. When He sent out His disciples to preach the gospel during the days of His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus gave them the following instructions: *"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>go rather to the lost sheep of Israel"* (Matt. 10:5-6.) But at the time of His ascension, having completed the work of redemption, our Lord issues His Great Commission, instructing His disciples to bring the gospel to all the nations: *"go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt. 28:19.) As the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Rome, the gospel is *"first for the Jew, then for the Gentile"* (Rom. 1:16.) But Scripture also indicates that at the end of the age, when the full number of God's elect from the Gentiles have been brought to Christ, then God shall bring His people Israel to Christ:

*I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. <sup>26</sup>And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. <sup>27</sup>And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. (Rom. 11:25-27)*

Thus, we might say the redemption of the Jews, occurring in large numbers at the beginning of the New Testament age and again at the close of the age, serves as "bookends," enclosing the whole number of the redeemed, both Jew and Gentile alike.

Note that, although twelve tribes are listed, one of the original tribes of Israel is omitted: the tribe of Dan (Joseph's son, Manasseh, fills the vacant slot to complete the number.) The tribe of Dan is apparently excluded because of their association with idolatry:

*After seeking advice, [King Jeroboam] made two golden calves. He said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." <sup>29</sup>One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. <sup>30</sup>And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there. (1 Kgs. 12:28-30)*

The message being pictorially communicated in verses 1-8 is this: All those whom the Lord has redeemed shall be preserved, not one of them shall perish. But the redeemed are not those who merely bear the Lord's name and have only a formal connection with Him. On the contrary, the redeemed are those who believe in Christ and are committed to Him. What the Apostle Paul says with regard to Old Testament Israel had equal validity for anyone who would identify himself with Jesus the Messiah and the covenant community:

*A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. (Rom. 2:28-29)*

If you have entrusted yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the assurance that the Lord will preserve you from judgment. All those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting His shed blood for the forgiveness of their sins and entrusting themselves unto Him, shall be saved, not one of them shall perish.

*All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject; <sup>38</sup>for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. <sup>39</sup>And this is the will of him who sent me, [namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. <sup>40</sup>My Father's will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day. (Jn. 6:37-40)*

## **II. Be Assured that the Lord will Bring You into His Heavenly Kingdom**

Note the contrast between Revelation 7:1-8 and Revelation 7:9-17. Whereas previously John **heard** the number of the redeemed (vs. 4,) now he **sees** a great

multitude (vs. 9.) Whereas previously the number was specified as precisely *“one hundred and forty-four thousand”* (vs. 4,) now the multitude that John sees is innumerable (vs. 9.) Whereas previously all the redeemed are viewed collectively as a unit within the fold of Israel, now all the redeemed are considered in their individual identity.

So it is that John now sees a great multitude. This multitude is *“standing before the throne and before the Lamb”* (vs. 9.) Contrast this to Revelation 6:16-17; the world of unrepentant mankind is heard to cry out to the mountains and to 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>17</sup>for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

This multitude has been clothed with *“white robes”* (vs. 9b.) The *“white robes”* signify their justification and glorification in Christ—they are accepted by God by virtue of their trust in the perfect righteousness of Christ and the fact that that perfect righteousness has been bestowed upon them by the Savior:

*I rejoice greatly in Jehovah, my soul exults in my God; because he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has wrapped me in a robe of righteousness—like a bridegroom adorns his head with a turban like a priest and like a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isa. 61:10)*

*... I regard all things as loss on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup>and be found in him—not having my own righteousness, which [is derived] from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God [received] by faith. (Phil. 3:8-9)*

The multitude is also seen holding *“palm branches”* (vs. 9c.) The palm branch is the symbol of peace and rejoicing before the LORD; note Leviticus 23:40, *“On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before Jehovah your God for seven days.”* Indeed, they are seen praising God, declaring, *“[We attribute our] salvation to our God—the one who sits on the throne—and to the Lamb!”* God the Father is seen to be the Author of our salvation and Jesus Christ His Son is seen to be the One who has accomplished this great salvation, as the Apostle Paul expresses it: *“It is because of him [God the Father] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—righteousness and sanctification and redemption”* (1 Cor. 1:30.) Once again, the whole host of the angels joins with the redeemed in praising God (vs. 11-12.)

Now one of the elders asks John, *“These who are dressed in white robes—who are they, and from where have they come?”* (vs. 13.) When John professes his ignorance, the elder proceeds to answer his own questions: This great multitude

is defined as being *“the ones who have come out of the great tribulation.”* In one sense, *“the great tribulation”* is descriptive of the Christian’s encounter with the world in any age: *“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33.) However, *“the great tribulation”* is intensified into a period of severe, worldwide persecution at the close of the New Testament age. Our Lord Jesus warns, *“you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me”* (Matt. 24:9.)

The multitude John now sees is further described as having *“washed their robes and made them white by the blood of the Lamb”* (vs. 14b.) A pictorial description of the redemption accomplished by Christ at Calvary: *“God presented [Christ Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement ... <sup>26</sup>he did it ... so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus”* (Rom. 3:25-26.)

*“Therefore,”* because of **both** their justification **and** their perseverance—*“he who stands firm to the end will be saved”* (Matt. 24:13)—they are found standing before the throne of God. Note: The believer’s perseverance is not self-produced, on the contrary, it is an integral part of God’s saving work in his life, as the Apostle Paul informs the church at Rome, *“the LORD is able to make him stand”* (Rom. 14:4b.)

The elder now reveals to us the future state of the Lord’s redeemed (vs. 15-17.) *“[God] will spread his tabernacle over them.”* As a husband receives his bride, so the LORD will receive us into His presence and will cause us to dwell with Him and He will dwell with us. Furthermore, all want and suffering shall be removed, because *“the Lamb... shall be their shepherd.”* As the Good Shepherd, the Lamb *“will lead them to springs of living water.”* Here is the perfect and full abundance of refreshment and blessing and life. Finally, *“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* God Himself condescends to minister His comfort and blessing to His people; note the wonderful promise the Lord Jesus makes in His parable of the faithful servants:

*It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them.* (Lk. 12:37)

As one who has entrusted yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the assurance that the Lord will bring you into His heavenly kingdom with all of its divine blessing.

## Conclusion

This is the message of Revelation chapter seven: the Christian’s assurance. The Lord gives us the assurance that He is faithful to protect His people and bring them safely through even the greatest of trials and into His everlasting kingdom. Because of the



Lord's great faithfulness, let us be assured that as those who have entrusted themselves to Him, we possess a blessed assurance.