

Unprecedented Revival in the Time of Wrath

June 6th, 2009 will be the 65th anniversary of the Allied invasion of Normandy, which began the historic World War II battle to liberate continental Europe from Nazi control.

One of the programs that aired on television on the fiftieth anniversary of the Normandy invasion paired two contrasting interviews back to back.

The first interview was with a marine who landed on Omaha Beach. He recalled horrors that sounded like scenes from Steven Spielberg's Academy Award winning movie *Saving Private Ryan*. The aging veteran recalled looking around at the bloody casualties and concluding, "we're going to lose!"

The next interview was with a U.S. Army Air Corps reconnaissance pilot who flew over the whole battle area. He viewed the carnage on the beaches and saw the sacrifices on the hills, but he also witnessed the successes of the marines, the penetration by the paratroopers, and the effectiveness of the aerial bombardment.

He looked at everything that was happening and concluded, "We're going to win!" Anderson, 164-165

The same event, viewed from different perspectives!

I submit to you that, taken together, chapters 6 and 7 of Revelation are like that!

The first man's perspective is like what we saw last week in chapter six with the harsh realities that will take place as the seals are opened and the tribulation begins.

But the second man's perspective is like what we will see today in chapter 7 of Revelation; that even though there are grim realities during that time, God will be actively at work to bring both Israel and the nations a chance to respond to the gospel before it's too late!

The question is often asked, "Will anyone be saved during the time of tribulation?"

Our passage today decisively answers that question, "YES!"

Chapter seven is an interlude showing us that even during the time of wrath, God will be working to bring people to Himself!

Read Revelation 7:1-17 PRAY!

V. 1-3 An Interlude in the Unfolding Wrath of God

Chapter six ended by describing the events that will happen when the first six seals having been opened; Chapter eight will feature the opening of the seventh seal, which seems to include all of the following trumpet and bowl judgments.

Instead of going directly to the next series of judgments though, chapter seven starts with an angel from the east telling other angels to hold off on the coming judgments momentarily while he completes his mission!

Now this is great news for us! If the text went from seals to trumpets to bowls, it would be so intense it would rock our world! Instead we get good news in Ch. 7!

Now seeing this angelic exchange here reminds us that Revelation is a goldmine of information about angels.

There are 67 occurrences of angels in Revelation, an average of 3 occurrences per chapter, one every six verses!

That's fitting for the last book of the Bible, isn't it?!

As earth moves toward its date with an extreme makeover, Revelation goes back and forth between Heaven and earth, and we should expect to see more open angelic activity described, and we do!

Here we see four angels standing at the four "corners" of the world. The word for corners is the same word we would get quarters from; Think of the four quadrants, or points on the compass: North, South, East, and West.

These four angels control the great atmospheric circulation which governs the winds of the earth.

If you know it will seriously mess up the world to have the wind stop for a while, say, "oh oh!"

The first trumpet judgment in chapter eight involves a third of the earth burning up.

No wind system means no rain, perhaps going along with the three and a half years there won't be rain in the tribulation.

When these four angels restrain those winds, global warming will escalate so fast Al Gore won't have time to blame it on the Bush Administration!

Well, we read in v. 2 of the angel from the east who tells those angels to hold up!

What is the angel from the east's mission? To seal 144,000 slaves of God.

We'll see what that means as we proceed!

V. 4-8 God raises up 144,000 special Jews!

Now few things cause as much speculation in the Book of Revelation as the identity of these 144,000; which is kind of sad, because Revelation says plainly who they are and gives a fair amount of detail about them!

It is clear who they are not: They are not Jehovah's witnesses or members of some other cult that twists scripture to suit their own purposes!

Because of the pain given to speak of the tribes they are from, it is also improbable that this is metaphorical language for Gentile saints!

Five things we know about the 144,000:

1. They live during the time of the tribulation.

Revelation chapters 6-19 are about the time of the tribulation.

2. They are Jews!

Not only are we told they are from the tribes of Israel, the tribes they are from are then spelled out for us! A plain reading means they are Jews!

By the way, assuming Joseph is spoken here to represent his son Ephraim, there is still a tribe missing here: the idolatrous tribe of Dan.

Some think that is because the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan, but that is simply not knowable from the Biblical data!

Dan does not get to be represented among the 144,000 here, but Ezekiel 48 says by God's mercy they will be represented in the millennial reign of Christ!

Anyway, plain meaning makes these actual Jews! And I am for plain meaning!

3. Sometime in the tribulation they give their lives to their Messiah Jesus!

Turn to Revelation 14:1-3 They have Jesus tattooed on their forehead!

4. They are sealed!

I believe the data indicates they are doubly sealed:

Sealed with the seal of salvation like believers now...

“In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation- in Him when you believed- were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the down payment of our inheritance...” -Eph. 1:13-14

I believe the Holy Spirit will still be active in saving people during the Tribulation, but not restraining evil in the world.

But there is another way they are sealed:

Sealed from some kind of harm during the tribulation!

Look at 9:4

They have the seal on their foreheads- when others are harmed, they're not!

5. They are pure! Look at 14:4 They are virgins!

During the tribulation, God will do a new thing in the life of Israel, saving 144,000 of her children!

But why? For what purpose? What's their mission?

We're not told explicitly, but we can make an educated guess...

The probable mission of the 144,000 is to spread the gospel worldwide during the tribulation!

Look again at 14:4

They were redeemed from the human race as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb.

Paul once wrote that the household of Stephanas was the Firstfruits of Achaia, the first of a lot of people who would believe during in Jesus in Achaia.

The 144,000 Jewish Christians are the Firstfruits of the Tribulational saints.

That their mission is to take the gospel everywhere during the tribulation seems to be confirmed by what comes next!

V. 9-17 Unprecedented harvest of souls from the tribulation

Right after hearing of these 144,000 sealed Jewish witnesses on earth during the tribulation, John again sees the throne room of Heaven, and in it he sees another set of people from every nation, tribe, people group and language!

Remember chapter five made it look like he had already seen a group like this in Heaven BEFORE the tribulation started!

The interesting exchange he has with the elder in verses 13-14 make clear this group are those who specifically have come out of this time of great tribulation!

So here's what I see happening, and if you disagree, forgive my enthusiasm!

In the tribulation, 144,000 Jews turn to Christ.

They read the scripture and find a new purpose for their life, paralleling the purpose we have in getting the gospel to the nations!

With boldness they testify and preach in even the most hostile of Muslim countries and among skinheads in Germany and among hostile Hindus in India. Those that thought they were done with Christians will be amazed that *they're back!*

Perhaps the fact they are sealed from harm will keep the witnesses from death; we're not sure about that, but if they are, it will make would be persecutors even more upset with them! When they can't kill them, they'll kill many of those who are converted listening to their message.

That would correspond to what we saw in the last chapter, when under the fifth seal we saw martyrs in Heaven looking down during the time of the Tribulation and seeing those who had killed them still actively persecuting others!

Now you ask, Danny, will people really listen to their message?

Oh yes! There will be lots of things that make sinners think during the tribulation.

You don't watch the flight attendant close when you think you are having a safe flight. But when the plane is going down, you're ready to hear that speech!

Now you ask, Danny, could 144,000 make such an amazing difference? Oh yes!

There are 16 million Southern Baptists in 50,000 churches in America. About 8 million come to church regularly. Last year we baptized 400,000 here. But our dedicated IMB missionaries, all 5521 of them, baptized 600,000 people in 1,183 different people groups! Said another way:

It took about 20 active Southern Baptists here in America for each one person baptized last year; but our missionaries' averaged 108 baptisms each!

You can get a lot done when you know you are set apart!

It is my great joy to pray for and give and participate in great commission work now, and I am looking forward to being in Heaven and praying for these 144,000 witnesses!

You say, Danny, we emphasize missions too much!

Friend, you're just wrong about that!

The entire IMB budget is only \$300 million. Americans spent \$310 million on the video game *Grand Theft Auto IV*- on its first day of release! While we sit around playing Grand Theft Auto IV the world is dying and going to Hell!

As the tribulation unfolds, hallelujah, there will be intensity not just in judgment but in evangelistic witness – may we have a little bit more of that fire now!

Now, before we end, we also should celebrate this look into Heaven we get:

Look at verse 10! In Heaven those who are there are not acting defeated, even though they had just been killed for their faith!

Today is Palm Sunday, when we are reminded of Jesus coming into Jerusalem like a king, being greeted like a victor with palm branches, with shouts of Hosanna, or “God saves,” as He rode in.

Here we see the coming Palm Celebration, as saints robed in white holding palm branches sing “salvation belongs to our God!”

Folks, that’s just another way to sing Hosanna!

In this case, defeat on earth is real victory: Victory in Jesus!

We tend to think of getting killed for the faith as the worst thing that could happen to a Christian.

Here we learn that it’s not that big a deal!

If the worst thing that could happen to you happens on earth, martyrdom, you get special recognition in Heaven!

Verses 16 and 17 tell us how tenderly Jesus shepherds them as the Great Shepherd!

Mistreated on earth, now they hunger and thirst and face heatstroke no more!

Instead there is fruit from the tree of life and living water!

And whatever bitter tears they have cried, God wipes away!

Yea, that relates to us too!

No matter what you are going through, no matter how tough it gets, you can make it through faith!

God is in control; Jesus is your shepherd; Heaven is your reward! Even during the worst times of trouble God can be glorified in your life – let Him!

But for that to apply to you, you have to be washed in the blood of the lamb!

Are you? Sinner’s Prayer!