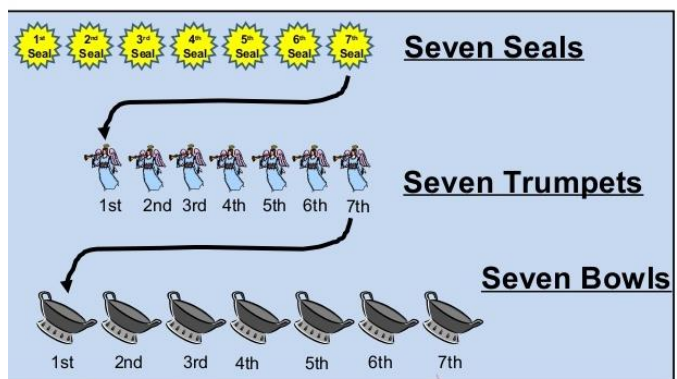


THE SEALING OF THE 144,000 AND THE MARTYRS OF REVELATION 7

INTRODUCTION

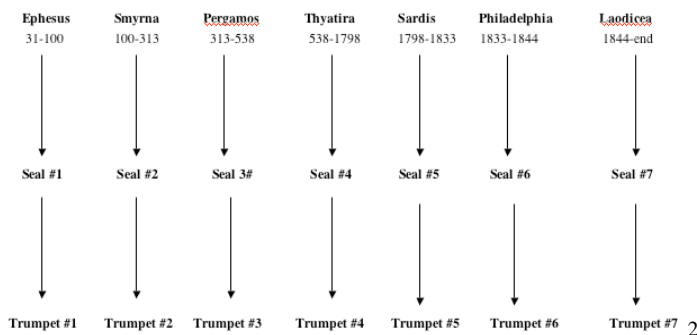
- Two primary views exist on approaching the layout of Revelation:
 - Progressive (premillennial)– the chapters are sequential...moving toward one final climax...each church, seal, trumpet, and bowl are allowed to stand on their own and are not to be considered parallel to each other

Sequence Structure for Rev. 5 - 19



- Recapitulation (amillennial) – the chapters describe the events of Revelation from a simultaneous perspective in that they run parallel to each other rather than chronologically

Recapitulation of the 7 churches, seals and trumpets

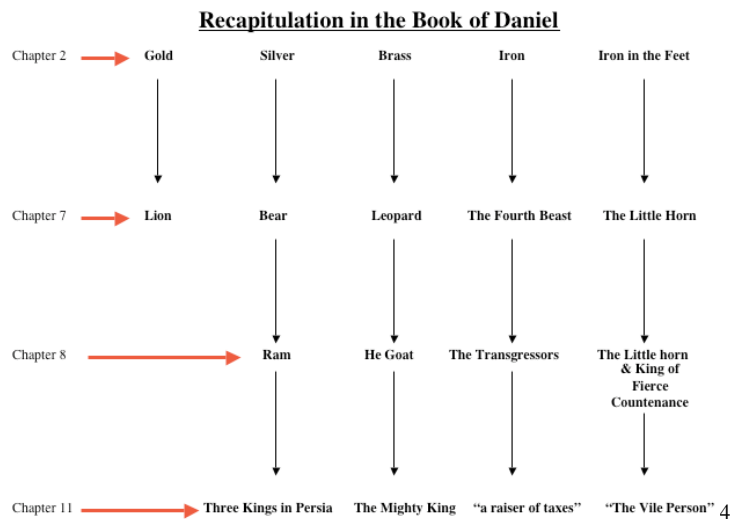


- The amillennial position depends largely on a recapitulation view of Revelation which sees the events in the book, not as sequential, but as simultaneous
- The amillennialist sees Revelation as a collection of several sections (usually 7), each of which “recaps” the events of the same period (i.e. the period between Christ’s 2 comings) rather than describing a succession of events

¹ <https://bibletimeline.org.uk/periods/the-rapture-and-the-tribulation/the-tribulation-opens>

² <http://www.explordanrev.com/wp/in-conclusion-part-ii/>

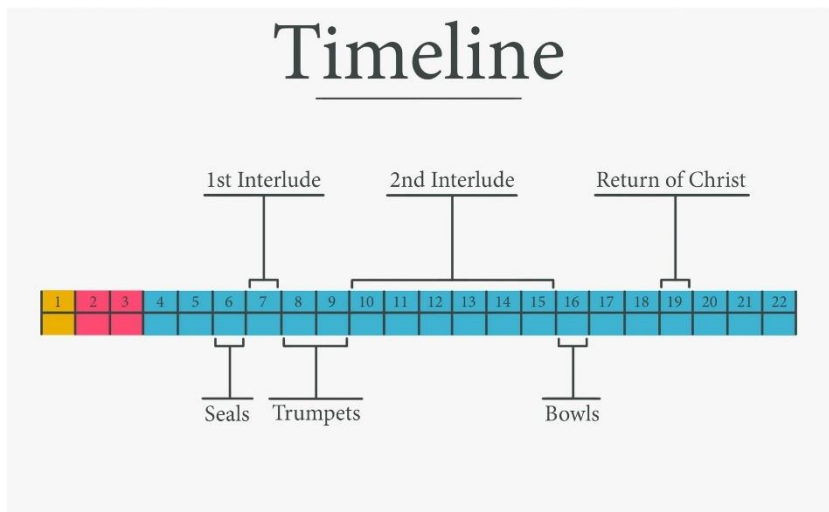
- Each supposed section describes the same era by picking up earlier themes and elaborating on them further
- Thus, there is no chronological movement in the book; rather, each section gives additional information on the events between the 2 comings of Christ
- “Whereas premillennialism claims the millennium is future and earthly, amillennialism affirms that the millennium is present and spiritual. The amillennial view relies heavily upon a recapitulation view of Revelation in which the events in Revelation are not sequential. Instead, Revelation captures events between the two comings of Jesus from multiple angles, perhaps seven angles, but describe the same period of time. This recapitulation understanding allows the amillennialist to view the second coming of Revelation 19 as occurring at the end of the thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20 and not before. Revelation 20 does not follow Revelation 19 sequentially but takes the reader back to the beginning of the interadvent age and conditions between the two comings of Jesus. This includes the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3) and the reign of the saints (Rev. 20:4). For amillennialism, Satan is bound in this age in the sense that he was defeated by the cross of Christ and is not able to stop the spread of the gospel to the nations. And the saints of God are currently reigning with Jesus. When this era of the millennial kingdom runs its course then Jesus will return from heaven there will be one general resurrection and judgment of the righteous and the wicked, then the eternal state will commence. Important to amillennialism is that both tribulation and Christ’s millennial kingdom reign run concurrently in this age. These are present, not future events.”³
- Many have taken this approach to Revelation because of the “recapitulation” seen in the book of Daniel which is arranged this way
- There is a restatement of much of the same information in Daniel 2, 7, 8, and 11



- Taking the chapters in Revelation as sequential (progression) rather than simultaneous (recapitulation), we understand that the 7 seal, the 7 trumpet, and the 7 bowl judgments move the action forward in a chronological fashion, while the intervening chapters (chaps. 7 and 10-15) form interludes which describe things happening during those judgments but not necessarily in a chronological way

³ Michael Vlach, *Theology 4 Course Notes*, The Master’s Seminary

⁴ Ibid.



- Revelation 7 constitutes the first of the parenthetical/interlude sections of the book
 - These interludes explain certain things that are transpiring in, and between, the main order of events
 - “These parenthetical passages, simply, contain explanatory matters about things that will transpire, but were not contained in the revealing of the seal, trumpet and vial judgments. However, understanding the reason for these parenthesis-interruptions is necessary in order to bring the reader up to date on what else is taking place during the revealing of these judgments in the Revelation.”⁵
 - The chronological sequence begun in chapter 6 is interrupted at this point...evident from the fact that the 6th seal is opened at the end of chapter 6 and the 7th seal is not opened until the beginning of chapter 8
 - Thus, chapter 7 is a parenthesis, one that fills in details that are important to the full picture...it reveals other things that are happening during this period of time
 - This reprieve from the vivid destruction of the seal judgments is a welcome break, one that is needed periodically
 - Specifically, chapter 7 answers the question that was raised at the end of chapter 6, “who is able to stand?” (6:17)
 - This is a logical question given the severity of destruction described in Revelation 6
 - One might wonder whether anyone would be saved in the midst of such devastation
 - One might wonder whether God is simply abandoning the planet to Satan and Antichrist
 - Often the question is asked: Will anyone be saved after the Rapture, especially since the Holy Spirit will be removed?
- 2 Thessalonians 2:7** ~ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.
- It is important to remember that, in the same way people were saved by the work of the Spirit prior to Pentecost, so also will people be saved by the work of the Spirit after His removal prior to the Tribulation
 - “Though the special ministries which are characteristic of the present dispensation may cease, there will be the continued ministry of the Spirit in a similar way to that which existed before Pentecost...The Holy Spirit will continue to be working in the world, but in some particulars in a different way. There is good reason to believe, however, that the Holy Spirit will lead people to Christ, and many will be saved during the tribulation time.”⁶

⁵ http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/Revelation-lesson%206.pdf

⁶ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 139.

- So, in chapter 7, we get to catch our breath and pull away from the destruction momentarily to see how God will protect His people in the midst of such calamitous suffering
- Even in the wrath and judgment of the Tribulation, God still displays His mercy and saving grace
- “So the scene of judgment is interrupted by the scene of mercy in this chapter.”⁷
- This is a reminder of both the “kindness and severity of God” (Rom 11:22)
- This is a reminder that God preserves His people in the time of judgment:

God preserved Noah and his family in the flood

God preserved Lot and his daughters in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah

God preserved Rahab and her household when He destroyed Jericho

God preserved the nation of Israel when Egypt was destroyed

Psalm 34:17-19 ~ The righteous cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all.

Psalm 91:3-10 ~ For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. 5 You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; 6 Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. 7 A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you. 8 You will only look on with your eyes And see the recompense of the wicked. 9 For you have made the LORD, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. 10 No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent.

- The answer is given to John in chapter 7 that two classes of people will be saved from God’s divine fury:
 1. Those who are saved in Israel because God sealed them (7:1-8) – they will not be killed
 2. Those of all nations who are saved spiritually (7:9-13) – these will be martyred but not as a result of God’s wrath

THE 144,000 JEWS

Judgment is Suspended

Revelation 7:1-3 ~ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out 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 or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

- Four angels, one at each “corner” of the earth (north, south, east, west...refers to the four points on the compass...not a statement that the earth is flat), will cause the winds to cease temporarily
- This represents a suspension of all the winds around the globe
- The four winds are often associated in Scripture with God’s judgment

Hosea 13:15 ~ Though he flourishes among the reeds, An east wind will come, The wind of the LORD coming up from the wilderness; And his fountain will become dry And his spring will be dried up; It will plunder his treasury of every precious article.

⁷ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, Everyday Bible Commentary, 69.

Daniel 7:2 ~ Daniel said, “I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea.

- A fifth angel (probably of higher rank than the others) instructs the four angels to withhold their judgment for a time
- “The angelic restraining of the wind also symbolizes the withholding of the plagues associated with the imminent trumpet judgments (8:5ff.). So the next phase of God’s wrath is restrained for the moment. The winds of judgment are gathering force, soon to be released.”⁸
- The motivation behind the suspension of judgment is that God wants to set apart and protect His servants before the full force of His divine fury is unleashed
- The withholding of judgment is to occur “until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads”
- These “bond-servants” are described in vv. 4-8 and identified as the 144,000 Jews
- That they are “bond-servants” indicates that they are already redeemed
- They are “sealed” in some way on their foreheads although the nature of the seal is not stated
- It could be a physical seal of some sort like the mark Antichrist will place on unbelievers (see 13:16) or like how Moses’ face shone
- Revelation 14:1 indicates that they will have “His [Christ’s] name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads”
- Or it may not be a physical mark at all but rather some indication that they are owned and protected by God while they are accomplishing their service for the Lord
- While Satan will mark his followers (Rev 13:16-18), God will seal His
- In that day, high ranking officials would use their signet rings to stamp into wax on a document, signifying a number of things:

1. Security or Protection

- A seal on a document meant that it was not to be opened by anyone but the king
- Christ’s tomb was sealed as a means of securing or protecting it:

Matthew 27:66 ~ And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.

- God will bind Satan for 1000 years, sealing him in the abyss:

Revelation 20:3 ~ and [the angel from heaven] threw [the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan] into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed

2. Authenticity

- A seal serves as a certificate of authenticity, showing that it’s genuine and not a fraud

3. Ownership

⁸ John Macarthur, *Revelation*, 216-17.

- Sealing is a demonstration of ownership, much like what ranchers do when they brand cattle

Ephesians 1:13 ~ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,

- This is what is meant by this group of people being sealed...they belong to God...they will be protected and secure
- They are a godly remnant that will be preserved during the Tribulation
- The Antichrist and Satan won't be able to hurt them
- This sealing marks off the people as God's possession and protects them through the terrible events of the end-time
- They will be a missionary corps of redeemed Jews who are instrumental in the salvation of many Jews and Gentiles during the Tribulation
- They will be the firstfruits of a new redeemed Israel
- They will be kept so that they can preach the Gospel in the midst of the devastation of God's judgment
- They will be faithful to the Lord, to the Word, and to the Gospel during these dark days
- As a result, a great multitude will be saved because of the testimony of this redeemed remnant from the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel
- They will be marked out as morally pure, wholly blameless, and completely devoted to Christ:

Revelation 14:1-5 ~ Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. 4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

- Some implications concerning angels from this text:
 1. There is a hierarchy within the angelic order (see Eph 3:10; 6:12)
 2. They are used in both halting judgment (Rev 7:1-3) and executing judgment (Rev 8:2; cf. also Matt 13:39-42, 49-50; 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7-8)

Jews are Sealed

Revelation 7:4-8 ~ And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.

- Some have tried to identify this group as the church which is sealed but nothing in the texts indicates this is referring to church age saints
- On the contrary, the context clearly points to Tribulation saints who, in this case, are Jewish
- The repetition of the phrase "from the tribe of" reinforces the Jewish ethnicity of these individuals
- "Attempts have been made to identify the 12 tribes here with the church, mostly to avoid the implication that this is literally **Israel**. The fact that specific tribes were mentioned and specific numbers from each tribe were indicated would seem to remove this from the symbolic and to justify literal interpretation. If God

intended these verses to represent Israel literally, He would have used this means. Nowhere else in the Bible do a dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the church.”⁹

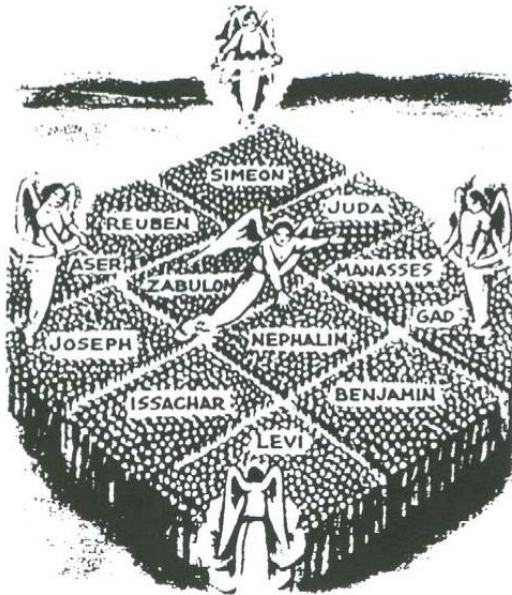
- Every time the word “Israel” is used in the Bible, it always refers to the Jewish people (including Gal 6:16), i.e. those who are racially descendants of Israel
- Thus, contrary to covenant theology, these 144,000 do not represent the church (spiritual Israel) in the Tribulation

Who are the 144,000?



The total Church of all ages gathered for all time with God in eternity

- These 144,000 are clearly ethnic Israelites who will most likely be converted during first part of the Tribulation



10

- There are 3 problems to address in this list:
 1. The inclusion of Levi – they were not given a portion of the land as an inheritance; perhaps they are included here because they will be the spiritual leaders of the nation
 2. The mention of Joseph instead of Ephraim – normally Manasseh and Ephraim are mentioned since they both received an equal inheritance of the land; but Ephraim was consumed with idolatry (Hos 4:17)

⁹ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 949). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

¹⁰ http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/Revelation-lesson%206.pdf

3. The omission of Dan – perhaps this is because they were the first to go into idolatry (cf. Judges 1:34; 18:1-2)...however, they do appear as a tribe in the Millennium (cf. Ezek 48:2)

- These 144,000 Jews will likely be the primary evangelists of the Tribulation
- They will finally be the witnesses and a light to the nations they were supposed to be in the OT but refused

Matthew 24:14 ~ This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

- Most likely, those described in Rev 7:9-17 are converts from the ministry of the 144,000...there will be a great multitude of saved people who will come from every nation on the earth
- It is important to note the doctrine of sovereign election which is evident in the choosing of 12,000 Jews from each tribe
- God has already marked out for salvation the 144,000 and has set them aside for his eternal purposes
- Interestingly, Jews today don't know which tribe they are from because Israel's records were destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD...but God knows!
- So, there is really no such things as the "lost tribes of Israel"
- Is the number 12,000 literal? → "The question has also been raised whether the '12,000' in each tribe means literally 12,000. There seems to be indication that more than 12,000 from each tribe actually will be saved. The point of this Scripture is that in any event 12,000 in each tribe are made secure. There will be other Israelites saved besides these 144,000, but many of these will die martyrs deaths and give up their lives for their faith. The 144,000 are those who are delivered from their persecutors and brought safely through this terrible time of tribulation."¹¹

THE TRIBULATION MARTYRS

- The juxtaposition of the 144,000 in the first half of the chapter with the description of the multitude of martyrs at the end of the chapter implies a close connection between these two groups

Their Description

Revelation 7:9 ~ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

- The evangelistic witness of the 144,00 leads to an innumerable number of people to repentance and faith in the Lord
- That this group is distinct from the 144,000 is clear from:
 1. Their number – this group is made up of "a great multitude" (v. 9) as opposed to a definite number
 2. Their nationalities – this group is made up of people "from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues" (v. 9) as opposed to those from the Jewish people...thus, many Gentiles will come to Christ in the great tribulation (cf. Rev 5:9)
 3. Their nature – this group is described as "clothed in white" (v. 9), likely referring to their holiness
- This is the same group of people mentioned in Rev 6:9...saints who are martyred during the Tribulation

¹¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 143.

- This clearly demonstrates that the tribulation will be a period of salvation for many people
- God will continue to pour out His grace

Their Praise

Revelation 7:10-12 ~ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

- Another company of worshippers breaks out in an ascription of praise to God and to the Lamb for their salvation
- As a result of the witness of the 144,000, a great multitude is saved, who are martyred for their faith and will be added to the glorious company of worshipper around the throne
- This is a similar scene to the one described in Rev 5:9-10
- The 7-fold description of their worship points to the kindness and mercy of God in saving people in the midst of the great destruction on earth
- Interestingly, angels do not experience salvation, yet they participate in this proclamation of praise

Their Identity

Revelation 7:13-14 ~ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” 14 I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

- They came “out of the great tribulation” – a reference to their martyrdom and subsequent arrival to the safety of heaven
- “[T]hose here described are martyrs who have sealed their testimony with their own blood. Some believe that the majority of saints in the tribulation will die as martyrs. Many will be killed by earthquakes, war, and pestilence. Others will be the object of special persecution by the world ruler. They will be hounded to death much as the Jews were in World War II. Because they will not worship the beast, they will be under a death sentence (Rev 13:15). Those who accept Christ in that time may be faced with the solemn alternative of either renouncing their faith in Christ and worshipping the beast or being slain. The result will be multiplied thousands of martyrs.”¹²
- The basis of their cleansing is solely the “blood of the Lamb,” namely his substitutionary atonement

Their Comfort

Revelation 7:15-17 ~ For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

¹² Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 146.

- “for this reason” points to the incredible blessings that spring from the shedding of Christ’s blood...they were purified and cleansed from their sins by the work of Christ on their behalf
- This, and this alone, makes them fit for the presence of God before His throne
- Contrary to the suffering they experienced as believers alive on earth during the tribulation (hunger, thirst, heat, tears), they will enjoy the shepherding care of Christ Himself and the presence and provisions of God
- “What a picture of peace, joy and quietness! Contrast this with the chapter, which follows when the judgments of the seven trumpets begin as the seventh seal is opened. Here we have the resumptions of the awful judgments of the Tribulation, but, far removed from them are God's redeemed saints who because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are in the place of eternal bliss and peace.”¹³
- So will people be saved in the Tribulation? → Many!
- Even in the time of great devastation on the earth, countless souls will come to Christ and experience God’s abundant grace

¹³ http://www.netbiblestudy.com/00_cartimages/Revelation-lesson%206.pdf