

Revelation 6:9-7:14 – Who are the 144000?

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[0 : 00] We're in Revelation chapter 6. So let me just pray and then we'll get into God's word. Father, we just come to your word now, Lord, and we want to hear from you, Lord.

We don't want the distraction of the cold or the ducks or, you know, the things around us, Santa's grotto out to the left and all of that stuff to either confuse us or distract us.

Lord, we want to be warmed by your spirit as we look into your word, Lord. We want to be encouraged by these things, Lord. So help us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So what we're going to learn this morning, what we're going to see this morning is that when things get bad, God is our rest, God is our deliverer, and God is our protector.

So God is our rest. He is our deliverer and he is also our protector. And so if you were here last week, you know, we started Revelation 6 and we started looking at the four or the seven seals. We looked at the first four last week and we said that God in Jesus was, what he was doing is sending judgment upon the earth so that he might ready the earth for his return.

[1 : 14] So when Jesus returns, when he comes back to set up his kingdom, he is preparing the world for that. And we see a shadow of stuff that's going on now, a shadow of things that are going to come, but these things are still yet future.

And so how can we, what can we get from this text? What can we get from this book? And so this morning, again, we see that things are going to get bad.

And we see that in the news already, don't we? Things are pretty bad. But as Christians, we have a hope. And our hope is that God is our rest, God is our deliverer, and God is our protector.

That doesn't mean that everything is going to turn out rosy in the way that the world might define rosy. And we're going to see that.

There's a clear difference of definition between all things working together for good, to those who love God, and a difference between working together for our good, for the things that we want, and for a comfortable life.

[2 : 22] Two different things. And we're never promised a comfortable life, are we? Like we're sat here in like minus 20 degrees. It's like we're never, we're not, we're not promised a comfortable life.

And so how do we, how do we live? And how do we have faith in God and trust God in the times when things are bad? And so that's what I think we see this morning in this, this text.

And so Revelation chapter 6, verse 9. John is in heaven and he is seeing a vision of heaven, something that is yet future.

And he's just seen the four horsemen of the apocalypse go out. And he now open, he now sees the fifth seal being opened.

So he says, verse 9, he opened the fifth seal. And I want you to notice the difference between this seal and the seals that have come before it. There is no horse and rider. So it's not five horsemen of the apocalypse.

[3 : 20] Like there is a fifth rider that comes later, all right, in chapter 19. But you could not describe him as the, as a horseman of the apocalypse. That is Jesus and he's coming back, right?

So there are five horsemen, but we've had four. This, there's no fourth, there's no fifth right now. And look, there's no, also no specific action of judgment.

So where we saw, you know, the first horseman go out carrying with him judgment. The second horseman go out with him judgment. Third and fourth, also carrying with them judgment. With this one, there's no specific action of judgment.

Just the result of judgment that has already taken place. Look what he says. He says, John sees under the altar, the souls of those who have been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

No specific act of judgment. Just a result. Something has happened to cause these people to be under, under the altar who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness.

[4 : 22] So it's important to see that this judgment is unspecified in nature. But it's resulted in the nations reacting in such a way so that Christians are martyred.

And so we might call these tribulation saints. There was a famous book written, Tribulation Saints. Please don't get your theology from that series.

What is it called? The Left Behind series. Wasn't there a film as well? Yeah. Don't get your theology from films. Get your theology from the word of God. Go back to the film and critically judge those films.

Right. So, but these are what we might call tribulation saints. They are people who have come to know Jesus during this time of tribulation, during Jacob's troubles.

And these are people who have started to follow Jesus during this time. Jesus said in Matthew 24 verse 9 that they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death.

[5 : 29] And you will be hated by all nations for my namesake. So there's a group of martyrs that are, have been slain during this time. And they are plainly identified with the great multitude at the beginning of chapter 7.

Which we'll look at in a minute. So this kind of goes hand in hand with that section of chapter 7. And in verse 10, it tells us what these tribulation saints are doing.

They cried out with a loud voice. And notice this. If you're highlighting or you're making notes, write this down. This is such a powerful phrase. They cried out with a loud voice, Oh, sovereign Lord. Like that's a good reminder for us, isn't it? God is sovereign. Like there is something that is, there is certain in this life.

And that is that life is uncertain. Do you agree? Like that's the certainty of life. Is that if there's anything that we can say that is certain about life, is that it is uncertain. It is both uncertain and short.

[6 : 40] Life has brevity. Simply put, we don't know what tomorrow holds. And we don't know whether tomorrow will come. Because life is both uncertain and brief.

And I think that so much this time of year, like in the busyness of this year, we get so busy planning to live that we forget to live. Like we're always into, especially this time of year, we're always in tomorrow.

Always in tomorrow. How's your week going? How's this week going to pan out? What we were talking about? Something that hasn't even happened yet. And we're planning for something that hasn't even happened yet.

There's no guarantee that that's going to happen. And yet we're planning for it. We're so busy trying to figure out how to get ready for tomorrow that we overlook the opportunities provided for us today. Life has uncertainty and it has brevity. But you know what the good news is? God is sovereign. That's the good news.

[7 : 39] That God has sovereignty. Like in a world of uncertainty and brevity, it's good to be reminded that God has sovereignty. That all things come under God's authority and they answer to him.

This is what Paul meant, I think, when he wrote to the Church of Philippines. He said this, that the one who began the good work in you will continue his work until it is finally finished.

I like how the NLT puts that. It's like finally finished. Like we just want it to be finished, right? Paul recognizes actually that this is a slow process. It's finally finished. On the day when Jesus Christ returns.

There's a day when Jesus Christ returns. And when he returns, the work that he's doing right now will be done. And that's not something to be rushed. That's according to his timing and according to his authority.

Regardless of what happens, here's what they say. Oh, sovereign Lord. Holy and true. How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?

[8 : 51] And I love the fact that they are there. These are people who have been martyred. They've been slain for their witness of Jesus. And they're not rocking up to heaven. Like I did when I came into church this morning, all grumpy and in a mood.

Because I'm looking around myself and I'm like, what's with everything? What's happened here? Right? They're not doing that, are they? Their focus, and this is exhortation for me, for us.

Their focus is they call on the truth about God before they question the actions of God. They call on the truth. They're reminded about the truth of God. That God is sovereign.

He is true. And he is holy. It's easy for us to question God's actions, isn't it, sometimes? And sometimes easy to question the lack of God's actions sometimes.

Like, what are you doing? Or why aren't you doing it? But if our legitimate questions, and sometimes we have legitimate questions, and sometimes we have legitimate problems, if our legitimate questions are not rooted in the truth about who God is, we can come away discouraged, can't we?

[10:03] If we don't understand that God is working, and he's working now, so that one day he will finish his work, and he is working now, and his work is rooted in his authority, and the fact that he is holy and true, we can come away discouraged.

That's how they start. There is something that is always true about God. You are sovereign. Always true about God. Like, in the definition of sovereignty, that is true.

They say, there is none like you. You are holy. And you are the genuine article. You don't lie. What you have said is going to happen. It's going to come about. And I love that they don't have the answers to the question, how long before, yet they can still say, whatever is the answer to that question, God, you're right.

You're completely unique. You're completely holy, and everything falls under your authority. And so then they say, after they've said, now clear something up for me, Lord.

How long, something I don't understand, how long before you would judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? And then they, as a beautiful response, were given a white robe describing their new state, new bodies, new hearts.

[11:29] It's like there's not necessarily an answer to their question, but a reaffirmation of who they are. And then they were told to rest a little longer.

To rest a little longer. And I don't know about you, but how many of us need to hear that time and again to rest a little longer?

And I don't mean, I don't mean like, put your feet up and rest, like after a long, hard day, right? You know, cozy up to the log fire and just going, I'm resting, right?

I'm not talking about that kind of rest. I think we all do need that kind of rest. I think we do need that Sabbath rest where our bodies are just allowed to stop it's not an excuse for laziness.

But this is not what this exhortation is or invitation is to rest. It's an invitation to rest in the Lord, to rest in the things of the Lord, to rest in the knowledge that God is sovereign, to rest in that.

[12:38] It's an invitation, can I say, it's an invitation to stop being grumpy. It's an invitation to stop moaning. It's an invitation to stop being fearful, to be, not to be anxious anymore.

It's an invitation to that. It's an invitation to rest. I'm reminded of Psalm 46 and I know that for some of you, this is one of your favorite psalms, one of my favorite psalms, where the psalmist is reminded God is our refuge.

Now look, where are the tribulation saints? They're under the altar of God, aren't they? God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not be, we will not fear. If verse one is true, God is our refuge, then there is no need to fear.

Though the earth gives way, I mean, if you read ahead into the sixth seal that's coming up in Revelation 6, these kind of go hand in hand, don't they?

[13:42] This psalm and Revelation 6, though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Sounds like the seals, doesn't it? Like this is chaos. This is, the waters roar and foam and even threaten the mountains. And there in verse 12 in Revelation 6, it talks about how this great earthquake and the light of the sun goes out and the moon turns to red and the stars fall from the sky.

And I think, no matter what is going on in my life and what is going on in your life, there aren't many worst case scenarios than that, is there? Like we're not going to like flicking on the news and the news not being there.

Like can you imagine? Like what's going on in the world, I'm just going to kind of like go on to Google and find out. Imagine if Google just didn't exist. It makes our slightly cold conditions pale

into comparison, doesn't it?

There's not many worst case scenarios than the great earthquake, the sun not rising in the morning, the moon being blood red, and when you go out tonight, there's no stars because they've fallen.

[15:10] Like, have you gotten anything that's bigger than that? Even if the whole world comes crashing down, even if the earth gives way under our feet, even if the mountains quake, the psalmist says, we're not going to fear.

Why? Because God is my refuge. And the tribulation saints, they found that to be true because they're there, they're there under the altar of God. That's the place that they run to.

He is our refuge. And look, we can continue through Psalm 46 where the psalmist says that there is a river. Look, this is where the psalmist's gaze goes and this is where our gaze should go.

In days of trouble, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation, the most high. God is in the midst of her.

She shall not be moved. Everything else is being moved and God is not moved. God will help her when morning dawns. You notice the picture goes from chaos to calamity when the psalmist fixes his eyes on the Lord.

[16:16] The nations rage, the kingdoms totter, that he utters his voice, the earth mount. The Lord of hosts is with us. Isn't that crazy? The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. He says, come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow, shatters the spear.

He burns the chariot with fire. And here is the rebuke and the invitation that the saints get in Revelation 6. It's the same one. Be still and know that I am God.

That is not like a cheesy 80s Christian song. That is a rebuke from God to say, stop.

In the words of Revelation 6, rest a while. It is not a gentle reminder to quiet meditation. It's a strong command for us to give up all of our attempts to take matters into our own hands.

[17:19] Don't be anxious about how things are going to work out. Just be faithful. Keep your eyes on the Lord. You might say, chill, rest, give in to God's sovereignty.

Now notice with me in Revelation 14, the contrast to these saints. So these saints find their refuge in God and they are told to rest because of that.

In chapter 14, verse 11, notice that those who aren't following Christ during this time, their outcome is quite different. It says that the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.

They have no rest. Like how many people want a bit of rest this morning? I'm like, give me some rest. Right? How do you get rest? By keeping your eyes on the Lord, by following Christ.

It's not going to give you comfort necessarily. You're not going to get like an easy ride in this world, but you will get ultimate rest. And so it's like, what verse do you want to be in?

[18:23] Do you want to be in chapter 6 or chapter 14? Do you want to be resting in the Lord or do you want to find yourself with no rest? So these saints were told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete and were to be killed as they themselves had been.

Now if you flick to chapter 7, we get some more details about this great number of people. And it's worth saying at this point that the sealed judgments, the sealed judgments and then the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments and there's even a good argument to say that there's thunder judgments there as well, but that's probably for another study.

That they are, all of these, the seals and the trumpets and the bowls, they are a narrative technique to move the story forward.

And that's their purpose. But what you have in between the sixth seal and the seventh seal is what we might call an interlude and here it is on the screen. So in other words, what you see is that the sixth seal is going to be opened.

In a minute, we'll read that. And before the seventh seal is opened, we, in chapter 8, you have chapter 7. This chapter, in chapter 7. And chapter 7 is describing some of the details for us that are happening at the same time as all the other seals are taking place.

[19:59] And the best way I could kind of like figure out how to describe this is that it is Star Wars. Right? Now, like, some of you might struggle with this analogy more than the Bible analogy.

I get that, but for some of you this might be helpful. It was helpful to me, right? So the Star Wars franchise in recent years have actually used the same idea. So you have the nine main Star Wars

films, helpfully called 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

Episode 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, right? So you have these nine Star Wars films and then the two, Rogue One and Solo, that were released later on. And then, if you have the Disney Channel or you know anything about TV at all, you'll know that on the Disney Channel, they, and I think I'm right in saying it's the Disney Channel, I'm looking for people to nod, thank you, that there's stories of the characters who you find in those main films, like go on for, you know, 12 hours or whatever, 12 episodes about the Mandalorian who appears in a couple of the films in the episodes.

It's filling in the gaps. Does that make sense? Like, it's not at another time. It might be in another universe or another planet or whatever, but those stories are there designed to fill in some of the gaps that are missing in the main episodes of Star Wars.

Right? Exactly the same thing happening here. So you have, you have the first six seal judgments. Right? And we see it on the screen, the first six seals. And then we have this interlude.

[21 : 34] And in that interlude, we get, we get to fill in some of the details about what else has been happening whilst those seals have been taking place. And then we get the trumpet judgments and we get the six trumpet judgments and then we get our second interlude.

And we get, it filled in about, oh, what, when questions set, people are saying, yeah, but what about, who are those guys? Oh, okay, let me tell you about those guys. And we go almost all the way back to the beginning of the seven years and chapter seven is telling us a little bit more about what's going on on earth at that time.

Does that make sense? It's filling in some of the gaps. And so, chapter seven is telling us a bit more about these saints who have been martyred. All right? So there in verse nine, just flick through to chapter seven, verse nine, John says, that I looked and behold a great number.

Who are those great number? It's the great number of the same great number under the altar of God who are singing, oh, sovereign Lord, how long? All right? So it's telling us a little bit more detail about them.

After I looked, behold, a great multitude no one could number. I love it because previously we've read about myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands. Like John was like, I could number those. Myriads and myriads, thousands of thousands.

[22 : 54] Great. Here he's like, I'm not even going to try. That's encouraging to us. There's not, there's not the, you know, the news just recently talked about how Christianity has become a minority religion in the UK, right?

Just in the last few years. You're not in heaven. You're a majority in heaven. Do you know that? Like, there's just a great multitude and no one could number.

And so, if you wanted any more detail about who they were from, you know, great multitude that no one could number, he says, well, they're from every nation.

They're from every tribe, clan. They're from people's languages. Standing before the throne, before the lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands.

The palm branches refer to the Feast of Ingathering, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. And it's interesting that John highlights this because the Feast of Ingathering or the Feast of Tabernacles was a celebration in remembrance of when God took the nation of Israel out of Egypt and then had them live in tents for 40 years in the wilderness because of their unbelief and disobedience.

[24 : 18] And the last day of the Feast, the great Hosanna was celebrated which involved carrying palm branches.

And what's interesting is that obviously the Apostle John is writing this book of Revelation. He is there seeing this stuff and it was John who was the only one who recorded the fact that the branches were waved when Christ entered Jerusalem.

The other gospel writers don't include that. They say they had sticks, they had branches, but John says they had palm branches. And it was on this day when the people who were there in Jerusalem you remember were celebrating Messiah and recognizing Jesus had come as Messiah to truly deliver.

And so the people started singing Hosanna when Jesus was riding into Jerusalem. Hosanna which means save us now or save now. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Zechariah chapter 14 verse 16 to 19 tells us that the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated every year during the millennium as a memorial to God bringing us through the wilderness into his kingdom.

[25 : 28] So these palm branches have to do with the Feast of Tabernacles and what these saints are celebrating is true deliverance. When things get bad we not only have a God that we can rest in, a God but also a God who will deliver us and has delivered us.

He's a deliverer. So these saints are celebrating as strange as it may sound they are saints who have been martyred who have died. They're celebrating deliverance.

Like they have the definition of deliverance right don't they? They've been delivered where? To God. We often think of deliverance from something and it can mean deliverance from something but they're talking about deliverance to something.

They've been delivered to God. And they're crying verse 10 out crying out with a loud voice salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb which is reminiscent of Psalm 118 Psalm 118 sung during the Feast of Tabernacles.

And the angels were standing around the throne in verse 11 and around the elders and the four living creatures and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God saying Amen. It's an interesting word.

[26 : 49] The idea is that God is a trustworthy king. Some scholars suggest that in Hebrew the word Amen is an arrangement of letters that spell out God is our trustworthy king.

Interesting. when you say Amen when you're there saying grace giving thanks for your food every time you eat and you say Amen you're saying God is our trustworthy king.

And they say blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever our God is a trustworthy king.

Amen. Then one of the elders addressed me saying who are these clothed in white robes and where have they come from? And I said to them sir you know like it's not like well you know I don't know but you know he's like you know what kind of question is that?

And he said these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb therefore they are therefore they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple or in his presence and he who sits on the throne will shelter them in his presence and they shall future tense this is now looking forward to a promise that we're going to read that we're going to read about and they're clear quotes if you want to jot this down Isaiah 49 verse 10 and Isaiah 25 verse 8 describing the millennium so all of a sudden we go from this vision in heaven where the the the one of the the elders is describing where they've come from to now attaching there in verse 16 a promise about the coming rule of God Isaiah 49 10 Isaiah 25 8 he quotes that passage passage which is talking about the reign of

[28 : 55] Jesus on earth the millennium where he says they shall hunger no more neither thirst anymore the sun shall not strike them nor any scorching heat for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and then the sixth seal is broken so we get that that picture there in chapter 7 this interlude and it's telling us about those guys we've just read about in chapter 6 in the fifth seal so then the narrative moves on the action moves on there in verse 12 of chapter 6 so we're going backwards again now we don't normally do this do we verse by verse chapter by chapter and we're all over the place this morning right but actually get used to that because revelation isn't necessarily laid out in a linear way right and so we're going to do quite a little bit of skipping and jumping when we get later on but that's just kind of your brief intro to how we're going to work that so then we go back and read in verse 12 of chapter 6 he opened the sixth seal and I looked and behold there was a great earthquake there are three great earthquake quakes in the book of revelation each time it should be noted that John isn't necessarily describing an earthquake now I know that some of you are like wait what what we just get in our text there was a great earthquake and I've just said well John isn't necessarily describing an earthquake what I mean is he's not making a geological assessment of the tectonic plates this isn't

John giving us a geological lesson he's the Greek word is seismos and it means shaking and John is saying there was a shaking of the earth and John is saying really the only the only thing I liken that to is an earthquake does that make sense so there are three shakings of the earth and whilst what he could be referring to could be an earthquake we need to be careful in explaining supernatural actions of God using natural phenomena like God is actively coming against the world he doesn't need to use earthquakes to do it right so just be careful as we move forward that we're not saying oh this was definitely an earthquake no this is God taking the world and going rattle rattle rattle rattle rattle shaking can he use an earthquake!

absolutely can! does he have to? no he doesn't! so this is the first of three shakings or earthquakes the second is recorded in chapter 11 verse 13 we read at that time or at that hour there was a great earthquake tenth of the city fell seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven then the second one or excuse me the third one is in chapter 16 verse 18 where we read it there were flashes of lightning rumbles peals of thunder and a great earthquake such as never been since man was on the earth so great was that earthquake so this is the first of three and I want you to notice that it's so powerful and this is one of the reasons I don't think it's necessarily talking about what we understand as an earthquake it's so powerful that it causes the people on earth to see cosmology different like the stars and the moon and the sun it gets them to see it in a different way these are the events that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24 that there will be earthquakes in various places now I should mention that these things are literal but poetic this is hard for us to understand because we don't generally use this kind of language they're literal but they're poetic

I don't think that there is a good enough reason to either read these as simple pictures of something else but I also don't think there's good enough reason to take them hyper-literally so the main reason for that is because as you read you're left with the impression that John isn't using technically precise language but simply describing what he sees so he says that the sun became black as sackcloth and the moon became like blood and then in verse 13 look what he says he says that the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale Isaiah 13 verse 10 talks about this time and we read that for the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light the sun will be dark at its rising and the moon will not shed its light same thing he's talking about

Jesus said in Matthew 24 immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be dark and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken so there's enough biblical reason to take these things as actual things that are going to take place because the Old Testament speak about it Jesus speaks about it and now we read about it in the New Testament even though the language isn't precise we can still take it literally as like this is going to happen verse 14 says that the sky vanished like a scroll that it was being rolled up and every mountain and island was removed from its place Zechariah chapter 1 verse 14 says that the great day of the Lord is near it is near and hastens quickly the noise of the day of the Lord is bitter there the mighty men shall cry out so these fallings of the stars and the rolling up of the heaven are apparent

[35 : 43] John sees them the people on earth sees them but they're not astronomical statements about quantum fluctuations in space because if the moving of the mountains and the islands from their places were universal and complete like all of the mountains suddenly disappeared and everything was like totally flat what do you make of verse 15 and 16 then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the where mountains oh wait a second there aren't any mountains the mountains are now flat places calling to the mountains well who are they calling to mountains that are not there you see what I'm saying it's difficult to take these things hyper literally but we shouldn't run the other way and go well nothing's going to happen if these verses were taken hyper literally then there'd be no mountains for the people in verse 15 to call or hide in so these things are literal but poetic and notice what they are they are saying fall on us notice this fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne like do people on earth know that this is coming from God hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand like the wrath of the lamb that just seems funny doesn't it like lambs don't get angry

I've never seen an angry I haven't seen many lambs but I've never seen an angry lamb it's the wrath of the lamb but notice they don't only hide themselves from the terror of the judgments but from the face of him who sits on the throne and so what we see is John describing what is a common idea in the Old Testament associated with the return of Jesus with the return of Messiah and what Jesus describes about his own return and I think that this is one of the main reasons that this text is speaking to us I think that sometimes we hardly know and hardly appreciate and understand the scope of the fall you know when we read Genesis 3 it's over and done with in a few verses isn't it and I don't think we generally understand the kind of the scope of what we read about took place at that time when we see actions like this to set in order a universe ready for the return of

Jesus to set in order a universe so that that it would have an impact on the very position of the stars is not something we normally think about

Paul said this in Romans chapter 8 verse 22 he said that the whole creation what does that include like everything includes the stars includes the sun includes the moon the whole of creation has been groaning together in pains of childbirth until now that means that since Genesis 3 the universe the known universe and the unknown universe that which is seen and unseen has been moving towards something the whole creation has been Paul says in labor in labor the Bible talks about a thread of hope a rumor that runs through the Bible a rumor that there was a day coming when all of the hurt and pain and weakness and suffering of our present experience will be explained and justified and will result in a time of incredible blessing the whisper of this in the New Testament in the Old Testament increases and increases as it approaches the New Testament where you come to proclamations like this in Romans that speak of the incomparable glory that lies ahead but the question at the end of chapter 6 is who can stand John is seeing and Paul is testifying in Romans that there is an increase and an increase and an increase and an increase and an increase there is the whole creation is groaning in labor waiting for a birth and the question that John asks at the end of chapter 6 is absolutely right one who on earth can stand if the whole of creation is in labor waiting for a birth who is able to stand and the question is left unanswered until chapter 7 where John sees this interlude and we've already seen part of that answer to that question who can stand well actually and ironically the people who stand are the people who stand on Christ they find that actually they are martyred but they stand on Christ who can stand those people who put their trust and faith in Jesus can stand it may not look like standing to this world it may look like very much like failure to this world so the first group of people in answer to the question what happens when things go bad we can have rest and we can have deliverance but look there's another one in that we have a protector and this is what the first part of chapter seven then explains and answers that who can stand those people who put their faith and trust in Jesus can stand either through martyrdom or through sealing here is chapter seven after this which is the same phrase at the beginning of chapter four so chapter four five and six here's my understanding of it chapter four five and six is taking place and that might be helpful great chapter four five and six is taking place chapter seven is actually covering all of the detail from four five and six what's going on there after this after these things talking about the same period of time through chapters four and six

John is being shown what else is happening they're not the only things happening at this time what else has been happening he says well I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth look this is not a proof text for flat earth theory amen okay there's people who believe that the four the word the word corner is angles and is describing a compass there are four angels standing at the north one at the north one at the south one at the east one at the west and I still have to do never each show did we help me out and I'm going to suggest that it's the north the south the east the west of Israel because if you go north and you keep going north you become south you've got to have a reference point and the reference point and I think we'll see this clearly we don't have time to look at it today but I think clearly we see that the reference point is Israel we become very very quickly

[43 : 50] Israel centric in this whole story what else is going on while everything else is going on there's four angels from the north of Israel there is one from the east of Israel there's one from the south of Israel to the west of Israel does that make sense and they're looking outwards from Israel and what are they doing they're holding back the four winds of the earth these angels are probably the same angels that we'll see in chapter 8 that we'll look at in January now who bring plagues on the earth and currently what we see is that they're holding back those judgments those winds so that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree and so what I'm seeing and what I think we'll see in a moment probably in our text too at the beginning of the tribulation period there are four angels standing at compass points from Israel facing out from Israel and they're waiting for something to happen holding back restraining verse 2 tells us what that is

I saw another angel so a fifth angel ascending from the rising of the sun from the east with the seal of the living God so we see another angel and we see another seal but this seal is a different seal to ones we've seen before this is a seal of protection and ownership it's the same kind of seal that we see in Ephesians chapter 1 where Paul says that you have been sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit same kind of seal it talks about protection talks about ownership and this angel he

ascended from the rising of the sun from the east with the seal of the living God and he calls out the loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea saying don't do it yet do not harm the earth the sea the trees until we have sealed they're waiting what are they waiting for they're waiting for the ceiling now look who is being sealed that's the question right so again can I paint this picture where you've got Israel you've got north south east west you've got angels waiting looking out from Israel to bring plagues on the earth and they're waiting for what they're waiting for the ceiling of something or someone let's look at who they are

I heard till we have sealed the servants of God where on their foreheads interesting note compare that with what we see the mark of the beast later on right there are some that are sealed and there are others that are sealed that's how it goes there's no one in between and I heard the number of the sealed 144,000 would you note that how many are sealed 144,000 easy right sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel and then if there is any doubt who those 144,000 are like they're not Jehovah's witnesses like you can't read this text and go oh yeah I'm 12,000 from the tribe of Judah that's me like what you know they teach a system called millennial dawnism it's not only stupid it's wrong it's totally unbiblical they talk about how overcomers who continue to be faithful to the end will be one of the 144,000 mentioned here so it's not only theologically inept but practically they had a conference a few years ago of the 144,000 that 150,000 were invited to like reserves yeah just in case plan B so look it's not if you're in any doubt over who's 144,000 if you want to take it spiritually John goes you can't really because now I'm going to tell you 12,000 from every tribe and then he's like well what's a tribe and he goes well it's this tribe and it's this tribe and it's this tribe and you can read them and out of all of the times the tribes are mentioned they're mentioned in different ways and some are included and some are excluded there is no other time anywhere in the Bible that these tribes are mentioned like this I have no idea what that means and I don't know if that's helpful but you know sometimes Dan is left in sometimes Ephraim is left out and sometimes Manasseh is put in and sometimes these other guys are left this one's unique some people say well Dan's not in there because the Antichrist is going to rise from Dan and whatever and it's like I don't know but what we know is there's going to be 12,000 from that tribe 12,000 from this tribe 12,000 from that tribe and so on and so forth so the answer to the question from chapter 6 who can stand what we're seeing in this section of the

Bible is that anyone converted during the tribulation period can stand why because they're standing on Christ they're martyred yes but are standing on Christ there's no special protection for them apart from the ultimate protection under the throne and the altar of God but there's also a remnant of Israel who are sealed they are protected they are not martyred you might see them in chapter I think it's 14 and we'll talk about that another time and they're given power to stand protected but would you notice that the angels can't do anything until God gives them authority to do it and look it's the same in our own lives isn't it you know we might moan and have a grumble

[50 : 33] I might moan I do moan a lot and grumble and I do that too but God is sovereign and it doesn't matter whether we're having a bad hour or a bad day a bad week or just generally things have been bad for a long time and I don't want to diminish some of the struggles that you guys have some of them are absolute they are genuine what this text teaches us is that God is our rest God is our rest when we give in to his sovereignty God is our deliverer he has delivered us and he will deliver us yet that is our hope but God is also our protector and we may not find ourselves numbered with the 144 thousand but God is still our protector and he only things only come into our life that he allows to come into our life that he then uses for our good and his glory and so this verse this chapter really is about submitting to God's authority

God's sovereignty in our lives to rest to be still and know that he is God still let's pray together father we want to acknowledge this morning Lord that you are sovereign you are in authority Lord nothing happens without your say so Lord we thank you that we can find our rest in you Lord and we do pray that today tomorrow this week this coming new year Lord that there would be just a revival of our own hearts and minds to submit to that work that you're doing Lord again your word says that you will continue working until your work is finished Lord and the very fact that we're still here tells us that you're still working you haven't finished what you're doing

Lord we want to submit to that Lord whether it's a work of your spirit in sanctifying our own hearts to make us more like you Lord that so often we resist would you continue that work today Lord whether it's us coming to terms with our own circumstance where you might have us today Lord we might not be okay with it Lord but we submit to it Lord that that is part of your plan and purpose for

our lives Lord may we may we be busy today not planning for tomorrow but living in today living for you today Lord help us by your spirit to be encouraged by your word Lord even the things that we read are quite out of this world and can fill us with a lot of fear and anxiety about what's to come Lord help us to fix our eyes on you Lord help us to first say sovereign God you are holy and true and to rest there Lord and to know that whatever else may come into our lives Lord that the one thing that doesn't change is that you are sovereign help us in this we pray in Jesus name Amen