

1. **Introduction:** Chapter 7 begins with a pause in the outpouring of God’s wrath displayed in opening the first 6 seals. Angels hold back winds of wrath while God ensures souls of the redeemed are sealed.

2. **Revelation 7:1-4:** *After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.* <sup>2</sup> *Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,* <sup>3</sup> *saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”* <sup>4</sup> *And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel (Verses 6-8 state 12,000 are sealed from each of the twelve tribes).*

3. **Revelation 7:3:** “... *Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees...*” indicates this passage is prior in time to the 6<sup>th</sup> seal which definitely results in harm to the earth, sea, and trees. The “*After this*” in 7:1 then means John received the vision for chapter 7 later than receiving the vision for chapter 6.

- The four winds represent destructive forces of wrath that are being held in check by four angels under God’s sovereign command. God’s redeemed people are to be protected or “sealed” before the destructive forces of judgment are released to do their job. The seal assures protection for their soul.
- In this vision (7:1-8), God’s people on earth are arrayed in battle formation, protected from divine judgments by four angels who hold back the winds of wrath until God’s people are redeemed and sealed “in Christ.” The resulting seal is termed a “*mark on their forehead.*”
- The reference to a mark from God placed on a person’s forehead symbolizes that their minds, thoughts, and intentions are dedicated to God. It is a spiritual mark not physical.
- The mark is the reality of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling presence in each believer, assuring their salvation and enabling them to stand firm in faith.
- The spiritual mark of the indwelling Holy Spirit indicates divine ownership and protection of the person’s soul. It is in direct contrast to the “mark of the beast” to be mentioned in Revelation 13. The beast’s mark identifies people who oppose God and serve Satan.

4. **And I Heard the Number of the Sealed, 144,000:** In Revelation, the number 144,000 appears only in 7:4 and 14:1, 3 suggesting that the number represents the same group in both places. In 7:3, the reference to “*servants of our God*” appears to indicate the number refers to the totality of the true people of God, the whole company of the redeemed whatever their ethnic origin.

- The number itself is the result obtained by multiplying the square of 12 by 1000, signifying the people of God in totality and fullness. People Were “Sealed” from every tribe of the Sons of Israel.
- The word “tribe,” as used throughout Revelation, signifies all believers, a number of completeness (1:7; 5:9; 14:6; 21:12).
- During most of the OT era, the Biblical view was that earth’s people could be divided into three groups – (1.) the Gentile nations, (2.) national Israel, and (3.) true Israel (God’s faithful remnant).
- The nation Israel frequently rebelled and became involved in idolatry and apostasy, but God always kept a faithful remnant for Himself – people who steadfastly trusted in Him. Not all the faithful remnant were ethnic Jews. For example, faithful Ruth the Moabite and Rahab the Canaanite are both mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.
- Proper interpretation of Revelation depends on the perceived relationship of Israel to the Church.

5. **Relationship Between the Church and Israel:** The following discussion on the relationship between Israel and the church is mostly based on Keith Mathison’s October 1, 2012, Tabletalk article.

- What is the true relationship between Israel and the church? Both Israel and the early church had people who were truly faithful to God but not all people in Israel nor the church are in that category.
- Two common views on the relationship between Israel and the church are (1.) they are separate and distinct (a view from traditional dispensationalism) and (2.) the church replaced Israel as recipient of God’s promises, a view called “replacement theory” held by some covenant theologians.
- The “separate and distinct” view of God’s plan for Israel and the Church believes the church consists only of people redeemed between the first Christian Pentecost and the rapture when Jesus comes again. the church is only people saved between the first Christian Pentecost and the rapture when Jesus comes again. Thus, the church does not include OT believers. There is a separate plan for the redeemed of Israel.
- Replacement theory assumes that in God’s plan, the church completely replaces Israel as recipient of God’s promises. In the “replacement” view, Jews may still be saved as individuals by coming to Christ. But, in replacement theory, the role the nation Israel and Jews as a people had in the Plan of Salvation ended with the formation of the church.
- There are problems with both these interpretations of the relationship between the nation Israel and the Church. The truth appears to be that the nascent church was formed from Jewish believers in Christ, that is from the true Israel of God, those Israelites who accepted Jesus as Messiah.

- Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah were not “true Israel,” despite their ethnicity (Romans 2:28-29). True Israel accepted God’s Messiah when He came into the world.
  - On the day of Pentecost (which began the Jewish Feast of Weeks), true Israel (believers in Jesus) were formed by the Holy Spirit into what became the core of the New Testament church (Acts 2).
  - The Holy Spirit was poured out on those Jewish “believers in Jesus.” They became the true new-covenant church. Soon, believing Gentiles began to be added to the ranks of believers.
  - The church is distinct from national Israel in the same way “true Israel” was distinct from National Israel. The true Israel remnant was part of National Israel but distinguished from the whole by their faith in Jesus as Messiah.
  - True Israel and National Israel are distinct, but “true Israel” and the “true church” are indistinguishable. The church was created from true Israel by the Holy Spirit on that incredible day of Pentecost. Both the true church and true Israel belong to God in Christ.
  - The olive tree analogy Paul uses in Romans 11 is helpful. The cultivated olive tree represents Israel, the nation with whom God covenanted. Branches who do not believe in Christ are broken off God’s olive tree. But believing Gentiles form a wild olive tree are grafted into God’s olive tree.
6. **Here is a summary:** God planted the olive tree (Israel) for Himself and cultivated it. Because of unbelief, much of Israel failed to obtain what God prepared for them. So, God broke off unfruitful branches and added grafted branches of the faithful from a wild olive tree.
- If the root of the tree is holy (the root of this tree is God), so are the branches, both native and grafted. The branches don’t support the root; the root supports the branches.
  - Some original branches were broken off the tree because of unbelief (notice the faithful Jewish believers remain). Faithful, believing Gentiles were then grafted into the tree.
  - Paul says, regarding the gospel, unfaithful original branches are enemies of God. As regards the gospel, unfaithful original branches are enemies of God, but as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.
7. **Important Notice:** God does not cut down the old tree and plant a new one (that would validate replacement theory). Nor does God plant a second tree alongside the old tree and then graft branches from the old into the new tree (that would validate traditional dispensationalism).
- God’s “one olive tree” exists across the divide between the Old and New Covenants. When unfaithful dead branches are removed from God’s olive tree, what remains is faithful “true Israel.”

- On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit created the one true new covenant church from God’s true olive tree by directly empowering the new Jewish believers. Those believers became the true church. All initial true church believers were Jewish. Gentile believers were grafted into that already existing old olive tree, and the true church grew.
  - There is only one good olive tree of God. That one tree existed in the OT and continues to exist in the NT. It crosses the divide between the Old and New Covenant. That one good olive tree continues today to represent the **totality** of the one people of God.
  - The hardening of national Israel (not true Israel) that began during Jesus’ incarnation has a purpose in God’s overall plan. We don’t know the purpose, but Paul tells us the hardening is not permanent.
  - It is important to right understanding of Revelation that a proper distinction be made between (1.) national Israel, (2.) “true Israel (Israelites faithful to God),” and (3.) the true church.
8. **Back to Revelation 7:** The chapter 7 interlude stands between the sixth and seventh seal judgments. Another interlude will occur between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments in Revelation 10:1-11:14, but there is no interlude at the end of the bowl judgments. Why?
- There are two visions in the chapter 7 interlude: (1.) Protective “sealing” of the 144,000 on earth (7:1-8), and (2.) a great multitude in heaven celebrating (7:9-17). These 2 visions seem to refer to the same group of people, namely the people “in Christ” but from two different perspectives.
  - In the vision of 7:1-8 we looked at earlier, God’s people are on earth, while in 7:9-17, they are in heaven celebrating God’s protective faithfulness. The hymn of heaven in 7:12 is a powerful anthem of praise sung by angels, proclaiming ***“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”***
  - God’s wrath at sin and unredeemed sinners began with Adam and Eve’s sin and persists throughout the age between Christ’s first and second coming. Who can endure God’s wrath at sin?
  - People “in Christ” will not experience God’s wrath due their sins. Their sins have been transferred to Jesus, and He bore both the death penalty due those sins and God’s wrath at those sins. But the redeemed can suffer collateral damage from God’s wrath.
  - Believers may be caught in collateral damage from the products of God’s wrath in the form of natural disasters, virulent diseases, mob actions, etc. Believers may be tortured and/or killed by violent unbelievers.
  - But whatever happens to believer’s bodies, their souls are safe and secure “in Christ” and they have the indwelling Holy Spirit to comfort and reassure them.
9. **Next:** Opening the seventh seal.

