

This week we read the Apocalypse of St. John (aka Revelation) Chapter 7.

In Chapter 6 there were 6 seals of Divine wrath which were opened upon the world.

Yet in Chapter 7, the final seal is not opened. Instead there is an interlude.

Mr. Jerry May, a life-long Latin teacher, explained to us that the word "interlude" comes from the Latin word meaning "between the games."

So this Chapter functions, in a sense, as an intermission between acts. But this intermission has a specific point: the sealing and protecting of God's people from the judgments which are forthcoming in Chapter 8. In this way, Chapter 7 functions as a great promise of God's enduring love and care for His faithful.

The Apocalypse of St. John Chapter Seven

INTRO:

-Chap 6 had the opening of the first 6 seals

-Now we come to an interlude before the 7th seal which is the outpouring of God's final judgment

-The subject of this Chapter is God's Divine Providence for His Church and how He mercifully prepares them before the final chastisements are unleashed in the world.

A. Angels Visit Earth

Orthodox Study Bible Note 7:1-17

Read 7:1

On the Four winds:

This is almost identical to the protection Jesus promises in the Gospel of Matthew: "And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven."

Read 7:2-3.

OSB Note 7:1-3

On Being Sealed:

Ignatius Catholic Study Bible (ICSB) Sealed: A seal is a mark of ownership and protection (9:4). Here the seal of God is related to the seals of the scroll, giving protection to the believing remnant of Israel, who will pass through the tribulation. This is probably more the grace of spiritual perseverance than a guarantee for physical survival because many are described as martyrs.

If time:

[In the broader context of Revelation, there is a contrast between the seal of God stamped on the foreheads of the righteous and the mark of the beast inscribed on the brows of the wicked (13:16). The former bears the divine name of God (14:1, 22:4), while the latter bears the demonic name of the beast (13:17) (CCC 1296). Ezek 9:1-7 has a similar prophetic vision.]

Orthodox Bible Study Note 7:3 What is this seal? In Ezekiel 9 angels were to slay all in Jerusalem that rebelled idolatrously against Yahweh. But before they began their dreadful task, one angel went through the city and, at the divine command, put a 'mark' (in Hebrew a 'tau') on all who were faithful (Ezek 9:4). Thus to be marked on the forehead is to enjoy the protection of God and an immunity from coming judgment. The letter 'tau' in Hebrew is shaped like a cross. The destroying angels were not to touch anyone on whom was the 'tau' or mark.

For the Christians [for whom Revelation was written] this was a clear prophecy of their baptism and chrismation. In the baptismal ritual of their time one was immersed thrice in water and then marked with a cross in holy oil on the forehead. This passage [in Revelation] recalls their baptismal rite and reveals its significance: as faithful regenerated believers, they are forgiven their sins and protected from the coming wrath of God. Even the mark on their foreheads, given in Chrismation, was called the "seal" and the rite itself, was called "Sealing" (mention practice of Antiochians).

The sealing administered in this passage by the angel echoes their own baptismal rite and reveals that God has claimed them as His own and will protect them in the coming conflict. Thus in the coming storm, they will be identifiable as God's own servants and will be spared His wrath." Pg. 91-92.

Read 7:4

OSB Note 7:4-8

Add: Census numberings were often used for military purposes (Num 1:2 & 1 Sam 14:15). Thus the 144,000 can be seen as the Church on earth sealed and prepared for battle as the Church militant. **OBS:** In numbering the servants of God who were sealed, the angels present the Church as the army of God mustered for battle... (p. 92).

Just as the 24 elders represented the 12 tribes of Israel plus the 12 Apostles of the New Israel, the Church. Now we have 12 x 12 (representing the old and new covenants) x 1000 meaning the great multitude of all the believers on the earth (Cf. OBS p. 93).

B. Sealing God's Servants

Read 7:5, 6, 7, 8.

ICBS Two irregularities stand out in this listing of the 12 tribes: (1) The tribe of Judah is listed first even though Judah was the fourth son of Jacob. This is to emphasize that Jesus Christ, who descended from the tribe of Judah, is our Savior (5:5, Mt 1:2-16). (2) The tribe of Dan is missing. This is probably for two reasons. Dan was infamous for its love for idolatry (Jud 18:16-19), and (b) an ancient Jewish tradition held that the Antichrist would come from Dan. **The** apocalyptic Testament of Dan describes Satan as the prince of this tribe. The Apocalypse can be seen as an heir to this tradition, so the omission of Dan expresses the truth that the Church, preserved by God, is devoid of any evil and treason.

In place of Dan was one of Joseph's offspring, Manasseh. Historically Joseph's tribe was split into two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:1-20).

C. Final Ingathering [into Heaven] and Worship

OSB Note 7:9a

Read 7:9, 10, 11, 12

OBS This second multitude is specifically described as multi-ethnic and beyond counting. See OBS Pg. 96 for more info on this second multitude.

OSB Note 7:9-14b For the importance of "white robes" see OSB Note 6:9-11

ICSB This "great multitude" is the Church triumphant, the saints in heaven who have passed through the great tribulation without compromising their faith (7:14).

ICSB "Which no one could number" also identifies them as the spiritual offspring of Abraham (Rom 4:11-17). Because Abraham believed God, God promised him he would be the Father of many nations (17:5) and of offspring too many to count (Gen 15:5).

ICSB v.12 contains a sevenfold blessing: These seven acclamations signify that God deserves the totality of praise from His creation.

Add "...forever and ever" in Greek is literally:

7:12 λέγοντες Ἀμήν ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ εὐχαριστία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ ἰσχὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων ἀμήν

-which is "unto ages of ages, amen." This is the traditional ending of our liturgical prayers in East (and West). Today we've modernized it to "forever and ever" but its important to know that literally it is "unto ages of ages."

"The term 'age' in Greek has a specific meaning indicating more than the simple measurement of time, as 'forever and ever' indicates. 'Ages of ages' implies not just an endless passage of time, but the taking into account of every age, every era and circumstance. It clarifies the glory due to God as possessing a fullness that extends beyond all created realities. Thus, 'forever and ever' is not as accurate and weakens the theological import of the original Greek." -From a Blog by an Melkite Catholic Priest:

<http://byzantineramblings.blogspot.com/2010/02/critique.html>

Read 7:13, 14

ICSB Great Tribulation: A time of unprecedented distress symbolized by the opening of the seals (6:1-7; Dan 12:1). Jesus warned of "a great tribulation such as has not happened since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will" (Mt 24:21). This is probably based on Dan 12:1.

OBS: What is the great tribulation? (1) All agree it is a time of unparalleled suffering, (2) most believe it is a period of final testing, (3) others see it as a time lasting throughout the age and ending only when the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, when the kingdom of the world becomes the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ (Rev. 11:15). Pg. 99

OBS Pg. 99 for explanation of more on Great Tribulation

Add?: Christians have given witness and endured many persecutions and tribulations, like those under Domitian near the end of the first century, throughout the Roman Empire, the Islamic Conquests, the Turks, the Communists, and continuing on today from Islamic extremists and totalitarian secular governments.

"They have washed..."

Add: The Apocalypse uses of paradoxes for greater emphases: "washed robes made white in the blood of the Lamb" and "who can escape from the wrath of the Lamb." Likewise our Eastern liturgical texts are filled with contemplations on great paradoxes of our faith, like how St. Mary is at the same time Virgin and Mother, how the worshipers of Stars are led by a star to the Sun of Righteousness who is also Son of God. On Great Wednesday we contemplate how the sinful woman was bringing myrrh, the disciple [Judas] was conspiring with the lawless / she rejoiced to expend the costly myrrh, while he hastened to sell the Priceless One..." etc. (The Div. Lit. of Presanctified Gifts, p. 142).

ICSB "They have washed..." Just as in old Israel priestly ordination included the purification of priestly garments with blood (Lev 8:30), Christians are cleansed

by the blood of Christ in Holy Baptism when we are Baptized, Chrismated and receive the Body and Blood of Christ.

Read 7:15, 16, 17.

OSB Note 7:15

ICSB The Messianic age is depicted as a time of protection from hunger, thirst and heat... filled with God's consolation where He wipes away every tear.

CONCLUSION: OBS 100

The privations of earthly life are no longer found. The Lamb, He who sits with God in the middle of the throne, will shepherd them; He will make them lie down in green pastures and lead them beside still waters (Ps. 22:2); He will guide them to living fountains of waters to slake their thirst. All the suffering of this parched life will be remembered no longer. Every tear they wept –tears shed because of persecution, sickness, bereavement, death- all are gone forever. God Himself will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Here is a vision to inspire the faithful of all ages and to steel them to endure any trial. This is the crowd of victors that awaits their arrival in heaven; these are the joys that are stored up for them in the Kingdom. David said a single day in God's courts was better than a thousand elsewhere (Ps. 83:10). How much greater will be the joy of standing in those courts forever, to ages of ages?