

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 12,

Revelation 6-7: 6th Seal--Who can stand?

6-Min. Video Overview

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We're about to tackle one of the biggest, most intense questions in the entire Bible, a question that comes right from the book of Revelation. When the world is ending, who is actually going to be able to stand? So picture this. You're reading Revelation chapter 6. You've just witnessed this terrifying vision of total cosmic collapse, and right at the climax, all of humanity cries out this question in absolute terror.

I mean, talk about the ultimate cliffhanger for the end of the world. But here's the fascinating thing. The book doesn't just leave you hanging.

The story literally hits the pause button on all the destruction just to answer this one question. And that answer, well, it unfolds in one of the most symbolic and debated chapters in the whole text. So let's figure this out.

Who can stand? Okay, first things first, we have to get a feel for the scene that makes everyone so terrified in the first place. This all happens when something called the sixth seal is opened. And what follows is just absolute cosmic chaos.

Now, it's really important to get this. This is not a literal scientific play-by-play of the apocalypse. John, the guy writing Revelation, is using what you could call apocalyptic stock imagery.

He's grabbing these incredible, powerful symbols straight from Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Joel, who use this exact kind of language to describe a moment of world-shattering divine judgment. So yeah, don't think of this as a weather report. It's much more like an ancient poetic way of saying the entire world order is being completely and violently unraveled.

It is the ultimate all-hell-broke-loose moment. But why? Why is this all happening right now? To answer that, we have to back up just a little bit. See, this cataclysm doesn't happen in a vacuum.

It's actually a direct answer to a desperate plea from those who have been martyred. Right before the world starts coming apart at the seams, we get this vision of the souls of martyrs. They're under a symbolic altar in heaven, and they're crying out to God with a question that honestly has echoed through all of human history.

How long? How long until you bring justice for what happened to us? And God's answer is fascinating. It comes in two parts. First, they're immediately given white robes.

In Revelation, this is a huge symbol of purity, of victory, of being proven right. Their sacrifice mattered. But the second part of the answer is that they need to wait a little longer.

Final justice won't roll out until a full number of their brothers and sisters, who will also suffer for their faith, is complete. Now, this might sound a little strange to our modern ears: this idea of a set number of righteous people. But it wasn't a new concept.

You can actually find it in other ancient Jewish apocalyptic writings. It was their way of saying that even when things seem chaotic, even when justice feels delayed, God is still completely in control. He has a plan, and he has a perfect timetable for all of history.

Okay, so you've got a world in chaos. You've got the martyrs waiting for justice. And that brings us right back to that terrifying question from the crowd.

Who can possibly stand? And right here, the whole narrative screeches to a halt to give us the answer. And this is so key to understanding how the book of Revelation works. Chapter 7 is not the next thing that happens on the timeline.

Think of it more like an interlude or a theological close-up that stops to explain the meaning of what we just saw in chapter 6. It's all about providing assurance and finally answering that critical question. The scene opens with four angels holding back what are called the four winds. These are symbols of God's destructive judgment.

But before they can be unleashed, another angel shows up with the seal of the living God. And the command is crystal clear. Stop.

Don't harm anything until we have marked God's people on their foreheads. This isn't about protecting them from all physical harm, but specifically about protecting them from the divine wrath that's about to be poured out. So this act of sealing God's people brings us to one of the most famous and maybe one of the most misunderstood numbers in the entire Bible.

Who exactly are these people being sealed for protection? John hears the number 144,000. They're sealed from the 12 tribes of Israel. Now, for centuries, people have argued back and forth about whether this is a literal, exact headcount of a very specific group.

But remember, we're in a book that is absolutely drenched in symbolism. We've got to dig a little deeper. The real key here is symbolic math.

The number 12 is massively important in the Bible, right? It represents the people of God. Think of the 12 tribes of Israel or the 12 apostles. So what you have here is 12 times 12, squared for emphasis, times 1,000, a number that signifies a vast, complete multitude.

So here's the takeaway. The 144,000 is a symbolic number representing the entirety of God's people. It's the whole church made up of both Jews and non-Jews.

John is taking the language that was used for ancient Israel and applying it to this new global community of faith. They are the complete numbered and sealed people of God. Okay, so they're sealed, but for what? What's their purpose? Well, the way John describes this group gives us our final and honestly pretty shocking clue about what they're meant to do.

I mean, think about it. Why does John bother listing out all the tribes and saying, 12,000 from this one, 12,000 from that one? Well, as scholars have pointed out, this sounds exactly like the military censuses from the Old Testament, like in the book of Numbers, where Israel was counting all of its fighting men by tribe. The symbolism here is just impossible to miss.

The 144,000, the complete church on earth, is being pictured as a powerful organized army drafted for a special mission right in the middle of all this tribulation. But what on earth kind of battle are they supposed to be fighting? And this, this is the beautiful, mind-bending twist of the entire book of Revelation. This army doesn't conquer with weapons.

They don't win through violence. They conquer the exact same way their leader, the Lamb, Jesus Christ, conquered through faithful, loving, self-sacrificial witness, even if it means their own death. Their superpower is their testimony, not their physical might.

And what happens next confirms this perfectly. First, John hears the number of the sealed army on earth, the 144,000. Then he turns, and he sees the result of their battle playing out in heaven.

This enormous multitude from every nation on earth, so huge that no one could even count them. And they're all standing victorious before God. It's two different perspectives of the exact same people: the church at war on earth and the church in victory in heaven.

When John asks who this incredible victorious crowd is, the answer ties it all together. These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. You see, their victory wasn't about avoiding the suffering.

It was about enduring through it. And they're victorious because their robes, their lives, have been made clean by the sacrifice of the Lamb. So let's go back to the beginning.

On that great day of wrath, who can stand? The answer Revelation gives us isn't some secret club or a literal number. It's anyone and everyone who is sealed for God's mission, an army that conquers through faithful witness. And that leaves us with a pretty challenging final thought, doesn't it? What if true victory isn't found in escaping suffering, but in persevering right through the very heart of it?