

Revelation 6 on the Sixth Seal, and Revelation 7 Who Can Stand Interlude

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Dave Mathewson examines the transition from the fifth and sixth seals in Revelation 6 to the interlude of Revelation 7. He demonstrates how the sixth seal employs Old Testament cosmic judgment imagery to depict the devastating terror of the Day of the Lord, raising the universal question of who can survive divine judgment. Dr. Mathewson argues that Revelation 7 answers this question by revealing the 144,000 sealed believers—representing the complete Church as a symbolic holy army—who conquer not through physical violence, but through faithful suffering witness modeled after the Lamb.

Outline

I. Introduction and God's Response to the Saints' Cry (Rev 6:9–11)

- A. Recapping the Cry for Vengeance under Seal Five
 - 1. Rooted in Old Testament Psalms and prophetic literature promising divine vindication.
 - 2. Addresses believers who suffered and died at the hands of a godless, oppressive empire.
- B. First Response: Granting of White Robes
 - 1. Does not depict resurrection bodies (resurrection occurs later in Rev 20:4–6).
 - 2. Symbolizes victory, moral purity, and righteousness (cf. Sardis in Rev 3:4; Rev 19:8).
 - 3. Reverses the world's verdict that their martyr witness was useless or defeated.
- C. Second Response: Waiting Until the Predetermined Number is Completed
 - 1. Concept of an appointed/set number of martyrs before final judgment.
 - 2. Paralleled in Jewish apocalyptic literature: 1 Enoch 47 and 4th Ezra 4:33–37.
 - 3. Explains delay, highlights God's sovereignty, and provides assurance to suffering believers.

II. Seal Six: Cosmic Upheaval and the Day of the Lord (Rev 6:12–17)

- A. Nature of the Sixth Seal Judgments

1. Cataclysmic dismantling: great earthquake, blackened sun, blood-red moon, falling stars, and sky rolling up like a scroll (Rev 6:12–14).
2. Draws on Old Testament prophetic stock imagery (Isaiah 24:1–6, 34:4; Joel 2:10; Matt 24).
3. Metaphorical rather than strictly literal, expressing the full dissolution of the universe at history's end.

B. Socioeconomic Universality of Judgment

1. Encompasses kings, princes, generals, rich, mighty, slave, and free (Rev 6:15).
2. Demonstrates that God shows no partiality across social or economic classes.

C. The Universal Climax Question

1. Terrified humanity attempts to hide in caves from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16).
2. Concludes with the pivotal question of verse 17: "The great day of wrath has come, and who can stand?"

III. Revelation Chapter 7: The Interlude Answering "Who Can Stand?"

A. Function and Purpose of the Interlude

1. Positioned structurally between Seal Six and Seal Seven (opened in Rev 8:1).
2. Not a chronological sequence or random digression, but an interpretive explanation of Chapter 6.
3. Provides a spiritual perspective revealing who is protected and able to persevere.

B. The Sealing of Believers (Rev 7:1–8)

1. Four angels holding back the four winds (representing destructive plagues/judgments).
2. Angel from the East applying God's seal to foreheads (alluding to Ezekiel 9).
3. Guarantees spiritual protection from divine wrath, though not immunity from physical martyrdom.

C. Identification and Symbolism of the 144,000

1. Symbolic numerical calculation: $12 \text{ (tribes/apostles)} \times 12 \times 1,000 = 144,000$ (complete people of God).
2. Three primary interpretive views:
 - a. Literal ethnic Israel preserved during future tribulation.
 - b. National Israel saved in the end times (cf. Romans 11:25–26).
 - c. Symbolic representation of the complete Church (Jew and Gentile) fulfilling Israel's destiny.
3. Distinctive features of John's tribal list:
 - a. Omission of Dan and Ephraim due to historical/apocalyptic associations with idolatry.
 - b. Judah listed first, highlighting Christological priority (the Lion from the tribe of Judah).

IV. The 144,000 as the Symbolic Holy Army of God

A. Old Testament Census Background

1. Alludes to Numbers 1 and 2 Samuel 24, where tribal censuses counted men eligible for military service.
2. The enumeration of 12,000 per tribe depicts the entire Church organized as a mighty army.

B. Character and Method of Warfare

1. Elaborated in Revelation 14:1–4 as pure male virgins, reflecting ritual abstinence required for holy war.
2. Ironical warfare: they conquer not by violence or swords, but through faithful suffering witness modeled after the Lamb.

V. Conclusion and Key Resources

A. Pastoral Application

1. Assures suffering Christians of God's ultimate protection, vindication, and sovereignty.
2. Calls compromising Christians to remain unspotted by imperial idolatry.

B. Recommended Reading for Further Study

1. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Revelation* (Cambridge University Press).
2. Michael Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*.