

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled - Part 15
“Who Is Able To Stand?”
Revelation 6-7

Introduction: In 2026, the World Watch List paints a grim picture for believers in many countries around the world. Christian persecution statistics show the crisis is growing, not shrinking, and the numbers back it up. An estimated 388 million Christians now face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, up 8 million from the previous year. 4,849 Christians have been killed for their faith during the 2026 reporting period. 224,129 Christians have been internally displaced or became refugees. 67,843 Christians have been physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons. 15 countries now rank at "extreme" persecution levels, up from 13 a year ago. 1 in 7 Christians worldwide face persecution for their faith. In Africa, that number jumps to 1 in 5 and Sub-Saharan Africa remains the deadliest region in our world for followers of Jesus.

As we think about this and how throughout the history of the last 2000 years, the church of Jesus Christ has suffered simply because people follow Jesus, we are reminded of Jesus' words in John 16:33: "...*In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.*" (NASB) Jesus says: You will have tribulation and this word tribulation is a key word in Revelation.

Revelation 6-7 are the first of three sets of judgement descriptions Jesus gives to John in his vision. In the next several chapters we will see the images of the Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls. The Seals answer the question, "Who Is Able To Stand?" Who is able to stand when all Hell is literally breaking loose in life and in this world?

Revelation 6 begins with the story of the scroll John pictured in Chapter 5. The scroll was sealed with 7 seals. In the Roman Empire, people's wills were sealed with 7 seals. This scroll represents 1. God's will for this earth; God's plan for mankind, for this world, and for the future which as we know from Apocalyptic literature is judgement on ALL Anti-God / Anti-Christian empires controlled by Satan and Evil. The scroll also represents, 2. God's ultimate Shalom for his people who remain loyal and persevere – WHO STAND in the face of evil and suffering, opposition and persecution. This scroll is God's plan to set the world right for God's people in John's day and for all time. God has the deed or title to the earth as he holds the scroll. So, he has authority, ultimate control, and will bring complete judgement which is why there are many number 7's in the text as 7 is the number of perfect completion.

A fundamental rule of hermeneutics (interpreting and understanding Scripture) – Start by asking what the author intended his readers to understand.

Revelation 6:1-8...

Even though these horses and riders are causing evil, GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL. The Lamb is the one who opens the seals. The Living Creatures (angelic beings) tell them to come and ride throughout the earth. These first two actions take place in the Throne Room of God and under His authority. So, in spite of what goes on in our world, GOD IS IN CONTROL. Does that mean God's people will be exempt from the evil these horses and riders bring to the world, and won't get caught up in the judgement God rains down on the evil empires of this world when Christians live in those empires? NO, and we will see that in these chapters.

1. The first horse – Political domination and power as a result of conquest.

Carrying a bow – A rare weapon of war in that day which is why the Romans had a hard time with the Parthians to their east who looked like the locusts of Revelation 9 with their masks, flowing hair, and ability to shoot an arrow from their horse in battle.

Crown – A symbol of power, authority, dominion. The purpose of this horse and rider is to go out and make war and conquer.

White – The color representing victory. When the Roman army came home from a conquest in war, the general would come riding on a white horse, and people in the cities would line the streets dressed in white. In Revelation 19, Jesus is riding a white horse in victory and God's people are dressed in white robes.

2. The second horse -- War and violence.

NOTE: In verse 4 the rider being given a big sword is a mistranslation. The Greek word used here for sword is a different word for sword than the word used in verse 8 which is the word for a large sword. The sword in verse 4 is a smaller sword or dagger that was used in sacrifices. It is the sword used by Abraham in Genesis 22 when he has Issac on the altar and is going to sacrifice him. The rider on the red horse has a sword used in sacrificial settings because as we see in the 5th seal, Christians are being killed and their souls are under the altar – under that which is used for sacrifices.

3. The third horse -- Inflation and subsequent famine, poverty and hunger that follow in the wake of war, violence, and upheaval in this world.

4. The fourth horse – Death followed by Hades.

One-fourth of the earth -- God is limiting the damage these evil forces are doing as he is holding back on his judgment. He wants people to repent. **The image of Hades following death** is a reference to the place where those who are evil and not followers of Jesus go after death. We know that those who are in Christ go into his presence in the place the Bible calls Paradise.

When the first 4 seals are opened, John describes what are known as the “4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse” who wreak havoc on the people of the earth and are used by God to bring judgement on evil. This image is familiar to God’s people as they knew the Old Testament Book of Zechariah. John draws on the image of the 4 horsemen from the Apocalyptic Literature in Zechariah 6 where God pronounces judgement on the Persian Empire in the same way that Revelation pronounces judgement on the Roman Empire. Both Zechariah and Revelation (and all apocalyptic literature in the Bible) also applies to any future Anti-God, Anti-Christian Empires which oppress God’s people and leads them into idolatry and sexual immorality. The story keeps repeating itself throughout the history of mankind.

The history of mankind has been a history of these four horsemen riding over nations and people. They ride roughshod over the church as well as God’s people are impacted by them sometimes simply because we are living life in this world that is experiencing judgment; and sometimes because Satan is turning his wrath towards God’s people.

Revelation 6:9-11...

The word for witness and the word for martyr in Greek are the same word. The early Christians wonder why this is happening and why Jesus does not return to set things right. Christians being persecuted and martyred today may wonder this as well. **See 2 Peter 3:8-10 for an explanation...**

Revelation 6:12-17...

Judgment is coming and it will be fearsome as described in the 6th seal. The judgment will be complete on both creation and the human race as we see in John’s use of the number 7 – the number for perfect completion. The reference to 7 elements of creation (the land destroyed by a great earthquake, the sun, the moon, the stars, the heavens, every mountain, and every island) show ALL of creation is affected by the judgement of God. The 7 groups of people show that ALL of humanity is affected by the judgement of God. This includes the first 5 who would have been in charge of fighting wars and inflicting harm on people (the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free).

NOTE: Many scholars have said that when verse 16 says the people called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!, they were calling on their idols – their gods who were made of rock – to fight for them and protect them. They are powerless to help them against the power of Almighty God.

Revelation 7:1-3...

John uses powerful imagery to picture the wrath and judgment of God poured out to such an extent that it causes horror among the human race. Later on, we will see another telling of these final events as more graphic and intense details will be added when we read about the 6th trumpet and then it will get even worse when we read about the 6th and 7th bowls.

Revelation 7:1-3...

A picture of those who are able to stand and will survive God’s final judgment. Nothing shall destroy God’s people spiritually. None of God’s people will be lost to Satan and eternal judgment. They and we are sealed in our faith. (See also Ephesians 1:3-14)

Revelation 7:4-8...

How did John’s readers and the early church understand these verses? They understood the number 144,000 being the total of 12 x 12 x 1000, and those numbers are significant in Hebrew numerology. 12 is the number of the Tribes of Israel and 12 is the number of the Apostles. The spiritual Israel of God, the Church is built upon the prophets and apostles, who represent both Old and New Testament saints, all of whom are built upon Christ the chief cornerstone as we see in Ephesians 2:14-22.

In addition, the number 10 symbolizes completeness (10 commandments, 10 plagues, the beast that has 10 horns which is symbolic of complete human power). When you have 10 x 10 you have 100, a symbol of definite completeness. But when you get 10 cubed (3 being the number for God), you have 10 x 10 x 10 which is 1000, a symbol of absolute completeness. So, when you take 12 x 12 you have 144 and you have God’s people, and when you

multiply the 144 (symbol of Old and New Testament saints) by 1000 (symbol of absolute completeness) you have 144,000. That is a symbolic number of ALL God's people who are living on the earth at any one point in time during the church age – the time between Jesus' first coming and when he will come again. (See the Additional Notes for other explanation of the 144,000).

Another reason for this understanding is that if this is a picture of just the Jewish people of God or ethnic Israel on earth, **Levi and Joseph would not be listed as tribes.** Levi was never listed as one of the 12 tribes with a geographical location as they were the Priests who were mediators between the People of Israel and God. The tribe of Dan is missing, and Levi is in its place. Joseph was never listed as one of the 12 tribes with a geographical location, but Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim were. The tribe of Ephraim is missing, and Joseph is in its place. Why?

The Bible does not explicitly state why Dan and Ephraim are left off the list of the 144,000, but biblical scholars and theologians point to historical patterns of idolatry and apostasy in both those tribes as they both led the nation of Israel into deep spiritual rebellion:

- **Idolatry Centers:** King Jeroboam set up golden calves for the Northern Kingdom to worship at **Dan** and **Bethel** (located in Ephraim's territory) to keep people from traveling to Jerusalem.
- **Historical Rejection:** Long before that, the Tribe of Dan abandoned the land originally assigned to them by Joshua and embraced carved idols and a self-made priesthood (See Book of Judges, chapter 18).
- **Apostasy Symbolism:** Many commentators view Dan and Ephraim as historical symbols of turning away from God, leading to their exclusion from this specific group of end-time witnesses

Because this list is a list of God's faithful people who are able to stand, and because of the importance in Revelation of both the Priest and King which we will see later in the book, Dan and Ephraim are excluded here and John instead puts in two names which represent the PRIEST and the KING. Levi represents the Priest and Joseph represents the King. The 144,000 are what the Apostle Paul calls in the New Testament, the spiritual seed of Abraham, a spiritual Israel; meaning God's people who are now in the New Testament church. This is a picture of God's people who are living on the earth at any given point and time in the church's history.

NOTE: Go back to Zechariah 6 and the passage with the four horsemen and in that passage, there is a Priest and a King like there is in the list here in Revelation 7. But what is fascinating in the Zechariah passage that is looking forward is that the Priest is given a crown and he becomes King as well. He is both Priest and King. And what is that Priest's name? Joshua. What is the Hebrew name for Joshua? Yeshua. What is another name for Yeshua? Jesus. WOW!

Revelation 7:9-10...

This part of the vision is a picture of the same group - the church, the people of God, but now it is the church triumphant in Heaven. The white robes and waving of palm branches are symbols of purity and victory.

Revelation 7:13-14...

Many translations read, *These are they that have come out of the great tribulation.* However, the correct translation of the Greek is: *These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation.* In other words, these are the steady stream of God's people coming out of the tribulation of life here on earth as they go to be with God. They are in white robes as they have stood strong in the face of evil and persecution, and have overcome and been victorious.

The phrase, the Great Tribulation is another event which is interpreted differently by followers of Jesus, and there is a discussion of that at the end of these Message Notes. But for our understanding of what the followers of Jesus in the 7 churches understood the Great Tribulation to be, it is NOT a future 7-year event that would happen near the end of time on earth as we know it. It is ongoing as it is happening to them at that time in the Roman Empire, and it will happen to followers of Jesus throughout history until Jesus comes again.

Those who are coming out of the great tribulation are singing: Examples of that in the lives of Jesus followers today....

The mark of followers of Jesus is that they rejoice in persecution; are cheerful in tribulation; and sing when they are in prison, in the dark and desert times of life, in danger, in hospital rooms when the diagnosis is terminal, and around gravesides in the face of death. The reason is nothing less than the presence and the power of the Lamb who was Slain and the reality that one day the four horsemen are going to be defeated and injustice, war, hunger, suffering and death will be no more.

May you and I never forget that being a follower of Jesus and being part of his family, the church, is eternally speaking nothing less than a life and death deal. It is not an activity to add on to everything else that has to be done in our busy life and schedule. Being a follower of Jesus is something for which hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of people who have come before you and me, have suffered and bled and given their lives for, and for which countless others have said: I will live for Jesus every day with a willing heart – no matter what I face in this world of evil and

suffering. AND we can sing praise to God in this life and join the singing of praise to God that will never stop as we live in eternity with Him. **Revelation 7:15-17...**

Additional Thoughts on The Great Tribulation

1. A seven-year period at the end of time.

The Futurist understanding is that the Great Tribulation refers to a specific period at the end of time, often thought of as lasting for seven years based on a particular interpretation of the Book of Daniel. Most who hold this view believe that the church will be raptured (removed) from the earth before the time of tribulation occurs. Many who hold this view, believe that the 144,000 talked about here in Revelation 7 will actually be Jewish people who become believers in Jesus after the rapture and as a result, there will be a Christian presence on the earth during the tribulation that will be a witness to people and lead others to faith in Christ during a time of great persecution. This view is called Dispensationalism, and it is the view portrayed in the 1970's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and the more recent *Left Behind* series.

2. A description of the suffering of God's people from the time of Pentecost to Christ's return.

The second view of the Great Tribulation is that statements such as Revelation 7:14 refer not to just one particular time of tribulation (not just a 7-year period of time near the end of history), but to the tribulation that God's people have experienced throughout every era of history. Those who take this position would note that the Greek word for "tribulation" is "thlipsis" (θλίψις) and is used about 45 times in the New Testament, and generally it is used to describe the persecution that the church is already going through. (Acts 14:22, Revelation 1:9, etc.)

Meaning and Usage

- **Literal definition:** It means pressure, compression, or squeezing—like a heavy weight crushing down on an object or grapes or olives being crushed in a press.
- **Figurative definition:** It refers to affliction, distress, oppression, trouble, or suffering that hems a person in.
- **New Testament frequency:** It appears about 45 times and is translated into various English words depending on the context, including *tribulation*, *affliction*, *persecution*, and *distress*

In the Book of Revelation, the Greek word *thlipsis* (θλίψις) occurs five times. Because modern Bible versions translate the word differently depending on the context (sometimes as *tribulation*, *affliction*, *persecution*, or *suffering*) OR depending on their theological bias around their end times theology, many Christians in the American Church connect it with end-times events. However, the understanding of the Tribulation as **the suffering of God's people from the time of Pentecost to Christ's return** is what the church has historically held to throughout the centuries until the Dispensationalist view was developed in the 1830's. Other than the Christian church here in the United States and a few other places, the majority of Christians around the world believe that the Great Tribulation has taken place since the church was born and will continue until the end when Jesus returns. A book that describes this view is, *The Incredible Cover-up*, by Dave MacPherson.

Other thoughts on the Great Tribulation:

1. This church is not going to divide over issues such as this.
2. We are not going to insult people with whom we disagree.
3. A Pastoral Concern: Be discerning about books and teachers who imply or say outright that their particular interpretation of the end-time scenario is the only one that a committed student of the Bible can believe; and that somebody who doesn't believe their position either lacks intelligence or doesn't adhere to the Scripture.

As Christians we are committed to believe that Jesus will come back and that his return will be personal, visible, and imminent. In regard to the "End Times", beyond that, there is much that is open to different opinions and debate.