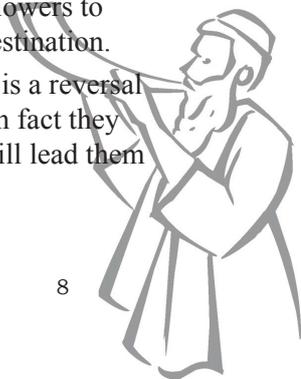


b) Interval: Community of the saved 7:1-17

1. This chapter is an intermezzo. There is no 'reverse historical' sequence after Rev 6.17.
2. The four angels at the four corners of the world - this refers to Zechariah 6.5. In Zechariah we also see the four horses that were mentioned (Zech 6.1-4). In Rev 7.1-3, the four angels ensure that no disasters happen to the earth before the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads. This 'sealing' happened before the disasters of Rev 6 began to unfold.
3. Who are these 144.000? (See also Rev 14.1-5.) I have never seen any other explanation for this number than that it means $12 \times 12 \times 1000$, i.e., a fullness of Gods servants. All of them. In the summing up of all God's servants, the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. And though in Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh were two separate tribes, they are combined into one by John, namely in their father Joseph. So John did not try to give a perfect list of all tribes of Israel. They are called 'servants of God', a term that is only used for followers of Jesus by St John.
4. The seal on their foreheads - see also Ezechiel 9.4. In Ezekiel the people who received the seal on the forehead were faithful Jews in Jerusalem, who had to be protected before God's wrath was poured out over unfaithful Jerusalem. Later, in Rev 13, we see the opposite seal, the mark of the Beast.
5. The second part of Rev 7, about the multitude from every nation, is in my opinion the explanation of the first part, about the 144.000. The two parts must be read as parallels. The 144.000 are the persecuted on earth who are not harmed by God's wrath (they have his sign on their forehead) - but they are persecuted nonetheless. (Do not forget Rev 2-3, about the persecuted addressees.) The church is in tribulation and is being tested and has to be faithful unto death. (see, for instance, Rev 2.9-10.)
6. The sign on the forehead refers to the wrath of God that came on Jerusalem (Eze 9.4) and the people saved are people from all nations. And while they are being persecuted (remember, by the Jews, Rev 2-3) they are at that very moment already before the throne of the Lamb.
7. Yes, these are martyrs, but I think they are also those who are being persecuted. And by inference we should say, these are also all Christians who are not being persecuted. The church on earth (Rev 2-3) is encouraged: they may see and feel lowly, but in reality they participate in the heavenly worship in the temple of God with their songs, their prayers, their lives.
8. We see the same temple imagery as before - the throne, angels, 24 elders, four angelic creatures, worship.
9. Notice the trinitarian worship again - the people stand before the throne and the Lamb, and they recognise that salvation is from God and the Lamb.
10. When asked who these people are, the answer seems to suggest that these are not only those who have arrived in heaven after being killed. They are before the throne and they serve God day and night in his temple (Rev 7.12), but is that not what all Christians do? Rev 7.16-17 seems to indicate a future aspect of their salvation. The idea that the Lamb will shepherd and guide his followers to springs of living water seems anachronous if people have already reached their eternal destination.
11. Concluding, I think what John sees and what he promises the persecuted church on earth is a reversal of roles: the persecutors will be punished but the persecuted await eternal blessings and in fact they already worship God in his heavenly temple. The Lamb is their Shepherd now, and he will lead them to full salvation.



c) Seventh seal - 8:1-5

1. After the intermezzo (Rev 7) the series of seven seals is coming to an end. The seventh seal is opened. And this seventh seal itself is the same as the sounding of the seven trumpets (8.1-2). This means that when eventually the seventh trumpet sounds (Rev 11.15-19), the seventh seal is 'finished'.
2. The scene begins with God (on his throne, where else) and seven angels before him. In the temple in Jerusalem, there were angels (two actually) who 'guarded' the throne of God - the ark of the covenant, and angels embroidered on the Veil that closed the Holy of Holies.
3. Next we see the golden incense altar - we are still in the heavenly temple. One angel has a golden censer - used for serving that incense altar. This incense signified the prayers of the saints - those prayers come to God as fine fragrance. This makes me think that the altar in Rev 6.9 is this same incense altar - as the scene is very similar. It is again about the saints (all God's people) who are praying, and the impact of the prayers is shocking! Rev 8.5 shows that the censer that the angel holds is used for the beginning of Gods wrath on those who persecute the church. Compare with Eze 10:2.

