

Revelation Series: Part 9
Revelation, Chapter 7: Israel and the Gentiles
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Text: Revelation 7

Revelation, Chapter 7 opens with John the visionary seeing four angels standing at the four directions, called “four corners” of the earth. Each of them is “holding back” the wind to prevent it from coming from its direction to blow upon the earth, the sea, or against any tree. Power had been given to these four angels to damage the earth and sea, but another angel rising from the east having the seal of God loudly called out to them not to harm the earth, the sea or the trees until they had sealed the servants of God with a seal on their foreheads.

John heard the number of those who were sealed: one hundred forty-four thousand out of every tribe of the people of Israel. Twelve thousand people were sealed from each of twelve tribes of Israel. However, these twelve tribes do not exactly correspond to the names of the original sons of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. The tribes included and named in this 144,000 were: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin.

Conspicuously missing are Dan and Ephraim. There is no mention of Dan at all in the sealing of the twelve tribes of Israel, although he was the son of Jacob. To understand why Dan was left out, I went back to Genesis 30 to the story of Dan’s birth and the circumstances around his conception.

As you may remember, Jacob first fell in love with Rachel, and he worked seven years for the right to marry her. But, her father, Laban tricked Jacob by giving him his first-born daughter, Leah, instead of Rachel on the wedding night. Since brides were usually veiled, Jacob didn’t realize he was with Leah until the next morning. When Laban insisted that it was their tradition to give the firstborn first before the second-born could be married, Jacob agreed to work seven more years for the right to marry Rachel.

The two sisters became jealous of each other, and childbearing was used by Leah as a way to win Jacob’s love and attention, since Rachel was more beautiful than she, and Rachel had been the one he *chose* to marry because he loved her.

When God saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb, and she had four sons, while Rachel was barren. So, Rachel envied Leah because of Leah's four children. She told Jacob, "Give me children or I shall die!" This angered Jacob, because he felt that it was not himself who had prevented her from getting pregnant, but it was God who had withheld children from her. So now, there is envy and anger involved.

To add to the envy and anger, Rachel tries to circumvent the will of God by devising another way to obtain a child. She gives her maid, Bilhah, to her husband Jacob, and asks him to go in to Bilhah so that she would have a child that Rachel could claim as her own. Jacob obeyed Rachel, rather than waiting upon the will of God. When he was given to Bilhah, she conceived and bore a son whom Rachel named Dan, saying, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." The name Dan means "He judged."

Rachel had prophesied her own judgment, which only becomes fully apparent in Revelation 7. In judging, God removed Dan's name from among the tribes, possibly because Dan was conceived out of fear, rather than faith. Rachel did not trust God to be merciful to her and eventually open her womb, but ran ahead to secure her own desire according to her own timing, not God's. Her motive was envy, and she sparked anger in her husband. She also involved her maid in her scheme for the purpose of vindication in contest with her sister, Leah. **Her greatest error was the failure to recognize the sovereignty of God and to submit to it.** When Jacob responded to her, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" Rachel responded by giving her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob, rather than by exploring *why* God had withheld her from childbearing.

It was later discovered that Rachel had hid her father's idols in her tent, after stealing them from his home in Paddan-aram when she left with Jacob to return to Canaan. This might indicate that her trust was in the idols, rather than in the living God whom Jacob served. Her sister Leah, on the other hand, had named each of her sons in relation to her response to God's blessing in giving them to her.

Leah named her firstborn son "Reuben," and said, "Because the Lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me." The name Reuben means "See, a son."

Leah named her second son "Simeon" saying, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." Simeon is from the Hebrew word "shama" which means "to hear, to listen, to give attention to, to

understand, to submit to, and to obey." Already, we can see the difference between the perspective of Leah and that of Rachel. Rachel did not believe that God heard her request, when she did not receive immediately what she had requested. She apparently did not know that **delay does not mean denial.**

Leah named her third son "Levi," which means "joined." She said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons." This son would go on to become the ancestor of the Levites, who were the chosen priests whom God called to lead worship in the Tabernacle. They would be in charge of "joining" the people to God through worship, intercessory prayers and receiving/keeping/teaching God's commandments. Moses and Aaron were descendants of Levi (Exodus 2:1-2).

Leah seemed to reach the apex of her faith in God when she bore her fourth son, Judah, which means "praise." After she bore him, she ceased bearing for a period of time. From the tribe of Judah came King David, King Solomon, and Joseph, the step-father of Jesus Christ. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also from the tribe of Judah, so that although Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit of God and was the Son of God, he was also the physical son of Mary of the tribe of Judah.

Although God later had mercy on Rachel and opened her womb, so that she bore two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, she died while giving birth to her second son, naming him Ben-oni, meaning "son of my sorrow." Jacob later changed his name to Benjamin, which means "son of the right hand."

Many years later, when Jacob was blessing each of his twelve sons in Egypt just before his death, his blessing for Dan was, "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward." Just after pronouncing this "blessing" on Dan, Jacob says, "I wait for your salvation, O Lord."

Jacob seems to describe Dan in similar language to how Satan is described earlier in Genesis. Satan is depicted in the Garden of Eden as a serpent, and when God pronounces a judgment upon him for tempting Eve and Adam to sin, God said to Satan, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:14b-15)

Jacob seems to be waiting for “salvation” from the venom of Dan, or perhaps from his deceptive ways. This is not clear, but the connection to the imagery of Satan appears to be strong.

The tribe of Dan is completely left out of the 144,000, unless they were somehow assimilated into other tribes by marriage. Another possibility for leaving Dan out would be the significance of his name, which means “He judged.” Since those in heaven whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life will not be judged, there would be no place among the redeemed for judgment.

Also missing by name in the 144,000, but possibly replaced by Joseph is the tribe of Ephraim, Joseph’s younger son and the brother of Manasseh. In blessing Ephraim and Manasseh at his death, their grandfather, Jacob, had added an extra tribal portion of land when he gave his son Joseph a portion for each of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, putting the younger of the two first.

The tribe of Manasseh is included in the 144,000, but instead of naming Ephraim in this list, Joseph is named. When the land of Canaan was divided among the tribes, Manasseh received a portion of his land on the east side of the Jordan and another portion parallel to it on the west side of the Jordan. However, Ephraim received land only on the west side of the Jordan River in Canaan proper. Ephraim’s land stretched all the way to the Mediterranean Sea from the Jordan River, but it was much smaller than Manasseh’s large expanse of land, which stretched from Gilead on the east of the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea on the west.

By contrast, the tribe of Dan received a small strip of land, which was surrounded by Gath, Ekron, and Ashdod, which were cities of the Philistines, enemies of Israel, although it was just next to the land of the tribe of Benjamin, in which was the city that would become Jerusalem. During the time of Judges, Dan rejected its claim to its parcel of land and moved north to occupy a part of the territory of Naphtali.

According to commentary in versebyverseministry.org), “In Judges 17-21 we’re given two stories of apostasy in Israel. Both stories center on the tribes of Dan and Ephraim [the two tribes left out of the 144,000] and on the city of Bethlehem... In those chapters, of Judges, Dan sinned by viewing the land God allotted to them as unacceptable, so they abandoned it. While passing through Ephraim, they stole idols from a home and recruited a Levite to serve in a false temple in the new territory. As a result, Dan became the first tribe in Israel to embrace idol worship in Israel.

Meanwhile, the tribe of Ephraim, the source of the idols, assumed control over the land originally intended for Dan. They aided and abetted the Danites in bringing idolatry into the land of Israel. These sins give just cause for God to exclude them from the privilege of preparing Israel and the world for the Messiah's return.

"Furthermore, since the tribe of Manasseh is already included in the list of Revelation 7, then we know that the tribe of Joseph can't represent his two sons, as is usually the case in scripture. Instead, Joseph still represents two tribes, but in this case Joseph replaces Dan and Ephraim, tribes historically and geographically linked by their conspiracy to introduce rebellion and idolatry into Israel. So they were excluded from this list by name with the name Joseph standing in their place." (versebyverseministry.org)

This suggestion seems plausible since the name "Joseph" means "adding." In a sense, Joseph's substitution for the sinful tribes of Dan and Ephraim is a symbolic representation of Jesus' substitution for sinful humanity. Joseph's good name may stand as a substitute for Dan and Ephraim, representing those tribes by his name.

Knowing this background presents us with plausible reasons why the tribes of Dan and Ephraim were omitted from the 144,000 who were sealed by the angel of God as the servants of God in Revelation 7. This allowed the twelve tribes to still be represented in the 144,000, while acknowledging the sin of the tribes of Dan and Ephraim by omitting their names.

The other patriarchs of the rest of the tribes were not without sin: Reuben slept with his father's concubine, Simeon and Levi invaded a village and killed all of its men, after their sister, Dinah was raped by one of the men from that village. Jacob condemned their anger and wrath.

Even Judah was not without sin: Judah withheld his youngest son, Shelah, from marrying Tamar as it would have been the custom to do when the other two sons, whom she had consecutively married, had passed away. He unknowingly made use of her services thinking that she was a prostitute, and she conceived twin sons. When she made known who the father of her twins was, Judah admitted that he had been wrong in withholding his third son from marrying her. Judah never had conjugal relations with Tamar again.

So, there were sins committed by Leah's sons, as well as Rachel's but the sin of idolatry was a direct affront to the sovereignty of God, making it more egregious.

The good news is that the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was sufficient to cleanse all people from their sins, including the twelve tribes of Israel.

When Revelation 7 continues, John saw a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from *all* tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They were glorifying God and the Lamb, saying "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.

This declaration of salvation affirms that the errors and the sins that were committed by humanity have been atoned for. God has his own method of redeeming those who were born during the time before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Peter said that Jesus preached to those who were in Hades (which he referred to as "prison"), during the days between his death and his resurrection. (1 Peter 3:18-20)

Regardless of *how* Jesus accomplished it, people all over the world from every race were rejoicing in his salvation at the throne of God in heaven.

All of the angels were worshipping with them, as they surrounded the throne, the elders, and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.

They sang a song of praise in response to the declaration of the redeemed ones, singing: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.

When one of the elders asked John who those were who were dressed in white robes, and where they came from, John said, "Sir you are the one that knows."

Then, the elder said to John, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal [tribulation]; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple.

The elder told John that those people would never be hungry or thirsty again, and that the sun would not strike them, nor any scorching heat, because the Lamb at the center of the throne would be their Shepherd. He would guide them to springs of living water [the water of life], and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is what we have to look forward to! We are the redeemed! We are among those who are dressed in white robes, washed and made clean by the blood of the Lamb! We will surely join that multitude who stand around the throne of God and say with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Amen.