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Revelation chapter 7 English Standard Version

1After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. **2**Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, **3**saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” **4**And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

512,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, **6**12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, **7**12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, **8**12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed. **9**After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10**and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” **11**And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12**saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” **14**I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. **17**For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 7:1

ESV

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

What does Revelation 7:1 mean? In this verse the apostle John reports that he saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. Just as it is used today, the phrase "four corners of the earth" is not meant to suggest the earth is literally square. It means the angels had taken up positions at the points of the compass. They stood at the north, south, east, and west. They exercised authority to hold back the four winds.

The four winds represent God's judgment. In His pledge to destroy Elam—another name for Persia—God said, "I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven. And I will scatter them to all those winds, and there shall be no nation to which those driven out of Elam shall not come" (Jeremiah 49:36). Like John, Daniel also saw in a vision the four winds of heaven. He states in Daniel 7:2 that they were "stirring up the great sea," which meant the Mediterranean Sea. During the four angels' delay of judgment no wind would arise to shake a tree.

Revelation 7:2

ESV

Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,

What does Revelation 7:2 mean? John testifies in this verse that he saw another angel ascend from the sunrise. He was holding the seal of the living God. He shouted loudly to the four angels positioned at the four points of the compass. The word translated "angel" may also be translated "messenger." Both in Hebrew and in Greek, the original term literally means "a messenger."

Ephesians 1:13–14 declares that the Holy Spirit seals believers until the day of redemption. Based on this, the Holy Spirit might be the messenger who holds the seal of the living God. John notes that the four angels had received power to inflict damage on the earth and the sea.

A "seal" signifies security, ownership, and authority. When Daniel was thrown into a den of lions, the king's seal was placed on the stone at the entrance to the den to secure Daniel's prison (Daniel 6:17). First Kings 21:8 informs us that Jezebel wrote letters in her husband Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, thereby giving them royal authority. Queen Esther used the king's seal in her correspondence to the Jews to protect them from Haman (Esther 8:8). The stone that was supposed to secure Jesus' tomb was sealed (Matthew 27:66).

Revelation 7:3

ESV

saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

What does Revelation 7:3 mean? In this verse we read that the ascending angel—or messenger—speaks to the four angels mentioned in the prior verse. Their role was to hold back the four winds, which is symbolic of God restraining His judgment. These four are told not to harm the earth—to delay further judgment—until God's servants had been sealed on their foreheads. In John's day, slaveowners sometimes marked their slaves, even on the forehead, to indicate ownership and protect them from kidnapping. In Ezekiel 9:3–4 Ezekiel wrote about a man with a writing case who was commanded to pass through Jerusalem and put a mark on the forehead of every person who lamented the abominations that were committed there.

The seal of God stands in contrast to those who will take such a "mark" from Satan in the end times, a concept seen later in Revelation. The servants of God will refuse this "mark of the beast." Whether or not all saved believers in the tribulation will have this special "sealing" of God is not entirely clear, but it seems likely. The beast is the false prophet who exercises control over Israel as

the willing accomplice to the head of the Revived Roman Empire, the region around the Mediterranean Sea (Revelation 13:1, 16–17). Instead of this ungodly emblem, believers will have the name of the Lamb and the Father's name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

Revelation 7:4

ESV

And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

What does Revelation 7:4 mean? This verse reports that John heard the number of those who were sealed. It was 144,000, and all 144,000 were from the tribes of Israel. They comprise a remnant of Jews who become believers in the tribulation and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom throughout the world. The gospel of the kingdom is the good news that Jesus' kingdom is imminent. The term *gospel* literally means "good news." In this specific context, the "good news of the kingdom" differs from the gospel of God's grace. They are intertwined, however, so all who believe the gospel of the kingdom and open their hearts to Jesus, the Messiah, will be saved by grace through faith.

John the Baptist preached the gospel of the kingdom, but proclaimed Jesus as the Lamb of God, who would take away their sins and qualify them for kingdom citizenship. John urged those who heard him preach to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that entrance into the kingdom is limited to those who are born again (John 3:3, 5). He also said emphatically, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43). Once again, in the tribulation, the good news of the kingdom of God will be preached.

Revelation 7:5

ESV

12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

What does Revelation 7:5 mean? From the tribe of Judah, 12,000 are sealed. Judah is mentioned first, perhaps because Jesus came from this tribe. When Jacob blessed his sons, he said of Judah: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall

bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub...The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:8–10). Jesus is identified in Revelation 5:5 as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah," and "the root of David." He prevailed to take the scroll from God's right hand and to open the seals. At the end of the tribulation Jesus will devour His enemies like a lion and rule the nations from the throne of David. Isaiah 9:7 prophesies that Jesus, the virgin-born Messiah, will sit on the throne of David and govern with justice and righteousness.

From the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 are sealed. When Jacob blessed his son Reuben, he called him his firstborn, "preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power" (Genesis 49:3). However, Jacob also described Reuben as "unstable as water" and predicted that he would not have preeminence because he had defiled Jacob's bed (Genesis 49:4). As the firstborn, Reuben was entitled to a double portion of his father's inheritance and leadership, but he forfeited those privileges by committing adultery with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah (Genesis 35:22). This sad event happened after Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath.

When Joseph's brothers lifted him out of the pit where they had thrown him, they sold him to certain Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt. Reuben was not present when the brothers sold Joseph, but when he returned and learned what they had done, he was remorseful. So, Reuben was unstable emotionally. Judges 5:15–16 alludes to the tribe of Reuben's indecisiveness. But by God's grace the tribe of Reuben will serve God effectively in the tribulation.

The tribe of Gad is also identified as receiving God's seal. The number of those sealed is given as 12,000. Jacob predicted that Gad would be raided and in return would raid (Genesis 49:19). Gad was one of the tribes that settled east of the Jordan River, where raids were common. This tribe, the Reubenites, and the half tribe of Manasseh included 44,760 valiant warriors (1 Chronicles 5:18). In the tribulation period, the Gadites will triumph over persecution by faith in the Lord.

Revelation 7:6

ESV

12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

What does Revelation 7:7 mean? The tribes of Simeon, Levi, and Issachar are named in this verse as being sealed, 12,000 from each tribe. Both Simeon and Levi were violent men. In an act of rage, they slaughtered all the men of Shechem because the prince of the land, Shechem, had seized and raped their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). Their father Jacob rebuked them, but Simeon and Levi defended their actions (Genesis 34). When dying, Jacob referred to their violence. He recalled that in their anger they had killed men and hamstringed oxen. He cursed their anger and their wrath. He prophesied that they would be divided and scattered (Genesis 49:5–7). However, God extended His grace to both tribes. Levi became the priestly tribe, and both tribes appear as God's servants in Revelation 7.

According to Jacob, Issachar would occupy a pleasant land but would become "a servant at forced labor" (Genesis 49:14–15). When Israel settled in the Promised Land, Issachar took possession of the pleasant plain of Esdraelon but became vassals of invading armies. During the tribulation, they will be willing servants of the Lord.

Revelation 7:8

ESV

12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

What does Revelation 7:8 mean? This verse names the final three tribes that were sealed: the tribe of Zebulun, the tribe of Joseph, and the tribe of Benjamin. According to Jacob, Zebulun would profit from maritime trade (Genesis 49:13). Perhaps in the tribulation Zebulun will exert its influence along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Joseph is listed as a tribe, and so is his son Manasseh, but Joseph's other son Ephraim is omitted. In dividing the Promised Land, the tribe of Joseph was split into the tribe of Manasseh and the tribe of Ephraim. It seems the tribe of Ephraim became synonymous with that of Joseph (Numbers 1:32–33). When Jacob blessed his sons, he called Joseph "a fruitful bough" (Genesis 49:22). Perhaps he picked up this term from the fact that Joseph's son's name, Ephraim, means *fruitful*. Jacob lavished praise on Joseph and spoke of God's protection and blessing of Joseph. Joseph's survival at the hands of his envious brothers and his elevation from prison to Egypt's throne shows how perfectly God protected and blessed him (Genesis 37–50). God will protect and bless the tribe of Joseph in the tribulation, as well.

Jacob described Benjamin as "a ravenous wolf" (Genesis 49:27). The men of Benjamin were successful warriors but they were cruel. Saul, Israel's first king, was a Benjamite who tried repeatedly to kill David of the tribe of Judah. In the tribulation both tribes will serve God together as His evangelists.

Revelation 7:9

ESV

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

What does Revelation 7:9 mean? This verse fast forwards to the end of the tribulation. The 144,000 have faithfully evangelized the world and an innumerable number of Jews and Gentiles have trusted in Jesus. They represent every nation, tribe, people group, and language. This is a potent, poignant reminder that all people are precious to God, and no race, ethnicity, or background is exempt from His love (Galatians 3:28). The message of the gospel is inherently opposed to racism or ethnic hatred (1 John 4:20).

It is not clear whether this multitude is in heaven or on earth. Those who believe the multitude are in heaven note the reference to God's throne in heaven and the Lamb's presence there (Revelation 5:6). Also, John saw angels, the elders, and the four living creatures around the throne (Revelation 7:11).

Others believe the scene takes place on earth. The temple (Revelation 7:15), they say, refers to the temple that will stand in the millennium. Ezekiel prophesied about the millennial temple in Ezekiel 40—44. Wearing white robes and waving palm branches, it is clear the multitude is anticipating the restored Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles, in Jesus' earthly kingdom. The Feast of Booths was celebrated annually by the Jews. For a week they lived in booths to commemorate their temporary dwelling in the desert as they journeyed to their permanent destination in the Promised Land. The Feast also celebrated the autumn harvest. Zechariah 14:16 prophesies that the Feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated during the millennium.

Revelation 7:10**ESV**

and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

What does Revelation 7:10 mean? This verse focuses on the praise delivered by the multitude described in the previous verse. These believers have learned that only God, through His Son Jesus, can forgive sins and grant eternal life. Their acknowledgement that salvation is completely God's work apart from human efforts is similar to the praise Jonah offered just before God ordered the great fish to spit him out on land. Jonah cried out from the fish's belly, "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Jonah 2:9).

To provide for our salvation, God gave His Son Jesus, the Lamb, as our perfect substitute. Jesus took our penalty on the cross and freed us from sin's penalty and power. Romans 5:6 states: "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." It is significant that the multitude cried out to "God who sits on the throne" (Revelation 7:10), because God is a sovereign ruler. He could have chosen to let the multitude perish, but by an act of His will He chose to save those who believed on the Lamb and to rescue them from their persecutors.

Revelation 7:11**ESV**

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

What does Revelation 7:11 mean? This verse paints a picture of universal worship in heaven. In response to the multitude's declaration that salvation belongs to our sovereign God and the Lamb, all the angels around God's throne and around the elders and the four living creatures (Revelation 4:3–6; 5:9–10) prostrate themselves before God's throne and worship Him. An acknowledgement that God and the Lamb provide salvation to all who believe prompted this group in heaven to worship God.

Worship is the correct response to God's sovereignty and saving grace. When God led the wise men to the place where Jesus was, they fell down and worshiped Him (Matthew 2:11). When Jesus healed a blind man, the man

believed on Jesus and worshiped Him (John 9:38). Psalm 95:6 says: "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!" Psalm 99:5 commands: "Exalt the LORD our God; worship at his footstool! Holy is he!"

Revelation 7:12

ESV

saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

What does Revelation 7:12 mean? This verse tells us what the members of the heavenly throng said as they worshiped God. They said "Amen!" and ascribed to God "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and might ... forever and ever!" This praise ended with another "Amen," meaning "so be it."

This praise acknowledges God's attributes. He is the source of every blessing, and no one can be truly happy without knowing Him. He is glorious, as Isaiah observed when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and seated upon His throne (Isaiah 6:1). Also, God is all-wise. He deserves everyone's gratitude and homage. All power and strength belong to Him forever and ever. In Isaiah 40, God asks, "To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him?" (Isaiah 40:25). In answering His own question, God states, "The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength" (Isaiah 40:28–29). We need this high view of God because it reflects who He truly is.

Revelation 7:13

ESV

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

What does Revelation 7:13 mean? In this verse one of the elders in heaven asks the apostle John the identity of the innumerable multitude. The elder refers to their white robes and asks specifically where they came from. This is yet another scriptural example of a figure asking a question when they, in fact, already know the answer. The question is being asked for effect, or to prompt a response, not because the person speaking needs to be informed. It seems the elder who asks John about the white-robed tribulation believers wanted him to

focus on them as overcomers and thereby be encouraged to endure his trial of banishment to the island of Patmos.

John and many other believers were suffering persecution in the first century but the Lord assured them, through Paul, that they were more than conquerors through Christ, and not even death could separate them from God (Romans 8:37–39). Also, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul said that those who endure will reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12). John himself encouraged his readers that "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Revelation 7:14

ESV

I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

What does Revelation 7:15 mean? In this verse, an unnamed elder continues his discussion of the white-robed multitude seen by John in heaven. These were identified in verse 14 as those who had come out of the great tribulation. He speaks of the tribulation survivors' reward. They are positioned before God's throne and are privileged to serve Him continually.

Serving God is not a tiring or boring task for the tribulation survivors, and it should not be for us. We should serve Him with gladness (Psalm 100:2). The tribulation survivors serve God "day and night." This might suggest that the throne in this passage is in the millennial temple on earth, rather than in heaven, presuming that in heaven there is no day or night. It might also simply mean that they serve "constantly," and that God's light shines such that day and night are irrelevant in New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:25; 22:5).

God is said to "shelter them with his presence." He will spread His tabernacle over them as He did when the Hebrews journeyed through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. The tabernacle was the place God met with His people, and because it was portable, it went wherever the Hebrews went. Similarly, God's presence will be with the tribulation survivors at all times and wherever they go. Ezekiel prophesied about the millennial temple in Ezekiel 40–44.

Revelation 7:16**ESV**

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

What does Revelation 7:16 mean? During the tribulation, a powerful false prophet will arise in Israel (Revelation 13:11–12). He will honor the head of the Revived Roman Empire who is called "a beast" (Revelation 13:1). The false prophet will control the economic trade and will try to force everyone to worship the head of the new and controlling government. He causes everyone to receive the mark of the beast on the right hand and forehead. If a person refuses to worship the beast, he will be executed. Further, no one can buy or sell unless he has received the mark of the beast.

Obviously, tribulation believers will refuse the mark and they will not worship the beast. Consequently, many believers will be executed, and many will go hungry and thirsty. Further, many of God's judgments during the tribulation will include extreme environmental effects for all inhabitants of earth. Revelation 8:7 mentions hail and fire, mixed with blood, that burns up one third of the earth and one third of the vegetation. It will be extremely hard to survive such difficult days. Nevertheless, when these believers enter Messiah's kingdom, their hunger and thirst will end, and they will no longer experience sunburn or scorching heat.

Revelation 7:17**ESV**

For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

What does Revelation 8:1 mean? In this verse the apostle John tells us there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. He must have estimated the time from an earthly perspective because such delays have little meaning in an eternal heaven. The silence is significant. Just as silence pervades a courtroom when the judge is about to render a verdict in a criminal trial, so the occupants of heaven fall silent as they anticipate what the Judge of the universe is about to do.

John tells us the Lamb opened the seventh seal. As each previous seal was opened, a specific judgment struck the earth. As we will learn later, the opening

of the seventh seal includes all the horrific events described in Revelation 8:7—19:10. The trumpet and bowl judgments, that is, are themselves the result of the opening of the seventh seal. Seven trumpet judgments occur near the middle of the tribulation period, and seven bowl judgment occur in the second half of the tribulation. Each series of judgments intensifies the outpouring of God's wrath.

Psalm chapter 149

English Standard Version

1Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly! **2**Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! **3**Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre! **4**For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation. **5**Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds. **6**Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands, **7**to execute vengeance on the nations and punishments on the peoples, **8**to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, **9**to execute on them the judgment written! This is honor for all his godly ones. Praise the LORD!

1 John chapter 3

English Standard Version

1See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2**Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3**And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

Context Summary

First John 3:1–3 highlights the amazing love God has for us. Not only is He willing to call us His children, we actually *are* His children. Some of that transformation is immediate, but not everything we will be has been revealed, yet. Only when Christ returns will we see everything He has in store for us. John also connects a relationship with Christ to "pure" living.

1 John 3:1

ESV

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

What does 1 John 3:1 mean? Verses 1 through 3 focus on God's love, and how His love results in believers becoming children of God. Becoming a child of God is seen as a great sign of love from God the Father. John specifically mentions that believers are not only "called children of God;" believers truly are God's children. This theme closely connects with the words of John 1:12: "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." God's children are those who both receive Jesus as Lord and believe in His name as the risen Messiah.

John highlights this concept using the Greek term *ideate*, meaning, "look at this!" The idea that God would love us enough to make us His children is just one of the amazing aspects of the gospel.

John then notes why unbelievers do not "know" believers: Unbelievers do not know Christ. As used by John, the concept of "knowing" involves more than just information. It refers to a sense of intimacy, fellowship, and connection. The unbelieving world does not have a relationship with Christ. Therefore, they have no relationship with His children. God's children are to become increasingly like the Father, regardless of whether others recognize us.

1 John 3:2

ESV

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

What does 1 John 3:2 mean? John next refers to his readers as his "beloved," or dear ones. Being a child of God is not a future event for the believer; we are His children from the point when we believe into eternity future (John 1:12). In addition, our future has not yet completely been revealed. In eternity with the Lord, believers will experience a new body and exist forever in God's presence, in a way far superior to our lives today. Some of this is simply impossible for us

to understand; certain things will only be "revealed" to us once Christ appears to bring us home.

John anticipates this appearing will take place at any moment. Believers will see God "as He is" at that time and become like Him. John's words appear to closely connect with passages associated with the rapture, such as 1 Corinthians 15:50–58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Jesus will appear, believers will see Him, receive a new body, and be with the Lord forever.

It is critical to notice John's point that we are not yet what we *will be*. John's warnings about sin and fellowship, like the rest of Scripture, recognize that even saved believers will not be perfect. The expected result of salvation is a life that grows to become more and more like Christ—but this does not mean an immediate change to perfection. God loves us enough to forgive our sins (1 John 2:1–2), and to help us overcome them (1 John 2:14; 1 John 4:4).

1 John 3:3

ESV

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

What does 1 John 3:3 mean? Because believers have hope, and anticipate being with Jesus for eternity, they pursue a pure life. The goal of living a pure life is to be like Christ. He is pure, and believers seek to live like Him. This lays groundwork for comments John will make later in this chapter, depicting sin as incompatible with fellowship in Christ.

Purity is a strong theme in the New Testament. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus taught, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Paul sought to present believers as a "pure virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Believers are to "be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10). First Peter 3:2 speaks of the "pure conduct" a believer should pursue, which stands out to unbelievers. To be pure is to be free from sin, to live increasingly like Christ in a world filled with evil. Those who do can look forward to heaven rather than fear future judgment.

Matthew chapter 5

English Standard Version

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. **12** Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Context Summary

Matthew 5:1–12 contains the beautiful Beatitudes delivered by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount. The series of nine sentences describes an unlikely group of people as blessed: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those hungry for righteousness, and the merciful. All are blessed because of their part in the kingdom of heaven. This includes those persecuted for the sake of righteousness and on account of Jesus. Instead of despairing, they should rejoice for the great rewards they will receive in heaven. These are not prerequisites for salvation; instead, they are the natural expressions of saving faith in the life of those who know Christ.

Matthew 5:1

ESV

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

What does Matthew 5:1 mean? The previous chapter ended with a description of great crowds who came from far and wide to hear Jesus' teaching and witness His miracles. Now Matthew slows the action down. He focuses on one

specific day in Jesus' ministry, when He saw how large the crowds around Him were and wanted to teach them.

Matthew was a tax collector before He followed Jesus (Matthew 9:9). This would have required some education, including the ability to read, write, and handle record-keeping. Ancient writings, like the gospel of Matthew, were typically arranged by topic instead of in strict time order, so even though Matthew's conversion is *described* after the Sermon on the Mount, he might have begun to follow Jesus during His earlier ministry (Matthew 4:23–25). If he was there, scholars believe Matthew might have transcribed Jesus' words in this message. While some biblical records of Jesus' words may be paraphrased, this passage may well be an exact, word-for-word register of this sermon.

Jesus goes up "on a mountain" to teach the people. In the context of that region, this doesn't mean something like Mount Everest. Rather, these are what people in many other cultures would think of as steep hills. Galilee contains many such hills. Jesus likely wanted to get some elevation above the crowd so He could be heard by as many people as possible. Matthew does not describe the exact location of the sermon. Tradition points to a ridge of hills northwest of a town called Tabgha, which is near Capernaum with a view of the Sea of Galilee.

Jesus sat down to teach, which was the normal practice of rabbis. Matthew often describes Jesus as sitting down to teach in many different locations. The use of a sloped hill would have made this easier, by allowing people to see Him more easily.

Matthew writes that Jesus' "disciples" came to Him. In this context, the term refers to all of those who were there with a sincere interest in learning. He spoke to everyone who was following Him and open to His message.

Matthew 5:2

ESV

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

What does Matthew 5:2 mean? Matthew 5–7 contains the first of five long speeches from Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel. It is called the Sermon on the Mount, and it begins with what are known as the Beatitudes in verses 3–12. Luke 6:17–49 also presents a sermon from Jesus, containing much of the same content. As a former tax collector (Matthew 9:9), Matthew would have been fluent in both reading and writing and might have been there to record Jesus'

words verbatim. Writings such as the four Gospels were often topical, not time-ordered, so Matthew may have been present, even though his conversion is explicitly described later in this book. If he was not there, in person, he would have been able to compile the message through Jesus' later, repeated teachings.

Some scholars suggest Matthew and Luke are describing parts of the same sermon. It is likely that Jesus spoke many more words than those recorded in either version. It's possible the Matthew and Luke, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, emphasized different parts of the same, longer message.

However, Luke describes his version of the sermon as occurring "on a level place." A more likely possibility, then, is Matthew and Luke record two different speeches, delivered in different places. Jesus was a traveling preacher, and He may have preached the same content repeatedly as He came to different places. This is no different in speakers and preachers of the modern era. Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain would considerably overlap, because Jesus taught similar things in multiple presentations.

Matthew 5:3

ESV

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What does Matthew 5:3 mean? Matthew 5:3–12 contains what have come to be known as the Beatitudes. This title comes from the Latin word *beatus*, which means "blessed" or "happy." Each of the Beatitudes begins with a reference to those who are blessed, in connection to some behavior or attitude. The idea of being "blessed" in Jesus' sermon does not mean feeling happy, necessarily. Rather it means recognizing what is truly good in a person's life and why. It refers to those on the right track, who are following a godly pattern of thoughts and actions.

Jesus begins by saying that the poor in spirit are blessed. This is not a reference to money or finances. To be "poor in spirit" is the opposite of being self-confident or self-reliant, especially in any spiritual sense. The poor in spirit recognize they are incapable of providing for themselves by their own strength, goodness, or righteousness. They know themselves to be spiritually bankrupt of true goodness. They cannot hope to bargain or earn their way into the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus says, though, that they are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is theirs already. In other words, admission that one does not deserve a place in God's kingdom is a requirement for entrance into that kingdom. This is the opposite of assuming one has earned citizenship by his own merit.

Even as part of a sermon from Jesus, these words need to be understood in careful context. Jesus is not teaching, in this one single verse, every detail of the plan of salvation. As He continues to teach, Jesus will be clear—and the New Testament will emphasize—that nobody comes to the Father except through faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

A corresponding attitude to salvation is that of being poor in spirit. The kingdom of heaven will be populated by the humble and not the arrogant. In that way, the poor in spirit are blessed.

Matthew 5:4

ESV

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

What does Matthew 5:5 mean? Jesus continues to describe the Beatitudes: sayings about who is blessed and why, especially as it relates to the coming kingdom of heaven. Now Jesus declares those who are meek to be blessed because they will inherit the earth. The word meek does not mean "weak," though that's how many misinterpret it. The word is best understood as "gentleness," or a refusal to take control by brute force or manipulation. Meekness, from a Christian perspective, is about faith. It is about trusting God to win the battle in the end instead of going to extremes to win the battle on our own terms. The concept is often referred to as "strength under control," rather than "strength seeking control."

This is exactly backwards from the world's common understanding. Most believe the world to be controlled by those strong and ambitious enough to take what they want. The world belongs to the rich, the dominant, and the bold. Jesus flips that around. He declares that the true inheritors of the earth are the meek.

Once again, Jesus' meaning here is in connection to those who have faith in Him. If we belong to the Lord, and if the Lord becomes king of the earth, as the Messiah will, then all those who are His will inherit the earth with Him. "Meekness" is not a requirement for becoming a true Christian, but meekness is something which naturally comes from having a saving knowledge of Christ.

It should be said that true meekness takes courage; we must fight with ourselves to trust God's plan and His character. It's hard to be humble and patient when we cannot fully understand how good will win in the end.

Matthew 5:6

ESV

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

What does Matthew 5:7 mean? Jesus continues to identify those who are truly blessed. This list is commonly referred to as the Beatitudes. Jesus' claims are surprising from a worldly perspective. Instead of declaring that the rich, the beautiful, or the victorious in war are those who have been blessed, Jesus has described as blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and those who are meek. In every case, their blessing comes from the ultimate source of all blessing, which is God. Their status as "blessed" is based on God's response to these humble attitudes.

Now Jesus adds the merciful to those who should see themselves as blessed. Why? They, too, will receive mercy. Jesus is most likely referring to receiving mercy from God. Generally, it is the character of God to show mercy to the merciful (Psalm 18:25). The reverse should also be true but it's not always the case. Those who have received mercy from God ought to be merciful to others (Ephesians 4:32).

Again, Jesus likely has in mind the kingdom of heaven as He speaks. Those who are merciful now, He says, will receive mercy from the king of heaven when He takes the throne. His meaning is not that a person must be merciful *in order to be saved*, but that those who submit to God in salvation will naturally respond with an attitude of mercy towards others.

Matthew 5:8

ESV

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

What does Matthew 5:8 mean? Jesus adds another "blessed are" to His growing list of those who should rejoice in the way God sees them. Today, we

refer to this litany as the Beatitudes. Jesus now says that the "pure in heart" are blessed, for they will see God. This doesn't mean they'll be happy, but it does mean they should not feel hopeless.

Modern Christians might associate "purity" with a freedom from sexual sin or moral failure. Those who first heard Jesus' words may have connected "purity" to performing the law of Moses, or perfectly following the rules of the Jewish teachers. This would carry the sense of being completely free from sin.

However, Jesus focused much more on the hearts of His listeners, instead of their ability to maintain the rituals of the law. He preached against obeying the law in action only, rather than out of true love for God. "Purity," in its most clear and original meaning, refers to the idea of something being singular, unified, unmixed, or consistent. The pure in heart are focused from the inside out on *one single thing*. In this case, that thing is God.

Jesus promises here that, when the kingdom of heaven arrives, those who are pure in their devotion to God will see Him. This reveals a remarkable idea about God's kingdom. Most Jews would have learned at an early age that nobody can see God and live; He is too holy. Jesus, though, says that those who enter into the kingdom of heaven will see God.

Matthew 5:9

ESV

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

What does Matthew 5:10 mean? Jesus' list of people who are "blessed," which we know as the Beatitudes, continues to grow. The word used for "blessed" can sometimes mean "happy." However, in this context, mere feeling is not the point. In fact, some people Jesus mentioned may feel deep unhappiness due to their circumstances (Matthew 5:1–9). Despite hard situations, however, they are blessed: they are doing what is right and will experience eternal good in the kingdom of heaven.

Now Jesus says those persecuted for the sake of righteousness are blessed, and part of the kingdom of heaven. His early preaching ministry has focused entirely on this kingdom. Both Christ and John the Baptist have called the Jewish people to repent of sin, to be ready for the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 3:1–2; 4:17). John made it clear that nobody would be able to enter it simply because they were Jewish. Bearing fruit, being used by God for good, being

faithful to God in your choices: these have been described as the signs of those who would enter the kingdom Messiah would bring to earth.

The implication here is that those being persecuted have some choice in the matter. In other words, they did not choose to avoid doing what is right, in order to avoid being harassed or harmed. They made a conscious choice to honor God, and to be faithful to Him, despite persecution from those who are unrighteous.

Matthew 5:11

ESV

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

What does Matthew 5:11 mean? This is part of Jesus' explanation of the Beatitudes: a series of statements about those who are "blessed," as proven by certain attitudes or actions (Matthew 5:1–9). In the previous verse, Jesus mentioned those who endured persecution for the sake of righteousness (Matthew 5:10). Here, He adds details about what persecution might look like and what might cause it. For the first time, Jesus moves away from general statements, given to His largely Jewish audience, and focuses more narrowly on Himself, specifically, as the One they are following.

The central issue in true Christian "persecution" is, of course, Jesus Christ. Merely being harassed or treated unfairly isn't necessarily persecution—especially if it's in response to our own wrongdoing (1 Peter 4:15). What Jesus means is that one proof of being "blessed" is willingness to endure unfair treatment on account of faithfully following Him (1 Peter 4:12–14). Those in opposition to Jesus might insult His followers, abuse them, and falsely accuse them of doing terrible things.

At the time Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount, this hasn't yet happened to those who follow Him. However, this blessing serves as an early warning that such abuse is coming (John 16:1–4). In the following verse, Jesus will continue to explain why those who suffer for being connected to Him are blessed.

Matthew 5:12**ESV**

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

What does Matthew 5:12 mean? Jesus has declared that those treated badly on His account are "blessed" (Matthew 5:11). Abuses they could expect were insults, persecution, and false accusations about doing terrible things. The context of these attacks is when people are truly following the teachings of God — the world hates them specifically because they emulate Jesus (John 15:21).

Now Jesus explains why willingness to be connected to Him despite harsh treatment is a blessing. Those who do so will receive great rewards in heaven. Jesus does not hold this out as a consolation prize for a difficult life. He tells His disciples to rejoice and be glad about the opportunity to be treated awfully for His sake. The rewards waiting in heaven because of this honor (Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 4:12–13) makes the experience itself a victory worth celebrating.

While Jesus will later predict intense hatred levied against Christians (John 16:1–4), attacks on God's people are not new. God sent many prophets to Israel to deliver messages to the people. Many of those prophets were persecuted for representing God. Now many of Jesus' disciples will be persecuted for representing Him to the world, which will earn them great rewards in heaven, as well.

For the first time, Jesus mentions heaven as the destination of His followers instead of the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God). He also describes the blessing of those who are His as including more than just entry into the kingdom, but rewards in heaven.