

## **Dec 22/24 Leader's Guide**

### **Revelation 7 "Entering His Story"**

The story of Revelation is the story of a God who is bringing new creation, making all things new. Of necessity that involves the judgement of wrong, the removal of evil, the tearing down of the tyrannical powers that hold humanity in its grasp.

#### **Read Revelation 6: 12 – 7: 3**

As the sixth seal is opened releasing powers bent on removing everything that stands against God's good creation a question is asked – who can stand? What will remain when judgment has run its course?

1. What answer to this question is implied by the lack of response?

*That no one and nothing can stand, for sin and death has left its mark on all.*

*We often ask the question – How could a good God allow so much evil and suffering in the world. If God truly loved us, he should do something about this. What are we doing in that question? We are asking for God to come and judge, to wipe away wrong. But have we really thought through the implications of that?*

*We have this understanding that if God were to come and do away with everything that was wrong with the world he would come and deal with the people, the problems, the situations out there. But if God came and dealt with the problems and the people and the situations out there would our world be made new? No – because if God was going to come and put right all that was wrong, he would need to come and deal with me, and with you, because you and I are part of the problem with the world for sin and death has left its mark on its on.*

2. What is God's response to this question? How does this form a possible theodicy (the vindication of divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil)?

*The hosts of heaven are holding back judgement so that the servants of God may be sealed. In other words how can a good God allow evil to persist? Mercy, so that his life, the life of new creation may take shape in his people, sealing, saving, preserving them.*

#### **Read Revelation 7:4-8 and skim Genesis 49:1-28**

3. Compare the lists of tribes. How are they different? What do you make of these differences?

*They are not in the same order. Reuben was the first born and yet in this list Judah is giving prominence.*

*A whole tribe is missing – Dan. A grandchild is added – Manasseh.*

*Something has changed, shifted that changes what it means to be Israel, to be the people of God.*

*What has changed / shifted? The first name offers us a clue. Judah – a name already given prominence in the book. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the lamb slain upon the throne – Messiah Jesus reconstitutes what it is to be Israel, to be the people of God.*

4. In Hebrew culture numbers were used qualitatively rather than quantitatively, that is they were used to communicate the meaning or significance of something. What meaning do you think is being communicated in this passage?

*12 was a number that signified completeness. 1000 was a number for the Hebrews that was beyond numbering, multiplied by another complete number 12. 144000 a fully complete and incredible expansive number.*

*This goes beyond national Israel – but we are not quite sure how yet...*

### **Read Revelation 7: 9-17**

5. We now behold the mystery of a reconstituted Israel. What is being communicated by the details we are given in the vision?

*This is not just national Israel this is a complete number from every tongue and tribe and nation. All are welcomed in the very presence of God and will serve in his temple as a kingdom of priests – this stands against the institutionalized racism and sexism that was given spiritual significance in the temple in Jerusalem.*

*They are clothed in white; they have had their clothes washed in the blood of the lamb, cleansed from the impact of sin and death.*

*They hold in their hands palm branches, a symbol of victory.*

*This means there is no elongated cleaning up period after death – the victory of the lamb is fully effectual now!*

6. “These are those who are coming out of the great tribulation” In Greek the word for tribulation is the word *thlipsis* – the pressure – the crushing pressure that is at the intersection point of clashing kingdoms. This is what happens when the kingdom of Jesus clashes with kingdoms that are inconsistent with it. Can you give some examples both past and present where the Kingdom of Jesus clashes with the kingdoms of this world?

*Here are some of the examples that Tim gave in the sermon that might help direct the conversation:*

*This thlipsis – this clashing of kingdoms began the night Jesus was born – King Herod later heard of this one destined to be King of the Jews – enraged he had every child under two in the vicinity of Bethlehem murdered – thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms.*

*It carried on through the life death and resurrection of Jesus – the religious authorities - the Roman power brokers – saw him as threat – plotted his demise – thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms.*

*It continued as the spirit descended upon Jesus people in the upper room – they began to incorporate gentiles alongside Jews as the beloved people of God – sparking a murderous campaign led by a Pharisee named Saul later Paul – thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms.*

*It continued as the Jesus movement spread across the Roman empire – the Romans saw caring for the poor – the lame – the disenfranchised as weakness – let em die out - but the Christians generously and wholistically cared for all – the Romans practiced infanticide – leaving unwanted children out to die of exposure – mostly girls – leading to a social crisis of gender imbalance – the Christians took those infant girls into their homes to raise as their own – some now see Christian teaching on sex and marriage as repressive – but in Roman culture it was incredibly progressive – providing safe haven in particular for women – as a result of all of these things and more - the Christian movement was growing in leaps and bounds – Rome began to see it as a threat – sparking a persecution under the Roman Emperor Domition - that tribulation sits as the background for the book of revelation – Thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms*

*It continues to this day - where our culture says I decide for myself who I am - what is right and what is wrong – the Jesus follower says – no God defines who I am – created in his image to reflect his way – bringing life to the world around me – thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms.*

*It continues to this day – in the midst of a secular culture that says this life is all there is – and so I have to fill this life with as many beautiful things – experiences and pleasures as I possibly can – the Jesus follower says – no this life is not all there is – it is not a life to be lived for ones own sake – for that only ravages our planet – our communities – our very souls – the essence of happiness is not in accumulating for ones own sake – but in love pouring out for the sake of others – thlipsis – the clashing of kingdoms.*

7. What we need at the intersection point of the clashing of kingdoms is a vision, a sure hope of how it will all turn out. What do we learn about the kingdom of Jesus from this vision?

*We are given here a vision of the future kingdom of Jesus, made sure by the faithfulness of the one who gives it. The promise here is that the kingdom of Jesus will one day flood the earth – human creatures will be drawn into the presence – the presence of the one who loves us with an everlasting love – the one in whom all of our earthly desires find their ultimate fulfillment – a future where our world is not divided amongst the have's and have not's – where some live a life of leisure – while others work tirelessly in the scorching heat and still do not have enough to fill their bellies – a future is coming where justice will flow like a river as all are drawn into the*

*fullness of life that God intended – wiping away every pain – every sorrow – every disease - with the tenderness of the beloved wiping tears from our eyes*

8. Darrell Johnson calls this vision the most comforting of all the visions. Comforting both in the modern sense of giving us a state of well being, and comforting in the traditional sense – from the Latin com (with) and forte (strength) – comforting – fortifying us with strength for some courageous action. How does this vision comfort in both the modern and traditional sense?

*Take comfort – this is who you are in him - chosen – cleansed - loved - sealed – drawn into the family of God – given the Spirit - a deposit of a future inheritance – the foretaste of a glorious future*

*Take comfort – be fortified for courageous action – when you find yourself in Jesus at that point of thilpsis – the clashing of kingdoms – stand strong – press on – for it's not in vain – the future you yearn for - pray for – speak for - work for is sure – new creation will indeed flood the earth - the kingdom of Jesus will have the last word - hold onto that reality – God's reality - as you plunge back into the reality of your world*