

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

NOVEMBER 4TH, 2018 // BOOK OF REVELATION

In Revelation 7, John sees two groups- 144,000 from the tribes of Israel on earth, and a great multitude in heaven having come out of the "Great Tribulation".

144,000 SEALED (7:1-8)

John is in the midst of receiving a vision from God concerning the end of all things and God's judgment being poured out.

- Chapter 6 records "six seals" of God's judgment being poured out on the earth leading up to end of all things.
- And now the events of chapter 7 fall between the breaking of the 6th and 7th seals- this is an interlude of sorts.

John's vision continues from this heavenly vantage point as he sees four angels standing at the "four corners of the earth".

- Skeptics have tried to twist this poetic reference to say that the Bible teaches that the earth is flat- but this is a simply a phrase that describes all of the earth by listing the four primary points of a compass (north, south, east, & west).
- These angels held back "the four winds".

The four winds are personified as agents of God's judgment (Jer. 4:11-12).

- Someone in an arid, desert environment knows the destructive power of a sandstorm like someone in a tropical environment knows the destructive power of hurricane winds.
- These angels are "holding back" the winds of judgment on the earth.

John then records another angel ascending from the direction of the east ("from the rising of the sun") with "the seal of the living God".

- The 5th angel cried out to other four, "don't harm the earth...until we've sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads".
- This seal is intended to protect God's people from the destructive effects of judgment.

Ancient monarchs and officials often had engraved rings or cylinders that were pressed on clay or wax to authenticate and protect what was sealed.

- Here God's angel stamps God's seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God (later in Revelation those hostile to God also receive a "mark" on their heads).
- The seal is most likely symbolic.

Who receives this seal and is marked to be protected from God's judgment on the earth?

- "...144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel."- 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.
- Why this number? 144,000 is both mathematically precise (12x12,000) and an ideal number easily factorable into smaller numbers: twelve squared times ten cubed.

This is the only New Testament list of the twelve tribes of Israel.

- In the list, the tribe of Dan is absent and eleven sons and one grandson (Mannassah) (vs. 6) of Jacob are actually listed.
- This group is intended to represent a special remnant of God's people that will be preserved and protected on the earth during the time of tribulation and judgment.

THE IDENTITY OF THE 144,000 (TWO MAIN VIEWS)

1. A symbolic representation of the church ("the Israel of God", Gal. 6:16) who are preserved and protected from the last judgments on earth.
2. Actual ethnic Jewish believers representing all 12 tribes of Israel that are preserved and protected for an end times purpose.
 - The most obvious and straight forward reading of the text leads us to identify these individuals as "from every tribe of the sons of Israel" (ethnic Jews).
 - The term "Israel" must be interpreted in accordance with its normal biblical usage to mean literal, physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This passage seems to be a symbolic picture of the salvation of Israel that will happen in the last days.

- In Romans 9-11, the Apostle Paul addressed the issue of the unbelief of the Jewish people in light of the promises of God.
- Paul insists that God's promises towards Israel HAVEN'T been annulled and that God is not through with Israel.

The 144,000 most likely represent a "remnant" of Jewish believers who at the end times will represent God to the world and speak of Yeshua Hamashiach (Jesus the Messiah).

- They will receive special, divine protection during the time of tribulation and will fulfill Israel's mandate to be a "light to the nations" (Isa. 49).
- God is not through with Israel! All of God's promises are faithful and true.

A GREAT MULTITUDE (7:9-17)

After John saw the 144,000 on earth, he looks and sees a great multitude that "no one could number" in heaven.

- They stood before the throne and the Lamb in white robes and with palm branches- a sign of purity, joy, victory, and festivity.
- They were multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual (vs. 9) and they cried out as a people that have been redeemed (vs. 10).

Their song is not primarily one of gratitude for their own deliverance, but one of praise to God for the greatness of His salvation (vs. 10).

- The angels joined the redeemed in praise to God, speaking out in agreement, "Amen!".
- The obvious question (that John is probably wondering) gets asked to John by one of the elders- "Who are they, and where did they come from?"

Of course, John didn't know, so he politely replied, "Sir, you know".

- The elder answered the "where" part of his question first and tells him, "they have come out of the great tribulation" (vs. 14).
- The phrase, "have come" in the Greek is more correctly translated "are coming".
- This crowd had been arriving in heaven from earth for some time and were continuing to come.

These individuals are ones that were coming out of the "Great Tribulation"- the final time of suffering that Jesus predicted would happen before His return (Matt. 24:21-22).

- Revelation 8-16 describes this time of suffering in the unleashing of the trumpet and bowls of judgment.
- So how did will they "come out" of the Great Tribulation?

TWO VIEWPOINTS

1. A "pretribulation" rapture- believers in Christ at this time will be removed from earth to heaven ("raptured", 1 Thess. 4:16-17) before the tribulation.
 - The saints coming out of the Great Tribulation in chapter 7 are raptured.
2. A "posttribulation" rapture- believers in Christ at this time go through the suffering of the tribulation and then the church is "raptured", with the "rapture" and the "second coming" being the same event.
 - The saints coming out of the Great Tribulation in chapter 7 are martyred.

The elder also answers the question, "who" these people are.

- They're redeemed humans who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"-but how could washing something in blood make it white?
- This is a symbolic, supernatural washing that speaks of believers' sins being forgiven and guilt being removed.

This multitude of redeemed people are described as receiving ten eternal blessings.

- They're "before the throne of God" (vs. 15), they "serve Him day and night in His temple"- they worship and serve God with a redeemed, heavenly purpose.
- They're sheltered by the presence of Him seated on the throne (vs. 15)- "tabernacled", God's presence is with them always.

Never again will they hunger or thirst (vs. 16)- these redeemed experienced famine and pain on earth, but in God's presence in eternity it'll never happen again.

- "The sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat"-many believers through the centuries were burned at the stake, but it will never happen again.

"The Lamb...will be their shepherd"- in eternity Jesus will guide, lead, and care for His people with gentleness and love.

- "He will lead them to...water"- Christ sees it as His personal duty to lead His people to a place where their physical and spiritual thirst will be quenched eternally (Rev. 21:6).
- "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes..."- no more pain, mourning, or death.

Those "washed" in the "blood of the Lamb"...

- ...will enjoy eternity in the direct presence of God.
- ...will enjoy an end of all the negative effects of sin.
- ...will enjoy personal guidance, care, and love from Jesus as a friend and shepherd.

Expect Tribulation in this lifetime. Expect Victory. (John 16:33)

"When we understand the victory that is ours in Christ, our fear is exposed for what it is!"

F.E.A.R.- "FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL"

- For the believer, fear of anything but God is an illusion- "everything sad will become untrue".
- What if the fear that's keeping you from having peace, joy, strength and hope is simply an illusion blocking out the reality that in Christ your destiny is one of victory?