

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 14TH-15TH, 2024 // REVELATION

## 144,000 SEALED (REVELATION 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 six records "six seals" of God's judgment being poured out on the earth leading up to the end of all things.
- And now the events of chapter seven fall between the breaking of the sixth and seventh 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".

- These angels held back "the four winds" which are personified as agents of God's judgment (Jeremiah 4:11-12).
- Someone in an arid, desert environment knows the destructive power of a sandstorm (just like hurricane winds in tropical places).

These angels are "restraining" the winds of judgment on the earth (v. 1).

- 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" (v. 2, ESV).
- The fifth angel cried out to the other four, "don't harm the earth...until we seal the servants of our God on their foreheads" (v. 3).

## WHAT'S WITH THE SEAL?

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

- This seal is intended to protect God's people from the destructive effects of judgment.
- Here God's angel stamps God's seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.

The seal is most likely symbolic and represents allegiance to God and God's ownership.

- Later in Revelation those hostile to God also receive a "mark" on their heads (Revelation 13).
- The "marks" and "seals" of Revelation are fertile ground for conspiracy theorists to wildly speculate about current trends/events while completely missing the theological and spiritual meaning of these passages.

## 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 Israelites:" 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

- Why this number? 144,000 is both mathematically precise (12 x 12,000) 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 (Manasseh) (v. 6) of Jacob are actually listed.
- This group is intended to represent a special remnant of God's people who 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 who are preserved and protected for an end times purpose.

Many have identified this group as the Church.

- The most obvious and straightforward reading of the text leads us to identify these individuals as those "from every tribe of the Israelites" (a remnant of 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.

To many, 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.
- Romans 11:1-2a

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 divine protection during the time of tribulation and will fulfill Israel's mandate to be a "light for the nations" (Isaiah 49:6).
- God is not through with Israel! All of God's promises are faithful and true.
- Zechariah 8:23

God is determined to have every tribe of His ancient people, Israel, brought through these troubles and into His Kingdom.

- Somehow, ethnic Israel is going to play a huge role in God's purposes and plan for the end times.
- We must be discerning, wise, biblical, and prayerful in how we view the secular nation state of Israel. Antisemitism is incompatible with the Christian gospel!

## GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND PROTECTION.

We often think that protection, safety, and wellbeing are only ours if we're cautious and responsible.

- But God has a plan for our lives, and His mark of protection is what truly matters!
- We have a purpose in the story of God, and until God is finished with us, nothing can touch us.

## A GREAT MULTITUDE (REVELATION 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 (v. 9), and they cried out as a people who have

been redeemed (v. 10).

Some would say that the 144,000 and the great multitude are not two different peoples, but rather two different ways of describing the same purified bride who is sealed and supernaturally protected by God during this time of tribulation.

- Just as John was told about a Lion and turned to see a Lamb (Revelation 5:5-6), so he is told about the 144,000 and turns to see a great multitude.

According to this interpretive view, from one vantage point, the purified bride is numbered; from another, she is innumerable—a great multitude that no one can count.

- The most obvious and straightforward reading of Revelation 7 is that these are two distinct groups mentioned: 144,000 ethnic Jews (vs. 4-8) and a great multitude of people from all nations (vs. 9-17).

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

- The angels joined the redeemed in praise to God, speaking out in agreement, "Amen!" (v. 12).
- 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 told him they "have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 14, NIV).
- The phrase "have come" in the Greek is more correctly translated as "are coming."
- This crowd had been arriving in heaven from earth for some time and were continuing to come.

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

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

God's people emerge from the trials on earth and are ushered into the glories of heaven not by a painless, secret rapture, but by patiently enduring evil even to the point of death.

- This great multitude is a host of overcomers and conquerors who have faithfully finished the journey of their faith and have given their lives for Jesus by enduring suffering (v. 16).
- They held fast to their faith and gave all!

The elder tells John a bit more about "who" these people are (v. 14)

- They're a host of redeemed humanity 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 is described as enjoying and receiving ten eternal blessings.

- They're "before the throne of God" (v. 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 (tabernacled); God's presence is with them always (v. 15).

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

- "The sun will no longer strike them, nor will any scorching heat." Many Believers through the centuries were burned at the stake, but it will never happen again.

"The Lamb...will shepherd them." In eternity, Jesus will guide, lead, and care for His people with gentleness and love.

- "He will guide them to...waters of life." Christ sees it as His duty to lead His people to a place where their physical and spiritual thirst will be quenched eternally (Revelation 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 to all the negative effects of sin.
- ...will enjoy personal guidance, care, and love from Jesus as a friend and shepherd.
- Heaven will be a place of rest, blessing, reward, perfection, and unending fellowship with God and His people.

## 1) THE SAINTS OF GOD WHO WILL BE WITH HIM IN HEAVEN ARE NOT PERFECT, SINLESS PEOPLE, BUT FORGIVEN PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN WASHED CLEAN BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

- Have you let Him wash you?
- Are you continually going to Jesus to purify your heart and make you clean when you fall into the impurity of sin?

## 2) GOD HAS A PURPOSE AND PLAN FOR HIS SAINTS. IF YOU ARE HIS, YOU HAVE BEEN MARKED FOR A PURPOSE, AND YOU CAN TRUST HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE.

- God knows the number of each day of your life and has a special purpose for every one of them (Psalm 139:16).
- If you're His, God has sealed you for Himself (2 Corinthians 1:22) and He has work for you to do.

## 3) THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WILL BE FULL OF SUFFERING, TRIALS, AND DIFFICULTIES, BUT GOD'S REWARD FOR FAITHFULLY FINISHING WILL BE GREATER THAN THE PAIN.

- Patient endurance often means a long obedience to Jesus in the same, ordinary, everyday things even when we are not seeing immediate results.
- Patient endurance often means staying faithful to what we know is true despite temptation and trials.