

The Sealing of the 144,000
Revelation 7:1-8

INTRODUCTION

1. This morning we are returning to our study of the book of Revelation.
2. So if you will, please turn with me to Revelation chapter 7.
3. This morning we are looking at the first 8 verses.
4. Read Revelation 7:1-8.
5. Years ago when I lived in Tallahassee, Florida, I was visited at my door by a Jehovah's Witness who proceeded to tell me that she was one of the 144,000 witnesses who would inhabit the earth.
6. My question for her before I closed the door was simply "Which tribe because there are 12 listed?"
7. I said that simple grammar tells us in this passage that these 144,000 witnesses are Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel.
8. John tells us that 12000 from each tribe will be sealed and this sealing will occur before the Day of the Lord which is the opening of the 7th seal.
9. As we have already learned from our study in this wonderful book that John is given a series of visions.
10. Those visions begin in chapter 1:10 with the glorified Lord Jesus Christ who tells John to send 7 letters to 7 literal

churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

11. Following this vision of the churches, John is then given a vision of heaven.
12. From this point he begins to tell us further about the things he sees.
13. He sees:
 - a) A door open in heaven (4:1-2a)
 - b) A throne set in heaven (4:2b)
 - c) The One who sat on the throne (4:2c-3a)
 - d) A rainbow around the throne (4:3b)
 - e) Twenty-four thrones (4:4a)
 - f) Twenty-four elders on thrones (4:4b)
 - g) Lightnings, thunderings, and voices (4:5a)
 - h) Seven lamps of fire (4:5b)
 - i) A sea of glass (4:6a)
 - j) Four living creatures (4:6b-9)
 - k) Worship (4:9-11)
 - l) A seven sealed scroll (5:1-5)
 - m) A lamb (5:6-7)
 - n) Worship and singing (5:8-14)
 - o) The first six seals opened by the Lamb (6:1-17)
14. And now he tells us about the sealing of the 144,000 Jews on earth and the saints who are in heaven.
15. Today we are looking at the sealing of the 144,000 Jews.

I. How John Responds (4:1a)**II. What John Saw (4:1ff)**

- A. A Door Open in Heaven (4:1-2a)
- B. A Throne Set in Heaven (4:2b)
- C. The One who Sat on the Throne (4:2c-3a)
- D. A Rainbow Around the Throne (4:3b)
- E. Twenty-Four Thrones (4:4a)
- F. Twenty-Four Elders on Thrones (4:4b)
- G. Lightnings, Thunderings, and Voices (4:5a)
- H. Seven Lamps of Fire (4:5b)
- I. A Sea of Glass (4:6a)
- J. Four Living Creatures (4:6b-9)
- K. Worship (4:9-11)
- L. A Seven Sealed Scroll (5:1-5)
- M. A Lamb (5:6-7)
- N. Worship and Singing (5:8-14)
- O. The First Six Seals Opened by the Lamb (6:1-17)
- P. The Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

“After these things” or “After this” introduces a new vision as it does throughout the book of Revelation (4:1; 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1).

The use of eidon signifies that the vision of the 6th seal has ended and John is about to see a new vision.

This may also “indicate that this new vision depicts events that come after the sixth seal chronologically” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.215).

1. John says as this vision unfolded he first saw “four angels” (vv.1-3)
 - a) This is not the first time John sees any angels. In fact angels are mentioned 291 times in this

book alone.

b) Angels are frequently associated in Scripture with God's judgment

(1) In chapter 8:2 he mentions seeing "seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them."

These seven angels are about to sound the trumpets of the Day of the Lord's wrath on the world.

In the Old Testament we see many occasions where they are associated with God's judgment. One place in particular is 2 Samuel chapter 24.

(2) In 2 Samuel 24, after David sinned in numbering the people, the Lord "sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men of the people from Dan to Beersheba died" (v.15). In verse 16 it says "When the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord relented from the calamity and said to the angel who destroyed the people, 'it is enough! Now relax your hand!'" (NASB).

Their association with God's judgment is also seen in the New Testament where Jesus tells us what place they will have in the end of the age.

- (3) In Matthew 13:41-42 Jesus said that at the end of the age He will “send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and the gnashing of teeth.”
- (4) In the same chapter Jesus gives the parable of the dragnet and He says in verse 47:

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat.13:47-50).

Notice what John says about these four angels:

- c) These four angels are given power over the elements of nature
 - (1) We can compare them to chapter 14:18 where an angel had “power over fire.”
 - (2) We can also compare them to the third angel in 16:5 who “poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and

they became blood.” He is referred to “the angel of the waters.”

- (3) These four angels are seen “standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth” or as the NASB reads “holding back the four winds of the earth.”

The language that John uses in this verse is similar to that of Matthew 24:31 where Jesus tells us that He will “send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

- (a) What does John mean when says “the four corners of the earth” and “the four winds?”

Some unsophisticated skeptics imagine that John’s poetic reference to the “four corners of the earth” reflects a primitive notion that the world is flat and square.

But the phrase actually refers to the whole earth by designating the four primary points on the compass (north, south, east, and west) from which directions “the four winds of the earth” originate.

Dr. Henry Morris says, “This verse

has long been derided as reflecting a naive "prescientific" concept of earth structure, one that supposedly viewed the earth as flat with four corners. ... In terms of modern technology, it is essentially equivalent to what a mariner or geologist would call the four quadrants of the compass, or the four directions. This is evident also from the mention of the "four winds" which, in common usage, would of course be the north, west, south, and east winds.

Parenthetically, accurate modern geodetic measurements in recent years have proved that the earth actually does have four "corners." These are protuberances standing out from the basic "geoid," that is, the basic spherical shape of the earth. The earth is not really a perfect sphere, but is slightly flattened at the poles. Its equatorial bulge is presumably caused by the earth's axial rotation, and its four "corners" protrude from that. (The Revelation Record [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1983], 126)

(b) The "four winds" are often associated in Scripture with God's judgment

(1) The Lord said Jer.49:36 to

Elam: “Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the foremost of their might. Against Elam I will bring the four winds from the four quarters of heaven, and scatter them toward all those winds; there shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go.”

- (2) In Daniels vision of the four beasts he said that he “saw in [his] vision bynight, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea” (Dan.7:2).
- (3) Against Ephraim, God said in Hosea 13:15 that “Though he is fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come; the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness. Then his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up. He shall plunder the treasury of every desirable prize.”

What is John telling us in this first verse in Revelation 7?

He is saying for the duration of the interlude described in chapter 7 judgment will be held back as the angels turn off the essential engine of earth’s

atmosphere.

“There will be no wind, no breeze, no waves breaking on the shore, no movement of clouds in the sky; everything will be deathly still” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.216).

Henry Morris says the “circulation of the atmosphere is a mighty engine, driven by energy from the sun and from the earth's rotation. The tremendous powers involved in this operation become especially obvious when they are displayed in the form of great hurricanes and blizzards and tornadoes. These winds of the earth make life possible on earth through the hydrologic cycle, transporting waters inland from the ocean with which to water the earth. Yet the angels-only four of them-had turned off this gigantic engine” (Morris, *The Revelation Record*, 126).

He says that these 4 angels are “holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree” (7:1).

The phrase “holding back” is from *krateo*, which is a strong word that suggests that the winds are struggling to break free from their restraint.

The angelic restraining of the wind also symbolizes the withholding of the plagues associated with the imminent trumpet judgments (8:5ff)” (MacArthur).

So everything is being held back before the opening of the 7th seal.

2. John says in verses 2 & 3 that he “saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’”

The reason for the temporary restraining of God’s judgment becomes clear as John see “another angel” in addition to the four holding back the winds.

- a) The angel’s identity in verse 2 is also unknown

“Some have identified this angel as Jesus Christ, but that is unlikely because allos (another) means another in numerical sequence, another of the same kind as the first four angels. Though Christ appeared in the OT as the Angel of the Lord, He is not in essence of nature an angel. In addition, by using the plural pronoun ‘we’ in verse 3 the fifth angel identifies with the first four in the work of sealing God’s servants” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.217).

- b) This fifth angel is said to have ascended “from the east” (NKJV) or “from the rising of the sun” (NASB)

“From John’s perspective on the isle of Patmos, the east would be toward the land of Israel” (MacArthur), “possibly from Jerusalem or Zion” (Alan Johnson, Revelation, The

Expositor's Bible Commentary).

“It is appropriate that the angel who seals the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel should come from the direction of Palestine” (Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p.167).

- c) This angel had with him “the seal of the living God.”

The sphragis (seal) “often referred to a signet ring. Kings and other officials would use such rings to stamp into wax on documents and other items, thereby affirming their authenticity and guaranteeing their security” (MacArthur).

- (1) Mat.27:62-66 reveals that the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate asking that he would make the tomb of Jesus “secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away...Pilate said to them, ‘You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard.”

The NASB reads verse 66 this way:
 “And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone.”

- (2) When Daniel was thrown into the den of lions it says in Daniel 6:17 that “a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the

den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.”

- (3) A seal not only guaranteed authenticity and security but it also denoted ownership and protection
- (a) In John 6 after Jesus fed the 5000 he went to Capernaum and when the people found him they said “Rabbi, when did you come here?” Jesus answered them and said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father Has set His seal on Him” (vv.26-27).
- (b) In 2 Cor.1:21-22 we hear these words about God’s ownership of all believers:
- “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”
- (c) Eph.1:13 says, “In Him you also

trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”

Warren Wiersbe says, “In Scripture, a seal indicates ownership and protection. Today, God’s people are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph.1:13-14). This is God’s guarantee that we are saved and safe, and that He will one day take us to heaven. The 144,000 Jews will receive the Father’s name as their seal (Rev.14:1), in contrast to the ‘mark of the beast’ that Antichrist will give those who follow him (13:17; 14:11; 16:2; 19:20). This seal will protect these chosen Jews from the judgments that will ‘hurt the earth and the sea’ (7:2), and occur when the first four angels blow their trumpets (ch.8)” (Be Victorious, p.69).

- (4) Notice also the contrast of the seals of the petty earthly rulers to that of God. It says that the seal borne by the angel was that of the “living God”

The Bible frequently identifies God as the living God to distinguish Him from the dead idols worshiped by unbelievers

- (a) Rev.4:9-10 “who lives forever”
- (b) Rev.10:6 uses the same phrase referring to God “who lives forever”

“In the Old Testament, God marked Israel with blood on their doorposts and lintels to spare them when He killed Egypt's firstborn. He marked Rahab with a scarlet cord to keep her and those with her from being killed. But the illustration that most nearly parallels the present passage comes from Ezekiel 9:3-6:

Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case. The Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark."

Those with God's mark on them would be spared in the coming destruction of Jerusalem. Similarly, these servants of God whom the angel will mark with God's seal will be protected from and preserved through the judgments yet to come (cf. 9:4).

- d) Urgently, authoritatively, the fifth angel cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the

bond-servants of our God on their foreheads” (v.3).

The harm or damaging devastation that will come to the earth, the sea, and the trees will occur when the four angels suddenly release the judgment (symbolized by the winds) they have been restraining. But that judgment (and the trumpet and bowl judgments to follow) had to wait until the angels had sealed the bond-servants of God on their foreheads” (John MacArthur, Revelation 1-11, p.218).

Revelation 14:1-5 describes the character and devotion of the 144,000 as being the most faithful, loyal, diligent, holy servants of God during these dark days.

3. John says in verse 4 that he “heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed.”
 - a) Some has interpreted the 144,000 as the church but there is no support for such an identification nor is there a “clear-cut example of the church being called ‘Israel’ exists in the NT or in ancient church writings until A.D. 60...This fact is crippling to any attempt to identify Israel as the church in Rev.7:4” (Robert L. Thomas, Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary, p.476).
 - b) The term “Israel” must be interpreted in accordance with its normal Old and New Testament usage as a reference to the physical

descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nor is there any exegetical reason not to interpret the numbers 144,000 and 12,000 literally.

- c) That there were 12,000 sealed “of all the tribes of the children of Israel” speaks of God’s elective purpose.

“Mere random human choice would not come up with such an even division” (MacArthur).

“While the tribal records were lost when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in A.D. 70, God know who belongs to each tribe” (MacArthur).

“Even the fact that ten of the tribes were taken by the Assyrians and ‘lost’ is no problem to God” (Wierbse, p.70).

The specific tribal names in this list raise some interesting questions.

First, however, it should be noted that there is no standard way of listing the twelve tribes.

There are at least 19 different ways of listing them in the OT, none of which agree with the list given here.

Robert Thomas says, “In the Old Testament lists, sometimes the order of birth is followed (Gen. 29:32-35:18). At other times, it is the order of Jacob's blessing them (Gen. 49:3-27), the order of encampment (Num. 2:3-31), the order of the census before the invasion of

Canaan (Num. 26:4-51), the order of blessing and cursing (Deut. 27:12-13), the order of Moses' blessing (Deut. 33:6-25), the order of "the princes" (Num. 1:5-15), the order of inheritance (Josh. 13:7-22:34), the order by the wives and concubines (1 Chron. 2:1-8:40), and the order of the gates of the city (Ezek. 48:31-34)" (Thomas, Revelation 1-7, 479).

Warren Wiersbe says, "This is not to say that our literal interpretation of this passage is not without problems. Why is Levi included when it had no inheritance with the other tribes? (Num.18:20-24; Jos.13:14). Why is Joseph named but not his son Ephraim, who is usually connected with his brother Manasseh? Finally, why is the tribe of Dan omitted here and yet included in Ezekiel's list for the apportionment of the land? (Ezek.48:1). Many suggestions have been made, but we do not know the answers" (p.70).

John MacArthur says, "This critical passage reinforces the biblical truth that God is not through with the nation of Israel (cf. Rom.9-11). Though Israel failed in his mission to be a witness nation in the Old Testament, that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish people will come the greatest missionary force the world has ever known. The result of their effort will be a redeemed Israel, as promised by God, and innumerable redeemed Gentiles" (Revelation 1-11, p.220).

CONCLUSION

1. Judgment is coming!!!
2. The only way to avoid it is to repent right now and commit your life to Jesus Christ.
3. Let's pray.