

THE 144,000

Revelation 7:1-17

OVERVIEW

We are in the third division of the book of Revelation - *those (things) that are to take place after this* (1:19). Chapters 6-18 reveal the events of the seven year Tribulation. The Tribulation will begin with the signing of the seven year covenant between Antichrist and Israel (Dan. 9:27).

Chapter six reveals the first of three series of judgments that take place during the Tribulation. Some scholars believe the Seven Seal Judgments will take place in the first quarter of the seven year Tribulation, that is, during the first 21 months of the Tribulation (see Chart on page 5). The first four seal judgments follow one another in a cause and effect relationship: the Antichrist sets out to conquer the world, war breaks out resulting in famine and mass death from starvation, disease and wild animals (6:1-8). The fifth seal judgment reveals that all during the first half of the Tribulation persecution and martyrdom will break out against followers of Jesus (6:9-11). With the sixth seal judgment, God will shake heaven and earth producing catastrophic destruction (6:12-17). The seventh seal judgment reveals a half hour of silence in heaven and preparation of the next series of judgments called the Trumpet Judgments (8:1-2).

Notice in your Bible that the seventh seal judgment (8:1-2) is separated from the sixth seal judgment (6:12-17) by chapter 7. Chapter 7 is a parentheses, an interlude in the flow of action for the purpose of explaining something mentioned in chapter six.

Let's begin by reviewing the sixth Seal Judgment paying particular attention to the closing statement of verse 17.

Revelation 6:12–17 (ESV)

¹² *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,* ¹³ *and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.* ¹⁴ *The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.* ¹⁵ *Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,* ¹⁶ *calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,* ¹⁷ *for the great day of their wrath has come, and **who can stand?**"*

From the severity of the Seal Judgments, and the sixth seal in particular, it would appear that no human could or would be saved from the wrath of God. But, as the fifth seal reveals, men, women and children will be saved during the Tribulation and, as revealed in 7:9, will "stand" before the throne and the Lamb.

Revelation chapter 7 explains how it is that people will be saved during the first half of the Tribulation.

God will seal 144,000 Jewish evangelists to evangelize the entire world during the first half of the Tribulation!

THE SERVANTS OF GOD WILL BE SEALED BEFORE THE SEAL JUDGMENTS COMMENCE (7:1-3)

Revelation 7:1–3 (ESV)

¹ *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.* 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."*

It is significant to observe that verse one begins with *after this* (meta touto) and not *after these things* (meta tauta; example 4:1). Unfortunately the ESV fails to make the distinction, but it is important. *After this* indicates a break in chronology whereas *after these things* indicates a sequence of events that follow in chronological order. Verse one introduces a break in the flow of chronological events; what follows is a parentheses in the action.

John was shown four angels standing at the *four corners* of the earth referring to the four directions of the compass. They are commanded by another angel to suspend their judgments temporarily until the servants of God are sealed. This may convey the idea that before the Seven Seal Judgments commence, the sealing of the servants of God will be accomplished.

Revelation 14:1 indicates that the seal will be the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on their foreheads. The purpose of this seal is service and protection. They are sealed for protection so that they cannot be hurt either by the judgments poured out by God or by the persecutions against believers. They are also sealed for service, for they are the ones who will proclaim the message of the gospel in the Tribulation.

The identity of these servants is very clear; 144,000 Jews will be sealed as servants of God at the beginning of the Tribulation. Stated another way: following the Rapture, these 144,000 Jews will come to faith in Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. At the beginning of the Tribulation, they will be sealed for protection and for their service. The 144,000 sealed servants are clearly Jews, what we would call "Messianic Jews". They are not the Church. They are not the chosen few of Jehovah's Witness teaching. They are 144,000 post-Rapture, Messianic Jewish evangelists through whom God will accomplish one of the main purposes of the Tribulation: the salvation of a myriad of Tribulation saints.

That these sealed servants of God are Jews is made clear in verses 4-8.

144,000 JEWS WILL BE SEALED AS THE SERVANTS / EVANGELISTS OF GOD (7:4-8)

Revelation 7:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ *And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵ 12,000 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.*

Two unique features of this list are that the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are omitted. We need to understand that there were actually thirteen tribes of Israel. Jacob had twelve sons, but Jacob's son, Joseph had two sons who became two tribes: Ephraim and Manassah. Here, Manassah is mentioned and Joseph is substituted for Ephraim. Dan was probably omitted to maintain the symmetry of twelve. The tribe of Dan is included in the Millennial Kingdom (Ezekiel 48:1, 32).

That the service of the 144,000 is evangelism is verified in verses 9-17.

MYRIADS WILL BE SAVED THROUGH THE EVANGELISM OF THE 144,000 DURING FIRST HALF OF TRIBULATION (7:9-17)

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."*

¹³ *Then 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.*

¹⁶ *They 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.”*

The fifth Seal Judgment reveals that persecution and martyrdom will break out against followers of Jesus early in the Tribulation. These described in chapter 7:9-17 are those martyrs written of in 6:9-11. Chapter seven explains the means by which people will come to faith in Jesus as Savior during the first half of the Tribulation: it will be by the means of the gospel preaching of the 144,000 Messianic Jews sealed and sent by God throughout the world. Through their preaching people of every tribe, tongue and nation will come to faith and be saved.

JESUS' PROPHECY OF A WORLDWIDE EVANGELISM CAMPAIGN DURING TRIBULATION WILL BE FULFILLED BY THE 144,000 (MATTHEW 24:9-14)

This will fulfill that which Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:9-14 concerning a worldwide evangelistic campaign during the Tribulation.

Matthew 24:9–14 (ESV)

⁹ *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ **And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world** as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

REFLECTION

The sealing and sending of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists is yet another manifestation of God’s mercy and love for sinners.

The Apostle Paul refers to God as our Savior

1 Timothy 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ *who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

It is only because God loves us that any of us have been saved. Jesus made it very clear that none of us would come to Him unless the Father drew us.

John 6:44 (ESV)

⁴⁴ *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.*

Since the Fall, it has always been us who move away from God, not the other way around. Think about it, even after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, everyone at that time in our history knew God – even Cain. But what happened? We rebelled against God and followed Satan until our race was so depraved God washed us off the face of the earth. How many people got off the Ark? Eight. What percentage of the human race at that time knew God exists? 100%. But in a fairly brief span of time what happened? The people rebelled and built the Tower of Babel.

We always move away from God.

But God pursues us.

If you are hearing this message and have not put your faith in Jesus for salvation, God is pursuing you right now. It is no accident that you are hearing this message that God loves you and gave Jesus to die on the cross to pay the penalty of all your sins, be buried and rise again on the third day to give you eternal life. There are people around the world who go through their entire lives never hearing this message of God’s love. But you are hearing it today and I want to encourage you to accept God’s gift of forgiveness today. Put all your faith in what Jesus did for you on the cross and in His resurrection. You will be forgiven all your sin, past, present and future and God’s Spirit will come to live in your life and begin to change you to be like Jesus. Trust in Jesus today!

I was prepared to talk to those of us who are trusting in Christ about different ways to witness to our unsaved family and friends. But the truth of the matter is that if we have a heart for the lost, we have or will discover ways to share the gospel with our unsaved friends and family.

I think the more fundamental issue we need to explore is our attitude toward the lost.

If we are abiding in Christ and walking in the Spirit it is inevitable that our concern for the lost will increase; as we are conformed to Christ His perspective on the lost will increasingly become our perspective on the lost.

If we find that we have little concern for the unsaved, it may indicate that we not abiding in Christ or that there is some kind of spiritual breakthrough that needs to set us free from fear or bitterness or self-righteousness or whatever is causing our disinterest in the salvation of the lost. If we have little interest or concern for the lost, we are not in step with Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

I am not talking about your evangelistic style or methodology; those with the spiritual gift of evangelism generally are going to be bolder in their presentation of the gospel than those of us who do not have the spiritual gift of evangelism.

What I'm talking about is our attitude.

I'm not trying to make us feel guilty. I want to encourage healthy, honest self evaluation. If we discover that we really don't have much concern for the lost let's not deny it or ignore it. Better, let's ask the Spirit to work in us to change us and give us a heart for the lost. We can pray this prayer knowing that we are praying according to the Father's will. He "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" will give us that same heart if we ask for it.

Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. *The Footsteps of the Messiah : a Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. Rev. ed. Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003.

