

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

The future, as revealed by God in the book of Revelation, will include an intense period of time in which the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, releases His just judgment on this world. These judgments unfold sequentially throughout Revelation, but there are pauses along the way to interject additional truths about the future. These interludes describe events that run throughout a portion of the series of judgments or throughout the entire period of judgment on the earth. Revelation 7:1-8 presents the first of these interludes. It reveals that during the time of intense divine judgment on the earth God will still protect His chosen people, the Jews. In fact, God will raise up 144,000 Jews who will have a global influence for the gospel of Jesus Christ. This interlude reminds us that God protects His people as He fulfills His purpose for this world.

We can count on God to preserve and protect His servants (7:1-3).

In the midst of future judgment God will preserve and protect His chosen servants. Since God will do this in the future, we can trust Him to preserve and protect His people today.

Four angels stood at the four corners of the earth restraining the four winds (7:1).

Having observed the first six seal judgments John, the author of Revelation, saw something new. The phrase “after this” may refer to the future sequence of events—the sealing of God’s servants will take place after the sixth seal judgment. However, the phrase may simply refer to the sequence in which John received these revelations and the sealing of God’s servants may have taken place prior to the release of the seal judgments. In either case, God will preserve a select group of His people in that future day.

John saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth holding the four winds of the earth. Rather than forcing this verse to fit a theory of a flat earth the four corners of the earth readily refer to the four compass points. To talk about the four winds of the earth, therefore, is to describe destructive natural forces that emanate from every direction wielding universal impact (compare Jeremiah 49:36; Daniel 7:2; Mark 13:27). Four powerful angels restrain these destructive natural forces, preventing the winds from blowing on the earth, the sea, and the trees, each of which would suffer devastation by such hurricane force winds. In fact, the first two trumpet judgments will include extensive destruction of these same three targets—the earth, the trees, and the sea (Revelation 8:7-9). But prior to these destructive judgments God will seal a select group of His servants.

Another angel from the east and bearing the seal of God came on the scene (7:2a).

While the four angels held back the four winds, John saw another angel coming up from the east, from “the rising of the sun.” This eastward orientation may imply a new hope just as the rising of the sun offers a new day. This fifth angel did indeed possess a hopeful sign, the seal of the living God. The fact that God is described as living speaks of His power to give, sustain, and preserve life. The seal was in ancient times the mark of authority, identity, preservation, and

protection. The scroll of judgment had seven seals that could be opened only by the One who possessed the proper authority, the Lamb of God (Revelation 5:5-6). The fifth angel possessed divine authority to place a seal on the people of God, to identify them as God's own specially chosen people.

The fifth angel instructed the other four angels not release their destructive forces until the servants of God received a seal on their foreheads (7:2b-3).

The fifth angel cried out with a loud voice to the four angels who held back the four winds. These four angels had been given the task of inflicting great damage to the earth and the sea. But first they were ordered not to hurt the earth, the sea, and the trees until the fifth angel could complete his own designated task of sealing God's servants. The fifth angel used the plural pronoun "we" to describe his task, possibly including the first four angels or possibly referring to others who would assist in this work. This angel was to seal the servants of God on their foreheads. Ezekiel 9:4 describes that prophet's vision of placing a mark on the foreheads of God's faithful people in the face of impending judgment. In a similar way God's faithful people during the time of future intensive judgment on the earth will receive a seal on their foreheads. This seal may be merely a spiritual mark of divine ownership but may in fact be a physical, visible mark for others to see.

Today God's people possess a spiritual mark, a seal—the indwelling Holy Spirit. Second Corinthians 1:21-22 describes this seal as a mark of divine ownership and a deposit that guarantees our future security. Ephesians 1:13-14 states that this seal of ownership and promise, the Holy Spirit, was granted to us at the moment of salvation. Ephesians 4:30 likewise indicates that this seal, the Holy Spirit, preserves us until that future day of redemption. The servants of God who will receive the seal of God in the future period of judgment will likely enjoy the same presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. God will preserve and protect them during that time of judgment.

**We can count on God to fulfill His
purpose and plan for His chosen people (7:4-8).**

Up to this point in this interlude John has described those who will be sealed simply as "servants" or "bond slaves." Now we learn that these future, sealed servants of God will in fact be Jewish believers, representatives from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Those who received a seal on their foreheads totaled 144,000 servants from all the tribes of Israel (7:4).

"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000." Those who will receive the special seal of God's authority and protection in that future period of judgment will be a limited number of Jewish believers, 144,000 to be precise. The number 144,000 raises interpretive questions. Is this number symbolic or an actual number of sealed servants of God? Actually, there's no reason that it can't be both. It's best to interpret the Bible literally unless there's an indication in the text to move into a figurative interpretation. Here the number 144,000 can easily be taken literally, especially given the fact that the number is broken down

into twelve units of 12,000 in the following verses. Nevertheless, the number 144,000 carries symbolic significance. This number incorporates the twelve tribes of Israel, the number twelve sometimes being identified as a symbol for fullness or completion (compare the twelve disciples of Jesus). These twelve tribes each have twelve thousand representatives, completion intensified by the number 1,000. However, there is no reason to doubt that this number is real. There will be 144,000 specially sealed servants of God in that future day of judgment, just the right number to accomplish God's purpose. Apparently these special servants will survive the period of judgment, fulfilling a special mission for God. Revelation 14:1-5 describes these 144,000 servants as having a special relationship to the Lamb as well as a special sense of calling to His work. We might rightly conceive of these 144,000 Jewish believers as Spirit-empowered missionaries who stand out with the gospel message in the midst of that future, severe season of tribulation on the earth. One can only imagine the spiritual impact of such an army of passionate missionaries!

The 144,000 sealed servants consisted of 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (7:5-8).

The 144,000 sealed servants of God will come from "all the tribes of Israel" (verse 4). Verses 5-8 specify the twelve tribes. Because of this specificity it makes sense to identify these sealed servants as ethnic Jews rather than spiritualizing the text to refer to the church. It's worth noting that this list of the twelve tribes of Israel includes the tribe of Levi which was often omitted in the Old Testament lists because it was the priestly tribe and received no land inheritance. Their task in the future won't be limited by geographic space, so it makes sense to include them in this list. Also noteworthy is the fact that Joseph is included as a tribe instead of his son Ephraim, but since Joseph's other son Manasseh is included it seems that mentioning Joseph takes Ephraim into account. The one tribe of Israel that's truly omitted is Dan, probably because that tribe was the first to pursue idolatry. There will certainly be members of the tribe of Dan among the redeemed Jewish people in the future but none will be included among the specially sealed servants of God, the 144,000 Jews.

Since ancient times God has had a plan for the Jews, His chosen people. Genesis 12:1-3 records God's unconditional promise to Abraham to bless all people on earth through him and his descendants. Romans 11:26 looks ahead to a day in which "all Israel will be saved." God has not abandoned His chosen people and will, in fact, draw many to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ in a wave of revival. The 144,000 sealed servants will doubtless be instrumental in leading many other Jews as well as Gentiles to faith in Jesus. God keeps His promises and He fulfills His purposes. He will do so in the future, and He is doing so now within the church. This passage reminds us that God protects His people as He fulfills His purpose for this world.