

Then I Heard the Number of Those Who Were Sealed, 144,000 from all the Tribes of Isra'el

7: 1-8

DIG: What will the four angels do? Why are they doing it? Why will the 144,000 need to be sealed? When will this happen? What message will they preach? What will be the result?

REFLECT: How have you sensed God's protection in the last several months? What sort of seal has the Lord placed on your life? How is this seal evident to others?

Chapter 7 forms a parenthetical section between the sixth and seventh seals to answer the question of **who can stand** in the face of the wrath of **Ha'Shem**. We see two groups who will be protected by **God**. The first group is the **144,000 Jews** who will preach the Gospel during the Great Tribulation (7:1-8), and will be the **firstfruits** of many more to come (14:4), and secondly, we see **their** converts seen standing before the throne in heaven (7:9-17). This is **the third of five events** that occur during the first half of the Tribulation.

There are some who say the Church is absent from the scene on earth until the return of Christ in Chapter 19. Nothing could be further from the truth because these **144,000** are **Jewish** believers preaching the Gospel that faith in **Jesus** will save them from their sins.

The passage begins with **after this**, which is not chronological. **John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth (7:1a)**. **Corners** here is the Greek word *gonia*, closely related to our modern word *quadrants*. It literally means *angles, or divisions*. It is customary to divide a map into *quadrants* as shown by **the four directions**.

Angels always act with **the Lord's** specific direction and will. They are **ministering spirits sent by God** to do His will (Hebrews 1:14). Here we see them **holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or any tree (7:1b)**. The phrase **the four corners of the earth**, refers to **the whole earth, or the four quadrants** of the compass. So **the four winds** would be the north, west, south and east wind. In the Bible, these **four winds** are often associated with **Ha'Shem's** judgment (Jeremiah 49:36; Daniel 7:2; Hosea 13:15; Zechariah 6:5). For the duration of **their** ministry they will control **the four winds of the earth**. There will be no wind, no breeze, no waves crashing on the seashore, no activity in the sky, everything will be deathly still.²²²

The circulation of the atmosphere is like 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 take the form of great hurricanes, blizzards or tornadoes. These **winds of the earth** make life possible through the hydrologic cycle, transporting waters inland from the ocean with which to water **the earth**. Yet the **angels** - only **four of them** - will turn off this enormous engine.²²³

The Greek word for **holding back** is from *krateo*, a word that hints that **the winds** are fighting to break free of **their** restraint. Because the **angels hold back the winds**, they also **hold back** the plagues associated with the trumpet judgments soon to come (**8:5**). Thus, the next phase of **God's** wrath is confined for a while. But **the winds** of judgment are gathering and cannot be restrained forever. While **YHVH's** love will last evermore **His** patience will not.

Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. **Angels** are divided in different ranks, military style. Some rank higher than others and some serve **God**, while others serve Satan. We do not know who **the angel from the east** is, but do know that **he** will have authority over **the other four angels**. **He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea (7:2).** The Bible does not say what **the seal** will be. We do know that these specific **144,000** messianic evangelists will be protected by some sort of **mark (Ephesians 1:13-14)**. **He said: Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal of ownership on the foreheads of the servants of our God (7:3).** This tells us that **the Lord** is in complete control, and **His** intent is to bring **harm upon the earth**.

The sealing of God's servants is based on **Ezekiel 9:4-6**, where **the LORD** instructs a man to go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the idolatry practiced there. Then all those who did not have **the mark on their foreheads** were slaughtered (**Ezekiel 9:1-11**). Later in Yochanan's vision, during the fifth trumpet, a plague of locusts will fall on **only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (9:4)**. All believers will be protected from being stung by the demons at that time (**Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:19**). This will be reminiscent of the first Passover in Egypt (**Exodus 12:11-13**), **ADONAI's** people will be delivered from wrath.

Although the Great Tribulation will be a time of unprecedented death and disaster, it will also be a time of salvation for many. **The Lord** will preserve a godly **remnant** in that time of judgment. **He** always has. When **God** destroyed the world in the Flood, **He** preserved Noah and his family. When **He** destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, **He** preserved Lot and his daughters. When **He** destroyed Jericho, **He** preserved Rahab and her household. When **He** destroyed Egypt, **He** preserved the nation of **Isra'el**.²²⁴ And when the **70th seven** of **Dani'el**

comes, **He** will preserve a remnant of Jewish believers. **John** tells us that **he** heard the number of those who were sealed for a specific ministry: **144,000** from all the tribes of **Israel (7:4-8)**. Even though these verses are clear and straightforward, some people still want to spiritualize them. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, believe this refers to **144,000** of their members. However, the verse clearly states that the **144,000** will be **Jews**. Not Gentiles. It is best to ignore the mental gymnastics and accept the literal interpretation.²²⁵

Those **144,000**, who were probably saved through the preaching of the **two witnesses** (see **Dc - I Will Give Power to My Two Witnesses and They Will Prophecy for 1,260 Days**), will be **sealed** for protection so that **they** cannot be hurt either by the judgments poured out by **God** or by the persecutions against believers of **Christ**. As **He** protected Noah from the Flood and **Isra'el** from the plagues, **ADONAI** will protect these **Jews** from the evil one. But **they** are also **sealed** for service, for **they** are the **ones** who will proclaim the message of the Gospel to the world and trigger a worldwide revival.²²⁶

While the tribal records were lost when the Romans sacked Jerusalem in AD 70, **YHVH** knows who belongs to each **tribe**. Today only the tribe of **Levi** can be identified genetically. This passage also teaches that the *so-called* ten lost **tribes** were, in fact, never lost (**Matthew 19:28; Luke 2:36, 22:30; Acts 26-7; James 1:1; Revelation 21:12**). Instead, the faithful remnant from the ten Northern tribes filtered south and intermingled with the two Southern tribes and were thus preserved (**Second Chronicles 30:1-11, 34:1-9**).²²⁷

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Gad 12,000 were sealed,

Although Reuben was the oldest, Judah is sealed first. Reuben was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to Joseph (**First Chronicles 5:1-2**). To Judah, the fourth son of Jacob, was given the scepter (**Genesis 49:10**), and it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah (**Hebrews 7:14**). Therefore, Judah will be sealed first and Reuben second.²²⁸

From the tribe of Asher 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000 were sealed,

Asher and Naphtali were the eighth and sixth sons of Jacob. Manasseh was the first son of Joseph, Jacob's eleventh son by adoption.

From the tribe of Simeon 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000 were sealed,

Simeon and **Levi**, Jacob's second and third sons, are frequently listed together. However, **Levi** was the priestly tribe and had no geographical region originally given to his descendants in the Promised Land. As priests, the **Levites** were given specific cities in all the various tribal areas. As the spiritual leaders of **Isra'el** throughout the centuries, it would be expected and appropriate that they would be included among those sealed for this special service. On the other hand, the tribe of **Dan** is omitted (**Genesis 49:16-18**) from the **144,000**. But mercifully, we see that the tribe of **Dan** will be included in the millennial Kingdom. **Jesus** will return through the eastern gate of **Jerusalem**. And the messianic Temple, where **Christ** will live and rule, will have twelve gates for the twelve tribes. On the eastern gate, we see the name of **Dan** (**Ezekiel 48:32b**).

From the tribe of **Zebulun** 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of **Joseph** 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of **Benjamin** 12,000 were sealed.

Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's sons, is listed last, as **Judah** was the first. **Judah** and **Benjamin** had been the two faithful tribes left in the southern Kingdom after ten of the tribes separated and formed the idolatrous northern Kingdom in the days of **Jeroboam** (**First Kings 12:16-24**). The northern Kingdom was often called **Ephraim** because it became the dominant tribe among the ten tribes of the nation of **Isra'el**. **Ephraim** was the son of **Joseph**, and the brother of **Manasseh**. **Joseph** was given a double inheritance that was forfeited by **Reuben**. Therefore, **Ephraim** and **Manasseh** have traditionally been recognized as part of the twelve tribes, with **Levi** not considered as one of the twelve. Here, however, **Manasseh's** father **Joseph** is mentioned in place of **Ephraim**, because the name **Ephraim**, like **Dan**, became synonymous with spiritual adultery. Mercifully, however, in the messianic Kingdom all thirteen tribes, including **Dan** and **Ephraim**, will have a portion of Land (**Ezekiel 48:1-29**).²²⁹ These are the number of **Jewish servants** that will be sealed.

During the Great Tribulation there will be four distinct groups of **Jews**. The first group can be called the apostate **Jews**. These are the many of **Dani'el 9:27** who will enter into the seven-year covenant that will start the Great Tribulation (see **Cg**). They will make up two-thirds of the nation of **Isra'el** and will die in the worldwide persecution of the **Jews** during the second half of the Great Tribulation (**Zechariah 13:8a**).

The second group will be the **144,000 Jews**. They are part of the one-third that will survive the Great Tribulation (**Zechariah 13:8b-9**). These are the **Jews** who will be saved and sealed some time after the Rapture of the Church. They will be like **144,000** **Billy Graham's** during the Great Tribulation conducting a worldwide revival. They will survive the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments for ministry. **ADONAI** will protect them from the antichrist and they will enter the messianic Kingdom alive. The **144,000** will appear again with the Lamb on Mount Zion singing a new song that no one else could sing (**14:1-5**).

The third group can be called **the other Jewish believers**. These are **the Jews** who will receive the Gospel as a result of the preaching of the **144,000**, the two witnesses (see above), or by other believers. These **Jews** are **from every nation**. Many will be martyred and are seen in the next section standing before the throne of **God** in **their** white robes of righteousness along with Gentile believers (**7:9**).

The fourth group is called **the faithful remnant**, and **they** are the key group of **Jews** in the second half of the Great Tribulation (see my commentary on **Isaiah Hm - I AM the LORD, Your God, Who Takes Hold of Your Right Hand**). **They** will be attacked by the antichrist and the whole world. Their goal will be genocide, to kill every last **Jew** on the face of the earth. Some of these **Jews** will hide in Jerusalem initially, but then they will flee and take refuge at Bozrah (see my commentary on **Isaiah Kg - The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Bozrah**). By the time **Messiah** returns (**19:11-16**), the one third of **the faithful remnant** still living at the end of the Great Tribulation **will be saved** (**Rom 11:26a**).

As **he** reveals his vision to us, **John** peppers **his** account with numbers. Sometimes we can be tempted to look at them in the same way we read census figures or other statistics. But as with other examples of apocalyptic literature, very large numbers tend to be symbolic of a great gathering of people before the throne. Such is the case here with the **144,000 sealed servants of God**. To be sure, the **144,000** messianic evangelists will be a literal number, but they will also represent something else.

The effect is similar to the way today's movie directors filming a battle scene or natural disaster will "pan out" of the scene to reveal the full scope of the action. By pulling back in this way the director enables the audience to see the vast numbers involved in the struggle and appreciate the drama.

The **144,000** witnesses represent a promise fulfilled. **The LORD** called **Isra'el**, "**My people**." **He** made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **He** rescued them from slavery in Egypt. **God** gave **them** the Torah and the prophets. **John's** vision also is reminiscent of **Ezekiel's** vision that one day **ADONAI** would restore all the children of **Isra'el**, including those **tribes** whose records were lost when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70. The **144,000** are a sign that **God** is faithful to **His people**.

From the very beginning, the book of **Revelation** has been a message of hope for those persecuted in the middle of troubles. The vision in this book reveals the truth that **the LORD** has been in control of our destiny from the very beginning. **He** is sure to achieve **His** purposes because **when the time had fully come, God sent His Son** to pay the ransom and buy us back (**Galatians 4:4**). Knowing this, we can place our trust in **Yeshua** who saves. Every prayer time is a new invitation to join in the worship at the heavenly throne. When we think about **God's** faithfulness, we can rise above the setbacks in our lives. Or, at the very least, it can help us endure them for a season.

*Lord, may my daily prayer give me the perspective of those marked with **Your seal**. Help me to stand among **Your faithful** today, always ready to testify about **Your plan of salvation**.²³⁰*