

# The Sealing of the 144,000

## Chapter 7

Introduction:

Chapter 7 is an interlude to provide reassurance to the people of God. Chapter 7 does not advance the action that is taking place but rather explains the protection of God's people from judgment.

In chapter 7 we are zooming out and looking at the whole of what is going on in both earth and heaven.

We are also getting a more complete picture of God's purpose and plan.

An important interpretive element is the question that is raised in the last verse of chapter 6.

The question is, "who can stand in the time of God's wrath?"

Revelation 6:17 (ESV) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The answer is that there is a great host of God's people who are going to be able to stand in the time of God's judgement.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

However the unrighteous will not stand.

Psalm 1:5 (ESV) Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

Psalm 1:6 (ESV) for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Theme: The angelic forces have been given an important task: to secure the people of God with a seal on their foreheads, indicating ownership, that they are God's people and to signify that they are to be protected from the judgements that are soon to follow.

Outline: Chapter 7 divides into two sections.

7:1-8 The saints on earth.

7:9 -18 The saints in heaven.

I. First there is the restraint in judgement as the saints are sealed on earth.

Revelation 7:1 (ESV) 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.

Revelation 7:2 (ESV) 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,

Revelation 7:3 (ESV) saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

A. The nature of restraint

Rev 7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, **holding back the four winds of the earth**, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

1. The winds are often viewed as the instruments of God's judgement.

a. In Exodus it was the winds that brought the locusts and also removed them.

Exodus 10:13 (ESV) So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind had brought the locusts.

Exodus 10:19 (ESV) And the LORD turned the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea. Not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt.

b. It was the wind that turned the sea into dry ground.

Exodus 14:21 (ESV) Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

2. In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Revelation the judgment of God came upon the earth like a mighty wind.

Revelation 6:12 (ESV) 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,

Revelation 6:13 (ESV) and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

Revelation 6:17 (ESV) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?

- a. The question was asked “who can stand?”

Revelation 6:17 (ESV) for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

- b. The answer will be those who are “sealed.”

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

- B. The agents of restraint - Angels who are put in charge of nature.

1. The four corners of the earth is an idiom for every part of the world or the “ends” of the earth.

Revelation 7:1 (ESV) 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. The angels are holding back the winds of judgment.

Revelation 7:1 (ESV) 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.

C. Reason for restraint - the sealing of God's people.

Revelation 7:3 (ESV) saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

D. The essence of restraint - Divine protection for the people of God.

1. The divine protection is due to Divine ownership depicted in the form of a seal.

Revelation 7:3 (ESV) saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, **until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.**"

2. The seal of Divine ownership is the protection of God's people who alone will be able to withstand God's judgment as pictured in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel 9:3 (ESV) Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house. And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his waist.

Ezekiel 9:4 (ESV) And the LORD said to him, "Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it."

Ezekiel 9:5 (ESV) And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and strike. Your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity.

3. The promise of the gospel is that God's people will be "sealed" - protected from God's wrath.

Ephesians 1:13 (ESV) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 1:14 (ESV) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 4:30 (ESV) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

II. The identity of the 144,000 who are sealed.

A. They are identified as the servants of God.

Revelation 7:3 (ESV) saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

B. Problems in identifying the 144,000.

1. The text states that the 144,000 represent all the tribes of Israel.

Revelation 7:4 (ESV) And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

a. The text goes on to list the 12 tribes.

Revelation 7:5 (ESV)

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

Revelation 7:6 (ESV)

12,000 from the tribe of Asher,  
12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,  
12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

Revelation 7:7 (ESV)

12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,  
12,000 from the tribe of Levi,  
12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

Revelation 7:8 (ESV)

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

b. A close reading of the list of tribes reveals that the tribe of Dan is omitted even though the text states every tribe is included.

(1) Some have said that Dan's omission is a judgement upon that tribe for its apostasy.

- (2) However in Ezekiel, Dan's presence in the millennial kingdom is fully established.

Ezekiel 47:21 (ESV) "So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:22 (ESV) You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:23 (ESV) In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 48:1 (ESV) "These are the names of the tribes: Beginning at the northern extreme, beside the way of Hethlon to Lebo-hamath, as far as Hazar-enan (which is on the northern border of Damascus over against Hamath), and extending from the east side to the west, **Dan, one portion.**

Ezekiel 48:2 (ESV) Adjoining the territory of Dan, from the east side to the west, Asher, one portion.

- c. The half tribe of Manasseh is listed in our text, which was actually a half tribe coming from the tribe of Joseph.

Revelation 7:6 (ESV) 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

- (1) The half tribe of Ephraim (the other son of Joseph) is omitted in our text but indirectly referred to in the tribe of Joseph.

Revelation 7:8 (ESV) 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

- (2) The tribes of Israel are listed 29 times in the Bible. There is no listing of the 12 tribes of Israel anywhere else in the Bible that matches this list.

2. Thus the tribes and their number **cannot** be taken completely literally.

The word of God acknowledges that the Gentiles will be numbered with the Jewish tribes.

Ezekiel 47:21 (ESV) "So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:22 (ESV) You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the sojourners who reside among you and have had children among you. They shall be to you as native-born children of Israel. With you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel.

Ezekiel 47:23 (ESV) In whatever tribe the sojourner resides, there you shall assign him his inheritance, declares the Lord GOD.

III. The scene changes to the saints in heaven.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

A. What is the relationship of the 144,000 to the great multitude. Are the 144,000 and the great multitude two separate groups or one group?

B. Some commentators hold that the 144,000 are Jewish people and the great multitude are the Gentile converts.

1. The text states that the great multitude is comprised of more than Gentiles.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

2. If the great multitude does not include Jews then it does not represent every nation and every tribe.

3. The word tribe in Rev. 7:9 is the exact same Greek word that is used in Rev. 7:4 referring to the 12 tribes of Israel.

- C. Other commentators hold that the 144,000 and the great multitude are the same group. Verses 9-17 serves to explain verses 1-8.
- D. I think it is best to think of the 144,000 as a small subset of people (both Jew and Gentile) being added to the great multitude that is already in heaven.

1. That is the "144.000" are joining and being added to the great multitude that is already in heaven.
2. This supplies us with clues as to the significance of the symbolic number 144.000. The number of people coming out of the great tribulation is small (can be numbered - 144,00) in comparison to the great multitude which cannot be numbered.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

3. It should not be lost that the 144,000 is 12000 X 12. That is the 12 tribes are greatly enlarged in number. I think this depicts the adding of the gentiles to them.

IV. What is the significance of this subset being added to the great multitude?

- A. These are those who have come out of the great tribulation.

Revelation 7:11 (ESV) 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,

Revelation 7:12 (ESV) saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

Revelation 7:13 (ESV) Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) 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.

1. There has always been tribulation on the earth.

John 16:33 (ESV) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

2. Please note that it is the great tribulation that these saints come out of and not merely tribulation in general.

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) 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.

3. It states that they are “coming out” of the great tribulation as opposed to having come out of the great tribulation.

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) 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.

- a. Thus there is a process going on. Not all translations reflect that important aspect.

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) 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.

Revelation 7:14 (NASB95) I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Revelation 7:14 (KJV 1900) And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Matthew 24:21 (ESV) For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

- b. They come out of the tribulation which could mean either that they die during the tribulation because of their faith or that they survive the great tribulation or both.
- c. It is important to realize that they do not all come out of the great tribulation at the same time.

Matthew 24:22 (ESV) And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

B. They are believers.

Rev 7:14 And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Note this is not a statement of martyrdom. The blood on the robes is not their blood but the lamb's blood.

C. They are accepted in the presence of God because of the work of Christ.

Rev 7:15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.

D. What is the great multitude doing?

- 1. They are lauding Christ for His great triumph.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

Revelation 7:10 (ESV) and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

- 2. All of this is foreshadowed in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Matthew 21:8 (ESV) Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on

the road.

Matthew 21:9 (ESV) And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

E. They are a people who will know eternal bliss and joy.

1. The hardships associated with earthly existence shall be done away.

Revelation 7:16 (ESV) They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.

2. The reason is that the lamb will shepherd them with great authority.

Revelation 7:17 (ESV) 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."

Psalms 23:1 (ESV) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Psalms 23:2 (ESV) He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters."

3. The great shepherd will one day remove every need and heal every hurt.

Revelation 7:17 (ESV) 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."

Revelation 21:1 (ESV) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Revelation 21:2 (ESV) And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Revelation 21:3 (ESV) And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, **and God himself will be with them as their God.**"

Revelation 21:4 (ESV) **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes**, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

V. Concluding applications:

A. The blessing of perseverance in all that has been experienced in chapter 6 is manifested in chapter 7.

B. We see the accomplishment of the lamb’s successful mission on earth.

Revelation 7:9 (ESV) 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,

C. We see that the people of God are in His presence not as a reward of their martyrdom but rather because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 7:14 (ESV) 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.

D. We are to have great solace because our salvation has been secured having been sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13 (ESV) In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

Ephesians 1:14 (ESV) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

E. We have been saved to bring glory to God in this age and the age to come.

Ephesians 1:14 (ESV) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

1. We will glorify Him on earth.

2. We will glorify Him in Heaven

3. We will glorify Him in the New Heaven and New Earth.