

WORSHIP SERVICE - 9.26.2021

SEALED

I. INTRODUCTION

MAIN POINT: The Lamb ensures that all who belong to him will be spiritually protected throughout the tribulation.

Revelation 7:1-8

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

12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,

12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,

12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

12,000 from the tribe of Asher,

12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,

12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,

12,000 from the tribe of Levi,

12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,

12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,

12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

II. THE 144,000

- A question was posed at the end of the sixth seal of final judgment, "Who can stand?"
- Well we know that the inhabitants of the earth couldn't. They were under the severe judgment of the great day—the final judgment.
- But the ones who can stand were those who were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
- Our text today shows us HOW the redeemed can stand.
- It answers the question—HOW will God protect his people throughout the Great Tribulation?

A SERIES OF FOURS

- What is it that John sees? Four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth.
- Four is the number of creaturely and earthly completeness. Four corners means the whole earth.
- These four angels have sovereignty over the whole world concerning the judgments.
- At the moment they are holding back the four winds of the earth.
- That is another figurative reference to the four horsemen. Conquest, Bloodshed, Famine, Death. They are the agents of the Lamb that are executing pre-judgment-judgment on the world.
- This is an allusion to the horses and chariots in Zech. 6.
- These judgments of the four horsemen have been said to have already happened in Rev. 6:1-8.
- The four angels are restraining these forces of darkness prior to the Lamb opening the first seal.

WHY ARE THEY SEALED

- V2 John then sees another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, who possesses the seal of the living God.
- This is most likely a representation of Christ—the Angel of the Lord.
- Who else can give the command to restrain judgment other than the Lamb of God who holds the scroll containing the decrees of judgment.
- He commands the four angels who are tasked with harming the whole world in judgment telling them to wait until the servants of God have been sealed.
- The judgments of the first four seals cannot take place until the servants of God have been identified and marked with the seal of God on their foreheads.

- John doesn't see who these servants of God are at the moment but he hears the total number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.

WHAT ARE THEY PROTECTED FROM

- Those who are sealed are kept from the harm that will be inflicted on the earth.
- But what is the nature of the harm they are kept from if the seal is meant to protect them?
- There is an allusion regarding sealing or marking that comes from Ezekiel 9.
- Ezekiel is given a vision where God is commanding the angel to put a mark on the foreheads on those who grieve over the sins that are committed in Jerusalem. Because they hate sin they will be protected when God strikes the city in judgment.
- **Ezekiel 9:3-6** 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. 4 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." 5 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. 6 Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house.
- In Ezekiel, the mark kept those faithful to God from physical harm brought about by judgment.
- Think of the mark in the Passover story in Exodus. The mark of blood on the doorposts of each Israelite home protected them from the judgment of the final plague—the firstborn male of every Egyptian household was to be killed. (Exodus 12)
- This reference to the seal or mark is mentioned in the trumpet and bowl judgments.
- **Rev. 9:4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.
- In ch. 16 we see that the plagues of judgment only come upon those who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. Those who do not have that mark but have the seal of God are not harmed.

PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL PROTECTION

- The seal is not about physical security and protection but spiritual security and protection.
- We have established through our study of the seven letters that God's people are not exempt from trials, tribulation and suffering in the world.
- The seal is a beautiful promise that the Lamb of God will protect and preserve a believer's salvation and a believer's faith as they face suffering and persecution throughout the tribulation of the church age.
- Trials and suffering become the means God uses to sanctify and strengthen believers.
- Where the judgments and trials that are brought upon the earth end up hardening the ungodly so that they remain unrepentant, believers are purified through those very same judgments and trials.
- The 144,000 are mentioned again in ch. 14.
- Rev. 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.
- The 144,000 with the seal on their foreheads and the 144,000 with the name of the Lamb and his Father's name written on their foreheads must be the identical group of people that belong to God.
- Now, there is a counterfeit seal that is upon the inhabitants of the earth that are NOT sealed with the seal of God.
- They are said to be sealed with the mark of the beast.
- Rev. 13 says that they are marked on the right hand or on the forehead with the mark which is the name of the beast, or the number of its name.

ARE ONLY ETHNIC ISRAELITES SEALED

- Jacob, whose name is later changed to Israel, is the father of twelve sons. They become the fathers of a vast number of people that are the twelve tribes. Jacob's descendants are ethnic Israel.
- But John is not referring to ethnic Israel but the True Israel, which is comprised of believers under both the OT and NT.
- Jesus says to believers in Smyrna, "I know the slander you face by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (Rev. 2:9)
- Christ sees the church as the true people of God—the true Israel of God—spiritual Israel.
- It is the consummation and fulfillment of the promises God made to his covenant people.
- It is not ethnic Jews who are the true Jews and the true Israel, it is only those who have trusted in Christ as Messiah.
- God's people are no longer defined genealogically, they are defined Christologically.
- **Romans 2:28-29** For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. 29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

- **Romans 9:6-8** But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.
- Who is the true Jew? Not the one born as a physical descendent of Abraham but the one born again of the Spirit.

REASONS THIS IS NOT REFERRING TO ETHNIC ISRAELITES

- Tribes are never listed in this order in the O.T. and there are names mentioned that aren't usually listed and others that usually are and are omitted in this list.
- Judah is listed first and that is never done in the listing of the tribes. Judah was not the firstborn, Reuben was.
- The reason Judah is listed first is to highlight that the Messiah came from the line of Judah as was promised and prophesied. (Gen. 49:10)
- The Lamb of God is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.
- This is not a listing of literal Israel but rather the true Israel which is the church of Jesus Christ that is comprised of OT and NT saints - both Jews and Gentiles.
- **Rev. 14:1-5** Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.
- This is a picture of the church in its entirety.
- What follows the vision of the 144,000 is that John sees a great multitude in heaven standing before the throne and before the Lamb. This vast number of people are comprised from every nation, all tribes, and peoples and languages. Jews and Gentiles alike.
- The 144,000 represent the church symbolized, the militant church of Jesus Christ throughout the tribulation period.
- The multitude are the church realized, the triumphant church of Jesus Christ now in glory with the Lamb.
- When God made the covenant with Abram he promised that Abram would be a father of a multitude of nations, not just one nation. (Gen. 17:4)
- This is why 144,000 is not a literal number but a symbolic number.
- 144,000 is a multiple of 12.
- 12 tribes / 12 apostles - represent God's people under both the Old and New Testament.
- 12 is a number of completeness / fullness
- 144,000 is 12 x 12 x 1000—1,000 is a great quantity in the Bible—in other words, a very large number of people.
- The people sealed are the church of Jesus Christ.

III. THE SEAL

Mark of Ownership

- The sealed are called the servants of God. The Greek word is 'doulos' which refers to a bondservant. That is a person who is legally owned by another. It can refer to a domestic servant but the point is that the life and or livelihood and purpose of the servant was determined by their master.
- In Greek and Roman culture and in many parts of the ancient world, it was a common practice for slaves to be branded or marked, sometimes on their forehead, to indicate ownership and whom they served.
- The name of the Lamb and the Father's name are written on the forehead as the seal indicates that the 144,000 are God's property.
- Notice where they are sealed—on their foreheads.
- God places a clear and indelible mark on his children, his servants, to publicly claim them as his. We have his name not our own!
- This mark of ownership means that we are publicly declared to be and identified with the people of God—we are not the secret and hidden people of God.
- All of hell knows who has been marked by God!
- There are several references in Scripture about foreheads.
- Ex.28, God gives the instructions for the priestly garments. One of the pieces that the high priest was to wear was a turban that had a solid gold plate fastened to the front of the turban. On the plate was engraved the phrase, “Holy to the Lord.”
- Aaron, the high priest, was solely dedicated to the Lord. He was consecrated to the Lord.

- That phrase engraved on the forehead was a continual reminder of that consecration. Aaron's life was set apart for God.
- In such a way, that seal on the forehead of believers is a mark of identification. We identify with God and with the Lamb.
- What an encouragement this would be to the faithful believers who received this letter that they are sealed by God as his. They belong to God no matter what trial or persecution they face.
- The seal means that as God's people, as his possession, they were to endure hardship, live a godly life, suffer shame for his name, and even to be ready to die for him.
- The one sealed has the security that that none of the trials and sufferings of the tribulation will destroy their faith or invalidate their salvation
- Just like the believers in the first century, we wonder how we will make it to the end.
- There are so many things pressuring us to compromise, to make shipwreck of our faith, to be swept away by sin and the cares of this world.
- But the seal as a mark of ownership means that God has staked his claim on us.
- **Romans 8:35** the question is asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"
- The answer, **Romans 8:38-39** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- When we are overwhelmed by trials, we must remember, we are sealed by God, we belong to Him. Nothing can change that!

Guarantee of Eternal Life

- The seal is also a mark that what God has promised us is as good as done.
- How do we know this?
- **Ephesians 1:13-14** 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, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
- The seal secures our promised inheritance because of WHO we have been sealed with.
- We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit!
- The Holy Spirit is given to us as a foretaste of the glory to come.
- 2 Cor. 1:21-22 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, 22 and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

IV. HOW CAN I KNOW IF I AM SEALED?

- Only those who have been redeemed by the Lamb and who have been forgiven are sealed.
- Ephesians 1:13 says that when we heard the word of truth, the gospel of our salvation, and believed in him (Jesus), we were sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- If you have responded to the gospel call, to believe Christ, to place your faith and trust in Christ alone for your salvation, then you can have assurance that you have been sealed.
- Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- No exertion of your human will and work results in your salvation—it rests solely upon the will of God and the work of Christ. That is what we believe!
- You can know if you were sealed with the Spirit because he will continually convict you of sin and lead you to repentance and renewal in your spiritual life.
- Do you have a desire for godliness and holiness in your life?
- Do you increasingly hate sin in your life?
- If so, that can only come from the Spirit.
- Are you willing to bear witness of Christ in the midst of the pressure to compromise your faith?
- The seal is a mark of allegiance. It is a mark of who you belong to.
- Do you boldly confess Christ, no matter the personal cost, because you know you have been sealed by him?
- If you can answer those questions affirmatively, you can have assurance that you have been sealed by God and will be spiritually kept through the tribulation.
- He can't lose what belongs to Him!