

## The Sealed People Of God

**Memory Text:** “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”  
(Revelation 7:14)

**Setting The Stage:** There are even seals on the scroll in God’s hand that no one but the Lamb is worthy to open. After Christ takes the scroll, one by one he opens the seals and what is revealed is, to John, the future history of the church. He first sees the incredible advances made by the apostolic church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in the face of Roman power and dominance. He next sees Satan’s efforts to put a halt to that success by inspiring Rome to persecute the church during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, but the blood of martyrs is like seed, and more join the sacred cause.

John then beholds the devil’s strategy change from one of promoting persecution to that of promoting compromise. Instead of converting the world, the church now becomes transformed by the world as church leaders seek favors at the hand of the state and the doors of membership are swung wide open to everyone and anyone, no matter their belief, no matter their lifestyle.

Then he sees the church in absolute apostasy. She is but a shell of what she used to be when the apostles were alive. Now intolerant of dissenters with the arm of the state to enforce her decrees the world is plunged into a dark period of fear, superstition, and dread. The faithful few calling the people back to fidelity to the gospel and the word of God, are persecuted and many killed in the name of religion, and it seems as if all is lost. The situation is so bad that John hears the cries of the martyrs asking how long it will be until their blood is divinely avenged.

Finally, John beholds signs in the heaven’s and earth that pinpoint that the earth has now entered the time of the end, and He sees the awesome events leading up to the return of Christ in power and glory to redeem His children. What is experienced is so dreadful that a solemn question is forced from the lips of the lost at that time, and one that we must seriously consider: “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who shall be able to stand?”

Between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal there is an interval which provides an answer to that question. Revelation 7 reveals who will prevail and how they will be able to stand during the closing scenes of earth’s history to welcome Christ when He returns. You’ll see something similar between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet.

## Sunday – Restraining The Winds

Revelation 7:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:19

**Revelation 7:1-3.** After John is given a view of the first six seals, the scene changes and transports the reader back to the time just prior to the return of Christ.

**“Four angels...Four corners...Four 4 winds”.** The four angels represent divine agencies holding back the forces of evil until the work of God on human hearts is complete. The four corners simply signify what is taking place across the entire world (Isa. 11:12; Ezek. 7:2). Four winds represent the four directions of the compass (Dan. 8:8) and these winds obviously speak to destruction (Rev. 7:3).

Some one said that our world can be likened to an elephant appearing ready to fall off the cliff's face, but it doesn't because his tail is holding onto a daisy. Have you ever wondered how our world could be in the state it is in today, problems unsolvable by human beings, and things not spiral out of complete and utter control? Do you know why? Because heavenly agencies are at work to prevent the winds of strife from being unleashed. The devil's efforts to completely destroy (Rev. 12:12) has been held in check for the time being.

But when probations doors close “Satan will then plunge the inhabitants of the earth into one great, final trouble. As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passion, all the elements of strife will be let loose. The whole world will be involved in ruin more terrible than that which came upon Jerusalem of old.” (The Great Controversy, p. 614) This statement begs the question, “What type of people ought we be if we are to stand through the time of trouble such as never was?”

**“The seal of the living God”.** The ancients regarded the east as the cardinal point on the compass. Directions were reckoned from the point of view of a person facing east. It was from this direction that Ezekiel saw the glory of God entering the temple (Ezek. 43:2-5). The sign of Christ's appearing will come from the east (Matt. 24:30). So the direction from which the angel comes denotes that he is coming from the presence of God.

From antiquity seals were used in the Middle East much like signatures are used today. And as signatures today attest to the authorship of the letter, ancient seals indicated the ownership of the object on which the seal was impressed. A seal would also authenticate a document. If a seal was found on a thing, then it was known by the seal who the thing belonged to.

The idea of God placing a mark on His people harkens back to Ezekiel's vision of the man with the writer's inkhorn who was commanded to “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it.” By virtue of the mark they were saved from imminent destruction.

The concept of sealing is also applied in other instances. Paul referred the figure (sealing) to the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit in connection with conversion and baptism (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Jesus spoke of Himself being sealed by the Father, no doubt a reference to the Father's recognition of Christ as His Son at His baptism when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (John 6:27).

The symbolism of sealing finds an interesting parallel in Jewish last-day thinking. To the Jews, a mark on the righteous would keep them from the perils at the time of Christ's coming. Similarly, Rev. 7 points to a sealing of God's people that prepares them to stand through time of trouble prior to Christ's return. As in ancient times, a seal on an object testified to its ownership, so the seal of God upon His people proclaims that He recognizes them as his own.

**2 Timothy 2:19:** "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' "

And God has always marked those who are His by their faithfulness to His commandments. And at the heart of His law we find God's signature, His seal. We find in the Ten Commandments that thing that authenticates, that gives backing to His law. Most seals today carry a name, title, and territory. Think: the President of the United States of America. God seal is found in the fourth commandments (Ex. 20:8-11) where we find His name—the Lord, His title—Creator, and His territory—heaven and earth. And this seal stands in opposition to the mark of the beast.

Ultimately, the issues of the last days are more than skin deep. Are we letting Christ write His law in our minds and hearts by spending time with Him in His word? Are we settling into the truth, both spiritually and intellectually in preparation for that day? Like Daniel, who also endured his time of trouble, have we purposed in our hearts that we might not serve anything else other than our God? Choices today determine where we will be tomorrow. Let's make good choices, what do you say?

## **Monday - The Sealed People Of God**

Revelation 7:4-8; 22:14

**Revelation 7:4-8.** 144,000 were said to be sealed, 12,000 from each tribe of Israel. Two views have been held regarding this number: 1) that it is literal; 2) that it is symbolic. Those that hold to the number being literal point out that the numbering may be similar to the numbering system employed when Matthew recorded that there were 5,000 were miraculously fed, not including women and children (Matt. 14:21). Those that hold that the number is symbolic point out that the vision is clearly symbolic and therefore the number must be as well, or else were talking literally about 144,000 Jewish virgin males.

The number twelve is truly a significant number. There were twelve tribes of Israel and there were twelve disciples of Christ. The twelvefold repetition of the number 12,000 may actually suggest that the principle aim of this passage is not to disclose the exact number of those sealed but to show the distribution of the sealed among the tribes of spiritual Israel.

One of the things you'll notice is you compare this list of the tribes with lists from the OT is that they are different (see Num. 1:5-15; Deut 27:12, 13). The OT lists mostly begin with Reuben, but with this list Judah is mentioned first, perhaps because Christ came from the line of Judah. In the OT, sometimes Levi isn't mentioned, very likely because Levi received no inheritance among the tribes. But here, Levi is mentioned. Dan isn't mentioned. Perhaps that had to do with the tribe's reputation for idolatry (Judges 18:30, 31). Ephraim isn't mentioned either (although his dad Joseph is), probably due to the declaration found in Hos. 4:17, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."

Of course we are dealing here with spiritual Israel, not literal Israel. If we are talking about literal Israel, how can we reconcile that with the remote likelihood of an actual identical number being redeemed from each tribe—but not a single soul from Dan—and the requirements that they be all celibates? But if we're talking here about spiritual Israel, the church of God, then the tribal divisions and other details are also figurative, and the difficulties disappear.

There are multiple verses we can look at in the NT that show clearly that today's Israel of God are those who have faith in Christ. All can be a part of spiritual Israel if they want (Rom. 2:28, 29; Gal. 3:28, 29). But if we just looked at a few other verses in Revelation we will see that the Israel being referred to here is symbolic.

Rev. 21:12 tells us that there are twelve gates that go into the New Jerusalem, and on those gates are engraved the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Does that mean that only the twelve tribes get to go in? A few verses later, John declares that no temple is needed and no sun in the NJ, because the Lamb is the temple and the cities light. Then in vv. 24 & 26 he writes, "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light...And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it." Notice the word "nations". This isn't referring only to literal Jews, but people from all over the world, every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. One more.

**Revelation 22:14:** "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city."

The new covenant promise states that God will write His law in our hearts and minds and if we let Him do that we are considered "His people." (Heb. 8:10) Who is that promise for? "Whoever will," that's who. You and me. A wide and warm welcome will be given to all those who let God have their hearts entirely.

## Tuesday – The Great Multitude

Revelation 7:9-17

**Revelation 7:9, 10.** There are three main views regarding the great multitude.

1. The 144,000 and the great multitude are the same group under different conditions, and that vv. 9-17 reveals the true identity of the 144,000. They say that any differences noted between the two groups aren't differences but explanations. So when they say that this great multitude cannot be numbered, they answer by saying the number 144,000 is symbolic not literal.
2. The 144,000 and the great multitude are different groups. One group is numbered, the other group cannot be numbered. One represents a special group, the other a triumphant group from all the ages.
3. The 144,000 are a part of the great multitude, which represents all the redeemed. Adventist's have typically favored the second view.

How is this great multitude portrayed? According to v. 9 the great multitude is made up of every people group across this planet, they are dressed in white, and they hold palm branches. Palm branches symbolize rejoicing and victory (John 12:13), and robes of white, purity, righteousness, and victory (Rev. 19:8; 3:5).

According to v. 14, they have come out of great tribulation. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), and Paul to Christians living in Antioch, reminded them, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

They are also described as having washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. The saints aren't triumphant on their own accord, but because of the victory won by Christ on Calvary. If we ever hope to stand before the throne of God, we must be made white. Sometimes we spill things on our clothes and we get them dirty. So we throw those clothes in the wash with some laundry detergent, add little bleach, and viola, clean clothes. How to keep them clean is the trick. But the good news is that it's not tricky for God.

We might sin against God along the way, and those sins weren't intentional, we didn't do them because we wanted to. But as long as we fall on the mercy of Christ each time, His blood washes away our sins. Eventually Christ is going to wash away that sin one last time, because you don't want to get your clothes dirty anymore, and Christ has taught you how to keep them clean. That's good news!

We know that when it's all said and done there are going to be two groups of people. You'll have the lost. And sadly, the lost will be in the majority. Jesus said that many follow the broad, but only few walk the narrow way. Rev. 20:8 describes the lost as the sands of the sea, and if you've ever been to a beach you know that you cannot count the sand there let alone what is in the vast oceans. That's a lot of people, and it may leave some to wonder whether they will be saved at all.

The good news is, yes, there's plenty of room for you to be saved, because we read in Rev. 7 about a great multitude that no man could number, and although it won't be as many as the sands of the sea, this is still a large number, so there's plenty of room for all who wish to be saved!

## Wednesday – Those Who Follow The Lamb

Revelation 14:1-4

**Revelation 14:1-4.** The only other time the 144,000 are mentioned is right in Rev. 14. And we learn more about this special group. Frankly we don't know who they are, but it seems we should strive to be a part of this group, amen?

**“Mount Zion”.** This is referring to the place where God dwells. The psalmist declared it be the city of God (Ps. 48:2). So the 144,000 aren't down here in the fray anymore as described in Rev. 13, they are up there now, victorious and redeemed.

**“Father's name”.** In Rev. 7 it is said that the 144,000 have the seal of God in the foreheads. Here, the 144,000 have the Father's name written there. So there is a close connection between the two. The seal must contain the name of the Father. Ancient seals contained the name of the authenticating agent. Applied to the 144,000, the names represent ownership (they belong to God) and character (the fully reflect the image of Jesus). In Rev. 13:17, there is a close relationship between the mark of the beast and the name of the beast

*“The indelible mark of God is upon them. God can plead that His own name is written there. The Lord has shut them in. Their destination is inscribed—‘God, New Jerusalem.’ They are God's property, His possession. Will this seal be put upon the impure in mind, the fornicator, the adulterer, the man who covets his neighbor's wife? Let your souls answer the question, Does my character correspond to the qualifications essential that I may receive a passport to the mansions Christ has prepared for those who are fitted for them? Holiness must be inwrought in our character.” (Testimonies To Ministers & Gospel Workers, p. 446, cp. EW, p. 71)*

**“Sing a new song”.** When we compare with Rev. 15:3, this song is the song of their unique experience—the song of Moses and the Lamb. No one can sing their song because no one has gone through what they have gone through.

**“Not defiled...virgins”.** To defile is to soil the conscience (1 Cor. 8:7) or clothing (Rev. 3:5). Specifically, it is referring to the defilement of illicit relationships, namely Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots (Rev. 17:1-5). They have come out and stayed out. They have not drunk the wine of her fornication.

**“Follow the Lamb”.** They have learned to follow Him here, and so will continue to follow Him there. His guidance is chosen, His companionship valued above the

companionship of earthly friends. Christ says, “He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Matt. 10:37).

**“Firstfruits”**. The ancient Israelites offered firstfruits to the Lord, both as personal and national offerings. The firstfruit was an acknowledgment of the goodness of God in giving the harvest. Applied to the 144,000 we can understand it in two ways: 1) As being the first installment or pledge of the great harvest. 2) As meaning simply gift or offering.

## **Thursday – Salvation To Our God & The Lamb**

Revelation 14:5

**Revelation 14:5** (cp. 2 Peter 3:14; Jude 24, 25). The last characteristic of the 144,000 reveals that this group is faultless. It kind of makes you feel uneasy doesn't it? When was the last time you could say that in your mouth was found no guile (fraud or deceit)? I think if God could get a hold of our tongues then He would have gotten a hold of us. But actually it's better put the other way: if God has our hearts then He has our all, including the tongue. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). It's like a spring. If Christ can clean that up, then what flows from the clean spring will be clean water.

Christ wants to bring us to a place where we will always speak the truth. In a day where lies are told a plenty, where untruth's are preached from church pulpits, God needs people who will tell the truth. But not only does God want them sharing the truth, He wants their lives to be ordered as such as it adorns the truth they tell. How, you ask? By looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2). It has to do with where our attention is; what we're focusing on.

The 144,000 don't forget where they've come from; they're not spiritually proud. They know that without Christ sustaining them they would be as bad, if not, worse off, than the next person. They have learned to trust Christ implicitly leaving the results of their obedience and faithfulness to God in His faithful hands.

Remember, we don't get to make the declaration that we are without fault. That's God's job. It was God, for example, who declared Job to be perfect (Job 1:8). And what did Job say? “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse” (Job 9:20). Let us only look to Jesus, trust His ability to save us entirely, cooperate with the working of the Holy Spirit in our life, and let God declare what He wishes to declare. That is His business, not mine. All I know is that I need Jesus each and every day. How about you?