

The Church of the Servant King

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PROPHECY SERIES

(Proph21G_Revelation_chp7_The Sealed of Israel & the Saved of the Tribulation)

Chapter 6 closes with a question – “...who is able to stand?” The answer is provided in chapter 7.

THE SEALED OF ISRAEL (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, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. 2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads.” 4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: 5 from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.¹

Verse	Phrase	Explanation
1	“...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.”	“The expression “the four corners of the earth” was used in antiquity among the Near-Eastern nations much as we use ‘the four points of the compass.’ Since nowhere in Revelation do we read of the four winds actually blowing, they may be taken as representing the earthly catastrophes that occur under the trumpets and bowls.” ² (The “trumpets” and “bowls” or “vials” will be described in upcoming chapters). The fifth angel (v. 2) who ascends from the east commands the other angels to not harm “the earth or the sea or the trees.” The four angels represent restraining influences of God who withhold divine judgments against the forces of Satan and the Anti-Christ.
2	“And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God”	This is a fifth angel that ascends from the east and who carries with him “the seal of the living God.” (See Appendix A to these notes for an analysis of the “seal” of God in Scripture).
3	“Do not harm...until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads.”	(See Appendix A to these notes for an analysis of the “seal” of God in Scripture). The “four winds” are symbolic of the fact that these judgments will come from all directions. The “bondservants” are the 144,000 sealed of Israel specifically (vv. 4-8).
4	“...one hundred and forty-four	The 144,000 are specifically Jews and is not symbolic of

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The Ryrie Study Bible, New American Standard Version* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Bible Institute, 1976, 1978).

² Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, Inc., 1976-1992), electronic version.

	thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel..."	completeness (12x12x1000), thus indicating all who will be saved as some indicate. The reason is that the details of this group are too specifically articulated in the following verses and do not support such a general understanding.
5-8	See Appendix B.	See Appendix B.

THE SAVED GENTILES (7:9-17)

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." 11 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 worshipped God, 12 saying "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever, Amen." 13 And one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?" 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. 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. 16 "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; 17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."

Verse	Phrase	Explanation
9	"...a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb..." and "...palm branches were in their hands..."	These are the saved Gentiles of the Tribulation period who died (were martyred?) during that period. Again, there are various interpretations of the identity of this group, but given the specifics provided regarding the saved of Israel in verses 1-8, the distinction of this group in 9-17 is too significant. The palm branches are signs of victory and were also used during the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39-43) which celebrated Israel's entrance into the Land (Lev 23:10) in fulfillment of God's covenants with Israel, specifically the Land portion of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was never kept in the Land by all of Israel – at least not until the return from Babylonian captivity (Neh 8:16-17). Then, all the people celebrated with great joy (Ezra 3:11-12; 2 Chron 20:19). ³
13 & 14	"...clothed in the white robes..." and "...washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."	These are references to the forgiveness (purity of white robes) available through the death of Christ.
15	"...they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple..."	Gentile believers, like the proselytes to Judaism during the Age of Israel, will have access to the heavenly temple as the serve as priests (Rev 5:10).
17	"...springs of the water of life..."	Compare this phrase to Revelation 21:6; 22:1-5

³ E.W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1984), 288.

Appendix A – An Analysis of the “Seal” of God in Scripture

In our analysis of the “seal” of God in Scripture, we will first make some observations regarding the contextual usage of the word in the book of Revelation. Second, we will analyze its usage in the Pauline corpus. Third, we will draw conclusions and reconcile the two.

The “seal” of God in Revelation – In Revelation, we discover the following facts regarding this group.

- This group will include the 144,000 (7:4ff) of Israel who are believers.
- The “seal” represents ownership by God and the Lamb (14:1, 4).
- The “sealed,” specifically the 144,000, are considered the first-fruits of God (14:3-4).
- The “seal” upon believers that is mentioned in Revelation does not protect those believers from harm inflicted by human agency; however, it does protect those believers from God’s direct acts of intervention in human and cosmic events (9:4; 13:7; 20:4).
- In Revelation 16:1-2, the bowl of God’s wrath is directed towards those who have the mark of the beast, but the “sealed” of God are excluded or are not mentioned.

The “seal of God” in the Pauline Corpus – In Paul’s writings, we discover the following facts regarding this phraseology used by Paul in reference to believers. Some of Paul’s uses of this phraseology is not so relevant to our study. From the passages that are bolded, we observe that the “seal of God” is a reference to God’s knowledge of those who have and will believe and God the Holy Spirit’s agency or role in the activity of sealing believers.

- Romans 4:11 – used to refer to the sign of circumcision that was received by Abram and is described by Paul as “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised.” (Paul’s usage in this particular passage is not quite as relevant to our study).
- 1 Corinthians 9:2 – Paul describes those Corinthians who have believed or accepted his gospel and teaching as a “seal” of his apostleship. (This usage is not quite as relevant to our study).
- **2 Corinthians 1:22** – God is described as having “sealed us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.” This passage provides us with the basis for what we understand to be the “sealing” ministry of the HS upon believers of the present dispensation (see also Eph 1:13; 4:30).
- **2 Timothy 2:19** – The Lord’s knowledge of those who are His is considered the “seal” of God and the “firm foundation of God.”
- **Ephesians 1:13-14** – believers are described as having been “sealed in Him [Christ – v. 12] with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance...”
- **Ephesians 4:30** – Believers are commanded – “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Some conclusions regarding the use of this phrase in Scripture – We must remember that in the book of Revelation, the dispensational setting and context is that final portion of the Age of Israel known as the Tribulation. Accordingly, God is working through redeemed and believing Israel once again (vs. the Body of Christ) to accomplish His redemptive activities. There is commonality or similarities between the usage of this terminology in Revelation and Paul’s usage – believers, those “sealed,” have assurance of their eternal destiny and the “seal” is language used to represent God’s knowledge of who they are. Nevertheless, there are some Israel-specific connotations that provide the use of the term or phrase in Revelation with a more Jewish or Israel emphasis. Note the following quotation in that regard.

As for OT background for the problem, Ezekiel 9:4-7 may well be primary. In this passage a divine messenger with stylus in hand was to go through the apostate Jerusalem of Ezekiel's day and put a mark upon the foreheads of those who deplored the faithless idolatry of the Israelites. Those so marked were the faithful and true servants of God in contrast to the professed but false servants who had abandoned him. The sealed would be spared the divine slaughtering of the

rebellious inhabitants of the city. Interestingly, the "mark" (tau) in the Phoenician script looked like a cross and was later adopted by early Jewish Christians as a symbol of their faith in Jesus.

The sealing language would have the effect of assuring the people of God of his special concern and plan for them. Even when facing persecution and martyrdom at the hand of the beast, they can be certain that no plague from God will touch them but that they will be in his presence forever because they are his very own possession. Therefore, the seal on the forehead is equivalent to the divine mark of ownership on them that elsewhere in the NT is referred to the presence of the Holy Spirit (2Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30).⁴

Appendix B – An Analysis of the Sealed of the Tribes of Israel

There are two primary interpretations of the list provided by John in Revelation 7:4-8. One interpretation is based upon a literal understanding of the number 144,000 and "Israel." The second interpretation is based upon the premise that John is using symbolic language to refer to the completed church consisting of both Jew and Gentile. The "complete" nature of this group is based upon the following logic that Gaebelein summarizes very well.

Earlier in Revelation (cf. 4:4), twenty-four (a multiple of twelve) serves as a symbolic number. The "thousand" multiple appears again--this time in relation to the size of the Holy City: "He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long" (21:16). Thus, 12,000 is symbolic of completeness and perfection. Even the wall is "144 cubits" (twelve times twelve) (v. 17). The tree of life bearing "twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month" (i.e., twelve months) (22:2) further supports the view that John intends the number twelve to be taken symbolically and not literally. By 144,000, he signifies the sealing of *all* or the *total* number of God's servants who will face the Great Tribulation.⁵

The support for this list being a "complete" listing of Jewish believers of the Tribulation era based upon the rationale presented by Gaebelein is plausible. However, the view that this list is symbolic of the present church, i.e. Body of Christ, consisting of both Jew and Gentile is not only highly doubtful, it is not supported in Scripture. Scripture makes a clear distinction between the believing Jew, the believing Gentile and the unbelievers from both of those groups (cf. Gal 3:29; Phil 3:3; Rev 2:9; 3:9). Only in passages dealing with the present age (Body of Christ, a.k.a. Church Age), are believing Jews and Gentiles seen as members of the same group (cf. Rom 2:28-29; 9:8; 11:25-29). Furthermore, the detail provided to John by Jesus Christ regarding this group of 144,000 clearly and specifically distinguishes them from the description of the believers found in verses 9-16.

The list of the tribes of the "sealed" of Israel – There are some interesting observations to make regarding this list. I will try to be as succinct as possible, yet address the more important points to be noted.

- John places Judah first. This was evidently to emphasize the priority of the messianic King who came from the tribe of Judah (Rev 5:5; Heb 7:13-14). Nowhere in the tribal listings of the OT except in the space arrangement of the wilderness camp (Num 2:3 ff.) does Judah come first.

⁴ Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, New Testament*, electronic version.

⁵ Ibid.

- This exception may itself be linked with the messianic expectation through Judah (Gen 49:10; 1 Chron 5:2).
- John's priority of Judah is comparable to the emphasis placed in late Judaism on the tribe of Levi (the priestly tribe).
- It is significant that John includes Levi among the other tribes, and thus gives no special place to the Levitical order, and that he also places Levi in the comparatively unimportant eighth place. Why? Because all the saved of the Tribulation era are said to be a "kingdom and priests" (Rev 5:9-10).
- The OT has no fewer than twenty variant lists of the tribes, and these lists include anywhere from ten to thirteen tribes, though the number twelve is predominant (cf. Gen 49; Deut 33; Ezek 48).
- John omits Dan (which elsewhere is always included) and Ephraim (one of Joseph's two sons) – instead he lists both Joseph and Manasseh (Joseph's other son) as tribes.
- This is peculiar because the tribe of Joseph is always mentioned in the other lists by either including Joseph and excluding his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 49), or by omitting Joseph and counting the two sons as one tribe each (Ezek 48).
- It is not until the Levitical priesthood gains more prominence that the tribe of Levi is omitted from the lists and is replaced by the two sons of Joseph.
- The early church held that the Antichrist would arise from the tribe of Dan – a view that was perhaps carried forward from pre-Christian Jewish tradition.⁶
- Dan was associated in the OT with idolatry (Judg 18:18-19; 1 Kings 12:29-30) – a topic of particular relevance to believing and unbelieving Jews of the Tribulation who will be tempted to escape the persecution and martyrdom directed against them by simply accepting the mark of the Anti-christ and worshipping Him.
- This may be the clue.
- In the OT Ephraim was also explicitly identified with idolatry as well (Hos 4:17).
- Jesus, through the Revelation to John, is most likely highlighting the exclusion of any Jew from the list of those sealed should they follow the example of Dan and Ephraim who were so noted for their idolatry.
- This is why Manasseh (son of Joseph) and Joseph (father of Manasseh and Ephraim) were chosen to fill up the sacred number rather than Manasseh and Ephraim – the two sons of Joseph.

⁶ Ibid. Gaebelein refers to Irenaeus and cites R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913), 2:334.