

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“Who Are The 144,000?”

Revelation 7:4-8

Review

1. This chapter is part of “the things which shall be hereafter” (1:19). Question: “hereafter” what? Answer: “the things seen” (1:12-18) even “the things which are” (chaps. 2, 3).

2. The Church (Body of Christ) has been raptured (4:1). God’s throne has been revealed (4:1-11). The Lord Jesus (Lion of Juda, Root of David, Lamb) has taken the “little book” (title-deed to His kinsman-Redeemer work and title-deed to Christ’s right to the universe 5:1-14). All of this concerns heavenly events.

3. With chapter six, the scene changes to earth. Six seals of the “little book” are opened (6:1-17). These are identical with the events described in Matthew 24 (4, 5, 7, 8, 9-13, 29, 30). Before the seventh seal is opened, God assigns angels to seal “the servants of our God in their foreheads” (7:3).

4. Since the sealing is before “the earth, the sea, and the trees” are “hurt,” it is clear that the sealing is prior to the “wrath of the Lamb” (Tribulation Period). The act of sealing was “given” to “four angels” and “another angel” (7:2).

NOTE: In this Age of Grace (Pentecost to the Rapture), the Holy Spirit is Himself the Father’s “seal” on every believer (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30). The Holy Spirit is “received” (John 7:39; 14:16, 17; Ro. 8:9), hence He is inside the believer. The “seal” of Revelation 7 unquestionably marks divine ownership (“servants of our God,” 7:3). But it is outside “in their foreheads” so others could see it and identify them. It is the “Father’s Name” (14:1) which will not allow secret discipleship. Those “sealed” “belong to the Lord” (2 Tim. 2:19).

5. The first way by which God’s grace is displayed is through the intervention of angels (7:1-3). No one could “stand” the great day of His (the Lamb’s) wrath” (6:17). However, the “sealed” will (7:1-8). The second way by which God’s grace is displayed is through the identification of the 144,000.

1. The Identification Was HEARD v. 4

The aorist verb () makes it evident that the event is a fact. Frequently, John “saw” (e.g. 5:1; 6:1), but He also “heard” (6:1, 3, 5). There is no guesswork here. Divine enumeration is at work.

2. The Identification Was SIGNIFIED v. 4

Amazingly there are those who suggest that the number could not be taken literally. Consequently, all sorts of strange views are advanced. Our reply is simple: If God did not mean what He said, why didn’t He say what He meant! So the figure stands as is.

Moreover, the perfect passive tense of the verb “sealed” () denotes the number is in the Bible by divine order and therefore inerrant.

The conclusion is inescapable. God has set the figure of Israelites whom He has sealed for protection through the Tribulation Period. God said it. That settles it. We believe it.

3. The Identification Was DETAILED vv. 4-8

a. Tribally

Consistent dispensational interpretation of Scripture must accept the reference here to “tribes” () belonging to the “sons” () of Israel. No Gentile could possibly be enumerated here (cf. Ro. 9:3, 4; Eph. 2:11, 12). The figure of 144,000 is therefore ethnically detailed.

b. Specifically

Twelve seems to be a signature number for Israel. Jacob had 12 sons. There were 12 stones on the breastplate of the High Priest (Ex. 28; Lev. 24), 12 Apostles (Mk 3:16-19), 12 gates in New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). The number may connote rule, government, and earthly administration. Hence, 12,000 are noted from each tribe recorded (vv. 5-8).

c. Individually

There are about 18 enumerations of the patriarchs or tribes of Israel in the Scripture (Gen. 35:22ff; 46:8ff, 49; Ex. 1:1ff; Num. 1, 2, 13:4ff; 26; 34; Deut. 27:11ff; 33:6ff; Josh. 13-22; Judges 5; 1 Chron. 2-8; 12:24ff; 17:16ff; Ezek. 48). The order differs somewhat in every list.

As to the order of the tribes here in Revelation, with the exception of Judah being placed first, the order does not seem to follow any particular rule. Reuben, the eldest does follow Judah and Benjamin, the youngest, is placed last. Any other consideration is rather questionable.

d. Practically

1) Omissions

Two notable omissions are made in the enumeration: tribes of Dan and Ephraim. This may well be due to their involvement in idolatry (Deut. 29:18-21). Further, these two tribes followed Jeroboam to setup Golden Calves to be worshiped in their territories (1 Kgs. 12:25-30). Dan may also have been omitted because Rachel followed the example of her grandmother, Sarah, in giving Jacob Bilhah who conceived Dan. Rachel may have called him Dan meaning: God has judged me (cf. Gen. 49:12; Judges 18:30). Joseph takes the place of Ephraim (cf. Num. 13:11).

2) Inclusions

Grace abounds with God, hence Dan and Ephraim will experience the blessing of the Lord in the Millennium. Their names appear in the partition of the Land when the 12 tribes occupy the land He gave them (Ezek. 48:1-7, 23-29). The sealing of this chapter concerns a heavenly preservation (cf. 14:1-5) more than for an earthly inheritance. The unsealed tribes pass through the Tribulation unprotected by sealing.

Conclusion

The literal interpretation of the Bible is at stake with this chapter. The 144,000 are Jewish people set aside for ministry about salvation (cf. 14:1-5, 6). These Jewish evangelists will bring about the salvation of the great multitude (7:9-17). Further along, they will be the remnant ready to enter the Millennial Kingdom at the close of the Tribulation. Meanwhile -- are you ready if the Lord Jesus returns for the Rapture? Make sure. Receive the Lord Jesus as your Saviour from sin NOW. Amen.