



The Seven Seal Scroll

The 144,000 of Revelation 7

The Vision of Revelation 7

There are two main groups mentioned in Revelation 7.

1. 144,000 sealed from the tribes of Israel (7:1-8).
2. A great multitude from every nation (7:9-17).

These are variously interpreted by historicists (various times in the ancient world or in the Reformation); preterists (pertaining to the fall of Jerusalem); futurists (pertaining to a future 7-year Tribulation); and idealists (pertaining to God's special protection during times of judgment).

The question is, which one fits best and fits with what we've seen so far in the book of Revelation.

I've argued that the preterist position best fit with the events of Revelation 6 (and even historicists like Matthew Henry agree). Especially 6:6 which seems to refer to the wine and oil looted from the temple after the graneries in Jerusalem were burned down (as reported by Josephus who was an eye witness). [along with the price of wheat and barley which matches verbatim the quote by Josephus.]

Revelation 7:1-3

¹ 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.”

This takes place for the final seal is opened and before the 7 trumpets are blown (which is what the final seal does). So before the end of judgment we have the sealing of the “servants of our God.”

Two interpretive symbols: (1) four winds and (2) sealing of the servants of God.

The four angels, four corners, and four winds? Some conjecture that these are references to certain battles (war that led to Rome’s demise or moral laxitude). It is better to see that God’s messengers (angels) are withholding this final judgment until God seals his servants. He will keep them from the coming disaster. He remains in complete control. They are holding back the winds of his wrath.

What do we do with “on their foreheads”? Should we read this literally or symbolically? As I’ve mentioned in the introduction, we should assume it is symbolic rather than a seal stamped on a person’s forehead.

Matthew Henry gets it right when he says, “God has a particular care and concern for his own servants in times of temptation and corruption. . . . The seal of God was set upon their foreheads, a seal known to him, and as plain as

if it appeared on their foreheads.”

The Four Winds

¹ Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. ² The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, ³ the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong. ⁴ Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” ⁵ And the angel answered and said to me, “These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth (Zech 6:1-5).

This takes place before the final seal is opened and before the 7 trumpets are blown (which is what the final seal does).

OR these could describe the first four seals and the four horsemen described there (parallel to Zech 6).

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Sealing and Parallel in Ezekiel 9

¹Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, “Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand.” ²And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar.

Ezekiel 9 describes the events prior to Jerusalem’s destruction in 586 BC.

Parallel in Ezekiel 9

³ 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.”

Parallel in Ezekiel 9 (cont.)

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. ⁷ Then he said to them, “Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.” So they went out and struck in the city. ⁸ And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, “Ah, Lord God! Will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?”

Parallel in Ezekiel 9 (cont.)

⁹ Then he said to me, “The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice. For they say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see.’ ¹⁰ As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; I will bring their deeds upon their heads.”

¹¹ And behold, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his waist, brought back word, saying, “I have done as you commanded me.”

Ezekiel 9 describes the events prior to Jerusalem’s destruction in 586 BC. God took care to identify his own and spare them from the judgment. It was after this marking that God sent in his angels to destroy the city and slaughter its inhabitants.

“The last words in Revelation chapter 6 were: “The great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (Compare the similar question and context of Mal. 3:2). The present vision answers this question.

Those who survived the slaughter of AD 70 were those who possessed the seal of God (Eph. 1:13), that is, the Jewish believers in Christ. That the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem actually escaped to safety prior to the siege is a matter of history”

Adam Clarke, a historicist who like Henry, sees Revelation 6-7 referring to the destruction of Jerusalem says, Clarke writes, “It is worthy of remark that not one Christian perished in the siege of Jerusalem; all had left the city and escaped to Pella.”

So this text has both biblical (Ezekiel 9) and historical warrant to see it refer to AD 70.

“Whenever God sends judgment on societies or civilizations, He is mindful of those who are His own and who bear His seal. The judgments of God are never released upon the earth until God’s redeemed are identified and sealed for special protection.”

Thomas Nelson. Revelation: Four Views, Revised and Updated (p. 175).
Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Revelation 7:4-8

And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000 from the tribe of Gad, ⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher, 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh, ⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000 from the tribe of Levi, 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar, ⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

Who are the 144,000?

Who are the 144,000?

1. The entire people of God (Israel of God). $12 \times 12 \times 1000$
2. During a future Great Tribulation, 144,000 Jewish people will be sealed for protection from the later plagues (cf. Rev 9:4).
3. The number of Jews who received mercy at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (cf. Rom 11:5; Rev 14:4).

Who are the 144,000?

#1. The church or whole people of God. Most common among contemporary interpreters.

#2. Revelation 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."

Futurist argues that it would not make sense for the church to be divided up into twelve tribes. This is referring to Jewish people, not the church.

The omission of the tribe of Dan from the list is considered by some an indicator that the Antichrist will be of that tribe. Others believe it was the idolatry of Dan and Ephraim that led to their omission.

Others believe that the irregular tribes indicates that this is not literal Israel but the church... Wilson says, "That ethnic Israel is not in view is confirmed by the irregular listing of the tribes. Judah is placed first as the Messiah's own tribe, Dan is omitted, Levi is included as an ordinary tribe and Joseph replaces Ephraim."

#3. Matthew Henry says, "In this list the tribe of Dan is omitted, perhaps

because they were greatly addicted to idolatry; and the order of tribes is altered, perhaps as they had been more or less faithful to God. Some take these to be a select number of Jews who were reserved for mercy at the destruction of Jerusalem; others think that time was past, and therefore it is to be more generally applied to God's chosen remnant in the world." He believes the former view is more probable.

This is the remnant of Israel that Paul speaks of in the book of Romans. Romans 11:1-5, "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. **2** God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? **3** "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." **4** But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." **5** So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace."

These Jewish Christians escaped Jerusalem before its destruction. The historian Eusebius wrote, "The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella."

The number is not necessarily literal but symbolic of the Jewish believers who were kept from the wrath of the lamb against Jerusalem.

Revelation 14:3-5, "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." In James 1:1, 18 he refers to the Jewish exiles as "firstfruits."

Why it is not the future tribulation:

- If these are future tribulation saints redeemed from a future Jewish nation before the very end one would expect them to be called the "last fruits" and not the "first fruits."
- The Jews have lost their tribal identity. The event of 70AD brought an end to the records kept in the temple and erased tribal markings.

It is best to see the complete and full number of God's people in Jerusalem, the remnant, were sealed and protected and delivered from his terrible judgment.

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹ 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, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs 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 worshiped 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.”

Revelation 7:9-17 (cont.)

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” ¹⁴ 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 7:9-17 (cont.)

¹⁵“Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For 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.”

Who is this great multitude from every nation?

Who is the Great Multitude of Rev. 7?

From all nations, clothed in white, before the throne and the Lamb, and with palm branches in their hand (v. 9).

They are coming out of the great tribulation (v. 14).

1. The church on earth (vv. 1-7), the church in heaven (8-17).
2. Whereas 144,000 Jews will be saved in the future tribulation, even more Gentiles will be redeemed.
3. The innumerable redeemed from the Gentile world following the formal end of Judaism when Jerusalem is destroyed.

#1. The church militant on earth (a host or army). Then the church triumphant in heaven.

Those who hold this position think that the language is too lofty to refer either to a preterist view or a short season in the futurists tribulation.

#2. For the futurist, this cannot be referring to the church since the church was raptured before the events in Revelation 4. So this is referring to people saved during the Great Tribulation who are non-Jewish.

Some believe that these, who did not believe before the rapture, will enter the millennium but “not first class saints” (Seiss). It is taught that they did not believe the gospel of grace but now they have responded to the gospel of the kingdom. Some believe this is not a scene in heaven but on earth before the physical kingdom of Christ.

The problem for the futurist is that the description here of the redeemed seems to overlap and parallel the description of the bride in Revelation 21 which is the church. But in their case, this is a subset of the church.

The other problem is that John says that he is in the tribulation with them (1:9).

#3. the two are groups distinct, with the main differences between them being

their respective sizes and their different ethnicities.

Besides the significant remnant of Israel who are delivered from destruction, at the fall of Jerusalem, there is an even larger number saved out of every ethnicity following that event.

Matthew Henry says, "God will have a greater harvest of souls among the Gentiles than he had among the Jews. More are the children of the desolate than of the married woman. [Isa. 54:1]"

These ones come out (literally, "are coming out") of the great tribulation (v. 14) in the sense that their inclusion in God's kingdom resulted from that event, at which time Judaism came to a formal end and the universal gospel was proclaimed to all nations.

Matthew 21:40-41, 43

⁴⁰When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

When did this happen? 70AD.

Matthew 22:8-10

⁸Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

When did this happen? 70AD.

Significance of Revelation 7

1. God protects and preserves his own.
2. God always remembers mercy in judgment.
3. God's judgment of Israel meant mercy to the Gentiles.
4. Jesus' words about judgment against the generation who put him to death and rejected his kingship are proved true.
5. The protection of God's people and their final victory will be perfect.

#1. The rapture doctrine teaches that God's people are removed from all tribulation. God teaches that he will preserve through it.

#2. God never forgets grace and mercy even as he pours out his wrath. He holds back his wrath until his sealing and preserving work is complete. The same is true even today. He is holding back his wrath, restraining his judgment, delaying his return, until all his saved are sealed by the Spirit of God and marked out to be safe for the wrath to come.

#3. God's judgment removed Jerusalem being central (Acts 15). Soon it was Antioch, then the whole world.

Romans 11:11, "11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles" Romans 11:25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11: 30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,

Gentiles are not called to boast, but to fear. The wild olive branches have been grafted in, but God can remove you. Do not boast because their judgment has meant your inclusion.

#4. In Matthew 21 and 22 Jesus promises that he would remove the kingdom from the Jews and give it to the Gentiles. He did that in their lifetime. While the Gentiles were being included before AD70, that event meant an end to Judaism. Christianity was no longer a persecuted sect, it was the inheritor of the Jewish Scriptures.

#5. Revelation 7 describes both Jews and Gentiles receiving God's mercy and then being protected and glorified before God forever and ever. All this is owing to the mercy of the Lamb.