

THE SEALING OF THE FAITHFUL

Introduction

1. Chapter 7 records an interlude between the opening of the sixth and seventh seals.
2. The opening of the first four seals revealed symbols of the suffering endured by the church – oppression, conflict, hunger, and death.
3. The opening of the fifth seal revealed the symbolic cry of the persecuted for vengeance against their oppressors.
4. The opening of the sixth seal revealed symbols that described the judgment God would bring upon the enemies of the church.
5. Now, before the seventh seal is opened, God symbolically declares His love for and protection of His faithful.

- I. The Sealing of 144,000 (7:1-8)
 - A. Following the opening of the sixth seal, the reader is filled with a sense of wonder.
 1. Who is able to stand in the day of God's wrath?
 2. What will happen to those who received God's judgment?
 3. What will happen to the faithful during this judgment?
 4. What will the seventh seal reveal?
 - B. But, before the last seal is opened, God focuses John's attention upon the faithful Christians.
 1. There is an important lesson to be learned from this chapter.
 2. Judgment upon the wicked is salvation for the righteous.
 - C. John saw four angels on the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth.
 1. The number 4 is symbolic of the world, the earth in its fullness.
 2. These four angels are conducting God's purpose in relation to the world and its judgment.
 3. The "four corners of the earth" symbolize the entire earth – the four cardinal directions; north, south, east, and west (cf. Isaiah 11:12; 24:16; Matthew 24:31).
 4. They are holding back the winds of God's judgment that His wrath will not come upon the earth until the time is right.
 5. The symbol of wind representing the judgment of God is found several times in Scripture (Jeremiah 49:36; Daniel 7:2-3; Zechariah 6:5).
 - D. As John watched these four angels, another appeared, rising in the east ("ascend from the sunrising" – ASV).
 1. This symbolized a message of comfort and assurance.
 2. While the church was facing a time of deep darkness, the appearance of this angel was like the breaking of dawn.
 3. This angel was another, but of the same kind as the four.
 - E. This angel possessed the seal of the living God.
 1. The seal was used to verify ownership and assure the genuineness and authority of an object.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Fifteen

Revelation 7:1-17

2. Cf. Genesis 41:42; Esther 3:10; 8:2; Daniel 6:17; Matthew 27:66; Song of Solomon 8:6; John 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19
- F. He cried to the other angels that the earth was not to be hurt until the servants of God had been sealed in their foreheads.
 1. This imagery comes from Ezekiel 9:1-6; the principle comes from Exodus 12:13.
 2. This mark or seal was to distinguish the upright from the wicked.
 - a. Obviously, God does not need a mark on a person's forehead to know if he is faithful or not.
 - b. This is a symbol to comfort God's people with the reminder that God knows those who are His – even in suffering.
 3. The seal was the name of God written upon their foreheads (14:1)
 4. The forehead is symbolic for several reasons.
 - a. It is conspicuous – a place where a seal would be obvious (to God or to man).
 - b. It represents the focus of the mind of man – their thoughts were centered upon God.
 - c. It was where the High Priest wore the gold plate engraved with “Holiness to the Lord” (Exodus 28:36-38).
 - d. It contrasts with the mark given by the beast (13:16).
- G. Notice that those who were sealed are upon the earth, showing that while they endure persecution, it is not because God has forgotten or forsaken them.
 1. Being sealed would not keep them from suffering.
 2. Instead, it reminded them that they belonged to God and that even death was a victory.
- H. The number of individuals who received this seal was 144,000.
 1. Obviously, this is a symbolic number.
 2. Twelve is the religious or covenant number.
 3. 12 X 12 (144) symbolizes the saved of both covenants – Old and New Testaments.
 4. Multiplied by 1,000, this number symbolizes a large but complete number of the saved – God does not forget any of His children.
- I. This number – 144,000 – is reached by sealing 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.
 1. Again, this is symbolic – representing all the saved.
 2. The 12 tribes listed here represent spiritual Israel, not physical Israel of the Old Testament.
 3. This list is different from any other.
 - a. Judah, not Reuben, is named first – a reference to the tribe from which Jesus came (cf. Hebrews 7:14).
 - b. Dan and Ephraim are not listed (cf. Deuteronomy 28:18-20; Judges 18; Hosea 4:17; etc.).
 - c. The tribe of Levi is included – perhaps indicating the importance of each Christian's role as priest.
 - d. The tribe of Joseph is included.
 4. These things point to the symbolic use of the tribes to represent the saved.

A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS DOCTRINE OF THE 144,000

1. They believe that only 144,000 will inhabit Heaven; the rest will live on the Earth.
2. Interestingly, in this passage the 144,000 are on the earth while the innumerable multitude is in Heaven (vs. 1-3, 9).
3. Furthermore, if we are to take this number literally, we must take all in the passage literally.
 - a. All 144,000 must be Israelites from one of the 12 tribes. {*This leaves Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out of Heaven in contrast to Matthew 8:11.*}
 - b. No Gentile can expect to go to Heaven, in contradiction of Matthew 8:11.
 - c. No one from the tribe of Ephraim or the tribe of Dan will be in Heaven. {*This excludes Joshua and Samson, among others.*}
 - d. No woman will be in Heaven, for the 144,000 are called men in 14:4. {*This excludes Hannah, Dorcas, Mary, Priscilla, and a host of others!*}
 - e. No married man will be in Heaven, for the 144,000 are virgins (14:4). {*This excludes Abraham, Moses, Peter, and a host of others!*}
4. Obviously, the number is symbolic like the other language in these verses.
5. There is no fixed number given in Scripture of how many will be in Heaven.
6. Furthermore, the Earth will be destroyed when the Lord returns (2 Peter 3).

II. The Multitude of the Saved (7:9-17)

- A. The second part of this vision reveals an innumerable host standing before the throne of God in Heaven.
- B. This is not a host of angels, but of men from all nations of the earth.
- C. They are those who have endured tribulation and persecution by remaining faithful unto death.
 1. Thus, the first part of this vision shows them on earth while they are undergoing persecution.
 2. Then, they were sealed and numbered so they would remember that God knows and protects His own.
 3. Now, they are seen in Heaven as a host without number.
 4. Instead of a seal on their foreheads, they wear white robes – cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.
 5. They have “palms in their hands,” symbolizing the joy of a bountiful harvest (cf. Leviticus 23:26-32, 39-44; *Feast of Tabernacles*).
- D. They give glory and honor to God and the Lamb for their salvation.
- E. They serve God in His temple as He dwells among them.
- F. They are delivered from all suffering – hunger, thirst, heat, etc.
- G. Instead, they are nurtured and nourished by the Lamb of God.
- H. Those who have endured so much on the earth have all their tears wiped away by the God of Heaven.
- I. The message is clear – *Be faithful unto death!*