

# REVELATION – SERMON 36

## *THE 144,000*

Revelation 7:1-8

### INTRODUCTION

- The Christian has a sovereign Protector and Preserver, whose Name we know
- When the fury of his wrath is poured out, he is able to protect and preserve his people
- Despite the forces of darkness wielding enormous power on earth during the tribulation period, there will be multitudes of Jews and Gentiles saved
- Though the Holy Spirit in his restraining capacity being taken out of the way (2 Thessalonians 2:7), he will yet continue to reprove and convict sinners during this time, drawing them to faith in Christ
- As is the case now, so too during the tribulation there will be a great struggle between the forces of light and darkness to win the hearts of the people on earth
- There will be the added element of signs and wonders.
- While the devil and antichrist will deceive many with their lying signs and wonders, many others will be turned to God by signs of his terrible judgments; the two witnesses (Revelation 11); the 144,000, and the destruction of the king of the north in the battle of Gog and Magog which takes place at the time of the sixth seal, in the first half of the tribulation (Ezekiel 38-39)
- In Ezekiel 38-39 there is described a coalition of Magog (Russia), Meshech/Tubal/Gomer/Togarmah (Turkey), Persia (Iran), Ethiopia (Sudan) who will make war against Israel

- God will intervene on Israel's behalf with a global earthquake and fire from heaven (Ezekiel 38:20-22; Revelation 6:12-13), and only one-sixth of their enemies will escape (Ezekiel 39:6); it will take Israel seven months to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:12) and seven years to burn their weapons (Ezekiel 39:9)
- Two-thirds of the Jews will perish, but the remaining Jews will repent and believe in Jesus Christ and be saved (Zechariah 13:8-9)
- Paul described his conversion "as of one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8), meaning "prematurely", and indicates that his conversion as an Israelite was an illustration, before the time, of the future national conversion of Israel (Romans 11:25-27)
- Revelation 7 takes place close to the mid-point of the tribulation
- It is one of several parenthetical interludes in Revelation, between the sixth and seventh seals, and it shows us that the nation of Israel has a major role during the tribulation
- The question posed in 6:17, "Who is able to stand?" is answered in this chapter
- Here we see a demonstration that God "in wrath remembers mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2)

## **I. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN JUDGMENT (1-3)**

### **A. The delay of judgment**

1. "After these things" (1,9) marks a transition in the vision
2. There are *four* angels/corners/winds
  - a. Four is the number of earth, indicating these judgment will take place on earth
3. Angels throughout Revelation are the instruments of God's dealings
  - a. They are God's ministers (Hebrews 1:7,14)

- b. They are continually active in the affairs of nations (Daniel 10:13; 11:1; 12:1)
4. The word for “corners” (Greek *zonia*) is translated as “quarters” in 20:8, corresponding to the four points of the compass, and does not support a “flat earth” theory (cf. Isaiah 40:22)
5. The “four winds” bring hurt to the earth sea and trees and would indicate the impending trumpet judgments which will come from every direction
  - a. Wind is used in scripture to represent judgment (Proverbs 1:27; Hosea 8:7)
  - b. Daniel 7:2-3 describes the four winds upon the sea which brings forth the antichrist
6. These angels are “standing”, showing that these judgments are imminent
7. The delaying of harm to earth, sea and trees (v.3) is a delaying of the first trumpet which affects the earth and destroys a third of the trees (8:7); and a delaying of the second trumpet which turns a third of the sea to blood, kills a third of sea life and destroys a third of ships (8:8-9)

## B. The sealing angel

1. This high ranking angel is charged with the protection of God’s people (Psalm 91:11)
2. He comes from the *east*
  - a. This is literally “from the sun-rising”
  - b. God’s judgment and deliverance in scripture often comes from this direction (Genesis 41:27; Exodus 10:13; 14:21; Psalm 48:7; Isaiah 27:8; Jeremiah 18:17; Ezekiel 19:12; Hosea 13:15; Jonah 4:8)

- c. God's glory departed the temple from this direction (Ezekiel 10:18; 11:22-23) and will return from this direction (Ezekiel 43:2-4; 44:1-2)
3. This angel carries the seal of the living God
- a. Such seals or stamps were used by kings to set an official mark which would designate possession (Daniel 6:17)
  - b. Servants also were marked or branded by their masters to denote ownership
  - c. Believers are presently sealed by God, which denotes possession, authentication and protection (2 Corinthians 1:22; John 6:27; Ephesians 1:14; 4:30)
  - d. As in previous judgments, God will seal and protect his people through them (Genesis 7:16; Exodus 12:13; Joshua 2:18)
  - e. When God sent his judgment upon Israel in Ezekiel's day, he set a mark upon the righteous (Ezekiel 9:1-6)
  - f. God will not slay the righteous with the wicked (Genesis 18:23-33)
  - g. The antichrist will have his own mark that will identify those who belong to Satan (Revelation 13:16-18; 14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20)
  - h. It appears that the sealing of these 144,000 servants in this chapter is the initial sealing of an evangelistic witness, and subsequently, many more, both Jew and Gentile, will come to believe and also receive this seal (Revelation 9:4; 22:4)
  - i. While this seal guarantees protection against divine judgment in the tribulation, it may not protect against harm from other people (Revelation 13:7,15; 20:4)

## II. GOD'S PROTECTION OF THE JEWS (4-8)

### A. The identity of the 144,000

1. There are many false interpretations of this group
2. Cults see them as representing their own particular group
  - a. JWs originally thought that the 144,000 included all their number, but as their cult increased it was applied to a select number in their group that will be permitted to go to heaven
  - b. Mormons understand the number to represent their elders
  - c. SDAs see them as faithful SDAs who are keeping the sabbath when Jesus returns
3. Amillennials are forced to spiritualise the plain meaning of these verses from a bias against anything that may indicate a favourable future for the Jewish people
4. Yet there is no reason to not take these verses literally and see the 144,000 as that precise number of Israelites from the twelve tribes
5. There are two groups of believers described in this chapter
  - a. Israelite missionaries who take the gospel to the world in (1-8)
  - b. Gentile believers in heaven who were saved during the tribulation (9-17)
  - c. During this present dispensation, there is no distinction made between Jewish and Gentile believers – they are one in the body of Christ (Colossians 1:26-29; 3:11; Ephesians 2:14-22; 3:1-7)
  - d. Yet during the tribulation, God deals with Israel in a distinct national relationship

- e. This is further confirmation that the church age will have ended, and the church removed from earth before the tribulation begins
6. The 144,000 will preach the gospel to the world
- a. “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14)
  - b. They will be empowered and protected by God as they travel the whole planet preaching the gospel
  - c. Verses 9-17 seem to indicate the fruit of their witness in bringing “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” to a saving knowledge of the Lamb
  - d. The antichrist will be enraged against Israel, will break his covenant with them, and set up the abomination of desolation in the temple, making war against them
7. Chapter 14 reveals more details about this group
- a. They have the Father’s name in the foreheads (14:1)
  - b. They are redeemed (14:3)
  - c. They are males and virgins (14:4)
  - d. They are the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb (14:4)
  - e. They are holy and faithful servants of God (14:5)
- B. The listing of the twelve tribes
- 1. Of the nineteen lists of the tribes in the Old Testament, none are the same as this list

2. Judah is listed first as usual, his being the royal tribe from which Messiah comes
3. Manasses is listed, but not Ephraim, who is replaced with Joseph – Ephraim was the chief tribe in the northern kingdom which went into idolatry
4. The priestly tribe of Levi is included – perhaps because the Levitical order has been done away with, and they are now equal with the other tribes
5. The tribe of Dan is omitted – this was the first tribe to establish idolatry in Israel (Judges 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29-30)
6. Yet God in his grace includes Ephraim and Dan in the allocation of land the kingdom (Ezekiel 48:1-2,5)
7. The meaning of each of the names of the tribes is instructive
  - a. Judah – “praise of the Lord”
  - b. Reuben – “who sees the son”
  - c. Gad – “a band”
  - d. Aser – “blessed”
  - e. Nepthalim – “my wrestling”
  - f. Manasses – “forgetting”
  - g. Simeon – “hearing”
  - h. Levi – “adhering”
  - i. Issachar – “reward”
  - j. Zabulon – “habitation”
  - k. Joseph – “adding”

- I. Benjamin – “son of the right hand”
  8. Put together, the message is, *“Praisers of the Lord, who look to the Son; a band of the blessed, their wrestling forgotten; hearing and adhering to a reward of a habitation; adding [souls] to the Son of the right hand.”*

## CONCLUSION

1. This passage reminds us of the vital role the Jews have in God’s redemptive plan (John 4:22) and the exalted position they will have in the future (Zechariah 8:23)
2. God’s blessing is upon those who bless them, and his curse is upon those who curse them (Genesis 12:3)
3. It is a great comfort to the believer that God knows those who are his (Nahum 1:7; John 10:27)
4. Though the Christian is promised to face trials and tribulation in this world, he can say with confidence *“the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”* (2 Timothy 4:18)
5. God’s sealing of the believer is not only a comfort to the believer, it is a challenge
6. Those who are sealed must name the name of Christ and depart from iniquity (2 Timothy 2:19)
7. Those who are sealed must live not to themselves, but unto God (2 Corinthians 5:15), that they grieve not the holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30)