

Lesson Nine

Interlude: The 144,000 (7:1-8)

There are several places in Revelation that pause to provide clarification and necessary details.

Commentators call these pauses Interludes. The sixth seal concludes the description of the coming terror with the question, “who is able to stand?” (6:17). A visionary interlude provides the answer.

Sealing of the 144,000 (7:1-8)

7:1. Four angels temporarily hold back the judgments of God on the earth. They await the coming of another angel to seal the great multitude (7:2-3). We have a prototype of seal in OT history. It was a seal that protected Israel, the people of God, from the plagues God sent on Egypt. The purpose of the seal is to protect Believers from God’s judgment on the earth (9:4). The intense judgments of God that occur during the Great Tribulation do not occur until the full number of God’s servants is sealed.

Excursus: The Sealing

The Sealing in Revelation

3:12. Every Christian who overcomes spiritual testing is an overcomer, Jew and Gentile alike. Names represent ownership.

7:3-4 The seal is placed on their foreheads; this signifies ownership. This is a preview of what is to come later, the salvation of Israel (11:1-13) and the protection of the judgment of God (9:4; cp.16:2).

9:4. When God sends his judgments on earth, His servants are protected from harm. The seal of God is placed on the foreheads of God's servants. They belong to Him.

14:1. The 144,000 have the name of God and Jesus on their foreheads. Here we see the prominence of Jewish Believers in End Times.

22:4. The name of God is on the foreheads of Believers who inherit the new heaven and new earth. This is true for Jewish and Gentile Believers.

The Sealing in Other NT Passages

All believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit. This is for assurance or guarantee of our inheritance of eternal life. Sealing occurs at the time of our salvation.

Ephesians 1:13-14. Sealing provides assurance/guarantee of our salvation and it identifies Believers as God's own possession.

Ephesians 4:30. Sealing assures and guarantees our eternal redemption.

II Corinthians 1:22. Sealing is for our assurance and guarantee. It is accomplished by the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts.

Therefore, the best understanding of the sealing of the 144,000 is:

- the sealing occurs at the time of salvation. This passage acknowledges the mass conversion of the Jews during the Great Tribulation; however, all Christians of all times are sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- the sealing is for assurance and protection. Sealing is not unique to the 144,000 since all Christians are sealed.
- the sealing of the Holy Spirit guarantees that we are God's own possession. The seal is the name of God, Jesus, and His city on the foreheads of Believers. This is not literal script but a sealing by the Holy Spirit.

7:4-8. John hears the number sealed. Who are the 144,000?

- Some commentators see these as “special agent” Jews.
- Some commentators think they are the New Israel, or the Church (Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:29; Revelation 2:9, 3:9).

- Some commentators identify these as the complete number of Jews who accept Christ as Messiah during the Great Tribulation (Romans 9:25-26). The salvation of Israel is described in 11:1-13. Revelation 14:3-5 helps identify the 144,000. They are Believers who have an uncompromising spiritual commitment. They are described as first fruits to God and Jesus. Israel is called the first fruits of God (Jeremiah 2:3). First fruit means a part of a whole.

Therefore, the 144,000 appear to be Jews who are saved (inherent in sealing) during the Great Tribulation. Other Believers/saints are alive during the Great Tribulation. All Believers have the name of God and Jesus on their foreheads because they belong to Him; all Believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit for protection and assurance.