

Survivors of the Wrath of God

Revelation 7:1–8

Let's open our Bibles, to Revelation chapter 7. We have much in store as the Word of God is opened.

Coming to chapter 7, of course, is somewhat of a significant milestone in this book; it means that the foundational six seals are behind us which lay out really the judgment of God over the period of time called the tribulation, which is yet to come. **And 7 is sort of slid right in between the sixth and the seventh seal. If you look at chapter 8, verse 1, when he broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half-an-hour.**

So, we're taking a bit of respite here in the fury of the sixth seal before the seventh and final seal is broken. After all of the furious, devastating judgment of the first six seals, this chapter offers a moment of calm, a moment of promise, a moment of hope. **It offers insight into escape.** To borrow the words of an Old Testament prophet, **"In the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy."**

Now, as we have been learning, the future of our world will bring a time of unbelievable terror, a time of horror, a time of slaughter. It'll come from the hand of the very one who made the world, the very one who entered the world as a baby, the very one who was crucified and rose again, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the one who is unrolling the seven-sealed scroll. He is the one who is taking charge of His universe and this prophetic picture. He, along with the one who sits on the throne, His Father, God Almighty, are affecting these powerful judgments on the earth.

As we went through the six seals, we saw how the period of wrath to come is described in six different phases. First there is a false peace, then war, then famine, then pestilence and death, then vengeance, and then fear as the final day of the Lord comes crashing in in the sixth seal.

The sixth seal, described in chapter 6, verses 12 to 17, is what triggers the day of the Lord. The sixth seal and the day of the Lord are really synonymous.

Although what has come before is the work of God and the wrath of God, it is preliminary to the final great day of wrath, as it's called in verse 17, which we could call the day of the Lord. And that's typically what God does. There are preliminary judgments that act as a warning, and then the final day of the Lord comes. We see that historically, even as we see it hear prophetically.

The world up to this time – that is up to the sixth seal – has not been willing to acknowledge God.

Believers in the world – people have been converted; and so, there are believers in the world – and believers in the world have been giving testimony to the Word of God and telling people that this that is happening to them is the judgment of God. **But they are not believed. Ultimately, they are persecuted and killed, if possible, in an attempt to silence them.**

Finally, when the sixth seal hits, however, the world cannot escape that this is God. **They know it!**

And in **verse 16**, they say, **“Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”**

When the culminating fury comes, they know it's God. It is then that most likely they will acknowledge that all that they have been experiencing has come from the hand of God as a manifestation of His judgment. **They are, as we noted last week, scared to death.**

I quoted you out of Luke, where the Bible tells us that they will faint for fear. And the word “faint” means to die.

Some of them, during this time of the sixth seal, will be scared to death. The ones that don't die out of fear are going to want to be dead, and they're going to cry for the rocks to crush their life out rather than have to face God and Christ alive, thinking perhaps that way they'll escape.

What they say at the very end of verse 17 is very important for understanding the next chapter, because they ask the question, “Who is able to stand?” And that question is, in part, answered in chapter 7.

In fact, we could safely say that chapter 7 is the answer to that question. **Who will survive the divine fury? Who will survive the anger and wrath of God? Who will survive the collapsing universe?**

And the worst is yet to come. Trumpet judgments in chapters 8 and 9; bowl judgments, as they're called in chapter 16; and all of them seem to be embraced within the horrors of the sixth seal. Who can survive it?

When you look at the sixth seal, and the seven trumpets, and the seven bowl judgments, and you add the cumulative effect together, the question is a very good question. **Who can survive? And chapter 7 helps us answer that.**

First of all, let me quickly say that the ungodly can't survive. They will not survive. In **1 Thessalonians chapter 5** - we've gone back to that book numerous times in our study because they're so closely related - it says at the end of **Verse 3, "They shall not escape."** And, of course, it's speaking of the unbelievers who will feel the fury of destruction from the hand of God.

In **2 Thessalonians chapter 1**, it says that **"when the Lord Jesus" – verse 7 – "is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, He will deal out retribution to those who do not know God, to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction."**

There is nothing in that passage, either, that gives a glimmer of hope to any unbeliever that he or she might survive the wrath of God.

In **Chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians** and **verse 12**, it says, **"- in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth but took pleasure in wickedness."** The day of the Lord, in terms of its effect on the ungodly, seems to be comprehensive.

So, the ungodly will not survive, but there are some people who will survive the holocaust of God's wrath.

They'll live through the sixth seal. They'll live through the trumpet judgments. They'll live through the bowl judgments, and they will actually go into the millennial kingdom alive. All of the judgment fury of God will miss them. All of the holocausts that are going on in the natural world around them will not touch them. They will also be protected from the murderous efforts of Antichrist and the rest of the world that aligns with him to wipe out the Jews and the Christians.

They'll survive it all: the wars, the famines, the earthquakes, the plagues. They'll survive it all, every bit of it. They will survive rampant sinfulness running amok on the earth as the Restrainer – the Holy Spirit – let's go and sin runs its course. They'll survive the belching out of hell of previously bound demons who will increase the demon force on the earth.

They will survive the terror of Antichrist who rules the world and sets himself up as the only God to be worshiped. They will survive his blaspheming, his murderous intent. They will survive all of his enterprise, this man who has desecrated the temple, set himself up as God, committed an abomination there. They'll survive it all, and they'll go right on into the kingdom.

Who are these people that will survive? Well, let's meet one group of them. Chapter 7, verse 1, "After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads.’

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed; from the tribe of Reuben...” and then it goes on – Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

This is a fascinating section and a fascinating group. It is obviously the logical answer to the question at the end of chapter 6, as I said.

In the midst of judgment, there is to be mercy. As I read that, I was reminded of that wonderful and hopeful and encouraging text in the last book of the Old Testament, namely the book of **Malachi**. It, too, talks about the day of the Lord. In **Chapter 3 and verse 16**, “**Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.**”

What were they talking about? Well, they were speaking to each other because they were hearing the prophecy about the day of Lord, and they were saying to each other, “*I wonder what’ll happen to us?*”

And the prophet says the Lord know about them, and the Lord has a book, and in that book are written the names of those who fear the Lord.

And when the day of His fury hits, **verse 17** says, **“They will be Mine on that day,’** says the Lord of Hosts, **‘I will prepare My own possession. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’**

So, you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

“For behold, the day” – that’s the day of the Lord – **“is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff”** – that, again, is the universal destruction of the ungodly – **“and the day is coming that will set them ablaze,’** says the Lord of Hosts, **‘so that it will leave neither root nor branch.**

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his beams, and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.”

I think what he is saying, as he looks at the end time of the day of the Lord, is that God will protect the righteous, and they will enter into His kingdom, whereas He will destroy all of the wicked.

Now, we see a glimpse of that right here in this text that I just read to you. **God knows who belongs to Him, and God knows how if He chooses to protect them.**

- In the destruction that He brought in the flood, He knew how to protect the eight people that He wanted to protect.
- In the destruction that came in the city of Jericho, He knew how to protect the one woman He wanted to protect - Rahab.
- In the destruction that came to Sodom and Gomorrah, which was massive and wholesale, He knew how to protect the family He wanted to protect – that's the family of Lot.
- And when He set about to devastate, destroy, and slaughter in the land of Egypt, He knew how to protect those He wanted to protect there as well. God knows who He wants to protect.

And the wrath will come, and the wrath belongs to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And when the full fury of that wrath hits, it's going to consume the ungodly, but some of the godly will survive. And one of the groups that will survive is here identified as these 144,000 – 12,000 out of each of the tribes of Israel.

Now, let me just digress for a moment so that I can't give you somewhat broader picture here. We look at the period of the seven-year tribulation as a time of judgment, and indeed it is. As it unfolds in the seven seals, it is a time of judgment as the trumpets and bowls will affirm.

But it is also a time of redemption, and we need to remember that. That same seven-year period is a time of salvation, a time of redemption. Yes, God will judge Satan, and God will judge demons, and God will judge sinners, but God will also redeem.

We meet the redeemed out of this time period – don't we?

– back in chapter 6, where we see under the altar the souls of those who were slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained.

And we meet those who were redeemed out of this period, in **chapter 7, starting in verse 9. A great multitude; nobody could even count them. They come out of every nation and tribe and people and tongue, and they stand before the throne and before the Lamb, and they're clothed in white robes, and they have palm branches in their hands, and they are singing about salvation.** And **verse 14** says, **"These are those who come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.**

Now, would you notice a distinction there? The first group, in chapter 6, is in heaven. They're under the altar in heaven. The second group appears to be standing on the earth. There will be people redeemed during that time period.

Some will die and go to heaven; some will live to enter the kingdom.

Many of the Gentile believers will die from the persecution. Some of them surely will die from the physical factors of earthquakes, and famines, and pestilences, and the breakup of the universe, and asteroid showers, and meteorite showers, and the chaos in the universe.

But some of them will survive and go into the kingdom. Even those who die will be immediately ushered into the presence of the Lord, won't they?

True Christians may die in the persecution, but that's not God's wrath; that's God's grace, because when they die, they leave all the persecution to enter into the glory of the presence of the Lord.

And certainly, the suffering of this world, as Paul said in Romans 8, isn't worthy to be compared with the glory which belongs to those who know Him.

True Christians may die in the earthquakes and die in the famines, and the plagues, and destructions that come in the seals and trumpets and bowls. That probably will happen. There's no reason to assume that it won't, but that's not God's wrath on them. The persecution isn't God's wrath on them, and neither is the judgment that falls in the world that may cause their death. That's simply another way for them to be ushered into God's presence also.

So, those believers among the Jews, and those believers among the Gentiles who die in the persecution will enter into the presence of the Lord. And those who die in the terrible judgments of the world will really escape them. But there will be many Gentiles and many Jews who will not die. **They will survive to populate the kingdom.**

We know that the Jews will be living on the earth in the kingdom; that's clearly promised in the Scripture. It is also promised, as we shall see in the Scripture, that all the nations of the world, during the kingdom, are going to be coming to Jerusalem, and they're all going to be looking at the Christ. They're going to be hanging on the coattails of a Jew.

Every Jew, says the Old Testament prophet, will have ten Gentiles hanging on his clothes saying "Lead me to the Messiah."

So, there are going to be nations of the world in the kingdom, as well as the nation of Israel, which means that some of them have to survive into the kingdom. The only ones that will survive will be believers.

Jesus made this very clear in **Matthew chapter 25**, when He said, **“In the separation process, I separate between the sheep and the goats.”** The goats represent the ungodly who are cast into outer darkness. The sheep represent the Christians who go into the kingdom.

When the kingdom is initiated – the thousand-year kingdom – it is populated only by believers – believers of the nation Israel, believers of the nations of the world that God allows to survive the persecution and survive all of the holocausts of the world, and they become the populace that starts out the millennial kingdom.

And they begin to reproduce and populate the world during that thousand-year reign of Christ.

Now, among those who will survive is this very, very unique group. We do know that the Lord is going to save Israel during this time. His prophets call this time the time of Jacob’s trouble, but it is also the time of Jacob’s conversion. It is the time when Zechariah speaks very directly to the salvation of the nation Israel.

Listen to what he says, **Zechariah Chapter 12, verse 10**, “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and of supplication so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son; and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”

They’re going to see Christ for who He was. “In that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo.”

And he goes on to talk about the morning. **Verse 1 of chapter 13**, “In that day, a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for impurity.”

There’s going to be salvation. Down in **verse 9**, He says, “I’ll bring the third part through the fire, refine them as silver is refined, test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name; I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is my God.’” That’s the conversion of Israel. Two out of three of them will be purged out.

Ezekiel talks about the purging out of the rebels, chapter 20 and verse 38. One-third will remain after the purging, and that third will be the redeemed Israel who have looked upon the Messiah and seen Him for who He really is.

Chapter 14 of Zechariah says, “Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle; the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, half the city exiled. But the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.

“Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when He fights on a day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.” 4

The Lord’s going to make a valley right through the very heart of the land of Israel, right from the Mediterranean Sea moving right through the city of Jerusalem. He’ll cut a huge valley and, into that valley, will gather the nations and separate them, the sheep from the goats.

“You will flee by the valley of My mountains for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!”

Looking at the coming of Christ in the eyes of Zechariah, he sees it as a time of Israel’s conversion and a time when all the nations are called together, to be devastated by the coming Christ, to be judged as to whether or not they enter His kingdom.

So, there will be, then, at the end of this time period, a protection of certain people from the nations and certain from Israel who have come to faith in Christ, and they will go into the kingdom. As I said, many of the believing people will be killed, but not all of them. Not all of them.

This is the time of which Paul spoke when he said, “All Israel will be saved. God purges out the rebels. The rest see their Messiah, believe, are redeemed. And we don’t know, of that number, how many, but obviously a large number will survive all of this and enter into the kingdom.

Now, among these people who survive is this group in Revelation chapter 7. Let’s go and look at them. And I needed to give you that context, so you’d understand it. They’re not the only survivors, but they’re a very unique group, and their survival is crucial to the rest of the survivors, and I’ll show you why.

These folks have been saved earlier; I think it’s important to note that. It isn’t telling us that at the time the sixth seal hits, 144,000 people become converted. No. I think long before this they have become converted.

Long before this they have looked on Him whom they have pierced, and mourned for Him as an only son. Long before this, they have understood the saving message of the gospel of Christ. Long before this, they have heard the testimony of the Word and believed. They have been saved earlier than this. They have been preserved up till now, and now as the final fury hits, they will be singled out for special service and special protection.

They don't experience temporal wrath or eternal wrath. Other believers will experience the temporal and not the eternal one as they may die in the persecution or in the holocaust that takes place.

Now, the vision unfolds in three perspectives. Let's look at the first one. Let's call it wrath restrained. **Wrath restrained. Verse 1, "After this"** – I hate to stop after two words, but I need to. **"After this" is a very important phrase. You see it numerous times in the book of Revelation. Wherever you see it, it introduces a new vision. It introduces a new vision. We saw, back in chapter 4, verse 1, where we came to that vision of heaven. We see it again in chapter 7, down in verse 9, "After these things," and it usually is followed by eidon, the verb I saw/I looked. And it signals John's new vision.**

The sixth-seal vision is set aside now, and he sees a new vision. It is also safe to say that there could be a chronological perspective here as well. There seems to be a chronological perspective in the "after this" of chapter 4, verse 1; that is it moves on from what is being discussed in chapters 2 and 3. And this particular "after this," introducing a new vision, seems to flow in chronology as does the one in chapter 7, verse 9. **So, there is a note here that this is a new vision, but also there can be a chronological sequence as well.**

This scene seems to fit right in after the sixth seal is opened. Right after the sixth seal begins to unfold, as described in verses 12 through 17, and before the trumpets and before the bowls are poured out, in the real fury contained within that sixth seal.

The scene then shifts from judgment to another vision. It's the vision not of the judgment on the ungodly, but a vision of a special protection on the godly.

He says, **“In this vision, I first of all saw four angels”** – four active, powerful agents of judgment. Even in the parables of Jesus, you see Him talking about the angels being a part of the final fury and the final judgment. **These powerful, active agents of judgment are carrying out God's will in this great time of the wrath of God.**

And John says, **“I saw these four angels, and they were standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”**

Now, the angels are very powerful beings. Here you have four angels who can hold back wind. Powerful beings. They work with the elements of nature. You see that elsewhere, and I don't want to take too much time, but there are a couple of other places where you see that in the book of Revelation.

In chapter 16, verse 5, there's an angel involved with controlling the waters. And in chapter 14 of Revelation and verse 18, there is another angel who has power over fire. An angel with power over fire, an angel with power over water – and here are four angels with power to control the wind. When **Psalm 103, verse 20**, says, **“They are mighty in strength,”** it means just that.

Now, they're standing at the four corners of the earth. And, you know, the skeptics will always say, "***Well, ha-ha. This was obviously written before people knew the world was round, because the world doesn't have four corners.***

Well, let me answer that by saying this: there are four points on a compass. Is that not true? North, south, east, and west. And those four places on the compass are the four points from which wind originates. We always say comes from the north, or the south, or the east, or the west, or some variant of that – south by southwest, or north by northwest, or whatever. But everything configures around those four compass points. So, it is accurate to describe it in that way.

It also tells us that this basically means the wind is not blowing. Quite an interesting phenomenon. For whatever period of time this little interlude takes place, wind doesn't blow.

In wanting to kind of understand this from a scientific standpoint, ***Dr. Henry Morris***, who is a well-known creation scientist wrote.

“In terms of modern technology, it is essentially equivalent to what a mariner or a geologist would call the four quadrants of the compass or the four directions. This is evident also from the mention of the ‘four winds,’ which in common usage would be, of course, the north, west, south, and east winds. Parenthetically, accurate, modern, geodetic measurements in recent years have proved that the earth actually does have four corners. There are four protuberances” – those are things that stick out, you understand – “there are four protuberances standing out from the basic geode, that is the basic spherical shape of the earth. The earth is not really a perfect sphere; it is slightly flattened at the

poles. Its equatorial bulge is presumably caused by the earth's axial rotation, and its four corners protrude from that."

The meaning here is undoubtedly that the angels located in four different key positions on the earth, perhaps one at each pole and two at the opposite ends of a strategic equatorial diameter are able to control the great atmospheric circulation which governs the winds of the earth.

When John first saw these four angels in particular, they were already engaged in the remarkable labor of restraining the great wind systems of the earth, keeping the winds from blowing on either land or sea.

"The circulation of the atmosphere," he writes, "is a mighty engine driven by energy from the sun and from the earth's rotation. The tremendous powers involved in this operation become especially obvious when they are displayed in the form of great hurricanes and blizzards and tornadoes. These winds of the earth make life possible on earth through the hydrological cycle, transporting water inland from the ocean with which to water the earth. Yet the angels, only four of them, have turned off this gigantic machine." End quote.

No wind, no breeze, no rustling of leaves, no waves breaking on the shore. Everything is deathly still. No clouds moving. They're holding it back.

The verb "holding back" gives you the idea that the wind would like to go. It wants to move, and they restrain it. It wants to be released. It wants to blow its fury. And believe me; it will. When those angels let go, the wind will do its judgment damage.

That introduces us also to another component in the day of the Lord. We talked about the breakup of the universe and the stars falling and other astral bodies falling. We talked about earthquakes and the shaking of the whole universe. **Add to that in all this chaos going on, the wind is going to be magnified and accelerated so that there will be hurricane-type effects on this globe, but not yet.**

Wind is often, by the way, associated with God's judgment: Jeremiah 49:36, 2 Samuel 22:11, Daniel 7:2, Hosea 13 and verse 15. God is associated with the wind. God moves in the fury of the wind. And frankly, the next phase of God's judgment involves this.

Go over to chapter 8, because this is really important. The angel there takes a censer, in **verse 5, of chapter 8**, and fills it with fire from the altar and throws it to the earth. And this is another one of these fiery bodies coming down to hit the earth. And following this, peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning. **And all of a sudden, what you see here is the angels are letting go. And the wind comes, and it drives the storms, the thunder, and the flashes of lightning. The earth begins to tremble.**

“And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them. And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

“And the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures, which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

“And the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters.” And so forth.

What it said back in **verse 1** was, **“Hold back the wind so that it doesn’t harm the earth, it doesn’t harm the sea, and it doesn’t harm any tree.”**

What I just read you, in chapter 8, was the fury of judgment that devastated the sea, that devastated the land, and burned up a third of the trees. The very judgments described in the trumpet judgments are precisely what are being held back until this act can be carried out in chapter 7. The wind is roaring but restrained. And when it breaks loose, it becomes the agency which catapults this stuff into the earth, terrorizes the earth so that a third of the earth, and a third of the sea, and a third of the living plants, and ultimately a third of humanity are massacred – but not yet. Wrath restrained.

Second point, saints sealed. Why is this wrath being restrained for a moment? Why is there a moment of calm in the midst of the storm? And you can only imagine – I don’t know how long this’ll last, but in all the fury that’s been going on, when all of a sudden it comes to a stop, the world will wonder what has happened. And **verse 2** says, **“I saw another angel.”**

John says, **“He was ascending from the rising of the sun, and he was having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea. And he said to them, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees’”** – in other words, don’t let that wind go; don’t let those trumpets be blown – **“until we have sealed the servants”** – the doulous, the slaves of our God on their foreheads.”

Now, he says, **“I saw another angel”** – another of the same kind – similar, let’s put it that way – **“I saw another angel”** – similar to the other four.

You say, **“Well, is this – could this be Christ?”**

People have said, **“Could it be Christ?”**

I don’t think so because of the use of the plural pronoun “we” in verse 3 - “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until ‘we’” – and there that angel identifies himself with the other four angels.

At this point, although Christ can be identified in the Old Testament as the angel of the Lord, He’s not coming back as an angel now; He’s coming back as the glorified Christ.

So, this is another of these powerful angels who speaks to his four fellow angels. Notice where he comes from. It’s quite an interesting note. It says the angel ascends from the rising of the sun. That’s simply a prosaic way of saying the east. The sun always rises in the east. The angel ascends from the east.

Now, John, when he was experiencing all of this and writing it, was on the isle of Patmos in the Mediterranean toward the west.

And to the east would be the land of Israel, the land of Messiah, God's Promised Land, and the land of the 144,000, the 12 tribes. So, John sees this coming from the Holy Land.

And there is this angel, and he ascends. And he has the seal of the living God. What is this? .

It is like an ancient signet ring, similar to the ancient rings which bore the crest of ancient kings, which were used to imprint some clay on important edits or documents.

This is the kind of seal that you have here, and this word's sphragis, which often meant a signet ring some king or official used to stamp documents. Do you remember how they would melt wax and then stamp into the wax the seal, marking ownership authenticity and security.

You find this used in the Old Testament. I don't need to take you to all the passages – Genesis 41; Esther chapter 3, chapter 8; Daniel chapter 6. And it was used to put the official, authenticating seal of ownership and protection, "This is mine; this is authoritative; this can't be opened because it's my possession; only by those who are authorized."

So, here comes this angel, and he's got the seal. Not the seal of some earthly monarch, but the seal of the living God. Not the seal of some dead idol, but the seal of the living God. Not the mark of some false teacher, but the true and living God.

People in ancient times knew about this, because commonly there were logos, similar to a signet ring like this, that identified the deities of old.

And sometimes, when worshipers went to the temple to worship, they would have the signet of that deity tattooed on their body. That was not uncommon. Heraclitus writes about the fact that people commonly like to have the seal of their God put on their bodies so that they would be always identified as belonging to that deity.

Well, there's one dominating false deity, in the time of the tribulation, who makes everybody do that. Who is it? Antichrist. He makes everybody take the mark in the forehead or on the back of the hand. And if they don't, they're going to die. That is to say if they will not publicly identify with him as their God and take his mark, they will die.

In chapter 13 of Revelation, chapter 14, chapter 16, chapter 19, and chapter 20, it talks about the "mark of the beast," the "mark of the beast," the "mark of the beast," which means the seal of the Antichrist that people take that links them with him as belonging to him, following him.

So, here comes the eternal God, and He's got His own mark and His own sphragis, his own seal. And this angel, carrying the seal of the living God, cries out with a loud voice, to the other angels who are holding back the wind so it doesn't harm the earth and the sea, and says, **"Don't harm the earth, the sea, the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads"** - Antichrist did it on his, and we're going to do it on God's.

It's not new for God to put His mark on people. He put a mark on Lot when He wanted to save Him. His mark was an angelic escort.

He put a mark on the children of Israel who were to be spared in the slaughter of the firstborn. The mark was the sign of the cross on the doorposts and the lintel of the house.

He put a mark on Rahab, a scarlet cord hanging from her window that marked her out as one whom the judgment would miss.

But the best illustration of this, a graphic one, is back in Ezekiel chapter 9, and I want you to look at it. **Ezekiel chapter 9 and verse 3.** **“Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case.”**

Ezekiel sees this vision. And here is a guy who appears, clothed in linen, **who’s got a writing case. What’s that?** Well, it would be a little case that he carried, and in it would be ink, or in it would be some kind of a seal that could be put on parchment or put on papyrus, whatever it was – put on vellum, which is an animal skin. **This guy’s responsibility was to mark things, to write things.**

Verse 4, “The Lord said to him, ‘Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sign and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst’” – you go through the city, and you find the holy people; you find the people who can’t tolerate the fact that the sun is being worshiped in My temple; you find the people that can’t tolerate the abominations of other gods in the temple. You find those principal who are loyal to the true God, and you put a mark on their heads.

“But to the other He said in my hearing, ‘Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare” – anybody who’s not marked by the guy with the writing case, He says to the other of the hosts, kill them. Kill them. **“Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark. God says, ‘I’m coming in judgment, and I’m going to spare the people that are marked.’ That is precisely the idea.**

Now you can return to Revelation chapter 7. Precisely the idea here. Look at **chapter 9**, for a moment, **verse 4**. The fifth angel sounds in the opening of chapter 9. The bottomless pit opens up; smoke comes billowing out. And out of the smoke locusts. These probably refer to demonic hosts. And as these demons coming belching out of the pit of hell, verse 4, **“They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”**

The seal of God, then, was a protection. It made these people invincible against the judgments. Anyone could die in the judgment except those people marked out.

So, the angel says in **chapter 7**, **“Don’t let the wind go. Don’t let the devastation carry on. Don’t blow the trumpets yet until we seal the bondservants of our God on their foreheads.”**

The word “harm” – “do not harm the earth,” in verse 3, indicates this is a judgment wind, and that the result would be devastating ruin. But it’s got to wait; we need to seal them. These are the redeemed people that are to be protected.

Now, would you please notice they already belong to the Lord; they aren't saved here; they've been saved before this. They are redeemed people. I believe they are people who have lived faithfully, powerfully, effectively preaching the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. They have not died as martyrs; they're still alive. And they are to be protected.

If you want to know a characterization of these people, look at chapter 14; this is crucial. Chapter 14, verse 1, "I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion." Now the Lamb is back; He's returned; He's on the Mount. And with Him are the 144,000. Guess what? They made it through. They were sealed, and they were preserved. And they had the mark. And what was the mark? Verse 1, they had His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

People say, "What's the mark? What's the mark?"

There it is. That's the Mark. They had the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father on their foreheads. "And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth." That tells us they had been – what? – redeemed.

And what were they like? Verse 4, **“These are the ones who had not been defiled with women”** – they were morally pure – “they have kept themselves chaste.

They are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.”

These are tribulation elders. Qualified at that level, blameless, pure, undefiled with women, chaste, redeemed, following the Lamb obediently. They are a new kind of first fruits to God. First fruits always means the initial – the initial ones, the first. When the full crop comes in, you have it all. But the first fruit is the first crop to come in.

As men plant fields, they plant one field during this week and maybe another field the next week and so forth. And so, they come in as staggered as they are planted. And when the first fruits come in, that’s the indication that the full crop is coming. I see the 144,000 as the first fruits of a redeemed Israel. The first fruits of a redeemed Israel. But they’ve already been converted.

These are Jews who have come to Christ; Jews who have been redeemed, kept themselves pure and chaste, been obedient to the Lamb, done whatever he asked, no lie found in their mouth. They were honest; they had integrity, and they were without any blame. The most faithful, loyal, diligent, holy servants of the Lord during this time, they are the cream of the crop. They stood for Christ against everything while the world sinned and the world blasphemed, and the world mocked, and the world cursed.

They were pure, and they were devout, and they were godly believers who served the Lord. And I personally believe they must have been very instrumental in the conversion of other Jews and Gentiles as well. **They are really a missionary corp. Their sealing, in some ways, is a reward. They have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and the Lamb. First fruits of a new redeemed Israel. The whole nation eventually will come, for all Israel shall be saved, says Romans chapter 11.**

I believe these 144,000 have been instrumental in the salvation of other people in their own nation as well as other nations of the world. I believe that they are probably very much a part of what it says in Matthew 24:14, where we're reminded the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole for a witness to all the nations, then the end will come. **I believe they've been a part of that great missionary force.** Do you know right now probably there may be 50,000 missionaries in the world today? And out of that 50,000, who knows how many of them are effective other than God.

But in this day, imagine 144,000 totally-committed, sold-out Jews who understand who their Messiah is, who are devoted to Him, who are holy, godly, and pure, and who have been instrumental in the salvation of many. That's this group. They have preached judgment; they have warned about the impending day of the Lord; they have called people to repentance right through the tribulation time, and now they are going to be delivered, and they're going to go right on into the kingdom time, and they're going to keep on preaching in the kingdom.

And to the people that are being born in the kingdom, who will be born, of course, still in sin because they'll be born by human parents.

Even though their parents are Christians, many of them will rebel. And they will preach to them and call for repentance. They will go into the kingdom and preach as they did during the time of the tribulation. I believe by their service, by their instrumentation, all Israel will be saved.

And when the kingdom starts, each tribe will have its own land, and each tribe will have one of the apostles as its spiritual judge and leader. And they will evangelize the rest of the world. And there'll be 12,000, in each of those tribes, who are the leading evangelists and the leading missionaries even during the kingdom period.

You say, *“Well, when they get in the kingdom, they must be living a long time, because it'll take a while for babies to be born, to grow up to reject Christ.”*

That's right. They'll live a long time. In fact, the prophet said that a person who dies at the age of a hundred will die as a baby.

Life will be elongated. They will be spared because of their faithfulness and allowed to preach right through the judgment, be instrumental in the conversion of Israel. And the innumerable host of Gentiles, I think, in verse 9, are part of the fruit of what's going on in verses 1 to 8. God, I believe, will pick out the choice ones, the cream of the spiritual crop.

And a final point, Israel identified. Wrath restrained, saints sealed, **Israel identified. Who are they?**

It should be pretty clear, since it tells us. It says in **verse 4, “There were a hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”**

Now, how hard is that to figure out? Some people say it’s the Seventh Day Adventists; others say it’s the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Some say it’s the Mormons. Some say it’s the British Israelites. **Many people today, even in American Evangelicalism say it’s the Church.**

I don’t know how you get the Church out of a statement like this, “One hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.” You don’t even have to be Phi Beta Kappa to interpret this.

Now, that does tell me something about election, because I’ll tell you one thing, just by sheer random, human choice, you couldn’t come up with 12,000 from every tribe. So, God must be involved. This is one of the great and hidden proofs of elective purpose and redemption. God knows the number he wants, and he knows the number he wants from every tribe.

Here will come these powerful, godly Jews. “They will be made jealous,” Romans 11 says, they will be made jealous by the Church. I think it’ll start right after the rapture.

I think the Lord’s going to convict their hearts, and they’re going to say, ***“Where did the Church go? Do you mean to tell me that they went up to be with the Lord? Do you mean to tell me that what it says in John 14 happened? That the Lord was away, preparing a place for them, and He’s now taking them to be where He is? But we’re His people. What about us?”***

And Paul says, “**They will be provoked to jealousy.**” And out of that jealousy they will turn to the Messiah. And they will be converted and redeemed, and they will start witnessing.

And then the Lord will take the best of them, 12,000 out of every tribe, and He’ll seal them so that they can’t be touched. And they’ll go right on through the judgment, and right on into the kingdom to be His special evangelists.

Now, just a couple of notes of great interest. You see the 12 tribes there? Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. I need to say this so that you’ll not be confused. In the Old Testament, there are a number of different listings of these tribes, and they’re different.

Sometimes the order of birth is followed, such as in Genesis 29 through 35. Sometimes the order of Jacob’s blessing is followed, such as in Genesis 49. Sometimes the order of encampment is followed, such as in Numbers chapter 2. Sometimes the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan is followed, such as Numbers 26. Sometimes the order of blessing and cursing as in Deuteronomy 27. Sometimes the order of Moses’ blessing, Deuteronomy 33. Sometimes the order of the princes in Numbers 1. Sometimes the order of inheritance, Joshua 13 through 22. Sometimes the order by the wives and the concubines, 1 Chronicles 2 through 8. Sometimes the order of the gates of the city, such as Ezekiel 48. So, the order changes a lot.

And there are sometimes variations even in the names. Let me show you why.

There's several interesting things here. The first tribe named is Judah. But Judah wasn't the firstborn; Reuben was. Why institution Reuben first? **And the answer is Judah is named first, though he's not the firstborn of Jacob or Israel, because according to 1 Chronicles 5:1, Reuben lost his birthright because he sexually defiled his own father's bed, and who has slipped down from the primogenitor role.**

Then you have another interesting note. Down in verse 7, it includes Levi. Now, Levi was the priestly tribe from which the Levites come, and they never were given a territory. So, why are they included here? They're usually kind of on the outside. They were the priests to the whole nation and never had a territory; why are they included?

And the answer is because Dan is left out. The tribe of Dan is left out because of gross idolatry - Dan was the only tribe that failed to conquer its territory, Judges chapter 1; and Dan wholly turned to idols, Judges 18 - and because of Dan's gross sin. And because in Deuteronomy 29, verses 18 to 21, it says that anyone who brings idolatry into Israel will have his name blotted out. **The tribe of Dan is removed, and Levi slips into his place to keep the 12.**

You will be happy to know that in the millennial listing of the tribes, Ezekiel 48, Dan is included. God's grace triumphs on Dan's behalf, and Dan is brought into millennial glory, but Dan is not protected through this because of idolatry.

Then one other note. Instead of having Ephraim and Manasseh, you have, in verse 6, Manasseh only; and down in verse 8, Joseph.

Usually, to get the listing of 12, Levi not having a territory, the two sons of Joseph – Manasseh and Ephraim – are listed, but **Ephraim is left out. Why? Because Ephraim was addicted to idols.** Ephraim was a defector from the house of David, and Ephraim was an ally of Judah's enemies. So, some interesting notes here. So, **Ephraim's place is taken by his father Joseph.**

Do the Jews know what tribe they're a part of? Nope. No Jew knows. The records have all been lost and destroyed in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

But God does. God knows. And isn't it amazing how pure the Jewish people have remained? They still have a tribal heritage; they just don't know what it is, but God does. And there are still going to be 12,000 out of every tribe. It is possible that this could emblematic, 12 being somewhat of a number of comprehensiveness or completeness, such as 12 apostles; 12 tribes; 24 elders representing the Church, being a multiple of 12.

Some people think this could be representative of the – of a wider range of Jews who are protected to enter into the kingdom. We don't know that; it's possible.

But for certain, there will be 144,000 of them. There's no reason not to interpret this literally. The numbers in the other parts of the book of Revelation, such as 42 months, 1,260 days, 3-1/2 years, 1,000 years, 4 angels, 7 trumpets, 7 seals, bowls, 3 unclean spirits we take literally. So, why not 144,000?

Now, in closing, this is a very critical passage. Why? Because it shows God has a great elective purpose for the Jew, that God has not finished with Israel. History has been unable to blot out the Jew. Genocide has failed to remove him. Why? Because God wants them around.

You say, "***Well, what about the northern kingdom? Didn't the northern kingdom, ten tribes, all get carried away into captivity and all that was left was the southern kingdom of Judah and Benjamin? How are you going to get the 12 tribes out of those 2 remaining ones?***"

Listen very carefully. Yes, when the kingdom divided, ten tribes went to the north; yes, they were taken away captive in 722, yes. But before they were ever taken captive, remnants from those ten tribes had filtered back down into the southern kingdom so that all 12 tribes were reconstituted even within Judah and Benjamin.

The tribes aren't lost; God knows where they are, and God is going to redeem Israel, and He's going to choose 12,000 from every tribe to be His witness nation.

That's so wonderful, because the first time around, Israel blew it, didn't they? They were given this same opportunity once, and they blew it. And next time they won't. They'll see their Messiah, and they will become the witness nation God has always intended them to be. **That's why he called them in the first place. He didn't call them to be an end; He called them to be a means to an end. He called them to be a witness nation, and they failed.**

But the time will come when, in His wonderful grace, and His everlasting and unbreakable covenant, He will come back to Israel. He will redeem Israel; He will purify them. He will put them in the place of being His witness nation, the greatest force of missionaries the world has ever known. And the result of their effort, a redeemed Israel, and a redeemed humanity that is innumerable according to chapter 7 and verse 9.

What does that tell us about God? That tells us that God is faithful no matter how complex and difficult it is. With all the grief that Israel has caused Him, it will not violate His ultimate purpose with that nation. We have a faithful God, amen? A faithful God. And that moves right down to His relationship to those of us who are His children.

Father, thank You for our time tonight in Your Word. What a great, great section of Scripture. How enriched we are. How blessed it is to know that in the future Your people, Israel, who failed once to be Your witness nation, will have a second opportunity, and will succeed by the power of Your Holy Spirit. O Lord, how thankful we are for that.

In the meantime, help us to have a tender heart toward Israel and to call them to Christ. We know that You even now will call a remnant from Israel of believing Jews who will embrace the Savior. We look forward to the day when all Israel will be saved, and a worldwide revival like this world has never known will take place. From the greatest missionary force that have ever walked the globe, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, souls will be redeemed to enter into Your kingdom. We pray for that great day.

And we, in confident faith, thank You that whatever You plan You'll bring to pass.

In the meantime, we thank You for redeeming us and calling us to Yourself and making us the witness nation for this time. May we be faithful, not unfaithful as was Israel, for Christ's sake, amen.

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