

Revelation Chapter 7 (and Chapter 14 v 1 to 4)

The 144,000 and the Great Multitude...

The 'Heptadic' (seven-fold) structure of the Book of Revelation

In each of the series of 'seven' judgments – seals, trumpets, and bowls – there seems to be an inserted 'parenthetical passage' between the sixth and seventh of each series. Having completed six of the seven seals, Chapter 7 (which is the focus of this study) pauses for some amplification before continuing with the seventh seal in Chapter 8, which in turn ushers in the seven trumpet judgments. Following the sixth trumpet there is a 'parenthesis' of four chapters (10 to 14) before the seventh trumpet, which precipitates the seven bowl judgments; and following the sixth bowl there is a one-verse 'parenthesis' (Revelation 16 v 15), before concluding with the seventh bowl... See diagrams over (Missler, Koinonia House, 2005).

Chapter 6 concluded with the statement, "for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" Chapter 7 responds to that question...

The 144,000 of Israel and the Lamb (Revelation 7 v 1 to 8, Revelation 14 v 1 to 4)

1. The "four corners of the earth" (verse 1) is an ancient equivalent to 'the four points of the compass'; the idea is that these angels affect the entire earth. The "four winds of the earth" (verse 1) may refer back to the four horsemen of Revelation 6 v 1 to 8, after the pattern of Zechariah 6 v 1 to 7, in which four chariots with horses of the same colours go out to "the four winds of heaven" to patrol the whole earth.
 2. Another angel has "the seal of the living God" (verse 2), and he seals the servants of God. A king or property owner used a seal to show authority or ownership. These servants will receive a protective seal on their foreheads, containing the Father's name (Revelation 14 v 1). We are not told what exactly their service is, but the 144,000 are sealed for a unique purpose.
 3. The idea of being sealed is not limited to them: (i) in Ezekiel 9 v 4 a seal ('mark') was given to the righteous before Jerusalem was judged (the seal may have been the Hebrew letter tau = t, the shape of a small cross); (ii) Jesus was sealed (John 6 v 17); (iii) we are sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance (Ephesians 1 v 13, 14); and (iv) this sealing with the Spirit is both an encouragement and a challenge – see 2 Timothy 2 v 19, Ephesians 4 v 30.
- Although we are not explicitly told what the 144,000 servants' mission was, assuming verses 9 to 17 describe the fruit of their endeavours, what do you think was their mission?
 - If the number '12' symbolises God's authority, order and government, what might be the significance of '144,000'?
 - Why is the tribe of Dan missing from the list (see Judges 18 v 30)? Notice that Ephraim also is slighted (Hosea 4 v 17), as it is mentioned only obliquely ("Joseph" (v 8) minus "Manasseh" (v 6) equals Ephraim).

So who are the 144,000? Many scholars regard them as either symbolic of 'the Church' or as converted Jews, still identified as Israelites in some way. It is an important issue: if they represent the Church, then the Church is going through the 'Great Tribulation', albeit 'sealed' for survival. But if the Church is symbolised by the twenty-four elders (Revelation Chapter 4), then the Church must be in heaven before the tribulation begins.

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Some observations about the 144,000 from these passages provide insights into their identity: (i) they are called the “sons of Israel” (Revelation 7 v 4); (ii) their tribal affiliation is specific (Revelation 7 v 4 to 8); (iii) they are protected through the period of God’s wrath, meeting Jesus at Mount Zion at his return (Revelation 14 v 1); (iv) they are celibate; (v) they are “first-fruits”, i.e. the beginning of a greater harvest; and (vi) they are marked by integrity and faithfulness (Revelation 14 v 4, 5).

It is best to see the 144,000 as specifically chosen Jewish believers in Jesus, protectively sealed throughout the Tribulation, and the ‘first-fruits’ of the salvation of Israel (Romans 11 v 1a, 26a; Matthew 23 v 37 to 39).

A great multitude from every nation (Revelation 7 v 9 to 17)

- What kinds of people make up the great multitude?
- Where are they standing?
- How did they come to be there?
- What is their occupation?
- What blessings do they enjoy, and what symbols are used for them?
- Who are they? One of the elders explains that they have come out of “the great tribulation” (verses 13, 14).

The palm branches remind us of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12 v 12 to 16), where Jesus was praised as Saviour and King. Palm branches are emblems of victory, showing that the great multitude celebrates great victory. Those saved in the Great Tribulation are wearing white robes, symbolizing that they are made righteous by the blood of the Lamb (verse 14). Notice that their martyrdom does not save them – only the work of Jesus cleanses and saves.

The presence of so many ‘tribulation saints’ is a powerful testimony to God’s grace and mercy. Even in this time of judgment and wrath upon the earth, many are saved. Because the great multitude is mentioned immediately after the sealing of the 144,000, many believe they are saved as a result of the work of those 144,000 servants of God. The 144,000 are most likely ‘evangelists’ who help reap this huge harvest for the kingdom during the Great Tribulation...

The Heptadic Structure

