

Chapter 21

The Sealing of the 144,000

“After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried 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, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’”

(Revelation 7:1-3)

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So many have speculated as to the identity of this 144,000 sealed of God in their foreheads. One group says that these are all the believers that will go with Jesus in His initial coming. Others try to say that they are not Jews at all but are representative of believers. Let me emphatically state that nowhere in scripture has the believers in Christ been spoken of as taking the place of the Jewish people. There are some instances that suggest we are spiritually joined to the Jews but nowhere does it say that we have replaced them.

Yes we are told that their branches were broken off and we as Gentile believers were grafted in (see Romans 11:17-24) but this does not mean that we are now spiritual Israel and all verses regarding the Jewish people in the Bible actually refer to Christians. They do not. Israel was, is, and will always be God's chosen people. We as Gentiles are fortunate that we have been allowed into the Kingdom of God and we should count it a great privilege to have been accepted. We should never look down on the Jews but always hold them up in respect.

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Of course they failed God. Yes they rejected God. But the many prophecies in the Bible regarding their return to the Lord and His Divine salvation to them cannot be spiritualized, shrugged off or dismissed. They hold true and will be fulfilled.

This 144,000 sealed by God in their foreheads could be special missionaries key to winning back the Jews. I don't know because we are not told. All we know is what the Bible specifically says. In these verses they are sealed and in Revelation 14:1-5 they are seen again standing on top of Mount Zion with none other than Jesus Christ. We will speak more of that incident later. However the description found there should be mentioned here. Of them the Bible says (Revelation 14:4-5): *“They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”*

They are chosen 12,000 from among each of the tribes of Israel. From the description in chapter 14 it really seems that they were chosen individuals to go to Heaven before the rapture of the saints because they are described as being “first fruits.” If this is true then they

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are hand-picked Israeli people who have always believed in Christ, were celibate men (not being defiled by women – sorry ladies; not my words but God's), whose entire lives were consumed with following Christ wherever He led (He goes). There was no deceit found in their mouths (the intentions of their hearts) and are without fault before the throne of God. Nearly perfect individuals!

These men are not to be spiritualized for the Bible gives no suggestion of a spiritual application. Therefore their identity should be taken literally. I can't explain what God's intended purpose is for these men but I don't have to. He is God not me. He chose them not me. I can only let you know that they exist and will be chosen by God. They are not Christian Gentiles who are spiritualized into being Jews but actual Jews God has chosen as first fruits.

Chapter seven tells us that God's wrathful judgements are withheld from the earth until these have been sealed. There are 12,000 from each of the tribes listed:

12,000 from Judah
12,000 from Reuben
12,000 from Gad
12,000 from Asher
12,000 from Naphtali
12,000 from Manasseh
12,000 from Simeon
12,000 from Levi

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12,000 from Issachar
12,000 from Zebulun
12,000 from Joseph
12,000 from Benjamin

Okay; as you study that list you will notice some differences from other listings of the tribes of Israel throughout scripture. I did some reading as to why this listing is different and learned some things but realized that much of it is only speculation.

Joseph is listed but not Ephraim. Remember Manasseh and Ephraim were both sons of Joseph. But Ephraim was the one blessed especially by Jacob. So it is pretty safe to assume that the listing of Joseph here is actually referring to Ephraim.

But the other exclusion is a mystery. The tribe of Dan is left out and Levi is used. In most of the Old Testament listings Levi is left out largely because the listings were of men of war. The tribe of Levi was excluded from war because they had been chosen and assigned as keepers of the Tabernacle (and later under Solomon, the Temple). There were three major branches of them, one assigned the duties of priesthood, another assigned to carry the articles and furnishings of the Tabernacle, and one to care for those things and serve the priestly branch. They were excluded from war and so it makes sense that they would be excluded from the listings of the men of war.

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In these passages the rites of sacrifice and temple worship are no longer in place. This is not a listing of warriors as in the Old Testament. Therefore Levi is once again listed. You would think that Dan would also be listed and the sons of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) would both be included as the tribe of Joseph. But God chose differently.

Some have speculated that Dan was the first tribe to fall wholly into idolatry (see the book of Judges). And that is true. They did exactly that. Because of their early idolatry some have said that God excluded Dan. Nowhere is that specifically stated so I am not going to suggest this as truth.

The fact remains that no one really knows why Dan is excluded. Only God knows for sure and for that reason I am not going to try to second guess God. We will just let it rest where it lies.

Instead let's concentrate on what we are told. We are told that these 144,000 Jewish men were set apart and sealed in their foreheads as first fruits by God.

Their purpose could have served as missionaries because right after that in Revelation chapter 7 we are told about a great number in Heaven. But we are not specifically told that they were there due to the witness of this 144,000. So let's not go there either.

Suffice it to say that they were just what God labeled them: First Fruits. Other than those who have

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died and gone on before, these men are the first fruits of raptured men who have lived lives nearly perfect before God and have been taken to Heaven sort of as an honorarium of their faith. That is what we are told (that they are first fruits) and that is enough.

Why must we always want to know the answer? We must be patient about some things and realize that we might just not know until we get to Heaven ourselves. Once we are there I am certain that we will say, "Oh, that's why. I understand now." and frankly we will probably say that about a great many things we don't actually know. We must realize that there are just some things God chose not to tell us and there is no shame in saying, "God hasn't told me so I just don't know the answer to that right now."

When we stick by the facts we are much better off. So let's do that. Let's not try to spiritualize these 144,000 Jewish men. Let's just realize that God chose them and the reason why (other than their near perfection) is His business, not ours.