
Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation

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Revelation 7: 1-8: The 144,000

General idea: In the eye of the storm, the Lamb gives a reprieve; He preserves, assures, and protects His faithful in the midst of the catastrophes and afflictions of life, and tribulations. Imagine the worst calamities you have ever faced, multiply them times a hundred; you are tired, worn out, and pleading to God for amnesty. Suddenly, He gives it to you, seemingly out of nowhere! The storms of tribulation and judgment subside as the winds calm and the seas become quiet and a heavenly shout of “WAIT” is bellowed out to the earth so all can hear and take comfort!

In the midst of Judgment and the chaos that transpires from it (as a result of our petty ways here on earth), Christ gives us a break, a cooling—off period. It is a time to assess who we are and what we are doing, giving us an opportunity to look to Him, and another chance to place our trust in Him that He will carry us through it. Or, we have the choice to stay in our sin, ignore His sealing and His grace, and live our lives as we see fit. Humanity continues to live in sin as a great delay in judgment takes place. The ungodly continue to live as they see fit, ignoring God and enjoying the sins of the world, while the faithful receive their seal, and place in the Kingdom from our Lord.

Vs. 1-8: This passage is not about numbers or who will be saved; it is not about customs or race or some drawn-out nonsensical theory. Rather, it is about God’s love and care, that He spreads His wings over His chicks to protect them. It does not matter what we go through, as long as we remain true and faithful to Him.

- *After this* shows us the succession of John’s visions. It does not denote this as the sequence of events, as Jewish thinking is not necessarily based on a sequential timeline; rather, it is relational. God is not limited to chronology or a particular historical period. These events can come in whatever series or cycle or timing and method that God feels like doing them. He is not limited; only our understanding is limited. This passage itself is not necessarily in sequence, as the preceding passage (if it is the end of the age) may take place before this one, or they may be simultaneous (Rev. 4:1; 6:1-17).
- *Four angels standing* does not mean that there are four, literal Angels holding the earth; rather, this is a metaphor for the elements and behavior of nature that God controls and directs (Psalm 148:1-12; Zech. 6:5).
- *Four corners of the earth* does not indicate literal corners or that the earth is flat. Even in Jesus’ time, the Greeks believed that the earth was circular—even spherical. (Jewish teaching taught that the earth was a sphere in the

book of “Jubilees.”) This meant that there are four directions that we know today as North, South, East, and West. Or, another view is that the world is divided up in four sections.

- *Holding back the four winds* is symbolic for Judgment and/or things that may be negative. These are some form of destructive Angels of God, or the wrath of the Lamb-Lion (Ex. 12:11-13, 23, 29-30; 2 Sam. 23:15-18; Jer. 49:36). Also it could mean the start of a “new age.” This passage also conveys some Greek imagery such as “Helios,” who drove the chariot that carried the sun. This passage does not mean that, but a first century Jew or Roman could have comprehended this passage clearly.
- *The seal* refers to God putting forth His seal of approval to be His authority and representative and/or acting on His behalf. God delegates and uses His angels—and us! Some see this as the evangelism first of the Roman Empire, then of the rest of the world.
- *Foreheads* infers that judgment cannot start until the faithful are marked (protected). The forehead and hands were the only parts of the body in ancient times that were visible to others. This, too, is symbolic; not that God will “rubber stamp” people or we will have a some kind of a visible mark, tattoo, “branding” or a “cross sign” (because the Hebrew letter *Taw*, looks like an X or cross sign), nor is this some kind of replacement for circumcision. God sees us as important and worth protecting (Ex. 13:9-16; 28:38; Deut. 6:8; 11:18; Isa. 66:19; Ezek. 9:4-6; Gal. 6:17; Rev. 13:16-18)!
- *Servants of our God*. This is a key phrase that denotes the meaning of this passage, referring to those whose faith is in God—the entirety of those who are His, who are saved. God is not limited to number or race as God is a God of equality as demonstrated in Acts and in the letters to the Seven Churches (Rev. 1:1; 6:11).
- *The number* refers to those who are the real, authentic followers of Christ, the righteous who are covered by Christ’s righteousness and thus “saved” from God’s wrath. (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 21:2, 14). This also may allude to Israel’s restoration as a nation, which occurred in 1948, but this is highly speculative and not supported in the context of the passage. The problem is that passages such as 2 Chron. 36:21, Jer. 24:1-7; 29:10; 32:44; Ezek. 20:34; 36:33-35; 37:15-28; Dan. 9:2; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:14-15; Micah 7:8-11; and Zech. 12:6-8 are read into this passage. These Old Testament passages speak of Israel being restored after the Babylonian captivity, but not necessarily as a nation thousands of years hence.
- *Sealed* means that those who are faithful, who accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and who are claimed as His will be protected. The image here is like important documents in ancient times that were folded or rolled, tied with a

string, and then wax or clay placed on the seam, and impressed with a signet ring (Rev. 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Jesus seals us for protection showing that He cares, is in charge, and has ownership over us. His ownership means He possesses us—not Satan, not the world, and not even our fallen nature and sin. His possession of our soul and life is our great comfort and relief (Gen. 4:15; Ex. 8:28; 9:4; 11:7; 11:18; Isa. 44:5; Rev. 5:6; 9:4; 14:1)!

- *144,000* is a symbol, meaning that the numbers are beyond counting or unfathomable to man (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 22:6). This denotes how Israel returned from the Babylonian captivity to inherit the land (Ezek. 48). This also alludes to us, the Church, who are the inheritors (Rom. 11:1-36; Rev.12).
- *12,000*. Twelve, like most numbers in Revelation, is not an actual number nor is 12,000 or 144,000; rather it refers to “fullness.” Twelve is also found, in various Jewish sects and in the Dead Sea Scrolls, to mean “the people of God.” Then the “12” is magnified as to 12 multiplied by 12 to mean complete fullness or God’s bountiful provisions and blessings. This is a symbolic Jewish metaphor for being “servants of God,” just as the key phrase previous to this symbolizes. This also means that He is the Provider. The debate over the numbers centers on whether they represent the entirety of saved souls or just those who just are “restored” Jews. Nonetheless, the term “servants of our God” makes it more understandable (Ezek. 9; Matt. 10:30; Rev. 9:4; 14:1-5; 21:8; 22:15).
- *All/Every Tribe*. The term, “tribes,” is used for the sake of illustration rather than actually referring that only some will be saved. Rather, it means that God, in His fullness, selects whom He selects for His purpose—Jews and Gentiles alike. (Ezek. 9:4; Eph. 2:11-22; Rev. 9:4; 14:1).
- *Joseph* is listed twice as his sons, “Manasseh and Ephraim.” Levi is omitted as the priestly tribe without land inheritance rights. *Joseph* has two for His faithfulness while *Dan* is excluded from the list, perhaps because of their rebellious nature to God and idolatry as well as an Early Church tradition foretelling that the “antichrist” was to come from that tribe. *Judah* may be listed first before the first-born *Reuben*, because Christ the Messiah came from the tribe of *Judah*. The sequence of the tribes has no significance as they are often listed in various ways, depending on who is listing them (Gen. 37:21; Judg. 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29; Ezek. 48:1; John 6:70).

Remember, the context is also about worship and church leadership. Jesus is the ONE who is qualified and able to judge and, by his grace, to give us a reprieve. It is amazing of all the convoluted theories on this number that ignore Jewish customs, apocalyptic metaphors, and of course, the context and Old Testament that tell us the meaning. Many commentators see this passage as just pertaining to actual Jewish tribes or a group of Jewish believers who convert during the period of tribulation.

We are not told exactly who and what these 144,000 are. Possibly, it is because it is not important, as the reason and purpose of pointing to Christ and showing us opportunities to get our priorities in line with His are far greater. We can either honor His name by living lives worthy to be in Him, or we can reject His offer of salvation and reconciliation and do as we want; and we can “want” ourselves all the way from judgment to hell. The bottom line meaning is that God keeps His promises to individuals and to people groups, as He here confirms.

The point of this passage tells us that God is at work even when all seems lost—and then it gets even worse! God is still there, even in tribulations, no matter how short or great His love and grace are carrying us through it! The purpose that John has in mind, and what God calls us to in the context of this passage, is the obvious: *Beware! Judgment is coming! And now, here is some grace. Here is a quiet time so you can assess where your priorities and direction in life will be, but there is not much time.*

The Preterist view: They see this passage as happening during the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., and God as minimizing the evil to the Church during the carnage. Accordingly, to early church historians, all the Christians escaped, many to “Pella,” and no one was killed. God identified His faithful, provided for them, and they escaped harm before the fall of Jerusalem. A similar occurrence happened in 586 B.C. when the Romans invaded, and the faithful Jews were protected, which was predicted by Ezekiel in chapter nine. God “marked” His people and protected them as He did at the Passover with the blood on the doorposts (Mal. 3:2; Eph. 1:13). They see the 144,000 as God’s faithful Jews, who acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and are saved, even though most of the other Jews were apostate and the reason for the conquest and judgment by way of the Romans. Others see the 144,000 as the actual faithful Jews who escaped the fall of Jerusalem.

The Futurist view: They see this passage as literal, as four literal Angels and four literal corners, even though the earth is a sphere. Some see this as four “quarters” or sections of the earth. They also derive from this passage that Angels are in control of the elements and nature. They also see this passage as not a reprieve but an extra narrative of what is going on during the opening of the sixth seal, since they believe there are no Christians present as they all have been raptured before this period. Their debates center on whether people can be saved after the rapture or not. Others in this camp see the first part of this passage as just a stylistic interlude as with chapter 10. They see the 144,000 as a select number of Jews who are faithful and receive salvation during the tribulation, and have no bearing on the Church. They see the “sealing” as God preserving those Jews who evangelize and bring Israel to repentance (Zech. 12; Matt. 24:14; Rom. 11:26-32). *Dan* is not mentioned as they see the antichrist coming from Dan (Gen. 49:17; Jer. 8:16). Some who are “post—tribulationists” see God protecting His faithful during the Tribulation.

The Idealist view: They see the “winds” in the passage as symbolic for the four horsemen in the previous chapter, and cite Zechariah 6:5. Others see this taking place before the opening of the seals, and still others see it as God’s grace protecting His faithful. They see the 144,000 as symbolic of the camp groupings during the Exodus (Num. 31:4-5). They also see no distinction between Jews and Christians. They see God protecting the Church during His judgments, but they will still suffer the results of the wars and catastrophes.

The Historicist view: They see this passage as a pause of His judgments as God protects His faithful before the angels continue their destructive mission. Others have said this refers to God protecting the Seven Churches from invaders; still others see this as the period of Constantine when Christianity became accepted, and peace and prosperity reigned for the Church until the Barbarians took over Rome and the Church fell to the Dark Ages. The general idea is that God cares, has a plan, is in control, is concerned for His faithful, and will protect us. They see the 144,000 as symbolic for the entire professing Church, as “God’s Israel.” Others see this as Constantine’s conversion; others see it as God protecting the seven churches from the invaders. Some see this as a select number of Jews who are faithful and who receive election in Christ.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. What is your favorite kind of weather? If you could symbolize your life by weather, such as warm and sunny, windy, tsunami... what would it be?
2. Why would Christ give the world a reprieve, a cooling—off period, in the midst of judgment?
3. What does it mean to your faith that Jesus preserves, reassures, and protects His faithful? How can this encourage you in times of suffering and distress?

4. How would you feel if you were going through the worst calamities you have ever faced, and suddenly you got a reprieve? How do you think Christians would react if in the midst of dire tribulations there came a heavenly shout of “WAIT?” How would the rest of the world react? What about you?
5. Do you think the rest of the world, given a delay in judgment, would take advantage of a chance to place their trust in Christ? Why would they *not* want to?
6. Why do the ungodly continue to live as they see fit, ignoring God, and enjoying the sins of the world? How will they feel when the faithful receive their seal and place in the Kingdom from our Lord?
7. Can you trust God in how He judges? How are you impatient when things do not go your way? How can you more fully understand His grace, and trust in His love?
8. Do you believe that there is a greater purpose in this passage that most commentators seem to miss? What do you think of these four major views? Is there one that appeals to you more than the others?
9. How can knowing that Christ has possession of your soul and life, that He cares, that He is in charge and has ownership over you help you better see that He is your great comfort and relief? What would that mean in your life?
10. How do you feel that God keeps His promises to individuals and to people groups, that God is at work even when all seems lost—and then it gets worse? How do you know that?
11. What can you do to trust Him more and not have need to fear these events that one day will come about in their fruition?
12. What kind of a respite do you think you need from Christ? What are you going to do about it? Do you need a quiet time so you can assess where your priorities and direction in life should and will be? How can you do this? *When* will you do this?