

144,000

Revelation 7:3-17

9/09/07

Intro

As we study through Revelation, we are taken with John into a scene of heaven. He sees the throne of God and He who sits upon it had a scroll sealed with seven seals. The only one found worthy to open the book and break the seals was Jesus, the Lion from the tribe of Judah who is then seen as a Lamb that was slain.

As he breaks the seals on the book, each one reveals an event of the coming seven year Tribulation period which is the wrath of God. The first four seals revealed the four horsemen of the Apocalypse that brought first the deceiver, the Antichrist, then war, then economic collapse and finally death and Hades.

After the sixth seal is broken there is a pause before the seventh seal is broken. We will see that the seventh seal ushers forth seven trumpets, each of which declare more cataclysmic events of the wrath of God during the Tribulation.

It is during this pause before the last seal is broken that 144,000 witnesses are given a mark on their forehead. It is these 144,000 that we look today for insight not only into the future events, but also how this might apply to our lives now.

I. God Always Has a Witness

- First, it's important to remember that the Tribulation is the wrath of God on the earth, and that God has not destined the church to receive His wrath.
- This means that the church is not on the earth at this point in Revelation, they have been raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation.

A. Who they are not

- There have been several groups who have claimed to be the 144,000 of Revelation.
- The Jehovah's Witnesses have taught that only 144,000 will gain access into heaven, which of course would be them.
- They ran into some difficulty however, when their numbers exceeded 144,000 so they declared that the next 144,000 would live on a glorified earth. When their numbers exceeded that, they then said that the next 144,000 would be servants on the glorified earth.
- Historical Mormonism claimed to be the 144,000 as did Seventh Day Adventists and finally, the Worldwide Church of God made the claim.
- They are also not representing the church since the church would be with Christ through the rapture.
- In other words, they are not gentiles at all.

I Thessalonians 5:9-10, For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

- I believe the identification of the 144,000 is found in the promise that...

B. All Israel will be saved

- The Lord is making a special point to let us know that there will be 12,000 from each tribe of Israel, though interestingly, Ephraim and Dan are missing.
- Most commentators believe this can be explained by noting that Levi, the tribe assigned to be priests is included, and Joseph, the father of Ephraim is listed. That only leaves Dan missing and many believe this is because it was Dan who led Israel into idolatry.
- There are some who teach that Israel as a people was cut off and the church now is considered the new Israel. I do not agree with this because scripture seems clear to me that the promises of God to Israel are irrevocable.

Romans 11:28-29, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

- These 144,000 are Jews who are 'completed,' meaning they have received Jesus as the Christ – the Messiah- and are now His witnesses on the earth.
- They are called the 'first fruits' later in Revelation.

Revelation 14:1, 4, Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.... These are the ones who follow the Lamb

wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

- They will be witnesses on the earth to both Gentiles and Jews, but the scene in heaven we see immediately following are of people from tribe, nation and tongue before the throne.
- Israel as a nation is not saved until they see Jesus returning and they recognize Him...

Zechariah 12:9-10, "And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 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."

- This will fulfill the scripture that says that all Israel will be saved.

Romans 11:25-27 All Israel will be saved.

C. The message of hope is on their lips

- This is a wonderful declaration of the heart of God in that while this is the Day of the Lord and His wrath is being poured out, He gives the opportunity for mercy.

Habakkuk 3:2, Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O Lord, revive Your work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.

Illus – This is seen throughout Israel’s history. In the days of the kings when Israel was divided with 10 tribes in the north and Judah and Benjamin in the south, the Assyrian army was coming to take the northern tribes captive, but God gave a warning and an opportunity. Many of the ten tribes joined with the two tribes in the south.

Illus – over the years many have made wild claims about the “missing ten tribes of Israel.” Some groups in Africa claim to be descended from one or another tribe. The *Anglo-Israelism* group believes that the British are the ten tribes.

The Book of Mormon teaches that native American Indians are descended from Joseph; and on and on.

- None in Israel however know which tribe they are from so there remains a mystery, but surely God know those who are His.

Deuteronomy 29:29, The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.

- These witnesses declare the mercy of God in the blood of Christ and many come to faith in Jesus during the Tribulation.

II. Tribulation Can Bring Transformation

- A great multitude is saved during the Tribulation and this is an example of how transformation can come from tribulation.

A. God takes no pleasure in destruction

- The wrath of God is poured out on a world that has rejected Him.

Illus – I was witnessing to a man in Russia and asked if God is our Maker does He not have the right to require allegiance? If I made a computer from dust and then when I booted it up it told me to take a hike, what should be done with it?

- But God does not want anyone to choose hell.
- God gave us a free will that we might freely choose Him.

Ezekiel 33:11, Say to them, “As I live!” declares the Lord God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back; turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?”

Illus – The bible speaks about the blood of Abel and the blood of Christ. The blood of Abel cries out for revenge, but Jesus’ cries out the hope of mercy.

Hebrews 12:24, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

- So God allows times of difficulty to get our attention; to wake us up from spiritual stupor.

Revelation 3:2, Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

B. God wants us to turn to Him now

- The message of the 144,000 witnesses is that God wants the world to turn and be reconciled to God.
- This is a message that God has been speaking for many generations.

Joel 2:11-14 Return with all your heart

- When we turn, we also see that He promises blessing.

II Chronicles 7:14-15, “and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.”

- It’s so important that we see that God desires the heart to be changed first. “Return to me with all your heart,” God says.

Illus – Isn’t that true for us with our own children? Is it their behavior or their heart that is the most important? It’s their heart because we know that if the heart is changed, the change of life will surely follow.