

“TRIBULATION INTERLUDE: SALVATION”

Revelation chapter 7 is considered a **tribulation interlude** (or *parenthesis*) because it pauses the chronological sequence of the seven seals, which pause after the sixth seal in Chapter 6 and resume with the seventh in Chapter 8. It provides a thematic break to reveal ... who is sealed, protected, and saved during the Tribulation.

Key Reasons for the Interlude:

- **Answers "Who Can Stand?":** The end of Chapter 6 (6:17) poses the question, *"For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"* Chapter 7 answers this ... by showing the 144,000 sealed servants of God and the great multitude of converts.

One group will come from the Jews and the other from the Gentiles. Both will find the salvation in Jesus that is necessary for anyone, including you and me, to be able to stand. And just as Revelation 6 gave us *an overview of the judgements of God* throughout the entire period, so this chapter will give us an overview of salvation, and even graduation (*to Heaven!*), in the tribulation.

Now as well as the outward gospel message presented in this chapter ... there is also a hidden gospel message that relates to your salvation and mine, there are extra points on offer if you know where!

So now, we'll look at the following:

- The sealing of God's servants - How is this connected to an interesting Old Testament story about a mysterious man with a familiar mark?
- The identity of the 144,000 - Who are they and what is their mission?
- The gospel message hidden in the 12 tribes of Israel - Where is it and have you seen it?
- The result of the 144,000's mission - Who is this great heavenly multitude?

And finally ... some washing instructions - How do you get your garments completely white?

LET'S BEGIN ...

Revelation 7:1-3 (NIV) ... **“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. (2) Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: (3) Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”**

Firstly, is to stop the wind. Now holding back the wind doesn't sound too bad does it? We all enjoy a nice calm day don't we? But what would happen if there was no wind? Well, let's think about this for a moment ... The Wind: “brings the rain, disperses the seeds, powers electrical energy, regulates earth's temperature and clears pollution to name a few of its essential benefits.” Wind is critical to the functioning of the planet ... Google: **“what would happen if there was no wind?”**

If wind ceased to exist, Earth would experience catastrophic environmental, climatic, and ecological collapse. The planet would be split into extreme, uninhabitable zones: scorching, arid deserts in the tropics and barren, frozen wastelands at the poles. Global water cycles would stall, leading to widespread famine and drought, and ocean ecosystems would become stagnant and die.

Holding back the wind might be worse than it sounds! Our text says that these four angels have been given power to harm the land and sea. This is likely through the action of stopping the wind though they might have other powers as well. Holding back of the wind, you could say ... ***is the literal and symbolic 'calm before the storm'!***

Put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God - There is another specific angel that comes from the east **to set the seal of the living God upon the foreheads** of these servants of God. The east, and specifically the east wind, often speaks of God's actions in both judgment and deliverance (Ps. 48:7, 78:26, Isa. 27:8, Jer. 18:17, Eze. 19:12).

NOTE: Here it is a mark for deliverance as it is a seal of ownership and protection. Later in Revelation, Satan will mark his followers in their forehead or right hand (Rev. 13:16-18) ... **mimicking (as he always does) what God does here. White Satan's mark ensures the judgement of God ... God's mark brings protection from His judgements.**

During the time of the Tribulation, it appears there will be three(3) categories of people:

1. Those who are sealed and protected by God for special ministry (Rev. 7:4-8; 14:1).
2. Those who accept the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:16-18) *and are doomed* (Rev. 14:9-10). They are not written in the Book of Life.
3. Those who refuse the mark of the beast, many of whom are martyred (Rev. 20:4).

God's Seal - The Old Testament Example

Now like most things in the book of Revelation, there is an Old Testament example of sealing God's people to protect them from judgements. Can you think of who had God's seal on them, protecting them, before judgement came? And if you are thinking the original Passover in Egypt where they placed the blood on the doorframes to protect them from the angel of death... then... Nope!

- It occurs in the book of Ezekiel in a very interesting passage. In Ezekiel chapter 8 the Lord speaks of detestable things that were occurring in Israel at that time. In chapter 9 we see the dramatic outcome of this:

Ezekiel 9:1-6 (NIV)... "Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, "Bring the guards of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand. (2) And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. **With them was a man clothed in linen** who had a writing kit at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar. (3) Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then **the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side** (4) and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." (5) As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. (6) Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, **but do not touch anyone who has the mark**. Begin at my sanctuary. So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple."

Because the sin of Israel and Judah was so bad at this time, **God instructed six men (most likely angels)** to go through the city of Jerusalem and strike down all those that offended. And this judgement began at the house of God. It began in His own temple because of the wickedness that was specifically performed there (Ezek. 8:16-18, 1 Pet. 4:17).

Now there was a seventh **'man clothed in linen'** who God instructed to first mark those that grieved and lamented the detestable things that occurred. These were protected from God's judgement.

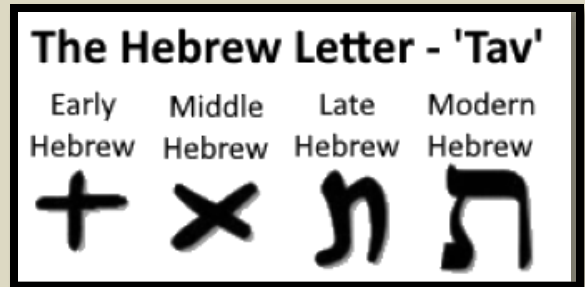
But this gets more interesting ... Before judgment fell in Ezekiel, **God sent a man to mark the ones who still cared about holiness** ... And today, before judgment comes, **God has sent His Son to seal those who still grieve over sin.**

- But the question of mystery is ... "What **'mark'** was added to these ones that feared God and despised the wickedness in the city?"



The 'Man' and the 'Mark'

"The word "mark" in the Hebrew is "Tav," the last letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Its literal meaning is "cross." This letter "T" was a cross in the older Hebrew script as well as in the Phoenician and Samaritan. The Egyptians also used a cross in their language, with them it was a sign of life. Ancient Jewish tradition gives the information that the blood sprinkled in Egypt on the doorpost Exodus 12:23 was in the form of a cross. All this is interesting. To this we may add that in Genesis 4:15, the mark set upon Cain, an entirely different word is used."



So, to sum up ... we are given here a picture of 'the man in linen' (a type of Christ) placing the 'Tav' (the sign of the cross), on the forehead of all those that were His, protecting them from judgement. What a great picture this is of what happens to Christians and God's servants in Revelation 7!

It is also a great reminder that believers today are sealed by God. His seal today is the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, Eph. 4:30) and while this seal is not visible to the human eye, it is to the angelic realm. They know who belongs to the Lord and are protected by Him!

The 144,000 (spoiler alert: not JW's!)

Revelation 7:4 (NIV) ... "Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel."

There are 144,000 servants that are sealed. Now people have done all sorts of things with both this number and the people it represents ... but let me say as clearly as possible, that this is not a symbolic number! God knows how many He has, and how many He needs, to perform His work. **And if He can count the hairs on everyone's head ... I think He is fine counting people!**

- As an example ... in the days of Elijah, when Elijah thought he was the only one left, God said He had 7000 other prophets (1 Kings 19:18) and that is what He had. And I know He will have 144,000 **marked** in this coming day! ***This is not the Church ... and no, I'm terribly sorry, but it's not Jehovah Witnesses either!***

Historically it was always the role of the Jews to be a witness for God to the nations. They were to be a light as the people of God ... but they failed in that task. God, however, has a long memory and has ways of fulfilling His plans despite our failure. So, God isn't through with the Jews. They will fulfil the mission God has for them ... in the coming Tribulation period!

Revelation 7:5-8 (NIV) ... **“From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, (6) from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, (7) from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, (8) from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.”**

Now some commentators have a problem with these men being literally from these twelve tribes of Israel because after the dispersion of the Jews into all the world (starting in 70 AD) ... they say that there is no way to know today what tribe a Jewish man belongs to. Now, that may be somewhat true from a human standpoint. **But here is the important part - it isn't man that is setting aside 12,000 from each of the tribes, and it isn't man that is counting. It is God.**

And God can not only count correctly, *but He also knows who* descends from each of the tribes... even if we don't! Others have noted various things that differ here, from other lists of the tribes of Israel in the Bible. For Example:

- Judah is mentioned first in this list even though Reuben was the first born - This is possibly because of Reuben's sin in (Genesis 35:22) and Judah's elevation to the kingly tribe in (Genesis 49:8-10).
- There is no tribe of Dan in this list - This might be because the tribe of Dan was the first tribe to fall into idolatry (Judges 18:30). The tribe of Dan later became the headquarters for calf worship whereby *“Jeroboam made Israel to sin”* (1 Kings 12:28-30). However, the tribe of Dan is again mentioned in the list for the Messianic Kingdom in (Ezekiel 48:1).
- The tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, is included in Dan's place.
- Ephraim is also missing - Ephraim was also guilty of idolatry. (Hosea 4:17) *“Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.”* Ephraim was also the tribe which led the division of the kingdom in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 11:26).
- Joseph takes the place of Ephraim.

But there is something else that is interesting and powerful in the different order of these tribes. And this becomes all the more interesting ... when exploring and unlocking the meaning of their names ...

THAT'S FOR THE NEXT CLASS ... STAY TUNED!