

The Sealing of the 144,000 (II)

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The church is sealed by God. This guarantees her safety in the midst of a world which is being plagued and shaken by God. The sealing is performed by God to preserve to Himself certain individuals. In the midst of all the evils and judgments which will characterize the end, these individuals will be preserved by the power of God. Who is sealed, and what is the result of that sealing?

The church must understand that when God will send great judgments and terrible plagues as we have them described in the sixth seal and the ensuing seven trumpets, even though the outward manifestation of these shall fall upon all men everywhere (they shall cover the whole earth for the four angels will release the four winds of heaven), yet these terrible things will not be given to the people of God as judgments. As surely as God sends sunshine and rain to all men everywhere, yet from a twofold motive (as favor for His people and as tokens of wrath upon the wicked... that their measure of iniquity may be filled), so also God sends His plagues upon all men for this same twofold purpose (as judgments and wrath upon the wicked... tokens of the fiery cinders that shall enflame them in death and hell, but as tokens of favor for His people... assuring them that even in the tribulation He works all things for their spiritual well-being, c.f. James 1:2-5 and draws them into the redeeming arms of love in Jesus Christ).

We must now ask, just who is sealed?

John did not actually see the throng of people who had this seal on their foreheads, he “heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel,” Rev. 7:4.

According to the Dispensationalists who divide the Bible into various epochs or periods, the Israel of the Old Testament is obviously intended. They refer this even to the saving of the nation of Israel.

Many serious objections must be raised against this view. First, the literal 12 tribes are not intended because the list excludes two tribes, Ephraim and Dan. Besides, Joseph is mentioned as a tribe, which he never had except through his two sons Ephraim and Manasses. Judah is mentioned first rather than Reuben who was the oldest and therefore is mentioned first in other lists, e.g. Numbers 1. No one is willing to make the 12,000 a literal figure as if each tribe had exactly the same number of people saved, a fact which would be contradicted by history. The emphasis here is rather upon the spiritual house of Israel. The Israel of the Old Testament is here representative of the people of God of all ages as they are redeemed in Jesus Christ. Judah is mentioned first because it was out of Judah that Christ was to be born, c.f. Gen 49:10, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” Secondly, throughout the New Testament, “Israel” is referred to as the church of all ages. Consider Matt. 2:6 where Christ is presented as a “Governor, that shall rule my people Israel,” a reference to the entire church of all ages.

Similarly Rom. 11:26, “So all Israel shall be saved” is a reference to the entire church, the children of Israel according to election and the church of our day, Jew and Gentile. These same children are identified as the children of Abraham (Rom. 9:6), an obvious reference not to the natural seed of Abraham, but the spiritual seed. Here they are properly called, “servants of our God,” Rev. 7:3. Thirdly, if those sealed referred entirely to the Jews of the nation of Israel, there would be little significance in proclaiming this to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor (Rev. 1:1-8). These churches included Jews and Gentiles who had been drawn together by the power of the gospel. To them comes this vision, the tidings of good news. Consequently, to each of us who are called by the gospel unto a living faith in Jesus Christ comes the good news: we are sealed by the living God and all the tribulations that must come to pass in order to bring our Lord Jesus Christ upon the clouds of heaven, shall not separate us from the love of our God, Rom. 8:33-39. Finally, this same truth is borne out in significance of the numbers themselves.

Numbers have revelatory significance in Scripture. The total of 144,000 is the product of 3 x 4 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10. Three is the number of God triune. Four is the number of man as he reaches out into the vast span of the earth

(four directions, four corners). Three times four speaks of the power of the three over the four, or God's power over man, hence 12. Consider God's power over the life of Israel as represented by the 12; Twelve sons of Jacob formed the twelve tribes, twelve stones in the Jordan after the miraculous crossing, Elijah took twelve stones for the altar on which the fire of God descended, there were twelve gates to the temple, etc.

The number ten in Scripture conveys the idea of completion, the full and perfect extension. Thus the ten plagues on Egypt formed the complete expression of God's wrath upon them, the ten virgins in the parable of Christ represented complete humanity of which five were wise and five were foolish. The extension of 10 x 10 x 10 indicates the sum total of all the twelves from generation to generation as they are brought into the church throughout the history of the world. If we put this together, we can understand that in the Old Testament the 3 x 4 was represented in the 12 tribes of Israel. In the New Testament the 3 x 4 was represented in the 12 disciples of Christ. By multiplying them together we have the product of the two as God unites them in Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile are saved by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:11-22). This product multiplied by 10 then indicates to us that God will gather His church from all the generations of the earth, as long as the earth continues, He will gather unto Himself all His people, the complete number of every generation until all things shall be realized in the return of Jesus Christ.

This then is the gospel of great comfort to the people of God, whether Jew or gentile, we are sealed by God Himself on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit. We have the certification that though God subjects the wicked to terrible judgments, His mercy is always upon us as He draws us nearer and nearer unto Himself. In His hands we shall rest safe and content.

Those that are sealed shall surely be saved. Already in the later part of this chapter we are directed to lift up our eyes beyond the church that militantly struggles in this world and see her as she is redeemed in the blood of the Lamb, "After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb," Rev. 7:9, 10. These are further described in Rev. 14:1,ff "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand having his Father's name written in their foreheads . . . and they sung as it were a new song before the throne."

The kingdom of heaven is reserved for all those who are sealed. Are you one? Now you understand how to answer the question, don't you? You recognize that all the 144,000 confess that they are not living for a great kingdom of peace on this earth, their eye of faith is directed to the new heavens and new earth. They do not live for themselves and seek the praise of men, they recognize that they are dead in sin and unworthy of the least of God's blessings, their great joy is being sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ and thus made worthy through Him. Finally, those who are sealed have but one purpose in this life and in that which is to come. They desire to praise God, to everlastingly shout forth the greatness of our God who hath saved us in the blood of the Lamb. If this is your confession, do not doubt that you are sealed unto that great day.

Conclusion: God assures us that we are sealed and preserved by His power. This is our comfort when we look at Rev. 9:1-12. The explanation of the fifth trumpet is terrible. We thank God that His elect are sealed, being redeemed by Jesus Christ and placed under His care. May God give you that peace and encouragement as you continue to seek His kingdom.