

THE GRACE OF WRATH

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Text

Revelation 7:1-17

Topic

God seals 144,000 Jews from the twelve tribes of Israel to preach the Gospel in the Great Tribulation

Title

"I Seal Good...You Knew that I Would"

Marine Corps Raiders... Marine Corps Force Recon... Army Green Beret... Army Rangers... Air Force ParaRescue... Navy SEALs...

Search for 'elite units,' and these will be on the list.

(If I got something wrong, or overlooked any, *don't blame me*; blame military.com. My military knowledge is limited to GI Joe action figures).

Super-special forces are a staple in the movies and on television. Whether it's the Dirty Dozen or the Suicide Squad, humanity depends on their heroics.

As Nick Fury put it, "The idea was to bring together a group of remarkable people, see if they could become something more. See if they could work together when we needed them to fight the battles we never could."

There are elite forces in the Bible.

- David had a group of warriors called David's Mighty Men. The International Standard Version calls them "David's special forces" (Second Samuel 23:8). Their exploits are legendary.

- After Judas' betrayal and suicide, the believers sought the Lord to fill his apostleship. Mathias was chosen and the group was afterward known as "The Twelve" (Acts 6:2). They turned the world upside down with the Gospel.

God has an elite force in the Great Tribulation.

An angel introduces John to them in chapter seven. We're calling them *Sealed Team 144,000*.

"One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed" (v7).

Most futurist scholars believe this chapter reveals the success of their mission. The saved "great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" in verse nine were likely evangelized by the Sealed Team.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Seal Me & I Will Be Sent**, and **#2 Seal Me & I Will Be Heard**.

#1 - Seal Me & I Will Be Sent (v1-8)

Jesus said, "And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). It seems straightforward enough.

The Gospel must be preached to every person on the earth before Jesus can return.

- Jesus will return to resurrect and rapture His church to Heaven, thereby keeping His promise to keep us out of the Great Tribulation.
- Seven years later, Jesus will return to the earth in His Second Coming to establish the kingdom.

When He told His disciples “this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world,” Jesus described evangelism that would take place *after* the rapture of the church and *during* the Great Tribulation on the earth.

We should do everything we can to reach the world for Jesus. However, it is not something that must occur before we can be raptured.

The rapture is always imminent.

In chapter six we attended a prayer meeting under the altar in Heaven that involved martyrs from the Great Tribulation. Since the church will be gone, who shares Jesus with them?

Deploy Sealed Team 144,000.

Rev 7:1 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.

Angels must be eagerly awaiting the Great Tribulation. God will task them with amazing missions.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rode out in chapter six. It is not a type, or a figure, or an allegory. They are four angels on four heavenly horses. They see to it that the conditions on the earth correspond to the operational plan for the Great Tribulation.

Four additional angels are given a different task. They stand at the four points of the compass to keep the wind from blowing.

I've been pointing out as we go that there are many striking performances and pauses in the Revelation. It is a true future history, but God has a flair for the dramatic.

Withholding the wind is positively operatic. An eerie stillness comes over the entire planet. No wind or breeze or air movement *anywhere*. It is noticeable; it is palpable. God pauses the action to seal His elite force.

Rev 7:2 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,

Rev 7:3 saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."

The five-angel unit is on this support assignment. We'll see other units of angels as we read further in the book.

The angel tells the four wind-blockers that once the servants of God are sealed, they are cleared to harm the earth.

A "seal" signifies ownership and protection:

- These are "servants," owned by God because He redeemed them from slavery to sin and Satan.
- They will enjoy supernatural protection during the Great Tribulation on the earth. The next time we see them, their number is intact.

Will this "seal... on their foreheads" be visible? It will certainly be visible to those in the unseen realm.

Rev 7:4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed:

I find it beyond absurd that anyone reading the Revelation would mistake the identity of the 144,000 or claim it for themselves or some other group.

As far as being clear goes, this verse is crystal. "The tribes of the children of Israel" are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's *physical descendants*.

God is going to save Israel and the Great Tribulation is how He will do it:

- The book of Romans devotes three full chapters (9, 10 & 11) to a discussion of God's future plans for Abraham's *physical* descendants.
- We read, "I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! (11:1) ... So all Israel will be saved" (11:26).
- The prophet Jeremiah calls the Great Tribulation the Time of Jacob's Trouble. Their persecution will make them realize that Jesus is their Messiah.
- The Great Tribulation events that Jesus highlights in His Olivet Discourse describe Jews in the Holy Land.
- Isaiah (66:19-23) and Joel (Acts 2:16-21) both speak of a group of Jews who will bring the Gospel to the world during the Great Tribulation.

The Lord wanted us to 'get' this so much that He added a monotonous breakdown of the numbers.

Rev 7:5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed;

Rev 7:6 of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed;

Rev 7:7 of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed;

Rev 7:8 of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

This list *includes* the tribes of Levi and Manasseh, and it *excludes* the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. Before you ask "Why?" I should point out that "of the nearly twenty Old Testament listings of the twelve tribes, *there are not even two lists that are the same*. There are various names excluded from these lists without any explicit significance attached to their exclusion."

Since the Bible provides no explanation, *any explanation is speculation*. If God wanted us to know why Dan and Ephraim didn't make the cut, *He would have told us*.

Sealed Team 144,000... Jews for Jesus... the 12²... the Maker's Dozen Dozen... the Durable Dozen Dozen... The Salvation Squad.

They've been called "144,000 Billy Graham's." With no disrespect, they will be "144,000 apostle Paul's."

God deploys an evangelistic army. His seal will supernaturally protect them as they preach the good news around the globe to the last generation before Jesus returns.

#2 - Seal Me & I Will Be Heard (v9-17)

The Revelation is sequential.

It follows a linear timeline:

1. Jesus will open the seven seals on the scroll He takes from His Father.
2. When Jesus opens the seventh seal, angels will blow seven trumpets in sequence.
3. When the seventh angel blows his trumpet, seven additional angels will pour seven bowls of God's wrath in sequence upon the earth.
4. Then we read, "It is done."

There are many events chronicled in the Revelation *between* the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls. They are *flashbacks* or *flash-forwards*.

In the film *Saving Private Ryan*, a squad of Army Rangers must find Ryan before he is KIA like his three brothers. The film begins at the end of the story... then flashes back... then flashes forward.

Jesus opened the first six seals in chapter six. Instead of the seventh seal, we get a flashback and a flash-forward:

1. The sealing of the 144,000 in verses 1-8 is a flashback. It happens sometime before Jesus opens the sixth seal.
2. In verses 9-17 we see a flash forward of those saved by Gospel preaching throughout the Great Tribulation.

Rev 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

“Which no one could number” is a literary hyperbole. John wanted to communicate the success of God’s program sending out the 144,000.

The “white robes” are actual heavenly garments that additionally serve to illustrate salvation by grace through faith:

- Humans are born dead in sin. The Bible depicts us wearing “filthy rags.”
- When a person believes God, they are declared righteous thanks to the death of Jesus on the Cross.
- Jesus takes away your filthy rags and exchanges it for a white robe of righteousness.
- The robe cannot be deserved or earned; it is a gift. Without it you cannot enter Heaven.

In Hong Kong, I was excited to buy brand-name clothing at a fraction of the cost. Too bad the Izod shirts I purchased were knockoffs sized for Hobbits.

All the world’s religions and philosophies are knockoffs - bad knockoffs.

In the end, they are all attempts to launder your filthy garments. None of them can provide you with Jesus’ robe of righteousness.

The stain of sin only comes out by Lamb's blood.

The saved multitude has "palm branches in their hands."

It immediately reminds us of Jesus' triumphal entry when the crowd spread palm branches to make the way for the King. He was *rejected* in His first coming; Jesus is *received* in His Second Coming.

Palm branches are prominent at the annual Feast of Tabernacles. Jews build a temporary structure to camp outdoors. The tabernacles, also called booths, commemorate the shelter of the Israelites during their forty years in the wilderness.

The Feast of Tabernacles will be a world-holiday during the Kingdom Age:

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass *that everyone* who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

The mention of palm branches seems to favor a future earthly celebration.

Rev 7:10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

"Salvation" in the Bible is three-fold:

1. You *are saved* the instant you believe God and He counts it as righteousness.
2. You are *being saved*, or we say *sanctified*, as you walk day-by-day with the Lord.
3. You will be *perfectly saved* when you are resurrected or raptured.

Salvation is only available as a gift from God. Jesus was sent from the throne in Heaven to earth as God in human flesh to be the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Rev 7:11 All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, Rev 7:12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.*"

In chapter four, we identified the twenty-four "elders" as a heavenly council of supernatural beings who assist God the Father. They appear behind the scenes several times in the Old Testament.

The church *is* safe in Heaven, but the twenty-four elders are *not* the church.

Worship is a significant activity in Heaven, as well it should be. They praise God for "Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might." Each of these words has many definitions, many applications. It is therefore impossible to exhaust their depth and breadth.

Instead of defining them, we each ought to reflect upon them in our own life and circumstances. For example, there are seven praises in the list. Maybe take one of them each day and think about it all day.

Make Taco Tuesday Thanksgiving Tuesday.

Rev 7:13 Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

Interestingly, the elder asks John the question rather than vice-versa. You know John must have been wondering what he was witnessing.

Ask questions about a text when you are reading the Bible. *But don't forget to wait on it and let it ask you questions.* Interact with it as a living Word.

Rev 7:14 And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

You don't need to be a know-it-all regarding spiritual things. The man born blind could not answer the probings of the religious leaders. He knew that he was blind but now could see. It stumped them.

If you are saved, you know more about what is essential than the most brilliant nonbeliever.

Every believer can be described as having "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It isn't something you do, because you must be *given* the robe in its already pristine condition.

Rev 7:15 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. Don't read verse fifteen as a job description. It's a joy description. One of David's psalms puts this into proper perspective: "One *thing* I have desired of the LORD, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to inquire in His temple" (Psalm 27:4).

Rev 7:16 They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat;

These conditions describe a person on the run without resources. They are subject to the elements and malnourished. No more; never again. They are home.

Rev 7:17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus was and is unique as the God-man Who alone in all the universe could die in your place as a lamb.

Knowing what it's like to live as a lamb He is the perfect Shepherd.

Do you know that God saves all of your tears?

In Psalm 56:8 you read, "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book."

Every tear is accounted for in a ledger. In Heaven, that account will be 'drained' as God wipes away every tear. I don't think it means you will suffer memory loss. You will understand things in a way you cannot until you are glorified.

It isn't simply that we won't cry anymore. God will heal every emotional wound and pain once-for-all.

God's saved sealed servants will be heard and multitudes will receive Jesus. Mission Accomplished.

There is another elite unit we need to discuss. It is the church. In Second Corinthians 1:22 we're told God "has **sealed us** and given **us** the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."

Ephesians 1:13-14 is even more specific:

Eph 1:13 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, **you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise**,

Eph 1:14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Apologist Don Stewart writes:

*We do not seal ourselves. It is completely an act of God. There are no outward signs which accompany the sealing of the Holy Spirit. The seal of the Holy Spirit guarantees believers that they are God's children. Those who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit belong to the God of the Bible. Thus, when the Holy Spirit seals the believer, **He guarantees that person's security**. God's authority is*

*behind the sealing. The sealing is thus a promise that the salvation the Christian receives is granted both now and forever. Whomever He seals, He claims as His own; **He will never abandon them.***

You are not sealed to be protected from physical harm. The Church Age is a dispensation during which God is glorified in our weaknesses. Your sealing is far greater. It is the guarantee that He Who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.

Elite units normally have ridiculously high standards.

According to military.com, only about 6% of Navy SEAL applicants meet the requirements. Odds on completing training are 1 in 4.

You are sealed before you are trained.

You are instantaneously equipped with everything you need:

- You are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.
- You have access to all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.

In one important sense, you do not need more of *anything* except the willingness to yield to God the Holy Spirit.