

# ***The Book of Revelation***

## ***The Sealed People of God***

Lesson #6 for February 9, 2019

Scriptures: Revelation 7; 14:4-5,12; 17:5; 2 Peter 3:9-14; Deuteronomy 8:11-17; Romans 3:19-24.

1. Revelation 7 describes an interlude between the sixth and the seventh seals. In many of the lists of seven in Revelation, it is common to have an interlude between the 6<sup>th</sup> item and the 7<sup>th</sup> item. The seals clearly bring us to the time of the second coming of Jesus. Mountains and islands have disappeared. And a great question arises: Who will be able to stand through those terrible events just before Jesus comes back?
2. That answer is given in Revelation 14:1-5. They are called the 144,000. Each of the groups of seven in the book of Revelation are focused on the final events in this earth's history.
3. The group of trumpets which comes up next—found in Revelation 10:1-11:14—talks about an angel who gives John a scroll. He is told to eat it, and it will be sweet in his mouth but sour in his stomach. Then, he was given a measuring rod and told that he was to measure the temple of God but that the outer courts of the temple would be given to the heathen who will trample on the holy city for 42 months or 1260 prophetic days/years. These were the courtyards that Jesus cleansed when He was on this earth. Then, God will send two faithful witnesses dressed in sackcloth to proclaim His message. These two witnesses are olive trees or lamps, and they have the power to destroy those who attack them. But, surprisingly, when they finish proclaiming their message, a beast comes out of the abyss, the home of the Devil, and fights against them. He defeats them and kills them. People from all nations, tribes, languages, and races look at their dead bodies and celebrate. But, three and one-half literal years later (this is understood to represent the French Revolution), a life-giving breath comes to them from God, and they stand up. This terrifies all who see them. That message closes with a terrible earthquake.
4. Read Revelation 7:1-3 and 2 Peter 3:9-14. John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the winds of strife until God's faithful people are sealed. Peter went on to say that God wants everyone to be sealed if they are willing to turn away from their sins. But, he reminds us that we will not know exactly when the day of the Lord comes, that is, the exact day of the close of probation; it will come like a thief. Then, the heavens and the earth will disappear. And we need to do our best to hasten His coming.
5. *Winds* were used to describe the destructive forces by which God executes His judgments upon the wicked, and that was used even in Old Testament times. See Jeremiah 23:19-20 and Daniel 7:2. We have already discovered that many of the symbols used in the book of Revelation were taken from the Old Testament. Ellen White comments:

As the angels of God cease to hold in check the fierce winds of human passions, all the elements of strife will be let loose.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 614.1.
6. So, what does it mean to be *sealed*? In ancient times, sealing was a mark of ownership. God knows those who are His. (2 Timothy 2:19) They will be sealed by the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) What does that sealing consist of?

Just as soon as the people of God are sealed in their foreheads,—it is not any seal or mark that can be seen, but a settling into the truth, both intellectually

and spiritually, so they cannot be moved,—just as soon as God’s people are sealed and prepared for the shaking, it will come. Indeed, it has begun already; the judgments of God are now upon the land, to give us warning, that we may know what is coming.—Ellen G. White, (“Medical Missionary Work in Southern California,” Interview held in Los Angeles, California, September 15, 1902.) *10MR\** 252; *MS 173,\** 1902, 3-6. (“Medical Missionary Work in Southern California,” November 20, 1911.); *SDABC,\** vol. 4, 1161.6; *1MR\** 249.2; *Mar\** 200.2; *FLB\** 287.7; *LDE\** 219.4-220.0; *OFC\** 83.6; 328.2.

7. But, we know that the Devil is not asleep. Revelation 12 tells us that he knows that his time is short, and he is very angry. (1 Peter 5:8) Read Revelation 13:15-17. The Devil threatens to kill anyone who does not join him in his rebellion against God.
8. Read Revelation 12:17 and Revelation 14:12. Compare Ezekiel 20:12,20; Hebrews 4:9-10; and Revelation 14:7. In these passages we see that God’s seal involves the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath and all that represents. And those who are faithful to God will be preserved despite all that Satan does. He will also have a mark called *the mark of the beast* to identify those who are his.

**Revelation 7:4-8:** <sup>4</sup>And I was told that the number of those who were marked with God’s seal on their foreheads was 144,000. They were from the twelve tribes of Israel, <sup>5-8</sup>twelve thousand from each tribe: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Revelation 7:4-8). New York: American Bible Society.

The announcement of the number of those who are sealed marks the completion of the sealing. John hears that their number is 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel. The reference here is not to a literal number but to what it signifies. The number 144,000 consists of 12 times 12 times 1,000. Twelve is a symbol of God’s people: the tribes of Israel and the church built upon the foundation of the Twelve Apostles (*Eph. 2:20*). Thus, the number 144,000 stands for the totality of God’s end-time people: “All Israel” (Jews and Gentiles) who are ready for Christ’s return and who will be translated without seeing death (*Rom. 11:26, 1 Cor. 15:51-53[; Gal. 3:28-29]*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, February 4. [Content in brackets is added.]

9. So, where are these people described as *the 12 tribes of Israel*? Read 2 Kings 17:5-23. Historically, we know that the northern kingdom of Israel, consisting of most of ten tribes, were taken off into captivity because of their rebellion against God; no one knows where they are now. So, is this a literal number? Or, only a symbolic number?

Also, the list of the 12 tribes in Revelation 7 is like no other found in Scripture (*compare Num. 1:5-15, Ezek. 48:1-29*). Judah is listed as the first tribe (*Rev. 7:5*) instead of Reuben (*compare with Num. 1:15*). Also, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim, included in the lists of Numbers 1 and Ezekiel 48, are omitted from the list in Revelation 7, while Levi and Joseph are included instead (*Rev. 7:7, 8*). The obvious reason for the exclusion of Ephraim, and apparently Dan, from the list in Revelation 7 is that in the Old Testament these two tribes are apostate and idolatrous (*1 Kings 12:29, 30; Hos. 4:17*).—*Ibid.\**

10. It should be clear, then, that this is not a literal number applying only to genetic Jews.

The list of the tribes in Revelation 7 is not historical but spiritual. The absence of Dan and Ephraim from the list suggests that the unfaithfulness of these two tribes will have no place among God's sealed people. Also, the church in the New Testament is referred to as the 12 tribes of Israel (*James 1:1*). The 12 tribes in Revelation 7 stand for the entire people of God who endure to the end, both Jews and Gentiles.—*Ibid.*\*

11. But, John sees another group. Who are they? Read Revelation 7:9-10. Clearly, these are people who are faithful to God, and they are standing in front of the throne in heaven. They are shouting and singing because they have survived a great tribulation. Is this another description of the 144,000? Or, could this be another group? We know that the word *tribulation* is used in the Bible to describe God's faithful people who suffer because of their faith. See Exodus 4:31; Psalm 9:9; Matthew 24:9; John 16:33; and Romans 5:3.

12. What does Ellen White tell us about this group?

Nearest the throne are those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan, but who, plucked as brands from the burning, have followed their Saviour with deep, intense devotion. Next are those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void, and the millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith. And beyond is the "great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,... before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands." Revelation 7:9. Their warfare is ended, their victory won. They have run the race and reached the prize. The palm branch in their hands is a symbol of their triumph, the white robe an emblem of the spotless righteousness of Christ which now is theirs.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*\* 665.2; *SR*\* 421.2. Compare *Spirit of Prophecy*,\* Book 4, 479.3; *Mar*\* 339.3; *ML*\* 346.4.

13. Read Deuteronomy 8:11-17. This passage is a part of one of Moses's final speeches given to the children of Israel just before he left them and they entered the promised land. He reminded them of how God had preserved them through very difficult circumstances; but, he warned them not to reject God or to think that they do not need Him anymore.

14. Read Revelation 14:1-5. Who are those 144,000 saints?

**Revelation 14:1-5:** <sup>1</sup> Then I looked, and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion; with him were 144,000 people who have his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup>And I heard a voice from heaven that sounded like a roaring waterfall, like a loud peal of thunder. It sounded like the music made by musicians playing their harps. <sup>3</sup>The 144,000 people stood before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders; **they were singing a new song, which only they could learn. They are the only ones who have been redeemed.** <sup>4</sup>They are the men who have kept themselves pure by not having sexual relations with women; they are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from the rest of the human race and are the first ones to be offered to God and to the Lamb. <sup>5</sup>They have never been known to tell

**lies; they are faultless.**—*Good News Bible*.\* [Bold type is added.]

15. So, what does it mean not to have “sexual relations with women”? These people have survived through the fullest extent of Satan’s wrath in the final crisis. But, because of their very close relationship with Jesus Christ, God has protected them. But, they have not been defiled with the teachings of Satan or his followers. *Sexual immorality* is a symbol of unfaithfulness to God. (See Revelation 17:5; compare Revelation 18:3.)

The 144,000 are further described as the ones who have been “redeemed from among men” as “firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (*Rev. 14:4, NKJV*). In ancient Israel, the firstfruits were the best fruits of the harvest offered to God (*Num. 18:12*). The word “firstfruits” can refer to saved people as distinct from those in the world (*James 1:18*), but in Revelation the 144,000 are clearly a special group because they will be translated without seeing death (*1 Cor. 15:50-52*). Thus, they are the firstfruits of the larger harvest of the saved through all the ages (see *Rev. 14:14-16*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Wednesday, February 6.

16. Read Revelation 14:5; 2 Peter 3:14; and Jude 24-25. We are admonished to do everything we can to be a part of those final remnant people of God. But, we need to stay very close to Jesus and be “without fault.” This is necessary because the Devil will do everything possible to deceive and destroy God’s faithful people. (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11; Matthew 24:4-5,23-24) So, what does it mean to be *without fault*?

“Without fault” (Greek *amōmos*, “blameless”) refers to the fidelity of the 144,000 to Christ. In the Bible, God’s people are called to be holy (*Lev. 19:2, 1 Pet. 2:9*). Abraham (*Gen. 17:1*) and Job (*Job 1:1*) were blameless. Christians are called to be holy and without blemish before God (*Eph. 5:27, Phil. 2:15*).—*Ibid.*\* for Thursday, February 7.

[Revelation] Chapter 7 is inserted parenthetically between the sixth (*Rev. 6:12-17*) and seventh (*Rev. 8:1*) seals. Chapter 6 closes with the opponents of God calling on the rocks and mountains to hide them from the face of God and the wrath of the Lamb (*Rev. 6:15, 16*). They then close with the poignant statement, “For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?” (*Rev. 6:17, NKJV*). That question is answered in chapter 7 with the appearance of two groups: the 144,000 (*Rev. 7:4-8*) and the great multitude (*Rev. 7:9-14*). In order to survive the calamities that accompany the Second Coming, it is necessary to be sealed (*Rev. 7:1-3*). The end result is a people who stand blameless before the throne of God (*Rev. 14:5*) and serve Him in His temple (*Rev. 7:15*). The purpose of Revelation 7 and 14, within their larger context, is to identify what God’s people will be like just before the Second Coming.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 81. [Content in brackets is added.]

17. God has always asked His faithful followers to “be holy because He is holy.” (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 2:9)
18. This does not mean that we will somehow in our own strength be perfect. Read Romans 3:19-24. All of us are sinners and are hopelessly lost apart from the salvation offered by faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by what God is able to do in us and through us if we cooperate with Him. (See Ephesians 2:8-10.)

We need to be refined, cleansed from all earthliness, till we reflect the image of our Saviour, and become “partakers of the divine nature”.... When the conflict of life is ended, when the armor is laid off at the feet of Jesus, when the saints of God are glorified, then and then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved, and sinless.—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*,\* Book 3, 355.2-356.0. Compare *Signs of the Times*,\* March 23, 1888, par. 13; *Ibid.*\* May 16, 1895, par. 4.

19. Clearly, we can see that at that time just before the second coming of Christ, Satan will do everything possible to deceive and, if possible, destroy God’s faithful people. But, God also promises them that He will protect them and preserve them despite these tribulations if they will remaining close to Him.
20. Since the early days of Seventh-day Adventism, questions have been raised about who these 144,000 are. That question has been hotly debated. One of the best descriptions of the 144,000 is found in *Great Controversy* 648.3. Psalm 91:7-16 is a precious promise from God about how He will care for those who are His faithful people.
21. But, there are some things which God chooses not to reveal.

**Deuteronomy 29:29:** <sup>29</sup> “There are some things that the LORD our God has kept secret; but he has revealed his Law, and we and our descendants are to obey it for ever.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

Christ says that there will be those in the church who will present fables and suppositions, when God has given grand, elevating, ennobling truths which should ever be kept in the treasure house of the mind. When men pick up this theory and that theory, when they are curious to know something it is not necessary for them to know, God is not leading them. It is not His plan that His people shall present something which they have to suppose, which is not taught in the Word. It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand? This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question.—Ellen G. White, *Notebook Leaflets*,\* vol. 2, 164.4; *Selected Messages*,\* Book 1, 174.3; *SDABC*,\* vol. 7, 978.4.

22. But, one thing is clear:

Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* March 9, 1905, par. 4; *SDABC*,\* vol. 7, 970.10; *Mar*\* 241.9; *OFC*\* 332.7.

23. We know that one of the important characteristics of the 144,000 is that they will be able to sing a new song—which no one else can sing—because they have been through an experience like no other group in history ever has. (Revelation 14:3-4; 15:2-3)
24. In our study for this week, we have talked about seals and sealing, the cosmic conflict, and the work of the Holy Spirit; (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30) and we have just discussed the 144,000—whether it is literal or symbolic and whether it is the same as that *great multitude* that were seen before the throne of God. Do you feel that you now have a better understanding of the 144,000?
25. In ancient times, sealing accomplished two main purposes: (1) It validated the contents as

being authentic or official because of the nature of the seal; and (2) it prevented others from viewing the contents of the scroll who were not authorized to open the scroll. (See Isaiah 29:11; Revelation 10:4; 1 Kings 21:8; Esther 8:8; Jeremiah 32:44.)

26. We have also seen that sealing is a mark of ownership. (Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30; 2 Timothy 2:19; and Revelation 14:1)
27. Everyone living on earth will have to choose either intentionally or by default which side he will be on, God's side or the Devil's side. Read Ephesians 4:27 and Ephesians 5:1. We must do everything we can to remain faithful to God and to avoid giving the Devil any kind of chance.
28. So, what about these two different groups: (1) The 144,000; and (2) the *great multitude*? Read Revelation 5:5-6; 1:10-12; 17:1-3. These verses could suggest that the 144,000 are the same as the *great multitude*.
29. However, there is good evidence to suggest that the 144,000 represent those who are translated at the end of this earth's history without seeing death while the *great multitude* include all those who have been saved from all time periods and are standing before God's throne in heaven. See Revelation 14:1-5 again.
30. So, what do you see happening in our world today? Does it seem like God's angels are holding back the winds of strife? Or, are they letting go? There certainly have been times when things seemed to be worse on a worldwide scale, for example, during World War II and the times of the Holocaust.
31. Clearly, the Devil is responsible for all the evil which is happening. (Revelation 9:11; 12:12)
32. Read Revelation 3:19 and Hebrews 12:5-7. We know that we will spend eternity in a beautiful place where there will be no trials, no problems, no death, no torture, no tribulations, or anything of that sort. So, why do we need to go through these terrible events just before Jesus comes again? Satan must be given an opportunity to prove what things would be like if he were allowed to be in charge. But, more than that, God will use these trials to discipline and prepare His children for their eternal life. God is not the cause of all the troubles that will be coming on this earth; but, He allows them to enhance the Christlikeness of His followers. This will prepare them to fulfill a unique role in eternity. See Revelation 7:14-15 and *Great Controversy* 648.3-649.0.
33. Wouldn't you like to be a part of that group?

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