

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

**“Vision of the Sealed Servants”  
Revelation 7:1-8**

INTRODUCTION:

This weekend marks the 63<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the modern nation of Israel. On May 14, 1948, in Tel Aviv, Jewish Agency Chairman David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independence of the State of Israel.

This declaration of Independence shown here, established the first Jewish state in some 1,900 years since AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish temple.

Later in the day on May 14, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed this document recognizing the provisional government of the new state of Israel.

Some have suggested that the sovereignty of Israel might be threatened due to the widespread unrest that we have witnessed in the Middle East over the last few months.

Certainly, there have been protests, uprisings, and revolutions throughout the Middle East with Israel right in the middle.

This has caused many people to be concerned that Israel could be wiped off the face of the earth.

While others could care less because they believe that God is finished with Israel due to their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

In fact, there are many Christians who believe that God is indeed finished with Israel and that His promises to Israel have been given to the church.

However, we will begin to see in our passage this morning that God is not yet finished with the nation Israel. In fact He has a future plan for Israel. So, turn with me to the book of Revelation 7:1-8.

Before we read our passage, let me remind you of where we are at in our study of the book of Revelation.

Remember that we are examining future or end time events known as the Tribulation Period. So, Revelation chapter 6, began to focus God’s future judgment poured out upon the earth.

In Revelation 6, we saw that John was given a vivid description of literal events that will take place on the earth during the first half of the tribulation period.

With the opening of the first seal, we saw that there will be a rise of false messiahs culminating in the rise of the antichrist and his pseudo peace through a covenant with Israel.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

With the opening of the second seal, we saw that there will be world-wide warfare and bloodshed breaking out as supposed peace and prosperity will turn to conflict.

With the opening of the third seal, we saw that there will be a devastating world-wide famine, where a full day's salary will barely buy food for one person for one day.

With the opening of the fourth seal, we saw that ¼ of the earth's population will perish as a result of war, famine, disease, and wild beasts.

With the opening of the fifth seal, we saw that John was given a vision of slain tribulation saints under the altar awaiting the culmination of God's judgment upon the unbelieving world.

With the opening of the sixth seal, we saw a great catastrophe upon the earth including a damaging earthquake, a darkening of the sun, a discoloring of the moon, asteroids or meteors dropping to the earth, the displacement of the mountains and islands, and an unusual atmospheric disturbance giving the appearance of the sky splitting apart.

Remember that these first six seal judgments from Revelation 6 ultimately describe the events up to the mid-point or just after the mid-point of the tribulation period.

But, before John moves on to describe the breaking of the seventh seal judgment, he pauses in Revelation 7 to describe two visions that he was given regarding the saints of the great tribulation.

This morning we will look at the first vision: "The Vision of the Sealed Servants" in Revelation 7:1-8. READ!

It is important to note that the phrase *after this* or *after these things* is used throughout the book of Revelation with the term, *I saw* to signify a new vision (cf. Revelation 4:1, 7:1, 7:9, 15:5, 18:1, 19:1).

So, Revelation 7 is a new vision. The scene shifts from judgment of the ungodly to special protection for the godly.

Essentially Revelation 7 is a parenthetical passage, considering the question put forth in Revelation 6:17, "Who is able to stand?"

Notice that, there are two aspects of this vision that we must examine in order to understand God's plan for the future:

### **I. First, we must examine what John saw (Revelation 7:1-3).**

What John actually saw is described for us in verses 1-3. So, what did John see in this vision?

A. John saw four angels.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

He says, “***1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.***”

We are not told whom these angels are or how they relate to the other angels that we will see throughout the book of Revelation.

It does become quite clear that God utilizes angels in the pouring out of His judgment upon the earth during the tribulation period because we will later see seven angels who blow the seven trumpet judgments in Revelation 8, and seven more angels who have the seven bowls of God’s wrath in Revelation 16.

Here in Revelation 7:1, John does provide us with two important points regarding these angels.

1. He describes their position.

He says in verse 1 that they are, “***standing at the four corners of the earth.***”

The four corners of the earth do not refer to the earth as being flat, but is idiomatic of the four quadrants of the compass and thus means *north, south, east, and west*. In his commentary on the book of Revelation Dr. Henry Morris comments, He says:

"This verse has long been derided as reflecting a naive pre-scientific concept of earth structure, one that supposedly viewed the earth as flat with four corners.

In terms of modern technology, it is essentially equivalent to what a mariner or geologist would call the four quadrants of the compass, or the four directions.

This is evident also from the mention of the 'four winds,' which, in common usage would of course be the *north, west, south, and east* winds.”

Dr. Morris goes on to say, “Parenthetically, accurate modern geodetic measurements in recent years have proved that the earth actually does have four corners.

These are protuberances standing out from the basic geoid, that is, the basic spherical shape of the earth.

The earth is not really a perfect sphere, but is slightly flattened at the poles. Its equatorial bulge is presumably caused by the earth's axial rotation, and its four corners protrude from that.”

Not only are we given the position of these four angels, but...

2. He also defines their purpose.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

John continues on in verse 1 by saying that these four angels are, ***“holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.”***

The four winds are likely representative of God's judgment to come. The mention of God's judgment as such is typical eschatological imagery and is quite common in Scripture (cf. Jeremiah 49:36, Daniel 7:2, Hosea 13:15).

For example in Jeremiah 49:36, it says, ***“I will bring upon Elam the four winds From the four ends of heaven, And will scatter them to all these winds; And there will be no nation To which the outcasts of Elam will not go.”***

Here in Revelation 7:1, these winds of judgment are held back so that no wind would blow on the earth, sea or any tree.

These winds, representative of God's judgment would be freed during the 1st and 2nd trumpet judgments in Revelation 8 and will in fact harm the earth, the sea, and even the trees.

The term *holding back* is from KRATEO, a strong word that suggests that the winds are struggling to break free from their restraint.

The angelic restraining of the wind symbolizes the holding back of the plagues associated with the imminent trumpet judgments (Revelation 8:5ff).

So the next phase of God's wrath is restrained for the moment. The winds of judgment are gathering force, soon to be released.

But, that is not all John saw...

B. John saw another angel.

He says in verses 2-3, ***2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”***

At this point in John's vision he sees another angel. Some have suggested that this angel is Christ, an archangel, the Holy Spirit or some other specially prepared messenger.

It is important to point out that there are two terms used in New Testament Greek for the word “other” or “another.”

ALLOS, meaning “another of the same kind,” or HETEROS, meaning “another of a different kind.”

The term used here in Revelation 7:2, by John is ALLOS, “another of the same kind.”

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

Thus the angel here is of the same sort or character as the previous four angelic beings and therefore, cannot be Christ, an archangel or some other specially prepared messenger.

Here in Revelation 7:2, John also provides us with two important points regarding this additional angel.

1. He describes this angel's appearance.

John says, "*And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun.*"

The phrase, "*from the rising of the sun*" is a poetic way of speaking about the point of the compass from which the sun rises; thus, it is a figure of speech that simply means the east.

From John's perspective on the Island of Patmos, the east would be toward the land of Israel, the land where God's promised salvation came through Jesus the Messiah, and from where the 12 tribes of Israel came—the bondservants who are about to be sealed.

John also describes the angel as, "*having the seal of the living God.*" The term, SPHRAGIS, meaning "seal" often referred to a signet ring.

Kings or other officials would use such rings to stamp into a wax seal on documents or other items, thereby affirming their authenticity.

We see King Ahasuerus gives his signet ring to Haman to decree the destruction of the Jews in Esther 3:10. The seal was thus authenticating the King's decree.

We also see this when King Darius seals the lion's den with his signet ring in Daniel 6:17.

A seal also denoted ownership and protection and is used as such to speak of those who are believers in the New Testament (cf. John 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30)."

The nature of this seal in Revelation 7 is not specified except that it was to identify certain special servants of God. These servants were to be protected from the coming judgments of God on the earth.

These sealed individuals evidently have a special ministry to fulfill and are to be protected by God until that ministry is accomplished.

John does not only describe this angel's appearance, but...

2. He also details this angel's admonition.

There are two features that we should take note of in regards to this angelic admonition.

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

First, notice that this angel cries out with a loud voice. John says, “***and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea.***”

There are several aspects to this admonition that can be gleaned from the use of the phrase “cried out with a loud voice.” The Greek words translated “***loud voice***” is where we get the English term “megaphone.”

The use of this term could emphasize the intensity of the voice heard, possibly to grab the attention of his hearers.

It could also emphasize the authority of the voice heard, driving home the necessity to follow his instructions.

It could also emphasize the importance of what is about to be said.

Clearly, this fifth angel has been given the responsibility to issue forth important instructions to the four angels responsible for holding back the winds of judgment.

So, how does this fifth angel direct the other four angels?

Notice, he instructs them, “**3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”**”

This fifth angel cried out for the other four angels not to harm the earth, the sea, or the trees until the bond-servants of God had been sealed.

God's judgment in the form of the trumpet and bowl judgments, which are represented by the four winds, was being restrained by the four angels.

These four angels were to continue to restrain or hold back these judgments until the completion of the sealing.

These who were to be sealed were called bond-servants of God and thus can be identified as redeemed individuals.

The term "we" implies multiple angles are involved in the sealing process. Given the number to be sealed, this is understandable.

The text also mentions that this sealing involves the placing of a special mark on the forehead. We are not told what this mark is. Anything beyond this is speculation.

John does not only record the vision that he saw, but he goes on to speak of what he heard in regards to the vision of the sealed servants of God. And that is our second point...

**II. Second, we must examine what John heard (Revelation 7:4-8).**

What John actually heard is described for us in verses 4-8. So, what did John hear regarding this vision?

A. John heard the total calculation of the sealed bond-servants.

***“4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand...”***

The number of bond-servants that were to be sealed was 144,000. How should we understand this number? You may be saying, why are you asking this question?

I am asking this question because there are people, who misunderstand/misinterpret the Scripture because they don't follow the normal rules of interpretation.

This is especially true when they study the books of prophecy.

There are some who will utilize what is called an allegorical method of interpretation when they get to the prophetic books of the Bible.

Under this system, the words are often understood in a symbolic sense that results in a different meaning of the text when compared with understanding the text in a plain literal way.

Thus, they believe that the number 144,000 is symbolic of something. And the usual interpretation is that it signifies that which is complete or whole and thus can be an unlimited number.

Is this the best way to understand this number? No Way! Absolutely Not!

The proper way to interpret the Scripture is a literal method of interpretation. The literal method of interpretation is also known as the normal method. It employs an examination of:

\* ***Historical*** elements-In other words, the cultural background and circumstances of the writer and recipients are considered.

\* ***Grammatical*** elements-The words are taken in their normal sense unless it is evident that a figure of speech or symbol is used. Attention is paid to the original language of the text.

\* ***Contextual*** elements-The words are considered in light of their immediate and broad context.

\* ***Rhetorical*** elements-Noting the special features of the particular type of literature being studied (narrative, poetry, prophecy etc...)

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

The literal method of interpretation does allow for symbols and figures of speech, but only if clearly stated or undoubtedly alluded to in the passage.

In other words, when we are seeking to understand a passage of Scripture we must adhere to the golden rule of interpretation, if the plain sense makes good sense, then seek no other sense.

With that in mind, this number is best understood in a literal way and not symbolic of anything else. There is no mention in the text of this number being symbolic for anything else.

It literally means that the total number of people sealed is 144,000. This is further reinforced by the context of 12 listings of 12,000 bond-servants to be sealed.

B. John also heard the tribal classification of the sealed bond-servants.

***“4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel 5 From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, 6 from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, 7 from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, 8 from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.”***

Clearly stated, these sealed individuals are from every tribe of the sons of Israel. They are the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel means Israel.

Remember also that this passage already stated that the sealed individuals were bond-servants of God. Therefore they are best identified as Jewish believers who are sealed.

As I said before, there are some Christians who believe that God is finished with Israel due to their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah.

In fact, there are many Christians who believe that God is so finished with Israel that they believe His promises to Israel have been given to the church.

But, if you understand the plain sense of this passage, Israel is not symbolic of the church or of all believers during this time. In fact John emphatically states that 12,000 from every tribe of Israel will be sealed and then goes on to list each of those 12 tribes.

This is an emphatic way of making this inevitably clear that there will be a sealing of 144,000 Jewish believers, which will include 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes.

Some have objected to this because the tribal identity of the Jews has been lost since the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

## *Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

However, we must recognize that our Sovereign God knows who is part of what tribe and is capable of sealing those whom He has determined to seal.

There are also questions raised in the listing of the 12 tribes here because it does not match other lists of the 12 tribes in Scripture.

It should be noted that there is no standard way of listing the twelve tribes. In fact, there are at least nineteen different ways of listing the 12 tribes in the Old Testament.

They are first listed by the order of birth (Genesis 29:32-35:18). At other times, it is the order of Jacob's blessing them (Genesis 49:3-27), the order of their encampment (Numbers 2:3-31), the order of the census before the invasion of Canaan (Numbers 26:4-51), the order of blessing and cursing (Deuteronomy 27:12-13), the order of Moses' blessing (Deuteronomy 33:6-25), or the order of inheritance (Joshua 13:7-22:34).

Although there are 12 tribes listed in verses 5-8, some substitutions have been made. For example, Dan is eliminated and Levi is added to the list, and the tribe of Ephraim is replaced by Joseph.

Many reasons have been offered for these substitutions. Most scholars believe that Dan and Ephraim were omitted because of their continual promotion of idolatry in Israel (1 Kings 12:28-30; Isaiah 7:17; Hosea 4:17)."

This of course is only speculation, but it is the best guess as to the substitutions made here. However, it is important to note that the Scriptures are silent as to the exact reason that Dan and Ephraim are replaced with Levi and Joseph here.

So, what should our response be as believers in light of John's vision of the sealed servants?

First, we should remember God's sovereignty (Isaiah 40:12-26)!

God is clearly in control of all things. The Bible/the book of Revelation clearly proclaims the power and sovereignty of God and reminds us that His purposes for the future will come to pass.

God will indeed pour out His judgment upon an unbelieving world during the tribulation period.

God will restrain His judgment until the appropriate time so that His plan and purposes will be accomplished.

God does have a future plan for Israel. The church will not take the place of Israel. God will fulfill His promises to Israel.

Likewise, God also has a future plan for the church and He will also fulfill His promises to the church.

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

No one can thwart God's mighty plans and purposes. Just as the prophet Isaiah declares in **Isaiah 40:12-26** that God our Creator is not impressed with the assumed power of men and nations, which is anemic in comparison to His sovereign power.

In light of this we should be moved to recognize the sovereignty of God and turn to Him in worship.

Second, we should rejoice in our future hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:13).

Just as God has a future plan for Israel, He also has a future plan for those of us who have embraced Christ.

The Apostle Paul makes it inevitably clear in **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** that we as believers at some point in the future will be removed from this earth to be with the LORD prior to these future events in the book of Revelation.

Therefore we should take comfort in God's plan and rejoice in this future blessed hope.

Just as Paul teaches in **Titus 2:13** we should be, "**looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.**" In other words, these future events should motivate us to long for our Lord's return.

Lastly, we should resolve ourselves to serve the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:51-58; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ephesians 2:10).

The Scripture often emphasizes a need to serve the Lord in light of future events.

- According to **1 Corinthians 15:51-58**, knowing that the Lord will return should motivate us to abound in the work of the Lord.
- Also, in light of the judgment seat of Christ in **2 Corinthians 5:10**, we should be motivated toward good works.
- Let us remember **Ephesians 2:10**, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

This is God's plan for believers in the here and now. A study of or a knowledge of these future events should motivate us to serve! It should motivate us to walk in the good works that God has prepared for us!

And here at Valley Bible Church we have many opportunities to serve. (children's, Nursery, AWANA, men's, women's, Youth, Sunday school, EE etc...)

Clearly God has a plan for Israel in the future, but He also has a plan now for believers; and...

*Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript*

My hope is that we will remember the sovereignty of God, rejoice in our blessed hope and be resolved to walk in the good works that God has prepared for us.