

**WHO ARE THE 144,000?**

**Episode Eight: Revelation 7**

This mystery perplexes scholars, consumes researchers, divides churches, and has even spawned cults. Who are the 144,000 servants of God who bear his seal of protection imprinted on their foreheads? Are they Jews converted during the Great Tribulation, or past and future Christians, or are you among them today? The Revelation code solves that mystery. Once you see it yourself, it should put a song in your heart and steel in your backbone for the days ahead.

1. **The Great Pause** [Revelation 7:1-3-9; 8:1].*“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* [Rev. 7:3]. “*And there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”*[Rev. 8:1]

* The pause between the 6th Seal and the 7th Seal [the final and great wrath of God upon the earth] to give protection for “God’s servants.”
* See this in contrast to the 666 mark put on the foreheads of those who belong to the Beast. As Bob Dylan sang, “You’ve got to serve somebody.” We are either owned by the creation or the Creator. There is no neutral ground in the War of the Worlds.
* This is parallel to the plagues upon the Egyptians who also made gods of creation, and were visited by ecological disasters. Yet the Exodus account continually says that those plagues were not visited upon the Israelites. God had also sealed them with His ownership. Along with that came His protection. We can count on the same thing in the Last Days.
* But the greatest seal on the Israelites was when God’s final wrath fell upon Egypt: the Angel of Death. That seal was the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts of their homes.[Exodus 12:12&13] It prefigured the blood of the greater Lamb, Jesus Christ, which marks God’s ownership of us [1 Corinthians 6:19&20], as well as protection from His wrath against the world. Just as the Israelites were protected at Passover, and later in the Red Sea crossing, so will we be kept safe in the great day of His all-consuming wrath.

[that’s why I believe in a pre-wrath rapture of the church].

1. **The Servants of God who are sealed number 144,000.** [Revelation 5:4]

* Are there literally only 144,000 “servants of God” on the earth at this time? [as say the Jehovah Witnesses]. Or are these Jews who are converted in the tribulation period? [as say many evangelicals, pointing to the 12,000 from each of the twelve ancient tribes of Israel?
* Let’s remember our biblical symbolism when it comes to numbers. The number **one** is the number for God *[“Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is One*—Deuteronomy 6:4] Two is the number for union [*“…and they ( the two) shall become one flesh…”*—Genesis 2:24]. Those numbers equal twelve, which represent God’s mystical union with his Bride, Israel or Christ’s mystical union with his Bride, the church. Thus the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles representing the Church. Together, they make up the twenty-four elders who represent the people of God, or his servants, in both the Old and New Testaments.

Let’s also remember the number **ten** and its multiples, especially the number **one thousand** stands for all that belongs to God. “God owns the cattle on a thousand hills,” says the Psalmist. In other words He owns all the cattle on all the hills in the world (and even those in the valleys and on the plains).

**Take all that together and you have 12 (Old Testament servants) times 12 (New Testament servants times 1,000) (all those who belong to Him), which equals 144,000. In other words, these are all of God’s people down through the ages.**

* Are these people now raptured to appear before the throne? Are they the people before the throne? [Revelation 7:9] “A great multitude no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.”

Certainly a literal 144,000 could be counted. But a symbolic number, as we shared above, could not be counted. It is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham about his descendants: “many nations” and “numbering more than the stars of the heaven,” or “the grains of sand on the seashore.” Why would only 144,000 be called “God’s servants” when so many millions more have served him in the Old and New Testament ages?

* **The problem with the specificity of the twelve tribes of Israel.** Many think these refer to 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will be left on the earth during the time when God pours out his full wrath (after the seventh seal is broken). Here’s **the problem**: one, only two of these twelve tribes have survived the upheavals of history: Judah and Benjamin. Ten are lost. So, how can this be literal?

**Another possibility with the twelve tribes:** this too is symbolic. If 12,000 is the number of those who truly have a union with the Triune God, then it connects to the rest of Scripture: the idea of the invisible or spiritual Israel [Romans 9:6, “Not all are of Israel] just like an invisible or spiritual church consisting of those who truly belong to Christ.

They still constitute a number that no man can count, but they fall far short of the numbers who have falsely professed belief in God or Christ down through the eons of time.

**In short, the 144,000 are the fully devoted followers of Christ down through the ages. They have His seal because they alone are fully owned by Him and truly serve Him. If you belong fully to God, you are one of these 144,000 sealed servants.**

1. **The vast number of Martyrs** [Revelation 7:9-17]. A different group than the 144,000. “After this I looked, and a great multitude…” [vs. 9] His head turns and he sees another group.

* The Great multitude identified [vv. 13&14] Martyrs from the “great tribulation.” [see LSO Matthew 24:3-29]. These can’t be Jews martyred during the great tribulation. What does that mean then about us not being in the Great Tribulation?

* Martyrdom and tribulation are not expected to be an extraordinary experience, but ordinary and universal [verse 9].

“Most Christians are so unordinary that when one lives the ordinary Christian life, people say that it is extraordinary.”

Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian life*

Tribulation is a cause for jubilation. It also places martyrs in a special place in heaven [vv. 10-12]

The rewards of martyrdom and tribulation are great [vv.14-17].