

I know someone who would always skip the introduction of a book. They would just open the book and skip the prologue, and everything. I asked them why and they said they didn't need all that stuff. They wanted to get into the meat of a book and if it was important than it would come again later.

Some of us approach Revelation the same way.

We want to skip all the stuff in the beginning until we get to chapters 6 and 7.

This is when the book is going to begin to get even more complicated and difficult to understand.

And this is the part where, typically when we read it, we start trying to solve it.

We come to the word of God, and instead of approaching, it is something to believe and something to obey and something to apply to our lives and something that points us to Jesus we begin to approach it like a math equation.

So I just want to remind you that I'm here to help us wrestle with a book of revelation.

There are problems here and there are things that are hard to understand.

I'm gonna do my best to give you an answer.

If you don't like my answer, I'm gonna give you a couple other valid answers that are legitimate options for reading interpreting God's word.

But the main thing that I'm gonna do in the main thing that I want us to do is a church is I want us to try and get at the heart of what God means in his word.

I want us to see why he wrote Revelation to us and what it means to us today not just what is it gonna mean in the future.

## **I. God will protect His people (v. 1-8).**

This is the primary principle that we need to see and that we need to understand when we are talking about the 144,000 that God Seals.

We are going to ask who these people are?

What do they do?

When will this happen?

What does the seal look like?

But the most important thing we have to hold onto, is the main idea.

God will protect His people.

Even at the end of the World.

Remember our context with just happened in Revelation 6.

There God unleashes all of the seals of judgment on the Earth.

And the 6th seems apocalyptic and is where the entire world is ending.

The sun, and the moon are disappearing, and the stars are falling and crashing into the Earth.

And it ends with the question of who can stand?

The answer to the question of who can stand is here in chapter 7.

Those who can stand, are those God protects.

Verse one, **"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree."**

We get this image of angels holding back wind.

Seems to me like they are holding back and pushing back the judgment of God so that there is someplace it doesn't blow and it doesn't come to.

God is protecting His people.

Verse two, **"Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea,"**

Here another angel comes and says, "hey wait don't let all of those seals.

Don't let all those judgments go out on the earth yet.

They hold back the judgment, just a little bit.

Don't let the wind blow it forth onto the Earth.

There's something that has to be done first.

Verse three, **"saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads."**

The judgment can't go out until God has sealed His people.

So the people of God are sealed and marked.

They are marked in such a way that the angels know who is protected by God.

We may wonder what the seal looks like.

But it seems like the angels are the ones who see it.

The point is not that there's some sign visible on their forehead.

The point is that God is protecting His people even in the midst of this judgment that is going to be poured out on the Earth.

Just like God protected His people when the plagues fell on Egypt.

God sealed, and God marked His people so that the angel of death would pass by those who were covered by the blood of the lamb.

In a similar way, these people are sealed and marked.

The Scriptures also refer to Christians as being sealed with the Holy Spirit.

I don't think these are coincidentally related.

God seals His people.

And here He seals some to keep them safe from judgment.

Versus 4 to 8 a little tricky **"And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:"**

John hears the number of those who have been sealed

And he mentions that it is 12,000 from every tribe.

There is a lot to unpack here.

I will be honest numbers in the Bible will make me nervous.

Because people can use numbers to mean anything that they want.

But as we're looking as we're trying to unpack this mystery and wrestle with the Revelation, we need to fall back on what do we know for sure.

We know, for sure God has sealed and protected some of His people, even in the midst of this horrific judgment that is coming. And it seems like this number comes from the Jewish people. It comes from the tribes of Israel.

This is where when you hear people and will say that in the tribulation before Jesus comes when he Jews are gonna come back to the faith. They will come back and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the messiah. Jesus Christ truly is God and the Savior.

Some believe these 144,000 are only from Israel. Others believe these are all of the church. Because Romans 9 and other places remind us that we have been grafted into Israel. And the church and those of faith are truly descended from Abraham. I think both are legitimate interpretations.

There are some, like in the Left Behind series that make this number a special group of evangelists. Or like those especially chosen by God in contrast to other believers in the great tribulation. I don't see that part in the text.

But why these numbers?

I think we can make some mistakes here. I think we can make a mistake if we take these numbers too literally and if we take these numbers too figuratively.

I think there's a sense in which we need to take them both literally and figuratively, but not stretch it too far.

I do think this seems to indicate that there were people descended from the tribes of Jacob and the tribes of Israel, who will come to faith in Jesus and be sealed and protected by God, even in the tribulation. I believe that is literally true and is actually what will happen.

But that doesn't mean gentile believers will not be sealed.

Now does that mean it will only be exactly this number?

There are some who will say yes that means that God isn't going to save one person less or one person more than this and that is it.

I think that's a little too far.

We see people confused or Jehovah's witnesses who say only the 144,000 will be saved.

Or that they are particularly holy and everyone else is a lower class of believer.

I don't think that's the main point of this passage.

The primary idea is that God is protecting His people.

It seems to me more this is trying to show kind of a number of completeness.

God promised He will not abandon Israel forever, even though they rejected Him that He will come, and He will bring them back to God.

And we go through and we get 12,000 from each tribe

And that can lead the questions to why are the tribes in this order?

Or why is one included and not the other?

It is a good question, but the OT is always random about the order of tribes and which ones are included.

But Judah being first is significant and worth noting.

It does mention 12,000 from each tribe is to show the completeness from every single tribe.

That's the grace of God is not gonna be bestowed more on Judah than it is on any other tribe.

It is not that one tribe will be favored more than the other.

Or this tribe is not as good and that tribe is not as good.

It is all grace.

And they will all be included.

We need to understand the way the Bible uses numbers too.  
Because it is not always as exact as we are today.

My children wake up too early.  
So one morning Calvin comes in my room.  
He is allowed to get up at 6am but not before that.  
But I look at the clock and tell G "it's 5 o'clock go back to bed."  
And he tells me no it's not 5 o'clock. It's 5:05.  
Am I wrong when I say it's 5?  
No!  
And the point I am trying to make is "Go to bed!"  
Don't argue about the number.

I'm not saying this is just a symbolic number.  
But it probably is at least a little.  
Maybe it's just a symbolic number.  
Maybe it's just a nice round number.  
I am not sure it means God will only seal 144,000 and not 144001.  
Imagine you were there and counted the people then told Jesus He got it wrong.

So, the way I understand this passage is literally and figuratively.  
There is a complete true number of people from the nation of Israel God will seal and protect from judgment.  
I also will not be surprised if this number is not exact and if it includes Gentiles and other believers.  
Because the point is that God will protect His people.  
The point is not how unique these people are.  
OK, that's just my opinion.  
That's how I'm interpreting it.  
You can disagree with me here if you would like and can find a better way to explain God's word.

I think it makes more sense to stand on what we know for sure.

God is protecting His people.  
He's definitely gonna protect some people from the tribes of Israel.  
It's gonna be from all of the tribes.  
And it's gonna be exactly who He wants it to be.

And I don't think that we have to be insistent that it's these exact numbers.  
Nor do we have to just talk about symbolic protection.  
I think we can do it that we can interpret it that way while still being faithful to God's word.

You can be more exact or less exact if you want, but you do need to see you need to recognize that even in these circumstances, God can and will protect His people.

He will keep them even from all the terrible judgments that will befall the earth.

And this is part of why I do believe the church and believers endure the tribulation.

Personally, I don't see the Scriptures say God's people will escape it. But He does say they will be sealed and protected in the midst of it.

### **I. God will fulfill his promises (9-12).**

As we ask our questions, we need to keep this in mind.

We need to see that God has kept His promise, and God will keep His promise, even at the end of the world.

Verse nine, **"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,"**

John looks out and now he does not just hear, but he sees an incredible multitude.

He sees a group that cannot be numbered.

It is a number that is too fast and too big.

This also might give us a clue about those mentioned before.

They seem to be related.

Especially since we will see later in verse 14 that this multitude came from the tribulation.

And they were also protected through it.

But John can't even round up.

It is just a multitude from every nation, tribe, and language.

This is glorious, and this is what I cannot wait to see.

People who all look different, act different, talk different, dress different, worship different, every part of the spectrum of humanity.

They all come together to stand before God and worship.

What a joy that will be.

To stand in that crowd in the heavens and realize how insignificant our country, language, people, and place truly are.

They are just one small piece of the puzzle.

Now we'll just get to stand in that great multitude in the kingdom of God and worship.

But I want you to see here is a part of what is happening in this Revelation is the idea that God has kept His promise.

God kept His promise to Abraham to bless Him.

To make Him the father of many nations.

That through Him every nation on earth will be blessed.

And from the old man beyond child bearing years, this multitude comes.

They have all come to Jesus to worship.

Abraham didn't get to see it in his day.

He only saw one son in his day.

But then we will all get to see.

And the crowd wears pure white and carries palm branches.

Two weeks ago, our kids came and they waved Palm branches.  
And it was adorable and a great reminder.  
Well, one day we will see children from all over the world doing the same thing.

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

They cry out in one voice.  
I don't know what that voice is gonna be like, but I have some ideas.  
Maybe we will cry out in the heavenly language.  
Maybe we were all saying and all cry out in our own languages and it will sound beautiful in perfect harmony.  
Maybe it will be like Pentecost, where everyone will speak his own tongue, but we will hear altogether.  
Whatever it is, it will be unified and beautiful.

And the crowd will sing that God keeps His promises.  
We will sing and praise it because God kept His promise to save us.  
That the promises that we heard.  
The promises we believed in.  
The promises we gave our lives to.  
They will praise the lamb who kept every promise.  
And who brought the promised salvation.

Verse 11, **"And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,"**

Get along this great multitude is the angels the elders the creatures and all of them will fall and worship God.  
It will not be those things will be the multitude of the people of God will come.

God will have kept his promise he just disciples must go to the ends of the Earth to playing the gospel.

Verse 12, **"saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."**

God is deserving of everything forever and ever.

We will all worship God together as He deserves and as we always should have.

It will not be an empty "to God be the glory."

It will be full and wonderful and true.

We will all praise the God who has kept every promise He has ever made.

## **II. God will bring us out (v. 13-17).**

This is where we see that the 144,000 are not the only ones in the tribulation.

This entire multitude was protected by God and brought out.

Verse 13, **"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"**

There is some humor here.

Because one of these elders who stands around worshiping the throne comes up to John and says, "so who are all these people?"

I imagine at least he's asking with a little bit of a smile or smirk.

Because John doesn't have any idea who they are.

This elder certainly should so why does he ask John?

And so verse 14, **"I said to him, "Sir, you know."**

John says, don't mess with me. You know who these are.

Why does this exchange happen?

Well, there's some things in Revelation John will not get the answer for.

There are some things John doesn't ask about because He knows He will not be given an answer.

But here's the invitation to ask because the answer may be found.

The rest of verse 14, "**And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."**

This multitude are all of those who have come out of the great tribulation.

The church and believers will endure the tribulation.

It seems that believers from every tribe every every nation and every tongue, even in this time will still face it

Some say the great tribulation is just what the church experiences now.

And this multitude is just all believers since Pentecost.

I can understand that, but I don't think so.

Have a hard time imagining that those seals that we read about in Revelation 6 are the ones that are poured out on the Earth right now.

It seems more likely to me that the church everywhere faces the tribulation.

But they are protected, sealed, and brought through the tribulation.

And the reason that they have white robes is because they have been washed by the blood of the lamb.

One of the great old hymns is Washed in the blood.

It's a wonderful image because we know that we would normally never wash anything in blood.

That would ruin our clothes and lead to a lot of weird questions.

Anytime we get even a small bit of blood on our clothes we have to work hard to get it out.

But the blood of Jesus is not like our blood.

Because we actually need to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

We need to be covered by the blood.

We need to be washed in the blood of Christ.

Because the blood of Jesus makes us clean.

It washes away all of our sins.

Verse 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 shelter them with his presence."**

Those who are brought out get to be with God forever.

Day and night they get to be in His presence.

This is not telling us that heaven is where they will work all day long never getting to leave the temple.

It is the promise that they will be with God.

God will shelter us.

It gives us the same idea of the tabernacle.

He will tabernacle us.

He will place His tent over us.

He dwells among us and over us.

His presence will always be with them.

Verse 16, **"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat."**

The blessings continue.

Those who have had to see and endure the tribulation.

They who wandered through the desert and wilderness of this life.

They will feast at God's table.

They will no longer hunger or long for anything.

They will no longer thirst because they will drink from the fount of living waters.

They will be under the shade of God.

Verse 17, **"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

And the Lamb of God will be their shepherd.

He will take them to the spring.

To the only place that satisfies our deepest longings.

And God will wipe away the tears.

There will be tears shed in the tribulation.  
There will be suffering and sadness, even for God's people.  
But it will soon be no more.  
It will fade and God will take away the tears.

These are the promises.  
Too often when we speak of Revelation and the tribulation we focus on the suffering.  
We focus on the problems.  
We don't want to be the Christians who go through that.  
But the Bible, especially this chapter, does not focus on the suffering.  
It makes it clear that God will seal them.  
He will protect His people in the midst of the tribulation.  
And instead, the focus is on the blessing on the other side.  
The blessing is for those who endure.  
Who stand firm in the Holy Spirit.

Read those blessings again.  
Just read verses 15-17.  
Who among us does not want that?  
Who among us does not desire to be in the midst of the Lamb?  
To be with our Shepherd who will guide us to the living water?

One day He will.  
And every amount of suffering and pain we face in this life will be worth it.  
Whether we endure the greatest of tribulation at the end,  
Or whether we endure smaller tribulations in this life.  
This is the blessing that awaits those who belong to Christ.  
To the sheep who know His voice.

There will be suffering in this life.  
But it is all worth it.  
God's protection does not always mean avoiding suffering.  
The 12 disciples did not get to escape punishment and pain.

They were protected by God, and almost all of them were killed.  
But if you could talk to them now, they would say the suffering was worth it.  
If you could go forward in time and speak to this multitude or the 144,000.  
They would both say God brought them through.  
And they wouldn't trade it for anything.

Listen, if God can bring His people through the great tribulation.  
Then He can bring you through whatever smaller tribulation you are facing.  
Whether it is something you are in the middle of, or something coming.  
God can and will do for you what He does here for His people.  
And if we hold the faith.  
If we refuse to give up and hold onto Jesus.  
Someday we will join this crowd.  
Take heart those who suffer.  
Be encouraged those who fear the future.

Because we can stand.  
Knowing that our God seals us, protects us, and will bring us out.  
Whatever you are facing, God has you.  
And what waits for you on the other side of eternity will be worth it.  
And then our voices will join with the heavenly chorus and sing.