

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Revelation 7:1-8**
“Are You Sealed?”

The Bible says that if we have been saved, then we have been sealed with the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). What does that mean? What does God's Spirit do for us? And what does He do *through* us? Billy Sunday once said, "What God needs, and the world needs, is men who are solid mahogany all the way through." Today we will see a hundred and forty-four thousand such Christians, all sealed by God.

1: The suspense (v1). The Bible often speaks of the heavens as being somewhat of a "fabric" (e.g., Isaiah 42:5). Einstein discovered many neat things about physics, but I'm sure there's more we haven't figured out yet. What does God mean in referring to the "**four corners**" of the earth? Perhaps Jerusalem (Mount Zion) is God's epicenter by which the eastern/western **corners** of the earth are measured; but in any case, imagine the silence when the angels **hold the four winds of the earth**, to the extent **that the wind should not blow on the earth**—windmills slow to a halt, eagles are unable to soar for a while; **nor on the sea**, meaning sailboats will be dead in the water, and wind-driven waves will also cease; **not on any tree**—the leaves will be completely still, except for motion caused by birds or squirrels. The whole world is holding its breath, as it were, for something incredibly momentous to happen.

2: The intervention (v2-3). I picture this **other angel** who is **ascending**, apparently from the earth and **from the east**, to be possibly returning from an errand, since he has **the seal of the living God**. Not to be irreverent, but it almost seems as though he is running a little late (see Daniel 10:12-13). This angel **cried with a loud voice**, as if having something important to say before they continued with their mission; these other angels had been issued a "permit" to **hurt the earth and the sea**, fully legal and ready. In a similar sense, God's intervention to save our souls through Jesus Christ is entirely out of mercy, not duty.

What does this angel cry? To **Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees**; interestingly, these are the exact things which were so calm, having no wind whatsoever. Do not trust in the apparent calmness of your life as a sign that you are right with God. Do not trust in the stability of your health or finances. It could be the "calm before the storm," so to speak. Some people are relieved when they stop feeling the convicting of the Spirit of God in their hearts; but this lack of "wind" (cf. John 3) may simply mean that you have fully numbed your conscience, or are very close (I Timothy 4:2).

Christians, on the other hand, are **sealed**; and just as a patriotic American would never degrade the flag which represents his beloved nation, so God will never pour out His wrath on one of His sealed saints (I Thessalonians 5:9). But Christians are also **the servants of God**. I.e., the Holy Spirit not only protects us, but He changes our hearts and lives (Romans 8:14). Are you really serving Jesus? That's the evidence of someone who's sealed. And they are sealed **in their foreheads**; a person could lose a seal if it were in his hand or arm, as those could be lost in battle or disease. But a seal on the *forehead* means security and permanence.

3: The number (v4-8). When John **heard the number** (cf. Revelation 9:16), I imagine that he hears the faint yells in the distance by each rank and tribe, and the tallies being given. The total is **an hundred and forty and four thousand**, or $12^2 * 1000$; or, $(2^7)(3^2)(5^3)$.

For conciseness, information about each tribe in this list is included in the following format: [birth order, order in Numbers, mother, meaning]. The story behind the birth of these twelve patriarchs is really quite sad. Many of the names were chosen by Jacob's two wives to spite each other. God *never* endorsed polygamy in the Old Testament; instead, He records the terrible and unfair strain it places on the wives. But for more information on what this information means, you can cross-reference Genesis 29, 49, and Numbers 7.

(v5) 1: Juda [4th, 1st, Leah, "Now will I praise the LORD" (Genesis 29:35)]; references a Lion, sceptre, and prosperity (Genesis 49:8-12).

2: Reuben [1st, 4th, Leah, "Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me." (Genesis 29:32)]; firstborn, yet "unstable as water"; committed

perverse act; in a sense, gave up birthright in the ordering of tribes.

3: **Gad** [7th, 6th, Zilpah (Leah), "A troop cometh" (Genesis 30:11)]; "Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last" (Genesis 49:19).

(v6) 4: **Aser** [8th, 11th, Zilpah (Leah), "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed" (Genesis 30:13)]; "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties" (Genesis 49:20).

5: **Nephtalim** [6th, 12th, Bilhah (Rachael), "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed" (Genesis 30:8)]; "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words." (Genesis 49:21).

6: **Manasses** [N/A, Genesis 48:13-20]; he was actually the older of *Joseph's* two sons but received the lesser blessing; yet oddly, Ephraim isn't mentioned in this list.

(v7) 7: **Simeon** [2nd, 5th, Leah, "Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also" (Genesis 29:33)]; instruments of cruelty, wrath, and murder are mentioned (Genesis 49:5-7).

8: **Levi** [3rd, N/A, Leah, "Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons" (Genesis 29:34)]; oddly, the way they were "scattered" as mentioned by Jacob (Genesis 49:7), at least for Levi, may have been to become the religious instructors without a specific land or inheritance. Yet in this list here, perhaps implied is that the "scattering" has ended.

9: **Issachar** [9th, 2nd, Leah, "God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband" (Genesis 30:18)]; "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute." (Genesis 49:14-15)

(v8) 10: **Zabulon** [10th, 3rd, Leah, "God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons" (Genesis 30:20)]; "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon." (Genesis 49:13).

11: **Joseph** [11th, N/A (sons are 7th/8th), Rachael, "God hath taken away my reproach...The Lord shall add to me another son."

(Genesis 30:23-24)]; a "fruitful bough", persecuted, separated, yet victorious (Genesis 49:22-26). I find it interesting that Joseph (the father) and Manasseh (one of the sons) are mentioned, but Ephraim (the only other son) is not; presumably Joseph minus Manasseh would be somewhat equivalent to listing Ephraim here instead of Joseph, but for some reason God does not do that.

12: **Benjamin** [12th, 9th, Rachael, Genesis 35:18]; "Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." (Gen 49:27). They were almost completely wiped out as a tribe because of their defense of wicked men (cf. Judges 21:3).

That's quite a lot of names! Studying the tribes and patriarchs can be a bit confusing, and even sad, but what are some things we can possibly learn from this list? First, Israel is still God's chosen people. Any attempt to make this an allegory is made more difficult by the fact that each individual tribe is mentioned. Second, God has His representatives scattered everywhere, like salt; and this will be true even in the terrible end times with this group of elite Jewish missionaries. Third, we should have the humility to know we are not irreplaceable; interestingly, Dan is missing from this list, but the work goes on. Finally, this list includes and excludes some people that may surprise us (Dan excluded, Levi included). The same could be said about the roll of heaven. I especially like the way John Newton, author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," put it: "If I ever reach heaven, I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had expected to see there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there."

It's a good idea to ask yourself whether you have been sealed by the Spirit of God. Does He live inside of you? All true Christians are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14). Be sure that you don't have an outward form of religion without an inward conversion and personal relationship. If you are sealed with God's Spirit, you have the safety of His eternal stamp on you. And God *never* misplaces anything that He seals.