

~Other Speakers S-Z: David Servant:

This seventh-chapter interlude in the "seal judgments" is a prelude to chapter eight, in which the seventh and final seal of the sacred scroll is broken by Christ, which introduces seven successive "trumpet judgments." Prior to those judgments, it is apparently important to mark "the bond-servants of God" on their foreheads so that they will not suffer the judgments that are about to fall upon the world. In chapter nine, for example, we will read about stinging locusts that will torment only those who do not have "the seal of God on their foreheads" (9:4).

We are later told in Revelation that the mark on the foreheads of these 144,000 bond-servants is the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father (14:1). We are also later told that all of the bond-servants of God will have His name on their foreheads (22:3-4). For that reason, we may be jumping to a wrong conclusion if we think that only 144,000 descendants of Israel receive that mark at the time it is mentioned in this chapter. It is certainly possible that there will be more than 144,000 bond-servants of God on the earth then, and if so, it is certainly possible that all of them will be marked, but that 144,000 who are descended from Israel among them are specifically mentioned for some reason. Some theorize that they are called as evangelists, but that is speculation. They are mentioned again in 14:1-5, but by that time they are found in heaven worshipping before God's throne, either by virtue of martyrdom or rapture. So many mysteries!

How will it be possible to single out 12,000 descendants from each of the 12 tribes of Israel when there has been so much inter-mixing of those tribes over the past 2,000 years? Obviously, if we are to take the twelve-thousand number literally, then those who are marked won't necessarily possess a pure lineage from just one tribe, but each could have a dominant lineage from one tribe. God knows everyone's genetics. It has also been suggested that the 144,000, unlike other bond-servants who are sealed on their foreheads at that time, are ancient believing Jews who are already in heaven, and who thus may all possess pure lineages. On the other hand, there would seem to be no reason to mark those who are already in heaven. Again, we have more questions than answers.

Some suggest that it is during this interlude between the sixth and seventh seal judgments that believers will be raptured from the earth due to the fact that, in this chapter, John sees a multitude of redeemed people in heaven who are described as "the ones who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14). Yet we will read in chapter nine, as I have already mentioned, of the release of stinging locusts that will torment only those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads, implying that there will be people on earth at that time who do possess God's mark. On the other hand, we may be wrong to assume that what we read in chapter nine follows chronologically what we're reading today in chapter seven! It is also possible that the great multitude whom John saw is a multitude of martyrs rather than of "rapturees!" I don't know!

In any case, we can be certain that, although believers who are alive during the tribulation may not be spared from suffering under the antichrist's political system, they will certainly not be the objects of God's wrath as He pours it out upon the earth. There are only three possibilities. They will either be martyred, raptured or protected. God has not destined us for wrath (1 Thes. 5:9).

Rather than worry ourselves with what might lie ahead in our temporary future, let's rejoice in what lies ahead in our eternal future. As the angel told John, God will "spread His tabernacle" over us (7:15) and "wipe every tear" from our eyes (7:17). In the "ages to come," He will be showing us "the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). Praise God!