



## Intro

The evocative power of numbers:

- 1776
- 7,000,000,000+
- [the *really* important #] 17

In Revelation [so far]:

- $\frac{1}{4}$  (6:8)
- 2 (2:12)
- 4 (4:6, 8; 5:6, 8, 14; 6:1; 7:1[3], 2)
- 6 (4:8)
- 7 (1:4[2], 11, 12, 16, 20[5]; 2:1[2], 3:1[2]; 4:5[2]; 5:5, 6[3]; 6:1)
- 10 (2:10)
- 24 (4:4[2], 10; 5:8)
- “myriad of myriads and thousands of thousands” (5:11)
- 12,000 (7:5, 6, 7, 8)
- 144,000 (7:4)

144,000

- Modern American Dispensationalists like John MacArthur: Jewish evangelists saved during the “seven-year tribulation period” of chapter 6.
- Jehovah’s Witnesses: the number of those who will be saved in the highest heaven while the rest will be in a lower heaven.

***Our Theme:*** like so many of the numbers in Revelation, 144,000 is symbolic. It’s God’s way of proclaiming to us all those he will save from the whole world before Jesus’ Second Coming.

### 1. A Truth Derived from the *Structure* of the Text

- 1.1. The way the Word is organized reveals the creativity of the Spirit.
  - 1.1.1. Chapter 6: all death & disease, famine & fighting in this evil age are judgments of God upon a rebellious world. Like

drops from a bucket, they are limited previews of a full outpouring.

- 1.1.2. 6:12–17 is the Second Coming (one of the reasons the book isn't chronological). And at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ the great and awesome Day of the Lord will come with Christ as the Lion to judge the living and the dead.
- 1.1.3. Therefore “seals” 1–6 survey history from Christ’s ascension to his Second Coming.
- 1.1.4. That same final Day is spoken of again in 8:1–6, where the 7th seal picks up at the Second Coming (also introducing the 7 trumpets).
- 1.2. Why is this important?
  - 1.2.1. Between these descriptions of the final judgment (6:12–17 & 8:1–6) is chapter 7 (even Dispensationalists like MacArthur acknowledge ch. 7 is parenthetical).
  - 1.2.2. The seals (ch. 6) & trumpets (ch. 8) describe condemnation & havoc; ch. 7 describes salvation & heaven.
  - 1.2.3. Chapter 7 is an interlude in these visions to give the church comfort and confidence in the Lord’s work in history.

### v. 1

*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.*

- Wind: Jer. 49:36
- 4 horseman/4 winds (Zech. 6:2–5)

### v. 2

*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,*

- Ancient kings used signet rings to mark ownership/authenticity
- “Seal” in the NT: John 6:27; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13 (4:30); Rev. 14:1, 22:4

v. 3

*saying,*

*“Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees,*

*until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”*

- When the Lord sent plagues on Egypt, did they indiscriminately fall on his children? (Ex. 8:22–23; 9:6–7, 25–26; 10:22–23)
- See Ezek. 9:3–6

## **2. A Truth Derived from the *Symbol* of the Text**

v. 4

*And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.*

vv. 5–8

12,000 from twelve different tribes of Israel.

2.1. Why do I believe the 144,000/12,000 are symbolic?

2.1.1. Note the *order* of the tribes here. Judah is moved from his typical fourth place in order to first in this list. Why? Because Jesus comes from Judah. Notice that Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, who were born to Jacob’s gentile concubines Bilhah and Zilpah, and are typically listed last, are moved up here. Why? The Lord is showing us his people the New Covenant include the gentiles.

2.1.2. Note which tribe is *excluded*: Dan. All the way back in Judges 17–18 we read that Dan gave into idolatry. They took Micah’s household idols and his Levite priest as their own priest and set up their own worship. So why is he excluded here? It teaches us that the people of God do not engage in idolatry but are to be fully devoted to the one true God who has revealed him in Jesus Christ.

2.1.3. Note which tribes are *included*: Manasseh (v. 6), Levi (v. 7), and Joseph (v. 8). This is a strange list because Joseph was a full tribe, but Ephraim and Manasseh were half tribes. To include Joseph, Levi, *and* Manasseh in the place of Dan means that there are really twelve and a half tribes numbered here; again it’s a symbol. Especially we see this with Levi included (v. 7). Levi had no inheritance with Israel but the Lord himself was his inheritance (Deut. 10:9–10). But now that all who belong to the Lord are “a kingdom and priests” (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9) there’s no distinction between the tribes and Levi.

## 2.2. The Objection

“...Israel must be interpreted in accordance with its normal Old and New Testament usage and reference to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (MacArthur).

2.2.1. This is contra how Jesus (John 6 & 8) and Paul (Romans 9 & Galatians 3) describe the “seed of Abraham”

2.2.2. As in ch. 5, what John “hears” and “sees” are different but the same. So he “hears” of the 144,000 (12,000 x 12) but sees what in 7:9?

2.2.3. What Old Testament promise is this visually depicting? (Gen. 13:16, 15:5)

2.3. What drives home the point that these are not saved Jews after the Rapture and during the Antichrist’s tribulation period is the fact that John says the 144,000 **sons of Israel** (v. 4) are **the servants of our God** (v. 3).

2.3.1. In Revelation “servants” refers to all those who believe in Jesus Christ (In 19:5–6 the 24 elders & the 4 living creatures call God’s “servants” to praise his name; in the New Jerusalem “his servants shall serve him” [22:3]).

### **3. Application**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.