

Chapter 7

The Sealed of Israel

¹After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ²Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³“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.”

These angles are holding back the judgments of God, the judgments begged for by the martyrs in the 5th seal, until those who are the servants of God are sealed in his name. These powerful angles hold back the winds of strife while those who are secured by God and in his name are sealed and protected from what is to come.

Something reinforced here is the connection between the ‘land, sea and trees’ representing people around the world. We established this in Daniel with ‘sea’ and ‘trees’ being either important individuals or groups of people but now John adds ‘land’ to this. If we consider the context of ‘sea’ used in Daniel – and especially Chapter 7 – we find that all the powers are related to the East and Mediterranean. The expansion here to add ‘land’, especially in the context of this being right at the end of time, logically expands the ‘sea and trees’ to add all people around the earth.

The winds of strife are therefore being held back from harming not just great and powerful men, but also the European/Mediterranean/North African/Middle Eastern part of the world and the New World/Asia parts too. This distinction is important and will be very important in the distinction drawn in Chapter 13.

One of the most important questions in Adventism is what is this seal? What does this seal do, what does it represent, what is it?

As we have already discussed, Seals were used to certify authorities and the authenticity of documents and the scope in which they exist. But in this situation, people are being ‘sealed’ in their foreheads.

This mark cannot relate to a tattoo or a physical brand as both were against Jewish law and were against Roman culture. This mark cannot be anything physical at all, so we need to find something that held the authority of God. It must be some demonstrable sign that lives in the ‘forehead’, indicating that it is something intellectual or having to do with the mind. In Jewish – and most ancient – traditions, the bowels or stomach was the seat of passion and emotion, the heart the seat of beliefs and trusts while the mind was the seat of reason and intellect. This is an interesting area to have a seat of God which is generally related to belief and faith.

We can make some deductions here about what it relates to. It is the seal of the living God, meaning whatever it is, it is holy and good. It is put in their foreheads indicating that it is most likely something attached to the mind of the sealed individual, but that is not something we can hold to.

What's more, the fact that this group is so sealed indicates that the seal can be seen. If this is something put on their minds, it must be a practise that they all engage with. If it's a literal seal, it must be clearly visible.

We have already, heavily, examined the 10 commandments as being the distinction between God's people and those who are not God's people. If we examine them, the 4th stands out as distinctly different compared to the others.

Exodus 20

And God spoke all these words, saying:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;

5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

7 "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's

wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

The 4th commandment stands out compared to the other commandments for a few reasons.

- It is one of only 2 with justifications in it – the other being the 2nd commandment
- It is the only one that references an Authority in the commandments. The introduction refers to this God as the one that "brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" but in this commandment, a higher authority is referenced. "11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day."
- It is the longest of the commandments
- It is the only one that uses the word 'remember' – an intellectual instruction
- It is the only one that encourages the follower to be like God, to emulate God's actions
- Its also the only one that is expected to apply to those outside of the person who hears the commandment. Including the servants/slaves and even cattle of the hearer has an incredibly broad scope.

What's more, as we look more broadly to the scope of the Jewish Law, this commandment was established with Moses as a sign or signifier to differentiate the Jews and Israel from the rest of the world. Moses himself was told, unambiguously, that the Sabbath is the distinguishing mark of the Holy.

Exodus 31

¹² And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³ "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

This was further reenforced by God to Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 20

¹⁰ "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness. ¹¹ And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.' ¹² Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.

...

¹⁸ "But I said to their children in the wilderness, 'Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. ¹⁹ I *am* the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; ²⁰ hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I *am* the LORD your God.'

Clearly, the Sabbath is drawn out as the sign/seal of the Living God as the key and important element beyond just the 10 commandments more broadly. The Sabbath has to be, if not the entirety of, an extremely important element in the seal of the Living God.

We have also clearly looked – ad nauseum – at the Roman and various Protestant churches that have changed or removed the Sabbath as a concept. What we haven't looked at in any depth is the movement back to the Sabbath at/around 1844.

Ellen and James White were brought to the Sabbath Truth by Captain Joseph Bates. During the spring of 1845, Bates accepted the seventh-day Sabbath after reading a pamphlet by T. M. Preble – a Seventh Day Baptist minister in New Hampshire. Preble was also instrumental in the conversion of J. N. Andrews, the Adventist Church's first missionary, but would repudiate his work later in his life. Bates soon became known as the "apostle of the Sabbath" and wrote several booklets on the topic. One of the first, published in 1846, was entitled *The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*.

The conversion from the Sunday-Sabbath to the Saturday-Sabbath, both for the Church and for the individuals inside the movement, was and is an intellectual conversion. It's one of the few doctrines that can be taken entirely on history and not on faith. It fits, nicely, with the seal of the Living God being on people's foreheads – the centre of intellectual conviction and reason rather than emotion. It is the sign that distinguishes those who wish to understand and properly follow God's commandments from those who don't.

The Sabbath is not introduced as a new institution but as having been founded at creation. It is to be remembered and observed as the memorial of the Creator's work. Pointing to God as the Maker of the heavens and the earth, it distinguishes the true God from all false gods. All who keep the seventh day signify by this act that they are worshipers of Jehovah. Thus the Sabbath is the sign of man's allegiance to God as long as there are any upon the earth to serve Him. The fourth commandment is the only one of all the ten in which are found both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It is the only one that shows by whose authority the law is given. Thus it contains the seal of God, affixed to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force. (E.G. White. *Patriarchs and Prophets*. P. 307)

SDA Church

It's also important to recognise that this is the authority on which the Seventh-Day Adventist church holds itself as the **current** embodiment of the church of God. Our Church is one of the few churches that preaches and practises the Sabbath as a distinguishing mark between our movement and other movements around the world.

We have always called ourselves "Children of the Word" and while recent generations have reduced the depth to which we study the Bible, our willingness to become intellectually convicted of a position at the sacrifice of what we want the answer to be. Our holding of separate doctrines that are specifically enunciated in our name – Seventh-Day Adventist – is the marker that distinguishes us from the rest of the world.

To be clear, not all Adventists will be in Heaven and, as we will explicitly see, not all in Heaven will be Adventists. The choice is still left up to the individual and there are plenty of Sabbath-keeping Protestants out there that are going to be in Heaven before their SDA Brothers. Furthermore, we know that the church will fracture at the end of time and there will be no formal church that moves into Heaven as a block, so we can look toward a day when the SDA Church is broken up and the question of Salvation is left much more up to the individual.

⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed:

⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed;

⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed;

⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed;

⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed;

of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

Debate over the number of these people has caused quite some problems amongst some protestant denominations with some going so far as to explicitly keep lists of those included in the 144,000. The Adventist church is no exception to the debate, and our deduction to the **who** is far less important than the **what**.

"It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand. This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question." Councils on the 144,000 (1963 Compilation), Page 1

The fact that 12,000 were sealed from each of the 12 tribes indicates that these are intended to repopulate Heaven as the new Israelite Nation. This can also be referred to as 'spiritual Israel'.

The fact that they are the ones sealed at the close of probation but before the winds of strife are released, gives us a good indication as to what group they come from. These are those who will be "alive and remain" (1 Thessalonians 4:17) at the second coming of Christ and those who will be protected through the times of trials. These are those who are kept for Jesus at his second coming, and they are associated with, but separated from, the "great multitude" that John also saw.

A Multitude from the Great Tribulation

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."

This group is kept separate from the 144,000 but are still members of the saved. They come from all places and all nations. They are celebrating because they are saved and they are worshiping God alongside the 4 Creatures and the rest of the angels. This multitude comes from all time and from all places. They have no number, so broad is God's grace that he wishes all possible to be saved.

¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

Who is this elder referring to?

The entire focus of this Chapter is the sealing work. The fact that the question asks "and where did they come from?" would indicate that we can't be referring to the unnumbered multitude. That multitude comes from known places as it says clearly they come from "all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues". The question must be referring to the 144,000.

Why is the elder asking this question? Doesn't he know a LOT better than John? Surely this is a strange question?

He's testing John. He wants to see how John will respond.

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

John responds exactly as he should. He humbles himself before the elder and does not answer the question, instead deflecting the question onto them. "You tell me?"

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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 dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

The question asked in the previous chapter – "Who shall be able to stand" has therefore been answered. The 144,000. However, in answering this we have also caused a separation, "the sheep from the goats" so-to-speak that leaves the world divided. What can follow after this sealing work but the Judgements that must come from Heaven and the participation in salvation or damnation?

This is the group that will go through the "great tribulation" but are protected because they "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb". Their rewards are what we see them receiving. They serve God in his temple, they have no feeling of hunger, thirst, sunstroke or heat, no sorrow nor any weeping. Unfortunately, this list of things they will never experience again does indicate the things they will experience when they are going through the times of trouble.

More will be heard of the 144,000 in Chapter 14.

Chapter 8

Seventh Seal

8 When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

This seal is a tricky one to pin down, and has been widely debated.

- Firstly, it's the 7th seal when there are only 7 seals on the book.
 - If we are looking on this book as the book of life correctly, then we assume that the time has come for the inheritance – eternal life – to be dished out.
- Secondly, it comes after the Close of Probation and after the separation between those sealed by God and those not.
 - There really is no mixing after this; what else can follow? After the splitting of those groups, what difference do you have?
- Thirdly, it comes after the judgements have been laid down on the earth by God through the releasing of the 4 winds.
 - This is implied as they are only held back until after the sealing has been done.
- Fourthly, we need to acknowledge that silence isn't exactly apropos to the Judgement so it really can't relate to releasing those 4 winds of strife.
 - What's more, this being the final seal, as stated, judgement is not part of the inheritance. The book of life is exactly that, a book of life.

One way or another, the 2nd coming follows very quickly after the opening of the 7th Seal. We will layer onto this seal more and more what we know will happen but the 2nd coming must be a part of that, and that includes some rather interesting elements.

- This is the resurrection of the righteous dead
- This is the translation of the righteous dead and living
- Eternity starts from this moment
- Those who pierced Christ are resurrected to see his Glory

The time period mentioned here – “[about half an hour](#)” translates to 7 ½ literal days through the math we have used, which matches what Mrs White saw in her first vision;

"Then Jesus' silver trumpet sounded, as He descended on the cloud, wrapped in flames of fire. He gazed on the graves of the sleeping saints, then raised His eyes and hands to heaven, and cried, "Awake! awake! awake! ye that sleep in the dust, and arise." Then there was a mighty earthquake. The graves opened, and the dead came

up clothed with immortality. The 144,000 shouted "Alleluia!" as they recognized their friends who had been torn from them by death, and in the same moment we were changed and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

We all entered the cloud together, **and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass**, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory. Here on the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square. Some of them had very bright crowns, others not so bright. Some crowns appeared heavy with stars, while others had but few. All were perfectly satisfied with their crowns. And they were all clothed with a glorious white mantle from their shoulders to their feet. Angels were all about us as we marched over the sea of glass to the gate of the city. Jesus raised His mighty, glorious arm, laid hold of the pearly gate, swung it back on its glittering hinges, and said to us, "You have washed your robes in My blood, stood stiffly for My truth, enter in." We all marched in and felt that we had a perfect right in the city." – E.G. White, 1915, Life Sketches of Mrs White - Page 66

Why was Heaven quiet? Because it was empty. There was nobody in Heaven. All Heaven will come with Jesus to witness his 2nd Coming and to demonstrate his power. By this point the Judgments have all been completed and God has been vindicated. This is the demonstration of Jesus Power, the adoration of Jesus, the recognition that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to save humanity and that God's law was just.