

LESSON 9

AN INTERLUDE

THE SEALING OF THE 144,000 (7:1–8)

The scenes of chapter 7 may have come as a surprise to those who originally heard Revelation read. The first six seals had been broken in quick succession. The listeners would have expected seal seven to be opened next; but before that took place (see 8:1), there was what commentators call “an interlude” or a “parenthesis”: the symbolic sealing of the 144,000 and the picture of the innumerable multitude around the throne.

1. What evidence suggests that chapter 7 does not appear chronologically with the events around it?
2. Why were the scenes of chapter 7 not inserted earlier in the account?
3. What response could be given to those who accuse John of believing the world is flat because of the phrase “the four corners of the earth” (7:1)?
4. What significance did the east have in Jewish thought?
5. In what ways did the seal in chapter 7 fulfill all three purposes of a seal?
6. In what sense were first-century Christians protected from the calamities to come?
7. What do various groups believe who take the number 144,000 literally?
8. What is the symbolic significance of the number 144,000?
9. For what three reasons is the conclusion that the 144,000 represent literal Jews incorrect?
10. What “twists” can be found in John’s list of the tribes (7:5–8)?

11. To whom does the 144,000 refer?
12. If 7:4–8 refers to Christians, why did the text use the symbolism of Jewish tribes?

THE INNUMERABLE MULTITUDE AROUND THE THRONE (7:9–17)

In chapter 4, there was the throne and then the elders and the living creatures. In chapter 5, the Lamb and the angels joined the scene. Now, in chapter 7, an innumerable multitude crowds the throne room.

13. What differences do those who believe that the multitude is not the same group as the 144,000 find between the two groups?
14. What significance did palm branches have to the Jewish mind?
15. What does the word “salvation” refer to in verse 10?
16. What three differences exist between the tributes in 5:12 and 7:12?
17. What details from 7:9–17 prompt commentators to observe that much of the text’s imagery was taken from the Feast of Tabernacles?
18. To what does “the great tribulation” refer in 7:14?
19. What common misconception about heaven does verse 15 show to be false?
20. Why is the symbolism of the lamb filling the role of shepherd more fitting than it first appears?