

The Apocalypse

A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

by
J. A. Seiss, D.D.

Lecture Fifteenth

Note: This lecture contains one of the best and most sobering warnings to those who think they are saved, as well as those who don't care whether they are saved, that I've read in a commentary. -- Ken Morgan

THE SEALING OF THE 144,000--MERCY IN THE MIDST OF JUDGMENT--ARE JEWISH PEOPLE--ARE DESCRIBED BY THEIR TRIBAL NAMES--THE NUMBER OF THEM--THE NATURE OF THEIR SEALING--NOT A MERE ARBITRARY OR EXTERNAL WORK--THE AGENT PERFORMING IT--AN IMPARTATION OF THE HOLY GHOST--HOW MANIFESTED IN THESE SEALED ONES--THE INTENT AND EFFECT OF THIS SEALING--GOD NOT YET DONE WITH THE JEWS--OUR CALLING

Rev. 7:1-8 (Revised Text):

After this I saw four angels standing over the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that wind might not blow upon the earth, nor upon the sea, nor upon any tree.

And I saw another angel going up from the sun-rising, having a seal of the living God; and he was crying with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to injure the earth and the sea, saying: Injure ye not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.

And I heard the number of the sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand [were] sealed, out of every tribe of the children [rather, sons] of Israel; out of the tribe of Juda, twelve thousand [were] sealed; out of the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Aser, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Nephtalim, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Manasses, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Zabulon, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand; out of the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand [were] sealed.

These words describe the continuation of the action and course of events signified by the breaking of the sixth seal. It is, therefore, still the period of the judgment with which we here have to do. But in the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy. With all the fearful physical prodigies [wonders/portentous signs] which mark the first shock under this seal, and the terror and dismay of mankind in general in view of those prodigies, the material universe remains, the earth continues in its place, and gracious operations still go on among its remaining populations. Though the heavens and the earth are terrifically shaken and the whole system of nature is thrown into commotion, as if on the verge of utter ruin, there is a lull in the storm. The angels who have charge of the disturbing blasts are commanded to hold them back for a season, and a scene of calm and of gracious manifestation to certain of the children of men ensues before the great and terrible day of the Lord advances to its meridian.

The judgment has begun and has progressed through a number of its most important stages, but still Divine compassion lingers, grace has not entirely departed, and the merciful act of the

sealing of the 144,000 has to be completed before another step in the succession of judicial wonders can occur. And this sealing, it is, which is to occupy our attention this evening. We may consider,

I. THE SUBJECTS OF IT

II. THE NATURE OF IT

III. THE EFFECTS OF IT

And to this end may God help us with the illumination and guidance of his Holy Spirit!

I. *Who, then, are these 144,000 sealed ones?* This is a vital question in the right interpretation of this part of holy writ. But very conflicting and uncertain have been the answers generally given to it. Many writers are so perplexed and confounded with it that they scarcely presume to answer it, and seek to quiet inquiry by saying that the subject is too difficult for man to handle. Did people only keep themselves to the plain reading of the words as they are, without subjecting them to chemical treatment to bring them into affinity with radically false conceptions of the Apocalypse, they would save themselves much perplexity, and their readers much confusion.

So long as men will keep thinking of the present Church and the location of these events in the past or in what is now transpiring, just so long they will remain bewildered in the fog and fail to find any solid way through these wonderful revelations. If we only take to heart, that, when John writes "*children of Israel*" he means "children of Israel"--the blood descendants of the patriarch Jacob--and that when he mentions "the tribe of Juda," "the tribe of Reuben," "the tribe of Gad," "the tribe of Aser," "the tribe of Nephthalim," "the tribe of Manasses," "the tribe of Simeon," "the tribe of Levi," "the tribe of Issachar," "the tribe of Zabulon," "the tribe of Joseph," and "the tribe of Benjamin," he truly means what he says, we will at once have the subjects of this apocalyptic sealing unmistakably identified.

But many are so morbidly prejudiced against everything Jewish that it is concluded in advance that anything merciful referring to the Israelitish race must needs be understood some other way than as the words are written. Though all the prophets were Jews, and Jesus was a Jew, and the writer of this Apocalypse was a Jew, and all the Apostles were Jews, and salvation itself is of the Jews, and the Jews as a distinct people are everywhere spoken of as destined to continue to the world's end--it is regarded as the next thing to apostasy from the faith to apply anything hopeful that God has said to this particular race. Though Paul says that to his "kinsmen according to the flesh" "the promises" pertain, that "God has not cast away His people which He foreknew," "that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (but only "in part" and only until then), and that God's unchanging covenant still has something favorable for them in reserve--even many otherwise enlightened Christians become impatient and will not at all hear us when we presume to pronounce God's own words as if He really meant what He has said.

No wonder, therefore, that they cannot find a consistent interpretation of a vision of grace which is predicated of Jacob's literal seed, in contradistinction from all others. Nor is there a vice or device of sacred hermeneutics which so beclouds the Scriptures and so unsettles the faith of men as this constant attempt to read *Church* for *Israel*, and Christian peoples for Jewish tribes.

As I read the Bible, when God says "*children of Israel*," I do not understand Him to mean any but people of Jewish blood, be they Christians or not. And when He speaks of the twelve tribes

of the sons of Jacob and gives the names of the tribes, it is impossible for me to believe that He means the Gentiles in any sense or degree, whether they be believers or not. And this would seem to be so plain and self-evident a rule of interpretation that I can conceive of no legitimate variation from it, except in such case as the Holy Ghost Himself may explain to the contrary.

There is a sense in which a man may be a Jew outwardly, and yet not be one according to the spiritual calling of the Jews; and there is a sense in which even Gentiles, if they be true believers, are "Abraham's seed." But I know of no instance in which the descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel include the Gentiles, or in which what is discoursed specifically of persons out of the tribes of Juda, Reuben, Gad, Aser, Nephthalim, Manasses, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph, and Benjamin is to be understood only of "the blessed company of *all* faithful people, gathered together from all parts of the world, and constituting the Church universal." Above all, such a way of interpreting the Scriptures would be out of place in a book in which more is said about "the church," strictly as such, than in any other sacred book, and in which it is particularly shown that the Church's judgment has begun--and to a large extent already gone into effect--before what is thus written of the tribes of the sons of Jacob takes place.

It is also to be remembered that the crowned Elders and the Living ones are a part, and a very conspicuous part, of "the glorified company of the whole Church." Yet in chap. 14:3 they appear in connection with the 144,000, but as a wholly distinct body. The sealed ones are one company complete in itself, and the Elders and Living ones are another company complete in itself. John beholds them both at the same time, the one in the presence of the other but each with its own separate place, character, and blessedness. The 144,000 therefore can by no possibility "represent the glorified company of the whole church." There is no proof that they represent anybody but themselves, or that they are at all a part of the Church properly so called. Everything shows that they are a class of the saved separate and distinct from all others.

They are also described as being "the first fruits unto God and the Lamb." But they cannot be the first fruits of all saints, for the Elders and Living ones are glorified and have received their golden crowns *before* these 144,000 have even been sealed on earth. They must therefore be the first fruits of another calling and order, after the present period of the Church (strictly so called) has run its course.

And when we take along with us the apostolic commentary upon the ancient covenant, to wit, that after the fullness of the Gentiles is come in the scales are to drop from the eyes of Israel's blind descendants and a fresh current of salvation is to set in towards them, the argument seems to me conclusive and overwhelming that these 144,000 are just who John says they are--*Jews*, descendants of the sons of Israel, the first fruits of that new return of God to deal mercifully with the children of His ancient people for their father's sakes.

If we look a little further on in the chapter, we find another company described whose nationalities are also distinctly given. They are "out of every nation, and [of all] tribes, and peoples, and tongues." Literal nationalities are therefore an important element in the whole chapter. And as those said to be out of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues cannot be Jews only, so those said to be out of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel cannot be Jews and Gentiles indiscriminately.

Some have inferred the necessity of taking these Jewish tribes in a mystic sense, from the omission of the names of Dan and Ephraim and the substitution of the names of Levi and Joseph

in their stead. But these are circumstances from which I infer the exact contrary. If it were the common body of all believers that is meant, the proper symbol would be the complement of the common twelve tribes, as historically known. But here is a new enumeration and quite a different order developed, so far as respects this sealing. It is, therefore, a new and original thing to itself, in which one of the historical tribes appears to be omitted altogether, and a double number taken out of another. Besides, if we are to take these tribes mystically of the whole Church, it is impossible to find anything to correspond to it in all the history of the Church--past, present, or to come.

On that theory, the vision has never been and cannot be explained. Hence, we are driven back upon the literal sense, which was the accepted sense in the time of Irenaeus, and which introduces no such embarrassing difficulty. The tribes mentioned by name are the tribes meant. So I, at any rate, read the sacred account. And if I err, I err with "many," and err on the side of the most direct and plainest sense of the word, as God has caused it to be written. Nor have I ever yet seen the argument for any other acceptance which does not seem to me to torture and browbeat all the records that bear upon the case, set aside all safe laws of exegesis, and bring the whole Apocalypse into inextricable confusion.¹

But these 144,000 are not simply Jews, for there are many of Jewish blood, and even of the saved among them, who are not of this number. They are Jews of a particular class, singled out from the Israelitish populations on account of spiritual attainments and character not found in the rest. They are not only descendants of the Hebrew patriarchs, living in the time of the judgment, but such of those descendants as shall then correspond in their characteristics to the signification of the several tribal names by which they are designated.

In Genesis 5 we have the names of the antediluvian patriarchs, from Adam to Noah. In the meaning of those names, taken in the order in which they stand, we have a singular epitome of the history of the race and of the principal teachings of holy Scripture from first to last. Taking these tribal names of the 144,000 in the same way, we also find a very striking indication of their personal character on the ground of which their peculiar honors are based. All Jewish names are significant, and the meaning of those which here are given is not hard to trace. *Juda* means *confession* or *praise of God*; *Reuben*, *viewing the Son*; *Gad*, *a company*; *Aser*, *blessed*; *Nephtalim*, *a wrestler* or *striving with*; *Manasses*, *forgetfulness*; *Simeon*, *hearing and obeying*; *Levi*, *joining* or *cleaving to*; *Issachar*, *reward*, or *what is given by way of reward*; *Zabulon*, *a home* or *dwelling-place*; *Joseph*, *added* or *an addition*; *Benjamin*, *a son of the right hand*, *a son of old age*. Now put these several things together in their order and we have described to us: Confessors or praisers of God, looking upon the Son, a band of blessed ones, wrestling with forgetfulness, hearing and obeying the word, cleaving unto the reward of a shelter and home, an addition, sons of the day of God's right hand, begotten in the extremity of the age.

This certainly is very remarkable and cannot be taken as mere accident, particularly as the order of the names, and some of the names themselves, are changed from the enumerations of the twelve tribes found in other places. The same will also account for the omission of the names of Dan and Ephraim and the substitution of the names of Levi and Joseph in their stead. Those names are not of the right import to describe these 144,000. Dan means *judging*, or *the exercise*

¹ Alford remarks on the passage: "By many, and even by the most recent commentator, Dusterdieck, these sealed ones are taken to represent Jewish believers; the chosen out of the actual children of Israel." Among these we may note Irenaeus, Bullinger, Grotius, Bossuet, Bengel, Eichorn, Heinrichs, Maitland, Zullig, Hoffman, B.S. Newton, Kelly, "Matheotees," and others.

of judicial prerogatives; but these 144,000 are not judges and never become such. Ephraim means *increase, growth by multiplication*; but these 144,000 are a fixed company with none of the same class going before them, and none of the same class ever to come after them. The idea of increase or multiplication is altogether foreign to them. "They are virgins." These names are therefore unsuitable and are superseded by others better adapted to describe the parties to whom they are applied.

These 144,000, then, are Israelites living in the period of the judgment, who are only then brought to be confessors and praisers of God, while most of their kindred continue in unbelief and rebellion. Viewing the Son, as their fathers never would view Him, they acknowledge Him as their Messiah and Judge. As Jews, they thus constitute a distinct company to themselves and are blessed. As the result of their conversion, they are also very active in practical righteousness. They strive and wrestle against their own and their nation's long obliviousness to the truth as it is in Jesus, hearing and obeying now the voice of the Lord, cleaving unto the shelter and heavenly home promised by the prophets as the portion of those who call upon the name of the Lord, even at that late hour. They are not of the Church proper, for their repentance comes too late for that. They are a super-addition to the Church--a supplementary body--near and precious to Christ, but made up after the proper Church has finished its course. As Paul in his apostleship was like one born out of due time, so they are in the position of children belated in their birth; sons of God indeed and destined to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, but sons begotten in the day of God's right hand, in the period of His power and judgment, in the last extremity of this age. All this comes out naturally and distinctly without the least straining of a single word.

As to the number of this company, there could not be a clearer or more definite announcement than that which is given. John says: "*I heard the number of the sealed: a hundred and forty-four thousand,*"--twelve thousand out of each of the twelve tribes named; twelve times twelve, not a unit more nor a unit less.

Owing to the fact that most of our expositors suppose this company to embrace all the saved of all the natural children of Jacob, or the whole Israel of God both Jewish and Gentile, they have generally taken these numbers as mystical--a definite number for an indefinite. Unwilling to believe (as they well might be) that only 144,000 of all the children of men, or of all the children of Abraham, are finally saved, they propose to understand a much greater number than the figures give. But such views of this body of sealed ones are thoroughly erroneous. These 144,000 are not all the saved, either from among the Jews and Gentiles together or from among the Jews alone. They are a particular class of the saved gathered up from among the seed of Jacob in and during the period of the Judgment. And with this made out, as I think it is most conclusively, every reason for taking these numbers in any but a literal sense entirely disappears. John heard the number of them announced as twelve times twelve thousand; and I know not by what right they are to be accounted any more or any less.

II. We come, then, to inquire into the nature of the sealing of which these 144,000 are the subjects.

1. It is manifest that the transaction takes place on earth, and in the case of people contemporaneously living in the flesh. It does not run coordinately with the entire Christian dispensation, for it only begins after the Judgment has begun, and has progressed beyond the opening of the sixth seal. It is also completed and finished before the opening of the seventh

seal; for the opening of the seventh seal, with its trumpets and vials, is the letting loose of the four hurtful blasts which are commanded to be held back until the sealing is done. Under the sounding of the fifth trumpet particularly, we find these sealed ones living and moving among those upon whom the plague falls, and exempted from it by reason of their having been sealed. The sealing has therefore been finished before that time.

2. This sealing involved the imparting of a conspicuous and observable mark. A sealing is necessarily a marking of some sort. It is a common thing in God's administrations to have some fixed and understood token by which His people are distinguished. Under the Old Testament, He set a visible mark in the flesh of His chosen. When He visited Egypt with death, He exempted the children of Israel by a mark which He commanded to be put upon their dwellings. When Jericho fell, He saved Rahab by the mark of the scarlet line which she was directed to bind about her window. Antichrist, in his mimicry of Christ, causes a mark to be put upon the right hand or forehead of his people, and will not permit anyone to buy or sell who has not the mark. And we hence infer that this sealing also involves the impressing of some manifest sign upon those who are the subjects of it.

Ezekiel describes a similar transaction, under similar circumstances, in which reference may be to precisely the same thing beheld in this vision. In the one case the executioners of vengeance appear with slaughter weapons in their hands, in place of the four angels with their hurtful blasts in this instance. But in that description also, a single sealer appears who is sent out before the slaughterers, to "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and who cry for the abominations," on account of which judgment impends. That mark was to be a visible means of identifying those who receive it, and of securing their safety in the midst of general destruction. And so these 144,000 have impressed upon them some manifest token, at least as conspicuous and prominent as a physical inscription upon their foreheads, if not, indeed, a physical mark. It is described as a sealing "in their foreheads" and as the "Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 9:4; 14:1), and it cannot be otherwise than something particularly distinguishing.

3. It is something Divine. The seal with which the sealing is done is "a seal of the living God." The affixing of a seal of God can only be by Divine authority and appointment. It is so intensely an official act, and connects so fully with the direct administrations and government of God, that it must needs be done by the hand or ordination of the Almighty himself. It so pledges Him, and to Him, that it must be regarded as His own act.

4. The office of this sealing is in the hands of an Angel, who comes forth from the sun-rising. He is a high officer of God. He carries a seal of the miracle-working God, and He gives commands to the angels of judgment. Many take Him to be the Lord Jesus himself. There is much to sustain this view. The star which heralded His nativity came from the East. He is himself called "the bright and morning star." Ezekiel beheld the Shekinah returning to the deserted temple from the East. His second coming is referred to as the lightning which shines from the East even unto the West. The promise to the Jews with reference to the judgment time is: "Unto you who fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise," which involves a going up from the East. And He is the sender of the Holy Ghost. With these representations the vision of this Angel well harmonizes.

We may, therefore, readily regard this Sealer as truly the Jehovah-Angel, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, who comes forth, invisibly it may be, for the sealing of the 144,000. That He

appears as an Angel, that He speaks of God as *his* God, and that He alludes to the sealing as if other agencies were associated with Him in the work, does not at all interfere with this conclusion. Similar language is found on the lips of Jesus in other portions of the Scriptures; and one of His most characteristic titles represents Him as the Messenger from God--the Angel of the Lord. He is here also very particularly distinguished from, and assigned an authority over, the four angels of judgment. It really does not alter the character of the matter whether this Sealer from the sun-rising be Christ in person or not. It is, at any rate, a high officer of God who has charge of the work; and what he does proceeds from Christ's mediatorial achievements.

5. This sealing was moreover a moral, and not a mere arbitrary or external, thing. Those who receive it are described as "the servants of our God," as contradistinguished from other classes of men. And from what is said of them in the fourteenth chapter, they are very eminently and very peculiarly God's servants. They are there described as having been entirely free from the adulterous and idolatrous defilements of mankind in general. "In their mouth was found no guile." And they finally come up faultless before the throne. The whole spirit of the record shows that this--their extraordinary sealing--is connected with and based upon their extraordinary spiritual characteristics.

This was also the case in the parallel instance in the ninth of Ezekiel. It was the men who sighed and who cried for the abominations that were done, upon whom the mark was set. And it is the common law of the Divine proceedings that His special honors are never otherwise conferred than in connection with special dutifulness and fidelity under very special trials and difficulties. Every branch that brings forth fruit he purges, that it may bring forth more fruit. And he who does not profit by the talents bestowed, from him shall be taken away even that which he has. These were people who had humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God. They had learned rightly to interpret the signs of judgment taking place about them in the heavens above and in the earth beneath. They had learned, and effectually taken to heart, the true character of the times in which they were living, what God was doing in their day, and what place they occupied in the ongoing of the Divine purposes. And the fruit of all was a vigor of faith, confession, and holy consecration seldom attained among the children of men.

All their idolatries, sensualities, and unbeliefs they had most solemnly abjured. They had now given up to know nothing but God and His service, in the most unfaltering trust in that Lion of the tribe of Judah under whose wondrous power the whole earth was trembling and smarting, as if in the agonies of dissolution. And because of this thorough, spiritual transformation and their holy sighing and crying for the abominations that cover the world, "the Angel of the covenant" comes up from the quarter of grace to honor their devotions and to set apart and seal them for a peculiar destiny of favor and exaltation.

6. And from this we are enabled to get a still deeper glance into the nature of this peculiar sealing. The seal of God is the Spirit of God, particularly in His more unusual gifts. Thus Christ himself was *sealed* by the Father when the Holy Ghost descended upon Him from heaven, marking Him out and endowing Him for His wonderful career (John 6:27). Thus also Paul wrote to the Ephesians (1:13): "After that ye believed, ye were *sealed* with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance." Paul besought them, "Grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are *sealed* unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30; also 2 Cor. 1:22).

We may, therefore, conceive of this sealing of the 144,000 as a special and extraordinary impartation of the Holy Ghost, which again connects this vision with particular Old Testament

promises. By the mouth of Joel the Lord said to Israel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh." This was indeed a general promise; but with it was coupled another not so general, but particular to Israel: "And *your* sons and *your* daughters [O Jews] shall prophesy, *your* old men shall dream dreams, *your* young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaidens in those days will I pour out my Spirit." Peter tell us that this began to be fulfilled in the miracles of Pentecost; but the fulfillment did not end there. There are also particulars in the passage which were not fulfilled upon the primitive Church--particulars which refer to the judgment times and connect directly with the scenes to which this sealing of the 144,000 is related. "Wonders in heaven and earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke," are spoken of; and the turning of the sun into darkness and the moon into blood; and all directly on the eve of "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

In this we distinctly recognize the occurrences under the red horseman of the second seal, the physical prodigies [wonders/portentous signs] of the sixth seal, and the exact manifestations under the first and fifth trumpets. And in connection with these wonders, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call" (Joel 2:28-32). Preeminent among this "remnant" are these 144,000. In them, therefore, is fulfilled above all what is foreshown of mercy and grace thus mixed up with the terrors of the judgment. They are the sons and daughters of the people whom the prophet addressed. They are the ones who, above others of their time, call upon the name of the Lord. They are related to Mount Zion and Jerusalem as none of the Gentiles are.

And it is not too much to say that their peculiar sealing at least embraces this self-same miraculous endowment with the Spirit of God, which is so often referred to as the seal of God. They shall be made to dream God-begotten dreams and to see God-shown visions. The Pentecostal Baptism from heaven shall be renewed in them with its original vigor. All the fruits and manifestations of the Holy Ghost, which characterized the apostles and early Christians at the beginning, shall reappear in them, perhaps with augmented power. And whether particular ceremonies connect with the thing or not, this is the chief element and essence of this sealing with "a seal of the living God."

At any rate, those sealed have, by virtue of their sealing, the Father's name in them; and so in them as to mark and distinguish them as though a visible inscription stood written upon their foreheads. And those who are so eminently and peculiarly the bearers of the Father's name must needs be partakers in very extraordinary degree of the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. Besides, the title of "the living God" is seldom, if ever, used except in connection with some display of His power in the sphere of the miraculous.

7. Very various and diverse, hence would also be, the outward manifestations of this mark. It would show itself in the doctrines professed by the sealed ones, in the power with which they announce and defend them--perhaps in miraculous works wrought in proof of them, in a particularly holy, prayerful, and self-denying life, in a bravery and fearlessness before gainsayers [opponents] which no earthly powers can daunt, and in a wisdom and heavenliness of demeanor, making them appear like beings from another world and lighting up their very faces (perhaps like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount or like the face of Stephen in the midst of his murderers).

III. We come now to the intent and effect of this marvelous sealing.

It is agreed, on all hands, that it is a merciful and gracious act. Its first effect is to stay the blasts of judgment and produce a lull in the work of vengeance. Four angels, stationed over the earth at the four points of the compass, have already received power to hurt the earth and the sea. These four agents seem to be the same that act in connection with the first four trumpets, under which the whole system of the world is so fiercely smitten. Hail and fire, mingled with blood, there fall upon the earth, and the third part of what grows in the fields is destroyed. A great burning mountain is cast into the sea and a burning star upon the rivers and fountains, turning the waters into blood or bitterness and making havoc with all forms of life, both in the deep and on the land. Portentous and afflictive manifestations are also wrought in sun, moon, and stars. All these would seem to be, at least included in, the blasts with which these four angels had received power to blow upon the earth, the sea, and the trees. But the sealing Angel, with a great voice, commands them to hold back their blasts until these servants of God are sealed.

And so it is always. God's people are the salt of the earth. But for them and God's gracious purposes toward them, judgment and ruin would instantly break over the globe. It is only for the elect's sake that the world stands, that the sun shines, that the fields yield their increase, and that men's greatest blessings are not at once turned into curses. It is only because God has his servants in the world, and saints preparing for glory, and children among earth's populations who sigh and cry over the abominations that are done, that the chariots of destruction do not rush over all that is. Governments stand, society exists, the waters flow, the trees live, the sea retains its salubrity [soundness/vigor], the grasses grow upon the earth, and the death-blasts of the destroying angels are restrained only because the Lord is engaged in taking out from among the nations a people for His name, the number of which must first be made up.

Ten righteous persons in Sodom would have put off the ruin of that sink of sin; and even when the terrific scenes of the great day have begun, and advanced to the very margin of their culmination, the whole process is made to delay till the 144,000 servants of God are sealed. Oh, the compassion and forbearance of Jehovah and the intensity of His faithfulness to them who call upon Him! Nor do the proud and haughty ones of this world begin to comprehend, neither can they measure, how much they owe to those meek children of obscurity whose faith, devotions, and concern about the judgment they so often ridicule and so much despise.

But this sealing was more particularly for the comfort, assurance, and security of the sealed ones themselves. In the parallel passages in Ezekiel and Joel, the preservation of the marked ones and the deliverance of those who call upon the name of the Lord are specifically asserted. Here also, in the general commission of the agents of destruction and torment against men in general, there is a reservation in favor of those who have the seal of God in their foreheads (chap. 9:4). The nature of the sealing itself is such as to forewarn and empower those who receive it against the impending evils. The restraint upon the blasts until this sealing is completed also shows a relation of this sealing to those blasts, implying securement against them. And all such Divine markings in every other case had protection and deliverance for their object. It was so in the case of the children of Israel in Egypt. It was so in the case of Rahab. And it is so in the case of Baptism now. Hence, as remarked by Wordsworth, "this action of sealing with the seal or signet of God is equivalent to a declaration that they who are so sealed appertain to God and are distinguished as such from others who do not thus belong to Him, and are assured by Him of His protection against all evil."

As the gift of the Holy Ghost certified and assured the apostles of the Divinity of the cause they had espoused, of their acceptance as God's acknowledged ambassadors, of the certain fulfillment unto them of all that their Lord had promised, and of their everlasting life, triumph, and glory no matter what men might do unto them or what might happen, so this sealing with the seal of the living God certified and assured these 144,000 of the unmistakable character of their faith, of their election as a first fruits of incoming new administrations, and guaranteed to them not only security amid the blasts of heightening judgment upon earth but also a peculiar and blessed portion with Jesus in His glory. And as the Baptism of the Spirit secured the safety of the primitive Christians when Jerusalem was overwhelmed, so this sealing secures the safety of the sealed ones as the judgment of the great day goes over the nations. They trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, and the Psalmist's words are fulfilled: "*When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.*"

From this, then, we see that God is not yet done with the Jews. Their national restoration is not necessarily involved in this text; though such a restoration in advance of this sealing would admirably agree with the vision and with other predictions relating to the same transactions. But it *is* involved, that the Jews shall remain a distinct people upon earth up to the day of judgment; and that before the final consummation God will again turn Himself toward them, and begin to deal with them once more in mercy, as in the days that He brought them up out of the land of Egypt. Edom, and those who disbelieve with Edom in Jacob's birthright, may sneeringly ask, "Watchman, what of the night?" But, there is a morning coming. A stormy mourning it may be, but a morning nevertheless, and not without its sunshine and its rays of blessing.

They err who tell us that all God's promises to Israel as a race are dead, never again to be revived. The Giver of them does not so speak. His inspired Apostle (even after Jerusalem had fallen) wrote, with regard to this very subject, that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;" and that for the self-same Israel which has fallen, and been cast down, and broken off, there is a coming fullness, recovery, and grafting in again, when the Deliverer shall come (see Rom. 11).

And the visible pledge of something special yet in reserve for this marvelous race is written in all their history, from the fall of Jerusalem to this hour. Else why the unparalleled preservation of this people, with such unwaning and ever-active life-energy "against such overwhelming odds, through the storms of so many centuries, the vicissitudes and perils of so many generations, and amid the wrecks of so many buried empires?" Else why that undying presentiment, which throbs in the universal Jewish heart, and which no adversity can quench or prosperity entirely charm into quiet, of some future return to the high estate of their fathers? The very land itself--in its perpetual refusal to give peaceful and secure home to any of the Gentiles who have overrun it, throughout all its sad desolations--gives out its plaints and prayers that Jehovah would not forget his covenant with the house of Israel, and [it] utters from every hill and valley, shore and sea, the prophecy of some future of hope and blessing which cannot be delayed forever. What that hope is we need not here inquire. But linked in with it is the sealing of 144,000 out of the twelve tribes of the children of Jacob, to stand as God's servants and witnesses upon earth amid the ongoings of the judgment, and finally to take their places with the Lamb on Mount Zion amid the Halleluias and harpings of heaven, and to sing there a song never sung before and never to be sung by any but themselves.

Friends and brethren, it is not for us to be a part of this 144,000. But we have our calling also, and a much superior one. The Jehovah Angel from the sun-rising is even now at work

throughout the world, marking and sealing men for kinghoods and priesthoods far sublimer than all the honors of these 144,000. His proposal is made alike to all, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, bond or free. And that proposal is (by His word, sacraments and Spirit) to set a seal upon each of us, not only for our safety in the day of judgment, but for our admission into the royalties of heavenly empire. And it is only to allow time for the making up of the full number to reign with Him forever that the blasts of vengeance are restrained, and the day of judgment tarries. Child of Adam, have you, then, the mark? Have you been set apart to God and sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise?

I am addressing some who hope they have the seal of God. Baptized into His name, enrolled among His professing people, communing punctually at His table, lifting often their hearts and voices to Him as their stay and strength amid earth's trials, believing with all their soul in Jesus as their salvation, and with the desire ever burning in their breasts to be found of Him in peace--they promise well to be among the first-born in heaven. But, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Not one of us is out of danger yet, and the word of the Master is: "Hold fast that which you have, that no man take your crown" (Rev. 3:11).

But I am addressing others who have forfeited their right to any such hope. Though baptized, it is the same as if they had not been, except that they have vows upon them which they do not fulfill. Though outwardly grafted into the Church, no life-connection has been formed and tonight they are mere dead branches--leafless, fruitless, unsightly, and ready for the burning. They are witnesses against themselves that they have chosen the Lord to serve Him, but they have not done it. O you backsliding children, remember from where you are fallen, and repent and do the first works lest your Lord come in an hour when you think not and assign you place with hypocrites and unbelievers. Even though you may never have run to the same excess of riot with many around you, it would be blasphemy for you to say that you are ready for the judgment if you have lived forgetful and neglectful of God and duty. Up, then, and be doing, for your opportunities will soon be past!

And yet others are listening to me who have not so much as been baptized; whose names are nowhere on the records of the pious; who have hitherto been living without God and without hope in the world; and who are conscious that no saving mark is on their foreheads. Prayerless and careless have they passed the precious hours in which they might have become the sons of God, and are tonight on the road to everlasting death. O sinful, self-deceiving mortal, to you once more is the word of this salvation sent!

***Jesus ready stands to save thee,
Full of pity joined with power.***

With the seal of the living God in hand, He waits consent to stamp its saving impress on your brow. Ask, and it shall be given; seek, and you shall find. But let not another day or hour be lost, lest there should be no more hope for you.