

The 144,000 Bond Servants
A Series on the Function of Revelation's Interludes: Part 1

In some ways, the book of Revelation reads in a straightforward manner. As Jesus breaks each seal or an angel blows a trumpet or pours a bowl, it signals some event(s). But the narrative has four significant intervening pauses that are confusing and difficult to understand. What do they mean and why are these periscopes important?

Beginning at Revelation 7:1, between the Jesus' sixth and seventh seal, the first interlude introduces the 144,000 bond servants of God. Note that the seventh seal introduces the trumpet judgments; thus, in this first interlude (Rev 7:1-17), the apostle John is providing background information just prior to the trumpets. In the first three verses of this interlude (Rev 7:1-3), there are several significant observations that should be made:

The four angels standing at the four corners of the earth are not in heaven and each carry out harmful earthly events when signaled by their trumpet blowing partner in heaven.

When the first trumpet sounds, one of the four angels throws down to earth hail and fire mixed with blood which results in the burning of 1/3 of the earth, 1/3 of the trees, and 1/3 of the green grasses (Rev 8:7).

When the second trumpet sounds, one of the four angels throws down to earth's sea "something like a great mountain burning with fire" which results in 1/3 of the sea becoming blood, killing 1/3 of all sea creatures, and destroying 1/3 of all ships in the sea (Rev 8:8-9).

When the third trumpet sounds, one of the four angels throws down "a great star burning like a torch" called "Wormwood" which results in 1/3 of the world's rivers and springs becoming poisoned and bitter and killing many who drink it (Rev 8:10-11).

When the fourth trumpet sounds, one of the four angels strikes 1/3 of the sun, moon and stars which results in the darkening of 1/3 of the sun, 1/3 of the moon, and 1/3 of the stars; the net effect is that 1/3 of the day and night is darkened (Rev 8:12).

An angel with the seal of the living God commands the four angels at the four corners of the earth, and by implication the four angels in heaven with trumpets, to wait until the bond servants are "sealed on their forehead." The bond servants are on earth, and the trumpet judgments commence only after these particular bond servants are sealed the names of Jesus and Yahweh written on their foreheads (Rev 14:1).

This sealing appears to be very different from the Holy Spirit's sealing of a new genuine Believer (2 Cor 1:21-22; Eph 1:13-14). The "seal of God" protected the bond servants from the woe of the fifth trumpet (Rev 9:4) – the plague of stinging locusts from the bottomless pit that tormented people with pain for five months.

The time it took to seal the 144,000 may have been the reason for the thirty minutes of silence in heaven when the seventh seal was broken (Rev 8:1-2).

As a bond servant himself on earth (Rev 1:1), John is writing "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10), and he learns that the sealed bond servants number 144,000 from every tribe "of the sons of Israel." (Rev 7:4).

As exemplified by Paul, Timothy, James, Peter and Jude (Phil 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jude 1:1), a bond servant is one who is wholly devoted and dedicated to serve God. They serve without any wages and can be seen as "slaves to Christ" (Eph 5:5-8).

The 144,000 are described as blameless virgin Jewish men who "follow Jesus wherever He goes" and were considered "first fruits to God and to the Lamb" (Rev 14:3-5).

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12,000 bond servants come from the 12 sons of Israel:

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|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1. Judah | 2. Reuben | 3. Gad | 4. Asher | 5. Naphtali | 6. Manasseh |
| 7. Simeon | 8. Levi | 9. Issachar | 10. Zebulun | 11. Joseph | 12. Benjamin |

There are at least two observations that can be made of the above list:

The original sons that Jacob blessed were (Gen 49:3-28): Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, **Dan**, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Comparing the 144,000 bond servants to the original twelve sons of Jacob, the tribe of Dan is missing and in its place is Manasseh who was the oldest and most prominent son of Joseph (Gen 46:20; Num 26:28-37; Josh 17:1). Although Manasseh was his grandson, Jacob accepted him as his son.

Then Jacob went on to say: Joseph, your two sons Ephraim and Manasseh were born in Egypt, but I accept them as my own, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children you have later will be considered yours, but their inheritance will come from Ephraim and Manasseh. (Gen 48:5-6)

There is no explanation for Dan's omission from the list of 12 tribes and 12,000 bond servants. Also noteworthy is that while his grandson Manasseh was Joseph's firstborn, Jacob recognized his grandson Ephraim, Joseph's second born, as greater and blessed him accordingly (Gen 48:8-20). But the greater tribe of Ephraim was omitted from the list from which the 12,000 bond servants arose from.

From his view looking down at earth, the apostle John's attention returns to the throne of God in heaven. In contrast to the finite 144,000 sealed bond servants who descended from Israel (Jacob), the apostle John sees a great multitude of saints who "were from every race, tribe, nation, and language" (Rev 7:9).

They were holy and worshipped before God with angels, the 24 elders and the four living creatures (Rev 7:11-12).

When questioned by one of the twenty four elders, the apostle John learns that these Believers died during the Great Tribulation as "the ones who have gone through the great suffering" (Rev 7:14-15).

They were released by the opening of the fifth seal: from "under the altar the souls of everyone who had been killed for speaking God's message and telling about their faith" (Rev 6:9).

They were Gentile Believers and Messianic Jews outside of the 144,000 sealed virgin Jewish males.

Because the resurrection has not occurred, these saints were clothed spirit beings.

These tribulation saints were honored to stand before God's throne to worship Him day and night. God would see that they will "never hunger or thirst again," will not "be troubled," "will wipe all tears from their eyes," and will not be "scorched by the sun." Jesus Christ "will be their shepherd" and "lead them to streams of life giving water" (Rev 7:14-17).

For Gentile Believers and Messianic Jews who aren't of the sealed bond servants, this information is of particular interest, because it reveals the fate of all Believers who share "God's message and tell others about their faith;" it is God's role for them in this period of judgment.

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Subsequent to this first interlude, after the seventh trumpet and before the first bowl, the apostle John sees Jesus Christ with the 144,000 sealed bond servants "who had been purchased from the earth" (Rev 14:3-4), which indicates that they were dead and in heaven as (presumably clothed) spirit beings (since the reaping has not yet occurred [Rev 14:14]).

They were at Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 14:1). The heavenly location of Mount Zion was first introduced by the writer of Hebrews:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

They were privileged to sing a new song before God, the twenty four elders and the four living creatures that no other saint could learn (Rev 14:3).

They were blameless and incapable of telling a lie (Rev 14:5), which implies a reference to what they may have been like while on earth as mortal human beings. If true, is this intended to remind the world of Jesus' first coming albeit a mortal and human version?

Thus, the trumpet judgments did not begin until the 144,000 bond servants were sealed, and by the seventh trumpet, they were no longer on earth.

Using a chart to record these observations, the existence of the sealed bond servants of God would look like this:

	Seal 7	Trumpet 1	Trumpet 6
Third Heaven (location of the Temple of God)	30 minutes of silence (Rev 8:1)		
Fate of Believers	The bond servants of God are being sealed (Rev 7:1-3)	Presumption: the sealed bond servants have begun their ministry	By the end of Trumpet 6, the sealed bond servants no longer exist on earth (Rev 9:20-21) and after Trumpet 7, they are being honored in heaven (Rev 14:1-5)

The function of the first interlude is to introduce the 144,000 bond servants and indirectly inform Believers of their role and purpose during this period of divine judgment.

Tribulation saints were those who served God by sharing the gospel and dying for it.

During the period of trumpets, from the first to the seventh, 144,000 chaste Messianic Jewish men are serving God by sharing the gospel and testifying about God especially during the five month period and first woe of painful stinging torment initiated by the fifth trumpet; however, by implication, regular Believers and subsequent new Believers are suffering the stinging torment.

As a message to the seven churches, the implication is, "are you living now in the manner worthy of a tribulation saint?"