

THE 144,000 AND GREAT MULTITUDE: REVELATION 7

Matt 24:15-22, “Therefore when you see the ABONINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things our that are in his house; and let him who is in the filed not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on the Sabbath; (now verse 21) for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life or no life (flesh) would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.”

For those of us raised to believe one particular end-of-time sequence of events taught by our favorite author, prophesy preacher, or local bible (PhD) expert that includes a future rapture, antichrist, great tribulation, and Jesus Returning to establish His Kingdom, it is nearly impossible for such a heavily pre-conditioned believer to learn the truth of Jesus’ words in these verses.

God never changes (Malachi 3:6, James 1:17), and neither does Jesus (Heb 13:8). Our favorite authors, prophesy preachers, and local experts have never learned God’s word never changes either. Every symbol, word, word phrase, picture, circumstance, or tradition God uses in Revelation He used somewhere else in the Bible. The difficult task to understand Revelation is to locate and understand the scripture verse(s) where God previously used the same words He uses in Revelation to explain Revelation. This way, God’s word is the only source relied on to understand Revelation. Using God’s word (scripture) to interpret God’s word (scripture) will show us what God wants His church to know from book of Revelation.

Only God’s word can pierce the veils of false teaching on Revelation arising from heavy pre-conditioning initiated by our favorite author, prophesy preacher, or local expert. Since none of these have ever required scripture to interpret scripture to formulate their teachings on Revelation, none of them have ever taught the truths of Revelation. None rely on God’s word to understand the “exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Eph 3:20) truths in Revelation. Their human minds can never see the truths because the truths are beyond what they can think. Whatever indwelling spiritual revelation they think they received from God is false because their speculations are not aligned with God’s word (scripture). Only scripture explains and interprets scripture!

When does this “great tribulation” occur? Matt 24:34, "Truly I say unto you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (includes the “great tribulation” from Matt 24:21). Bible prophesy preachers have explained this verse away using various speculations, but this verse stands as God’s answer to this question. We will see why below.

Rev 6:17, “For the great day of Their wrath (God and Christ) has come, and **who is able to stand?**” The answer is Rev 7:13-14, “And one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?’ And I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

These are the ones who were sealed by God. Rev 7:1-3, “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘**Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**’”

Rev 7:4, "I heard the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel." John then mentions the 12-tribes and 12,000 from each tribe (total 144,000). Verses 9-12, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb clothed, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands, and they cry out with a loud voice saying, 'Salvation to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Rev 7:13-14 (again), “And one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?’ And I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation (and any tribulation)**, and they have washed their robes and them white in the blood of the Lamb’” **(the ones sealed by God).**

Verse 15, “For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the waters of life; and God shall wash away all tears on their eyes."

Those to be delivered are those who have received the seal of God on their forehead. Note, He did not say they will not experience tribulation, or that they will not go through tribulation, but God will deliver them through it. If God delivers them from this “great tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall,” He will certainly deliver His people (us) from any tribulation we face.

The symbol of sealing here has its roots in the Old Testament and goes back to Ezekiel 9, when God is going to bring judgment upon His people because of the sins they had been committing in His presence. Ezek 9:1, “Then He cried out in my hearing with a loud voice saying, 'Draw near, O executioners of the city, each one with his destroying weapon in his hand.’” God is going to destroy the city because of its sin. But before He destroys the city, Ezek 9:4, the Lord said to this man who was clothed in linen with a writing case at his loins, 'Go through the midst of the city, *even* in the midst of Jerusalem, and **put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over the abominations which are being committed in its midst.**' But to the others He said in my hearing, ‘Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity, and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women (everyone in the city were to fall to the sword), but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary.’” **The ones with the mark are the only ones God spared.**

Similarly, the church receives the seal of God (His mark on our foreheads) and are the only ones delivered through their tribulations. We may suffer or be killed, but God will deliver us.

In the scriptures, a seal does three things:

- 1.) It protects from tampering. Matthew 27:66, “And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone (tomb of Jesus so there would be evidence of any tampering).
- 2.) It marks ownership. Song of Solomon 8:6, “put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol (the grave); its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.”
- 3.) It certifies genuine character. Esther 3:12, “. . . being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet ring.” The King's ring served as a seal to certify documents were genuine in character.

As Christians, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 1:13) and sealed for the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). This seal is identified in Revelation 14:1, "And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion (the church), and with Him 144,000, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." We are identified with Christ and with God sealed with His Holy Spirit.

The 144,000, in spite of what the Jehovah's Witness may assert, is simply a symbol. The number 12 is the symbol of Israel in the Old Testament. In John’s vision, twelve (12) is squared (in Rev 21:16, the city, which is the church, “is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width, and he measured the city with the rod, 1,500 miles; its length and width and height are equal”) and multiplied by 1,000. 1,000 is a symbol of many (in this case people). It is the number of men of war in a basic military division in the tribes of Israel.

What we have in the beginning of chapter 7 is the fact that the true Israel now exists as the people of God, or the church. The sealing of 144,000, without going into great detail, is simply a picture of those who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit who make up the true Israel of God, which is the church. In the 12-tribes listed in Rev 7, Dan, who was the first to introduce idolatry into Israel, is dropped. Dan is not mentioned in the list. Levi, who no longer has a priestly function, is added in Dan's place. Ephraim, who was the first tribe to apostatize under Jeroboam whenever the kingdom split, is taken out and replaced by his father, Joseph.

So the 144,000 has got to be a symbol. It is a symbol of the true Israel of God, which is the church. This is difficult for us to imagine with all the prophesy preaching to the contrary. But when scripture is used to interpret scripture, God's word identifies the explanation or interpretation, not men's opinions and speculations as we have been taught.

Notice a few verses. Matthew 21:43, Jesus makes this statement to the ruling Jews of His day, "Therefore I say to you (uses "Therefore" from the fact they rejected Him), the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it." I Peter 2:5-9 tells us the nation He gives the kingdom to is the church. More explicitly, Romans 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God." Paul says the real Jew is not one that is a Jew outwardly, but one that is a Jew inwardly. **It is a spiritual fact that makes a person a Jew (a child of Abraham).**

Go further, Galatians 6:16, "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy upon them, and upon the Israel of God." Who is the Israel of God? Galatians 3:16 tells us, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is Christ." When God made the promises to Abraham, He did not make them to include an entire nation of people. Paul says, God made it to Abraham and Christ. Verses 26-27, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (the Old Jews thought they were the only sons of God). For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ (some versions say 'put on Christ')." As a result, verse 28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, but you are all one in Christ Jesus." Now verse 29, "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring (seed), heirs according to promise."

If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed. You are Abraham's heir. You are the true Israel of God. When John sees the 12 tribes of Israel summed-up in a symbolic number of 144,000, he is seeing the true Israel of God, which is the church. He then goes on with the second half of that vision.

Rev 7:9. "After these things he looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." The blessings ascribed to both groups, those who are numbered and typified by the 12 tribes and the great multitude which no man can number, belong to the church. These are blessings that only the people of God enjoy. For that reason, this great multitude is the entire church in all ages who stand victorious with Christ.

John is saying when God begins to pour out His wrath upon a sinful world, there are those who have been sealed by His Spirit, who have been called out, and who will be victorious over all that comes upon the church or upon the world. He first sees the church as the Israel of God sealed and protected. Second, he sees the church as an innumerable, victorious multitude. He does not see a weak, whimpering, whining, whipped, defeated group of people with no significance in the world who are just waiting for God to come and take them out of their temptations, struggles, and trials (no rapture).

John sees a great multitude of people which no man can number who were more than conquerors then, they are more than conquerors now, and they shall be more than conquerors in the future. John sees a picture of the victorious church in spite of the tribulation, the suffering, the persecution, or whatever the world brings against the church. John sees the church standing victorious.

So, before the wrath of God is poured out, or when they are in the midst to the wrath of God, there is the sealing, the marking of His people, in order that they might be delivered. Note important things about this. Rev 7:9, this great multitude is standing before the throne and before the Lamb. After they have come through the great tribulation, after they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, verse 15, "For this reason they are before the throne of God."

We need to get the significance of what John is saying. John sees a victorious people before the throne of God. The most damaging doctrine Satan has pawned-off on the church is that Christ suffered and bled and died in order that we might go to heaven when we die. The truth is Jesus suffered, bled, and died to give us access to heaven (to enter heaven itself) while we live in this body. That is why Jesus died; not that we might go to heaven when we die, but that we might enter "heaven itself" in Christ now (Heb 9:24), receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3), draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22), and live our entire lives on this earth in heaven before the throne of God. We missed this somehow, including the pathway to described in Eph 2:6, "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." No wonder we come through great tribulation. No wonder there is no power in the universe that can separate us from God.

Our faithless preaching has pushed this over-yonder where it will not do us any good. We will have missed the opportunities, blessings, and obligations to provide an acceptable

service to God because we never learned how He wants us to truly serve Him. We might get 5% of it right, but we are missing the other 95%.

Jesus is physically in heaven, but spiritually He is here on the earth in His body, the church. The church is physically here on earth, but spiritually it is in heaven before the throne seated with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

Today's christian suffers unimaginable loss from failing to enter heaven itself now for the exact same reason the Jews spent 40-years in the wilderness. Today's christians do not believe God any more the Old Jews did who failed to enter the promise land "because of unbelief." Heb 3:19, "And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

Our preachers reject God's word by failing to believe God throughout the centuries just like the unbelieving Jewish leaders who first overlooked the promise land when God brought them out of Egypt by a mighty hand when unbelief pushed them into the wilderness for 40-years.

If you fail to enter heaven now, it is because you do not believe God. You do not know you are needlessly suffering loss far greater than any Jew suffered who lived in the wilderness for 40-years. Do not forget that entire generation of unbelieving Jews died in the wilderness without ever entering the promise land. Instead of 40-years, the unbelieving church has had billions and billions and billions of believers die during the last 2,000 years without ever entering into heaven or enjoying any of its richest blessings while they were in the land of the living (Psm 27:13).

Hebrews 4:16. "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we might receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need." People talk about it how wonderful it will be whenever they die because they will go to heaven. The Hebrew writer says you can go before the throne of grace now to receive all the grace and help you need right now. **Stop missing it because of your preacher does not believe God and has rejected God's word!!**

Hebrews 10:18-19, "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin (we have been forgiven). Since therefore, brethren, **we have confidence to enter the Holy place by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh (His death)." **What is the holy place that we have confidence to enter (now) by the blood of Jesus?** Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ did not enter a Holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into **heaven itself**, now to appear in the presence of God for us." God has given every believing christian "confidence to enter the holy place (heaven itself) by the blood of Jesus." **Do you see why requiring scripture to interpret scripture is the only way to understand any book of the Bible? It is time the church raises a generation of believers who believe God's word by faith!!**

Look closely at this. We have missed many other things, but we will look at this for now:

John 12:26, Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant be also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him." Where do we serve Him? We serve Him here upon the earth. We are where Jesus is now. John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou has given Me, be with Me where I am." Jesus did not request they come to heaven whenever they die to be with Him. Jesus asked they be with Him before that, see the latter part of verse 24, "in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love me before the foundation of the world."

Go back to John 17:15, Jesus said, "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*." Jesus is praying for God not to take them out of the world (not to rapture them), but to send them into the world. They have access to heaven in order that they might go into the world. That is the point. We have missed this point also!! We are sealed and protected in order that we might serve God as we stand before the throne and before the Lamb.

Spiritually we sit with Christ in heavenly places; physically we represent Christ in the world. Physically Christ sits on the right hand of God interceding for us; spiritually He is in His people going into the world through the power of the Spirit. That is what it is all about.

Look closer, the second part of Rev 7:15, not only are they standing before the throne and before the lamb clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hand, "They serve Him day and night in His temple." John pictures this great multitude of the 144,000; His people, His church **serving Him in His temple**. God has a temple in which we serve. He certainly is not talking about the four walls of a church building or a temple in Jerusalem. Ephesians 2:20-22, ". . . Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

The emphasis in scripture is not our going heaven to dwell with God. The emphasis is God coming to earth and dwelling among His people. His people are His temple. The church is the only temple that God has. God destroyed the physical temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. No physical temple built by man will ever be inhabited by God again. God and Jesus both dwell in the church. **You are being built up as that temple in the Spirit.**

II Cor 6:16, ". . . For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I SHALL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.'" God's purpose is to dwell in His people living on the earth with His presence among them. That is why they go through great tribulation, face suffering and persecution. God is in His church and the world hates that, just like the world hated Jesus and killed Him for it (John 15:18 – 16:3).

I Cor 3:16, Paul speaking to the church in Corinth which is being torn asunder by all kinds of sins and evil that has crept into it. In chapter six, he refers to the individual using the same words. Verse 16, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?"

Look at serving God "in His temple" (Rev 7:15) from different perspective. Hebrews 12:22, "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Anywhere in the New Testament where Mount Zion is mentioned, if it is not referring directly to the old city of Jerusalem, which it seldom does, it is referring to the redeemed church.

Revelation 14:1, John sees "the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 having His name written on their foreheads." You are Mount Zion, the church. You have come (past tense) to Mount Zion (you are there now). You are a part of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city, which is Mount Zion.

Now, if you want to know the significance of Mount Zion, Psm 110:1-2, "The Lord (God) says to my Lord (Jesus), 'Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet (that is what God is doing now, it is happening now). The Lord will stretch forth Thy strong scepter (His rod of power, His ruling scepter) **from Zion**, saying, rule in the midst of Thine enemies." Verse 5, "The Lord is at Thy right hand; He will shatter Kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill *them* with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over the broad country." How is He going to do that? The Lord will stretch forth Thy strong scepter **from Zion; He is going to do it through His people, through the church.**

God wants a people who have received the seal, His mark, who have been filled by the Holy spirit, who know they are the Israel of God (the Zion of God) through which His will is going to be accomplished upon the earth in spite of tribulation, who know who they are in Christ, and know no matter what happens God is going to bring them through it.

John concludes chapter 7, latter part of verse 15 saying, "And He who sits in the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them." That is indirectly referring to the cloud that was over Israel in the wilderness (His tabernacle is His dwelling place). He will be in their midst, spread His canopy over them. Rev 7:16-17, "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life (they may be living in the midst of a barren land, amongst a great tribulation where things are hard); and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

This language comes from Isaiah 49:8-13, "Thus says the Lord, 'In a favorable time I have answered you, and in the day of salvation I have helped You; and I will keep You and give You a covenant for a covenant of the people, to restore the land, to make them inherit the desolater heritages; saying to those who are bound, Go forth, to those who are in darkness, Show

yourselves. Along the roads they will feed, and their pasture will be on the bare heights. They will not hunger or thirst, neither will the scorching heat or the sun strike them down; for He who has compassion on them will lead them, and guide them to springs of water. And I will make all My mountains a road, and My highways will be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar; and lo, these *will come* from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Sinim. Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the Lord has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted.”

John sees the compassion the Lord has for His people. He is not going to call them to go through great tribulation or to represent Him on the earth without having compassion upon them and equipping them to be able to do so. They are the 144,000, the church, who have the seal of God, His name written on their foreheads. God has called and equipped them to go into the world serving Him in His temple, the church. They are in His very presence in heaven before His throne. They have at their disposal all the armament and resources in heaven because they are the chosen.

That is who we are. We are not just a struggling group of people trying to make it through to get to heaven. We are a group of people who have had heaven come down to us, fill us, equip us, and send us out into a barren desert land around us, to witness, testify to His power and glory, and influence the world around us . . . to rule with Christ in the midst of our enemies (our enemies are Christ’s enemies). It is a great privilege be one of the 144,000 who are standing with Him on Mount Zion.