

June 2018

Frank W. Nelte

### **THE 144,000**

[This is Part 3 in a series of four articles. All four are connected to a common subject and should ideally be read in sequence. The 4 articles in this series are:

**Part 1 = "Great Tribulation" And "The Great Tribulation"**

**Part 2 = The Great Multitude**

**Part 3 = The 144,000**

**Part 4 = The 144,000 Cannot Be Physical Israelites**

Articles 2, 3 and 4 are based on the foundation of the article(s) that preceded them.]

In the first two articles of this series we have seen that the expression "coming out of the great tribulation" in Revelation 7:14 is definitely not a reference to the tribulation before Christ's return, and which tribulation is also identified as "the time of Jacob's trouble". The group that is identified as coming out of "all nations & kindreds & people & languages" in Revelation 7:9 has to include far more racial and ethnic and linguistic diversity than could be possessed by any group of people that could theoretically come out of "the time of Jacob's trouble".

We concluded with two points:

1) The expression "coming out of the great tribulation" in Revelation 7:14 refers to the entire time from the creation of Adam right down to the lake of fire after the 100-year period. In approximate terms, the great tribulation of Revelation 7:14 will cover about 7,100 years, the age of physical, mortal man. All of us are right now living in **that** tribulation.

[Comment: See the previous article for a more detailed discussion of this number "7,100 years", with special reference to how the millennium ties into it.]

2) "The great multitude" of Revelation 7:9 refers to all those human beings who repent after Christ's second coming. That great multitude will consist of people who will live during the millennium, and also of people who will come up in the second resurrection and take that opportunity to repent. In fact, **the vision in Revelation 7 represents the first "day" of their lives as spirit beings.**

With those two questions answered, the question that remains is: who are the 144,000?

### **TWO REFERENCES TO 144,000**

You know that the Book of Revelation mentions 144,000 in two different chapters. First, there is the reference in Revelation 7:4. And then there is the reference in Revelation 14:1.

In this article we'll examine both places. But I will tell you up-front that it is the same group of people in both places.

Revelation chapter 7 is an inset chapter into the story-flow of end-time events. This inset is devoted to explaining how the entire Family of God will be built and structured.

Revelation chapter 14, on the other hand, is a part of the story-flow itself. It discusses that part of the story-flow that deals with the time of the first resurrection.

Chapters 7 and 14 serve different purposes. But as far as the 144,000 are concerned, both chapters talk about the same group of people, though they are viewed from different perspectives in these two chapters. God does not have two different groups of 144,000 each. There is only one group of 144,000.

So let's examine chapter 7.

### **THE LEAD-UP TO REVELATION 7**

When the sixth seal is opened, then "there was a great earthquake" (Revelation 6:12). This is a **mistranslation**. At that point there is no earthquake at all! The "earthquake" actually only comes much later, when the seventh plague is poured out (Revelation 16:18). But when the sixth seal is opened, there is no earthquake at all.

Here is the mistranslation.

In Revelation 6:12 the expression "there was a great earthquake" is a translation of the Greek text "seismos megas egeneto". Now **the word "seismos" does not mean "earthquake"**, even though that is how it is always translated (except once).

The Greek word "**seismos**" simply means "**a shaking**"! It comes from the verb "**seio**", which means "**to shake**".

There are potentially at least three different things that can be shaken by God, and to which the word "seismos" can apply.

1) If it is the **earth** that is shaken, then we have "**an earthquake**".

2) If it is the **waters** that are shaken, then we have "**a tempest**".

3) If it is the **heavens** that are shaken, then we have "**a shaking of the heavens**". (Unfortunately we don't have a word like "a heavensquake" or "a heavensshake".)

For example, Matthew 8:24 reads "there arose a great '**seismos**' in the sea ...", and our English translations correctly translate this as "there arose a great **tempest** in the sea ...".

In Matthew 8:24 the Greek word "seismos" most certainly does not mean "earthquake". It means "tempest", and the translators certainly understood this.

### **A SHAKING OF THE HEAVENS**

God repeatedly speaks about "shaking the heavens". Here are a few examples:

Therefore **I will shake the heavens**, and **the earth shall remove out of her place**, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger. (Isaiah 13:13)

The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; **and the heavens** and the earth **shall shake**: but the LORD *will be* the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. (Joel 3:16)

For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it *is* a little while, and **I will shake the heavens**, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry *land*; (Haggai 2:6)

Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, **I will shake the heavens** and the earth; (Haggai 2:21)

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall **the sun** be darkened, and **the moon** shall not give her light, and **the stars** shall fall from heaven, and **the powers of the heavens shall be shaken**: (Matthew 24:29)

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more **I shake** not the earth only, but **also heaven**. (Hebrews 12:26)

Yes, these Scriptures certainly also speak about God shaking the earth. That is something I do not feel I have to highlight. What I need to highlight is that at the time of the end God will most assuredly "shake the heavens".

Consider Matthew 24:29 above. When the normal functions of the sun, the moon and the stars are altered, **what is happening?** Do you understand this verse? When God says that "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken", what does God mean? Understand that the altered states or functions of the sun, the moon and the stars are **a consequence** of the powers of the heavens being shaken.

Do you know what "the powers of the heavens" are? This is not a cryptic reference to any kind of spirit beings. It means exactly what it says.

**"The powers of the heavens" are the powers that keep the heavenly bodies in their orbits!**

So "the powers of the heavens":

- keep the moon in its orbit around the earth;
- keep the earth in its orbit around the sun;
- keep all the planets in their orbits around the sun;
- keep the star constellations in their relatively "fixed" positions to one another;
- etc.

"The powers of the heavens" keep our night-sky in its familiar and predictable configuration. It is "the powers of the heavens" that enable us to predict new moons 10 years from today, and to ascertain new moons that occurred 100 years ago.

Okay, so now we know what the expression "the powers of the heavens" refers to. So let me ask you a

very profound question:

### **What do you think happens when those "powers of the heavens" are shaken?**

Why is God even telling us this?

Take a suitcase and very neatly fill it about a third to half full with stuff you might take for a week's vacation on a beach somewhere. Make sure there is still plenty of room in the suitcase. And make sure everything is quite neat. Then close the case, pick it up and **violently shake it in every direction**, left, right, up-and-down, and upside-down, etc.

Now open the case. What will you find?

The things you had packed so neatly are now messed up and all over the place, right? And frankly, you knew in advance that everything would be severely messed up after that violent shaking.

So what do you think happens when God gives this universe "a severe shaking"? Keep in mind, that this universe also has plenty of "empty space" in it, like that suitcase which you only packed a third full. What will happen?

Why, **the orbits of all the heavenly bodies are going to be severely altered.**

That's what "a shaking" will produce ... altered orbits. As Isaiah 13:13 above tells us, "**the earth shall remove out of her place**". That means that from the sixth seal of the Book of Revelation onwards **this Earth will no longer have an annual cycle of 365.25** (rounded off) **days**. When the Earth is moved "out of her place", it will be impossible to maintain the length of our present annual cycle.

Let's now go back to Revelation 6:12.

### **THE SIXTH SEAL**

And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great "seismos" (shaking); and **the sun** became black as sackcloth of hair, and **the moon** became as blood; (Revelation 6:12)

The text of verse 12 itself makes clear that this "seismos" is not a shaking of the Earth at all! It is a shaking of the heavens. The proof is that this particular "shaking" affects the sun and the moon, i.e. it affects the celestial bodies in the sky. And no effects of that shaking on the Earth itself are mentioned or even hinted at. That's not "an earthquake".

And (as a result of that shaking!) **the stars of heaven fell unto the earth**, even as a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. (Revelation 6:13)

The stars don't fall unto the earth at all! And neither is this some kind of meteor shower. It is really very simple.

As a result of the powers of the heavens being shaken, **the stars all change their positions in the night-sky**. If you were standing out in the open on a cloudless night, with a 360-degree horizon all around you, then in this scenario you would see the stars flying towards the horizon in every direction. And when they disappear below the horizon, then from an observer's perspective those stars have "fallen unto the Earth".

If you were standing in the middle of the Sahara, then in every direction stars would be whizzing towards the Earth, to then disappear below your 360-degree horizon. That's what John saw in Revelation 6:13.

**The sixth seal is all about positions in the universe being very dramatically changed. The moons and the planets in our solar system no longer follow their former orbits; the star constellations have played "musical chairs", and the former constellations have become unrecognizable; the Milky Way has scattered in every direction.**

And when the sixth seal is finished, then the heavens will have the appearance they will have throughout the millennial rule of Jesus Christ. And then the monthly cycle and the yearly cycle will be the ones that will exist throughout the millennium.

The purpose of the sixth seal is to prepare this Earth and this universe for the millennial rule of Christ.

The sixth seal will usher in a perfect 30-days monthly cycle. And it will usher in a perfect 360-days annual cycle. The sixth seal has an extremely important function in God's plans for Jesus Christ's millennial rule.

Not surprisingly, the people still alive at that point in time will be scared out of their wits (see Revelation 6:15-16). To carnal man that situation will look like the universe is about to explode or to implode. No human being will ever before have witnessed that kind of unleashing of unimaginable power. It will produce stark terror in unconverted people.

It is a fearful thing to be exposed to the unleashing of God's awesome power. It is on that note of awesome power that God then interrupts the story-flow.

In the previous article I discussed 1 Corinthians 15:23-24, where Paul discusses the three steps by which God builds the Family of God. Briefly, those 3 steps are:

- 1) Jesus Christ the firstfruits,
- 2) those in the first resurrection,
- 3) the end ones.

The purpose of Revelation chapter 7 is to discuss steps 2 and 3 in this 3-step plan.

In plain terms:

The 144,000 refer to all those who will be in the first resurrection.

The great multitude refers to those who repent at any time after Christ's second coming, and in due time they then become "the end ones" in the Family of God.

## **REVELATION 7:1-8**

This chapter starts with the words "and **after these things I saw ...**". This tells us that this vision of the 144,000 is what God next showed John. This doesn't necessarily mean that it has to also represent the next chronological event as events unfold, though that could also be the case.

It is basically a neutral expression for changing to a new subject, without necessarily implying strict chronological sequence.

This might be a good place to examine this expression "after these things I saw" a bit more closely. It certainly also affects "the great multitude" in verse 9, as well as the 144,000 here. So consider the following:

The one Greek expression "**meta tauta eidon**" is used five times in the Book of Revelation. Here is how it is translated:

Revelation 4:1 = after this I looked ...

Revelation 7:1 = after these things I saw ...

Revelation 7:9 = after this I beheld ...

Revelation 15:5 = after that I looked ...

Revelation 18:1 = after these things I saw ...

A careful examination of the above five verses shows that in this expression "after" does not necessarily mean "after in a chronological sequence". Also, the Greek verb "eidon" in this expression is not the normal verb for "seeing with the eyes" ... that verb is "blepo". The verb "eidon" mainly refers to mental perception, perceiving with the mind rather than with the eyes. It's like we in English might say, upon hearing an explanation for something we had not understood before, "**oh, I see**".

Anyway, for our subject in these three articles: The expression "after this I beheld ... a great multitude" in Revelation 7:9 does not mean that "the great multitude" follows immediately upon the heels of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4. From other Scriptures we can understand that there is in fact a time-gap of about 1,100 years between these two groups of people.

Let's continue with Revelation 7 verse 2.

An angel who has "the seal of the Living God" is introduced next (verse 2). Here is what this angel then says:

Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, **till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.** (Revelation 7:3)

What does this mean? The ones who are going to be "sealed" are already God's servants. This means those "servants" already have God's spirit dwelling within them. They received God's spirit when they repented.

"The sealing" here is a reference to **being changed from physical human beings into immortal spirit beings.**

In plain language Revelation 7:3 says:

Don't pour out any more penalties on the earth, sea and vegetation **until the first resurrection has taken place!**

Revelation 7:4-8 is a discussion of all the people who will be in the first resurrection. The first

resurrection will consist of exactly 144,000 people, who come from many different racial and national backgrounds.

**It is absurd to believe that these 12,000 from 12 different tribes are physical descendants of those 12 tribes of Israel. That whole idea is totally ridiculous.**

It is the Church of God that is "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). No ethnic or racial membership of the people of Israel can possibly be more important than the feature of being a part of "**the Israel of God**".

Paul very clearly said as far as the kingdom of God is concerned: "There is **neither Jew nor Greek** ... for you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Paul continued to say: "**if you be Christ's then are you Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). So all those who are Christ's are Israelites as far as God is concerned.

And the 144,000 here are indeed "heirs according to the promise". And those "promises" apply to the members of God's Church.

When God gave the name "**Israel**" to the man Jacob, then God said that this name "Israel" means: **to have power with God as a prince** (see Genesis 32:28).

That meaning is a perfect description of all those who will be in the first resurrection. All those in the first resurrection will have "power with God". And they will have that power with God "as a prince", or to be more precise, those in the first resurrection will rule on this earth with Jesus Christ as "kings and priests" (see Revelation 5:10).

**The name "Israel" is a job description for all those who will be in the first resurrection.**

That is why God said: "Israel is ... My firstborn" (Exodus 4:22). There will not be a single individual in the first resurrection to whom, **in the eyes of God**, the name "Israel" will somehow not apply.

And Revelation 7:4-8 shows that God structures the Israel of God, the people in the first resurrection, into 12 precise groups of 12,000 each. And within that structure **each group is assigned a name of one of the tribes of Israel**. This is totally independent of the racial or genetic background of those 12,000 individuals assigned to each "tribe" of spirit beings.

That list of 12 names does not list "Dan", Jacob's 5<sup>th</sup> son, by the handmaid Bilhah. It does list "Joseph", Jacob's 11<sup>th</sup> son. And then it also lists "Manasseh", the 1<sup>st</sup>-born of Joseph. It does not list Joseph's other son "Ephraim". So there are two names for Jacob's 11<sup>th</sup> son, i.e. Joseph and Manasseh. Interestingly, Manasseh is listed before his father Joseph.

**The order of the 12 names in this list is difficult to explain. After listing Judah (4<sup>th</sup> son) and then Reuben (1<sup>st</sup> son), it lists the two sons of Leah's handmaid Zilpah, which are Gad (7<sup>th</sup> son) and Asher (8<sup>th</sup> son). That is followed by the second son of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah, who is Naphtali (6<sup>th</sup> son). That is followed by Joseph's older son Manasseh (son of 11<sup>th</sup> son). Then it lists the remaining four sons of Leah in the order of Simeon (2<sup>nd</sup> son), Levi (3<sup>rd</sup> son), Issachar (9<sup>th</sup> son), and Zebulon (10<sup>th</sup> son). And then it lists the two sons of Rachel, in the order Joseph (11<sup>th</sup> son) and Benjamin (12<sup>th</sup> son).**

God certainly has reasons for presenting this order. But it seems difficult to explain why Manasseh is listed ahead of his own father Joseph? And why are three sons of the handmaids listed ahead of Leah's other four sons? And why is Dan left out of this list?

(The reasoning that Dan is supposedly not listed because the Irish are so steeped in Catholicism is not really valid. The same goes for the reasoning that says they are not listed because they were the first tribe to accept paganism. These ideas were nothing more than on-the-fly quickly presented justifications, developed in the early years of Ambassador College, which seemed plausible enough to us at the time. But that doesn't really hold water. And I don't believe either idea is correct. God hasn't really told us why Dan is not included in this particular list. We might consider that in the prophetic section about the millennial temple, in Ezekiel chapters 40-48, Dan is certainly fully included, and there is even "one gate of Dan". See Ezekiel 48:32. So why is Dan included in Ezekiel 48, but excluded in Revelation 7:4-8? I don't believe that God at this point in time has revealed the answer to this question.)

And note that this list does not include Ephraim, the son of Joseph that was blessed ahead of his older brother Manasseh. Some people will reason themselves into saying: well, that's because when it says "Joseph", then it really means "Ephraim". Really? Then why didn't God just say "Ephraim"? Why did God say "Joseph", and then **expect us to infer** that this is supposed to mean "Ephraim"? Yes, I also can make a weak argument for "Ephraim" here. But the point is: **none of the 12 groups that make up the first resurrection are going to be named "Ephraim"**.

These 12 are not racial groups or ethnic groups of any kind. These 12 are names for **the 12 leading nations of spirit beings** in the immortal Family of God. It is God who determines into which of those 12 groups every single member of the first resurrection will be assigned. That's a part of Jesus Christ "preparing a place for us", and for everyone in the first resurrection (see John 14:2).

So to be quite clear: "to be sealed" in Revelation 7:3-4 means "to be resurrected or changed into a spirit being."

Now let's look at Revelation 14.

### **REVELATION 14:1-5**

Here is verse 1.

And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and **with him an hundred forty and four thousand**, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. (Revelation 14:1)

Revelation 7 told us **what** was to happen to the 144,000. They were to be changed into spirit beings. It also told us **how** they would be organized. They are to be divided into 12 groups of exactly 12,000 each.

Here in Revelation 14 it tells us **where** they will be. They will be with Jesus Christ on Mount Zion. This location identifies them as being with the returning Jesus Christ. It also tells us that they are now spirit beings; that's what having God the Father's name "written in their foreheads" means, that they are now spirit-born sons and daughters of God.

And they sung as it were **a new song** before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and **no man could learn that song** but the hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. (Revelation 14:3)

The "new song" goes something like this: "**we are the ones who were chosen by God to be in the first resurrection**". This song can only be sung by those individuals to whom it applies. "No man could learn that song" means that nobody else can ever become a part of that first resurrection group of 144,000. That resurrection confers a standing within the Family of God which will apparently last for all



future eternity.

They will sing this "new song" **before the throne of God the Father**, implying that they will still be "singing" this song in the New Jerusalem on the new earth, after this present universe has been replaced by "the new heaven and the new earth".

There are two different mountains: the Mount of Olives, and Mount Zion.

**The Mount of Olives is somewhat like the airport for interstellar arrivals and departures. So Jesus Christ left this Earth from the Mount of Olives, and He will also return to this Earth by way of the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:4).**

**Mount Zion, on the other hand, is the seat of government. So the 144,000 are shown as being involved with the government of God; they will assist Jesus Christ as kings and as priests. They will rule with Jesus Christ.**

Now notice the next verse.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, **being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.** (Revelation 14:4)

This verse answers the question: **who** are these people? The answer is that **they are the firstfruits to God!** What this tells us is that there cannot possibly be any other "firstfruits", in addition to these 144,000.

There will be exactly 144,000 people in the first resurrection, not one less, and not one more. That is how God has planned it.

Now consider something that is extremely important:

Revelation 14:4 makes quite clear that "the great multitude" of Revelation 7:9, who are also pictured before the throne of God the Father, cannot possibly be a part of the first resurrection!

The 144,000 are "firstfruits". Therefore the "great multitude" cannot also be "firstfruits". And the "great multitude" are also not pictured as being with Jesus Christ "on Mount Zion".

The expression "these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes" means that they submitted their lives to God in the age before the second coming of Jesus Christ. They obeyed Jesus Christ while Christ was in heaven, away from this planet Earth.

And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God. (Revelation 14:5)

They had their sins forgiven, and then they lived their lives in voluntary and joyful submission to God and to God's laws.

### **SOME DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE 144,000 & THE GREAT MULTITUDE**

Back in the 1960's many people in the Church accepted the wrong idea that:

- the 144,000 were supposedly "the Philadelphian era".

- the great multitude was supposedly "the Laodicean era".

Both of those ideas are completely false. Those were rather biased and extremely selfish interpretations of the Scriptures. But we didn't know any better. Unfortunately those wrong interpretations became ingrained in the minds of many who attended Church at that time. And today some people may still cling to those wrong ideas.

The truth is:

When God modified His plan of salvation for mankind in the years leading up to the flood, God determined that He would build the Family of God in two stages.

**Stage 1 = At the time of the first resurrection God would add exactly 144,000 individuals to the Family of God. They would then assist Jesus Christ during the millennium in working with mortal human beings. This group is compared to a harvest of firstfruits.**

**Stage 2 = All those people who would repent during the millennium, and then also during the 100 years allocated for the people in the second resurrection, would be added to the Family of God at the time when God would replace this present corrupted universe with "a new heaven and a new earth". The size of this group could not possibly be predicted in advance because those people will have free moral agency to obey God or to resist God. And none of those who resist God will be replaced by someone else. That (replacing failed candidates) only happens for the 144,000.**

Therefore this group is identified as "a great multitude which no man could number", made up of people from all races, tribes, nations and languages. This group is compared to the large final fall harvest.

Here are some of the points that distinguish these two groups from one another:

1) The 144,000 are shown as being **with** Jesus Christ on Mount Zion, the seat of world government during the millennium. They are the ones who **rule** with Jesus Christ as "kings and priests".

The great multitude is shown as standing "**before** the throne (of God the Father), and **before** the Lamb. They **serve** God day and night in His temple (Revelation 7:15).

The 144,000 rule, and the great multitude serves. No "ruling" of any kind is implied for the great multitude. Therefore these two groups must be in different resurrections.

2) To the Laodiceans Jesus Christ said: "to him that overcomes will I grant **to sit with Me in My throne**" (Revelation 3:21). But the great multitude does not sit ... **they stand!** This means that the great multitude cannot possibly be the Laodicean era.

3) Revelation chapters 2 and 3 list many "**rewards**" for those who will make up the group of 144,000 in the first resurrection. Many of the rewards are introduced with the words "to him that overcomes ...".

But there are **no rewards** of any kind presented to the great multitude. No rewards are mentioned or implied in Revelation 7:9-17. This means that the great multitude cannot be identified with any of the seven eras in Revelation 2-3.

4) Instead of any "rewards" for the great multitude, the only thing that is said for them is: **all their needs are always going to be met by God.** This is not to in any way diminish their needs being met; but that

is on a far lower level than being offered power and rulership **with** Jesus Christ.

The needs that will always be met include (see verses 16-17):

- they shall not hunger,
- they shall not thirst,
- neither shall the sun light on them,
- nor any heat (i.e. they won't suffer from cold or from heat),
- the Lamb (Jesus Christ) shall feed them,
- the Lamb shall lead them to living fountains of waters,
- God shall wipe away all their tears.

This is the perfect description for all those who become a part of the Family of God at any point after the first resurrection. Their needs will be met by God the Father and by Jesus Christ. But they don't rule in any way!

[Comment: In practice there is only one point in time after the first resurrection, when additional human beings will become a part of the Family of God. That one point in time is immediately before this entire present universe, including this planet Earth, is burned by the lake of fire.]

5) On the new earth, which will very likely be as large as our present sun, if not larger, the people who make up the great multitude are referred to as "the nations of them which are saved" (Revelation 21:24). At that time the New Jerusalem will be a staggeringly huge city. And the 12 nations that make up the 144,000 will all dwell in the New Jerusalem. That is why those 144,000 all have "the name of the city of My God, which is New Jerusalem" written on them (see Revelation 3:12).

So on the new earth:

- the 144,000 will all dwell **in** the New Jerusalem,
- the great multitude will all dwell in cities **outside of** the New Jerusalem, and the gates of the New Jerusalem will always be open (Revelation 21:25).

6) What are we told about the character of **the 144,000**? For all of them the instruction is "**to him that overcomes ...**". We are also told that they follow Jesus Christ unconditionally, i.e. "they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes" (Revelation 14:4). They eagerly obey Jesus Christ. They developed godly character by overcoming temptations and trials.

What are we told about the character of **the great multitude**? Nothing! All we are told is that they have "washed their robes" (Revelation 7:14). What does this mean? How do they wash their robes?

All this statement tells us about the great multitude is that **they accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ**, in order to have their guilty past blotted out. And once they did that (during the millennium or during the 100 year period), then they lived a stress-free life under the rule of Jesus Christ. Once they had accepted Christ's sacrifice, then they joyfully submitted their lives to God. And that is very, very good.

But they were never exposed to trials that were deliberately thrown at them for the purpose of testing their character. Instead, for all of them (since they all repented) it was a case of living in ideal circumstances. To all of them God said: **"before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear"** (Isaiah 65:24). Their prayers were answered instantly.

That is the ideal! That is the system that God had intended to implement before Adam sinned. That is a beautiful system.

But they were never tested! They never faced serious challenges, where there was great pressure to compromise and to disobey God. They didn't have to deal with threatening situations.

God knows that they are sincere and willingly submissive and cooperative, and eager to please God. And that is why God changes them into His spirit-born children. But they were never tested for leadership positions in the Family of God. To be given a leadership position in the Family of God requires a higher level of testing than simply being given the opportunity to be a part of that Family.

Can you see from the description of the great multitude that they could not possibly represent any part of the first resurrection?

I hope that by now you clearly understand that the reference to "coming out of the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:14) has nothing to do with what you and I generally mean by "the great tribulation". This great multitude did not go through any major testing. They obeyed God without testing, and God accepts their obedience, and therefore changes them into spirit-born sons of God.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

God is in the process of building the Family of God. After Jesus Christ had completed "the work which God the Father had given Him to do" (see John 17:4), God will add human beings to His Family in two stages.

Revelation chapter 7 is devoted to explaining those two stages of building the Family of God.

The first stage involves training and testing 144,000 individuals to be inducted into the Family at the time of the first resurrection. The name "Israel" is their job description ... they are to assist Jesus Christ in ruling over physical mortal human beings during the millennium, and then also during the 100-year period for the people in the second resurrection. Another version of their job description is that they form "the bride of Jesus Christ". This job description indicates that their work under Jesus Christ will produce many "children".

The second stage of building the Family of God is represented by the great multitude. That great multitude represents the results of Jesus Christ and the 144,000 working with physical human beings during the millennium and during the period for the second resurrection. The great multitude are "the children" that Jesus Christ and "His wife" will produce.

And when these two stages have been completed, then it will be time for "the former things" to pass away (see Revelation 21:4). So then this entire present universe will be burned up. At the same time all past memories will be erased, so that nothing, not even a single thought or memory from "the age of man", will be carried over into the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem.

That "age of man" (from Adam up to the lake of fire) was indeed "the great tribulation" which was

imposed by God as a penalty upon all of mankind for Adam and Eve's rejection of God's rule over their lives. It was "the great tribulation" because death was an ever-present enemy (see 1 Corinthians 15:26), and that enemy will also be destroyed in the lake of fire, so that thereafter there will be no more death (Revelation 21:4 again).

In the new heaven and the new earth the past will be as though it had never been. And the Family of God will move forward into endless future eternity.

Frank W Nelte