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THE TWO GROUPS IN REVELATION CHAPTER 7

In Revelation chapter 7 we see two different groups of people mentioned. First we see a group of 144,000 people made up of 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. And after that we see "a great multitude which no man could number", made up of people from every nation and language.

Amongst the various Church of God groups there are different ideas as to who are the people in these two groups. Are they physical Israelites? Are they spiritual Israelites? Are they all ethnic Israelites who will live over into the millennium? And who are the people in that great multitude?

In this article we'll take another close look at both parts of Revelation chapter 7.

TWO PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE 144,000 IN REVELATION 7

I have on many previous occasions explained that the 144,000 in Revelation 7 are **all the people who will make up the first resurrection**, which occurs at Jesus Christ's second coming. That includes people from very many racial and all ethnic backgrounds. This number of 144,000 is assuredly not restricted to people who are physical descendants of the tribes of Israel.

But since Revelation 7 specifically mentions the names of all the tribes of Israel (except for Dan), many people in the various Church of God organizations have some difficulty understanding this. **Why does it mention the tribes of Israel** when those numbers will include people from many other racial backgrounds as well?

Most people in the various Church of God organizations don't understand this chapter correctly. Their flawed ideas regarding the 144,000 in this chapter fall mostly into two groups:

1) There are many people in the churches of God who believe that there will be **12,000 physical Israelites from each of the 12 tribes in the first resurrection** (except for the tribe of Dan).

In this regard we need to consider the following:

There is nobody who disputes that the first resurrection will also include many non-Israelites. So how many non-Israelites will there be in the first resurrection? And what will be the total number of people in the first resurrection? If there are going to be 144,000 physical Israelites in the first resurrection, then the total number of people in the first resurrection will be far greater than just 144,000 people, right?

So does God know in advance how many people will be in the first resurrection? Or does God just know how many physical Israelites there will be? Is God not concerned about the number of non-Israelites in the first resurrection? Are they so insignificant that their total number is not really important to God? And if the non-Israelite people in the first resurrection are so insignificant, why does God have any of them in the first resurrection at all? Why not just limit the first resurrection to physical Israelites?

Will God make a distinction between people in the first resurrection who happen to have at least a 51% ethnic Israelite background (since nobody on earth today has a 100% Israelite DNA profile; every

Caucasian on earth has a DNA profile that includes multiple nationalities), and all other people in the first resurrection who do not have such an Israelite DNA profile? Is God really focused on the DNA profiles of the people God is inviting to be in the first resurrection?

Does it really make sense to claim that there will be 144,000 physical Israelites in the first resurrection? Why?

2) Secondly, I have also occasionally, including quite recently, heard from a few people in the churches of God who believe that the 12,000 from each tribe of Israel in Revelation 7 represent **12,000 physical Israelites** from each tribe, who will be physically protected by God **to survive as physical mortal human beings into the millennium**. This belief does not have any effect on how many people will be in the first resurrection.

These people believe that the 144,000 in **Revelation 7** are **physical** Israelites who live physically over into the millennium. And they believe that the 144,000 in **Revelation 14** are **spiritual** Israelites, who will comprise all the people in the first resurrection.

So these people see the two groups of 144,000 in Revelation 7 and in Revelation 14 as two completely different groups. They acknowledge that the 144,000 in Revelation 14 represent everyone in the first resurrection, including those people who were physical non-Israelites. They believe that there is no connection between these two groups of 144,000 each.

These are the two most common views amongst people in the Churches of God.

However, the point we should note is that **both of the above views** believe that Revelation 7 is talking about 12 groups of 12,000 **physical Israelites** each.

And both of these views are false! Revelation 7 is not talking about physical Israelites at all. Let's consider the facts.

A PERFECT NUMBER IS NEVER A STARTING POINT

Before we get into the details, here are some points that we need to understand about the mind of God.

12 groups of exactly 12,000 each, for a total of 144,000, represent **a perfect number**! I don't necessarily mean from a mathematical point of view. I mean from a godly logic point of view. I say this based on how God has used numbers like 12 and 10 and 7 throughout the Bible, from Old Testament times all the way to the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.

Perfection is a destination, a target, a goal to work towards. But perfection is **not a starting point**. God does not start out with a perfect number, which perfection would be immediately destroyed as children are born (for those who believe that 12,000 from each tribe will live physically into the millennium), or as soon as additional non-Israelite people are added to the first resurrection (for those who believe that 12,000 from each tribe will be in the first resurrection).

Perfection is the end-result of what God works for and achieves. Perfection is what God aims for, and what God assuredly will achieve! But it is not a starting point in any project.

Why on earth would God possibly want to start the millennium with a perfect number of physical Israelites? Originally God started with 2 people, and after the flood God started with 8 people.

What would be the point of starting the millennium with exactly 144,000 physical Israelites, in addition to an undefined number of non-Israelite physical people? That perfect number wouldn't even hold good for the first year of the millennium. **It would be a very fleeting number**! And it would have no meaning beyond the start of the millennium.

Another major difficulty with this idea is that **if** there are only 144,000 Israelites at the start of the millennium, then the total worldwide population at the start of the millennium would have to be very tiny indeed. If approximately 5% of the world's population consists of Israelites, then the worldwide population at the start of the millennium would only be around 3,000,000. That is a very tiny population indeed, considering today's almost 8 billion people. That would mean that **over 99.9% of all people alive today would have to die before the start of the millennium**.

Yes, a lot of people will die before Jesus Christ begins His millennial rule, But 99.9%? That's far more than the Bible seems to imply in various places. Look, even if 99% of all people were to die (and I believe the real percentage of those who will die will be smaller than that), that would still leave around 80 million people on earth.

That is still a very drastic picture. But even with a theoretical worldwide population of around 80 million, it makes no sense at all to say that the 12 tribes of Israel would **only amount to 144,000 people**. It would mean that only 1 out of every 500 people on earth at the start of the millennium (in approximate numbers) would be an Israelite. It would mean that God had protected more than 144,000 from most of the other nations to survive physically into the millennium. And that doesn't make sense either.

While I have no specific information regarding how many people will survive the terrifying times that lie ahead, **I am expecting far more than 144,000 Israelites to live over into the millennium**. And God somehow protecting only 12,000 people from each of the tribes of Israel (and none from the tribe of Dan?) to live over into the millennium seems **very unrealistic**.

So the idea that the 144,000 in Revelation 7 represent 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel, who will live **physically** over into the millennium doesn't make sense.

Okay, now let's consider the other idea.

DOES GOD DIVIDE THE FIRST RESURRECTION INTO TWO GROUPS?

As far as the belief that there will be 12,000 physical Israelites from each tribe **in the first resurrection** is concerned:

How is that supposed to work?

If God **does know** the exact number of non-Israelites in the first resurrection, why did God not reveal that number? Why (supposedly) only reveal the number for the physical Israelites in the first resurrection?

What is more important to God:

1) **The total number** for all those who will be in the first resurrection?

2) **Or the partial number** of those in the first resurrection, those who will have come from the racial stock of Israel?

In other words, does God divide the whole group of people in the first resurrection into two distinct groups ... physical Israelites and physical non-Israelites?

Will the first resurrection distinguish between people who had been physical Israelites and those people who had been non-Israelites? Is that what's going to happen ... because that is precisely what this particular idea implies.

Why would God in the first resurrection distinguish between people based on their ethnic origin, as opposed to judging them on their character-development? Are people who have an Israelite racial background in line for a greater reward in the first resurrection than people who do not have an Israelite racial background? To say that God will group people in the first resurrection based on their physical ethnic background would clearly make God "a respecter of persons".

It took a vision from God for the Apostle Peter to understand that God is **not** a respecter of persons. Peter did not understand this basic concept even after he had received God's spirit in Acts 2.
Peter **finally** came to this correct understanding after he had been given **a special vision**, and after he had met Cornelius.

Then Peter opened *his* mouth, and said, Of a truth **I perceive** that God is no respecter of persons: But **in every nation he that fears Him**, and works righteousness, **is accepted with Him**. (Acts 10:34-35)

Peter is here saying something that he himself had not understood until that very moment in time. And Peter had spent more than three years in daily contact with Jesus Christ.

This was a difficult thing for Peter to learn! Without the vision he had seen, the Apostle Peter would not have grasped this straight-forward truth. So when Peter said that "God is no respecter of persons", Peter had **finally** come to understand that **the racial background** of the people who come into God's Church is **totally immaterial**!

It doesn't matter one way or the other whether a repentant person has an Israelite background, or whether that repentant person has a non-Israelite background. The only thing that matters is that the person is truly repentant. That's what Peter had finally come to understand.

Now this Scripture, all by itself, means that **it is not possible** for God to divide the people in the first resurrection into physical Israelites and physical non-Israelites, without God being a respecter of persons. **And it is simply not possible for God to guarantee 12,000 converted people from every tribe of Israel**. Such a thing would totally destroy any claim to free will for all human beings.

ISRAEL'S STATUS IN THIS AGE

Have you ever known of **an heir who was disinherited** and removed from all positions of power by his own father, before the father died? That has happened occasionally throughout history. And I do not have any one such situation in mind. I am speaking in general terms. But how does such a disinherited heir usually respond?

Typically a person in that situation feels that they have been cheated out of something that should really be theirs. They believe that they are entitled to what has been taken from them, or else not given to them. The one thing they usually don't do is: **they don't blame themselves** for the inheritance being taken from them. They still see themselves as the legitimate heirs, and they feel sorry for themselves.

It is extremely unusual indeed for a disinherited heir to have the attitude of the prodigal son, who said: "... Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and am **no more worthy to be called your son**" (see Luke 15:21). This is a totally repentant attitude. And this type of attitude is extremely rare.

One example of this extremely rare attitude that comes to mind is Jonathan, the son of King Saul. Jonathan was in line to become king after his father. But Jonathan also understood that God had selected David to be king after his own father Saul. And Jonathan fully accepted that situation. As Jonathan said to David: "the Eternal be with you, as He has been with my father" (1 Samuel 20:13), and Jonathan repeatedly protected David, knowing and fully accepting that he himself would never become king. And Jonathan himself had in fact done nothing wrong, nothing at all.

That was an exemplary attitude.

Now what does this attitude of the prodigal son have to do with how we understand the 144,000 in Revelation 7? Here is the point:

Those who claim that God is supposedly very concerned about having 144,000 physical Israelites in the first resurrection don't understand that the physical nations of Israel have sinned against heaven, and are "**no more worthy to be called the Bride of Jesus Christ**"! And unlike the prodigal son, the nations of Israel are not repentant at all, not even remotely.

Here are the facts.

1) Jesus Christ had "married" Israel. See Jeremiah 3:14. That goes back to the old covenant made in the days of Moses.

2) The explicit purpose for that "marriage" between Jesus Christ and Israel was for Israel to produce all the "children" that would be needed for the first resurrection. Yes, God's **original** intention was for all those in the first resurrection to be from Israelite stock. In God's original intention there was no room in the first resurrection for any non-Israelite people.

3) And so already at the making of the old covenant God established the names He would give to those 144,000 individuals in the first resurrection, divided into 12 equal groups of 12,000 each.

Each group would be referred to as a nation. God selected **the names of the 12 tribes of Israel**, dropping the name of the tribe of Dan, and replacing it with the name of the half-tribe of Manasseh. **Those names** for the nations into which all the people in the first resurrection will be grouped **are fixed**, and **they will not be changed**. They were fixed in the days of Moses, when Jesus Christ "married" Israel.

4) **But Israel kept on sinning** and sinning and "backsliding". It became clear to God that there was no way that Israel would be able to produce the 144,000 (less a small handful) needed for the first resurrection.

5) So eventually Jesus Christ "divorced" Israel. See Isaiah 50:1. This divorce happened in stages. First Christ divorced the northern House of Israel. That divorce was finalized when those tribes went into Assyrian captivity.

6) In time the southern House of Judah turned out to be worse than the House of Israel. That is recorded in Ezekiel 23, in the story of Aholah and Aholibah. Verse 12 tells us that "Aholibah ... was **more corrupt** in her inordinate love than Aholah".

Judah was worse than the northern kingdom had been. So Jesus Christ then also divorced the southern House of Judah, and sent them into captivity to Babylon. Both nations had then been kicked out of the land God had given them ... **like a man sending his divorced wife out of his house** (see Deuteronomy 24:1).

7) But there was **a temporary reprieve** for the House of Judah, in that Jesus Christ allowed them to return to Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. We should understand, however, that **the majority of the Jewish people did not return** to Palestine. From the Babylonian captivity onwards, the majority of the Jewish people have always lived outside of Palestine.

8) Now the purpose of that reprieve was **to prepare for the first coming of Jesus Christ**. Judah, the tribe into which Jesus Christ was born, had to be in the area of Jerusalem when the Messiah would come to pay for our human sins. And thus God had arranged for **a small minority** of the people of Judah to return to Palestine after a period of captivity in Babylon. It was this temporary reprieve that also ensured that all 12 of the original apostles were from the tribe of Judah.

Without this temporary reprieve there would not have been any guarantee that all of the original apostles were going to be physical Israelites ... because all of the tribe of Judah would have been living in foreign lands, away from Jerusalem, just like the people from the other ten tribes have since the Assyrian captivity always lived in other lands. None of them went back to Palestine.

9) Throughout His ministry Jesus Christ focused on "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (see Matthew 15:24). As the Apostle John said: "He came unto His own, and **His own received Him not**" (John 1:11).

10) But once His ministry had been completed, then Jesus Christ changed the focus from "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" to a focus on "**teach all nations**" (see Matthew 28:19). To quote the words of Mark 16:15, Jesus Christ said: "**go you into all the world**, and preach the gospel to every creature". That was a major change in focus!

11) **That was the end of the temporary reprieve for the House of Judah!** That change represented a change in God's focus for **how to find people for the first resurrection**!

12) From Matthew 28:19 onwards **Jesus Christ's divorce** from both groups of Israelite nations **was complete and final**!

13) Jews as well as all the other tribes of Israel were no longer invited **as tribes** to the first resurrection, to the marriage supper. From then onwards **invitations to the marriage supper became an individual thing**, rather than a national or racial thing.

14) Invitations to the first resurrection became independent of an individual's racial profile.

Jesus Christ clearly said the following:

Then said He to His servants, **The wedding** is ready, but **they who were bidden were not worthy**. (Matthew 22:8)

That is a pretty blunt and direct statement! **The tribes of Israel** who had been invited to be in the first resurrection **had proved themselves to be "not worthy"**!

The next verse says:

Go you therefore into the highways, and **as many as you shall find, bid (invite) to the marriage**.

(Matthew 22:9)

To be invited to the marriage means to be invited to have a part in the first resurrection. Does this verse sound like: make sure you find 12,000 people in every tribe of Israel (except Dan) to come to the marriage?

No, of course it doesn't sound like that at all. Rather, it sounds like: you go and find as many people, **Israelites and non-Israelites alike**, as you can find for the first resurrection.

15) Oh, did I mention that **Jesus Christ was extremely angry** when the tribes of Israel rejected their invitations to the first resurrection? Well, let's look at verse 7.

But when the King heard *thereof*, **He was wroth**: and He sent forth **His armies**, and destroyed those murderers, and **burned up their city**. (Matthew 22:7)

With this statement Jesus Christ was expressing **His own personal feelings towards Israel** and towards Judah. These were His feelings in His capacity as the God of the Old Testament. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem, that was an expression of Jesus Christ's anger with the House of Judah!

Yes, Jesus Christ was angry that **the rebellious Israelites had forced Him to make another adjustment** to His plan. The rebellious Israelites had forced Jesus Christ to drop His intention of limiting the first resurrection to physical Israelites.

They had forced Jesus Christ to look outside of Israel for people to fill up the number of 144,000. As Christ said: **the King was wroth**! Let's understand that Jesus Christ had this great anger in His capacity as God, and not in His capacity as a mortal man. **It was God who was angry with Israel**!

16) Paul understood this situation very well. And so Paul explained:

And if **some of the branches be broken off**, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree ... (Romans 11:17)

Here Paul used the olive tree analogy. When Paul says that "some of the branches were broken off", Paul is saying "**the tribes of Israel were broken off** the natural olive tree". And once they had been "broken off" it became impossible for them to produce 12,000 people from each tribe for the first resurrection.

The principle that Jesus Christ explained about the vine in John 15 applies equally to the olive tree analogy in Romans 11. And that principle is:

Abide in Me, and I in you. As **the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine**; no more can you, except you abide in Me. (John 15:4)

All the tribes of Israel were "broken off". Broken off branches cannot possibly "bear fruit". So none of the 12 tribes can possibly bear "12,000 fruits".

17) In their places non-Israelite branches were "grafted in". For what purpose were they "grafted in"? They were grafted in for the purpose of producing fruit.

18) Now while the tribes of Israel were broken off as national entities, the branches that remained were on a personal and individual level, rather than on a national level. So **on the individual level** there are now both Israelite branches and non-Israelite branches.

So here is the correct picture regarding Israel, which the Bible presents to us:

1) God **divorced** Israel (Isaiah 50:1).

2) Those who had been in line for the first resurrection were **broken off** (Romans 11:17).

3) Those who were invited to the first resurrection were **rejected** (i.e. not worthy) (Matthew 22:8).

So as far as the first resurrection is concerned, **Israel was** ... **divorced** ... **broken off** ... **and rejected by God**. This is the correct picture that the Bible presents to us. And that is the exact opposite of ensuring "12,000 converted individuals" for the first resurrection from every one of the 12 tribes.

Israel has become the disinherited heir!

And it is no surprise that those people who think of themselves as physical Israelites don't want to accept that status! They still think that somehow they are entitled to be given special treatment and special consideration. To all such people God says through John the Baptist: "And **think not** to say within yourselves, **we have Abraham to *our* father** ..." (Matthew 3:9).

But that is precisely what the people who expect 12,000 from each tribe in the first resurrection are thinking ... **they are relying on the racial background** for having people in the first resurrection.

The divorce severed that relationship between God and Israel. **The breaking off** reinforced that severance. And **the rejection** means that this special relationship, on the national level, **can never be reestablished**. Never again can the physical nations of Israel have the privilege of being the exclusive providers for people in the first resurrection. That privilege was permanently taken away from them by Jesus Christ.

That is the correct picture that is presented in the Bible. But "**the heirs who have been rejected**" are unwilling to accept this reality. They still believe that they are somehow in a privileged position before God. And so they cannot understand the correct picture.

The names of the 12 tribes in Revelation 7 do not indicate where these people have come from! These 12 names indicate where these people are going! **The 12 names** in Revelation 7 do not indicate origin; they **indicate 12 destinations**! The focus in Revelation 7 is not on the past (i.e. on origin) but on the future (i.e. on destinations).

So now let's consider those 12 names.

COMPARING TWO LISTS

In Ezekiel chapters 40-48 we have a description of the religious system that will exist **during the millennium**, when Jesus Christ will rule over the whole earth. Right at the end of chapter 48 we are told that during the millennium Jerusalem will have 12 gates, and that each gate will be named after one of the tribes of Israel. Let's look at those names.

And the gates of the city *shall be* after the names of the tribes of Israel: three gates **northward**; one gate of **Reuben**, one gate of **Judah**, one gate of **Levi**. And at **the east side** four thousand and five hundred: and three gates; and one gate of **Joseph**, one gate of **Benjamin**, one gate of **Dan**. And at **the south side** four thousand and five hundred measures: and three gates; one gate of **Simeon**, one gate of

Issachar, one gate of **Zebulon**. At **the west side** four thousand and five hundred, *with* their three gates; one gate of **Gad**, one gate of **Asher**, one gate of **Naphtali**. (Ezekiel 48:31-34).

Now why are those gates during the millennium named after all 12 of the tribes of Israel? I suspect that the people from each of the tribes of Israel will enter Jerusalem through the gate that is named for them. The naming of these gates certainly means that all 12 tribes will be nations in the millennium. Specifically, the tribe of **Dan is firmly entrenched** right in the middle of this list. So during the millennium the tribe of Dan must be just as significant as every other tribe of Israel.

The naming of these 12 gates means that Dan will be a prominent nation during the millennium. Having the whole world know that one of the gates into Jerusalem is named after them is an enormous honor. During the millennium Dan will be just as much in the picture as all of the other 11 tribes of Israel.

Now let's look at the list of the 144,000 in Revelation 7. Here it is.

And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were* sealed an hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand **of all the tribes of the children of Israel**. Of the tribe of **Judah** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Reuben** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Gad** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Asher** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Napthali** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Manasseh** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Simeon** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Levi** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Issachar** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Zebulon** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Joseph** *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of **Benjamin** *were* sealed twelve thousand. (Revelation 7:4-8)

This list has a completely different sequence for the tribes of Israel, when compared to the sequence in Ezekiel 48. And both these sequences are different from the birth order for Jacob's 12 sons, which birth order is recorded in Genesis. So three different lists of these names present three different sequences. The point is that we should not attach any specific significance to the order in which the names of the tribes are presented to us.

Next, 11 of the 12 names are identical in the lists presented in Ezekiel 48 and in Revelation 7. Where Ezekiel 48 then lists Dan as one of the tribes, Revelation 7 omits Dan and instead lists Manasseh as one of the tribes. So in Revelation 7 Manasseh has taken the place of Dan.

The reason for replacing Dan with Manasseh in Revelation 7 is not revealed. We can speculate, but **we don't really know God's reason**. We have sometimes tried to justify Dan's exclusion in Revelation 7 by saying that the people of the tribe of Dan were the first ones and the worst ones in going into paganism. But that line of reasoning is only a speculation.

And in fairness, when Aholibah was even more corrupt and more perverse than Aholah (of which the tribe of Dan was a part), it could be argued that the tribe of Judah was even worse than the tribe of Dan. And let's not forget that **all of the tribes of Israel were bad** before God sent them into national captivities. So trying to pin some reason for exclusion on the tribe of Dan is a foolish exercise. Dan's inclusion in Ezekiel 48 surely means that Dan is definitely a prominent nation during the millennium.

Notice also that although Dan is excluded from the list in Revelation 7, Verse 4 clearly calls **that list** "of **all** the tribes of the children of Israel". So let's just accept that thus far God has not chosen to reveal to us why Dan is excluded in Revelation 7, but included in Ezekiel 48.

Okay, now that we have seen the list of tribes in Revelation 7, we should also take a close look at the first part of that chapter.

REVELATION CHAPTER 7

We should all be familiar with the general sequence of events that unfold in the Book of Revelation. There are 7 seals which are opened sequentially. When the 7th seal is opened, then there are 7 trumpets that will be blown. And when the 7th trumpet is blown, then Jesus Christ returns, the first resurrection takes place, and then the 7 last plagues are poured out on this earth in the presence of Jesus Christ, and in the presence of all those in the first resurrection.

In Revelation 6:12 the **6th seal** is opened, and verses 13-17 then discuss that 6th seal. In Revelation 8:1 the **7th seal** is opened, and then we have a discussion of the first 6 trumpets in chapters 8 and 9. The 7th trumpet itself is then only sounded in Revelation 11:15.

So the account in Revelation 7 is placed after the first 6 seals have been opened, and **before the 7th seal is opened**. Here is verse 1.

And after these things I saw **four angels** standing on the four corners of the earth, **holding the four winds** of the earth, that the wind should not blow on **the earth**, nor on **the sea**, nor on **any tree**. (Revelation 7:1)

What are these four angels doing? They are controlling the weather, the atmospheric conditions. These angels have been given great powers over what we like to call "the forces of nature". But at that point they are not yet instructed to unleash those phenomenal powers. They are to hold back those powers until something else has taken place.

The four winds are a reference to **the first 4 trumpets**, which are only blown after the 7th seal has been opened. The 7 trumpets consist of two groups: the first 4 trumpets unleash "the forces of nature", causing mind-boggling damage to this earth. They are referred to as "winds". After that the last 3 trumpets all involve extreme warfare with monumental destruction of life. Those last 3 trumpets are also called "woes", because of the staggering number of people who will die during those 3 trumpets.

The four angels holding back the four winds are a reference to the first 4 trumpets of Revelation 8:7-12.

Let’s continue with chapter 7.

And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the Living God: and **he cried with a loud voice** to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, (Revelation 7:2)

This angel has "the seal of the Living God". This means that this angel is bringing **an instruction from God the Father** to these four angels who have power over "the forces of nature". So let’s look at the instruction.

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)

Again it shows that "the earth ... the sea ... and the trees" are going to be exposed to phenomenal destruction. That destruction will be so severe and so terrifying, that many people at that time will die from **heart attacks**. Luke records Jesus Christ saying concerning that time: "**men’s hearts failing them for fear**" (see Luke 21:26), which is a reference to people having fatal heart attacks.

Those terrifying events will be held back until "the servants of our God are sealed in their foreheads".

What does this mean?

First of all, it does **not** mean **protection** from the great tribulation. That is because at this point it is **too late** to offer protection from the great tribulation. The great tribulation will have started at least two full years before this sealing takes place. This sealing has nothing at all to do with physical protection. This group is pictured just before the 7th seal is opened, well after the 5th seal was opened.

Next, those 144,000 individuals are **already** "**servants of God**" before their "sealing" takes place. These 144,000 individuals **already have God's holy spirit** dwelling within them **before** this sealing occurs. The Apostle Paul explained that if any man does not have "the spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (see Romans 8:9), i.e. he is certainly not "a servant of God". So servants of God are individual adults who have God's spirit dwelling in their minds.

So the "sealing" referred to in Revelation 7:3 is **not** a reference to those 144,000 individuals supposedly receiving God's holy spirit! And **neither** is it a reference to any kind of physical protection from the terrifying events that will be occurring worldwide.

Let's ask a question: what happens to something that is sealed? Something that is "sealed" **cannot be changed** without breaking the seal. So the "sealing" does something for that group of people that will be **permanent**.

Sealing makes something permanent and unchangeable. But sealing is **not a form of protection**, and sealing also is **not the same as giving something**. Sealing establishes a state or a status that cannot be changed. Sealing represents a commitment that something is to be seen as permanent.

Here is a point we need to keep in mind:

When Jesus Christ returns at the 7th trumpet, then the first resurrection takes place, and we meet the returning Jesus Christ "in the air" (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Exactly 144,000 individuals will meet Jesus Christ in the air. But **the return of Jesus Christ will be about 12 months after the 1st trumpet is blown**.

Consider that each of the first 4 trumpets may take a week or two or three. And trumpets 5 and 6 involve major worldwide warfare, where each of these two trumpets may take from 3-6 months. It seems very likely that God has allotted **one full year** for all 7 trumpets to be blown.

That one year will be "the day of the Lord". And that will be **the most terrible year that human beings have ever experienced**, or ever will experience. Never before have human beings been forced to live through such horrendous times for one whole year.

So the "sealing" in Revelation 7:3 will take place **one year before Jesus Christ returns**. And all the people who are "sealed" are (or have been, if they are still dead at that point!) in possession of God's holy spirit for many years in most cases, though there are likely to be some few who have only had God's spirit for a couple of years before being sealed.

So here is the point I am trying to make. Are you ready?

Precisely after the 6th seal has been opened and before the 7th seal will be opened, God will have achieved the exact number of 144,000 people for the first resurrection! That will be a 360-day year before Jesus Christ will return.

[Comment: It is the events with Seal #6 that will re-establish the perfect 360-day yearly cycle.]

Those individuals (and that includes the dead in Christ!) are then officially "sealed in their foreheads",

meaning that **their fate cannot be changed**. It is not talking about protection of any kind. It also makes no difference whether those specific individuals are alive or already dead at that point in time, because this sealing has no effect on physical life one way or the other.

It is the spirit that is sealed!

The sealing is not in their bodies. It is "in their foreheads", meaning **it is their spirit in man that is sealed**. After this sealing their spirit in man can no longer change to a different way of thinking.

They also cannot be "unselected" from the group of 144,000. No, they are "sealed". It also means that they can no longer sin ... that is something the "sealing" will do to them. **God will have His 144,000 for the first resurrection**, and nobody can be added to that number, and neither can anyone be removed from that number.

That is what this "sealing" is all about.

And that is established **one year before Jesus Christ returns**. So during the last one year before Jesus Christ's return nobody else can be added to the 144,000 for the first resurrection. If anyone during that period repents, or approaches closely towards being repentant, then **those individuals will live over into the millennium as physical human beings**. They "missed the bus" for being in the first resurrection. And they will have phenomenally exciting and stimulating physical lives during the millennium. But they can't be in the first resurrection.

So the sealing of the 144,000 one year before Jesus Christ's return will be **the cut-off date** for anyone becoming a part of the people in the first resurrection. At that point all the names of the 144,000 individuals who will be in the first resurrection will be fixed. So when the 7th seal is opened and the 7 trumpets are then blown, God is no longer looking for anyone to be in the first resurrection.

Jesus Christ is the One who opens all the seals. And **Jesus Christ will not open the 7th seal until He has got exactly 144,000 people for the first resurrection**. That must be absolutely and irrevocably certain. That's when Jesus Christ will have His hand-picked team for the millennium. **Only then can the plan of God proceed to the next phase**, with the opening of the 7th seal.

All those of the 144,000 who are alive before the 7th seal is opened will still be physical human beings; and they will only experience those terrible times "as observers" in circumstances, where they are protected from the actual physical forces that will be unleashed by those 7 trumpets. They will be at the place of safety (except for the two witnesses).

Let's keep in mind that **this is the only information we are given about these 144,000 individuals**. The only information verses 4-8 add to this account ascribes exactly 12,000 individuals to each of the 12 tribes listed here. But apart from that we are told nothing else about these 144,000 individuals. We are only told that they are "the servants of God", and implied is that **there are no other "servants of God" anywhere**, as far as human beings are concerned. Consider that **if** there were any other "servants of God" anywhere on earth at that time, or anywhere in the past history of mankind, **then** it would simply not be fair to exclude them from also being "sealed in their spirit" before they are resurrected.

This group of 144,000 servants of God consists of all human beings since the creation of Adam who at the end of their lives are or were "servants of God".

We see in Revelation 12:14 that true Christians (i.e. "the woman") are **protected for 3.5 years in the wilderness** "from the face of the serpent" (i.e. from all of Satan's vicious attacks). So physical protection at the end time is for 3.5 years. But the sealing of the 144,000 will only be one year before

Jesus Christ's coming.

Here is how I understand these things.

1) The **wrath of Satan** begins about 3.5 years before Jesus Christ's return. It begins with the start of the great tribulation. That wrath of Satan will continue for about 2.5 years. Hosea 6:2 ties in here.

After two days will He revive us: **in the third day** He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. (Hosea 6:2)

After two years the tribulation will start to wind down for Israel. And in the third year **it will be replaced by the wrath of God**, as expressed by the 7 trumpets and then the 7 plagues. The wrath of God is poured out on all of sinful mankind.

2) **So** for the last one year before Christ's return **the wrath of God takes over**. And that wrath will end with the pouring out of the 7 last plagues in the presence of Jesus Christ.

3) **Revelation 12:14** shows that God's people are offered protection from the **wrath of Satan**, which lasts about two-and-a-half years. That protection will then continue through the one year for the **wrath of God**, which follows right on the heels of Satan's wrath. So the total period of physical protection will be 3.5 years.

4) No specific number is indicated for exactly how many people will be physically protected in this way. But in addition to baptized adults, this group of physically protected people will also include unbaptized young children. This protection will be provided at what we generally call "the place of safety". There is **no** "**sealing**" of any kind mentioned in connection **with this period of physical protection**. Going to the place of safety does not involve being sealed. Keep this in mind.

5) In **Revelation 7:3-8** a special kind of "sealing in their foreheads" then takes place **one year before Christ's return**, just before the 1st of the 7 trumpets is blown. This "sealing" is limited to exactly 144,000 individuals. At that precise point in time those 144,000 individuals are assigned into 12 different groups of 12,000 each. That whole group consists of people who are alive at the place of safety, and also all of "the dead in Christ". These 12 groups are identified by the names of the tribes of Israel. They will form 12 nations within the Family of God.

[Comment: This sealing and how and why it includes dead people is thoroughly discussed in the companion article titled "**THE SEALING OF THE SPIRIT IN MAN**". You need to read that article to fully understand this subject. Here in this present article I am only briefly describing this sealing.]

6) The sealing locks the minds (i.e. the human spirit) in these 144,000 people into God's way of thinking. They are all set in the right way of thinking. And for the remaining one year of their physical lives (i.e. until they are changed at the 7th trumpet) it will be impossible for them to sin. That is what the sealing does to their minds. In that way it is assured that one year later Jesus Christ will still have exactly 144,000 for the first resurrection.

7) With this sealing Jesus Christ will have identified all those of the 144,000 who are alive at that point in time. The "dead in Christ" will still be dead, but they will at this time also each be assigned into one of the 12 tribes.

8) If you are one of those who is "sealed" at that time, and you are assigned to the tribe of Manasseh, I suspect that you will also learn who else will be in the tribe of Manasseh with you. And if you at that time find out that you have been assigned to the tribe of Asher, then you'll also find out who else around you

has been assigned to the tribe of Asher.

9) I suspect that when that sealing takes place, all those who are alive at that time will understand which tribe they have been assigned to, and which tribe every other person in the first resurrection will be a part of. The people in the group of 144,000 will have a year more to live as mortal human beings, before Jesus Christ will return, at which time they will be changed "in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52).

10) That, knowledge about who has been assigned to which tribe of Israel for the first resurrection, also includes knowledge about **those who are still "dead in Christ"** at that time. With that "sealing" **we will find out** to which of the 12 tribes Abel and Enoch and Noah and Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Job will be assigned. **They must all fit into one of the 12 tribes**!

That will be an administrative decision, not a genetic decision!

For example:

The 12 apostles will all be key leaders under Jesus Christ during the millennium. Racially they were all from the tribe of Judah. But **I personally doubt that all 12 of them will be a part of the tribe of Judah in the millennium.** Rather, I believe that they (excluding Judas Iscariot of course, and including Judas's replacement) will be assigned to one tribe each. As Jesus Christ said to them:

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, **you also shall sit upon twelve thrones**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matthew 19:28)

If each apostle judges a different tribe, it means that **each apostle is assigned to a different spiritual tribe** in the 12 spiritual tribes of Israel; and they will rule with Jesus Christ during the millennium. So all 12 apostles were racially of the tribe of Judah. But one of them will rule over the tribe of Reuben, while another apostle will rule over the tribe of Simeon, and another apostle will rule over the tribe of Benjamin, and another apostle will rule over the tribe of Asher, etc.

What this indicates, I believe, is that when God divides the 144,000 of the first resurrection into 12 "nations" of 12,000 each, all of whom will eventually have a permanent residence within the New Jerusalem, then **the 12 apostles will be assigned to those tribes over which they ruled as kings during the millennium**.

So apostles who were racially from the tribe of Judah will in the eternal Family of God be a part of nations other than Judah (i.e. 11 of them). They ruled over the physical nations of Israel during the millennium, and they will for all future eternity be in key leadership positions in spiritual nations with the same identity as the physical nations they had ruled over during the millennium.

While we are at it, I personally believe that in this context of the millennium and future eternity beyond that, it will be the Apostle Paul who will take the place of Judas amongst the 12 apostles. I cannot prove this. This is only my own personal opinion.

Anyway, there must be exactly 12,000 assigned to each tribe. And there will be exactly 144,000 in the first resurrection, not one person more. Jesus Christ is one individual. And His "wife" will consist of exactly 144,000 individuals. We need to understand that **everybody in the first resurrection must belong to one of those 12 groups of exactly 12,000 each**.

ALL IN THE FIRST RESURRECTION ARE ISRAELITES

In Genesis 32:28 Jesus Christ changed Jacob's name to Israel. And right there Jesus Christ defined what this name "Israel" means. It means: **to as a prince (ruler) have power with God and with men**.

And He said, your name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for **as a prince you have power with God and with men**, and have prevailed. (Genesis 32:28)

What Jesus Christ was saying here is: **I have selected you and your descendants to rule with Me during the millennium**. Your descendants are to provide all the remaining people that are needed to fill up the number of 144,000.

Many people do not understand that **the name "Israel" describes all those who will rule with Jesus Christ as kings and as priests during the millennium**! That is the primary meaning of the name "Israel". It is **only those who rule with Jesus Christ** during the millennium that will actually "have power with God".

Anyone who does not actually rule with Jesus Christ may be a physical Israelite, he may be able to trace his genealogy back to one of the tribes of Israel. But **such a person is not a real "Israelite"**, not if he doesn't also "have power with Jesus Christ". By saying that such a person is not "a real Israelite" I mean that **such a person is not a part of "the Israel of God"**! Only a very small number of physical Israelites will ever become a part of "the Israel of God", because the Israel of God will be limited to exactly 144,000.

And the only real Israelites are those who are a part of the Israel of God! The only real Israelites are those who will have power with Jesus Christ. The only real Israelites are those who will be a part of the first resurrection.

As far as physical Israelites are concerned, John the Baptist said that "... **God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham**" (Matthew 3:9). In other words, John the Baptist was saying that the physical line of descent is not really all that important. John was saying that if stones can become children of Abraham, then **anyone can become a part of God's Israel**.

[**Comment**: How is that for upsetting people who believe that they are physical Israelites? Well, that's tough! Anyone who gets a chip on his shoulder about being told that physical Israelites are not "real Israelites", and certainly not for all eternity, needs to read Paul's comments in Philippians 3.

After presenting his credentials as "a Hebrew of the Hebrews" and being of the stock of Israel, Paul then said that he viewed all these things as "dung" ... and in Greek Paul actually used a crasser word than "dung". See Philippians 3:4-8. So much for having the perfect Israelite pedigree. Paul was saying: my perfect pedigree actually means nothing at all. And don't forget about Israel being divorced, broken off and rejected.]

The meaning of the name Israel is one more indication that God **originally** intended all those in the first resurrection to be of Israelite stock. God gave Jacob this name in anticipation that **the descendants of Jacob's sons would provide all 144,000** people (less a handful) to then rule with Jesus Christ during the millennium. That number for "the wife" was fixed! It was physical Israelites, changed into sons of God, who were supposed to sit at the tables at the wedding supper. They are the only ones who were originally invited.

The name tags for the 12 nations, into which all those in the first resurrection will be grouped, **have already been put on the tables**. Those name tags were put on the tables back in Genesis 32:28. It is

just that different people from different ethnic backgrounds will now fill very many of those 144,000 positions. To be sure, very many of those 144,000 positions will indeed be filled by people who were of Israelite descent. But now it will no longer be exclusively physical Israelites who will fill those 144,000 seats. That intention was changed when those who were invited refused to come.

Let's look at some Scriptures. Notice what Paul told the non-Israelite Galatian church members.

For **you are all the children of God** by faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

Paul continued to explain:

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**. (Galatians 3:27)

"Putting on Christ" is on a far, far higher level than being a physical descendant of the man Jacob. In the next verse Paul continued his explanation.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for **you are all one in Christ Jesus**. (Galatians 3:28)

Do you accept this verse? And do you believe this verse? What does "there is neither Jew nor Greek" mean to you? Yes certainly, ethnically there are today still Jews and Greeks. Paul was not denying physical reality.

What Paul meant is: **It makes no difference to God** whether a converted person is from Israelite stock, or whether that converted person is from non-Israelite stock. When we appear before God to give account regarding how we have lived our Christian lives, then **our ethnic background doesn't enter the picture in any way**. Then our ethnic background is totally immaterial. Then all that counts is: how well have we developed godly character? How much have we done with the one or two or five talents that God gave us when we repented and received God's spirit? When God evaluates our lives, then we are all judged by exactly the same standards by God. **By itself an ethnic Israelite background has no value at all**. **Zero!**

Let's continue with Paul's explanation.

And if you *be* Christ's, **then are you Abraham's seed**, **and heirs** according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

Notice that Paul here stated two distinct things. Those who are truly repentant and who have the spirit of God dwelling in them are:

1) **Abraham's seed**

2) **heirs** according to the promise.

So how can non-Israelite Christians, who are heading for the first resurrection, be "Abraham's seed" on the one hand, but on the other hand then somehow not be a part of the 12 tribes in the first resurrection?

Notice what Paul then wrote in his concluding comments to these Galatian members of God's Church.

And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon **the Israel of God**. (Galatians 6:16)

Who is Paul referring to as "the Israel of God"?

Paul is clearly referring to the membership of the whole Church of God, consisting of both Israelites and also non-Israelites. **What** implied contrast is Paul drawing with this statement? Paul is drawing a distinction between those who are physical Israelites, those who are physical descendants of the man Jacob on the one hand, and those who are **God's Israelites** (i.e. those who are members of the Israel of God) on the other hand. **Which one** of these two options is more important to God? Clearly God is far more concerned with the Israel of God than God is concerned with physical Israel.

It is those who are the Israel of God, who are the heirs of God. **The physical Israelites are not at all heirs of God**. Absolutely not!

Let's look at something that Paul said in Romans 8.

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and **joint-heirs with Christ**; if so be that we suffer with *Him*, that we may be also glorified together. (Romans 8:17)

Who is Paul speaking about in this verse?

Paul is speaking about all converted church members from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Now **what** does the expression "joint-heirs with Christ" mean? It refers to those who will with Jesus Christ "inherit all things" (see Revelation 21:7).

Now **who** is going to inherit all things with Jesus Christ. **How** can we identify those to whom these promises apply? There is one group, and one group only, who will be "joint-heirs with Christ". And that one and only group are **all those in the first resurrection**. Nobody else will ever be a "joint-heir" with Jesus Christ.

Who are the 144,000 with Jesus Christ on Mount Zion in Revelation 14? **How** are these individuals identified? These 144,000 are identified as "the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (see Revelation 14:4).

Could there possibly be any other firstfruits who are not on Mount Zion with Jesus Christ in Revelation 14?

Absolutely not!

There is no way that there are additional firstfruits (i.e. members of the first resurrection) who are somehow not on Mount Zion with Jesus Christ. Any such suggestion would be utterly absurd! When Paul said in Galatians 3:28 that "**you are all one in Christ Jesus**", then it is impossible for all those in the first resurrection to somehow not be "one" with Jesus Christ on Mount Zion. There can only be one united group of "firstfruits".

We might also notice that in Revelation 14 there is no sealing of any kind that takes place. The sealing will have taken place at an earlier time.

Revelation 14:1-4 tells us **in absolute terms** that there will be exactly 144,000 in the first resurrection. **There is no other possibility!** But that number of 144,000 will assuredly include very many people who were not physical Israelites during their lives.

And this means that **there cannot possibly be 144,000 physical Israelites in the first resurrection**. The number of physical Israelites in the first resurrection must be considerably less than 144,000,

because there will also be very many non-Israelites in the first resurrection. And 144,000 is an inflexible total number for the people in the first resurrection.

Before God **all of the 144,000 will be "Israelites"**, irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. They will all be Israelites before God because **they are all destined to rule** with Jesus Christ as kings and priests. And that, ruling with Jesus Christ, is what the name "Israel" is all about.

Right, that about covers the first half of Revelation chapter 7. So now let's look at the second part of this chapter.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE WHICH NO MAN COULD NUMBER

Here is verse 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo, **a great multitude, which no man could number**, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and languages, **stood before the throne**, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; (Revelation 7:9)

Let's ask some questions.

What does "a great multitude which no man could number" mean? It is obviously not a number in the trillions. And it doesn't mean that we aren't able to grasp or express the number that is involved. So what does "which no man could number" mean?

The difficulty with this very great number is not the size of the number!

The difficulty with this great number is that **it cannot be established in advance** of certain events having taken place. That is why nobody, including God, can establish this number at this present time. In fact, the exact number for this multitude cannot even be established at the end of the millennium. The final exact number for this group will depend on individuals exercising their own free will ... to either choose God's way of life or to reject God's way of life. Rejecting God's way of life means choosing Satan's spirit of selfishness and competition instead.

The exact number of individuals in this group can only be established at the very end of the 100-year period allocated to those who will come up in the second resurrection. However, at this present point in time not even God Himself has determined the exact number of the individuals in this group. And there is no need in the plan of God for this specific number to be known in advance of the creation of the new heaven and the new earth.

Who are these people?

They are all the people **from the millennium** plus **from the second resurrection**, who will have voluntarily accepted God's way of using their minds, and who are fully repentant. This group will include people from every ethnic group and nationality and tribe of people who have existed on earth since the time after the flood in the days of Noah.

This group represents the third and final step in God building the Family of God. They are "the end ones" of 1 Corinthians 15:24. We might also call them "the final ones to complete the Family of God". Paul refers to the process of the establishment of the Family of God with the expression "**every man in his own order**".

In other words, there is a specific sequence in which individuals are added to the Family of God. **Step**

one was when Jesus Christ became the resurrected Son of God. **Step two** will be the first resurrection for "those who are Christ's". **Step three** will be the end ones, when Jesus Christ presents the whole Family of God to God the Father. See 1 Corinthians 15:22-24 for these three steps.

The most important step in that process is certainly the first step, the one that involved Jesus Christ becoming the Son of God by a resurrection from the dead. The other two steps after that are then both presented together here in chapter 7 in the Book of Revelation. So one way to view **Revelation 7** is to think of it as presenting to us **the establishment of the whole Family of God**.

What are the people in this multitude doing?

They are all "standing", meaning that none of them are given any seats. "Seats" are also referred to as "thrones", to represent that those who are seated are also ruling in some capacity. So none of the people in this group are shown as rulers. No, **they all stand**.

Where are these people standing?

They are standing **before the throne of God the Father** and before the throne of Jesus Christ. This is extremely important to understand. These people are pictured in the presence of God the Father! But it is impossible for any resurrected human being to stand before the throne of God the Father until after Revelation 21:3. Thus they are pictured at a much later time than the first resurrection.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and **He will dwell with them**, and **they shall be His people**, and **God Himself shall be with them**, *and be* their God. (Revelation 21:3)

Until God the Father has come down from heaven and then "dwells" with (formerly) human beings it is absolutely impossible for the great multitude in Revelation 7:9 "to stand before the throne".

Can we grasp this?

This great multitude is presented to us in the setting of the new heaven and the new earth, standing in the New Jerusalem before the throne of God the Father.

There is no other possibility! No former human being can possibly "stand before the throne of God the Father" until after God the Father has come down from heaven with the New Jerusalem. There is no other option.

What this means is that this great multitude cannot possibly have anything to do with the event we call "the great tribulation", and which event is identified as the fifth seal in the Book of Revelation. They are pictured more than 1,100 years after the great tribulation will have taken place.

This also means that **they cannot picture the Israelites who were the main victims of the great tribulation**. First of all, this is too late to picture anyone from the great tribulation. And furthermore, the great tribulation is identified in Jeremiah 30:7 as "**the time of Jacob's trouble**". But this great multitude consists of people from every nation and tribe and language group. This group is overwhelmingly non-Israelite. And on that count they can't be the group that suffered during "Jacob's trouble".

In what state is this multitude pictured?

It is impossible for mortal physical human beings to "stand" in the presence of God the Father. This means that the people in this great multitude, who will come from every nation and language since the flood, are pictured as spirit beings. They are no longer physical or mortal! They are pictured as **immortal spirit beings**. Mortal human beings simply don't stand before God's throne!

How are they dressed?

They are dressed in "white robes". What does that mean? They have the same clothing as "the wife" of Jesus Christ. Their clothing also represents righteousness.

And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, **clean and white**: for **the fine linen is the righteousness of saints**. (Revelation 19:8)

So their clothing also tells us that this great multitude **must be immortal**! A person's righteousness is not established until the person has come to the end of his physical mortal life. (Comment: The article on "The Sealing Of The Spirit In Man" will mention one exception to this statement.) We know the principle of Ezekiel 33:13, right?

When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, **all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered**; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. (Ezekiel 33:13)

The people in the great multitude must absolutely be past the point where they could theoretically still "commit iniquity". That means these people clothed in righteousness must be immortal, because as long as we are still mortal we can still "commit iniquity" (except for the group discussed in my "Sealing of the Spirit in Man" article).

Let's look at the next verse.

And cried with a loud voice, saying, **Salvation to our God** who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. (Revelation 7:10)

The expression "salvation to our God" really means "salvation **belongs to** our God", or even "salvation **is granted by** our God". The point here is not that salvation is given to God. The point really is that **it is God who has granted salvation to this great multitude**.

So besides standing, what are these people doing?

They are **expressing gratitude** to God the Father for having granted them salvation. This again means that these people are pictured as immortal spirit beings, and not as mortal human beings. Gratitude for salvation is only expressed after salvation has been granted.

What we have here is a scene in the New Jerusalem on the new earth. This great multitude represents "**the nations of them which are saved**", who regularly come into the New Jerusalem (see Revelation 21:24). They appear before the thrones of God the Father and of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at the next two verses.

And **all the angels stood** round about the throne, and *about* **the elders** and the **four living creatures**, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, *be* unto (i.e. belong to) our God for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 7:11-12)

Right, so now we have the whole scene complete. Do you know what this whole picture is all about? This whole picture presents one of the most profound moments in all eternity. Pictured here is **an extremely powerful moment**. This is not your average "day" in the life of God's immortal Family. No, **this scene describes a unique moment in all of eternity**.

What is this occasion?

Revelation 7:9-12 pictures the very moment when the whole plan of salvation has been completed!

It pictures the very moment when God the Father has come down from heaven to the New Jerusalem and has taken His place on His throne, with the throne of Jesus Christ right next to the Father's throne. And at that moment Jesus Christ has "**delivered up**" the whole Kingdom of God to God the Father. See 1 Corinthians 15:24 again. That's the Kingdom which until that point in time Jesus Christ had been responsible for developing (i.e. a reference to the process of leading human beings to salvation), and now the moment has arrived for everything to be handed over to God the Father.

That's the moment which these verses describe!

Put another way, Revelation 21:1-3 represents the completion of God's plan of salvation. And **Revelation 7:9-12 presents the scene one split-second after Revelation 21:1-3**. When God the Father comes down to the New Jerusalem, then Jesus Christ presents the whole Family to the Father. Those in the first resurrection were already introduced to God the Father at the marriage supper. Now the focus is on introducing the rest of the Family, that great multitude, to God the Father. This is the great multitude becoming acquainted with God the Father.

And the process of salvation will have been completed.

At this occasion all the angels are there, as are also the 24 elders (Revelation 4:4) and the 4 living creatures, or Cherubim. **Every spirit being in existence is present at this momentous occasion** (excluding Satan and the demons, who by that time will have been banished to "the blackness of darkness forever", Jude 1:13).

And the newcomers, the great multitude, are introduced to the whole spirit world. From that time onwards every spirit being in existence will be acquainted with every other spirit being in existence. **Everybody will know everybody else**, and also know and understand everyone's status and position within the whole Family of God structure.

Revelation 7:9-12 shows us the ceremonial start of future endless eternity!

Let's continue with Revelation 7. In this vision, once this setting of Jesus Christ presenting the whole completed Family of God to God the Father has been described, **then** one of the 24 "elders" talks to the Apostle John to give him some additional information.

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? (Revelation 7:13)

The purpose of the question was to focus John's attention on the identity of this great multitude. The two questions are:

1) **Who** are these people?

2) **Where** did they come from?

Obviously, John did not know the answer to either of these two questions. And so "the elder" then gave the answers.

And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, **These are they which came out of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14)

This is how this "elder" identified this great multitude to John. And right here we face **a major problem**!

OUR PROBLEM

The problem is not with the translation of the Greek text. The translation is fine. **The problem here lies with our bias and our preconceived opinions**.

We, not the Bible, have given the name "the great tribulation" to the wrath of Satan, when Satan will instigate severe persecution primarily on the people of Israel. We, not the Bible, have given the name "the great tribulation" to the event which is represented by the 5th seal of the Book of Revelation. To be more precise, **the religions of this world have given that event this specific name**, and we in the Church of God have simply gone along with that. We've rejected other names they have coined, names like "the rapture"; but we've accepted the name "the great tribulation".

We have turned the expression "the great tribulation" into a name!

In one sense it is not a problem for us to coin names for any events, biblical or non-biblical. Throughout this article I myself have freely used the expression "the great tribulation" as the name for a specific event that still lies ahead of us. Establishing names for specific events enables us to communicate more efficiently and with less words, in order to describe the events we are talking about.

The problem arises when the Bible uses an expression, which expression we (actually the churches of this world) have turned into a name for a very specific event, in a way that does not at all refer to the event with which we have identified that expression.

In plain language:

When we use the expression "the great tribulation", then **we mean** the events portrayed by **the 5th seal** of the Book of Revelation. And that is how I have used this expression throughout this article.

But when **the Bible** uses the expression "the great tribulation", it **never once means for this expression to be the name** for the 5th seal of the Book of Revelation. The Bible only uses the expression "great tribulation", including the expression "the great tribulation" as **a descriptive term** that can be applied to different occasions throughout human history.

Yes, even when the Bible uses this term to refer to the specific event we have named "the great tribulation", **the Bible still does not use it as a name**. It is still nothing more than a descriptive expression. The expression "the great tribulation" is never a name in the Bible.

The consequence of the Bible's way of using the expression "the great tribulation" is that this expression can sometimes refer to the event we have in mind. But at other times this expression "the great

tribulation" can refer to something that has nothing to do with the 5th seal. In the Bible **the translated expression "the great tribulation" simply cannot be restricted to the one event to which we have given the name "the great tribulation"**.

The biblical usage of the expression "great tribulation" goes way beyond the event which we have named "the great tribulation".

Biblical Greek has several words that have some relevance with this general subject of "tribulation", words like "thlipsis", "stenochoria", "sunoche", etc. We might consider the two words "thlipsis and "stenochoria". It is the Greek word "thlipsis" that is used in the expression "the great tribulation". However, we should consider the following:

While the precise meanings for the words "thlipsis" and "stenochoria" can frequently not be distinguished in biblical passages, it is well understood that **"stenochoria" is a stronger word than "thlipsis"**. Troubles described by "stenochoria" are generally more severe than troubles described by "thlipsis".

"Thlipsis" can in our modern terminology be translated by the word "**stress**". Stress is a descriptive word for a general condition, without having to be the name for one specific event. In many places in the New Testament "stress" would be a suitable translation for "thlipsis".

"Stenochoria" is used only four times in the New Testament, while "thlipsis" is used 45 times in the New Testament. "**Stenochoria**" is translated three times as "**distress**" and one time as "**anguish**". It is the stronger word. (We need not concern ourselves with this word, other than noting that biblical Greek did in fact have a stronger word than "thlipsis" available.)

"**Thlipsis**", on the other hand, is translated (in the KJV) 21 times as "**tribulation**", 17 times as "**affliction**", three times as "**trouble**", one time as "**anguish**", one time as "**persecution**", one time as "**burdened**", and one time as "**afflicted**".

So in the NT the word "thlipsis" has a broad range of applications, ranging from severe suffering to an everyday occurrence, like the pain a woman experiences when she gives birth to a baby. Worldwide well in excess of 300,000 babies are born every day. It is a common experience.

It was Jesus Christ Himself who used the word "thlipsis" to refer to a woman’s pain during childbirth.

A woman when she is in travail has sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more **the anguish** (Greek "thlipsis"), for joy that a man is born into the world. (John 16:21)

Without diminishing the pain a woman endures during childbirth, by no means would we associate childbirth with "tribulation".

Consider a verse where the Apostle Paul used both these Greek words in the same sentence.

Tribulation (Greek "**thlipsis**") and **anguish** (Greek "**stenochoria**"), upon **every soul** of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek (Greek "hellenos"); (Romans 2:9)

When we have the word "tribulation" in our translations, it is always the Greek word "thlipsis". Now here is a question:

According to Paul, who deserves to experience "tribulation"?

Answer: according to Paul, every human being who sins deserves "tribulation"! **Every sinner deserves "thlipsis"**. Are there any exceptions? No! So are there any unrepentant people in the entire history of human existence who have not deserved and experienced "thlipsis"? No!

Let's understand what Paul is telling us. It is Paul's understanding that every unrepentant human being deserves to experience "tribulation and anguish". **That is the lot in life** for every unrepentant human being. That's what Paul said in Romans 2:9.

Was Paul wrong in using the word for "tribulation" in this statement? No, he wasn't wrong at all. His use of this word "thlipsis" is in complete agreement with "the elder's" use of the word "thlipsis" in Revelation 7:14.

Now in Paul's case in Romans 2, Paul used this expression to create a contrast. And so in the next verse Paul wrote:

But **glory**, **honor**, and **peace**, to every man that works good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek: (Romans 2:10)

So here is how we can summarize the human life experience:

1) The human life **before repentance** is characterized by "tribulation and anguish".

2) The human life **after repentance** is destined to be characterized by "glory, honor and peace". That's Romans 2:9-10.

And since all of us in God's Church were unrepentant before we came into God's Church, therefore we have all, to one degree or another, experienced tribulation and anguish.

In previous articles I have presented numerous Scriptures to illustrate the more general meanings of "thlipsis" (e.g. in the article "Great Tribulation And The Great Tribulation"), and I will not do that again in this article.

Let me also point out one other thing: in Revelation 7:14 "the elder" used the weaker word "thlipsis". He did not use the stronger word "stenochoria". He did not say that the great multitude came out of "great stenochoria", which would have been more severe; he only said that they came out of "great thlipsis", which is the weaker, more general word, the word that is also suitably applied to a woman's pain during childbirth.

And as I have already mentioned, the name "the great tribulation" was not coined by anyone in the Church of God! **This name for the events of the 5th seal was invented by the churches of this world**. They called that specific event "the great tribulation". They are the ones who turned that descriptive expression into the name for that specific event. And we in the Church of God accepted this name without question.

To be clear: using the name "the great tribulation" for the time of severe affliction that still lies ahead, primarily for the people of Israel, is not a problem. In using this name we can all know that we are referring to the same event. The problem is that we cannot assume that every mention of "the great tribulation" **in the Bible** must refer to this one specific event, to which the world's churches attached this name.

Anyway, now let's look again at Revelation 7:14.

And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, **These are they which came out of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14)

So how does this "elder" identify this immortal multitude who are standing before the throne of God the Father in the New Jerusalem? Is the "elder" referring to the event we think of as "the great tribulation"? No, most certainly not!

There is absolutely no way that the still future event we call "the great tribulation" will involve "all nations and kindreds and people and languages". Why not?

Because "the great tribulation" will be on the people of Israel! "All nations and kindreds and people and languages" are simply not the target audience for the great tribulation. This description in Revelation 7 simply does not describe the people who will suffer during the great tribulation.

Furthermore, there are many tribes and languages which have died out, and which today in the year 2021 are no longer represented anywhere here on earth. They no longer exist anywhere on earth today. You can't find them.

But they will come up in the second resurrection.

This "elder", who has had his whole existence in the presence of God the Father, is referring to **the totality of human existence**, ever since Adam and Eve sinned, as "the great tribulation". And the people who lived before the flood most assuredly lived in "great tribulation" ... it was a terrible time to be alive. It was so bad that God actually wished He had not created human beings (that's Genesis 6:6). It was so bad that God destroyed everything with a worldwide flood (except for those in the ark).

And ever since Adam and Eve sinned, life for human beings has not been anything like what God had planned and intended for the human life experience to be like. The curses which God imposed on this earth after we human beings had sinned (see Genesis 3:17-19) were real and severe. And after that things only got worse.

Ever since then life has been "a great tribulation". None of us have ever known anything other than the present miserable reality. Keep in mind that we are talking about "thlipsis" and not about "stenochoria".

To us the present is "normal", and we learn to cope with it. We don't think of it as "a great tribulation".

In our world some people get ahead and others are left behind. But that is "normal". Sickness and disease and pain and suffering are all a "normal" part of our world. Poisonous plants and insects and vicious reptiles are "normal' in our world. Food shortages and polluted air and polluted water are "normal" in our world. These things simply mean that we have to work in some ways to try to eliminate these problems. But we can handle it, right?

The existence of guns and rockets and nuclear bombs is "normal". We feel that we just have to do certain things to keep those things under control. We have greedy selfish rulers and politicians, who impose all kinds of things on us, but that's "normal", right. Perhaps we can work our way to the top of the heap, and then we ourselves might even benefit from such "normal" ways of ruling?

We live with a spirit of competition, but that's "normal" for life, right. Where would our world be without so-called "healthy" competition? Competition is ever present with us. We all compete for the good things; we all strive to get more money, more wealth, more possessions. Some having a great deal and others

having almost nothing ... that's also "normal" for our world.

And people fighting and arguing, and marriages breaking up by the millions, that's also "normal". We have locks and security services and armed guards and ways to protect our possessions from theft, but that's "normal" for our world today. We have extortion and sex trafficking and identity theft, but that's also a "normal" part of life today. We have countries which are constantly trying to get the better of other countries ... but that's the way it's always been. So what's the problem with that?

We have delinquent children and teenage pregnancies and drug addicts, but that's not new, is it? That's always been "normal" for human societies. Our entertainment glorifies the ways of opposition to God in heaven. But that too has always been "normal".

We live in a sick, sick world, and we don't know any better. All we know is: the way to cope is for us to get a job and to earn money. If we just have enough money, then we can sort out all these other problems. **In our world money is the answer to every problem**. As long as we can just have enough money, we'll be okay.

But **from God's point of view** the "normal" human existence since Adam and Eve sinned has been **nothing other than tribulation and stress and affliction and suffering and pain and violence and fear**. Compared to the human existence which God had planned until Adam sinned, human lives have been wretched and miserable. This world has endured 6,000 years of tribulation, much of it severe tribulation.

Can we understand this?

So when "the elder" said that this great multitude "came out of great tribulation", then he was simply saying: these are all the people who have lived from the end of the flood at Noah's time up to the end of Jesus Christ's 1,100 years of ruling, who were neither a part of the 144,000 in the first resurrection, nor were they a part of the group that was destroyed in the lake of fire.

In other words, these are **all the people who have lived since the flood, and who willingly and unconditionally submitted their lives to God**, except for the 144,000 in the first resurrection. **This multitude** is made up of **two groups**: first there are all the people who lived during the millennium and who did not take part in Satan's rebellion when Satan was loosed at the end of the 1,000 years. And secondly there are all the people from the second resurrection who willingly repented and accepted God's offer of salvation. Together these two groups will very likely number into the billions of people. That will indeed be a very great multitude.

They will be "the junior members in the Family of God". They will not be given leadership positions within God's Family, and they were not trained and tested for leadership characteristics. **They will be given salvation**, the privilege to live for all future eternity in a family relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ and with all those in the first resurrection. It will be a happy and joyous existence.

What all the people in this great multitude have done is stated by "the elder" as follows: "They have **washed their robes**, and made them white **in the blood of the Lamb**".

"They washed their robes" means that **they came to a real repentance**; they really changed away from the way their minds had worked from early childhood onwards. And they emphatically rejected Satan's spirit of fear.

"They made their robes white in the blood of Jesus Christ" means that **they had all their sins forgiven**. Upon repentance the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was applied to each one of them individually, and all their

guilty past had been forgiven. Those are the two requirements for someone to become a regular member of the Family of God.

It is compared to this specific group in the Family of God that the first resurrection is called "a better resurrection" (see Hebrews 11:35).

In verse 14 we are told what the people in this multitude had done ... they had repented, and their sins had been forgiven. The next verse then presents **the consequences** of those actions.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and **serve Him day and night in His temple**: and He that sits on the throne shall **dwell among them**. (Revelation 7:15)

This verse expresses what will happen in general terms. For a start, let's keep in mind that in the New Jerusalem there will be **no day/night cycle**. As Revelation 22:5 tells us:

And **there shall be no night there**; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for **the Lord God gives them light**: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Revelation 22:5)

So the expression "day and night" in Revelation 7:15 is just a figure of speech to mean "all the time". Next, we are also told that there will not be any temple in the New Jerusalem.

And **I saw no temple therein**: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Revelation 21:22)

So the expression serving God "day and night in His temple" refers to serving God in the location in the New Jerusalem where God happens to be. God will not be in some kind of building, but **in the open** where all will be able to see God.

Let's also look at Revelation 21:3.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, **the tabernacle of God *is* with men**, and **He will dwell with them**, and they shall be **His people**, and God Himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. (Revelation 21:3)

When it says that "the tabernacle of God is with men" it means that "**the dwelling of God** is with men" (i.e. with men changed into spirit-born sons of God). The focus here is not on some kind of building, but on **God living amongst His children**. Exactly what that will look like is, I suspect, above our level of comprehension at this point in time.

The focus is on God providing a very enjoyable and happy existence for all His children. There will never again be any "death or sorrow or crying", crying being an expression of grief. See Revelation 21:4.

So yes, the people in that great multitude will always be serving God the Father and Jesus Christ. And God will provide for all their needs and see to it that all His children will enjoy their existence immensely. See Psalm 16:11.

That is also what the last two verses in chapter 7 focus on.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Revelation 7:16-17)

These verses hearken back to the "great tribulation" they have come out of, i.e. their original physical lives, specifically those people amongst them who are from the second resurrection.

These verses state that **all their needs will be provided for**. Nothing about this group speaks about "thrones" or "ruling". It only speaks about them being taken care of in every way. And they are pictured "standing". For spirit beings it is not a matter of "standing" somehow being more tiring than "sitting". From a well-being point of view, for spirit beings there is no difference between sitting and standing. When spirit beings "sit" they are shown in ruling capacities, like the 24 "elders" around the throne of God, and like the 144,000 in the first resurrection. Where this great multitude is shown "standing", it shows that they don’t occupy any leadership positions within the Family of God.

And that about covers chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation. The 144,000 refer to all those who will be in the first resurrection, and they are the same people who make up the 144,000 in Revelation 14. The great multitude represents all those in the Family of God who will come from the millennium and from the 100-year period for those in the second resurrection.

Now you need to read the companion article "The Sealing Of The Spirit In Man".

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