

Chapter II

The 144,000 and the Numberless Multitude

“Even on my *servants*, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”

– Joel 2:29, italics mine

Who Are They?

Ever since John penned the book of Revelation in A.D. 95, Bible students have debated and discussed questions about the 144,000. Who are they? What is their purpose? When will they appear? How will they be recognized? Where will they appear? Why are they numbered? Why is their Jewish lineage important? Before we examine these and other questions, carefully review the first eight verses of Revelation 7:

“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. 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, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. 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 Juda 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 Aser were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Manasses 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 Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.”

(Revelation 7:1-8, KJV)

You may notice, after reviewing the twelve tribes listed in Revelation 7:5-8, that the tribe of Dan is missing and the tribe of Ephraim is renamed. (The tribe of Joseph is another name for the tribe of Ephraim.) These nuances reflect certain developments that occurred during the history of ancient Israel.

Israel (also known as Jacob) and his family moved into Egypt because of the famine in Canaan (Genesis 46). He happily reunited with his “long lost son,” Joseph, and he adopted Joseph’s two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own. (Genesis 48:5) This adoption elevated the two grandsons of Israel to a position that was equal with their eleven uncles. Eventually, Ephraim and Manasseh became leaders of tribes bearing their names. (Joshua 14:4; Numbers 1 and 26.) This development explains why, at the time of the Exodus, the actual number of tribes that departed Egypt totaled thirteen, but they were formally counted as twelve. (Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 33)

When Moses ascended Mount Sinai to meet with God for forty days, many Israelites fell into idolatry while Moses was gone by worshipping the golden calf which Aaron built. When Moses returned to the camp, he called for volunteers to kill the defiant idolaters. The Levites immediately stepped forward and they killed about 3,000 of their kinfolk. When the Lord saw the Levites were willing to kill their kindred to honor His covenant, He exalted the Levites above the other tribes by making them His priests. (Exodus 32:25-29; Deuteronomy 33:8-11) This may sound strange, but when God exalted the Levites as priests, He eliminated their inheritance. The Levites were not given a share of the promised land. Instead, God gave the Levites a portion of the bounty from the land – the tithes and offerings¹ that would be forthcoming. (Numbers 18:20-24)

Points to Ponder

The tribe of Dan is not included in the list of tribes in Revelation 7. Evidently, this tribe was destroyed. Although the Bible does not explain

¹ God’s wisdom is both elegant and astonishing. By giving the Levites the tithes and offerings, the Lord made the Levites *dependent* on Israel’s faithfulness to Him. If the Levites stayed close to God and were faithful to their high calling of teaching and nurturing His people in the way they should go, the nation of Israel would prosper and there would be sufficient tithes and offerings to care for the whole tribe of Levi! On the other hand, if the Levites failed to “nurture the body of Christ” in word and deed, idolatry and rebellion would follow and the end result was that the Levites would be the first to suffer from national apostasy. (Deuteronomy 28)

the disappearance of the tribe of Dan, certainly, the 144,000 will come from *all* the tribes of Israel. **“Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from *all* the tribes of Israel.”** (Italics mine) Since Dan is not listed, we have to conclude that Dan became extinct. Dan occupied the northern part of Canaan which was the “wild frontier” in those days. (Joshua 19:40-47) Because Dan would have been the first to encounter hostile armies coming down from the north, the exposure may have contributed to this tribe’s demise. Dan’s geographical position in the promised land became a colloquialism. The northern and southern boundaries of Israel were frequently described with the words, “from Dan to Beersheba.” (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 1 Kings 4:25)

The inclusion of the tribe of Levi in Revelation 7 is significant for two reasons. First, this is the only place in the Bible where the Levites are numbered as one of the twelve tribes after the death of Moses. (Deuteronomy 33) Second, even though the tribe of Levi was exalted above the other tribes in ancient times, they *are not* exalted above the other tribes when it comes to the sealing of the 144,000. There will be as many Benjamites as Levites. The demotion of the Levites is explained by the apostle Paul in Hebrews 7 when he explains that God abolished the Levitical priesthood due to the implementation of a new covenant.

One final point in this section should be noticed. Revelation 7:5-8 indicates that when the sealing of the 144,000 occurs, each tribe is larger than 12,000 people. For example, the Bible says, **“Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand.”** The existence of each tribe will prove to be interesting later in this study because, currently, no one knows the identity or whereabouts of the twelve tribes. Fire destroyed the genealogical records of Israel in A.D. 70 when the Roman general, Titus, destroyed Jerusalem. In light of the language used in Revelation 7, the absence of genealogical records is interesting because the identity of the twelve tribes is known only to God at the present time. Of course, the twelve tribes have to exist at the time of the end because 12,000 will be selected and sealed from each tribe.

Who Are the 144,000?

Because the book of Daniel has been unsealed, we have four valid rules of interpretation. Because we have the rules, the identity, mission and timing of the 144,000 can be determined. Since Rule Two of apocalyptic prophecy requires that all specifications be met in order to produce a fulfillment, please review the following specifications concerning the 144,000. A discussion about each specification will follow:

1. John calls the 144,000, “servants,” “servants the prophets,” and

“servants of God” in the book of Revelation. (Revelation 6:11, 7:3, 10:7, 19:2)

2. The four angels do not hurt Earth until the 144,000 are sealed. (Revelation 7:3)
3. The 144,000 will be the first to receive the seal of God. (Revelation 7:3) They will be presented to God as the *firstfruits* of the Great Tribulation. They will not be defiled with women and they will travel with Jesus wherever He goes. (Revelation 14:4)
4. Unlike the *numberless* multitude who will come out of the Great Tribulation, the 144,000 will be *numbered*. (Revelation 7:5-8, 9, 14)
5. The 144,000 will experience and endure the sufferings of Christ. They will be honored above the rest of the redeemed. No one else will be able to sing their song. (Revelation 14:1, 3)
6. No lie or falsehood will be found in the mouths of the 144,000. (Revelation 14:5)
7. The 144,000 will visibly wear the names of the Father and Son on their foreheads throughout eternity. (Revelation 14:1; Revelation 22:3, 4)
8. The 144,000 will be Jews, descendants of Abraham. (Revelation 7:5-8)

Now that these eight specifications have been summarized, a few remarks about each one may prove to be helpful.

Specification #1 – Are the 144,000 “Servants the Prophets?”

John calls the 144,000, “servants,” “servants the prophets,” and “servants of God” in the book of Revelation. (Revelation 6:11, 7:3, 10:7, 19:2) Observe John’s use of language in the following texts (For the sake of clarity, I have inserted a few words in these verses and enclosed them in brackets, but especially notice the words I have emphasized with bold print.):

1. **Fifth Seal: Revelation 6:11** “Then each of them [the martyrs] was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow **servants** and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”
2. **The Delay: Revelation 7:3, 4** “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the **servants** of our God. Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: **144,000** from all the tribes of Israel.”
3. **The Seventh Trumpet: Revelation 10:7, 11:15, 18** “But in the

days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to **his servants the prophets**. . . . The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever. . . .’ The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging [avenging the blood of] the dead [martyrs], and for rewarding your **servants the prophets** and **your saints** and those who reverence your name, both small and great – and for destroying those who destroy the Earth.”

4. **The Third Bowl: Revelation 16:4-6** “The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your **saints** and **prophets** [the martyrs], and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’”

John Distinguishes between Prophets and Saints

If we compare these four passages to one another, we find that John consistently distinguishes between God’s servants and God’s saints. For example, in the first text, Revelation 6:11, John distinguishes between “servants” and “brothers.” Since the fifth seal occurs during the latter part of the Great Tribulation we have to ask, “What ‘servants’ of God will be slain during the Great Tribulation? Could the “servants” in Revelation 6:11 be the 144,000 “servants” mentioned in Revelation 7:3? Yes! Here is why:

In the fourth text, Revelation 16:4-6, John distinguishes between “saints” and “prophets.” This particular text forces a distinctive wedge between a group of people called “saints” and a group of people called “prophets” because of timing. We know that the third bowl will be poured out in the final days of the Great Tribulation (during the seven last plagues). The Bible says the third bowl will be specifically directed to those who shed the blood of “saints” and “prophets.” The book of Revelation identifies the prophets who are killed by the people who receive the third plague. The 144,000 “servants” in Revelation 7:3 are the “prophets” slain in Revelation 16:4-6. Notice how this connection is made.

The third text says that just before the seventh trumpet sounds, “The mystery of God will be accomplished just as He announced to His *servants* the prophets.” What *prophets* will be informed about “the

mystery of God” prior to the sounding of the seventh trumpet? Could the *servants the prophets* in Revelation 10:7 be the 144,000 *servants* mentioned in Revelation 7:3? The internal harmony within Revelation says, “Yes!” The 144,000 will be a distinct group of people who are separate and distinct from the numberless multitude who come out of the Great Tribulation.

Look again at the third text. When the seventh trumpet sounds in Revelation 11:18, loud voices in Heaven will urgently proclaim that the time has arrived for Jesus to avenge the killing of His “prophets” and “saints.” Once again John distinguishes between a group of people called prophets and a group of people called saints, and he indicates that people in both groups will suffer death during the Great Tribulation.

Therefore:

- When we consider John’s repetitive distinction between saints and prophets . . .
- When we consider the 144,000 will be called God’s “servants”. . .
- When we consider that many (if not all) of God’s prophets will die because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintain (martyrdom during the fifth seal) . . .
- When we consider that God’s mystery (announced to His servants the prophets) will be finished just before the seventh trumpet sounds . . .
- When we consider that God will avenge the death of His saints *and prophets* by giving blood thirsty murderers blood to drink during the time of the third bowl . . .
- When we combine these points, our understanding of 144,000 “servants” expands into 144,000 “servants the prophets.”

Before the Great Tribulation begins, God will select, empower, and seal 144,000 servants who will serve Him as prophets during the Great Tribulation. These people will speak for God. Because of religious arrogance and gross ignorance, most of these servants of God will suffer the fate of prophets in ages past. (Matthew 23:37)

A Job Title

Perhaps a larger selection of Bible texts will clarify why John differentiates between saints and prophets. The 144,000 are called “servants” in Revelation 7:3 because this word expresses their calling. The word “prophet” denotes their mission. When the two terms

“servants – the prophets” are brought together, the term becomes a job title. Please review the following texts (many more texts are in the Bible) and notice how the title, “servants *and* servants the prophets” is applied (I have emphasized certain words by putting them in bold text):

2 Kings 17:22, 23 “The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them until the Lord removed them from his presence, as he had **warned** through all his **servants the prophets**. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.”

Jeremiah 7:25, 26 “From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my **servants the prophets**. But they did not **listen** to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.”

Ezekiel 38:16, 17 “. . . In days to come, O Gog, I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘Are you not the one I **spoke** of in former days by my **servants the prophets** of Israel?’ ”

Daniel 9:6, 10 “[Oh Lord,] We have not **listened** to your **servants the prophets**, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. . . . we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his **servants the prophets**.”

Joel 2:28, 29 “And afterward, I will pour out **my Spirit** on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on **my servants**, both men and women, I will pour out **my Spirit** in those days.”

The Bible uses the title, “servants the prophets” nineteen times and in every case this title identifies special individuals whom God *selected* to speak on His behalf. Of course, the word “servants” can be used in a broader sense to mean subjects, slaves, employees and believers. (Genesis 24:34; 1 Corinthians 4:1) But the context in Revelation 7 indicates the 144,000 servants of God will not be ordinary servants. When we realize that God has delayed destroying the Earth until 144,000 servants are sealed, we know they will not be ordinary people!

Notice how the word “servants” is used within the context of Joel 2:28-31. The Lord told Joel, “**And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men**

will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my *servants*, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the Heavens and on the Earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The Sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Joel 2:30, 31, italics mine)

These verses pointed forward from Joel’s day to “the great and dreadful day of the Lord” that would have occurred after the expiration of the seventy weeks under “Plan A.” Because Israel rejected Christ, “Plan A” was abandoned and “Plan B” was implemented. Peter did not know that “Plan A” had been abandoned, so when the Holy Spirit was manifested at the Feast of Pentecost, he naturally thought the “last days” predicted by Joel had arrived and this is why he quoted from Joel 2. (See his remarks in Acts 2:15-21) Because Revelation 9 through 11 (Plan B) parallels Joel 2 (Plan A), we can be sure the Lord will pour out His Spirit on *all* people (all flesh, KJV) during the Great Tribulation. Furthermore, we can be sure that God will generously pour out His Spirit “*even on my servants, both men and women.*” Joel’s distinction between “all people” and God’s servants is important. In Revelation 7, John distinguished between a numbered group of servants and a numberless group of people. The phrase in Joel 2, “*even on my servants,*” emphasizes that God will not only pour out His Spirit on all people during the last days, but He will also elevate His servants *even* higher by giving them a greater measure of Holy Spirit power than His “servants” characteristically have had in ages past.

Summary

We close the first specification on the 144,000 with a summary deducted from the evidence examined thus far: Even though there is no way to determine who the twelve tribes of Israel are, we know the twelve tribes of Israel exist because God will select and seal 12,000 from each tribe before the four angels hurt Earth. As faithful *servants* of Jesus Christ, they will do everything their Master commands. As *prophets* of Jesus, they will deliver “the testimony of Jesus” during the Great Tribulation. (Revelation 1:9; 12:17; 19:10) The 144,000 will suffer enormously because of their words. Many, if not all, of the 144,000 will perish “because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintain.” (Revelation 6:9) John often distinguishes between God’s “servants the prophets” and ordinary saints because they are separate groups of people.

Specification #2 – Timing

After the 144,000 are sealed, the four winds of God's wrath will be released and the Great Tribulation will begin. According to the specifications of the fourth seal, the number of casualties will be 25% of Earth's population. Jesus will initiate the Great Tribulation with sudden and overwhelming destruction. (1 Thessalonians 5:3) *The punitive judgments in the fourth seal, the four winds of Revelation 7, and the first four trumpets harmoniously align.* (See Chart 11.1.) At this very moment, the only thing holding back the commencement of the Great Tribulation is a single command given to four angels! (Revelation 7:3)

Please review the following verses so you can thoughtfully consider the two questions that follow: **“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the Earth, holding back the four winds of the Earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels *who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.*”** (Revelation 7:1-4 Italics mine)

Question #1: Why do we need to know about this delay?

Question #2: Will the sealing of the 144,000 be determined by character or by timing? In other words, will Jesus wait for 144,000 people to become sanctified and “pure in heart” before He seals them or will Jesus wait for the appointed time to arrive to select 144,000 people and seal them?

Question #1 Examined

The delay in Revelation 7 is foretold because the final generation needs to know that God's wrath is overdue *before* it is released. This fact helps us understand the events recorded in Revelation 8:3-5. In other words, God's patience with sin and sinners expires *before* the 144,000 are sealed. This is why the four angels are empowered and sent to Earth, but told to wait until He has sealed the 144,000. The phrase, “the four winds of Earth,” is a word picture of global destruction and upheaval. The release of the four winds (coming from the north, east, west and south) implies powerful, but unseen forces that will chaotically scatter and sweep away all that the human race has built. Consider the following brief scenario which will be presented in greater detail in the next chapter of this book:

The Bible says there are seven angels that stand before God. (Revelation 8:2) These exalted angels are ready to carry out any command that proceeds from the throne. I understand that these seven angels were given seven trumpets in the Spring of 1994 because Earth’s cup of iniquity became full at that time. Four of the seven angels have been sent to Earth to harm this planet because God’s patience with Earth has ended. Before the angels could harm the land, sea and trees, Jesus restrained them with a command. The Lord put these four angels on hold until His 144,000 servants are sealed. Again, the last generation needs to know that **God’s wrath is overdue** and Jesus has put global destruction on hold until the time comes for 144,000 servants to be sealed. Please examine Chart 11.1.

The Matrix Aligns Revelation 6:7-9, Revelation 7:1-8, Revelation 8:2-7

Chart 11.1

Time	1994	Today	?	Great Tribulation – 1,335 Days				Second Coming
First Four Trumpets				XXXX				6,000 Years of Sin Ends
Global Earthquake			X					
Angels Given Seven Trumpets	X	-- Waiting --						
Four Winds Released			X					
144,000 Sealed			X	The Time of Wrath				
Fourth Seal			X					

Years ago, I heard Evangelist Billy Graham make a comment that went something like this, “If God does not do something soon about the degeneracy of the United States, He will owe Sodom and Gomorrah an apology.” Dr. Graham was right. The only reason that Jesus has not done something about Earth’s degeneracy is *timing*. Jesus imposed a short delay in Revelation 7:3 and the inhabitants of Earth have been living on borrowed time since 1994.

Question #2 Examined

Will the sealing of the 144,000 be determined by character or by timing? In other words, has Jesus been waiting for 144,000 people to become sinless so that they can be sealed, or is Jesus waiting for the appointed time to arrive to select and seal 144,000 people?

The answer to Question #2 is timing. Jesus is waiting for the appointed time to arrive before selecting and sealing 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. (Revelation 7:4) Contrary to what some denominations teach, Jesus is not waiting on 144,000 people to become sinless so they can be sealed. If Jesus was waiting for 144,000 people to become sinless, a person could argue the Great Tribulation will never start because a sinner cannot become sinless. A sinner may go for a period of time without sinning, but this does not make him sinless! *Once a sinner, forever a sinner!* This is why Adam and Eve had to be cast out of the Garden of Eden. Because we have carnal natures, we are sinful within. We cannot remove our carnal natures. At best, we can subdue our carnal desires through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 7-8), and millions of people have experienced victory over their carnal natures for centuries. Jesus could have sealed 144,000 people centuries ago if He had wanted, because at any given time there are enough people on Earth who love the Lord with all their hearts, minds, and souls, to accomplish all the Lord wants to do. Remember how Elijah thought that he *alone* had been faithful to the Lord during Israel's apostasy and the Lord politely informed the beleaguered prophet that He had seven thousand people in Israel who had not worshiped Baal? (1 Kings 19:18)

We have already noticed that when the sealing occurs, each tribe in Israel will be larger than 12,000 people. In other words, when the time comes for sealing, Jesus will have more than 12,000 people in each tribe from which to choose! This proves that Jesus is not waiting on 144,000 people to become sinless. At the appointed time, He will choose the best from each tribe (as firstfruits) to be His servants. These loyal servants will answer His call and endure the trials and tribulations of being His prophets.

Bottom line: Jesus is waiting for the *appointed time* of the end to arrive (Daniel 8:19); the time set by the Father. (Acts 1:7) When we approach the day that is 1,335 days from the end of the sixth millennium of sin, the 144,000 will be selected and sealed. Then, the delay imposed in Revelation 7:3 will end – right on time. God's judgments will begin on time. Jesus is waiting on the "Grand-Father's" clock to chime and when it does, He will declare the delay is over (Revelation 10:6) and the four winds of His wrath will be released. Before we leave Question #2, please consider the following points:

Parallels to Consider

According to Rule One of apocalyptic prophecy, each apocalyptic prophecy has a beginning point and ending point in time. The sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:1-8:1 follows Rule One. For centuries, Bible students have asked, **when** does Revelation 7:1-4 occur? Please examine these two texts and notice that in each case, four angels are involved (bold text and insertions mine):

Revelation 7:1 “After this I saw **four angels** standing at the four corners of the Earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.”

Revelation 9:14,15 “It [the voice from the Altar of Incense] said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release **the four angels** who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ And the four angels who had been kept ready for **this very hour and day and month and year** were released to kill a third of mankind.”

These texts identify two groups of angels. The first text (Revelation 7) describes four angels sent from God’s throne to harm Earth. The second text (Revelation 9) describes four angels (actually four fallen angels, e.g., demons) who will be let out of the abyss during the fifth trumpet. During the sixth trumpet, the four demons in the second text will be released at a *specific hour* to kill a third of mankind. (Review the bold faced words in the text.) Since the four demons in Revelation 9 are held back until the appointed hour, day, month and year arrives, the four angels in Revelation 7 are waiting for an *exact hour, day, month and year* to do their work. With God, timing is everything.

God’s four angels and Lucifer’s four angels will be allowed to kill the *same number* of people during the Great Tribulation. Look at the math: After the fourth seal is broken, 25% of Earth’s population will die. In round numbers, currently Earth’s population is about six billion people. Twenty-five percent of Earth’s population would be 1.5 billion people. So, Earth’s population will be reduced to 4.5 billion people by the destruction of the first four trumpets. When the sixth trumpet sounds (890 days later), one-third of mankind will be killed by Lucifer’s four angels. One third of 4.5 billion people is another 1.5 billion people! The net result is that both groups of angels kill the *same number* of people. This balance is not a mere coincidence. God has deliberately and purposefully determined the properties of the Great Tribulation.

God has predetermined that the battle for the hearts and souls of mankind will be a “fair fight.” If the devil was given complete control of

Earth, he would destroy the whole world in a single day. Therefore, the devil will be restrained at each step of the way because God insists that the survivors must remain free to exercise their power of choice. The Great Tribulation will be a powerful vortex that will force the living into *choosing* whom they will honor and obey. This is why worship will surface as the all important issue during the Great Tribulation. When the people of Earth see the overwhelming death and destruction caused by God's wrath, the topic of worship will become highly important, because worship will be viewed as the prerequisite means to appease God so that His anger will cease. Desperate circumstances will force the survivors into making a tough decision about whom they will obey. The consequences either way will be very difficult. This vortex explains why the Great Tribulation is called, "a time of wrath." (Daniel 8:19; 11:36; Revelation 15:1)

It is interesting to discover that during the Great Tribulation, whatever Jesus is allowed to do, the devil is allowed to do. Jesus will have 144,000 *servants* speaking for Him and the devil will have thousands of religious and political authorities speaking for him. Evil can neither conquer good, nor can good destroy evil *until* Jesus arrives. Jesus wants the people of Earth to make an informed and intelligent decision as to whom they will obey. (Matthew 24:14) This is why He seals 144,000 prophets *before* the Great Tribulation begins. The world will hear the testimony of Jesus through the mouths of His servants the prophets.

When we study the fifth trumpet in the next chapter, we will see another incredible balance: At the end of the 1,335 days (Daniel 12:12) allotted for the Great Tribulation, Jesus will physically appear in clouds of glory to gather up His children. To be fair, 890 days into the Great Tribulation, the devil will be granted the privilege of appearing in clouds of glory. He will masquerade as Jesus, pretending to establish a kingdom of peace on Earth for 1,000 years! (Revelation 9:1-11) These matters are introduced at this point because you need to be aware that the forces for good and for evil will remain "balanced" until all people on Earth have exercised their power of choice. When the last person on Earth makes his decision, Jesus will declare this verdict, "**Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.**" (Revelation 22:11, 12)

The Delay Terminated

I believe the Sabbath millennium described in Revelation 20 will begin on time because God’s Sabbaths are never early or late. When Earth reaches a day that is 1,335 days from the end of the sixth thousand years of sin, the Great Tribulation will begin. At this time, no one knows precisely where the sixth thousandth year is, but we cannot be very far from it.

Counting 1,335 Days Backward from 6,000th Year

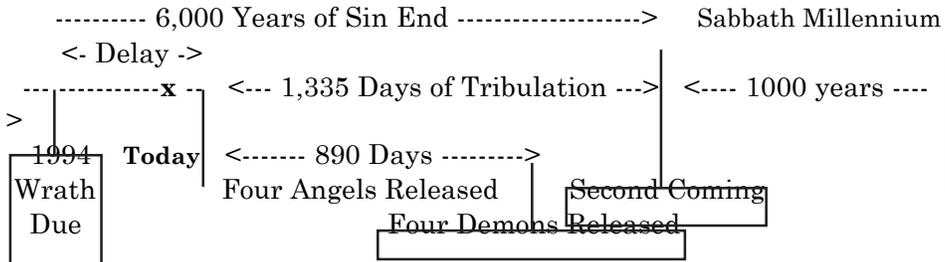


Chart 11.2

When the appointed day arrives, the four angels in Revelation 7:1-4 will be released to do their harm. This release is described in Revelation 10. **“Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to Heaven. And He swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, who created the Heavens and all that is in them, the Earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, ‘There will be no more delay!’ ”** (Revelation 10:5, 6) Just before the delay is terminated, Jesus will seal 144,000 servants. Then, He will announce the end of the delay in a thunderous voice. (In fact, this announcement will be the first of seven thunders which the 144,000 will hear and understand. See John 12:28-30.)

Jesus imposed a delay in Revelation 7:3 and Jesus will terminate the delay when He declares **“There will be no more delay!”** Until Jesus grants permission, the four angels cannot harm Earth. After Jesus declares there will be no more delay, no one will be able to turn the hands of God’s clock back or stop the arrival of His oncoming judgments. God’s wrath is overdue, but the 1,335 days necessary to conclude the 6,000th year have not arrived. Please examine Chart 11.3 and notice the vertical alignment of three prophecies.

Revelation’s Matrix Grows

	1798	1844	1994	Today	Great Tribulation	1,000 Years	White Throne
Prophecy #3 Six Trumpets					x1234 5 6		
Prophecy #2 144,000			A	Waiting	1,335 Days	B	C
Prophecy #1 Six Seals	1 2	3			4 5 6		

Chart 11.3

Prophecy #1 Revelation 4:1-6:17: The worthiness of Jesus and the six seals

- 1st seal = Salvation through faith in Jesus alone
- 2nd seal = Translation and distribution of the Bible
- 3rd seal = The judgment bar of Christ begins
- 4th seal = Great Tribulation begins
- 5th seal = Martyrdom of prophets and saints
- 6th seal = Second Coming

Prophecy #2 Revelation 7:1-8:1: The 144,000, the numberless multitude, the seventh seal

- A = Four angels of God given power to harm Earth
- Waiting = Currently we are waiting for the arrival of the appointed day to seal the 144,000
- B = The numberless multitude standing around the throne after the Second Coming
- C = Seventh seal broken at the end of the millennium

Prophecy #3 Revelation 8:2-9:21: The six trumpets

- x = Global Earthquake
- 1st trumpet = Fiery hailstorms
- 2nd trumpet = Asteroid impact on an ocean
- 3rd trumpet = Asteroid impact on a continent
- 4th trumpet = Ring of Fire erupts – volcano ejecta causes darkness
- 5th trumpet = Lucifer appears
- 6th trumpet = Lucifer’s four angels kill one-third of mankind

Specification # 3 – The Sealing

We will examine three specifications of the 144,000 in this segment. First, the 144,000 will be presented to the Father and the Lamb as firstfruits of Earth's harvest. (Revelation 14:4) Second, the 144,000 will not be defiled by women. (Revelation 14:4) Third, the 144,000 will be the first ever to receive the seal of God. (Revelation 7:3) With these three specifications in mind, let us take a look.

No one has yet received the "seal of God" described in Revelation 7, because the 144,000 will be the *first* to receive it. Two statements in the book of Revelation highlight this point. First, the four angels are told to hold back the four winds of the Great Tribulation until the 144,000 are sealed. (Revelation 7:3) In other words, when 144,000 people have been sealed, the fourth seal will be broken and the Great Tribulation will begin! Second, Revelation 14:4 says the 144,000 will be presented to God and the Lamb as firstfruits of Earth's harvest. Because the 144,000 will be the firstfruits of Earth's harvest, and because God's wrath is not released until they are sealed, they have to be the first people ever to receive the seal of God. The seal of God and the sealing of the 144,000 is an "iceberg" topic – one third of it is above surface and two-thirds are below the surface. With this in mind, let us dive under the surface and examine some controversial issues.

The Judgment of the Living

In Chapter 4 of this book, we examined the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 and the cleansing of Heaven's temple. In Chapter 10 we examined the relationship between the third seal and 1844. We have already touched on the essential doctrines of "soul sleep" and God's use of "parallel temples." A synthesis of these matters indicates that the judgment bar of Christ began in the Spring of 1844. At that time, Jesus began reviewing the records of the dead which had been "sealed" by death. Because man's power of choice is terminated at death, death permanently "seals" the life's record of those who die. This is why Hebrews 4:7 says, ". . . **Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.**"

Unlike the *sealed* records of the dead, the judgment of the living presents an interesting challenge. How can Jesus pass eternal judgment on a person who still has the power of choice and the freedom to change his mind? At the risk of being repetitive, here is a short response to this question. One day I was discussing this subject with some friends when one of them said, "Since God already knows our hearts, why does He not judge us on the basis of what He knows about us? If He judged us this

way, there would be no need for testing the people of Earth with torment and persecution during the Great Tribulation.” I responded, “Suppose Jesus were to do as you have suggested. Suppose at the judgment you discover that you are standing among the wicked, outside the holy city. When you realize that you are about to perish by fire, you cry out to the Lord saying, ‘Lord, I did not do anything to deserve burning in hell!’ The Lord responds, ‘My child, I know you did nothing to deserve this, but I knew that you would have if given the chance.’” Then I asked, “Do you want to be judged on the basis of *your* choices or do you want to be judged on the basis of God’s *foreknowledge*?” After a few smiles, the story surrounding the book sealed with seven seals suddenly made a lot of sense.

Four Purposes for Seals

In Bible times, seals were used for four purposes. (If possible, look up the following references.) Seals have been used to certify the authenticity of a document or transaction. (Esther 8:8, Jeremiah 32:10) Seals were used to prevent tampering or change. (Daniel 6:17; Matthew 27:65, 66) Seals were used to show approval and ownership. (John 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22) Last, seals were used as locks to secure property or secrets. (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 5:1) When the Bible speaks of sealing the 144,000, all four uses will apply! Notice how the sequence unfolds:

The *first* people to stand before the judgment bar of Jesus *while alive* will be the 144,000. They will be selected *from* the twelve tribes of Israel and they will be tested, judged, *mysteriously* transformed, and securely “sealed” with sinless natures just before the four winds are released. The “seal of God” on the foreheads of the 144,000 means, (a) they have been tested and judged, (b) their carnal natures have been removed, (c) they are free of any attraction to sin, and (d) they are bond servants of the Father and the Lamb. We will examine this four-step process in a moment. For now, we need to understand why the 144,000 are called “firstfruits.”

Firstfruits of the Harvest

The word “firstfruits” would speak volumes if you lived in Bible times. Basically, firstfruits were used as a tithe, a gift of 10% or more based on net increase. Presenting firstfruits to the Lord was to be both a gift of appreciation and an adventure in anticipation. God required the offering of firstfruits to challenge the creeping selfishness of man’s carnal heart. By requiring man to “give up” the first and best part of any increase, firstfruits were designed to frustrate man’s relentless preoccupation with acquiring wealth – just as God’s seventh day Sabbath was designed to

frustrate man's insatiable need for more time to do all that he wants to do. Even more, this gift was designed to develop faith in God through anticipation. Notice how this was supposed to work: If a farmer was about to harvest a wheat crop, he was to search through his field and select the finest stalks that matured *first* and present them to the high priest at the temple. The gift of firstfruits was to be given with gratitude for God's sustaining providence and the gift was supposed to represent a tithe of what the farmer *hoped* his new crop would produce. In other words, God designed the giving of firstfruits to be a remarkable experience, not a regular tax. Firstfruits included the first increase from wool, animals, crops and money – any type of increase.

The word "firstfruits" offers several object lessons. The quantity of firstfruits indicated the amount of increase "hoped for." When Paul wrote, "**Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.**" (Hebrews 11:1), Paul may have used the anticipation that went with gathering firstfruits to frame his remarks. A few verses later, he wrote, "**And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**" (Hebrews 11:6) Faith really defines the practice of giving firstfruits to God. The difference between paying a tax and giving firstfruits is gratitude. Tax is a necessary obligation. The giving of firstfruits was supposed to be accompanied with an attitude of gratitude, and embedded in the experience was a financial anticipation. (Unfortunately, Israel did not understand God's purpose for firstfruits and over the years it became regarded as a tax.)

The 144,000 are called firstfruits in Revelation 14:4 for two reasons. **First**, the 144,000 will be the firstfruits of the coming harvest to be sealed. Later on, the individuals who hear their testimony during the Great Tribulation and pass the test of faith will also be sealed as the 144,000 were sealed. **Second**, the 144,000 are called firstfruits because they are a sample of what follows. If barley was presented as a firstfruits offering, the harvest that followed would, of course, be barley. The 144,000 and the numberless multitude that come after them will be identical in composition. These matters will prove to be extremely important when we examine the Jewish heritage of the 144,000 and the great multitude in Specification #8. One last comment – when the firstfruits were presented to the High Priest, they became his property. The parallel is that when the 144,000 are presented to God and Jesus, our High Priest, they will belong to the Father and the Son. As a result, they will be highly exalted and they will follow the Lamb wherever He goes throughout eternity.

Jewish Virgins?

“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure . . .” (Revelation 14:4) Many people read these words and conclude the 144,000 will be sexually pure. Of course, they will be sexually pure, but so will everyone else who enters into the holy city! **“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”** (Revelation 21:8, italics mine)

Some people read the phrase, “[they] **did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure**” and conclude the 144,000 will be male virgins. Are women inherently defiling? Of course not! The Bible says the sexual experience between a man and woman within the confines of marriage is neither defiling nor immoral. (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 7:5; Hebrews 13:4) Other people say the 144,000 will be Jewish males that have not been sexually immoral with women. Look again! This text does not imply the 144,000 will be males! Women can defile themselves with women! (Compare Leviticus 18:22 with Romans 1:26.) Certain groups of Christians interpret this verse to mean the 144,000 will be members of *their* particular church – which, they believe, is the only church on Earth possessing the truth about God. This conclusion is based on a faulty understanding of the harlot’s identity in Revelation 17:5. The Bible says, **“This title was written on her [the harlot’s] forehead: Mystery Babylon the Great the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth.”** (insertion and italics mine) Several Protestant churches believe (or used to believe) the Roman Catholic Church is the great harlot of Revelation. As such, this makes the Catholic Church “the mother of prostitutes,” that is, the mother of apostate Protestantism. Of course, the irony of this view is that advocates are convinced their church is not a daughter of “the harlot.” Therefore, they conclude the 144,000 must originate from within their church, which they believe is the only *remaining true* church on Earth! As you can see, this view is completely consistent with the egocentric nature of man’s religion. Every religious system claims to know God best. The arrogance and ignorance of religion is difficult to measure.

Beneath the surface, there is a much deeper meaning to the phrase, “[they] **did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.**” This phrase is not about sexual immorality; but rather, it is a phrase describing the devotion of the 144,000 to serve the Lord. Rule Three of apocalyptic prophecy says that we should examine parallel language in the Bible to determine the intended meaning of this

phrase. In so doing, we will find *this specification to be a superlative statement about the devotion of the 144,000 to the Lord*. With this thought in mind, please consider a few words about God’s original purpose and mission for the twelve tribes of Israel.

God’s Purpose and Mission for the Twelve Tribes

When the Lord called Israel out of Egypt, He said, **“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. . . .”** (Exodus 19:4-6, italics mine) A priest is someone God has appointed to stand between God and man. (Hebrews 5:1) Israel was to be a kingdom of priests showing fallen man the love and ways of God. This was God’s plan for Israel, but His plan never got off the ground. Seven hundred years after Israel left Egypt, the Lord pleaded with Israel, **“I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. [If you will love me and obey me, I will not destroy you.] I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, to open eyes that are blind [to truth], to free captives from prison [of sin] and to release from the dungeon those who sit in [spiritual] darkness.”** (Isaiah 42:6, 7, insertions mine) These words fell on deaf ears and about a hundred years later, God exiled Israel to Babylon for apostasy. Seven hundred years after the exile, the apostle Paul elegantly summarized God’s original purpose for the twelve tribes when he said: **“For this is what the Lord has commanded us [the twelve tribes of Israel]: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth.’”** (Acts 13:47, insertion mine) We can see from these texts that God’s plan for Israel did not materialize, and we know from Revelation 7 that 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes will yet accomplish God’s purpose and mission.

Now that we have briefly reviewed God’s purpose and mission for the twelve tribes of Israel, we should be able to understand God’s *motive and intent* when He declared the following law¹: **“Do not intermarry with**

¹ Genesis 6 indicates the flood in Noah’s day was brought about because of intermarriage. The Bible says, **“The sons of God [those faithful to God] saw that the daughters of [carnal and agnostic] men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.”** (Genesis 6:2, insertions mine) Ironically, the consequences of verse 2 necessitated the destruction described in verse 7.

them [the inhabitants of Canaan]. **Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, *for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.***” (Deuteronomy 7:3, 4, insertion and italics mine) God declared this law just before the twelve tribes entered the promised land. Bible history confirms that Israel essentially ignored this law from the start. Everyone who knows anything about the Old Testament has heard about Samson's love for Delilah who was a Philistine, and King Solomon is widely known as “the man” who had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Notice this text: **“King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, ‘You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.’ Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and *his wives led him astray.*”** (1 Kings 11:1-3, italics mine)

Foreign wives led Solomon astray, and in turn, King Solomon led Israel into apostasy. Consequently, it became impossible for God to produce a nation of priests because His people had no interest in accomplishing His objectives. Israel had abandoned God's agenda to satisfy its own agenda. About 200 years after Solomon died, God destroyed the ten northern tribes of Israel, and 100 years after that, He exiled the remaining two tribes to Babylon. Ironically, God's wrath against the nation did not terminate Israel's intermarriage with foreigners. During the seventy years of Babylonian captivity, Jewish captives continued to intermarry.

God forbade intermarriage, because He foreknew intermarriage with foreigners guaranteed Israel's departure from the purpose and mission for which they had been chosen. Notice how God's law against intermarriage has two sides: From God's perspective, His law would protect Israel from the wayward influence of husbands and wives who wanted to serve other gods. From Israel's perspective, the law was a detriment to the pursuit of happiness because it restricted dating and marriage. Who can reason with two young people in love that they should not marry because there is a law against it? The parents of Samson tried to reason with him, but they could not overcome his affection (or should I say, affliction) for Delilah. In short, this is the dilemma of the carnal nature. *God's laws are based on a comprehensive*

understanding of good and evil and His exalted purposes for us. Our rebellion against God is caused by a heart that is grossly selfish, and our failure to understand the grand purposes for which we were created.

In the first month of the Jubilee year of 457 B.C., Ezra, a trusted officer in King Artaxerxes' court, a priest of Israel and a teacher of the Law of the God of Heaven, asked the king to issue a decree permitting him to travel to Jerusalem and finish the reconstruction of the city and the temple. Ezra was devoted to God's service and he eagerly wanted to see his people fulfill God's will. After a lengthy trip, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and he was overwhelmed with the indifferent attitude of the people toward God and the degenerate condition of Israel. After surveying the situation for himself, Ezra called for the leaders. **“After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, ‘The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.’ When I heard this, I [Ezra] tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled.”** (Ezra 9:1-3, insertion mine)

“Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, ‘We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord [Ezra] and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. . . .’ Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, ‘You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel’s guilt. Now make confession to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives.’ The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: ‘You are right! We must do as you say.’ ” (Ezra 10:2, 3; 10-12, insertion mine)

Now that we have reviewed God's law about intermarriage, Israel's history of apostasy and Ezra's solution to intermarriage, we are in a good position to understand the meaning of the phrase, **“they did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.”** In

summary, the 144,000 will not be corrupted by marriage and they will not fall into apostasy because of their families. The 144,000 will successfully fulfill God's assignment. They will not be deterred by marital conflicts or familial rejection. They will not be compromised. They will fulfill the calling, mission and purpose for which God ordains them. Perhaps the following A/B parallels will clarify this matter:

- A. When the time came to resume temple services in Ezra's day, the priests had a choice of abandoning their foreign wives and children if they wanted to serve the Lord. As you might expect, this was very painful.
- B. When the call comes to be a servant of the Lord God during the Great Tribulation, the 144,000 will have a choice to abandon their unbelieving families to serve the Lord. This will be very painful.
- A. Corporately speaking, Israel never did become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," "a light to the Gentiles," or "preachers of salvation" because the leaders of Israel married foreign women who insisted on worshiping idols and offering sacrifices to other gods.
- B. As a group, the 144,000 will be scattered all over the world. Many of them will be married and their spouses may or may not love the Lord as they do. The phrase, "they did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure" means their spouses will not compromise the 144,000. Their devotion to God will be pure. The 144,000 will, like Abraham, be willing to slay their only son if God were to command it. This kind of devotion to God is *uncommon*. This is why the Bible exalts the 144,000 saying, "they kept themselves pure – as in pure devotion." If necessary, the 144,000 will abandon their families to serve God – and we can be sure that many of the 144,000 will be abandoned by their families for this reason. Jesus said, **"A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."**
(Matthew 10:36, 37)
- A. In ancient times, a man could voluntarily "bind" himself to his king by becoming a eunuch. (Isaiah 56:3) This rather severe and irreversible procedure arose for two practical reasons: First, the service of eunuchs was desirable to kings because eunuchs were not encumbered with wives and familial relationships that could interfere with their work. Eunuchs were at the disposal of their king at all times and they often held positions of significant authority.

(Acts 8:27) Second, kings knew that eunuchs could not produce an heir to their throne. Therefore, kings trusted eunuchs to oversee the most contentious and dangerous part of their kingdom, their harem. (Esther 2:3) Young men counted it an honor and a great privilege to give up their “right of manhood” if they could be adopted as “barren” sons of the king.

- B.** As firstfruits of the harvest, the 144,000 will become the property of Jesus our High Priest. In this sense, a person could say the 144,000 will be bound like eunuchs to King Jesus. The 144,000 will form a personal entourage that will attend Jesus wherever He goes. (Revelation 14:4) The 144,000 will be highly honored throughout eternity because, like their father Abraham, they exalted the call of God above everything else.

Remember, the subject of the 144,000 is an “iceberg” topic. On the surface, the phrase says the 144,000 will not be defiled by women, however, beneath the surface, there is a lot more to this phrase than avoiding sexual immorality. God’s 144,000 servants, (both men and women according to Joel 2), will be severely tested. Abraham was severely tested to see if he loved Isaac more than God. (Genesis 22:2; Hebrews 11:17) Moses was severely tested to see if he would be willing to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. (Hebrews 11:24, 25) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were severely tested to see whether they would obey God. (Daniel 3:16-18) Daniel was severely tested to see if he would continue to pray to God. (Daniel 6:10) Job was severely tested to see if his faith in God was nonnegotiable. (Job 23:10) Jesus was severely tested in the wilderness by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11) and He was tempted in every way as we are. (Hebrews 4:15) The 144,000 will be severely tested to see if their love for Jesus will endure humiliation and the scorn of rejection. Once they pass their fiery test, they will be *mysteriously* transformed within. This mysterious transformation requires some explanation.

The Mystery of God

“But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” (Revelation 10:7)

What is the mystery of God mentioned in Revelation 10:7? We know that it will be completed at the seventh trumpet, but when does it start? The mystery of God is the sealing and it begins with the 144,000 because “judgment begins at the house of God.” (1 Peter 4:17) The mystery of God will be a *mysterious* transformation that cannot be seen, but the

results will be seen. During the judgment of the living, the carnal nature will be removed from everyone who receives Jesus as their Savior and passes the test of faith. The 144,000 will be the first people to experience this amazing transformation. After they have been severely tested and transformed, God will place His seal on their foreheads indicating a secure and permanent transaction has occurred. Remember the four uses of seals in the Bible? The seal of God on the 144,000 indicates a *finished* transformation, a secured position. The 144,000 will be delivered from the attraction of sin. The sinless and bold behavior of the 144,000 will reflect this stunning transformation. They will speak the truth without regard to consequences. The Bible says, **“No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless!”** (Revelation 14:5) This is why the mystery of God (the transformation of man’s nature) cannot be seen, but the results will be seen and heard.

Consider the following scenario: Because the 144,000 are declared “firstfruits,” the judgment of the living will begin with the 144,000. After they are tested and judged, their carnal nature will be *mysteriously* and *miraculously* removed. Then, the 144,000 will be “sealed” with sinless natures – having no propensity or attraction toward rebellion against God. In fact, they will have a distinct repulsiveness toward sin. The 144,000 will be the first to receive what Adam and Eve lost when they sinned. The good news is that each person who receives the testimony of the 144,000 and passes the test of faith will also experience “the transforming mystery of God” and receive the seal of God!

After each person is sealed, the struggle with the carnal nature will be over! Sin will be repulsive and unnatural. Paul knew this transition was coming, even though he did not know exactly when. He wrote, **“. . .The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the [whole] house of Israel [the ten tribes that lived in the north] and with the house of Judah [the two tribes that lived in the south]. It will not be like the [bilateral] covenant I made with their forefathers [in Exodus 19] when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because [of their carnal hearts] they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from [rejected] them, declares the Lord. This is the [everlasting] covenant I will make with the house [twelve tribes] of Israel after that time [the years allotted for the duration of sin], declares the Lord. I will [transform their hearts and minds and] put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts [so there will be no rebellion toward me within their body]. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a**

man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all [personally] know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. By calling this covenant ‘new,’ He [God] has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.” (Hebrews 8:8-13, insertions mine)

Demonstration and Proclamation

The gospel of Jesus is more than words. The gospel of Jesus is a way of life and love. Jesus will use 144,000 servants to “show and tell” the world what He wants. From the human perspective, we will look at the 144,000 as bold people at first. These ordinary people will prove to be anything but ordinary after they begin their ministry. Their testimony and actions will be awesome because they will be transformed by God’s power. All the money in the world will not be able to buy the seal of God. Jesus will personally transform and seal one person at a time as they take hold of His promises and pass the test of faith. Jesus is a personal Savior, as well as our Judge, and every soul who embraces His teachings will experience His transforming touch.

The 144,000 will be “perfect” reflections of the love of Jesus. They will be perfect examples of what “Christ in you, the hope of glory” looks like. (Colossians 1:27) Every person who loves truth, regardless of religious background, will observe the humble and loving character of the 144,000. Of course, their truthful speech and blameless lives will offend and infuriate the wicked. Jesus warned His disciples, **“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.”** (John 15:20, 21, italics mine)

We have discussed how the 144,000 will be the first among the living to be judged and mysteriously transformed. We know the 144,000 will be “sealed” a few days *before* the Great Tribulation begins. After they are sealed, the four winds will be released – the judgments of God will begin to fall. Then, 144,000 prophets of God will boldly and fearlessly proclaim the terms and conditions for salvation to a world saturated with ignorance and blinded by religious arrogance. Without regard for the wishes of family members or personal safety, they will speak the Words of Jesus given to them by the Holy Spirit. No lie will be found in their mouths. The testimony of the 144,000 will alienate the religious and political leaders of Earth and all of the wicked. Civil authorities will

severely persecute the 144,000, because their “testimony” will be regarded as “inflammatory speech.” The 144,000 will receive the brunt of persecution and religious hatred, and so will those people who receive their testimony. Nevertheless, the whole world will hear “the testimony of Jesus” through His faithful “servants the prophets” and the end result is that everyone on Earth will be tested. Everyone on Earth will be put through this four step process:

1. Every nation, kindred, tongue and people will **hear** the terms and conditions of salvation through the testimony of the 144,000. Everyone will be informed that Jesus is the Creator and He **commands** respect and worship on His holy day.
2. Revelation 13 indicates the human race will respond to God’s wrath by creating a crisis government that will attempt to appease God by mandating worship. Because the laws and penalties enacted by the crisis government will directly conflict with the laws and penalties of God, everyone will be forced into a difficult choice. The people of Earth will be forced to **make a decision** – submit to Jesus’ authority and suffer Babylon’s persecution or submit to the authority of Babylon and the devil, and receive God’s seven last plagues *and* the loss of eternal life.
3. Everyone will suffer wrath. Those people who obey the laws of God will suffer first. Those who obey the laws of man will suffer greatest, but both groups will suffer. Everyone will be **tested with persecution because** persecution exposes our highest allegiance. If we love our lives more than we love God, persecution will expose this. If we love God more than life, persecution will expose this, too. Jesus said, **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”** (Matthew 16:25)
4. Everyone who submits to the authority of God and passes the test of faith **will be mysteriously transformed and sealed with the seal of the living God.** All the people who refuse to obey Jesus will have no choice but to **receive the mark of the beast.**

During the Great Tribulation, the gospel of Christ will be proclaimed with clarity and power. Everyone will make an informed and intelligent decision with regard to the gospel. The gospel of Christ demands submission to the King of kings. Many will submit, and twice as many will rebel. In short, the whole world will be put through a time of severe testing. (Revelation 3:10)

Paul's Comments about the Seal of God

The sealing of the firstfruits (144,000) and the numberless multitude that follows occurs during the appointed time of the end because the sealing “of the living” is the last phase in the judgment bar of Christ. In other words, after a person passes the test of faith, that person will be *mysteriously* transformed and sealed with the seal of God. When the last saint is sealed, “the mystery of God” will be completed – just before the seventh trumpet sounds. (Revelation 10:7)

A certain amount of knowledge existed during New Testament times about the sealing, but it was not experienced or put in its proper context. Paul writes about God's seal and “sealing” in various places and we need to examine Paul's views and comments so that his statements can be prophetically corrected and applied to our day. Before we examine Paul's comments on the seal of God, please review the following texts from the New Testament so that you can appreciate the first century A.D. mind set which Paul and the apostles had with respect to time and timing. (I have underlined certain words to emphasize key points.)

1. The apostle Peter thought he was living at the end of the world. Notice these verses. On the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, Peter stood and said, **“These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.’”** (Acts 2:15-17) **“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.”** (1 Peter 4:7)
2. The apostle James thought he was living at the end of the world. He wrote, **“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.”** (James 5:7, 8)
3. The apostle John thought he was living at the end of the world. He wrote, **“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour.”** (1 John 2:18)
4. The apostle Paul thought he was living at the end of the world. He wrote, **“What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none.”** (1 Corinthians 7:29)

5. Paul also wrote, **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.”** (Hebrews 1:1, 2) **“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”** (Hebrews 9:24-26, KJV) **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”** (Romans 13:12)

After reviewing these texts we find unanimous agreement among the apostles. They believed they were living at the end of the world. History also records that most, if not all of the apostles, had died or been put to death by the time John wrote the book of Revelation. My point is the apostles died without realizing their inaccurate knowledge of God’s timing. None of them knew the Second Coming would be 2,000 years into the future. Paul acknowledged this handicap saying, **“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.”** (1 Corinthians 13:9, 10)

The subject of the seal of God specifically applies to Paul’s statement, **“For we know in part and we prophesy in part. . . .”** Paul was martyred about thirty years before John wrote the book of Revelation. Paul knew certain things about the mysterious transformation and the sealing, but he did not know its timing. Therefore, Paul applied what he knew about the sealing in his day! In a similar way, after reading the book of Hebrews a person could say that Paul certainly knew about the ministry of Jesus in Heaven’s temple as our High Priest in the Most Holy Place. The problem though, is that Paul did not understand the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14, and he did not know about the time, times and half a time of the little horn power in Daniel 7:25. Simply stated, Paul had no idea that the twenty-first century A.D. would take place. Paul and the apostles understood many parts of God’s plan, but they could not know the timing or arrangement of these parts because the book of Daniel was sealed until the appointed time of the end. (Daniel 12:4, 9)

A Sealed Judgment

Consider the following three statements:

1. At the present time, we know the 144,000 have not been sealed because the Great Tribulation has not begun. We also know the 144,000 will be sealed before the saints are sealed because the 144,000 will be the firstfruits of the “end time harvest.”
2. We know that death seals the records of the dead because the dead cannot make any more choices, but the living have the power of choice and opportunities to make choices.
3. A testing time is not only coming, but it is also necessary. Jesus will test the living and seal people who love Him and *choose* to put their faith in Him. The sealing of the saints will occur during the Great Tribulation *after* they have successfully completed the four steps described earlier.

Given these three prophetic matters and Paul’s ignorance of them, we have to put Paul’s comments on the sealing within the context of what he believed. The same holds true with Peter on the day of Pentecost; we have to overlook some of Peter’s statements about timing. Please examine the following texts (I have inserted some phrases in brackets and emphasized key words with boldface type):

1. “Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are **the seal** [as in a validating seal – similar to the seal of a Notary Public] of my apostleship in the Lord.”
(I Corinthians 9:2, insertion mine)
2. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom **you were sealed** [marked as the property of Christ] **for the day of redemption.**”
(Ephesians 4:29, 30)
3. “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set **his seal of ownership** on us, and put **his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.** I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you [from rebuke] that I did not return to Corinth.”
(2 Corinthians 1:21-23, insertions mine)
4. “And you [Gentiles] also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed,

you were marked in him with a seal [indicating ownership], the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13, 14)

5. "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of **this mystery, which** [no other religion offers] **is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**" (Colossians 1:27)
6. "In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. **This mystery is that through the gospel** [of Jesus Christ] **the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel**, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:4-6)

These six texts were written by the same man who wrote, "**What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none.**" (1 Corinthians 7:29)

These texts are presented to demonstrate that Paul could not have used the concept of sealing in his day as it should be understood in Revelation 7. Paul died thirty years before John wrote the book of Revelation. However, Paul knew something about the seal of God and the mysterious transformation that was "near" for the saints. Notice what he wrote about A.D. 63, "**This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. . . . By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.**" (Hebrews 8:10-13, italics mine) *If we take into account Paul's mind set and if we synthesize all that Paul wrote on the seal of God, his comments make sense even though they are not to be confused with the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7.*

If we selectively use Paul's comments to support a view that conflicts with Revelation 7, the Bible appears to be internally contradictory. The apostle Peter noticed that some people were using Paul's writings in a harmful way, so he wrote, "**Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in**

all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people *distort*, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:15, 16, italics mine)

Because we know that Paul’s writings are easy to distort, I have presented several texts to reflect the sum of Paul’s comments on the sealing. With these texts in mind, let us look more closely at Paul’s message.

“The Deposit” of the Holy Spirit

Jesus knew, from His own experience, that His disciples could not make headway against the ignorance and arrogance of Judaism without a manifestation of divine power, because it is not possible for one man to prove the superiority of his religion over that of another. Religion usually narrows thinking to a point where reasoning is not possible. Jesus also knew that if His disciples were left on their own to “grow His church,” they would succumb to discouragement because laboring for the conversion of others is hard work. Furthermore, there was a great deal of antagonism against Christianity within Judaism and this conflict made it almost impossible to have insightful discussions. Jesus knew that His ministry, teachings and church would evaporate if left to human prowess. So, **“On one occasion [near the time of His ascension], while He was eating with them, He gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. . . .’ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth.”** (Acts 1:4, 8, insertion mine)

The promised power arrived a few days later. On Sunday morning, April 21, A.D. 30, at the Feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit arrived *at just the right moment* for several reasons. The Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem was a required assembly for the Jews. (Exodus 23:17) Because the Jews had been scattered into every part of the world by Kings Shalmaneser V and Nebuchadnezzar in the eighth and sixth centuries B.C. respectively, the Feast of Pentecost was attended by Jews from all nations and they spoke many diverse languages. Jesus had been absent from Earth for ten days when this feast occurred and the disciples were certain that His return would be imminent. In fact, we have already observed in this segment that all of the apostles anticipated the end of the world and the establishment of the Kingdom of God “at any time.” (Matthew 3:1, 2; Acts 1:6)

Jesus sent a display of divine power through the Holy Spirit at the Feast

of Pentecost that morning to (a) awe the worshipers with Holy Spirit power, (b) to open the minds of the Jews to hear the testimony of His disciples, and (c) to validate the claims of the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. (This was necessary because of the lies which Jewish leaders had paid soldiers to spread throughout Jerusalem. Matthew 28:13-15). To make the testimony of the apostles really remarkable, Jesus gave His disciples the ability to fluently speak in the foreign languages of those present. (Acts 2:8) Jews from all parts of the world would be able to hear the gospel of Jesus in their own language while they were witnessing tongues of fire and a great noise that sounded like roaring wind. (Acts 2:2, 3)

The Holy Spirit was present and authoritative among members of the Christian Way until Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. Miracles were performed and the Church grew rapidly. The *deposit* of Holy Spirit power validated the teachings of the disciples. Consider these twelve notable events in the first ten chapters of Acts!

1. Through the Spirit, Peter and John healed a beggar who had been crippled from birth. (Acts 3)
2. Peter, made bold by the power of the Holy Spirit, spoke forcibly. (Acts 4)
3. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were slain by the Spirit for lying to Peter. (Acts 5)
4. The apostles were released from jail during the night by an angel. (Acts 5)
5. Seven deacons were chosen under the direction of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 6)
6. The deacon Stephen performed great signs and wonders. (Acts 6)
7. Stephen was martyred as his face shone with glory! (Acts 7)
8. Philip performed signs and wonders. (Acts 8)
9. Peter and John went to Samaria. The Holy Spirit was poured out on believers. (Acts 8)
10. Philip was mysteriously transported to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8)
11. Saul was converted. God used a believer named Ananias to miraculously restore Saul's eyesight. (Acts 9)
12. Cornelius was given a vision. Peter was given a vision. Peter was sent to the home of the Gentile, Cornelius. The Holy Spirit

was poured out on Gentile believers. (Acts 10)

These twelve events (and I am sure there were hundreds more, but not recorded in the Bible) are highlighted to show that the early Christian movement succeeded because the Holy Spirit was active. Without the powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit, the Christian movement would have died during the first century A.D. because religious cultures are opposed to change.

Christianity Possessed “The Seal of Approval”

Paul, himself, became a convert to Christianity through a miraculous conversion. His physical eyesight was restored by a miracle (Acts 9:17) and his spiritual eyesight was corrected by visions from God! (Galatians 1:17, 18) Because the manifestations of the Spirit were frequent and genuine and because the early church was convinced that Jesus would soon return, early Christians interpreted the presence of the Holy Spirit among them as God’s seal of approval. The gift of the Holy Spirit made Christianity the true religion on Earth. This is why Paul explained the seal of God as he did. The receipt of Holy Spirit power was the seal (or endorsement) of God, and he was right. Paul’s view of the sealing perfectly aligns with the thoughts of the other apostles.

With this information in mind, review these two verses:

1. “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set **his seal of ownership** on us, and put **his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come**. I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you [from rebuke] that I did not return to Corinth.” (2 Corinthians 1:21-23, bolding and insertions mine)
2. “And you [Gentiles] also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you **were marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit, **who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption** of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13, 14, bolding and insertions mine)

The problem with these texts is that some Christians read the verses *today* and they apply Paul’s first century A.D. comments to our present time. For example, some Pentecostals believe that every person who genuinely receives Christ will be able to demonstrate the power of the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way, such as speaking in an unknown tongue, healing a sick person, handling a poisonous snake or drinking

poison. These things are thought to “validate” one’s rebirth and the receipt of the Holy Ghost. (Mark 16:17, 18)

This view of Mark 16:17, 18 is a distortion of the purpose and mission of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit power was poured out on early Christians between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70 for the purpose of “jump starting” the early Christian Church into existence. After Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, the manifestations of the Holy Spirit began to dissipate because the Christian Church had become established. It had grown to the point that it could prosper through the influence and regeneration which the Holy Spirit typically works in the hearts of people. Of course, the Holy Spirit is at work today, but not in the powerful and dramatic ways recorded in the book of Acts. This does not lessen the work of the Holy Spirit! Twenty-seven percent of the world’s population claim to be Christian because the Holy Spirit is at work! Moreover, an amazing parallel is just around the corner! The power of the Spirit witnessed during the first century A.D. will be witnessed during the last century A.D., but for a different purpose. Please consider this:

Holy Spirit power will be poured out on *all flesh* during the Great Tribulation. The 144,000 will be sealed and the Great Tribulation will begin. For 1,260 days, God’s servants will proclaim the Word of God with great power and authority. Signs and wonders will accompany their testimony as in the days of the apostles. (Acts 14:3) Millions of people will receive Christ because of the Spirit enabled and Spirit empowered work of the 144,000. As people submit to the terms and conditions of salvation and pass the test of faith, they will be sealed just like the 144,000 were sealed. The *mystery of God*, the mysterious removal of the carnal nature, will end just before the seventh trumpet sounds. The problem is that Paul thought he was living at the end of time, during the time of the sealing, but he was incorrect. The first people to be sealed will be the 144,000 and their sealing will come soon.

Summary

The 144,000 are called firstfruits in Revelation 14:4 because they will be the first to be sealed. After they are sealed, a great harvest, a numberless multitude will follow them. The numberless multitude will be sealed *during* the seven trumpets of the Great Tribulation. The Bible also says the 144,000 will not be defiled by women. This means they will be “married” to their calling, to the service of Jesus, and His call will separate them from their families. They will not be compromised or distracted by familial relations. The 144,000 will be severely tested *before* they are sealed. The Bible does not indicate how they will be

tested, but we can be sure that Jesus will test His servants with the same fiery processes that He has used down through the ages. Because we know something about the life and death tests facing the saints during the Great Tribulation, we can be sure that Jesus will appropriately test the 144,000 for the challenges they will face on His behalf. At just the right time in Earth's history, Jesus will select 12,000 people from each of the twelve tribes and these "servants" will faithfully respond.

Earlier in this segment, we learned that seals were used in four different ways in ancient times. Notice how these uses apply to the sealing that is coming:

1. Seals were used in ancient times to certify the authenticity of a document or transaction. (Esther 8:8, Jeremiah 32:10) The seal of God will certify the authenticity of the 144,000 as His servants.
2. Seals were used in ancient times to prevent tampering or change. (Daniel 6:17; Matthew 27:65, 66) After they are sealed, the 144,000 and the saints will be secure from the attraction of the carnal nature.
3. Seals were used in ancient times to show approval and ownership. (John 6:27; 2 Corinthians 1:22) The power of the Holy Spirit will rest on the 144,000 and this power will confirm they are God's prophets.
4. Seals were used as locks in ancient times to secure property or secrets. (Daniel 12:4; Revelation 5:1) After the carnal nature is removed and God's people are restored to the pre-fall condition of Adam and Eve, the seal of God will secure their sinless nature.

Hopefully, you have an idea of how all four uses of seals will apply to God's people during the end time!

Specification #4

Three important distinctions between the 144,000 and the *numberless* multitude that many people overlook are outlined in verses 9-17.

1. The 144,000 are *numbered* and the *numberless* multitude cannot be counted. This feature indicates there will be two distinct groups of people living during the end time, a small group of prophets and a large group of saints. (We have already examined John's distinction between prophets and saints in specification #1.)

2. The Bible indicates the 144,000 will be the firstfruits of the harvest. The Bible also indicates the 144,000 will be God’s “servants the prophets” during the Great Tribulation. The Bible says the numberless multitude in Revelation 7 will consist of people who came out of the Great Tribulation. Notice this end time specification: **“Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of *the great tribulation*; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”** (Revelation 7:13, 14, italics mine) Since the numberless multitude in Revelation 7 is an end time group of saints (and not a group of saints from all ages) and since the numberless multitude will come from all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, they have to be the end time harvest, because the 144,000 are the firstfruits of this harvest.
3. The third rule of apocalyptic prophecy does not allow the number 144,000 to be symbolic. Rule Three requires the Bible to define the meaning of a symbol if a prophetic element is thought to be symbolic. In other words, if the number, 144,000, is a symbolic number, the Bible has to define the meaning of the symbol. We cannot make up our own meanings to symbols. There are no symbolic numbers in the Bible. God does not use one number to represent another number. Numbers can be used in analogous ways (Psalm 91:7), and numbers can be translated according to the Jubilee calendar (Rule Four of apocalyptic prophecy), but numbers themselves are *always* literal. Consider the math in this case: 12,000 people are sealed from each of the twelve tribes and this produces a literal total of 144,000 people.

After the Second Coming

The following verses describe a wonderful scene that occurs *after* the Second Coming. John saw a numberless multitude of saints, who came out of the Great Tribulation, standing before the throne of God. Please review the following verses from the KJV (I have inserted some clarifying text in brackets and italicized a few words for emphasis):

“After this [the sealing of the 144,000] I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of *all* nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, *stood before the throne*, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation [belongs] to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb [for

we are unworthy of this great reward].’ **And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshiped God, Saying, Amen: [Yes!, everything belongs to God and the Lamb] Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”**

“**And one of the [24] elders answered, saying unto me, ‘What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?’ And I said unto him, ‘Sir, thou knowest.’ And he said to me, ‘These are they which came out of [the] *Great Tribulation*, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.’”**

“[Because these particular saints experienced hunger and thirst during the Great Tribulation,] **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 [their memories of suffering and] all tears from their eyes.”** (Revelation 7:9-17, KJV)

Summary

In keeping with the distinction between saints and prophets, Revelation 7 describes two groups of people who will live during the Great Tribulation. The prophets are numbered and the saints are numberless. A numberless multitude will be saved out of all nations and cultures during the Great Tribulation. The 144,000 will be sealed first (before the Great Tribulation begins) and the saints that receive their testimony will be sealed during the Great Tribulation.

Specification #5

This specification is not often discussed, because it is poorly understood. The Bible indicates that the 144,000 will experience and successfully endure the sufferings of Christ. The highest honor that God can bestow on the followers of Jesus is to allow us to experience the sufferings of Christ. This concept may sound strange at first, so please consider the nature and purpose of Christ’s suffering for us. Paul wrote, **“In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of**

their salvation *perfect* through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are [members] of the *same* family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.” (Hebrews 2:10, 11, insertion and italics mine)

The word “fellowship” is defined as two or more people having the *same* experience or said in the vernacular, two or more people “in the same boat.” When we suffer for Jesus, we enter into fellowship with Jesus. He becomes our brother in suffering and we become connected to Jesus in an intimate way that words cannot adequately express. There is no stronger bond than brotherhood through suffering. Men and women who have not been on the battlefield find it hard to understand or appreciate the brotherhood that develops among warriors. You have to experience it to understand it. It is a very powerful thing, and I have seen it with my own eyes.

Amazingly, people from different backgrounds and different cultures can be thrown together in an infantry unit during a war, and over the course of time, they become “one” in purpose, plan and action. Of course, they recognize each other’s strengths and weaknesses and they know each other’s faults, but these things do not matter because a powerful bond of *love* springs up. When men become willing to lay down their life for each other, a union forms that cannot be broken. This is a phenomenon that, if experienced, is never forgotten. Though separated by thousands of miles and decades without communication, comrades never forget the sacrifices made by their brothers. I have seen many veterans reduced to tears when interviewed about their war experiences. This emotion involuntarily rises because through the deepest bonds of love, they are forever connected to their “brothers in battle.” This brotherhood, forged in the heat of battle, partially explains the great love that existed between David and Jonathan. (1 Samuel 18:3)

The brotherhood of suffering with Jesus is presented in this segment because the 144,000 will form a powerful bond of love for Jesus through their suffering for Christ. We have already learned they will be called on to give up their closest human ties, as necessary, to serve the Lord. As prophets of God, the 144,000 will face the wrath of the devil and his demons, not to mention persecution and torture by wicked people who hate the ways of God. Jesus said, **“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”** (Matthew 10:37-39)

Because of their steadfast devotion to Jesus, the 144,000 will lose everything they own – their family, their possessions, their respect in their community, and like the apostle Paul, their self-worth, to glorify Jesus. In the heat of battle, they will become “one” with Jesus in purpose, plan and action. This is why the 144,000 will serve as “priests” throughout ages to come. They will fearlessly go to their death for the cause of Christ when necessary. Because of their devotion and fidelity to Jesus, the 144,000 will be honored above the rest of the redeemed. No one else, not even the twelve apostles, will be able to sing their song.

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the Earth.”

(Revelation 14:3) Because they will share in the sufferings of Jesus, the 144,000 will be closest to Jesus. They will literally wear the names of the Father and the Lamb in their foreheads (signifying their exalted position) and they will attend Jesus wherever He goes. (Revelation 14:4)

Two Levels of Suffering

Jesus suffered on two levels for our salvation. First, in the physical dimension, Jesus was treated with contempt; He was mocked, denied justice, flogged and crucified. Ironically, Jesus died on the cross because of man’s hatred and God’s love. Men hated Jesus because they could not tolerate the truth about God, so they “attempted” to murder Jesus on the cross. On the other hand, God loved the world so much that He was willing to give us Jesus as an atonement for sin. Jesus did not die at the hands of men, even though that was their intent. The Father took the life of the Son after Jesus gave it to Him. (Luke 23:46) Never in the Bible is Jesus called the “Lamb of man.” Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God. The Father provided the Lamb for our salvation and the Father took the life which the Lamb willingly gave up. The Son of God died at and in the hands of the Father. This truth was powerfully demonstrated when Abraham was required to offer the love of his life, Isaac, on Mount Moriah. (Genesis 22:2)

Deeper Level

The second level of Jesus’ suffering is more difficult to explain. Jesus suffered within His soul to the point that He would have died in the Garden of Gethsemane if an angel had not strengthened Him. The Bible says His perspiration was like great drops of blood. (Luke 22:43, 44) Of course, the prospect of death on a cross was part of Jesus’ anguish in the garden, but Roman history tells us that thousands of people were hung on crosses in that era. Therefore, Christ’s anguish concerning the cross was similar to the anguish which the two thieves must have felt. Jesus

broke into a sweat like blood and would have died in the garden because He was made deathly ill by the presence and power of sin. **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Please consider this text: **“During the days of Jesus’ life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once *made perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.”** (Hebrews 5:7-9) Twice in the book of Hebrews, Paul indicates that Jesus was “made perfect” through suffering! The Greek word for perfect, *teleioo*, means mature, completed or finished. Of course, Jesus was perfect having no sin or rebellion from birth. He never sinned! (Hebrews 4:15) So, how could Jesus be “made perfect” through suffering?

Suffering is a powerful force that drives a human being into rebellion or submission. I would venture that many of the people in prison today are there because of suffering that began in childhood. The carnal nature hates suffering. Suffering produces anger and anger predisposes people to rebel against authority in general and humanity in particular. On the other hand, pain has been used for centuries to force people into submission. Since wicked people are not interested in a system of justice, torture is their best tool because it is a powerful force that drives a human being toward submission. A sinless Jesus was born into “a world of suffering” so He could demonstrate the importance of being perfected through *patient* suffering. We cannot totally appreciate the sufferings of Christ at the deeper level because our carnal nature has not been removed, but this will change.

Sin was grossly offensive to Christ’s sinless nature. Patiently living among sinners and dealing with the selfishness, blindness and arrogance of the human heart was very hard – even for Jesus. However, Jesus was made perfect *in patience* through suffering. He faced the tenacious power and degenerate influence of sin every day. Jesus learned how to receive grace from God as it was needed each day, and this is how suffering perfected His patience. Patience is how Abraham and Sarah failed when they decided Abraham should have a son by Hagar. Patience is how Moses failed when he killed the Egyptian. He had to spend forty years herding sheep in the wilderness before God could use him. Patience is how Moses failed when he struck the rock twice and God

refused to let Moses enter the promised land. Patience is the hardest thing on Earth to perfect! Through faith in God and patience in suffering, Jesus overcame the world. The plan of salvation was perfectly “worked out” because Jesus patiently submitted to the Father’s will each day.

James wrote, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete [perfect], not lacking anything.”** (James 1:2-4, insertion mine) The 144,000 will suffer physically, emotionally and spiritually because of the presence and power of sin. They will suffer most because (a) they will be the first to be sealed, and (b) they will have an overwhelming task to accomplish. Because they will have sinless natures, it will be painful for them to deal with the power and presence of sin. The irony is that God’s prophets will love sinners, but they will hate the bondage of sin which controls their listeners! *The challenge of the 144,000 during the Great Tribulation will be to lead people to suffer Babylon’s wrath for Christ’s sake, so that the carnal nature can be removed!* Their burden for souls, their frustration with the power of sin, and their love for Jesus and sinners will cause deep anguish within the 144,000. They will agonize, as Jesus did in Gethsemane, for strength to fulfill God’s will. Like the shepherd looking for that one lost sheep, the 144,000 will exhaust every physical and emotional fiber in their being to find one last soul so that person can be saved from the jaws of sin.

Summary

John indicates that many, if not all, of the 144,000 will be killed “because of the Word of God and the testimony they maintained.” We also know that millions of saints will be killed during the Great Tribulation because of their faithfulness to Jesus. This is why Jesus said, **“If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.”** (Revelation 13:10) This text epitomizes Jesus’ experience: patience and faithfulness. Because the 144,000 will faithfully endure the sufferings of Jesus with success, no other person will be able to sing their song. **“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”** (Revelation 14:12, KJV)

Specification #6

The sixth specification concerning the 144,000 is that no lie or falsehood will be found in their mouths. (Revelation 14:5) Again, the topic of the 144,000 is like an iceberg – one third of this topic is above the water line and two-thirds are below. This particular specification goes far below the water line. Consider this text: **“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”** (Revelation 21:8) This verse indicates that *no* liar will enter the kingdom of Heaven. In this sense, the 144,000 will be no different than anyone else going to Heaven! So, how does Revelation 14:5 exalt the accomplishments of the 144,000 when it says, **“No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”**?

After the 144,000 are sealed, the Great Tribulation will begin with a global earthquake. God’s prophets will be empowered to speak and they will present the demands of the sovereign Jesus to the people of Earth. Now, it is one thing to get angry and to “let loose” in the heat of the moment, but it is quite another to have to stand before hostile groups of people and tell them things they do not want to hear – day after day! The 144,000 will polarize the people of Earth with their speech. People who love truth will follow their lead. People who hate truth will produce every reason why the 144,000 should be silenced. The 144,000 will fearlessly declare the Word of God regardless of personal consequences. Because they will not take up arms to fight and because they will not run from their post, their brazen actions will be stunning and relentless.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees went out in the desert to see John the Baptist, pretending to be interested in his revival message, John quickly detected their hypocrisy and deceit. They were not interested in his message, they were spies sent from the temple. The Bible says, **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.’”** (Matthew 3:7, 8) No doubt, those Pharisees and Sadducees were embarrassed, but they could not do anything about his remarks because they were outnumbered. John the Baptist was to the first advent what the 144,000 will be to the second advent. The 144,000 will not blunt the double edged sword of truth by compromising their message. The Great Tribulation will not be a time for soft peddling the gospel. That day will be a valley of decision for multitudes. The 144,000 will cry out, **“. . . Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”** (Matthew 3:3)

Hopefully, a picture is forming in your mind and heart. The Bible exalts the integrity and honesty of the 144,000 saying, **“No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless,”** because they will be faithful spokespersons. They will deliver the testimony of Jesus without concern for their safety. They will proclaim the terms and conditions of salvation and their message will not be compromised or varnished. They will openly call sin by its right name and the Holy Spirit will work signs and wonders through them, confirming their divine message. Looking forward at their fiery assignment, these words in Revelation 22 will be particularly potent because there will be many who will reject or attempt to deflect their testimony. **“I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”** (Revelation 22:18, 19)

Specification #7

The Bible says the 144,000 will visibly wear the names of the Father and Son on their foreheads after they are taken to Heaven. (Revelation 14:1; Revelation 22:3, 4) John does not indicate the names of the Father and Son are written on crowns which are worn on their foreheads, although that might be possible. I prefer to view John’s comments as though the 144,000 will have the signatures of the Father and the Lamb, as medals of honor, literally written on their foreheads. The names of the Father and Son will indicate their high rank in God’s government throughout eternity. Notice these two texts:

1. **“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”** (Revelation 14:1)
2. **“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”** (Revelation 22:3, 4)

There are levels of authority in Heaven. For example, there are seven powerful angels that stand before God. (Revelation 8:2) We know that Gabriel is a highly exalted angel and he stands in God’s presence. (Luke 1:19) We know that Lucifer was anointed as a guardian cherub and he wore beautiful stones signifying his high rank. (Ezekiel 28:13, 14) The 144,000 will also be highly exalted after they are taken to Heaven.

Their exalted position will be noticed every time we look on their faces.

We have a similar way of exalting authority on Earth. Military officers have worn their rank on their foreheads (hats and helmets) for centuries. Field grade officers in the United States military are distinguished above lower grades by the gold webbing that is located on the brims of their hats. This gold webbing is designed to be visible at a distance because a field grade officer merits a higher level of attention and respect from his subordinates.

Many Christians tend to overlook the importance of the names of the Father and Son written on the foreheads of the 144,000. This specification is highly important because there is an evil parallel. The Bible indicates the devil will establish his kingdom on Earth during the sixth trumpet. After killing one-third of mankind, he will require his loyal survivors to wear a mark. Ordinary people will wear a tattoo showing “666” on their right hand, but the “exalted” leaders of Lucifer’s government will wear the devil’s name tattooed on their foreheads! Notice this text: **“He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on *his right hand or on his forehead*, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is *the name of the beast or the number of his name*. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man’s number. His number is 666.”** (Revelation 13:16-18, italics mine) The mark of the beast is both a number or a name. The mark of the beast is worn on the right hand or on the forehead. The parallel is obvious. Satan will counterfeit the 144,000 with 144,000 of his own servants. The counterfeits will wear the devil’s name tattooed on their forehead. Of course, the 144,000 will not wear the signatures of the Father and Son on their foreheads before they go to Heaven, but they will be highly exalted after they get to Heaven for declaring the truth about the devil and his deceptions under most distressing circumstances. Throughout eternity, the saints will see the 144,000 and each time we see them, we will remember their total devotion and sacrifices for the calling of Jesus.

Specification #8

Note: If, out of curiosity, you have jumped over the other specifications to read this one first, I hope you will be sure to read the other seven specifications in their order because there is a progressive order to this presentation on the 144,000.

The Bible clearly indicates that the 144,000 will be Jews, coming from the twelve tribes of Israel. Revelation 7:5-8 says, **“From the tribe of**

Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.”

Understandably, these verses give some people the idea that the 144,000 will come from the “Jewish race.” Before we examine this issue, we need to look at three texts. There is an important difference between being a member of the Jewish race and being a Jew.

1. **“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”**
(Romans 2:28, 29)
2. **“In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together *of one body*, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”**
(Ephesians 3:4-6, italics mine)
3. **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed [Greek: sperma], and heirs according to the promise.”**
(Galatians 3:29, insertion mine)

With these texts in mind, please consider the following ten paragraphs:

1. God called Abraham to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and travel to a land that He would give to Abraham and his descendants. (Genesis 12) When Abraham arrived in the land, God made an unconditional promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land for generations to come. (Genesis 13:15; 15:18-21) Centuries later, God honored His promise and gave the land of Canaan to the twelve tribes of Israel at the time of the Exodus. (Exodus 12)
2. While in the wilderness, God informed Israel that even though they would possess the land of Canaan, *it would not belong to them*. (Leviticus 25:23) They were granted the privilege of living

in the land for as long as they obeyed the Lord. If they chose to rebel against the Lord, He promised to evict them from the land. (Leviticus 18:28; 26:33, 34) Knowing they would eventually be evicted from the land, God also promised to restore them to the land of Canaan if they would repent of their sins while in exile. (Leviticus 26:40-42)

3. Over the course of centuries, Israel repeatedly rebelled against God. (Ezekiel 23) In fact, Israel defiantly refused to fulfill the purpose for which God had separated them from all other nations! (Exodus 19) So, God had the ten tribes in the northern part of the country evicted by Shalmaneser V in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17) and the two tribes in the southern part of the country were evicted by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 B.C. (2 Kings 24)
4. Near the end of the seventy years in Babylonian captivity, the prophet Daniel confessed the sins of his people and he asked God to fulfill the words of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11, 12) by restoring the nation of Israel to its homeland. (Daniel 9:1-23) God heard Daniel's prayer and responded according to the provisions stated in His covenant. (Leviticus 26:40-42) God granted Israel a measure of time, seventy weeks, to "straighten up" and prepare for the appearing of Messiah. (Daniel 9:24) The decree that marked the beginning of the Seventy Weeks, issued by the Persian King, Artaxerxes, was in the Jubilee year of 457 B.C. (Ezra 7)
5. According to the prophecy in Daniel 9, Jesus arrived on time. He was baptized at the beginning of the seventieth week (A.D. 27) and He died in the middle of the seventieth week, the Wednesday year of A.D. 30. Because Israel had fallen into defiant apostasy *again*, they rejected and crucified the Messiah. (Luke 23, Acts 3)
6. Because Israel rejected Messiah, God put a new plan in place. I call this new covenant, "Plan B." "Plan B" was made better than "Plan A" for several reasons. (Hebrews 8:6) For one, God redefined Israel under "Plan B" to consist of *everyone* who received Jesus as Lord and Master. (John 1:12; 3:16; 13:13, KJV)
7. The disciples heard Jesus annul God's covenant with biological Israel (Matthew 23:37-39) and they heard Jesus implement a new covenant that was based on submission to the authority of Jesus – as opposed to the authority of Moses. (Luke 22:20) In essence, the followers of Jesus received "the trusteeship of preaching the gospel" that once belonged to the Jews. (Acts 13)
8. After the outpouring of Holy Spirit power at the Feast of

Pentecost (Acts 2), early Christians came to understand that a “new Israel” had been raised to replace “old Israel.” The new Israel consisted of believers in Christ. In fact, the apostle James called early Christians, “the twelve tribes of Israel.” **“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings. . . . My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, do not show favoritism.”** (James 1:1, 2:1)

9. God revealed to Peter and the apostle Paul that in His sight, there is neither Jew nor Gentile anymore. However, His unconditional covenant to Abraham still remains, and everyone who receives Christ as his or her Savior will be counted as the offspring of Abraham. (Galatians 3 and 4; Ephesians 2 and 3) God also made it clear that in His sight, a Jew (a chosen person) is not determined by biological birth or physical circumcision. (Romans 2:28, 29; Romans 9:6) Instead, the twelve tribes consist of people who have faith in God and a circumcised heart (Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 2:29), as did Abraham their father (John 8:39). The bottom line is that the only people going to Heaven are those who lived as Abraham did – by faith! Thus, all Israel will be saved in the end because Israel consists of believers! (Romans 11:26) **Because believers in Christ have been “grafted in” to the promises made to Abraham, God’s promise will be fulfilled.** (Romans 10 and 11)
10. After Earth is purified by fire at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20), the Holy City will descend to Earth. (Revelation 21) It is so large that it will encompass the whole land of Canaan! (Revelation 21:16) The Promised Land will be located inside the Holy City! When the Holy City descends, two wonderful promises will be fulfilled. The heirs of Abraham will inherit the undefiled land of Canaan forever (**“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth”** Matthew 5:5) and Abraham will actually live within the city that he longed to see: **“For he [Abraham] was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** (Hebrews 11:10)

The bottom line is this: The 144,000 will be descendants of Abraham! But, the 144,000 will not necessarily be members of the Jewish race. The 144,000 will come from every race of people! Furthermore, the Bible says the numberless multitude that go through the Great Tribulation will come from **all** nations, kindreds, tongues and people. God promised

Abraham that he would be the father of *many* nations and Revelation 7 affirms this! Because the numberless multitude will be multinational, the firstfruits of the same harvest (the 144,000) will be multinational. Remember, firstfruits are a sample of the coming harvest!

Summary

There is no question that the 144,000 will come from the twelve tribes of Israel. The problem that many Christians do not understand is the identity of Israel. The New Testament teaches that God *redefined* Israel at the end of the seventieth week when it became evident that Israel would not accept His Son and fulfill their calling as a holy nation of priests. When the seventy weeks expired, the apostle Paul was converted (A.D. 34). Through the revelations God gave him, we have confirmation of this truth. Many Bible writers point to the redefinition of Israel. God made several unconditional covenants with Abraham, and He will keep them. Israel's rejection of Messiah has not thwarted God; instead, it has made Him more determined to gloriously fulfill everything He promised. Therefore, everyone who puts faith in Jesus is declared Abraham's seed, and as such, we become heirs to the promise!

Closing Statements

We have examined eight specifications about the 144,000. I have presented the following conclusions:

1. The 144,000 will be men and women. They will be spokespeople for God during the Great Tribulation.
2. The Great Tribulation will begin immediately after they are selected and sealed.
3. The 144,000 will be the first to have their carnal natures *mysteriously* removed. Their devotion to Jesus will not be compromised by family relations.
4. As firstfruits, the 144,000 are numbered. They are set apart from the *numberless* multitude, the end time harvest, which is the fruit of their labor.
5. The 144,000 will experience and endure the sufferings of Christ. No one else will be able to sing their song.
6. The 144,000 will not compromise the words that Jesus gives them to speak. They will speak the truth without regard for the consequences.

7. The 144,000 will visibly wear the names of the Father and Son on their foreheads throughout eternity.
8. The 144,000 will be Jews, the seed of Abraham, heirs of the promise through Christ.

Additional Notes on Chapter 11

Through the years, I have been asked various questions about the 144,000 that you may want to consider.

What is the significance of selecting 144,000 people from the twelve tribes?

God made some amazing promises to Abraham because God loved this man of faith. For example, God promised Abraham that through him, all the nations of Earth would be blessed. Jesus came through Abraham's lineage and that blessing is beyond calculation! (Galatians 3:16) On another occasion, God changed Abram's name to Abraham because God ordained that *a childless* Abram should be called, "the father of many nations." **"No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations."** (Genesis 17:5) Abraham will see the fulfillment of his name when the numberless multitude in Revelation 7 gather around the throne of Jesus. I look forward to the day when Jesus will call Abraham to His throne so that with his own eyes, the patriarch can see that indeed, he is the father of many nations! John said, **"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. . . ."** (Revelation 7:9, italics mine)

God told the biological descendants of Abraham that they were to be trustees of the gospel and a nation of priests. (Exodus 19) The apostle Paul and every Pharisee knew this. Paul said, **"For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the Earth.'"** (Acts 13:47) When Israel failed to live up to the terms and conditions of the covenant, God abandoned the biological family of Abraham for a family of people who believed in Messiah. This may sound harsh, but this was not the first time God did this. God destroyed the first generation that came out of Egypt by keeping them in the wilderness for forty years so that another group of people could enter the promised land. God destroyed the city of Jerusalem through Nebuchadnezzar so that He could raise another group of

people. Later on, God destroyed Jerusalem again through Titus in A.D. 70 so that He could raise another group of people. The point is that *God keeps destroying the rebellious and raising up another group of people to accomplish His promises.* God raised up the Christian Church and it rebelled just like Israel. God raised up Protestants, and they have rebelled just like Israel. This is why God will select and empower 12,000 individuals from each tribe at the end. He will use a group of people that have nothing in common but a heart of faith. By incorporating the twelve tribes into Revelation 7, God indicates that He is honoring the original promises He made to Abraham! The identity of the twelve tribes is unknown and unseen today. This is not a problem because God knows who His children are. Jesus said, **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”** (John 10:14-16)

Psychologists say there are four basic personality traits: sanguine, melancholy, choleric and phlegmatic. Each person has a dominant trait and recessive traits. The combinations of traits are said to produce twelve personality groups. Perhaps the redeemed will be grouped according to personality type because each of Jacob’s sons had unique personality characteristics and Jacob blessed his sons accordingly. (See Genesis 49 and 1 Chronicles 4:21, 23.) If the twelve tribes reflect personality types, then God can use *all* twelve personality types to reach the diverse people of Earth because no one personality type is acceptable to everyone.

The Bible says the Holy City, New Jerusalem, has twelve gates and twelve foundations. Each gate bears the name of a tribe and each foundation bears the name of an apostle. (Revelation 21:12, 14) These features are quite revealing. The twelve *foundations* of the Holy City bear the names of the twelve apostles because the gospel of Christ was built on the Rock of Ages by the apostles! The twelve gates into the city are portals named after the twelve tribes because each gate could be an entry point for each personality type. Twelve different groups of firstfruits, 12,000 servants from each tribe, will lead their *kinsmen* through their respective gate to God’s throne! Our family structure in Heaven will be our tribe. Everyone will belong to a tribe! Everyone will belong to a wonderful family!

Why does God choose 144,000 people and ignore the religious

systems of the world?

This is a good question. Why does God “leapfrog” over the great religious organizations that exist during the end time to use a diverse group of 144,000 people to preach the gospel? If we consider the vast resources that some religious organizations have, it would seem foolish to ignore these agencies during the end time! But, here are six reasons why God cannot use them:

1. The glory of doing the impossible, proclaiming the gospel to the whole world in 1,260 days belongs to God, not man.
2. The seven religious systems of the world are corrupt. They cannot and do not speak for God. They can neither correctly explain the everlasting gospel, nor can they properly explain the plans and purposes of God for the Great Tribulation.
3. Most people agree that God does not save people because of church affiliation. Salvation is not gained through membership in an organization. In fact, if God was going to use a religious organization to proclaim the everlasting gospel during the end time, church affiliation would prove to be an insurmountable problem. Consider the human trait called prejudice. You and I both know that some people would rather die and go to hell than to join another church or even worse, join the church of someone who has offended them. For example, let us suppose that God looked down on Earth and declared a particular sect within the Moslem faith to have the truth for the end time. How many Catholics, Jews and Protestants do you think would join with Moslems in order to be saved? Now turn the table around and ask yourself, how many Catholics, Jews, Protestants and Moslems would join your church?
4. God will not save a person because his biological great-grandfather was Abraham, Job or Daniel. The Lord has made it very clear in the book of Ezekiel that a person’s ancestry has nothing to do with their salvation! (Ezekiel 14:18; 18:4-28; Matthew 3:9) God has no grandchildren. Every child of God has to be born again.
5. A major obstacle that prevents God from using established religions during the end time is that *one man cannot prove the superiority of his religion over that of another*. If history proves anything, this point is proven true beyond question. Do you think that Elijah could have proven that his God was greater than the

god of Baal if God had not sent fire from Heaven? Because religion is inherently arrogant and egocentric, one religious group cannot prove its superiority over another religious group.

6. God knows that religion has far more to do with social structure than with a personal love for truth. (It is said that 95% of the people remain loyal to the religious system into which they were born and raised – even if they do not practice the religion.)

Because the properties of religion are very strong within the human race, because social relationships can be more important than commitment to truth, and because there is a distinction between serving God and serving the church, God will destroy the great religions of the world and test mankind to see if we love Him and His truth above everything else.

The test will be simple and will be applied without partiality. God will require everyone to leave his or her church for the sake of truth! The object of our deepest affection will then be revealed. At that time, some people will discover they loved their church more than they loved God! When a contest exists between “God’s truth” and “God’s church,” then, and only then, can humans detect the distinction that exists between serving God and serving the church. Until this test of loyalty is applied, most people cannot understand the problem. Remember, in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees could not figure out how they could be as blind as Jesus claimed! The same is true today. A time is coming when God’s truth will conflict with the teachings of every church, and everyone will have to make tough choices. We will see that many people cannot separate themselves from their church, even when presented with the plainest evidences of truth.

To help us make up our minds, God will allow the devil to appear on Earth. The devil (the Antichrist) will dissolve all the religions of the world and forcibly create a new global church. This event in itself will help motivate those people who could not leave their church for truth’s sake. On the other hand, people who are cowardly will prostitute their faith and join the newly created church because the devil will establish stringent laws so that everyone who refuses to join his church will be put to death. It is interesting to note in this context that God considers cowardice as great a sin as murder and sexual immorality. **“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”** (Revelation 21:8)

Before leaving this question, one more comment should be made. Why does God use such a tiny number of people to proclaim the everlasting gospel during the end time? Given the fact that nearly six billion people now live on Earth, it seems that the work would be much easier if He chose one million or ten million people to accomplish his task. In human terms, the 144,000, like Gideon's army, are too few to accomplish the task. By choosing such a tiny number, God will again demonstrate that He is not dependent on flesh to accomplish His purposes. “. . . **‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.**” (Zechariah 4:6) Even the stones could cry out if necessary. (Luke 19:40)

Do you think the twelve stars in the woman's crown represents the twelve tribes?

Yes! In Revelation 12, the story of the true church (represented by a righteous woman who is pregnant) and a great red dragon is told. The woman wears a crown of twelve stars on her head. From the Greek language, we learn that these stars are set in a *stephanos*, that is, a crown of victory. According to Revelation 1:20, stars can symbolize messengers or angels and by applying the words of Daniel 12:3 to the woman's crown of twelve stars we find a very beautiful fit. **“Those who are wise (or teachers) will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.”** In other words, the woman wears a crown of victory. This crown is set with twelve stars. The twelve stars represent the 144,000 – firstfruits of the twelve tribes – who will be victorious over the Antichrist.

How will the 144,000 be notified?

I presume the 144,000 will be notified just like all of the prophets in the Bible were notified. About the only thing the 144,000 have in common is their encounter with Jesus! Consider this parallel. In Revelation 10, John was given an open book and told to eat it. The book was sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. Then, John was told to prophesy again before kings, nations, etc. Within the context of Revelation 10, John's experience represents that of the 144,000. The book represents God's words which He will give to the 144,000 to proclaim throughout the Earth. He will give the 144,000 words to speak, otherwise, they would not know what to say. (Matthew 10:19) The final proclamation of the gospel will not be a matter of human ability. God will give the words that He wants spoken to the 144,000 and the Holy Spirit will provide the power. (Matthew 10:19)

Consider Ezekiel 2:8-3:4. Like John, God gave Ezekiel a book to eat that was sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. The book Ezekiel received contained the words that God wanted spoken. Ezekiel was told to speak these words to *his* people, whether they listen or not. This is the bitter part in the stomach. Ezekiel had to speak the words of God and this created a lot of ridicule and offense. (This explains why the life span of prophets is usually short.) Of course, the enabling power within Ezekiel was the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit enabled Ezekiel to say (and do) things that were beyond mere human capability. Ezekiel and John were both called to be prophets and they were given words to speak. This will be the experience of the 144,000.

How will the 144,000 be recognized?

The 144,000 will be recognized by three means: First, their message will be Bible based. The 144,000 will proclaim the everlasting gospel from the Bible, and as a result, they will find themselves standing in opposition to religious leaders of their day. Second, the 144,000 will be recognized by their humility, simplicity and authority. Remember John the Baptist with his humble dress? (Luke 7:25) People went out to the Jordan River to hear John the Baptist because he spoke with power and authority that came from Heaven! (Luke 7:24-26) People marveled at Jesus because of the authority with which He spoke. (Mark 1:22) Last, the 144,000 will be recognized as “prophets” because they will have the ability to perform signs and miracles. Of course, the servants of the devil will be doing miracles, too. (Exodus 8:18; Matthew 7:20-22)

During the Great Tribulation, many people will put their faith in counterfeit “miracles” because they do not want to submit to the “faith testing” terms and conditions of salvation. If a false prophet can perform a counterfeit miracle on demand (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12), many people will use the “sign” to justify rebellion against God. (Matthew 16:4) On the other hand, if the Holy Spirit knows that a miracle will help an honest person make a decision for truth, then a miracle will be given. Many miracles will occur and they will force people to take sides. This, of course, is how the sheep are separated from the goats.

How soon do you expect to see the 144,000?

I believe the great earthquake and the empowerment of the 144,000 could occur any day now. The 144,000 will not show up on TV. They will not receive a round of applause or some glittering reward.

However, when they show up you will know that Jesus has taken control of Earth and the final 1,335 days (of Earth) have begun. The 144,000 will not ride in limousines or have world fame. Paul wrote, **“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”** (1 Corinthians 1:27)

Will the 144,000 come from one church group?

No. God has people in every religious body whose hearts are right, but whose heads are wrong. (John 10:16; Romans 2:14-16) When Jesus knocked Saul off his donkey in Acts 9, Jesus knew that Saul had a good heart, but his head was terribly messed up by his religion. Consider the fact that Saul was persecuting the saints when Jesus called him to take the gospel to the Gentiles. My point is that, like Saul, the 144,000 will come from *all* religions. Many people have good hearts toward God, and after they encounter Jesus and receive the words that He wants them to speak, they will be transformed, just as Saul became Paul!

The net effect is simple. God wants to save as many people as possible. Therefore, God will have Moslem believers talking to their Moslem brothers; Catholic believers will be talking to their Catholic brothers; Hindu believers will be talking to their Hindu brothers, etc. Who is better at proclaiming the gospel of Christ than those who know and understand the obstacles that face their brothers? Do you really think a Moslem would listen to a Protestant? Do you think a Jew would listen to a Baptist? Of course not! The 144,000 will come from every nation, religion, language and tribe and after their encounter with Jesus, they will receive the script and speak His words to their brothers, just like Saul did! This will ultimately produce what Jesus wants, a numberless multitude of saints who come from every nation, kindred, tongue and people!

Will the 144,000 know each other?

Probably not. The important thing is that no one will be able to say that their message was contrived by man. In other words, what is the possibility that a mere 144,000 people who are spread out over the face of Earth, speaking different languages, belonging to antagonistic religions, and not knowing one another, preach the same message with amazing authority? The chance is zero! This miracle will provide profound proof that their work and calling is divinely ordained. This simple miracle will also confound and offend the religious leaders of Earth.