The 144,000

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From the time the Apostle John first recorded his astounding vision in the book of Revelation, a shroud of mystery has surrounded the identity and destiny of a unique assembly described as the 144,000. Who are these people and exactly when do they make their appearance on the prophetic scene? What does the Bible mean when it states that they are sealed? Could there be more than one group of individuals known as the 144,000? Are they comprised only of physical Israelites? Why are the tribes of Dan and Ephraim excluded? What do the Scriptures mean when they declare that they are virgins who are undefiled by women? What future awaits them, and how does their destiny differ from the rest of humanity? Answering these and many more questions with compelling Biblical insights, this is a book all of God's people should read.

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Chapter 1

Who are the 144,000?

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
but the glory of kings *is* to search out a matter.
~ Proverbs 25:2 ~

More than nineteen centuries ago the Almighty God chose the Apostle John to be the recipient of an astonishing prophetic vision. While in the Spirit, John was lifted to heaven and ushered into the very presence of God. There he observed the glorious appearance of Christ, the astounding living creatures, 24 elders, and the heavenly host surrounding God's glorious throne.

As the vision continued to unfold, John witnessed a mind boggling array of symbols and images. He viewed a kaleidoscope of future events including the appearance of frightening horsemen and terrifying beasts. The apostle also saw the mounting depravity of man escalate to the point that it literally threatened the survival of the human race. John then observed a series of punishing trumpet and bowl plagues rain down unimaginable devastation upon the planet.

John's vision culminated with an event that is the only real hope for mankind. He witnessed the return of the Messiah and the establishment of God's government on earth. Finally, he saw the creation of a new heaven and earth as the New Jerusalem descended from God; ushering in an eternal age of peace, beauty, and prosperity.

The 144,000

As John watched the pages of the last chapter of human history unfold, a powerful angel suddenly intervened to temporarily suspend the sequence of events. This commanding spirit announced that, before God would execute His judgment on a rebellious world, servants of God were to be sealed. John

then heard the number of those who were sealed. There were exactly 144,000. At that moment the apostle must have wondered, who are these people and what role do they play in God's plan?

From John's age to ours men have sought the answer to such questions, but a shroud of mystery has continued to cloud the identity of the 144,000. Today this enigma persists—piquing the curiosity and wild speculation among theologians, scholars, and students of the Bible.

What does it mean when the Scriptures state that the 144,000 are sealed? Exactly when does this sealing take place? Is there more than one group of 144,000, and are they comprised of only the physical tribes of Israel? What does God mean when He says that the 144,000 "are not defiled by women," and why are they called virgins? What is the ultimate destiny of this unique group of individuals, and how does their future differ from the rest of mankind? Can we know the answer to these questions, or does God intend to keep the identity and destiny of the 144,000 a mystery until the very end?

God Has Revealed the Answer

The longstanding mystery surrounding the 144,000 has been revealed—right in the pages of the Bible! The Almighty is a God of great purpose, planning, and design. He inspired every book of the Bible for the express purpose of revealing His blueprint for mankind. As the prophet Amos wrote:

> Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals
> His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

This verse is important to our understanding of prophecy. Amos relayed a vital, unbreakable promise from Almighty God. The Eternal has pledged to disclose His plans to His servants before He acts. Therefore, if His will is to seal precisely 144,000 individuals, we can rely on Him to reveal both the identity and future destiny of these individuals. However, some might think that, if God wanted us to know the identity of the

144,000, why has it remained a mystery for so long? The answer is found in God's perfect timing.

The book of Ecclesiastes states that there is a time for everything (3:1-2). God has a specific time in which He planned to reveal the destiny of this unique number. Further, we are told that some knowledge has been reserved until the end. As the following verse illustrates, even the prophet Daniel was denied some understanding of the visions God had given him:

> But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase... Go *your way,* Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end (Daniel 12:4-9).

We live in an age of enormous mobility. International travel has become commonplace. Knowledge is increasing at a stunning rate, and prophecy is unfolding before our eyes. We certainly fit the description of the generation prophesied to live at the end of the age, and now is the time we can know the identity of the 144,000!

You Need to Know

Of and by itself knowledge is of little value. So what is the merit of an entire book exploring the identity and destiny of the 144,000? The answer is that Christians are commanded to search after knowledge, apply our hearts to understanding, and seek wisdom as if it were earthly treasure (Pro. 2:1-9). When we follow this principle and dig deeper into God's Word, a previously dark cavern of misunderstanding becomes illuminated. The knowledge regarding the 144,000 is certain to enhance our motivation and compel us to continue moving forward as we pursue the Kingdom of God.

As you read this book, it must be understood that this subject is no small issue. It is of extreme importance to every believer. The faith and character of the 144,000 defines their identity and is a requirement of every Christian. Each of us

should sincerely desire to be counted among their ranks. Therefore, understanding what qualifies people to be a part of this unique number is essential to every true Christian.

Understanding the 144,000

Layer after layer of evidence will be uncovered as you read this book. Within the following pages there are keys that unlock the identity and destiny of this unique number. At the same time, you will find that these keys are character traits that are essential to overcoming human nature. They are necessary in order to become a person of genuine godly character. Further, they provide each of us the opportunity to qualify to be numbered among the true and faithful servants of God.

However, be warned. The evidence presented in this book may be unsettling. The truth about this unique assembly may challenge past assumptions. It may even prompt us to rethink what is necessary to insure we attain God's Kingdom.

On the other hand, once the identity of these people is understood, another wonderful truth will become clear. If you are called by God, it is possible to be part of this special assembly and the reward God is offering those who attain this goal is both marvelous and glorious!

As you proceed through the following chapters, each key will open your mind to what God requires in order to be chosen. Additionally, each chapter is written in great hope that the knowledge will motivate the reader with ever-increasing enthusiasm and greater discipline as we pursue our magnificent quest—the family and Kingdom of God.

Chapter 2

The 144,000 Revealed

The secret *things belong* to the LORD our God, but those
things which are revealed *belong* to us and
to our children forever, that *we* may do
all the words of this law.
~ Deuteronomy 29:29 ~

When the Apostle John was given the vision recorded in the book of Revelation he was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. Approximately sixty square miles in size, and consisting primarily of volcanic hills and rocky ground, Patmos served as one of Rome's penal colonies. Religious offenders sent to this island were considered the lowest of criminals and therefore subject to wretched conditions.

The noted historian Eusebius wrote that Emperor Domitian had banished John to this tiny island in 95 A.D. where he suffered 18 months for the crime of preaching the gospel (*Ecclesiastical History,* 3.20 8-9). This is a fact that John himself confirmed (Rev. 1:9).

Constantly fettered and required to work long hours at hard labor in the rocky quarries, John would have found himself exposed to the cruel lash of the Roman overseer. It was during this time that the apostle was given his shocking vision.

Understanding the Day of the Lord

As John's visualization began, he witnessed a series of events that he called "the Lord's day" and wrote:

> I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind
> me a loud voice, as of a trumpet (Revelation 1:10).

It must be understood that John was NOT referring to a particular day of the week. Instead, other verses help us to

understand that a "day of the Lord" is a time when the Almighty takes powerful action by intervening in the affairs of humankind. For example, notice what the esteemed prophet Jeremiah wrote:

> For this *is* the **day of the Lord** GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; it shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice In the north country by the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:10).

This verse refers to a "day of the Lord" that came to pass in 605 B.C. Although it is called a "day," it took much longer than 24 hours to fulfill. Therefore, the "Lord's day" spoken of by John has a similar meaning. It is times when God miraculously intervenes to fulfill His purpose.

The book of Revelation contains a calendar of successive world events that have continued over vast periods of time. It carries readers through history unto the end of this age and beyond. When the Apostle John was "in the spirit on the Lord's Day," it refers to him no longer being aware of the physical world. John was completely, spiritually, immersed in God's imagery. His entire vision is the "day of the Lord"—God's intervention in the world's history.

The Year of God's Wrath

The majority of Revelation's content deals with prophetic events to occur at the end of the age. These will take place over several years; during which, God will consistently have a hand in steering circumstances to serve His purpose. There is a specific time frame, however, mentioned by the prophets which points to an entire year of God's wrath. Consider the words of Isaiah who wrote:

> Wail, for the day of the LORD *is* at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty... Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce

> anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it (Isaiah 13:6, 9).

In this verse, Isaiah did not refer to a literal day, but rather a prophetic day—a full year. This principle is demonstrated in the book of Numbers which states "for each day you shall bear your guilt one year" (14:34). In addition, Ezekiel was told to perform an acted oracle that represented "a day for each year" (Eze. 4:6). These Scriptures verify that a prophetic day often represents a year.

Isaiah confirmed this principle when he made another reference to the day when God will execute His vengeance on a wicked world. The prophet explained that, among other things, the purpose of the Messiah's ministry was:

> To proclaim the acceptable **year** of the LORD, and the **day** of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:2).

In the entire Bible, the term "Lord's day" never refers to a particular day of the week. When God speaks of a specific day, He simply calls it by its number. For example, if God meant Sunday, He would say "on the first day" (Gen. 1:5; Mark 16:2). Therefore, the phrase "day of the Lord" has a different and specific meaning. It speaks of a time when God will intervene.

When we compare many of these Old Testament verses with those in the book of Revelation, we see that the Apostle John's vision references end-time events including the final year of God's wrath. For example, John described a day when the Eternal will execute His vengeance by striking the inhabitants of the earth with terrifying trumpet and bowl plagues. As an angel stated:

> For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:17).

This verse proclaims that the great day of His wrath will come after the sixth seal. It refers to a time when God will

intervene in frightening and devastating ways. Compare the prior scripture with other writings of Isaiah who foretold:

> For *it is* **the day** of the LORD's vengeance, **the year** of recompense for the cause of Zion (Isaiah 34:8).
>
> Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the LORD of hosts and in the **day of His fierce anger** (Isaiah 13:13).

This final year before Christ's glorious return will be the conclusion of the great tribulation affecting the entire earth (Mark 13:19). The turmoil is started by Satan and executed by his human instruments called the beast and false prophet. These tragic events perpetrated by the devil are written on a scroll having seven seals.

The Seals of Revelation

The seven seals which unlock events described in the sixth chapter of Revelation have been a source of controversy for centuries. However, it is possible to know exactly what each of these seals represent. The true Revelator actually spoke of them in much greater detail while performing His ministry on earth.

Just days before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Christ's disciples came to Him on the Mount of Olives and asked, "What *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Mat. 24:3). The Greek word for "age" in this verse is *aion* referring to a period of time spanning thousands of years. The disciples were actually asking Christ what the world would look like when the age of man's rule on earth would come to an end.

Christ responded to this query by proclaiming what is commonly known as the Olivet Prophecy. His prophetic discourse was recorded in three of the four gospels and it is the most famous and dire warning ever uttered by the Messiah (Mat. 24; Luke 21; Mark 13). When describing these calamities, Christ painted a picture of a world punctuated by religious deception, conflict among nations and races, famines, disease, great

persecution, and phenomenal supernatural signs in the heavens. Finally, all would culminate in the wrath of God.

The first four of these seals have become legendary. They have gained the interest of millions by the illustrations of various artists and authors down through the ages.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

When the aged Apostle John witnessed the first four seals, he saw them characterized as horsemen each riding a colored horse. Notice what John said about the first horse and its rider:

> And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer (Revelation 6:2).

Because of the color of this horse, many mistakenly conclude that it reflects John's description of the returning Messiah who also rides a white horse (Rev. 19:11-16). However, it must be understood that this first seal is NOT Christ. The rider of this apocalyptic horse conquers using a bow. This bow is a symbol of humanly devised weapons of war—not the supernatural sword issuing from Christ's mouth (Rev. 19:15).

Because it is white, this first horse actually portrays religious deception. It pictures a counterfeit Christ riding atop false Christianity. Influenced by the devil himself, this malicious system's deceptive practices will eventually be enforced by a powerful world empire (Rev. 12:9; 17:3).

When pronouncing the Olivet Prophecy, Christ spoke without the use of symbols. He provided us with a clear chronological sequence of seven end time evils that mirror the seals listed in the book of Revelation. He began by speaking of false religious leaders who would claim to represent Him:

> For many will come in My name, saying, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many (Matthew 24:5).

The Savior's words parallel the opening of the first seal, revealing that this symbolic white horse portrays the proliferation of a false religion that uses Christ's name, but purveys a counterfeit Christianity. This white horse represents apostate doctrines that will be forcefully instituted throughout much of the world. Christ then opened the second seal to reveal events symbolized by a red horse and rider:

> Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that *people* should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword (Revelation 6:4).

Notice that this second horse is red—the color of blood—and its rider has the power to take away peace. Thus it is a symbol of a world at war! Again, while presenting the Olivet Prophecy, Christ clearly revealed the meaning of this seal stating:

> And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom (Matthew 24:6-7).

The Greek word "nation" in this verse is *ethnos* which pertains to race or nationality. It is the word from which our English term "ethnic" originates. Therefore, Christ was describing a time when great racial strife would permeate society. He also stated that kingdom would rise against kingdom. In other words, this horrible violence will include armed conflict between nations.

After this, a third seal was opened. John then described a black horse stating:

> …I heard the third living creature say, "Come and see." So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand (Revelation 6:5).

The dark symbolism of this black horse portrays a war scorched earth incapable of supporting vegetation. The imagery of the balances portends the measuring of food. Therefore this revelation portrays severe hunger ravaging mankind as famine sweeps the planet.

Once again, comparing this with the Olivet Prophecy, we find Christ's description continues to correspond perfectly with the vision John recorded. The Savior warned that in the end time famines would take place on the earth (Mat. 24:7). By this He confirmed that the black horse is a symbol portraying a hunger plagued earth.

This brings us to the fourth and final horseman. When describing the fourth seal, the Apostle John introduced the reader to a pale horse whose rider delivers death! John described the grisly scene with these words:

> So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth (Revelation 6:8).

The word "pale" used to describe this horse is of great interest. It comes from the Greek word *chloros*. This word is one from which we derive the word chlorophyll today. It describes a horse that is a pale green color. By this we can see that this horse foreshadows man in the throes of sickness and disease leading to death.

In this context, today we are seeing an increasing development of resistant viruses and bacteria. These pestilences are a mounting threat to all mankind. In addition, warfare has changed dramatically. No longer is it simply fought with "conventional" weapons. A more exotic form of combat has now permeated the world scene. Included in this arsenal are chemical and biological agents, such as smallpox and anthrax. The threat of bio-terrorism is upon us and this clearly presents a danger to all people who inhabit the earth.

As more and more rogue states strap on their chemical and biological gun belts, this fourth horse and its rider symbolize the deadly effects of biowarfare resulting in widespread epidemics. The fourth seal also corresponds perfectly with the next words Christ spoke in His Olivet Prophecy. He warned that the world will suffer great pestilence following the ravages of war (Mat. 24:7).

The Fifth Seal

After describing the four horsemen of the apocalypse, John watched as a fifth seal was removed. He then saw a company of martyrs whose blood was shed for upholding the faith. The Apostle wrote:

> When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of **those who had been slain for the word of God** and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they *were,* was completed (Revelation 6:9-11).

The history of God's true Church is a bloody one. Many sincere Christians have been killed down through the ages. As far as we know, all of the apostles except John died violent deaths. The eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews describes some of the great sacrifices made by God's faithful people as they stood for the truth long before the New Testament was ever written. These Scriptures state:

> Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and

> goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented (Hebrews 11:36-37).

Because Christians throughout all ages would suffer persecution, the author of Hebrews reminds us of the sacrifices God's faithful people have made in times past. Further, when giving the Olivet Prophecy, Christ also spoke of the martyrdom of saints occurring during a great tribulation that would come upon the world. As the Savior warned:

> Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another (Matthew 24:9-10).

Christ asserted that God's faithful people will be hated and many will be killed during the coming time of trouble. However, the world will also be greatly affected. Massive numbers of its inhabitants will suffer terribly. As Christ warned, this time will be so brutally devastating that without His direct intervention every man, woman, and animal would be destroyed:

> For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).

The words of Christ are found to be in perfect synchronization with the seals and their symbolic meaning. This fifth seal depicts a time that will be the most violent in all of human history. The great prophet Jeremiah described this same period stating that there would be "none like it" (Jer. 30:7).

The Sixth Seal

The Apostle John next introduced an earth-shattering event. When the sixth seal is loosed, the very heavens convulse!

Imagine how this vision must have appeared to God's apostle as he described it with the following words:

> I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place (Revelation 6:12-14).

This sixth seal rocks the entire solar system by shaking our sun, moon, and stars. It will bring staggering natural disasters including earthquakes of unimaginable intensity (Rev. 6:12). These earthquakes, coupled with the frightening signs in the heavens, will cause even the mightiest of men to tremble in abject fear. The terror felt by those who witness this shall be so horrifying that men will prefer death rather than face what awaits them (Rev. 6:15; 9:6).

When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Christ spoke of this same great disturbance in the heavens. The Savior echoed the words of the prophet Joel 2:30-31, stating:

> Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matthew 24:29).

In these verses, Christ described the sixth seal of the book of Revelation. As with the preceding prophesies, His words are found to be in complete agreement with the symbolic events portrayed by the seven seals. When the seventh seal is opened, it initiates the year of the God's wrath.

Seal	*Symbol*	*Meaning*	*Scriptures*
1	White horse	Religious deception	Rev. 6:2 Mat. 24:5
2	Red horse	War	Rev. 6:4 Mat. 24:6
3	Black horse	Famine	Rev. 6:5 Mat. 24:6
4	Pale horse	Pestilence	Rev. 6:8 Mat. 24:7
5	Souls under the altar	Martyrdom of true Christians	Rev. 6:9-11 Mat. 24:9-11
6	Heavenly signs	Announces God's wrath	Rev. 6:12-17 Mat. 24:29
7	Seven trumpet plagues	The beginning of the day of the Lord	Rev. 8-9 Mat. 24:30-31

The Day of God's Wrath

Following the heavenly signs, the Bible reveals one last devastating seal. The events to follow will have far greater impact on the world than all of the preceding six combined. This seventh seal pictures a time of enormous destruction that will profoundly affect the entire planet.

The period of time in which this seal is executed is designated in the Bible as "the Lord's day," "day of the Lord" or the "day of God's wrath." It represents the very last year of man's rule on earth. During this period, God will rain down corrective punishment upon mankind. As John wrote:

> For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:17).

John is not the only one to describe the day of the Lord in such shattering terms. Several prophets in the Old Covenant also predicted this terrible time. For example, Joel wrote:

> The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong *is the One* who executes His

> word. For the day of the LORD *is* great and very terrible; who can endure it? (Joel 2:11).

As mentioned earlier, the day of the LORD is NOT a 24 hour period of time (Num. 14:34). Instead, it is a prophetic day which lasts an entire year. This final year prior to Christ's return will be a time of tragic judgment for mankind.

We can be certain this is the proper understanding of both the timing and meaning of the seals found in the book of Revelation. Matthew recorded Christ's explanation of these seals in plain language.

Preparing for God's Judgment

Wickedness is spreading around the world like a relentless pandemic. Brotherly love is rapidly fading (Mat. 24:12). Foreseeing this, God planned what must be done to a godless planet. It must partake of the fruit of its vile ways. As John saw:

> After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree (Revelation 7:1).

Four angels will be situated on the four corners of the earth. They are positioned in the north, south, east, and west; poised to insure that the devastation they bring will cover the entire planet.

When describing these angels, John also stated that they hold back the four winds of the earth. But what are these winds? Although John does not actually say, is it possible that these winds are angelic forces?

When speaking symbolically, wind represents spirit (John 3:8). The Greek word for "spirit" is *pneuma* and it literally means a "a *current* of air, that is, *breath* (*blast*) or a *breeze*" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, G4154).

Therefore, it is possible that the four winds may be symbolic of spirit forces used by God. These four angels are

literally holding back powerful supernatural forces that God will use to carry out His wrath over the entire population of the earth.

The 144,000 Introduced

The Apostle John also saw another angel coming from the east. This spirit being instructs four angels to withhold their destruction until the true servants of God who are alive during that time are sealed. Then, he introduced an assembly of people whose number amounts to exactly 144,000:

> Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." **And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand** of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed (Revelation 7:2-4).

God orchestrates a sealing that both identifies and protects the servants of the Almighty. This act can be a consolation to some. It reflects the fulfillment of His promise to comfort those who are deeply saddened by the sin pervading this world (Isa. 61:2). The saints who faithfully endure the tribulation will realize their perseverance was not in vain. They will be protected from God's terrifying fury. The supernatural act of sealing constitutes the first key to identifying the 144,000.

Chapter 3

They are Sealed

A garden enclosed *is* my sister, *my* spouse,
a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.
~ Song of Solomon 4:12 ~

We live in an amazing world where technology, education, and commerce are ever changing. A prominent characteristic of our time is the complexity of business dealings. In times past, business transactions were simple. Industry and trade were more permanent. Today, there are mergers and acquisitions in which corporations become mega-corporations. Many businesses actually have departments dedicated solely to evaluating the feasibility of buying other companies.

Another characteristic of modern business is that a multi-million dollar transaction may take place in order to acquire a desirable employee. A sporting franchise may invest tens of millions of dollars in a single athlete. Some potential CEOs are offered million dollar sign on bonuses. However, such an investment is only made after a great deal of analysis. Knowledge, strength, and a variety of physical and emotional attributes are evaluated in an attempt to determine an individual's potential and their impact on the team.

Regardless of the type of acquisition, the entire process begins with an intensive review of all the factors involved. In an interview for the book *X-Factor*, the individual responsible for engineering the 25 billion dollar purchase of R.J.R. Nabisco outlined the process that he utilizes when considering such an acquisition. Henry Kravis explained:

> Let's say I'm thinking of buying R.J.R. Nabisco. I think of what will be done with this company, where we would make it more productive, how we could make it grow and make our return on investment

> more profitable. We have analysts and consultants come in. In my mind would be the financing, the right capital structure, how much equity and how much debt should be in place so that the company has flexibility to grow, to move into different areas. Then I think about what happens if the market turns down. I ask myself where the downside is in this investment; how low can the earnings or the cash flow go, given the capital structure? Will the company be on safe ground? (p. 45).

Mr. Kravis gives great attention to every contingency. Much thought and preparation goes into the details of the decision-making process prior to the purchase of any corporation. Such acquisitions are never the product of whim, but rather the result of in-depth analysis and planning.

Similarly, when God decides to call an individual, and thereby offer them a role in His future Kingdom, He does so only after careful planning and analysis. The Father and Christ are assembling the greatest leadership team in the history of the universe. While forming this spiritual congregation, they use a much deeper and more thorough analysis than any conglomerate governed by men.

In the corporate world, once negotiations are complete, a contract is signed. At this point, the parties refer to the negotiations as "sealed." The individuals involved might say that they "sealed the deal," or the contract is "signed, sealed, and delivered." This business analogy reflects a spiritual principle. When God chooses to add a member to His future management team, He certifies their calling by sealing them.

The 144,000 are Sealed

Before the Almighty God executes His wrath on the earth, His faithful servants are sealed. The Apostle John wrote:

> And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed (Revelation 7:4).

The Eternal forges His plans with a greater scope and more detail than any man. Every decision He makes is with great purpose, and each reflects His perfect design. While God is infinitely powerful, He is also inestimably thoughtful. In every judgment He displays immeasurable wisdom. Therefore, it is unimaginable to think that God has not thoroughly planned sealing the 144,000.

The Almighty carefully watches over each and every one that He has called out of the world. He knows that they are prone to sin and therefore running in the spiritual "red." However, God looks beyond the surface. He confirms each person's conviction and determination to live His way of life before He acquires them.

The Eternal has paid the highest possible price in an attempt to obtain every person He calls. He purchased each individual with the supreme ransom sacrifice of God's only begotten Son who suffered excruciating pain and a violent death. The individual is baptized and the hands of the ministry are laid on them (Acts 8:17). The Holy Spirit is given to the person and this vital phase of the conversion process gives the believer an opportunity to become a good and faithful servant of God.

The Meaning of Sealed

The angel told John that the servants of God must be sealed in their foreheads. This unique term is translated from the Greek word *sphragizo* and has three fundamental meanings that apply in several ways to the 144,000.

First, *sphragizo* carries the sense of being sealed as a sign of personal ownership. Second, it denotes the setting of a seal on something in order to mark it as authentic. Third, *sphragizo* signifies sealing an object with a signet such as sealing a letter, scroll, or book in order to make it secure (*Strong's,* G4792).

Sphragizo and its Applications

Meaning	*Fulfillment*
A sign of ownership	Receiving God's Holy Spirit
A mark of authenticity	Displaying obedience to God
A seal of security	Protection from God's wrath.

A Sign of Ownership

Those who are sealed are identified as belonging to Almighty God. They become His personal and private property. When writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul explained that a process of being sealed takes place through the supernatural power of God's Holy Spirit. Speaking of Christ, Paul wrote:

> In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Ephesians 1:13).

Paul reiterated that Christians are sealed with God's Spirit. He also stated that it is God:

> Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 1:22).

The term "hearts" in this verse does not mean that a Christian literally receives God's Spirit in his or her physical heart. It is an idiomatic expression used in the Bible to refer to the seat of human thought and emotion. The heart actually refers to the mind. In other words, a Christian is sealed where our deepest feelings and convictions reside, and these convictions are to be held in the context of observing God's laws. As Moses and Paul wrote:

> And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes (Deuteronomy 6:6-8).

> Clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is,* of the heart (2 Corinthians 3:3).

The forehead is the location of this function of the human brain—that processes thought and is where our passions reside. It is also the place where Christians carry God's unique sign!

Those Who are Sealed Will Receive His Name

God has occasionally changed a person's name to reflect a dominating characteristic of their existence. For example, when Abram was 99 years old God changed his name to Abraham meaning "father of a multitude" (*Strong's*, H85). Abraham's new name reflected his new identity. Jacob proved his conviction and the Eternal renamed him Israel meaning "he will rule with God" (Gen. 32:28; *Strong's*, H3478).

Those sealed through the Holy Spirit experience a similar change. The Bible reveals that God's begotten children are identified with a seal on their foreheads. It also explains that this identifying reflects God's name! As the Apostle John wrote:

> Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

Because God the Father is the head of His spiritual family, it is only logical that the family should carry His name:

> For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named (Ephesians 3:14-15).

Christ will give every born again Christian a new name after their resurrection (Rev. 3:12). Exactly what that personal name will be is unknown. However, a vital part of that name will include the name of God. As Christ indicated:

> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. **I will write on him the name of My God** and the name of the city of My God (Revelation 3:12).

Every begotten believer carries a similitude of this name. They are known as Christians and God's people. Therefore, every member of the true Church must strive to live with the dignity and morality befitting His name. As God had said, "you shall be holy; for I *am* holy" (Lev. 11:44). This is a basis for the third commandment—you shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain (Exo. 20:7).

Marked as Genuine

A second meaning of *sphragizo* is to "attest." This means God marks these people to confirm that they are genuine. Being sealed could be considered as receiving God's stamp of approval. Though many profess to follow Christ, merely claiming to believe is not sufficient to make one authentic. Sincere obedience to the law of God is required. As John wrote:

> He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him (1 John 2:4-5).

This statement makes it clear that, in order to be marked as genuine a Christian must do more than simply profess

commitment. They must live according to the responsibility that legitimate commitment to God requires. As James wrote, "Faith without works is dead" (Jam. 2:20).

In our complex society it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between those who are faithful Christians and those who are not. God knows who are His because He is able to look on the inside and see what is in a person's heart. However, it is not only in the inside what matters. God requires an outward sign, or identifying mark, for all to see. One of those signs is keeping God's Sabbath holy.

Before He revealed the Ten Commandments to Israel, God tested them to see whether they would obey Him or not. The test was the weekly Sabbath. God gave the people manna and commanded them to gather twice as much on the sixth day so that they would have provision for the Sabbath—on which they were to gather none. Keeping this command indicated whether they would walk in God's law or not (Exo. 16:4-26).

So important is this commandment that God made it a covenant calling it a "sign" between Him and His people. The word sign is *oth* in Hebrew, and it can be translated as a "mark" (*Strong's,* H226). In this context, consider God's instructions concerning the weekly Sabbath:

> Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it *is* a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that *you* may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for *it is* holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does *any* work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as* a perpetual covenant. **It *is* a sign** between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD

> made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed' (Exodus 31:13-17).

God claimed that the Sabbath was a sign between Him and His people. By this He marked Israel as His people. God commanded that the Sabbath be kept as a perpetual covenant. However, Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness and profaned His holy day. God then declared that He would pour out His fury upon them:

> Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them'; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them (Ezekiel 20:13).

This pronouncement takes on much greater meaning when we consider that God will place a mark on certain individuals which will protect them from the plagues found in His wrath that will come on all those who do not keep His commandments.

God's Mark

God has a sign or mark. The mark of the beast is a counterfeit. Like that of the beast, God's mark is worn in the forehead and hand; reflecting what God's faithful people think about in their mind and labor to perform with their strength. Regarding the Passover, the Eternal stated:

> It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth (Exodus 13:9).

Observing the holy days is to be a priority. As stated in the verse above, the Passover is to be "a memorial between your eyes." This means that the observance is to be remembered, pondered, and practiced every year.

The Almighty made another point absolutely clear. His whole way of life expressed in the Ten Commandments is the mark of God. His moral code is worn in the hand and forehead and is dramatically illustrated by one of the most beautiful passages contained in the Scriptures. God stated:

> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. **You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes** (Deuteronomy 6:5-8).

The individuals comprising the 144,000 will be those who have been sealed in their mind by the Holy Spirit. Upon receiving it, they become begotten children of God. They begin the process of developing righteous character as they meditate on, and live by, His law in every situation in life. Their faithful obedience is a sign between God and them, and therefore they are marked as genuine Christians.

Sealed for Protection

Sphragizo can also mean to seal with a signet "for security or preservation." An example would be closing up a letter or scroll in order to make it inaccessible and secure. It would be as if God put a no trespassing sign on those who need protection. This inspired Paul to warn Christians:

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

Whenever God gives His Spirit to an individual, they come under His divine protection. This does not mean that adverse circumstances will never occur, but rather that nothing

devastating will happen to them without God's approval. As Paul wrote:

> God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it* (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Like Christ, God's people may suffer persecution and even martyrdom. However, as shown during the plagues of Egypt, God protects them from the forms of punishment He inflicts on the wicked.

In this context, it is interesting to note that the events in Revelation six, which lead up to the end of the age, were also "sealed." Each event was closed in order to prevent access by anyone but Christ. In like manner, prior to God's wrath being unleashed on the world, those who are not taken to a place of safety, and are found worthy by building righteous character in the tribulation, will be sealed to protect them from the last plagues. As the Apostle John wrote:

> Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads" (Revelation 7:2-3).

An Example from the Past

God has used a similar method to protect His people in the past. The prophet Ezekiel recorded an example in which God marked His faithful in their foreheads for the purpose of protecting them from His wrath:

> And the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry

> over all the abominations that are done within it." To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark; and begin at My sanctuary" (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

This example of putting a mark on genuine believers in their forehead is a type picturing a future time when God will seal some at the end of the age. Christians who sigh and cry for the abominations of humanity will be protected just before God's wrath begins.

God's Seal—an Invisible Mark

When speaking to Nicodemus, Christ described being born again as a spiritual birth. He indicated that this birth is not visible to the human eye. It is like the wind—invisible, but with apparent effects of existence. This parallel makes it clear. While humans can see the effects of the wind, they cannot see the air itself. In a similar fashion, we can see the effects of a spiritual dimension, but cannot actually see spirit unless God allows it (John 14:17; Exo. 33:23).

Spirit beings are not limited in this way. They can look beyond the physical surfaces we see. They clearly see everything taking place in the spirit dimension. Therefore, it may be that a spiritual mark, or even a name, is written on the faithful person's forehead. This would be a sign angels could see, but humans could not.

In Ezekiel's time, an angel was commanded to mark God's people, and to slay all those who did not have that mark in their forehead (Eze. 9:4-6). The sealing at the end of the age is much like the process described by Ezekiel. The angels who are poised to pummel the earth with the trumpet and bowl plagues will see the mark of God on each true Christian. Because these people faithfully obey God, they will be protected from the plagues that will ravage the earth.

Sealed as Servants of God

The first thing God reveals about the 144,000 is that they are sealed. This sealing identifies them as good and faithful servants who will be the total number chosen for the better resurrection! Many have misunderstood this truth. The misunderstanding is in part because some believe that the entire number is sealed at the same time. This is not the case. John never wrote that the 144,000 are all sealed at once at the end of the age. His words simply indicate that there will be people sealed before the trumpet plagues begin, and the total number of these faithful servants will be 144,000.

This truth is evident when we consider the fact that John did not see the 144,000 in one place until after the trumpet plagues (Rev. 14:1-5). The apostle first only heard the predetermined number of individuals to be sealed (Rev. 7:4). The reason John did not initially see them standing together is because the chosen few will not become spirit beings until the seventh trumpet is blown (1Cor. 15:52). In addition, the elect are NOT all sealed at the same time! Understanding the timing of events described in Revelation seven helps to make this clear.

Chapter 4

A Question of Timing

To everything *there is* a season, a time for every purpose under heaven
~ Ecclesiastes 3:1 ~

The book of Revelation reveals that 144,000 individuals will be sealed by the Holy Spirit. This sealing identifies them as genuine Christians who belong to God and are under His care. The following chapter specifically discusses the timing of those who become a part of the 144,000, and the information found here may be the most important truth necessary to understand the identity and destiny of these unique people.

Many do not realize that the 144,000 represent the entirety of the first resurrection. This has often been misunderstood because of a common false teaching that millions will be raised at the second coming, and the 144,000 are simply a smaller group within a larger resurrection. This conclusion can seem legitimate if readers do not recognize three facts.

First, an inset within chapter seven interrupts the progression of the seven seals to reveal two separate groups of people—the 144,000 and a great multitude. Second, while verses three and four are usually read together, you may not notice that each verse refers to different time periods. Third, John never sees the 144,000 being sealed. He only hears the total number after the last individuals are sealed.

If readers do not take these facts into account, it is possible to overlook the actual sequence of events and mistakenly conclude that the entire 144,000 are sealed at the same time. However, a careful investigation reveals that this is not the case.

Understanding Insets

The book of Revelation is a fascinating series of chronologies focusing on future events. As each time-line

unfolds, insets are frequently placed within specific progressions. These insets may interrupt the flow of events in order to introduce a new thought, to view a topic from another perspective, or skip ahead to reveal the result of a particular occurrence. Notice how these insets occur as Revelation moves from chapter one through seven.

Chapter one introduces Christ and the seven churches. The second and third chapters contain letters to these churches. In addition to conferring specific messages to each congregation, these letters also provide a prophetic history of God's Church throughout the ages. Chapter four begins by introducing an inset revealing the throne of God, the activity surrounding it, and the awe-inspiring beings that accompany Him. Chapters five and six contain a new chronology revealing six of the seven seals. As chapter seven begins, the seventh seal is poised for release. Suddenly, a unique inset introduces readers to the 144,000 and then a great multitude. It is vital to understand this particular inset to properly identify these two distinctive groups.

The 144,000 are not Sealed Simultaneously

While considering where one sequence of events ends and another begins, it must also be remembered that the original manuscripts were written without chapter or verse divisions. These breaks were created centuries later by translators who mistakenly decided to end the events discussed in chapter six in the initial verses of chapter seven. This can easily distract the reader's focus from the fact that the trumpet plagues are held back in order to seal those still alive who are to be included as part of the 144,000. Consider how these verses should be read with no break in the focus of thought:

> I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of

> its place. And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. **Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads"** (Revelation 6:12-17; 7:1-3).

Notice that the chronological flow of the seven seals is interrupted after describing the aftermath of the sixth seal. At this point, verse three of chapter seven looks forward to an act that must take place BEFORE the seventh seal is opened. The angel will seal God's faithful servants that are still alive to protect them from the trumpet plagues. Take note that John does not see anyone being sealed. Then, verse four shifts to a time AFTER these servants have been sealed:

> And I heard the number of those who **were** sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed (Revelation 7:4).

The apostle never witnessed these individuals or saw how many were sealed. He only "heard" the total number. This sum was revealed after the sealing was complete. This is where many readers make a common mistake of believing the entire number is sealed at the same time.

Next, John heard that they were composed of 12,000 from each of twelve tribes who are thoroughly discussed in chapter 8

of this book. Finally, the apostle saw the great multitude. Only then does the prophecy return to its previous flow by describing the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1-7).

Without recognizing where this inset begins, the shift in the timing, and the fact that John does not actually see the 144,000, many have incorrectly assumed that they are all sealed at once. But the Scriptures never say such a thing. The angel simply stated:

> Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees **till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads** (Revelation 7:3).

The 144,000 are God's Faithful from all Ages

The single most important fact is that John did not actually see how many were sealed prior to the trumpet plagues. Neither did he hear the predetermined number to be sealed. The reason is that it would be impossible for anyone to know the exact number because many faithful throughout history have been sealed prior to this event. The Bible speaks of great champions of faith in the Old Covenant who are certain to be included in the first resurrection. This fact makes it clear that the entire number chosen could not be sealed at once. It also explains why the apostle does not see this unique group gathered together until after the first resurrection in chapter fourteen.

The first three verses in Revelation seven allow for an unspecified number to exist at the end of the age. It is these people who will be sealed just before the terrible day of the Lord. They will complete God's final number. Christ's parable of the householder continuing to hire laborers right up to the very end demonstrates that such a circumstance is not only possible, God is in the process of fulfilling this very scenario (Mat. 20:1-16).

The First Resurrection

The 144,000 are composed of all those in the first resurrection, and they are not sealed at the same time. Some have already made their calling and election sure and are in the grave

awaiting Christ's return. In chapter seven, an angel interrupts the flow of events after the sixth seal so that the servants of God who are alive during the end-time can be sealed. The faithful during the end time will be added to God's loyal followers who died throughout human history.

The number of those who will be sealed during the last days was not revealed to John. The number of those sealed from the time of Adam unto our age is also not revealed. What the apostle heard was the sum total of all that have been, and will be, sealed (Rev. 7:4). Each individual will be chosen based on their consistent obedience. Like Abraham, every person must be tested to insure that he or she qualifies. After Abraham demonstrated His willingness to withhold nothing from God, the Eternal said "Now I know." At that point, he was assured a place among those who will attain the first resurrection.

The Eternal must come to know where each person's loyalty lies. He must try the minds and hearts of those He has called to see what choices they will make during good times and adversity (Psa. 26:2). Some may even find that they must prove themselves worthy by suffering horrific effects of the great tribulation. Nevertheless, those who qualify before the trumpet plagues begin will be sealed at that time. However, God's predetermined number is set. Only a comparative few will comprise the 144,000 (1Cor. 1:26). As Paul wrote, many will run the race, but not all will receive the prize (1Cor. 9:24).

For this reason, the number of available positions at the end of the age could not have been known when John received his vision because not all who are called will qualify. Some will fail to respond to their calling. Others may neglect or even reject so great a salvation. Therefore, those yet to be sealed cannot be determined until this specific time.

God often speaks of things that have not yet transpired as though they had already happened (Rom. 4:17). To Him it is an absolute reality because He first declares what will occur, and then makes it come to pass (Isa. 46:9-10). When Christ revealed that the 144,000 are sealed, some were not yet born. Others had died long before.

God will seal the remainder of His faithful servants prior to unleashing His terrifying trumpet plagues. He then revealed that there will be a total of 144,000 chosen from the time of Adam to the end of the age. It is this number who will be in the first resurrection and rule with Christ for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4).

The Great Multitude

As John's vision continued, the apostle also saw a completely different group of people called a "great multitude" (Rev. 7:9). Thoroughly explained in chapter 18, they will eventually stand before the throne of God, but are not identified by a specific number. They are NOT part of the first resurrection, but will exist at an altogether different time.

What must be understood is that chapter seven of Revelation contains an inset placed between the seals and the trumpet plagues in order to reveal two spiritual harvests of humanity. The first is comprised of the 144,000. These attain the first resurrection. They are spiritual Israel, and destined to be leaders in the Kingdom of God. The second harvest is the rest of mankind from every nation, age, and race on earth. This great multitude will ultimately attain the Kingdom of God, but will not have the same role as the 144,000.

Chapter 5

They are Servants of God

But now, being free from sin, and having been made servants to God, you have your fruit in that which is holy, and the end is eternal life.
~ Romans 6:22, *the Bible in Basic English* ~

Perhaps the least understood aspect of the Christian life is that of being a servant. As children, many of us may have felt a sense of fulfillment in being able to help mom or dad. However, as we mature, we tend to become jaded regarding the idea of servitude.

As a result of our modern, materialistic society, many adults now view serving as foolish, unsophisticated, or even demeaning. They see servants as individuals with a broken spirit, lacking self esteem, with little vision. They are sometimes compared to a pack animal plodding through life without dignity or a sense of destiny. But nothing could be further from the truth! When properly understood, being a faithful servant is one of humankind's highest aspirations. Consider that Christ said "he who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Mat. 23:11).

The Source of Selfishness

There was a time when service toward others was the only recognized way of life. The physical universe was not yet a reality. Only heaven existed, and it was populated by God and the angelic beings He had created. These angels were designed to enjoy God's way of life and would eventually serve humankind which God would later create (Heb. 1:14).

Lucifer was a leader among these angels. At some point after the creation of the physical universe, he decided to no longer serve God and His purpose. Instead, this former being-of-light

wanted to be served rather than serve—to compete rather than cooperate. God actually revealed the inner thoughts of Lucifer as he rebelled against the Almighty stating:

> For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High' (Isaiah 14:13-14).

This powerful spirit being influenced one-third of the angels to follow him in a rebellion against God (Rev. 12:4). War ensued and the destructive forces unleashed by Lucifer's insurrection are indelibly written in the universe for all of mankind to see.

As scientists probe the depths of outer space, their telescopes find pummeled moons, asteroids and dust where beautiful planets once existed. They perceive massive black holes that consume everything around them. This startling devastation found in our universe reflects the angelic resistance that culminated in all out war against God and His way of life.

Cast down to earth, the influence of Satan and his demons now pervades this world. The persuasion of this evil being is so great that Scriptures refer to him as the god of this world (2Cor. 4:4). Satan sways national leaders to act in accord with his values. He has inspired tyrants to use and abuse people for the purpose of serving selfish ambitions.

Because of Satan's influence, the resources of entire countries have been exploited. Vast expanses of land have been raped for the benefit of the few while the poor have been left to languish. Man's history has been written in a river of blood as men have continually waged war to gain more power and wealth.

Every individual who has ever lived has felt the influence of the devil. The whole physical creation reflects this fact. In this context, the Apostle Paul wrote:

> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (KJV, Romans 1:20).

According to this statement the invisible spirit world can be understood by observing the physical creation. With this perspective in mind, consider the molecules that make up an organism. Each cell is designed to serve the body's requirements. Their job is to retain the nutrients, build tissues, and release energy when the body needs it. Molecules harmonious existence portrays the way God intended men to live.

Just as healthy cells picture God's way of serving each other in unity and mutual cooperation, diseases such as cancer portray Satan's way. Cancer cells take nutrients from the body, but refuse to surrender them when needed. Instead of serving the individual, these cells make war on the body. They selfishly drain life from the host and by this destroy even themselves.

In like manner, many people believe they exist primarily to take all they can for themselves. These individuals find the notion of being a servant abhorrent. Consider Paul's depiction of our end-time culture and how it portrays the demonic, spiritual cancer running rampant in our age:

> But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Timothy 3:1-4).

Our society reflects a philosophy in which each person puts themselves first. With individuals looking out for only their own welfare, our culture has become one in which it is accepted—even expected—that people use others for personal gain. It is no wonder that book titles such as *Looking out for Number One* found its way to the top of the bestseller list.

It is obvious that we have adopted Satan's self-serving ways. The good news is it will not always be this way. God is preparing a people who believe that serving others is our highest calling. God will use these individuals to restore His way of service to the earth and its inhabitants.

Champions of Service

The 144,000 are true and faithful servants of God. As the Apostle John recorded divine instructions given to four angels:

> Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads (Revelation 7:3).

Along with Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and all the great men and women of the Bible, true Christians are called "servants of our God." The Greek word for "servants" is *doulos*, meaning "a slave in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency" (*Strong's*, G1401). This is the same word that Paul used to describe the greatest servant of all. As he wrote about Christ:

> Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:6-7).

The Savior kept His last Passover with the disciples on the eve of His crucifixion. As they sat down to eat, the disciples began arguing among themselves who should be the greatest. This was not the first time they had engaged in arguments concerning self exaltation. For example, James and John once enlisted the help of their mother to ask the Savior if they could sit at His side in the Kingdom (Mat. 20:20-24).

Imagine how disheartening this must have been to Christ during His final hours. Nevertheless, He used this dispute to teach a profound lesson regarding the definition of greatness:

> And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:25-27).

After hearing the dispute among His disciples, the Messiah picked up a towel, poured water into a basin, kneeled before His disciples, and washed their feet. Christ then explained that those desiring to be His followers should emulate this beautiful example of service, stating:

> You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For **I have given you an example**, that you should do as I have done to you (John 13:13-15).

The act of washing the disciple's feet spoke volumes about God's view of greatness. While people might believe that those who are important are the ones who should be served, God sees those who serve as having more value. The greatest man who ever lived was Christ, and His entire life was dedicated to serving His Father and mankind.

One of the most graphic demonstrations of His desire to serve was evidenced later that night. While in the garden of Gethsemane, Christ prayed intensely that if it were possible the Father would remove the cup containing His impending beating, humiliation, and crucifixion. However, even when faced with such terrible suffering, Christ still had the mindset of a servant stating, "Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). He proceeded to willingly lay down His life to make reconciliation between man and God possible (Rom. 5:10).

Christ was the perfect example of a faithful servant. Far from being a life without dignity or purpose, His physical existence profoundly affected the entire world. For example, author Charles Swindoll wrote:

> Nineteen long centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever were built; all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life (*Improving Your Serve,* p. 160).

Christ is privileged to be called the servant of God, and those who follow His footsteps are also profoundly honored to carry this respected title. The 144,000 understand that helping others is the Eternal's way of life. They have dedicated their existence to an eternity of serving both God and His people.

What Is Required of Servants?

Being a servant implies humility and reliance upon one who is greater. The Bible states that a servant is obedient to someone or something more powerful than themselves. The Apostle Paul illustrated this principle when he said:

> Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? (Romans 6:16).

Obedience is essential to those who seek eternal life. A servant of God is one who obeys His law and submits to the Almighty's authority. In this context, there are many who claim to be Christian, but resist being servants. Billions who claim allegiance to Christ have been deceived by the devil to believe that God only requires accepting the Savior in one's heart and

righteous works are not required. John warned of this fallacy when he wrote:

> Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him (1 John 2:3-5).

In order to be a part of God's Kingdom, a person must be willing to submit to the authority of God's law. Those described by John as "the servants of our God" are individuals who are obedient to Him and keep His law. They know, and live by, His code of conduct as revealed in the Ten Commandments.

More than the Letter of the Law

Obedience goes further than keeping the letter of the law. A person's entire perspective changes once they grasp the defining characteristics of a true servant. A Christian begins to understand that their life is not their own. Christ purchased us with His life. As Paul wrote:

> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Realizing that they literally belong to God, His servants strive to obey Him in every aspect of life. In their daily decisions they continually ask what God's will is? They consider His ethics in every behavior whether it is work, play, or rest. They are not reluctant to submit to God's law. Rather they love His law. They make a real effort to understand His intent and they apply God's principles thoroughly to their own lives.

The servants of God understand that they, and everything they have, actually belong to God. Christians realize that we are

merely stewards of God's possessions which are temporarily entrusted to our care. They understand that our talents and every single day of life are a gift—not to be used for ourselves alone. Instead, they utilize these things to glorify God and strive to enrich the lives of others.

At work they serve God as well as their employer. At home they support and nourish the family with guidance and care. They make time to help others; especially those in need. In this way they fulfill God's law of love (Jam. 2:8).

God's Servants Work

Christ told His disciples, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me" (John 9:4). Earlier, He said that He must do the will of the Father, and "finish His work" (John 4:34). The Messiah was given a job that was multifaceted. It included revealing the Father, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom, establishing His Church, calling sinners to repentance, confirming the promises made to the fathers, and redeeming man from the consequences of sin (Mat. 11:27; 16:18; Luke 4:43; 5:32; Rom. 15:8; 1John. 3:5). These are just some of the assignments Christ was commissioned to perform, and He finished the work the Father gave Him to do (John 17:4).

Then, as the Savior commended His spirit to God, His last utterance was "It is finished" (John 19:30). With these profound words, Christ declared that He had successfully completed the work. Still, He also left a work to be done by His disciples. That work will continue until the day of His return. Because of this ongoing duty of Christians, Christ said that His servants would be blessed if they were found "so doing" when He comes (Luke 12:43). But what is that work?

A Twofold Commission

Besides the responsibilities each of us have to our families and employers, the Scriptures reveal a two-fold work that Christ gave to His entire Church. The first commission is to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God as a witness (Mark 16:15). So important is this task that the Messiah insured it would

be preached throughout the world before the Kingdom of God will come to the earth:

> And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

God's servants have proclaimed His Kingdom from the beginning, and they continue to preach this message to this very day. This aspect of the work will culminate with the appearance of two witnesses who will have great power as they indict all nations on earth (Rev. 11:3-6).

The second commission concerns the nurturing of God's Church. The flock is to be fed and edified. Christ reminded Peter of this work with the following words:

> So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Feed My lambs**." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "**Tend My sheep**." He said to him the third time, "Simon, *son* of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "**Feed My sheep**" (John 21:15-17).

With the words "feed" and "tend My sheep," Christ declared the second great commission given to His Church. His servants are to spiritually feed and nurture those individuals who the Father would call. The importance of this part of our work cannot be overstated. Everyone who is called by God needs to be nourished to sustain them in their daily walk. When writing to the Church in Rome, the Apostle Paul said that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This is why God established a ministry; to edify the saints and to

faithfully teach God's way of life by word and example. Ministers are to encourage and correct. They are to nurture and edify those God has called. By feeding His sheep, the ministry becomes a tool Christ uses to prepare Church members for the future Kingdom of God.

However, it is not only ministers who fulfill this twofold commission. All members of the Church are to support the work and assist in any way that they can such as with prayers, tithes, offerings, visiting one another, and volunteering to help with tasks that, no matter how menial, allow the Church of God to function as a team—a family of believers with the same mission and goals. In fact, the Almighty's entire Kingdom will consist of servants. His desire is to develop a servant family. Therefore He designed the structure of His Church to reflect this institution. In this way, each of His children profoundly affects one another as they learn to serve each other.

True servants seize opportunities to advance the cause of God's Kingdom. While some preach the gospel as a witness by sermons, booklets, television, and radio, others finance that gospel message through tithes and offerings. Some anoint the sick while others assist in prayers and fasting. Brethren help each other with words of encouragement, daily chores, lending a sympathetic ear, and providing necessities for those in need. Some may teach while others visit widows and fatherless.

Service toward one another makes it possible for every one of God's children to practice the Savior's way of life. Those who are counted among the 144,000 are able to identify opportunities to serve others. In doing so, they reflect the attitude of service God always intended for all of humanity.

Servants of Our God

God is going to establish His Kingdom here on the earth. When He does, it will not be ruled by tyrants who use others for their own purposes. The leaders will be servants of God and helpers of mankind.

Those who are counted among the 144,000 have voluntarily surrendered their will to God. They love God's law

and obey His commandments. They have dedicated their lives to living the way God would have them live. They learn to share their time, resources, and abilities with others. The 144,000 are dedicated to the work God has given them. They do not seek their own honor, but regard others as being greater than themselves (Php. 2:3). They are not only servants now, but aspire to be servants in the world to come.

This is the reason God will choose them. He is looking for those who have developed the mind of a true servant. It is this kind of person who will assist Him in serving humanity during the millennial rule of His Son. The 144,000 are a precise number that are called for this very purpose.

Chapter 6

They are a Precise Number

And I heard the number of those who were sealed.
One hundred *and* forty-four thousand…
~ Revelation 7:4 ~

The noted biblical commentator, Dr. E. Bullinger, made a profound statement in the preface of his book *Number in Scripture.* He wrote that "There can be neither works nor words without number" (p. 1). His words reflect the fact that, from the movement of our hands to the wavelength of our vocal chords—numbers play a vital role in every part of our lives.

The Almighty designed and constructed the magnificent universe with supreme planning and order. In fact, God is without question a great mathematical super-genius. He created numbers and the laws of physics with a magnificent purpose in mind. Everywhere we look we can see God's use of equations in the physics that rule our lives.

What may come as a surprise is that the Eternal also uses mathematics in His spiritual creation. While most understand that God uses numbers as time frames for the fulfillment of prophecy, few consider that He also created specific numbers to portray various principles and spiritual values.

For example, the number one signifies unity. For this reason a man and woman are to be joined together in marriage and become "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). In like manner, Christ explained that He and the Father were one in mind and purpose (John 10:30). Additionally, Christ entreated the Father that He would unite the apostles and other followers with this same spirit (John 17:20-22). The Apostle Paul also described the Church as having many members, but are one body (1Cor. 12:12).

The number two portrays division. The prophet Amos stated that two cannot walk together except they be agreed (Amos 3:3). Therefore Christians are encouraged to avoid division and to be joined together in the same mind (1Cor. 1:10). In addition, if the testimony of at least two witnesses is not in agreement, a proper judgment cannot be made (Mat. 18:16). The Apostle James also pointed out that a double minded man is unstable in his ways (Jam. 1:8).

The number three denotes a form of completeness. A complete geometric shape can be made with three lines. Christ completed His work on earth by rising from the dead on the third day (Mark 10:34). God's plan for mankind will be completed through a process of three resurrections (Rev. 20:1-15).

Four pictures a foundation on which to build. Four walls are capable of bearing great weight. There are four gospels upon which the New Testament was built. The first four commandments show love toward God and are the basis for the following six which show love towards neighbor.

The number five pictures that which God adds to the foundation. This figure represents God's grace which is "the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life" (*Strong's*, G5485). For example, the first five books of the Bible declare God's law which is His gift to inspire humankind. God also showed favor to Israel when He promised that five would chase away a hundred (Lev. 26:8). Paul stated that he would rather speak five words with understanding than 10,000 words which cannot be understood (1Cor. 14:19). The holy anointing oil had five parts (Exo. 30:23-25). The fifth kingdom on earth will be that of Christ (Dan. 2:44).

The number six represents that which pertains to mankind. Man and woman were created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26-31). God gave man six days each week in which to work (Exo. 20:8-11). A man called the beast in the Bible is destined to be the catalyst for the great tribulation, and the number associated with his name is 666—symbolizing the absolute worst that man can be (Rev. 13:18).

The number representing spiritual completion is seven. The Almighty created the Sabbath and sanctified it on the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath denotes the week's completion. It is believed that God has given man 6,000 years to rule on this planet (Psa. 90:4; 2Pet. 3:8). After which Christ will intervene to establish His Kingdom—launching the seventh millennium. Thus, the seven-day week pictures God's 7,000 year plan for humankind.

God also created seven annual holy days. These days foreshadow His entire plan of salvation (Lev. 23; Col. 2:16-17). The Bible also speaks of seven prophetic times in which God's punishment would be fulfilled (Lev. 26:18). Finally, Taking the number of man (six), and adding one (God's number for unity), the sum becomes seven. Therefore, man is only complete when connected to God.

Seven is also used throughout the book of Revelation. There are seven seals leading to seven trumpet and seven bowl plagues which complete God's righteous judgment on the world. There are seven churches representing seven eras of God's true Church down through time.

The number eight represents that which is super abundant, or more than that which is complete. A week is complete in seven days. The eighth day starts the first day of a new week. Thus, this number portrays a new beginning. For example, Noah and his family were eight individuals who were saved to repopulate the earth after the flood (2Pet. 2:5). A male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day after birth; portraying a new life as a child of God's people (Gen. 17:12). The eighth day after the Feast of Tabernacles reflects the end of God's 7,000 year plan and goes beyond to the new heavens, new earth, and New Jerusalem. It will be a spiritual new beginning for all who attain salvation (Lev. 23:36).

The number ten portrays God's law. The Eternal gave humanity the Ten Commandments which constitute His perfect moral code defining sin and how to express love (1John 3:4; Mat. 22:36-40). The Creator delivered Israel from Egypt in which His judgment upon that wicked nation consisted of ten plagues. His

law regarding finances includes instructions for tithing which literally means a tenth (Lev. 27:30).

Finally, consider the number twelve. This value reflects righteous government. It is used extensively by God in His governing of the heavens as well as the earth. The seat of His government in heaven is surrounded by 24 elders—two sets of twelve (Rev. 11:16). The nation of Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and each tribe constituted a regional government. Christ chose twelve men to be apostles who would be the beginning of His government in the New Testament Church. Thus, the number twelve plays a prominent role in both the nation of Israel and God's Church. These two governmental bodies will be intimately connected in God's Kingdom on earth. Therefore, this number is inextricably linked to the 144,000.

The number chosen for the first resurrection will only be 144,000, and they are numbered from twelve tribes (Rev. 7:5-8). Each tribe will consist of 12,000 servants of God. However, it is important to understand that these numbers do not necessarily reflect individuals with a physical heritage linking them to the tribes of Israel. As Paul wrote:

> But *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit… For they *are* not all Israel, who *are* of Israel (Romans 2:29; 9:6).

While physical Israel exists, Paul explained that there is a spiritual type of Israel which consists of various converts to God's true religion (Gal. 3:29). For this reason, God will assign 12,000 individuals to each of 12 tribes (Rev. 7:5-8).

It is also interesting to note that the number 144,000 is a factor of both twelve and ten. Ten reflects God's law which is the basis for judgment (Exo. 20). Twelve portrays government. An equation using these numbers reveals that 12 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10 = 144,000.

But—exactly what roles are these chosen saints destined to fulfill. The number 144,000 reflects the fact that these servants of God will play a prominent role in His government by making

judgments based on divine law. As Paul wrote, "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (1Cor. 6:3).

Government in the World to Come

The Bible describes a time in which the Messiah will return to the earth and restore peace and order (Rev. 11:15). Christ will establish His millennial government, and His faithful servants down through the ages will be raised to rule with Him (Rev. 20:4).

To insure His government will work in perfect harmony, God designed specific offices for each member of His administration. For example, when the Apostle Peter asked the Savior what reward he would receive in the Kingdom, Christ responded by revealing a transcendent destiny awaiting the twelve apostles who would faithfully obey God:

> So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

Although the apostles are dead and awaiting a resurrection, these men were promised that they will live again to serve in Christ's millennial government. Under King David, the apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes (Eze. 37:24). This means that the 144,000 will include David, the apostles, and those who are chosen to govern various cities and nations around the world. The wonderful truth is that their future is inextricably connected to the identity and destiny of the 144,000.

Their identity begins to manifest itself in a very real and practical sense. This unique number will be future assistants to Christ. They will rule under His authority as dignitaries of God's government on the earth. However, this magnificent destiny will not end there. The 144,000 will later govern the entire universe from God's future headquarters—the New Jerusalem. As Christ revealed:

> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem… (Revelation 3:12).

The future of God's elect includes sitting in positions of government for all eternity. The ultimate seat of God's government will be New Jerusalem. This magnificent holy city will come down from heaven adorned as beautifully as a bride dressed for her husband. It will sit in splendor in the midst of new heavens upon a new earth (Rev. 21:1-2). From this monumental edifice, the 144,000 will reign with God forever as the Son's Bride.

A City Inscribed with the Number of Government

In order to see the full glory of New Jerusalem, the Apostle John was carried away in the spirit to a "great and high mountain" (Rev. 21:10). When speaking prophetically, a mountain represents a government or kingdom (Dan. 2:35). The New Jerusalem is the seat of God's future government, and it will be occupied by the greatest leadership team ever assembled. Consider the number of government repeatedly expressed in its dimensions.

> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light *was* like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with **twelve gates**, and **twelve angels** at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the **twelve tribes** of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had **twelve foundations**, and on them were **the names of the twelve apostles** of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and

> its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: **twelve thousand furlongs**. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: **one hundred *and* forty-four cubits**, *according* to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was *of* jasper; and the city *was* pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city *were* adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation *was* jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates *were* **twelve pearls**: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city *was* pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:10-21).

The holy New Jerusalem will be a flawless 12,000 furlongs long, wide, and high. Translating furlongs to miles reveals that this building will be approximately 1,500 miles long, wide, and high. If it were placed on this current planet, it would stretch from the coast of California to Dallas, Texas and would cover nearly 1/3 of the United States of America. It would also reach approximately 1,200 miles beyond the earth's atmosphere. This future building will contain an astounding 2.7 billion cubic miles!

Because of its monumental size, New Jerusalem is far larger than any nation on the planet. If God attempted to place such a building on the earth today it would cause our world to spin off its axis. The New Jerusalem will be established on a new earth that God will create (Rev. 21:1).

The city will be surrounded by a wall 144 cubits high; the sum of 12 x 12. Taller than a 20-story building, this wall will have twelve foundations bearing the names of twelve apostles. Additionally, these foundations will be garnished with twelve types of precious stones. Access to the city is granted through twelve gates which will be fashioned from enormous pearls. The

twelve gates are to be attended by twelve angels. On the gates shall be written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and in the midst of the city are trees that will bear twelve kinds of fruit.

New Jerusalem has the number twelve meticulously built into its design. This number which reflects government is also used twelve times when describing the city. Twelve reveals that New Jerusalem is a city designed for those who are qualified to govern!

The Residence of God

Imprinted with the number twelve, and designed for those who will reign with Christ, the holy city is currently being constructed. The chief foreman of this colossal project is none other than the Messiah who is personally assuring that each room contains the quality befitting those chosen to be His bride. As Christ said:

> In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also (John 14:2-3).

The house with many mansions is New Jerusalem. It is being prepared for the firstfruits who will rise to meet Christ in the air at His coming (1Ths. 4:17). This is why both the faithful saints and New Jerusalem are referred to as being the wife and bride of Christ (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:9). The saints and the city share the same magnificent destiny!

John wrote that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life are allowed access to this city (Rev. 21:27). He also stated God the Father and Christ will have glorious thrones in this place (Rev. 22:3). The fact that God's throne resides in this city is of enormous significance. Without apology, Christ declared that He shared God's throne. At the same time, He revealed that He would share His throne with others (Rev. 3:21). The throne He spoke of is the very seat of God's government. This means

that the 144,000 are designated to assist in governing with Christ—first during His millennial rule on earth, and later in the new heavens and new earth.

Numerical Perfection

God's use of number in Scripture demonstrates a pattern that is far beyond coincidence. These numerical patterns reveal an extraordinary design and a great master plan. Because of God's numerical precision, it must be concluded that the number 144,000 is literal and not simply symbolic. This also makes it clear that this number reflects both God's holy law and His government. Unlike the number 666, which represents the worst that man can be, there is a number that reflects the best we can be. That number is 144,000!

This number will consist of people who have learned to submit to the law of God as they strive to live by His every Word. They actively work to overcome Satan's influence and their own human nature. They have matured spiritually and developed godly character.

The 144,000 are those who have followed God with passion and zeal. They are those who attain the first resurrection. They are the few chosen out of the many God has called (Mat. 22:14).

The New Jerusalem and the Number 12

Revelation 21:12-22:2

12 gates leading to the city
12 angels attending the gates
12 pearls constituting the gates
12 tribes written on the gates
12 foundations
12 precious stones
12 apostles on the foundations
Length. breadth, and height of the city are equal; 12 thousand furlongs
Height of city wall is 144 cubits (12 x 12)
12 manner of fruit on the tree

Chapter 7

Are 144,000 Too Few?

For many are called, but few chosen.
~ Matthew 20:16 ~

One of the most popular phrases describing the values of modern society is "bigger is better." We see this belief expressed almost everywhere in western culture. Corporations want bigger buildings and more profits. Employees want larger homes and televisions. People want bigger soft drinks, more action in movies, and computers with larger hard drives. This philosophy has become so pervasive that it has even infected the religious community. Many churches have become a mirror of the secular, corporate, model. In fact, most religious leaders seem driven to seek bigger buildings, increase the number of hits on their websites, and watch their fellowship grow. Sadly, this obsession is often motivated by a desire to increase financial contributions and personal power.

Large numbers have a powerful psychological effect on people. The greater the count, the stronger the sense of validation felt by both members and clergy alike. This perceived need for more is a driving force behind the spiritual work undertaken by many. As a result, we have mega-churches in which thousands attend, but it becomes impossible for members to personally know more than a fraction of the people. In addition, ministers do not have the time to properly counsel such large flocks. Still, these huge religious bodies are often esteemed as a model of ministerial success. However, as the churches grow in numbers, the vast majority of congregants continue to be troubled and spiritually unfulfilled.

One outcropping of the obsession with self-validation through numbers is the phenomena of anthropomorphism. This occurs when people believe that God is like us. Instead of

adopting His principles, many try to ascribe their values to Him. As a result of this tendency, church leaders have propagated the idea that God is also driven by numbers. They think that He is desperately striving to save as many people as possible before Christ returns.

What we must understand is that while men may be impressed by large numbers or great stature, God is not. The Almighty revealed this vital truth when He stated:

> "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Many mistakenly think that God is like us. However, His values vastly differ from ours. He is not obsessed with quantity. Instead, the Eternal is seeking quality! He is looking for those people who truly seek His perfect, holy, and righteous character.

For example, God did not look upon size or status when He chose David to be king. Later, in opposition to the thoughts of all others, David did not need a band of men to defeat Goliath. God also used Gideon and only 300 men to conquer 135,000 heathen soldiers (Judges 8:10). The Bible is filled with examples of God doing great works with only a few.

Still, some continue to think that Christ is going to require great numbers of assistants when He returns. This is not the case. He is the Almighty and does not need large numbers of angels to help Him overthrow Satan. Neither does He require millions of spirit beings to help Him rule the earth. Nothing is outside His ability to perform. As Luke recorded:

> For with God nothing will be impossible (Luke 1:37).

God is not trying to recruit vast numbers of people in order to enlist their help when He returns. Instead, He is personally selecting a team of servant based leaders to assist

Christ, and He will make these chosen few His personal representatives on the earth (Rev. 5:10; Mic. 4:5).

Now is not the Only Time of Salvation

The 144,000 will be those who have developed godly character and integrity during their lifetime. As a result, they will ultimately become spirit-born children of God. They will be changed in composition to become both incorruptible and immortal at the first resurrection (1Cor. 15:53). This will be an amazing gift, but is salvation limited to only 144,000 individuals? What about the billions of human beings that have lived since God created man? Isn't God trying to save them? The shocking truth is that God is NOT trying to save the majority of humanity at this time.

The Almighty created man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden. He taught them the right way to live. Then Satan deceived Eve into disobeying God, and she persuaded her husband to do the same. By this act, man chose to reject God's rule. Consequently, God severed His relationship with humankind. Since then, people have followed our first parent's example of rejecting God's authority and deciding for themselves what constitutes right and wrong. With the exception of a relative few individuals, humanity has been cut off from God. Millions throughout history have never truly known the Father, Christ, or the Scriptures (1Cor. 1:26).

Consider ancient countries such as Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and the Canaanite people before the time of Moses. Most of these people never even heard of the true God. As a result, billions have practiced a way of life diametrically opposed to the Almighty without any chance of knowing differently. Then there are the millions of infants who die every year due to disease, birth complications, and the horrific practice of abortion. These perish without learning a single word about Christ.

Even the majority of ancient Israel was not offered salvation. God brought them out of Egypt by a mighty hand and great miracles. He then entered into a covenant with them through the Ten Commandments. However, that Covenant never

offered eternal life. The Old Covenant simply promised physical blessings for obedience and a curse of destruction if they turned away from God (Deu. 28:1-20). Even after Christ came to this earth, God still did not offer salvation to everyone. He actually prevented many from understanding His message. For example, Christ told the disciples that He frequently spoke the truth in parables so that people would NOT understand and be converted (Mark 4:10-12). The Apostle Paul also explained that God had literally blinded much of Israel to the truth (Rom. 11:7-8). Even after He was crucified, and rose from the dead, God still was not trying to save everyone.

One of the greatest errors advanced by the religious community is the idea that the only opportunity for salvation is now, and that those who fail to accept Christ in this lifetime are lost for all eternity. This teaching is in direct conflict with the true gospel.

For example, shortly after His Galilean ministry, Christ confronted a number of unbelieving Jews. He presented them with a truth that was difficult for them to understand. He stated that not one person has been given the option of coming to God based on their personal volition. It is not a choice people can make. Instead, the Father chooses whom He will. As Christ clearly explained:

> No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

Christ revealed that individuals can only come to Him if the Father specifically calls them. Therefore, only those called by the Father have an opportunity to be a part of the first resurrection. Christ's profound words prove that God is not calling everyone during this age. This truth is also revealed in many other places in the Bible. Consider Paul's teaching that God was not calling everyone at this time. Writing to the church at Corinth, He explained:

> For you see your calling, brethren, that **not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called***. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

In these verses, the apostle made it clear that God is not calling the affluent at this time. He is not calling the brilliant, famous, or powerful. A time will come when all will be given an opportunity to know the King of the universe. At that time they will be able to make their choice regarding whether they will submit to God's way of life or not. The wonderful truth is that God is merciful. All those who never had a chance will eventually be given the opportunity to understand the truth (Rev. 20:5).

The reality is that God has excluded the vast majority from knowing Him. Humankind has widely remained cut off from God since the time of Adam and Eve. But this does not mean that they are forever lost. It only means that the vast majority have not been called to be a part of the 144,000.

Two Harvests of Humanity

God has a plan of salvation that includes everyone—not just those in the first resurrection. This plan is revealed in His annual holy days which foreshadow events to come (Col. 2:16-17). One of the most astounding truths revealed by these days is that there are two times of salvation. These two opportunities are reflected by the spring and fall harvest seasons which portray a first and second harvest of humanity.

The first harvest is pictured by Pentecost which is also known as the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Harvest, or Firstfruits (Exo. 23:16). The count to this Feast starts at the end of the first weekly Sabbath occurring during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At that time, a ceremonial wave sheaf was cut off, made into unleavened bread, and offered to God by the priest. God's people were commanded not to eat any of their spring harvest until after this first sheaf had been offered.

The wave sheaf pictured Christ who was cut from the earth by His resurrection at the end of the Sabbath—exactly three days and three nights from His burial (Mat. 27:63). He then ascended to heaven on Sunday to be accepted by God at the same time the high priest offered the wave sheaf. Just as God commanded that no one could eat of this harvest until after the sheaf was offered, no one can be resurrected and ascend to be accepted by the Father until after Christ (Lev. 23:14; John 3:13).

The wave sheaf begins a count of 50 days. On the 50th day, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is observed (Lev. 23:9-21). On this day the high priest offered God two wave loaves from a relatively small harvest. These two loaves contained leaven and picture the resurrection of the imperfect saints. As Christ ascended on the day of the wave sheaf, the elect will be raised and ascend to heaven on the day of the wave loaves—Pentecost. At that time, they too will be cut from the earth and accepted by the Father. This constitutes what the Bible refers to as the first resurrection. The Apostle John identified this great event when he wrote:

> And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This *is* the first resurrection** (Revelation 20:4-5).

This resurrection is described as being the "first." The fact that there is a first resurrection makes it clear that there is more than one. Another resurrection will occur that will culminate with God's second, and larger, harvest of souls. It will include the billions of people who never truly knew God prior to Christ's triumphant return.

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures a time leading up to that future event. This last set of annual holy days take place during the fall harvest and represents the beginning of God's rule on earth. It will be a time when those who survive the destructive trumpet and bowl plagues will begin to learn the truth of God as Christ rules with the saints on earth (Rev. 5:10). He will once again tabernacle among men during this 1,000 year millennial rule (Rev. 20:4). Vast numbers will be exposed to God's way of life during that age. But this will not be the end of God's plan.

The Apostle John also wrote that, when 1,000 years of God's Kingdom on earth have past, there will be an enormous resurrection of the rest of the dead (Rev. 20:5). This will include people who lived and died from the beginning of humanity's creation. It will be a resurrection to physical life in which the teeming masses will be raised and given a chance to know the true God. The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of this resurrection and wrote:

> Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD." So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but *there was* no breath in them. Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:4-10).

All those who never knew the truth of God will be raised to experience what a God-fearing world is like. They will be taught the truth and given the opportunity to decide to choose to live God's way or not. Satan will then be loosed from his prison, and these people will be tested—just as those called at this time are being tested today (Rev. 20:7). This will constitute their chance for salvation. If they choose to live God's way, they will ultimately enter into God's Kingdom as spirit-born children. If they choose to disobey their Creator, they will be erased from existence in a massive lake of fire. As John wrote:

> And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Those who are not called during this lifetime will be given an opportunity to be a part of God's Kingdom. However, they are not the firstfruits! They will not be Christ's bride nor will they rule with Him on the earth. That distinction is reserved only for the 144,000. For further information, please read our book—*The Magnificent Meaning of God's Holy Days*.

What about the Millions who Profess Christ?

God is not trying to save the vast majority of people on the earth at this time. He will teach them and give them a chance for salvation at a later time. But today there are more than a billion people on earth who claim to be followers of Jesus. What about them? What about those who lived and died believing they were worshipping God, and yet rejected His Ten Commandments and holy days while observing pagan traditions that have been dressed up to appear Christian?

Since the 144,000 make up the entirety of God's firstfruits, most who profess Christianity will not be included among them. What may come as a shock to most religious communities is that nearly all of these sects represent a faith that actually contradicts the very Bible that they claim to follow. Hundreds of Christian denominations do not even remotely resemble the New Testament Church begun by Christ and led by

the apostles. In fact, the most popular forms of Christianity actually consist of a faith built on human tradition, pagan myth, and superstition.

When we honestly consider their holidays and traditions, we recognize that, as beautiful as they may appear on the outside, their connection to God's truth is only in the imagination of those who celebrate them. For example, God forbids dragging a tree into the home, decorating it, and then kneeling down to place gifts under its branches (Jer. 10:2-5). The Eternal also rejects the fertility rites of Ashtoreth that have resulted in Easter bunnies, egg hunts, and sunrise services (1Kin. 11:5-6; Eze. 8:15-16). God abhors the whitewashed pagan festivals of Epiphany, Lent, and Ash Wednesday.

God instructs His people not to adopt the customs of pagans and weave them into our worship of Him (Deu. 12:29-31). Despite this unbending injunction, most who call themselves Christian are taught that pagan traditions are legitimate ways to worship the Almighty God. They claim that the ways of the heathen have been "confiscated for Christ."

Even worse, many religious leaders teach a false Christ by telling their members that God's law is done away (2Cor. 11:13). To them, all one has to do is profess acceptance of Christ as their personal Savior, and by this superficial act they are convinced that believers are forever saved. Tragically, this belief propagates the horrible lie that God will accept anyone, regardless of their lack of real repentance, or sins they might continue to practice. Such teaching is a false gospel—one in which tolerance is the chief goal instead of the righteousness of Christ (Mat. 6:33). However, it must be understood that the Bible repeatedly makes it absolutely clear that GOD DOES NOT TOLERATE SIN! It is easy to see why the Messiah predicted that there will be many who profess to know Him, but will ultimately discover that they were strangers to the true faith. As He warned:

> Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day,

> 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**' (Matthew 7:21-23).

Christ said that many will appeal to Him for entrance into His Kingdom. However, they will be shocked to find that the Savior characterizes their religion as being lawless! In other words, they did not observe the law that He gave to all of humanity (Exo. 20; Lev. 11; Lev. 23). This subject is thoroughly explained in our booklet—*Is This the Only Time of Salvation?*

What about True Believers?

It is clear that God is not calling the vast majority to salvation at this time. Most of professing Christianity has been deceived and teach for doctrine the vain traditions of men (Mar. 7:7). But what about true believers? Will there only be 144,000 faithful men and women throughout all human history?

The Scriptures reveal that God has designed His Kingdom to start small, but will eventually grow unbounded for eternity (Mat. 13:33). To illustrate this truth, Christ likened the Kingdom to a mustard seed which is tiny and unassuming. However, it eventually becomes the greatest of herbs (Mark 4:30-32).

Christ also referred to His followers as a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). The word "little" is the Greek word *mikros*, and it means "small (in size, quantity, number): least" (*Strong's*, G3398). It is from this word that we get the English expression *micro*, which is widely used today to refer to something that is minute. By this the Savior related that the faithful in His true Church would be a relatively small number.

Many are Called but Few are Chosen

Christ also mentioned the size of His Church in the book of Matthew. First, He conveyed the parable of the vineyard where laborers are called to the work at various times. Those who were

called early and worked the longest complained that they were not paid more than those hired at the end of the day. Relating the moral of the story, Christ stated:

> So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen (Matthew 20:16).

The Savior made it clear that few will be chosen to be a part of the first resurrection. He reiterated this truth in the parable of the wedding feast. In that story He referenced the first resurrection and the corresponding marriage supper of the Lamb. He explained that Israel was the first to be called to the wedding. However, because most did not sincerely respond to God's invitation, a call went out to the Gentiles.

As the parable continued, one was found at the ceremony without a proper wedding garment. The king ordered the improperly clothed individual to be cast out. Notice the profound implication of Christ's illustration:

> So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' **For many are called, but few *are* chosen** (Matthew 22:12-14).

The king did not cast the individual out because the man could not afford better clothing. It was because he did not prepare for the wedding by putting on proper garments. In Scripture, a person's garments are symbolic of their integrity. For example, righteousness is identified as white linen which is clean and pure (Rev. 19:8). The lesson is that no one will be allowed into the wedding supper of the Lamb unless they have worked to develop the righteous character of Christ (Mat. 6:33).

Being called, understanding the truth, and being placed into the Church, does not automatically mean a person will be chosen. Some are satisfied with being called and don't move

forward to maturity. Others wear their knowledge like a badge of honor, believing that it somehow makes them superior. These are no different than the self-righteous Pharisees who believed they were better than others and felt that anyone not a part of their religion was spiritually inferior (Luke 18:11-14).

Being called does not make anyone superior. Rather, it means that the individual is invited to run the Christian race. It does not mean they have won. As Paul wrote:

> But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Those who are called must have a higher standard of righteousness, self-sacrifice, and love. God's calling is only the beginning of the race—not the end. Still, some will not be diligent to make their calling and election sure (2Pet. 1:10). These will find their crown given to another (Rev. 3:11). They will be among those who are called, but NOT chosen!

God's calling means that we must work to bear spiritual fruit (John 15:16). If we do not, we can be assured that we will not be chosen (John 15:2). Because human nature is enmity with God, many of those who are called will not diligently fight against the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or the pride of life. For this reason, Christ both encouraged and warned us with this statement:

> Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and **there are few who find it** (Matthew 7:13-14).

The people that God shall choose will not drift into the Kingdom. The chosen will remain focused as they strive to overcome the pulls of human nature, the world, and the wiles of the devil. They will be those who sincerely desire to glorify God by subordinating their will to the standards, values, and morals of Christ. They pray, study, fast, and meditate on His truth. They

strive to keep the letter and the intent of His Commandments. Individuals like this are few indeed!

Early Church Growth

The New Testament Church experienced considerable growth in its early stages. Luke recounted its development in the book of Acts while describing the historic day of Pentecost and wrote that "three thousand" individuals were added in a single day. Not long after this, another 5,000 joined the movement (Acts 2:41; 4:4).

The early Church appeared to greatly expand at the start, but this initial increase was only temporary. The Church soon suffered great persecution, and few of those early adherents had the depth of conversion necessary to endure. Many abandoned the faith in the face of trial. Paul's second epistle to the evangelist Timothy noted this tragic fact when he wrote:

> This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me… (2 Timothy 1:15).

All those in Asia turned away from the truth of God and rejected Paul. Sadly, God's apostle wrote a second time regarding how persecution caused many to abandon the faith, explaining:

> At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me… (2 Timothy 4:16).

Many of Paul's converts failed to hold fast. Entire congregations had fallen away after his life's work. However, just as there was a remnant in Elijah's time, Paul wrote that he was also left with a fraction of believers (Rom. 11:4-5). This has been the history of God's people down through the centuries. Many would experience a calling. Large numbers would start the race, but few would finish.

This was all foreseen and prophesied by God. In fact, Christ never intended for His Church to become a huge, wealthy, organization boasting millions of members. Instead, God's

Church would be a little flock that often struggles to survive. For centuries, leaders and apostles have been sent to minister to the Church. Occasionally the groups amounted to thousands at a time. However, after a generation or two, zeal waned, doctrines became watered down, commitment softened, and vast numbers fell away.

Christ described this pattern in His parable of the sower explaining that the gospel is like seed sown on various types of soil. It would only take root, grow, and produce fruit within a fraction of those who received it (Mat. 13:3-9, 18-23). Christ also likened the unconverted to tares sown by an enemy among a field of wheat. The two would grow together until the time of harvest when those who offend and practice lawlessness will be destroyed (Mat. 13:24-30, 37-43).

These parables relate that, throughout every age, many who profess Christ are not faithful Christians. This holds true for ministers as well as lay members. As small as the true Church may be, the number of faithful is even smaller.

Small Numbers and Great Events

The Bible records great milestones in human history in which God directly intervened in the affairs of man. In every case, the actual number of faithful believers was always small. For example, Noah and his family were the only ones to escape the catastrophic flood. Only Lot and his daughters evaded God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, and Caleb were the lone faithful servants throughout the Exodus. God produced several nations through one faithful man—Abraham. However, most of his progeny eventually abandoned the true religion of their forefather. Even during the time of the Old Covenant, God knew His true servants would be a relatively small number. He made this fact known in the third commandment by stating that:

> For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but

> **showing mercy to thousands**, to those who love Me and keep My commandments (Exodus 20:5-6).

Of all people that would live, God understood that there would be "thousands" that would sincerely love Him and show that love by faithfully keeping His commandments. Not billions or even millions, but only thousands.

Furthermore, we are told that when the Savior returns with all His saints, the number of those saints will be small. The half-brother of the Savior wrote of Christ's return and invoked a traditional prophecy of Enoch which stated:

> Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "**Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints**, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14-15).

Jude did not say millions of saints will accompany Christ when He returns. He measured the number of true and faithful servants in tens of thousands. To be exact, the number of saints who will return with Christ will be exactly—144,000!

The 144,000 are God's firstfruits who will have intimate positions in His government. As firstfruits, they will serve in a role similar to that of the firstborn in any family. The firstborn helps to raise the younger children. As a result, they often enjoy a greater inheritance. The inheritance of the chosen few will be the earth (Mat. 5:5). They will be allotted various areas to rule over which will be proportionate to their works (Mat. 16:27; Luke 19:12-19). They will be counselors who teach people God's truth and His ultimate plan for humanity.

While few in number, once resurrected, the 144,000 will be all that God needs to fulfill that which physical Israel failed to perform. They will be His leadership team—a small nation of kings and priests—spiritual Israelites indeed!

Chapter 8

They are of Israel

For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel
~ Romans 9:6 ~

The nation of Israel plays a significant role in the plan of God. So prominent are they in Scripture that it is often said the Bible is primarily their story. As the Old Testament is read, it becomes obvious that other nations are generally mentioned only as they come into contact with Israel. When all is considered, the preeminence of Israel in God's plan is unmistakable. Even the vast amount of biblical prophecy is directed primarily toward them. This makes it clear that Israel is unique among all the nations, but it also generates some fascinating questions.

Why is this relatively small nation so important to God? What are we to learn from their relationship with the Almighty, and how are they connected to the 144,000? The answers to these questions are of great importance. As we discover them, we will learn significant lessons that open our understanding regarding God's purpose; not only for the 144,000, but for all humanity! It is within this context that Christ revealed another clue. As John wrote:

> And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand **of all the tribes of the children of Israel** *were* sealed (Revelation 7:4).

The 144,000 are clearly "of the children of Israel," and the story of Israel is one of the most fascinating ever told. What many do not understand is that the name "Israel" in this verse does not relate solely to the physical descendants of Jacob. As we will see, the Israel mentioned in the verse above will one day represent a unique group of people chosen from diverse ethnicities.

This truth is understood when readers of the New Testament are introduced to a spiritual counterpart to physical Israel. That counterpart is God's Church—a body of believers composed of individuals from various racial backgrounds (Gal. 6:16). The following brief summary of these two groups provide invaluable lessons that ultimately reveal the identity and destiny of the 144,000.

The Birth of a Nation

The story of Israel begins in Genesis with a man named Abram. While living in Haran, the Creator called Abram to become part of His extraordinary plan. In order to take part in that plan this dedicated man had to forsake the life he had always known. The Almighty told him to leave his home and go to a foreign land. Essentially, God was telling Abram "Trust Me." The Eternal then explained how He would bless Abram in response to that trust. He gave him seven conditional promises:

> Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1-3).

Abram accepted God's invitation and journeyed to Canaan where he was tested many times as the Eternal shaped his character. God eventually changed Abram's name to Abraham, and his wife Sarai's name to Sarah, when he miraculously empowered his elderly wife to give birth to a son. Then, in what was the most challenging test of Abraham's faith, the Eternal instructed Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son of promise—Isaac. This trial gave Abraham personal insight into God's plan of salvation.

After passing this monumental test, no harm came to Isaac, and God made His pledge to Abraham unconditional. He

foretold that, through Abraham's son, his descendants would enjoy national prosperity (Gen. 17:21). More importantly, God promised that the Messiah would come through his posterity. Abraham would become the father of many physical nations as well as a father of the future children of faith.

As Isaac grew in age, grace, and knowledge, he married Rebekah who bore him two sons; Esau and Jacob. Jacob ultimately received God's birthright blessing and, after a divine dream, he vowed obedience to God and His law. Jacob then worked 20 years for his uncle Laban and was greatly blessed by the Eternal. He finally decided to return home. On his way, he was confronted by a spirit being who appeared to him as a man. The two wrestled until the break of day and Jacob showed God his perseverance as he endured this grueling contest of will. God blessed him for his determination by changing Jacob's name to Israel. As a result, Jacob and his descendents would forever carry this profound identity.

Jacob had twelve sons who married and produced offspring forming twelve tribes. However, Reuben, his firstborn sinned and the divine birthright was transferred to Joseph who was the firstborn of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel. Joseph endured many trials at the hands of his jealous brothers. Their envy culminated in a fit of rage in which they bound Joseph and sold him to traders who in turn sold him into slavery in Egypt. Still, God was with Joseph as he suffered in Egypt for 14 years until the Eternal finally caused him to become a type of savior to Egypt as co-ruler with Pharaoh. Joseph later fathered two sons named Manasseh and Ephraim. Each of these sons became half tribes that also carried the name Israel. They received the birthright inherited by Joseph. This brought the total number of tribes to 13.

Israel's entire family prospered in Egypt for many years. However, sometime after Joseph's death, Israel began to forget God (Eze. 20:7-10). Another Pharaoh arose who no longer respected what Joseph had done for Egypt. This new ruler viewed Israel's growing population as a threat, and set taskmasters over the Israelites which resulted in centuries of cruel bondage until God sent Moses as another type of savior to deliver Israel from

Egypt's control. By way of the exodus, the progeny of Abraham were reintroduced to God and His plan (Deu. 18:15).

At Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel in which He promised that they would prosper above all nations if they would keep His commandments. Tragically, the adult generation did not believe God and feared to enter the Promised Land. As a result, the entire nation was forced to wander in the wilderness forty years. During that time, with the exception of God's faithful, the entire adult generation perished. It was the next generation who finally entered the Promised Land. This foreshadowed the calling to enter the Kingdom of God as kings and priests; of which most of the Israelites who were initially called will not be chosen. Another group including gentiles will be chosen (Heb. 4:1-11). Joshua, who had the same Hebrew name as the Messiah, led Israel in a holy war against the idolaters of Canaan, and the territory they conquered came to be known as the land of Israel.

Not all Israelites are Jews

Although many Bible students are familiar with this history, most lack a true understanding of the modern identity of these ancient people. The modern Jewish homeland in Palestine has been called Israel since its formation in 1948. However, it must be understood that the Jews are the descendants of Jacob's son Judah, and are only one of the twelve tribes that comprise the nation of Israel. This is extremely important to recognize while studying prophecy. While all Jews are Israelites, not all Israelites are Jews.

The Jewish people are identified as the house, or nation, of Judah. They are a distinct people in the Bible. Along with most of the tribe of Levi, and some of Benjamin, they separated from the other tribes after the death of Solomon. In fact, these three tribes actually threatened war against their northern brothers. Notice the historical record in the book of Kings:

> And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen

> *men* who were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel… (1 Kings 12:21).

Judah and Benjamin desired war with the northern tribes who carried the name Israel, and Levi remained with the temple in the south. At this point historians began to call the divided nations "the house of Judah" and "the house of Israel." Israel's king, Jeroboam, feared that any ties with Jerusalem would result in a lack of loyalty to his territory in the north. Therefore, this blasphemous ruler ordered Bethel and Dan to be established as places of worship instead of Jerusalem. He also set up two golden calves to be their gods and changed the days of worship which God had ordained (1Kin. 12: 25-33).

Lost to History

This political move caused the house of Israel to spiral into terrible religious apostasy. By the time of King Ahab's reign, Baal worship had become the dominant religion. This provoked God's anger to the degree that He severely punished the tribes. He allowed the house of Israel to be conquered and taken captive by Assyria. The Assyrians then placed Persians in the land where the house of Israel had dwelt, and these foreign people became known as Samaritans. The dispossessed Israelites eventually migrated to the north and west. Because they did not keep God's Sabbath and holy days they became lost to secular history. Sadly, as a result of abandoning God, they are now referred to as "the lost tribes of Israel."

The house of Judah waxed and waned in their faith towards God for nearly a hundred more years. In time, they sinned worse than the house of Israel. God then punished them by allowing Judah to be conquered and taken captive by the Chaldeans. After 70 years of bondage in Babylon, they were allowed to return to their land in order to fulfill the scepter promise that the Messiah would be born of Judah (Gen. 49:10). The descendants of Jacob who returned to this area came to be known as Jews regardless of the tribe they were originally from.

In 70 A.D., Rome was allowed to destroy Jerusalem, its temple, and scatter the priesthood. This resulted in the Jews being further dispersed throughout foreign nations. Still, many of their posterity continued to observe God's Sabbath. Because of this, they did not completely lose their identity as did their northern brothers. Many now live in various locations around the world, but still consider the territory of modern day Israel to be their homeland.

It is important to realize that, while the location of the lost tribes of Israel is not known by secular history, these people were never lost to God. The Eternal knows exactly who and where they are. He even prophesied what would occur to each of the tribes (Gen. 49). Furthermore, during the time of the first century Church, God directed letters to be sent to these scattered peoples (Jam. 1:1). God knows exactly where Israel migrated, and He promised to bring them back to Jerusalem when He returns to rule the earth (Isa. 27:12; Jer. 30-31; Eze. 20). He will reunite the lost tribes with their brothers and they will all be called Israel once again (Hos. 1:11). The Eternal will bless them, and they shall become a great people.

These examples help us understand an important aspect regarding how the 144,000 will be chosen. They will not be selected specifically from these physical tribes. As the typology of ancient Israel continues, we understand that the first Israelites did not enter the Promised Land. Of that first generation, only God's faithful few and their families were allowed to enter. This reflects an important spiritual truth.

The vast majority of those who were first called—failed! It was another generation that obtained the promise. In like manner, most of those who will achieve the promised Kingdom of God will be from another generation composed of spiritual Israelites—faithful people of God. This future Kingdom is what every true Christian has been called to attain. However, it must be remembered that, of the many who are called—few will be chosen (Mat. 20:16).

Not Two Groups of 144,000

Understanding the identity of physical Israel today has enabled many in the Church of God to grasp the meaning of numerous end-time prophecies. However, this has also led some to incorrectly conclude that there are two groups of 144,000. For example, there are a number of people who believe Revelation seven reveals a group of physical Israelites living at the end of the age while Revelation fourteen is a second group of people shown in a resurrected state. Those who hold this view think that Christ must protect 144,000 physical Israelites from His wrath in order to fulfill His promise to reunite Israel and Judah in Palestine upon His return. Although God did foretell that He would bring the remnant of physical Israel back to their land after the great tribulation, there are two reasons why the 144,000 in Revelation seven cannot be that physical group of people.

First, the Scriptures reveal that the millennial return of Israel to the Promised Land will be far greater than the Egyptian Exodus. Jeremiah prophesied of this re-gathering of the tribes and wrote:

> "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that it shall no more be said, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers. "Behold, I will send for many fishermen," says the LORD, "and they shall fish them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks" (Jeremiah 16:14-16).

Notice that after Christ restores Israel back to the Promised Land, people will no longer ascribe the Egyptian Exodus as the event to be remembered. Instead, they will recognize the miraculous millennial deliverance in which God will bring the scattered Israelites from around the earth back to

the Holy Land. The reason is because the second exodus will be far more significant than the first.

Consider that the first Exodus involved more than 600,000 men that came out of Egypt (Num. 1:46). When including women and children, it is estimated that there were over two million people. In view of the fact that the second exodus will be more noteworthy than the first, those Israelites brought back to the Middle East after Christ's return will undoubtedly number far more than 144,000. Therefore, the 144,000 described in Revelation seven cannot be the physical Israelites God will bring back to the Holy Land after the tribulation.

A second point proving that the 144,000 are not physical Israelites is found in a simple, and yet overlooked, biblical fact. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are excluded from the list of spiritual tribes comprising the 144,000 (Rev. 7:5-8). However, when Christ restores Israel as a physical nation, Ephraim and Dan are included. These two tribes will then be given an allotment in the land. Ezekiel recorded this future placement, stating:

> Thus says the Lord GOD: "These *are* the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph *shall have two* portions… *there shall be* **one *section for* Dan** from its east to its west side; by the border of Dan, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Asher; by the border of Asher, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Naphtali; by the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Manasseh; by the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west, **one *section for* Ephraim**; by the border of Ephraim, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Reuben; by the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west, one *section for* Judah… Opposite the border of the priests, the Levites *shall have an area* twenty-five thousand *cubits* in length and ten thousand in width … As for the rest of the tribes, from the east side to the west, Benjamin *shall have* one *section;* by the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west, Simeon *shall have* one *section;* by the border of

> Simeon, from the east side to the west, Issachar *shall have* one *section;* by the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west, Zebulun *shall have* one *section;* by the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west, Gad *shall have* one *section...* This *is* the land which you shall divide by lot as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel, and these *are* their portions," says the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 47:13-48:29).

The people of Dan and Ephraim will be among those who will be brought back when Christ restores physical Israel to their homeland. They will receive their portion along with the other tribes. However, these two tribes are omitted from the 144,000. This shows that the tribes listed in Revelation seven are NOT physical Israelites.

As discussed earlier, chapter seven calls the 144,000 "servants of our God." The Apostle John plainly wrote that his entire vision was written to God's "servants" (Rev. 1:1). Then the angel revealed specific messages contained in seven letters to the churches. These letters are prophetic of seven eras of God's Church which is comprised of true Christians. Therefore, the servants of God are converted Christians.

Chapter seven also describes the 144,000 as being sealed in their foreheads. The Scriptures reveal that true Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit (2Cor. 1:22). Therefore, the 144,000 have God's Spirit, they are His servants, and their destiny is the first resurrection. They cannot be a group of physical individuals who are separate from the 144,000 in chapter fourteen. They are the same group, but described at different times. In chapter seven they are noted as being sealed before the resurrection. In chapter fourteen they are shown after the resurrection.

God's Purpose for Israel

It is clear that the 144,000 are not simply physical Israelites. This being the case, who is the angel speaking about when referring to this unique group? In order to understand, it is important to recognize that God designed a duality within His plan of salvation. Throughout the fabric of creation there exists a

physical representation of spiritual realities. This fact inspired Paul to write:

> For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made… (KJV, Romans 1:20).

A few examples of this duality include God creating the first physical man in Adam. Later, Christ was raised from the dead as the first man to be raised as spirit and is therefore referred to as "the last Adam" (1Cor. 15:45). God instructed Moses to have Israel build a physical tabernacle on earth to reflect the spiritual temple in heaven (Exo. 25:8; Heb. 8:5). There is currently a physical heaven and earth which will one day yield to the creation of a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21).

Paul also wrote that God recorded the history of physical Israel so that they would be an example to spiritual Israel who would come later. This great apostle left us a profound warning:

> Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for *their bodies* were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our**

> **admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come** (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

Divine design included a physical nation that would precede a spiritual people also called Israel. God called Abraham, chose Isaac, and through Jacob brought forth twelve tribes. He used Moses as a Christ-like figure to bring Israel out of bondage (Deu. 18:15). God led them out of Egypt, and made a covenant with Israel which foreshadowed a better covenant He would make with His New Testament Church. As Paul wrote of Christ:

> But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as **He is also Mediator of a better covenant**, which was established on better promises. For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:6-10).

The Old Covenant required that Israel obey the law of God which was written in tablets of stone. Through the Holy Spirit, God made a new covenant that allows His law to be "written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is,* of the heart" (2Cor. 3:3).

Despite the miracles Israel had witnessed, most lacked faith in God and the entire nation was forced to wander in the Wilderness of Sin for 40 years. Then the Almighty brought a different generation into the Promised Land. This pictured

bringing a spiritual generation into the Kingdom of God. The Eternal performed all of this with the physical nation of Israel as an illustration for spiritual Israel to come.

Spiritual Israel Shall Come

Israel was called to fulfill a part of God's plan. The role they played is more transcendent than they could have ever imagined. They pictured a future group who will become the chosen people of God. The twelve tribes were a living, historical, and symbolic type of God's New Testament Church that was led by twelve apostles. It is from this Church and those faithful in the past that the Eternal will choose 144,000 spiritual Israelites to be brought out of the bondage of the physical creation by a resurrection to spirit. Instead of inheriting the Promised Land of Canaan, they will inherit the Kingdom of God.

The Church is true Israel. It is a spiritual nation not restricted to the descendants of Jacob. With the resurrection of Christ, believing gentiles are also accepted into the household of faith. This was shocking news to the early Church, but eventually it was understood and accepted. As the apostle appointed to the gentiles wrote:

> For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, **but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God**, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone* (Ephesians 2:18-20).

The Apostle Paul suffered great persecution from the Jews because of their enormous resistance to gentiles being included as God's people. Many early Christians had a difficult time understanding what God was now doing with those who were not Jewish. Paul explained that this knowledge was once a mystery, but had been revealed:

> how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery... which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: **that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise** in Christ through the gospel (Ephesians 3:3-6).

After the death of the Savior, the veil separating mankind from God had been torn in two (Mat. 27:51). Gentiles could become a part of Christ's spiritual body of believers by being grafted in. Using the analogy of an olive tree, Paul made this point clear by stating:

> What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded… I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles... And if some of the branches [of Israel] were broken off, and you [gentiles], being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree… Well *said.* Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear... For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that **blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in** (Romans 11:7-25).

Gentiles are no longer a separate tree. Some have been called, and grafted into the tree of God's people, but not physically. They have become a part of spiritual Israel—the Church of God! As the Apostle Paul explained:

> For they *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham… That is, those who *are* the children of the

> flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but **the children of the promise are counted as the seed** (Romans 9:6-8).

Spiritual Israelites are not simply those who have genes linking them to Abraham. As Paul wrote:

> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28-29).

Individuals who choose to follow the same path as Abraham are considered part of the patriarch's spiritual family. This means that heritage has absolutely nothing to do with the 144,000. Christ taught this truth while making a similar comment about His own physical family:

> While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You." But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50).

Christ made it clear that His true family is comprised of those who seek to live according to the will of the Father. They are the Israel God envisioned before there was a universe. This Israel is not limited to the descendants of Abraham, or those who perform the rite of circumcision. Those who obey God's law in the letter and in its spiritual intent are now members of the true Church of God (Mat. 5:17-48).

During the first century, the Apostle Paul repeatedly dealt with this issue. False teachers proclaimed that, in order to become a Christian, new converts had to first become a Jew through the process of circumcision. The controversy raged on for many years as Paul labored tirelessly to help Christians understand that God was now working with people from various racial backgrounds. This burning issue was finally settled by a special ministerial conference that was assembled for this specific purpose (Acts 15).

Church leaders agreed that converts to God's religion were no longer required to perform the rite of circumcision. Those who would commit to obeying God would be given the Holy Spirit as a sign of the New Covenant; and with it be able to understand the mind of God in order to convert their way of thinking. Therefore, Paul explained that circumcision was to be a matter of the heart and mind:

> For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; but ***he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart**, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God (Romans 2:28-29).

Circumcision pictured that which was to come spiritually. It foreshadowed a people whose way of life flowed from a deep inner commitment—not from an outward appearance. Paul explained this principle when he said:

> For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

Today, the people of God are composed of individuals from various nationalities. Regardless of race, they are fully committed to living by the intent of God's law, and by their commitment they are known by God as Israel. As Paul wrote:

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

More Proof from the Apostles

When God first revealed the 144,000 He stated that they are of the children of Israel. He then divided this number into 12,000 from each tribe. Because God's government is hierarchical, Christ revealed who will lead these tribes. As the Savior explained to His disciples:

> Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

The Messiah will search out and bring back the physical tribes of Israel after His glorious return. As their King, He will resettle them in the land surrounding Jerusalem and assign each of the twelve apostles to rule over one of the tribes.

It is also important to recognize that the apostles were not physical descendents of the specific tribe that they will one day govern. Although some might be related to their assigned tribe, not all the disciples came from different tribes. For example, Peter and Andrew were brothers. James and John were also siblings. James the son of Alpheus and Thaddeus were blood relatives as well. Therefore, three sets of brothers shared the same respective genealogical background. It would be impossible to have them each govern the tribe of their heritage and still fulfill all twelve positions.

The lineage of the apostles is NOT representative of all the tribes of Israel. This means that they will not be physically related to the tribe over which they rule. This is another indication that the 144,000 will be spiritual Israelites consisting of people from various races.

The inescapable conclusion is that the 144,000 are members of God's true Church which is not comprised of physical Israelites alone. They are individuals who will be

grafted into the spiritual tribes of Israel. Each will become a member of a tribe of God's choosing. What they have in common is a whole hearted commitment to living by the laws of God. As the Apostle Peter explained:

> But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; **who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God**, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Physical Israel can no longer exclusively claim the title of God's people. Instead, God has chosen individuals from every walk of life. They have been drafted from around the world and from every age. God's calling of physical Israel was not an end in itself. Those ancient people were chosen to perform an amazing service to all mankind. They serve as an example for the people God would call at a later time (1Cor. 10:11).

There is Still a Role for Physical Israel

The end of man's rule on earth is not the end of God's plan for physical Israel. They will again be chosen to fulfill the Eternal's purpose. Christ will return with His saints and gather the tribes from around the world. They will be placed in the holy land to learn God's way. Ultimately, the descendents of Jacob will become a beacon of light radiating out to the entire world (Zec. 8:23).

However, the 144,000 are the true Israel of God. They are the Church Christ promised to build. Ancient Israel was simply a precursor designed to provide numerous lessons to help those who are called in the new covenant to succeed in their quest for the Kingdom.

Lessons from the List

There are numerous lessons Christians can learn from both physical and spiritual Israel. One of these comes from the

list of the tribes that make up the 144,000. Notice this unique list in which God had John record how the 144,000 will be organized by specific tribes:

> And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed: of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand *were* sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed (Revelation 7:4-8).

Christ inspired John to record these tribes in such a way as to make it clear that the 144,000 are not the twelve tribes of physical Israel. When the tribes are listed in other places in the Bible, it is either by birth order, the way they were to assemble, or the geographic location of their settlement. The list in Revelation does not follow any of these methods of organization. The fact that this list does not reflect any other biblical list of the tribes is another indicator that it does not consist of only physical Israelites. Instead, this unique register is made up of spiritual Israel—faithful people chosen from God's true Church.

There is significant evidence proving this to be true. For example, this unique list begins with Judah. Instead of enumerating Israel according to physical birth order, the list reflects the spiritual birth order. Judah is likely listed first because it is the tribe of Christ who is the firstborn of many brethren to come (Rom. 8:29).

Another piece of evidence is the fact that the list includes Levi. As teachers and priests among the people, the Levites were

scattered throughout the other tribes. Therefore Levi was to have no inheritance in the land and is normally not named in other lists of the tribes (Num. 1:49). However, in this unique register, Levi is listed without further comment. The reason for this inclusion reflects the fact that the 144,000 are the resurrected saints—all of which will inherit the earth and become both kings and priests (Rev. 5:10).

Perhaps the most compelling evidence comes from the fact that the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted from the list in Revelation seven. However, the Scriptures reveal that these two physical tribes will exist after Christ returns. As was mentioned earlier, both Dan and Ephraim will be reestablished in the area surrounding Jerusalem.

This unique list is unlike any other. This is because the individuals described in Revelation seven will be an entirely new creation! They are not the tribes of old. This Israel is the Church of God; of which the apostles, prophets, and all true Christians throughout the ages will become an integral part (Eph. 2:19-20). They are spiritual Israelites, and God is molding them for the express purpose of becoming the bride of Christ as well as assisting Him in governing, not only physical Israel, but all nations of the earth.

A Lesson from Ephraim

This point is made even more clearly when considering the tribes that are omitted from the list. Ephraim is not included, but why?

When the northern tribes separated from the house of Judah, Jeroboam established two places of worship in Bethel and Dan. However, instead of worshipping God, golden calves became the focus of their adoration. As the historian wrote:

> Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan (1 Kings 12:28-29).

Bethel was an area known to belong to the tribe of Ephraim (Jgs. 4:5). In fact, the prophet Hosea related that Ephraim was one of the worst tribes when it came to idol worship and dishonoring God:

> Ephraim *is* joined to idols, Let him alone. Their drink is rebellion, they commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices (Hosea 4:17-19).

For their love of idolatry, God declared that Assyria would attack Ephraim. Notice God's judgment upon this tribe:

> Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading flower which *is* at the head of the verdant valleys, to those who are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, like a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, like a flood of mighty waters overflowing, who will bring *them* down to the earth with *His* hand. **The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim, will be trampled underfoot** (Isaiah 28:1-3).

God indicted the tribe of Ephraim for drunkenness and idolatry. The Apostle Paul wrote that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1Cor. 6:10). The drunkenness of Ephraim is an embarrassment to God that could tarnish of the very meaning of the name Israel. In addition, the Scriptures state that those who practice false religion are "drunk" on false doctrine (Luke 12:45; Rev. 17:2). It is likely that such heresy along with their unacceptable behavior caused Ephraim to become an abomination to God.

In addition, Ephraim had come to be known as traitors to their own people. The Scriptures document that this tribe actually betrayed their kin and plotted against Jerusalem:

> Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, *that* Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to *make* war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told to the house of David, saying, "**Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim**." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind… Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel" (Isaiah 7:1-6).

These may be some of the reasons that God takes steps to insure that spiritual Israel's reputation remains untarnished. By omitting the name of Ephraim as a part of His bride, their name will not be written on one of the gates of the New Jerusalem. This fact sends a vital message to each of us. We must understand that our character and reputation count in our quest to obtain the Kingdom of God!

A Lesson from Dan

The tribe of Dan is also omitted from the list of the 144,000. Many scholars suggest that this tribe is not included because the people of Dan also exhibited a profound proclivity for idolatrous worship. They too harbored an idol for the northern tribes to worship (1Kin. 12:29). The book of Judges gives us the following account:

> The six hundred men armed with their weapons of war, who *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entrance of the gate. Then the five men who had gone to spy out the land went up. Entering there, they took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the molded image. The priest stood at the entrance of the gate with the six hundred men *who were* armed with weapons of war. When these went into Micah's house and took the carved image, the ephod, the household idols, and the

> molded image, the priest said to them, "What are you doing?" And they said to him, "Be quiet, put your hand over your mouth, and come with us; be a father and a priest to us. *Is it* better for you to be a priest to the household of one man, or that you be a priest to a tribe and a family in Israel?" (Judges 18:16-19).

Could the tribe of Dan's sins have been so severe that God chose to blot his name out as part of the resurrected family of God? It is plausible when we consider that the only reason God would exclude this tribe's name from the divine list is because of rank iniquity.

Another explanation has been offered based on possible future actions of Dan. It has been speculated that the modern day people of this tribe will eventually ally themselves with the idolatrous beast power, and that the antichrist will come from Dan. As the second century bishop Hippolytus wrote:

> Moses says: Dan is a lion's cub, and he shall leap from Bashan (Deuteronomy 33:22). And that no one may fall into the mistake of thinking that this is spoken of the Saviour, let him attend to this. Dan, says he, is a lion's cub; and by thus naming the tribe of Dan as the one whence the accuser is destined to spring, he made the matter in hand quite clear. For **as Christ is born of the tribe of Judah, so Antichrist shall be born of the tribe of Dan**. And as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was spoken of in prophecy as a *lion* on account or His royalty and glory, in the same manner also has the Scripture prophetically described the accuser as a lion, on account of his tyranny and violence (http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0504.htm, retr. 7/26/2013).

There are a number of scholars who have maintained a similar belief. In doing so, they claim that Jacob's prophecy of this tribe is additional evidence pointing to the wickedness of Dan. As Moses recorded:

> Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward (Genesis 49:17).

Is it possible that the modern people of Dan will be complicit with the beast and false prophet in the last days? Considering that a serpent in the Bible is symbolic of the devil, many have concluded that the tribe of Dan will be a snare to God's people. If so, it is conceivable that God would blot out their name from spiritual Israel for this reason. This will not be the first time that God was witness to great evil committed by Dan and Ephraim. He had punished them in the past for such wickedness. As Jeremiah wrote:

> O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims affliction from Mount Ephraim (Jeremiah 4:14-15).

These two tribes were conquered because of shameful behavior. They stood as a witness to the remaining tribes in Jerusalem that God will punish iniquity. As such, they also stand as a witness to us today. Christians who have an ear to hear will read God's Word and learn this lesson. One cannot simply drift into God's Kingdom. In order to be chosen, believers must overcome. We must never lax, never give up, and never stop our pursuit of the righteousness of Christ (Mat. 6:33).

The 144,000 will be individuals chosen out of a larger group. The criterion for their election is more than just what they know, profess, or feel. It is their character! Knowledge alone is not enough. What matters is what we do with that knowledge. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

> Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." But in a great house there are

> not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore **if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master**, prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 2:19-21).

A Warning in the List

The list of tribes found in Revelation contains a lesson that is an important warning to all who seek the Kingdom of God. It is only when we understand that God is referring to spiritual Israel that we are able to grasp the message, and this warning that must not be ignored!

The Almighty tells us that the 144,000 are "OF all the tribes" (Rev. 7:4). The implication of this simple sentence is enormous! Those God seals as part of the 144,000 are chosen from a larger group. They are handpicked and taken out "of all" the people God has called down through time. Since the Israel that is spoken of is the Church, this means that God is selecting genuine Christians. As Christ proclaimed: "For many are called, but few *are* chosen" (Mat. 22:14).

This is a great lesson to those who claim to be believers. The mark of a true Christian is not what they profess, but how they perform. It is not what they say, but how they live. It is not what they know, it is what they do!

A Lesson in the Names

William Shakespeare once asked "What is in a name?" This question reflects an understanding that a name carries a great deal of meaning. This is especially true when God inspires the name. For example, when God promised Abram that he would be the father of many nations, He chose new names for Abram and Sarai. He gave Abram the name Abraham meaning "father of a multitude," and Sarai's name was changed to Sarah meaning "princess" or "queen" (*Strong's*, H85; H8282). When Jacob prevailed, the Eternal changed his name to Israel meaning "he will rule as God" (ibid, H3478). This indicates that those

destined to carry the name Israel will overcome sin and one day rule as members of the family of God.

In this light, it is inconceivable to consider that God would not also give names with profound spiritual meaning to the tribes that will one day consist of the 144,000. When these names are viewed in the order of the list provided in Revelation, an interesting story appears. Consider the following names and their definition.

Tribe	***Meaning***	***Scripture***
Judah	Praise the Lord	Gen. 29:35
Reuben	See a son	Gen. 29:32
Gad	A troop comes	Gen. 30:11
Asher	Happy am I	Gen. 30:13
Naphtali	My wrestling	Gen. 30:8
Manasseh	Making me forget	Gen. 41:51
Simeon	God hears me	Gen. 29:33
Levi	Joined to me	Gen. 29:34
Issachar	Purchased me	Gen. 30:18
Zebulon	My husband will dwell with me	Gen. 30:20
Joseph	God will add	Gen. 30:24
Benjamin	Son of His right hand	Gen. 35:18

Is it possible that the Almighty God inspired each of the names of Jacob's children in such a way that their tribes would tell a wonderful story of the Christian's struggle and ultimate triumph? By placing the definition of these names together in their inspired order, a paragraph can be created that identifies the 144,000 and reveals their destiny. Notice the story these names tell:

> I will praise the Lord. Behold a Son, and then a troop comes. Happy am I because my wrestling with God makes me forget my woe. God hears me, and has joined me to Him. He has purchased me, and my Husband will dwell with me. God will add me to the Son of His right hand.

Amazingly, the names of the tribes reveal the identity and destiny of the 144,000. They are individuals who will look to God's Son, and not dwell on their difficult past. They will marry Christ and rule with Him at His right hand.

Realize that these names will also be emblazoned on each gate of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:12). Individuals who enter the city will read them and the message will be clear. The story of the 144,000 is about those who faithfully serve Christ. They will be rewarded by receiving prestigious positions in God's Kingdom.

This is a marvelous hope for those who are called. As with Abraham and Jacob, God will change each Christian's name accordingly. He will give everyone who overcomes a new name (Rev. 2:17). It will include the term New Jerusalem, as well as God's official name. Christ encourages us with these words:

> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name (Revelation 3:12).

For those who overcome human nature and Satan's influence, Christ will give them the name of God. He will also give each of the saints a new personal name. In addition, the 144,000 will carry the name of the magnificent New Jerusalem—of which they will become pillars in the very government of God.

Chapter 9

They Stand on Mount Zion

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place.
~ Psalm 132:13 ~

For thousands of years, thoughts of Zion have stirred the deepest sense of reverence among the people of God. So important is this place that the Scriptures make more than 160 direct references to it. Psalmists and prophets alike have recorded the history and their hope toward this holy place known as Zion.

Although this location has been the site of much worship, Zion has also been the object of war. Israelis, Christians, and Muslims have claimed a God-given right to call this area their homeland. The result has been theological and political conflict that can only be resolved by Christ when He returns.

At that time, Israel's true King will claim Jerusalem as His own. The city will become the flourishing headquarters for God's government. Finally, more than 1,000 years later, the fulfillment of all that God has envisioned for Zion will occur. The New Jerusalem will descend to an entirely new earth, and become the residence of God's family for all eternity (Rev. 21-22).

Zion will be the headquarters for Christ's government (Zec. 8:3). Therefore, this city is inextricably tied to the 144,000. In fact, God revealed that this is the exact location where this distinguished group will stand with their Savior. As John wrote:

> Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

In John's vision, the Messiah is standing with the 144,000 on what the Bible identifies as Mount Zion. What is this mount, where is it located, and exactly where do the saints stand?

What is Mount Zion?

The term "Zion" comes from the Hebrew word *tsiyon* meaning "a permanent *capital*," or "a mountain of Jerusalem" (*Strong's*, H6726). The expression also implies a "structural fortress." Originally it was a Jebusite city (2Sam. 5:6-9). King David captured this area that sat upon a hilly ridge south of the current Temple Mount. Israel's king then renamed it "the City of David." Later, David brought the Ark of the Covenant to this location with great rejoicing (2Sam. 6). Thereafter, the city was considered a holy place.

Solomon later relocated the ark to the newly constructed temple in Jerusalem, and then the entire city came to be known as Zion. For this reason, the Bible frequently refers to both Jerusalem and the Temple as Zion. In addition, the term is sometimes used figuratively to represent the Church, or the heavenly Jerusalem (1Pet. 2:6; Heb. 12:22-23). In this context, some might wonder exactly where the 144,000 will be standing after the last trump.

Zion in the Millennium

After the triumphant return of Christ, the Bible reveals that His headquarters will be called Zion. As the psalmist wrote:

> Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, *is* Mount Zion *on* the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God *is* in her palaces; He is known as her refuge (Psalm 48:2-3).

Christ will supernaturally resurrect His faithful from around the world and marry them in a glorious wedding ceremony. After the marriage supper, the Messiah will bring the saints with Him as He descends to the Mount of Olives (Zec. 14:4). From that moment, these saints will rule with Him from

the capital city of God's government on earth. The prophet Isaiah referred to this unique time and place when he wrote:

> Then the moon will be disgraced and the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously (Isaiah 24:23).

Christ will rule with His ancients. These ancients will include the resurrected champions of faith such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and David. Among these elect will be the apostles and other faithful members of His Church throughout the ages. These will assist Him as He reigns over the earth from Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The prophet Obadiah made this clear when he wrote:

> Then **saviors shall come to Mount Zion** to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the LORD's (Obadiah 21).

Without question, Christ is the Savior of the world, and His Kingdom will first be established on the earth. However, this verse indicates that "saviors" will assist Him in governing the nations. Thus, God will utilize those who were faithful servants before His return. During His thousand year reign, these saviors will serve as magistrates, ambassadors, and judges in various cities around the world (1Cor. 6:2; Rev. 20:4; Luke 19:17-19; Mat. 5:5). During that time, Mount Zion refers to the city of Jerusalem that is on the earth. These verses speak of the place from which Christ and the saints will rule on earth. However, is this Mount Zion in Revelation 14 where the 144,000 will stand with Christ? Or is it possible the Apostle John was referring to an even greater temple?

Zion as God's Temple

The focal point of the Tabernacle that Israel built in the wilderness was the most holy place. It was designed to be a place for God to dwell among the people. Later, it was included as a

vital part of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. For this reason the Tabernacle and the Temple were often called "the house of the LORD" (Exo. 34:26; 1Kin. 6:37). At one time God's presence filled this sacred place (1Kin. 8:10-11). Therefore, the Temple is sometimes referred to as Zion (Psa. 20:2).

There is a vital principle in Scripture which reveals that physical types on earth often reflect a spiritual reality (Rom. 1:20). Thus, the tabernacle of old reflected God's throne in heaven (Heb. 8:1-5). The city of David was once called Zion. Then, the beautiful temple built by Solomon foreshadowed the magnificent millennial temple meticulously described by Ezekiel (40-47). Still, as great as the millennial temple will be, it prefigures a spiritual temple to come. The tabernacle and the temple were merely symbolic types representing a future spiritual building that is made without human hands. This spiritual temple will include individuals called to God's Church. As the Apostle Paul explained:

> Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* in whom **the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord** (Ephesians 2:19-21).

In these verses Paul refers to the process whereby Christ prepares individuals to serve in offices of responsibility within His future holy edifice. Since people from God's Church are being formed to become an intrinsic part of His future government, God's Church and the temple that will exist in the millennium share an intimate relationship. However, as will be demonstrated, neither the Church nor the beautiful millennial temple on earth is the Mount Zion upon which the 144,000 will stand.

Zion in Heaven

The principle explained by Paul reveals that, in the Scriptures, there is a consistent duality to that which God has created. Thus, it must be understood that the Zion of the millennium will precede a spiritual Zion to come. In other words, just as the temple of old served as a type of the future millennial Zion, the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a precursor to the eternal Zion—the New Jerusalem. In fact, the New Jerusalem, which is in heaven at this time, is the Mount Zion where the 144,000 will stand with Christ! We can begin to understand as we consider John's perspective. The apostle was not viewing events from the standpoint of earth. He was taken in vision and shown things taking place in heaven. As the apostle wrote:

> After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven... (Revelation 4:1-2).

John proceeded to describe the throne of God as well as various angelic beings and heavenly symbols. It was only while viewing these things that he saw the 144,000. As John continued to write:

> And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. **They sang as it were a new song before the throne**, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth (Revelation 14:2-3).

John saw the 144,000 singing a new song set to heavenly music. They were portrayed standing before God's throne in heaven. The beasts and elders are also present. Clearly, John's vision is of events in heaven. Notice also the end of verse three which states that the 144,000 "were redeemed FROM the earth." This indicates that they are taken from the earth, and relocated to heaven. After this, these chosen ones are presented at the throne of God as this celebration occurs.

The timing of this vision is after the resurrection which takes place at the seventh trumpet (1Cor. 15:52). The faithful then experience the marriage supper which occurs just prior to the return of Christ (Rev. 19:7-11). The 144,000 are joyous participants in this fabulous wedding feast—a celebration that will be unparalleled in the entire history of God's creation.

This celebration will undoubtedly be held in the most magnificent of settings. The faithful saints will be taken to the very throne of God. It would be inconceivable for the Father to allow the long awaited fulfillment of the marriage of His Son to take place in his absence. He will be there! The resurrected Saints will be like Christ (1John 3:2). Therefore they will be able to see the Father and be in His presence.

The 144,000 stand before the Father's throne on the sea of glass (Rev. 15:2). They are shown with the beasts, the elders, and Christ. This makes it obvious that they are in heaven at the base of spiritual Mount Zion. This Mount Zion is Jerusalem above. It is the spiritual fulfillment which the tabernacle, the ancient temple, and the millennial temple all point to.

Zion after the Millennium

It was no accident that Christ was a carpenter. He was in the construction business long before He ever came to this earth as a man. Christ was actually the builder and Creator of the entire universe (Eph. 3:9). As John wrote:

> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3).

In this context, He told His followers that He was going to prepare places for them to dwell in His Father's house (John 14:2-3). Christ has been working on this project for an untold number of years. He is building something of extraordinary brilliance and supreme magnificence. He is constructing palatial estates within the New Jerusalem for His future bride. This will ultimately be the abode for those chosen to be in the first resurrection.

This is the great hope of all true believers throughout history—to be with Christ where this magnificent edifice stands. Mount Zion is no less than the future headquarters for God's government for the rest of eternity. The author of the book of Hebrews inspired Christians throughout all ages with this vision:

> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22-23).

This profound verse makes it incontrovertibly clear. It will be genuine Christians who attain the first resurrection that will inhabit Mount Zion. Once they are resurrected, they will be taken to the magnificent city of God. This is the marvelous vision the Apostle John witnessed. He saw the 144,000 standing before the Mount Zion that will one day be their home.

New Jerusalem is the Bride

The angel that showed the divine city to John revealed that, even though the Church is the bride of Christ, New Jerusalem is also called the bride. Notice the revelation of this unique aspect of the true holy city:

> Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, **I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife**." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed

> me the great city, **the holy Jerusalem**, descending out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:9-10).

John was given a vision of Christ's bride, which includes New Jerusalem. And yet, as noted earlier, the Church is also the bride. How is it possible for resurrected saints and the New Jerusalem to both be Christ's bride?

The answer is that the Church and New Jerusalem are as one! Christ is creating places for His bride in the New Jerusalem in heaven. He is also forming His Church so that it will be an exact fit with this spiritual temple (Eph. 2:19-20). He is doing this by forging each Christian's spiritual character so that they will be fitting inhabitants of this heavenly structure. Glorious New Jerusalem is the exterior of the temple. Converted, resurrected, and glorified Christians are to be its interior. They will even carry its name as part of their identity (Rev. 3:12).

The resurrected Church stands on Mount Zion in heaven. The New Jerusalem that awaits its future residents is the Father's house! In the marriage that will take place in heaven, the 144,000 will become one with the New Jerusalem.

Heaven is Not the Reward of the Saved

We have seen that the 144,000 will stand on the heavenly Mount Zion with Christ. However, they will not remain in heaven. As the apostles watched Christ ascend from the Mount of Olives, they were told He would return the same way they saw Him leave (Acts 1:9-12). After the bowl plagues, and the marriage supper, Christ will return with His saints to this earth (Jude 14). He will then fight against His enemies, and His feet will again stand on the Mount of Olives. As the prophet Zechariah wrote:

> Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, *making* a very large valley; half of the mountain

> shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south (Zechariah 14:3-4).

Christ will establish His authority over the nations. He will then rule with the saints from an earthly Jerusalem for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4). As He once stated, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Mat. 5:5). Later the Apostle John recorded that the saints "shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

After the Millennium, the saints will still not reside in heaven. There will then be a second resurrection of all who never had a chance to know Christ. This will conclude with a third resurrection for a final judgment. At that time, the present heavens and earth will be no more (Rev. 20:11). Those who were faithful through the millennium will be given eternal life. Satan, his demons, and the wicked people of the earth throughout history will be cast into a spiritual lake of fire. They will experience a second death, from which there is no return (Rev. 20:12-15). For more on this, please order our free booklets—*Three Resurrections of the Dead* and *Satan's fate*.

After this, God the Father will create new heavens and a magnificent new earth. Only then will He bring the glorious New Jerusalem from above and establish it on the new earth. As the beloved apostle wrote:

> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God (Revelation 21:1-3).

The 144,000 will inhabit the spiritual Mount Zion. This is the heavenly mount where John saw the resurrected saints stand. It is in this place, filled with joy, awe, and gratitude, where they will sing a new song to God.

Chapter 10

They Sing a New Song

Oh, sing to the LORD a new song!
For He has done marvelous things.
~ Psalm 98:1 ~

Music has always played a prominent role in the worship of God. As an example, consider the book of Psalms. This series of hymns comprise the largest book of the Bible. Throughout the ages, these songs of triumph, tragedy, and rejoicing have been sung by prophets, kings, priests, and brethren alike.

The ancient Temple singers also reflected the esteem and reverence God's people have held for hymns. In his book titled *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services,* Alfred Edersheim described the grandeur in which the song service was carried out:

> To the wealth and splendour of the Temple corresponded the character of its services. The most important of these, next to the sacrificial rites, was the hymnody of the sanctuary. We can conceive what it must have been in the days of David and of Solomon. But even in New Testament times it was such that St. John could find no more adequate imagery to portray heavenly realities and the final triumph of the Church than that taken from the service of praise in the Temple. Thus, when first 'the twenty-four elders,' representing the chiefs of the twenty-four courses of the priesthood, and afterwards the 144,000, representing redeemed Israel in its fullness… sing 'the new song'…they appear, just as in the Temple services, as 'harpers, harping with their harps'… (p. 49).

As an authority regarding the Temple service, Edersheim recognized something of great significance. He understood that there is a profound connection between the Temple's song service and John's vision of the 144,000. However, John did not describe his vision based on the earthly Temple. Instead, the Temple and its service were a reflection of the heavenly reality (Rom. 1:20; Heb. 8:1-5).

A Prior Angelic Song Service

The Scriptures reveal that God created music (Eze. 28:13). In fact, the book of Revelation portrays the Eternal as a master musician. Even before the saints are resurrected and stand before His throne, there are magnificent angelic musicians playing instruments and singing a new song about Christ and His soon to be bride:

> And when he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one of whom had a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they were singing a new song, saying, "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and bought *people* for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation, and made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:8-10, LEB).

It is worth noting that many translations of the Bible render the last verses as, "For you were slain, and have redeemed **us** to God... and have made **us** kings and priests to our God." Such renditions can appear as though the angels who are singing in heaven are those who are redeemed and whose destiny is to become kings and priests on the earth. This is not the case. The prayers of the saints are wafting like a sweet aroma from the golden bowls these angels are carrying, and the words John heard were angelic singers whose song is a reflection of the prayers these bowls hold.

The *Lexham English Bible* is just one of several that translate these verses so they more accurately indicate who will be redeemed and who will become kings and priests to reign on the earth. The subject matter is Christ and His bride, and the prayers of the saints are reflected in this new song.

Another point made by this description of future events is that the 144,000 will not be taken strictly from the literal twelve tribes of Israel. While previously explained in chapter 8 of this book, in this chapter of the Bible, verse 9 again reminds readers that the saints will have been redeemed "from every tribe and language and people and nation." God's chosen will come from various parts of the earth, from various times in history, and have various ethnic backgrounds. DNA does not matter to mankind's Creator. Being His faithful servants does!

This angelic hymn takes place before the opening of the seven seals, and it shows that, at this time, there will be enormous joy among the angels of heaven. Their elation emanates from the realization that a major facet of God's plan is drawing near. As a result of their excitement, a grand angelic chorus plays music as they sing about the ultimate destiny of the faithful saints.

Another point to remember is that, while this song speaks of individuals who will ultimately become kings and priests on the earth, it does not disclose how many will be chosen. Not until chapter seven does an angel reveal that there will be exactly 144,000, and only in chapter fourteen does John see this group in heaven standing on Mount Zion.

A Song No One Else Can Learn

King David wrote many psalms that reflect the hope of believers. When considering the songs that will be sung by the 144,000 standing before God's throne, Psalm 144 offers another prophetic hymn. As David wrote:

> I will sing a new song to You, O God (Psalm 144:9).

King David is a champion of faith. The Scriptures make it clear that this man qualified to be in the first resurrection (Eze.

37:21-27). Along with this great king, those privileged to be in the first resurrection will form an elite choir. As their excitement and anticipation builds, they will begin to sing a new song—one that no one else can learn. As John recorded:

> Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth (Revelation 14:1-3).

The Apostle John wrote that no one will be able to learn this song except the 144,000. This statement has profound implications. The resurrection will have taken place. Those raised will no longer be human. They will be spirit beings like Christ (1Cor. 15:54; 1John 3:2). The Apostle Paul recognized this truth and wrote that the resurrected saints will know Christ in the same way He knows them:

> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known (1 Corinthians. 13:12).

According to Paul's God-given insight, the 144,000 will understand Christ's mind. Their intimate relationship with the Savior will enable them to learn a special song which others cannot. This fact alone indicates that the 144,000 are the totality of those raised in the first resurrection. If any other individuals were raised from the dead, they too would be capable of learning this new song. Therefore, the Scriptures reveal that the first resurrection consists of only 144,000 saints!

The Voice of the Groom

While describing the 144,000 singing before the throne, John noted an important component of the vision and wrote:

> And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder (Revelation 14:2).

The apostle heard the 144,000 singing, but the sound was not that of the resurrected saints alone. Another voice resounded above the others. The Scriptures indicate that this unique voice belongs to the Messiah Himself. Consider the following verses that also portray the Savior singing while in the midst of angels and the saints:

> For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: "**I will declare your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly** I will sing praise to you" (Hebrews 2:11-12).

> He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments... **I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels** (Revelation 3:5).

> But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, **to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn** *who are* registered in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23).

These verses indicate that Christ will acknowledge selected individuals and sing while surrounded by the assembly. This is likely a reference to the Savior singing among the 144,000 and holy angels. Could this be a referring to a new song that Christ and His bride will sing in heaven before God's throne?

In this context, other Scriptures indicate this voice belongs to Christ. While receiving a vision of the Savior in His glorified state, John previously described His voice as being like

"the sound of many waters" (Rev. 1:15). The prophet Ezekiel was given a divine vision and he wrote that "His voice *was* like the sound of many waters" (Eze. 43:2). When God sharply questioned Job, the Creator asked him:

> Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His? (Job 40:9).

These verses parallel Revelation 14:2 which states that Christ's voice is like many waters and loud thunder. After the resurrection, the Savior will lead the 144,000 in singing divine hymns. Their voices will be powerful and beautiful as they sing a new and exclusive song that will stir the emotions of the entire host of heaven.

The Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb

Prior to the marriage supper, the saints will be taken to heaven where they will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. As John wrote:

> Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:1-4).

John saw the saints standing before God's throne on what appeared to be a sea of glass (Rev. 15:2). Just as the tabernacle

was once a reflection of God's throne, it is likely that the translucent sea was foreshadowed by the great brass laver used in temple worship (Exo. 30:18-21; 1Kin. 7:23-24). The priests were commanded to wash in this large basin prior to performing their duties before God. Their washing reflects the need to become spiritually clean before approaching God's throne. Paul understood this concept and wrote:

> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and **cleanse her with the washing of water by the word**, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The sea of glass is before God's magnificent throne (Rev. 4:6). The 144,000 will stand pure and holy before God on this crystal-like sea. It is there that they will sing celebratory songs of triumph.

The inspired verses speak of the indwelling hope that has motivated many people throughout the ages. The words contain beautiful millennial imagery in which all nations will live peacefully by heeding the Word of God. The saints will sing with enormous passion; realizing that the lyrics will shortly become a reality.

The words of Moses hearken back to Israel's liberation from bondage. After passing through the Red Sea, the pursuing Egyptians were destroyed when God brought walls of water cascading down upon Pharaoh's army. Safe on the eastern shore, Moses led Israel in a glorious and prophetic hymn. While the words of this song speak of God's triumph over the Egyptian army, they also foretell of the Israelites building a tabernacle for the Almighty. Notice some of the profound lyrics:

> I will sing unto the LORD, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD *is* my strength and song, and he is

> become my salvation: he *is* my God, and **I will prepare him an habitation**; my father's God, and I will exalt him (KJV, Exodus 15:1-2).

This song foretells of Israel building a tabernacle for God. At this point it must be noted that most translations of the Bible mistakenly omit "I will prepare Him an habitation," and substitute the original text with the words "I will praise (or glorify) Him." This is clearly an error as the Scriptures tell us that we are not allowed to change the meaning or intent of God's printed word (Deu. 12:32). This mistranslation was likely made because the translators did not understand what the original text meant, and likely thought that building God a habitation was simply symbolic constructing praise for God. However, the "habitation" is an important part of the lyrics. It reflects Israel building God a physical tabernacle, but also portrays an individual's repentance by preparing themselves to be a dwelling place for God's Holy Spirit (2Cor. 6:16). As Christ said:

> If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him (John 14:23).

As the song continues, the words also prophesy of God's wrath upon the ungodly. It speaks of the second coming of Christ, the transcendent destiny of the saints, and the New Jerusalem—a habitation built by the hands of the Creator Himself:

> The people will hear *and* be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be *as* still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, *in* the place, O LORD, *which* You have made for Your own dwelling, **the sanctuary, O**

> **LORD, *which* Your hands have established**. The LORD shall reign forever and ever (Exodus 15:14-18).

These words are fitting for a song to be sung by the 144,000. The lyrics speak of a sanctuary that God's own hands will have established. They tell of the redeemed being planted "in the mountain" which is symbolic of the place where God's government will stand. This mount is a reference to the place Christ has been preparing for His saints (John 14:2). It is the New Jerusalem being built upon the heavenly Mount Zion (Psa. 48:2-3; Oba. 21). All of this will come to pass after the saints have been liberated from death by a resurrection. They will ascend to heaven, marry Christ, and be included as a part of God's eternal government.

In addition to this specific song, Moses penned lyrics to another song that also has far reaching applications. In Deuteronomy 32, the prophet wrote:

> Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the LORD: Ascribe greatness to our God. *He is* the Rock, His work *is* perfect; for all His ways *are* justice, a God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright *is* He (Deuteronomy 32:1-4).

The lyrics go on to describe people who are corrupt, deceitful, and foolish, and will experience His wrath. It also speaks of faithful people of Jacob along with those who eventually fell away. Then, in conclusion of the hymn:

> Rejoice, O Gentiles, *with* His people; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land *and* His people (Deuteronomy 32:43).

The words of this song express enormous reverence for God. They also foretell of deliverance for true and faithful servants as well as wrath upon the rebellious. In this way, many of the words are much like those found in Exodus 15—prophetic for those people at that time as well as for us today. Many of these verses would be fitting lyrics for a song of Moses to be sung by the resurrected saints.

The book of Exodus reflects the salvation of God's chosen people (1Cor. 10:11; Rev. 21:10). There is a duality in Israel's exodus from Egypt. Their journey to the Promised Land was a type foreshadowing the saint's journey to God's Kingdom. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the 144,000 will sing a song of Moses. The book of Deuteronomy pictures the promised Kingdom of God that the Eternal will give to the saints. These are just some of the words that the 144,000 may sing in celebration of their redemption.

Included in this composition is the Song of the Lamb. While every utterance of this future song is not known, we believe that it will include the following words that declare Christ's dedication and sacrifice making salvation possible:

> Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested (Revelation 15:3-4).

A Lesson for Us

This knowledge leads to another profound realization. God designed music to have a powerful affect on our emotions. Today it is common knowledge that music can literally change an individual's mood. On a romantic date we can be soothed by the sound of violins or a soft guitar. While watching a dramatic scene in a movie or play, excitement is heightened by pounding drums and the peal of trumpets.

In fact, music is one of life's peak experiences. Psychological and medical studies have discovered that the

human body is designed in such a way that music can affect our pulse rate, blood pressure, and adrenal glands. It even has the ability to assuage pain. Possessing passionate power, music can alter our body chemistry and transport us to emotional highs or lows. Professor Allen Bloom studied the emotional impact of music and wrote:

> Music… always involves a delicate balance between passion and reason, and, even in its highest and most developed forms—religious, warlike, and erotic—that balance is always tipped, if ever so slightly, toward the passionate. Music, as everyone experiences, provides an un-questionable justification and fulfilling pleasure for the activities it accompanies: the soldier who hears the marching band is enthralled and reassured; the religious man is exalted in his prayer by the sound of the organ in the church; and the lover is carried away and his conscience stilled by the romantic guitar (*The Closing of the American Mind,* p. 71-72).

As Bloom noted, songs can be emotionally powerful! What most do not realize is that music was designed by God with the ability to influence our disposition. As a gift to humanity, music was intended to generate positive feelings of happiness and joy while enhancing our worship of the Eternal.

With this in mind, when people assemble before God on the Sabbath and holy days, they should sing passionately with a spirit of celebration, enthusiasm, and a profound sense of great joy. As the Apostle Paul encouraged us:

> And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:18-19).

The Importance of the Sabbath Song Service

The seventh day Sabbath is the first of God's Feasts. It was instituted at the beginning of creation as a sign between the

Almighty and His people (Gen. 2:1-3; Exo. 31:13). This weekly observance stands as a symbolic reminder of Christ's millennial rule (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:4-11).

For this reason, the Scriptures indicate that a day prophetically pictures 1,000 years (2Pet. 3:8; Psa. 90:4). As a reminder of His 7,000 year plan, God commanded His people to work six days, but sanctified the seventh as a day of rest. By observing the Sabbath, Christians are reminded that humanity will toil for 6,000 years as the nations attempt to rule the earth without God's moral law. This rejection of our Creator has led to a continuity of false religion, war, famine, and disease.

However, when the time of humanity's rule has expired, the world will experience a seventh 1,000 year period that will be a type of Sabbath. This will be the time of the earth's rest—the fulfillment of what the Sabbath has always represented. At that time, the chosen saints will be resurrected to assist Christ in establishing God's Kingdom on the earth. The Messiah will restore this planet to the way God intended (Acts 3:19-21). The earth will finally delight in a millennial rest from the hardship and suffering caused by sin (Heb. 4:1-9).

God's 7,000 year plan is not a new concept. His true Church has understood the relationship between the Sabbath and the Millennium for untold centuries. This truth was even taught by the Jews before the birth of Christ. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* states they believed in:

> A world-week of seven millenniums corresponding with the week of Creation, the verse "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday" (Psa. 90:4) having suggested the idea that the present world of toil is to be followed by a Sabbatical millennium, "the world to come"...Of these the six millenniums were again divided, as in Parsism, into three periods: the first 2,000 years devoid of the Law; the next 2,000 years under the rule of the Law; and the last 2,000 years preparing amid struggles and through catastrophes for the rule of the Messiah (volume V, p. 211).

Notice also what the authors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* wrote while evaluating this same understanding documented in the Jewish Talmud:

> "In six days God created the world, on the seventh He rested. But a day of God is equal to a thousand years (Ps. 90:4). Hence the world will last for six thousand years of toil and labor; then will come one thousand years of Sabbath rest for the people of God in the kingdom of the Messiah." This idea must have already been very common in the first century before Christ (11th edition, vol. XVIII, p. 461).

Because the Sabbath pictures the coming Millennium, we acknowledge God's promise of His millennial rest by faithfully observing the day that foreshadows a future age. The fourth Commandment is a continual reminder of what our future holds.

The symbolism found in Sabbath observance also includes the time when God's chosen will be resurrected and taken before His throne. Therefore, when believers rise to sing every Sabbath, they literally foreshadow the 144,000 singing before the throne of God.

Imagine the excitement of singing a new song while being led by Christ. Visualize the majesty of glorified spirit beings with voices that sound like a harmony of waterfalls producing a melodic anthem before the Ancient of Days.

The song service we participate in each week is designed for us to rehearse this future event. Every Sabbath, we rise before the song leader, take up hymnals, and sing songs of praise to God. But do we sing with the understanding of what we are portraying? Far too often, we do not sing out—praising Him as we should. Some might believe they don't possess a good voice. Others may feel embarrassed to sing with their whole heart. Perhaps we are tired and display a lack of enthusiasm. But there is no excuse for a half-hearted effort. The song service is of great importance to God, and it should be to us.

When we sing, we should not worry about our voices being good enough. Instead, we should sing loudly and

cheerfully! We should do so with a vision of the 144,000 fixed in our minds; realizing that we have been called to attain this magnificent destiny. Further, we should remember that we will attain God's Kingdom if we keep ourselves pure and undefiled.

Chapter 11

They are Virgins Who are Undefiled

A glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing,
but that she should be holy and without blemish.
~ Ephesians 5:27 ~

The thought of a virgin elicits mental pictures of innocence and purity. This is exactly how God will view those who are faithful to Him when they become clean and righteous. For this reason, God inspired the Apostle John to describe the 144,000 in these terms:

> These are the ones who were not defiled with women,
> for they are virgins (Revelation 14:4).

The descriptions in this verse indicate that the 144,000 are individuals who have not been defiled by false religion. They have come out of the ways of this world and strive for moral purity (Rev. 18:4). They have worked diligently to keep themselves unspotted so that they are ready to marry Christ upon His return (Jam. 1:27; Rev. 19:7).

Qualified to Marry the High Priest

John's statement that the 144,000 are virgins reflects God's law concerning the high priest's nuptials. The high priest was required to maintain high standards of conduct. When it came to marriage, he was not permitted to marry any woman he might desire. Even in such a personal part of his life, he was held to the highest of principles. There were written requirements to follow which stated:

> And he shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow or a divorced woman or a defiled woman *or* a harlot—these he shall not marry; but he shall take a virgin of his own people as wife (Leviticus 21:13-14).

The temple and its priesthood were patterned after the heavenly (Heb. 8:5; 9:11). Christ was represented by the high priest (Heb. 3:1). Like the man of office, Christ must wed a woman that is pure. He cannot marry anyone that is defiled. The Church He ultimately marries is the 144,000 and they are spiritual virgins.

The Friend of the Bridegroom

The Apostle Paul understood that the high priest portrayed Christ, and his betrothed virgin pictured the Church. Paul was also conversant regarding the Jewish wedding in which a close friend of the groom was given an official position called the *shoshabin*. For this reason, Paul wrote:

> For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2).

Paul alluded to himself being a type of *shoshabin*. The *shoshabin* was responsible for the success of the wedding. This included invitations, arrangements, and organizing any activities. This individual also acted as a liaison between the bride and the bridegroom. The *shoshabin* would present the bride to the groom during the ceremony, and he was responsible for guarding the bridal chamber—only opening the door when he heard the bridegroom's voice.

The Apostle Paul had a similar responsibility to help prepare the Church for the marriage supper of the Lamb. He strived to keep the Church pure and clean in order to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ. The symbolism is clear regarding the 144,000. They are the bride that will marry the Bridegroom. For this reason, they must be holy, pure, and clean—virgins.

The Marriage Ceremony

It is important to consider the marriage ceremony as it existed during the lifetime of Christ. This will enable readers to further understand the symbolism used to describe the 144,000.

The traditional matrimonial affairs often lasted a week or more. The arrangements included three phases. Guests were first invited to the wedding. Later they would be called to attend the ceremony and festivities. Finally, the newlyweds would spend seven or more days celebrating with family and friends.

A person was invited when they were notified that the wedding would be taking place on a predetermined date. This notice constituted an invitation in which individuals were given a general time frame for the celebration. The host sponsoring the ceremony would make the necessary preparations. The guests were then called to attend once everything was ready. Christ provided considerable insight into these preparations when He gave the parable of the wedding:

> The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding" (Matthew 22:2-4).

Once called to the wedding, the guests were to prepare. They would dress appropriately and attend a service that included a grand feast followed by the marriage ceremony. The feast included a supper with delicious food and drink. After the banquet, there would be a formal ceremony in the evening. The *shoshabin* would bring the bride and groom together and present them to the officiating priest. The couple was then escorted to their new home by personal friends who carried lamps and torches to light the way. There was also a canopy held over their heads as they went. All this helped draw attention to the procession and they often took the longest route home so that

many townsfolk could wish them well. Anyone without a torch or lamp was not considered part of the wedding party.

The newlyweds did not go out of town on a honeymoon as we do today. Instead, the couple stayed in their abode for an entire week holding open house to friends and family. The entire community celebrated the couple's happiness. There was a spirit of joy and mirth in the whole town. Many would temporarily close their business and travel to the abode to enjoy the merriment. The couple often wore crowns as they entertained guests. They were treated much like a king and queen who's every request was fulfilled during the weeklong celebration (*The Gospel of Matthew*, W. Barclay, v. 2, p. 319).

Spiritual Insight from the Ceremony

The wedding ceremony during Christ's day provides rich insight for Christians. This is why He made use of the imagery contained in the physical ceremony as an educational tool to help His future bride understand the spiritual wedding supper to come.

God has called many to the Messiah's wedding (John 6:44). But not everyone who is called will qualify to attend (Mat. 22:14). Some who are invited will not value their invitation enough to respond appropriately. They will not properly prepare themselves. Others may be distracted by the cares of this world, while some may become defiled (Mat. 13:22). These will not be permitted to take part in the wedding supper.

Those who DO respond to their invitation will prepare themselves and be ready! They will be active participants in one of the most wonderful celebrations ever bestowed on humanity. They will marry their Creator! As the Apostle John wrote:

> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7-9).

What a blessing this event will be. As promised, the resurrected saints will eat and drink at Christ's table (Luke 22:30). They will enjoy the hospitality of the Almighty God and the host of heaven. They will fellowship with angels and all those who fought the good fight. Heroes of faith from all ages will be there.

The marriage ceremony will include a glorious feast. It is likely that God the Father will officiate during this magnificent service. The virgins will become the wife of Christ and be given glorious crowns as they are ordained kings and priests (Rev. 5:10). The entire host of heaven will come to honor them. They will meet the magnificent archangels Gabriel and Michael. The resurrected saints will likely be introduced to their personal guardian angels who may recount times they miraculously protected them. This event, and all that it portends, is so important, and so wonderful, that the Savior urged His people to be prepared!

The Parable of the Virgins

Christ related several parables exhorting His followers to always be ready for His return. These parables began with the Savior reminding Christians that His return will be unexpected (Mat. 24:42-44). He then explained that passive watching is not enough. Christians are required to actively overcome (Mat. 24:45-51). He also related that there would be a need for preparedness in the face of a seeming delay (Mat. 25:13-33).

During these illustrations, Christ gave the parable of the ten virgins. The virgins portray those who have been called to the marriage supper. The Messiah warned them to be ready if they hope to be a part of the wedding ceremony:

> Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. Those who *were* foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was *heard:* 'Behold, the bridegroom is

> coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us *some* of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, '*No,* lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you' (Matthew 25:1-12).

The virgins represent those God has called. While the Bridegroom appears to delay, the virgin's reaction to this seeming postponement will determine who is deemed wise or foolish. Some will let down while others remain motivated. Christ purposely provided this parable as a reminder to us to be vigorously preparing while awaiting His coming.

Christ stated that all the virgins took their lamps with them. The word "lamps" is *lampas* in the Greek, and can mean either a lamp, light, or torch (*Strong's*, G2985). Since this parable refers to the marriage procession, it is likely that torches were used. Torches were usually lengths of wood tightly wrapped with cloth around one end. The cloth was soaked in oil which caused the torch to burn for some time. Eventually, the oil would be exhausted and the fire would go out. More oil would be needed for the torch to burn again.

In this story, some of the virgins expected the Bridegroom to come immediately and did not prepare for the unexpected by bringing additional oil. Others brought supplementary oil. All the virgins dozed off while the groom delayed. Suddenly, the cry went out that the Bridegroom was coming! Some of the virgin's torches had begun to go out. They realized that they did not have the oil necessary to meet Him. They ultimately found themselves shut out of the marriage. The wise virgins brought extra oil to refuel their lamps. By being prepared, they were assured a place in the marriage.

The meaning of the parable is clear. Oil has been used as a reference to the imputing of the Holy Spirit such as when anointing kings or priests (Exo. 29:7; 1Sam. 10:1; 16:13; Psa. 23:5; Luke 4:18). The burning torch portrays our knowledge of God's Word which is able to light our way in the darkness of this world (Psa. 119:105). The virgins are those who have been called to prepare for the marriage supper of the Lamb, but experience an unexpected delay.

This parable is being fulfilled right now. Because Christ has not returned, some are spiritually slumbering. They have fallen into a belief that Christ delays His coming, and have begun to slack off in the practice of their faith (Luke 12:45-46). Many have created diverse doctrines that have confused brethren. Some have given up running the race altogether. Others are drifting and no longer actively striving to overcome sin and human nature. Regardless of our spiritual state, the cry will go out. The virgins will be called to the wedding ceremony, but not all will be ready.

This parable is a warning to the entire Church. Christ's admonition to His people at the end of the age is to be prepared, stay alert, and be in a state of readiness. Christians must not let down in prayer, Bible study, and temperance even if events have turned out different than expected. If circumstances are not what we anticipated, realize they are still according to God's plan.

It is imperative that each of us continue to develop spiritually as time presses on. We must live in a state of preparation so that we are not caught off guard. The call to the wedding will come. Five of the virgins were prepared for Christ. The other five were not. This indicates that many Church members will not be ready.

We absolutely must follow the advice God gives in this parable. Remain actively involved in developing godly character. Obtain a better understanding of the Word to insure our readiness during the current delay. Work at having a full supply of the Holy Spirit so that our light will be shining when He returns. Strive to keep ourselves pure and undefiled by the false doctrines and cares of this world (Mark 4:19).

Not Defiled With Women

As Christ revealed the characteristics of the 144,000, John recorded the following curious statement:

> These are the ones who were not defiled with women (Revelation 14:4).

With only a cursory reading, this verse can be one of the most misunderstood scriptures in the entire Bible. What is actually meant by this statement? Does God have a cynical view of women? Did He create them with qualities that defile? Is the Eternal issuing a warning that His magnificent plan of salvation is only applicable to men? The answer is obviously no.

We must first realize that God does not have an unbalanced view toward women. In fact, the New Testament reveals that Christ does not show partiality when it comes to those called to His Church. As Paul noted:

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

God has high regard for all men and women who are faithful to Him. For example, the wife and mother described in Proverbs 31 paints a beautiful portrait of a moral and ethical woman. The stories of Deborah, Esther, and Ruth reveal women who were paragons of virtue. The women who assisted Christ, and those who later helped the Apostle Paul, were invaluable to God and His work.

The Almighty is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He does not value men more than women. There is no spiritual difference between genders. God also does not feel that marital relations defile a person (Heb. 13:4). This being the case, it is clear that there is nothing inherent in women that defiles a man. Therefore, what does God mean by saying that the 144,000 are "not defiled with women?"

Symbolism in Revelation

While the Bible may sometimes appear difficult to understand, uncertainty regarding the meaning of Revelation 14:4 need not exist. God tells us that He is not the author of confusion (1Cor. 14:33). The meaning can be known by "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15).

Perhaps it would be helpful to consider the Bible's many books as analogous to a giant jigsaw puzzle. Each piece must be put in its proper place to create a clear picture. The Bible contains various pieces of God's puzzle that include fact, historical narrative, figurative analogy, and prophetic symbolism. The question readers must ask is which piece of the puzzle is Christ using in Revelation 14:4?

When we consider the context, it is obvious that the expression "not defiled with women" is symbolic. We can be certain of this for two reasons. First, attempting to apply the verse literally places it in direct conflict with God's respectful view of women. Second, a "woman" is used figuratively in many other places in the Bible to represent a religious organization.

In one example, ancient Israel was known as God's Church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). God said that He was married to her, but that she continually "committed adultery" and "played the harlot" by accepting false doctrine and worshipping false gods. Thus, the Eternal was forced to give her a certificate of divorce (Jer. 6:3-14).

The Song of Solomon was also written with profound imagery depicting Christ's love for His Church. Christ called His true Church a "woman" while foretelling her persecution during the end-time (Rev. 12:14-17). John the Baptist called the Messiah the "bridegroom" foreshadowing Christ's purpose to marry the Church (John 3:29). Additionally, Paul alluded to the future abode of Christ's Church (New Jerusalem) as the "mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26). The apostle also wrote of the marital relationship revealing that it represents Christ and the Church:

> Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is

> head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church** (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Human matrimony foreshadows the marriage of Christ to the Church. The apostle John also wrote:

> Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and **His wife has made herself ready.** And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints (Revelation 19:7-8).

The Symbolism of a Woman in the Book of Revelation

The True Church	***Scripture***
A woman likened to our spiritual mother	12:1
The woman is protected	12:6
Satan persecutes the woman	12:13
The woman is taken to a place of safety	12:14
Satan sends a flood after the woman	12:15
God helps the woman	12:16
Satan attacks the woman's seed	12:17

False Churches	***Scripture***
A woman seduces the saints	2:20
144,000 are not defiled by women	14:4
She sits upon many waters	17:1
Kings of the earth fornicate with her, and people of the earth are made drunk by her doctrine	17:2 18:3
A woman rides the beast	17:3
A whore adorned in riches	17:4
A mother of harlots and abominations of the earth	17:5
She is drunk on saint's blood	17:6
She rules over seven nations	17:7-9
Ten kings hate the whore	17:16
The woman resides in a great city	17:18
She makes merchants wealthy	18:3

God often refers to His Church as a woman. Nevertheless, it must be understood that she is never portrayed as a woman that defiles. God's Church is represented as a righteous woman in the traditional biblical role. She is clean, wearing white, teaching the Father's way to her children, and warning them of what will occur if they disobey His commandments. She protects and guards the truth regarding the right way to live as she nurtures, serves, and supports those who God places in her body awaiting eventual rebirth into eternal life (Rom. 8:21-23; John 3:3-8). However, individual members can be defiled by false doctrines that pervade society. For this reason, Paul warned:

> Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Colossians 2:8).

Paul's admonition is for God's Church not to be defiled by the false religious systems of this world. This understanding helps us to recognize that the word "women" in Revelation 14:4 represents false churches.

The Woman that Defiles

John's vision portrays God's Church as a woman seven times. The Bible refers to her as the Christian's nurturing mother—the beginning and ultimate destiny of God's faithful people (Rev. 12:1; Gal. 4:26). The book of Revelation also refers to a woman portraying a false church 13 times. So vile is this false church that the angel identifies her as a whore! The Bible leaves little doubt as to the identity of this whore. John described the woman that defiles as:

> …the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication (Revelation 17:1-2).

The apostate church is a great harlot who deserves divine judgment. She gives herself to others in exchange for affluence and power. She sits upon many waters which represents her presiding over vast numbers of people (Rev. 17:15). This false church influences many nations and government leaders. At the same time, she corrupts most of the people on earth with her intoxicating false doctrines (Isa. 29:9-13; Rev. 18:3). John further described her, saying:

> …I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast *which was* full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 17:3).

The whore sits upon a beast that has seven heads and ten horns, but what is this beast? The book of Daniel reveals that beasts prophetically picture various empires. The horns of these beasts are symbolic of power. They represent national leaders who rule over nations. This woman has influenced seven empires over centuries, and she will ultimately control an alliance of ten nations. By calling herself "holy" and "Christ's church," this spiritual whore blasphemes! She is wealthy and politically influential, but corrupt and unclean. She defiles all those she influences and, therefore, she is not clothed in the white linen that pictures righteousness. Instead, John described the whore with these words:

> The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication (Revelation 17:4).

John vividly described the church that has historically defiled Christianity. Her priests dress in beautiful fabrics. Her religious artifacts are made of gold, pearls, and precious jewels. Her buildings are decked with splendor. She is the church that holds the reigns of the beast power—controlling governments throughout various eras of humanity. She took on Christ's name, adopted detestable doctrines of pagan origin, and has defiled

countless numbers throughout the ages. She deceived people by teaching that the only way to properly worship God is through her. In John's next statement, he revealed exactly who this woman is:

> And on her forehead a name *was* written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH (Revelation 17:5).

This false religious entity is blasphemous. Her name reveals that her origin is Babylon. She is also known as a mother of harlots. This indicates that the whore has spawned many daughters, and her children have also prostituted themselves by teaching similar false doctrines. This means that numerous churches have adopted various adaptations of her abominable practices. These churches defile their members by mixing biblical truth with empty pagan traditions that many empires have used to seduce their citizens.

Mystery Babylon

The Apostle John identified the great whore as Mystery Babylon. This title points to a system of worship that started long ago with Nimrod who was the founder of Babylon (Gen. 10:8-10). Nimrod went contrary to God's command to spread out and replenish the earth. Instead, he formed cities and made himself a god-king. His most noted metropolis was Babel where he began to build the infamous tower (Gen. 11:4).

Some believe that Nimrod built this great tower to make a name for himself by reaching into heaven; similar to the act of Lucifer. Others are convinced that he was building something so sinister that it threatened God's timetable. As the Creator stated:

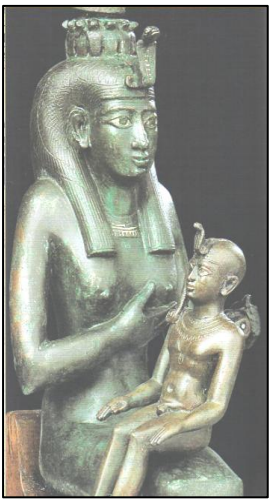
> …Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do (Genesis 11:6).

God saw it necessary to intervene in the affairs of these people. He confounded their language and caused Nimrod's subjects to spread abroad over the face of all the earth (Gen. 11:9). Regarding Nimrod's name, the *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* states that the name actually means "rebellion" (H5248). Certainly, Nimrod did revolt against God. His rebellion led to a vast apostasy that continues to influence most modern religions. Notice what the historian Alexander Hislop wrote about Nimrod and his mother Semiramis who also became his wife:

> According to the Chaldean doctrine, Semiramis, the wife of Ninus or Nimrod, when exalted to divinity under the name of the Queen of Heaven, came, as we have seen, to be worshipped as Juno, the "Dove"—in other words, the Holy Spirit incarnate...
>
> He as the Sun-god, was called Beel-samen, "Lord of heaven;" she, as the Moon goddess, Melkat-ashemin, "Queen of heaven." He was worshipped in Egypt as the "Revealer of goodness and truth;" she, in Babylon, under the symbol of the Dove, as the goddess of gentleness and mercy, the "Mother of gracious acceptance," "merciful and benignant to men." He, under the name of Mithra, was worshipped as Mesites, or "the Mediator;" she, as Aphrodite, or the "Wrath-subduer," was called Mylitta, "the Mediatrix." He was represented as crushing the great serpent under his heel; she, as bruising the serpent's head in her hand. He, under the name Janus, bore a key as the opener and shutter of the gates of the invisible world. She, under the name of Cybele, was invested with a like key, as an emblem of the same power. He, as the cleanser from sin, was called the "Unpolluted god;" she, too, had the power to wash away sin, and, though the mother of the seed, was called the "Virgin, pure and undefiled." He was represented as "Judge of the dead;" she was represented as standing by his side, at the judgment-seat, in the unseen world (*The Two Babylons*, pp. 141, 264-265).

Nimrod's ungodly subjects spread around the earth and took various forms of the Babylonian mystery religion with them. They continued to worship the same false gods, but with new names befitting their various languages. Semiramis and Nimrod became known as Isis, Osiris, Molech, Dionysus, Marduk, Fortuna, Jupiter, and a host of other names. Nimrod and his mother eventually became the Madonna and child image that has been carried over to the modern day worship of Mary and the baby Jesus! The Bible notes that this ancient pagan queen of heaven was worshiped by the heathen as Ashtoreth; a pagan god that came to be known as Astarte, Eostre, and Easter (Jer. 44:17; 2Kin. 23:13). This title was later adopted by the Catholic Church who teaches its members to pray to Mary—the supposed "queen of heaven." As Hislop continues:

> After what the reader has already seen in a previous part of this work, it is hardly necessary to say that it is this very goddess that is now worshipped in the Church of Rome under the name of Mary. Though that goddess is called by the name of the mother of our Lord, all the attributes given to her are derived simply from the Babylonian Madonna, and not from the Virgin Mother of Christ (ibid, p. 177).



Babylonian mystery religion is very much alive today. Though it is called by other names, it is this religion that defiles. As shocking as it may sound, this very system of ancient pagan religion now claims to be Christian.

The Woman's Transformation

Remnants of this ancient heresy eventually came to profoundly affect people who called themselves Christian. It began soon after Christ's resurrection (Mat. 24:5). The pure doctrines instituted by Christ, and observed by the apostles, began to be perverted by people who were influenced by pagan beliefs. Notorious Gnostic heretics such as Simon the magus and Cerinthus attempted to infiltrate God's Church. While they professed to believe in Christ, such false teachers brought in damnable doctrine (2Cor. 11:13-15; 2Pet. 2).

At the core of this false Christianity was the Gnostic belief that the acquisition of knowledge brought the individual closer to God and anything physical led a person away from Christ. Only things of the mind were valued by the disciples of this false religion.

Two sects emerged from this belief in a relatively short period of time. An ascetic view was first propagated which advocated that the physical led people away from God. Therefore individuals should avoid all pleasures in life in order to become more spiritual. The Apostle Paul described this branch of the movement when he spoke of those who taught, "Touch not; taste not; handle not" (Col. 2:21). Later, another sect developed called the Epicureans. This faction put an ironic twist on Gnosticism. They advocated that, since only thoughts of the mind mattered, a person should partake of every kind of physical pleasure in order to gain more knowledge. This perversion went so far as to teach that individuals could perform any depraved act and still be righteous if they simply believed in God in their mind.

That false belief continues to be propagated today. Most sects of Protestantism believe that, as long as a person has love in their heart, what they do physically does not matter. When addressing this faction of the Gnostic movement, Paul wrote,

"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1-2). The Apostle John also combated this first century heresy writing that "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1John 1:8).

The Gnostic movement continued to dramatically affect many people. Its purpose was to minimize the importance of obedience to God's law. While many remained faithful to the truth originally delivered to the saints, false teachers propagated the belief that a person's love for God in their heart was more important than actual obedience to His commandments. Several churches arose calling themselves Christian in which some members were marginal. Then, in the fourth century, a historic precedent catapulted the false Christian church deep into apostasy.

Emperor Constantine Furthers the Transformation

The Roman Emperor Constantine came to power early in the fourth century A.D. just as the empire was beginning to crumble due to depravity and excess. Christianity was a violation of Roman law at that time. Those who professed belief in Christ were considered enemies of the state and were often subjected to violent persecution. Still, the apostate sect of Christianity continued to grow. These believers appeared dedicated to their faith. They taught moral living, hard work, and loyalty to the state. The emperor was so impressed with their values that he decided to use this religion as glue to hold the failing empire together.

Constantine issued the Edict of Toleration in 313 A.D. Later he ordered that Christianity become the official religion of the state. Persecution of Christians stopped, and believers throughout the empire rejoiced. They were convinced that God had saved them through this pagan emperor. However, few could ever have anticipated what would occur next.

Because Christianity was now the state religion, the Roman church became political. An alliance between church and state was made and the woman began to ride the beast; just as prophesied in Revelation 17. The religion of this unholy organization called itself Christian, but it was a far cry from the

faith once delivered. Historian Jesse Hurlbut described this phenomenon, stating:

> The alliance of the state and the church also brought in its train many evils. The ceasing of persecution was a blessing, but the establishment of Christianity as the state religion became a curse. Everybody sought membership in the church, and nearly everybody was received. Both good and bad, sincere seekers after God and hypocritical seekers after gain, rushed into the communion. Ambitious, worldly, unscrupulous men sought office in the church for social and political influence. The moral tone of Christianity in power was far below that which had marked the same people under persecution. The services of worship increased in splendor, but were less spiritual and hearty than those of former times. The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. The old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship. The adoration of the Virgin Mary was substituted for worship of Venus and Diana... As a result of the church sitting in power, we do not see Christianity transforming the world to its own ideal, but the world dominating the church. The humility and saintliness of an earlier age was succeeded by ambition, pride, and arrogance among churchmen... the church and the state became one when Christianity was adopted as the religion of the empire, and out of the unnatural union arose two evils, one in the eastern, the other in the western provinces. In the east the state dominated the church until it lost all energy and uplifting life. In the west, as we shall see, the church gradually usurped power over the state, and the result was not *Christianity* but a more or less corrupt *hierarchy* controlling the nations of Europe, making the church mainly a political machine (*The Story of the Christian Church,* latest revised edition, 1954, pp. 62-63).

The Transformation becomes Complete

Legalizing Christianity appeared to solve one problem for the church, but it caused another. Millions of pagans professed to believe in Christ, but had no desire to give up their old ways. The priests half heartedly tried to resist the holidays and traditions of the pagan culture, but church leadership eventually made the decision to accommodate paganism. Historian Charles Guignebert explained how this process occurred:

> Now at the beginning of the fifth century, the ignorant and the semi-Christians thronged into the church in numbers... The clergy had believed it necessary to hasten the conversion of the masses of people whom the imperial government delivered over to their propaganda and, sacrificing quality to quantity, they had joyfully inscribed, as converts to the faith, the names of men who knew little of it save some few formulas. They could not understand these at all well and, in making their acquaintance, they had forgotten none of their pagan customs… The bishops of that period had to content themselves with redressing, as best they could, and in experimental fashion, the shocking malformations of the Christian faith which they perceived around them... for what could the clergy do with such a number in such a short time? Instruct them? It was out of the question; they had to be content with teaching them no more than the symbol of baptism and then baptizing them *en masse*, postponing until a later date the task of eradicating their superstitions, which they preserved intact. To tell the truth, this "later date" never arrived, and the Church adapted to herself, as well as she could, them and their customs and beliefs. On their side, they were content to dress their paganism in a Christian cloak (*The Early History of Christianity,* pp. 208-210).

This apostate church that called itself Christian attempted to tame the pagan world through a process of assimilation. But instead of converting the pagans, they absorbed pagan holidays,

rituals, and beliefs. This practice fueled the spread of false Christianity. It became much like a cancer taking over from within. Ultimately, their attempt at mass conversion further defiled their religion. As the famous historian, Will Durant wrote:

> Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it... the Greek mysteries passed down into the impressive mystery of the Mass. Other pagan cultures contributed to the syncretist result. From Egypt came the idea of a divine trinity... the adoration of the Mother and Child and the theosophy that made Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, and obscured Christian creed... From Phrygia came the worship of the Great Mother... The Mithraic ritual so closely resembled the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass that Christian fathers charged the Devil with inventing these similarities to mislead frail minds. [Modern day] Christianity was the last great creation of the ancient pagan world (*The Story of Civilization*, Vol. III, Caesar and Christ, p. 595).

Instead of being separate from the ways of the world, this form of "Christianity" was motivated by a desire to increase membership. Bishops began accepting a wide range of beliefs, symbols, and practices that ultimately came from Babylon. The church became extremely corrupt both morally and ethically. Alexander Hislop explained:

> This tendency on the part of Christians to meet paganism half way was very early developed (*The Two Babylons,* p. 93).

The new religion believed it could compromise true doctrine. The false Christian church accepted pagans and allowed them to keep many of their holidays and traditions if they would simply profess to accept Christ! The church soon became a toxic mixture of Christian sounding names and pagan practices. As it grew more powerful, it took control of the entire Roman Empire. The formerly persecuted church became the persecutor of true

Christians. The whore lived lavishly—drunk on false doctrine and the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6).

This shocking transformation was further enhanced by the birth of the Protestant movement. Splinter groups rejected the authority of the Catholic Church, but still observed the traditions of their mother. The supposed reformation was nothing more than another aspect of spiritual prostitution. Millions believed they had been set free from defilement by the whore, but this liberty only freed them from the Pope. This was a fulfillment of the whore becoming the "Mother of Harlots" (Rev. 17:5). Protestants broke away from their mother, but continued to bear her likeness in overall belief and tradition.

Many have been Defiled

From Nimrod, to the Gnostics of Paul's day, through the Spanish Inquisition, and for over 500 years after the reformation, the whore and her daughters have influenced the vast majority of religions. Billions have been defiled with seductive, deceptive, and false doctrine. The spread of this counterfeit system has been phenomenal. Very little has remained untouched by its insidious poison. That poison was injected by the serpent of old called the devil. The Apostle John foresaw how pervasive Satan's system would be and wrote:

> That serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9).

While most would agree that believers in religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism are deceived, few professing Christians would admit that they have been misled. But this is exactly how deception works. The deceived person does not know they are deceived. Consider the chart at the end of this chapter. It lists only a few of modern Christianity's beliefs that are in direct conflict with the Bible.

Shocking as it may sound, the number of beliefs and practices found in most churches that differ from the Bible reaches into the hundreds! False ministers have replaced God

with idols and try to honor Him with forbidden pagan holidays. False teachings regarding the nature of God, His purpose for man, the place of His law, and the authority of Scripture have replaced the true gospel with heresy. Such beliefs have defiled many. They have blinded people so that they cannot understand the truth of God.

False doctrines act like a virus in a believer's mind. They corrupt the way a person thinks and therefore what he or she does. The individual's behavior shapes their character which will ultimately affect their destiny. For this reason, those who strive to be God's true servants must resist these bogus and pervasive doctrines that have been influenced by ancient mystery religion. The 144,000 are those who have resisted defilement and have not accepted the mark of the beast! They have replaced false doctrine with God's truth. They have come out of that system by honestly and sincerely striving to keep themselves clean of its influence.

Christ will not marry a defiled bride. The 144,000 will not be defiled by false doctrine of the harlot or her daughters. They are those who are destined to inhabit New Jerusalem in which nothing will be allowed that defiles (Rev. 21:27). Therefore, His faithful people strive to keep themselves pure and clean in order to be presented to Him as a chaste virgin. At Christ's triumphant return, He will completely do away with that system that defiles billions today. As the book of Revelation declares:

> Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord our God! For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication (Revelation 19:1-2).

Some False Doctrines

False churches teach	*The Bible declares*
Crucifixes or statues and pictures of Christ and angels are legitimate aids to worship	We are to not use any images in our worship of God (Exo. 20:4-5)
Religious leaders are called father, rabbi, or reverend	Call no one your spiritual father (Mat. 23:9). Reverend is God's name (Psa. 111:9)
We can earn God's favor by doing penance	God wants repentance, not vain repetition (Mat. 3:8; 6:7)
Man is an immortal soul inside a physical body	Only God has immortality (1Tim. 6:15-16; Psa. 146:4)
The first day of the week, Sunday, is the day to worship	God commands the 7th day, Saturday (Gen. 2:2; Exo. 20:8-11)
Christ did away with the need to keep the Ten Commandments	Christ did not do away with the law (Mat. 5:17; 19:17)
Those who don't accept Christ will burn forever in hell.	The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23; Psa. 146:3-4)
We should bring a tree into our house and decorate it for Christ	Do not use a tree in a religious manner (Jer. 10:2-5)
Christ was resurrected Sunday morning at sunrise	Christ was already gone when it was still dark (John 20:1)
Believers are born again when they accept Christ	We are only born again at the resurrection (John 3:6)
The Kingdom of God is in your heart	The Kingdom of God is a literal realm (John 3:3; 18:36)
Easter is a central Christian holiday	God punished Israel for the worship of Easter (1Kin. 11:5)
Believers go to heaven when they die	No one has ascended to heaven (John 3:13; Acts 2:34)

Chapter 12

They Have Victory Over the Beast

Then *I saw* the souls of those... who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.
~ Revelation 20:4 ~

It has been demonstrated that the virgins portray those called to the marriage supper. Because Christ will not marry a defiled bride, the 144,000 consist of faithful servants who have not been defiled by false doctrines of the polluted church and her daughters. What's more, the great harlot and her daughters represent a false religious system dating back to antiquity. At Christ's triumphant return, the Almighty will use His limitless power to completely do away with this system that has defiled billions throughout every age of humanity. As the book of Revelation declares:

> Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord our God! For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication (Revelation 19:1-2).

The great harlot's doctrines are much like a cancer. They work to corrupt morals, faith, and an individual's personal relationship with God. Nevertheless, there is another powerful force that the 144,000 overcome. While there is a religious element in the world that defiles, there is also a secular side to this same false system. It has used its power in the past, but will use it again in the future to enforce the false doctrines of the whore.

The Identity of the Beast

In another breathtaking segment of John's vision, the apostle recorded that God's chosen will be victorious over a religious system that has allied with a civil and military establishment God calls the beast. As John related:

> And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have **the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name,** standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God (Revelation 15:2).

John wrote that those who attain the first resurrection will have victory over the beast. But what exactly is this beast? We can know by considering what John described a prevision vision of this entity:

> Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him… (Revelation 13:1-8).

Many theories have been suggested regarding the identity of this beast, but the only way to truly understand is to allow the Bible to interpret itself (2Pet. 1:20). This occurs when readers examine other prophetic verses using the same symbolism and speaking of similar events (2Tim. 2:15). For example, the seventh chapter of Daniel reflects this principle. There the prophet described a divine vision showing prophetic beasts representing empires which would dominate the world throughout history. As Daniel wrote:

> Those great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings *which* arise out of the earth (Daniel 7:17).

These four kings represent empires that were built upon a common culture. They began with Babylon; symbolized as a lion having eagle's wings (Dan. 7:4). Babylon finally came to an end in 539 B.C. when the Medo-Persian Empire conquered its capital (*The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*, Vol. 4, p. 526-527). Medo-Persia became the second beast symbolized by a bear (Dan. 7:5). It was during this time that King Cyrus issued an edict to free the Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and King Artaxerxes married Esther and dealt with the Persian administration of Judah (Ezra 1; Est. 2-10).

The third beast Daniel saw appeared as a leopard with four heads and four wings (Dan. 7:6). This creature represented the powerful Greco-Macedonian Empire ruled by Alexander the Great. His war machine used blitzkrieg type attacks portrayed in the Bible as a leopard flying swiftly to conquer its prey. Alexander's amazing success made way for Greece to become the next empire to dominate western civilization (*The Story of Civilization*; Durant, Ch. XXII). This beast was also depicted with four heads which foreshadowed the empire finally being split into four divisions after the death of Alexander. Each of these smaller kingdoms was then presided over by one of his four military generals (ibid, Ch. XXIII, p. 558).

The fourth beast represented an empire more frightening and powerful than all of the others. As Daniel wrote:

> After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things (Daniel 7:7-8).

This fourth empire was more powerful than any before it. Having subjugated all the preceding kingdoms, this fourth beast represented the Roman Empire which dominated Europe under the rule of the Caesars.

It is important to note the striking similarities between the beasts depicted by Daniel and that which the Apostle John described in Revelation 13. The beast of John's vision reflects all the characteristics of the four beasts witnessed by Daniel. This indicates that the end-time beast not only subdues the previous empires, it assimilates aspects of the cultures and religions of the kingdoms it conquers.

Throughout history, this syncretistic beast of Revelation would have successive ruling governments symbolized by its seven heads. These heads represent seven eras throughout the history of this empire. These eras can be recognized under the leadership of Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, the Hapsburgs, Napoleon, the axis powers of Mussolini and Hitler, and one final head yet to come (Rev. 17:10).

John and Daniel also noted that the last head would have ten horns (Rev. 12:3; Dan. 7:7). When the Bible speaks symbolically, a horn represents power, a nation, or a leader (Dan. 7:24). Therefore, the seventh and final head of this beast will be a union of ten nations that ally to become the dominant force in the world. Along with a prominent religious figure known as the false prophet, the end-time beast will enforce the whore's false religious system.

The Number of His Name

John also wrote that the beast has a name associated with a specific number. As we read the following words, note the clues that identify the beast:

> He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. **Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666** (Revelation 13:16-18).

We are told that to identify the individual leading this empire, we must have understanding while calculating the number of the beast. This number will reveal the human being who will control the final form of the most powerful empire in history. The sum of the number of his name will be 666.

Some have believed that 666 is the mark of the beast, but they have been misled. 666 is not his mark. It is the number enabling readers to identify both who and what the beast is. With this information it is possible to expose both the empire and the individual whose number is 666.

Using an ancient numbering system known as *gematria*, each letter carries a numerical value. When these values are applied to the letters of this man's name, they will add up to 666. For more information on this subject, please read our booklet—*Understanding the Mark of the Beast.*

The exact name of this end time ruler will not be known until he appears on the world scene. When he does, the Scriptures make it clear that he will eventually dominate Western civilization the same way the Romans dominated the Mediterranean world.

Many may wonder how one man could amass such enormous influence? God plainly answered this, stating that "the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority" (Rev. 13:2). This dragon is none other than the devil who has

influenced the world to reject the moral way of God and accept the immoral way of do what you want (Rev. 12:9).

Unknowingly, most people actually follow the devil's influence to varying degrees. Even the majority who claim to be Christian reject the authority of God by not keeping His commandments. By this, Satan reigns as the god of this world (2Cor. 4:4). In fact, his deceit is so effective that he will cause people to worship the future beast as a deity. As John continued:

> And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So **they worshiped the dragon** who gave authority to the beast; and **they worshiped the beast**, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority… (Revelation 13:3-5).

Satan will influence entire nations to passionately follow the beast. The devil will create circumstances that will sway political leaders to lead the masses in supporting this wicked empire (Dan. 7:8). Nonetheless, those who will be counted among the 144,000 will not be deceived. They will resist the influence of this wicked system, and by doing so, will achieve victory over the beast.

The Image of the Beast

John wrote that the masses will be required to worship the image of the beast while the 144,000 will have victory over it. We must understand that this image is not something made of wood, glass, metal, or stone. It is not a computer graphic or a holograph. What may come as a shock to many is that this image is a reflection of worship existing long ago during the first empire mentioned by Daniel—Babylon.

That religious system actually began with Nimrod, but experienced modifications as each empire came and went. It was fatally wounded by primitive tribes that destroyed the decadent Roman empire in 476 A.D., and was revived when the Byzantine Emperor Justinian took power in 527 A.D. (Rev.

13:12). A major aspect of Justinian's rule was his religious conviction. He envisioned his role as both king and priest. As such, the unification between an apostate church and state was formed, and the Holy Roman Empire became the image of the previous beast powers.

Many aspects of the Roman Catholic religion solidified as the empire adopted many rites and festivals of pagan territories it had conquered. The church substituted the names of heathen festivals, and changed their symbolism in an attempt to make them appear Christian. However, their morphed ceremonies still reflected the ancient Babylonian system. This religious syncretism enabled vast numbers to join the church and call themselves "Christian" while continuing to worship in their same pagan ways.

Thus, the image of the beast is a revival of that same corrupt system which is intimately connected to Satan's counterfeit religion. It has been reflected in successive empires, and will rise up a final time continuing to mirror that same ancient, false, religion. Further, this coming world power will require a mark that will identify its adherents. This mark of the beast is one that those who hope to attain the first resurrection absolutely will not accept.

The Beast's Mark vs. God's Mark

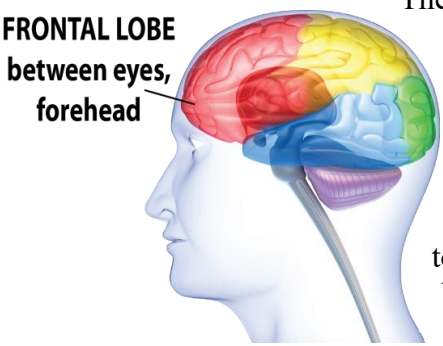
The Scriptures state that the mark of the beast is worn in the forehead or hand. Consequently, most people think of it as an external symbol that is easily recognized. Few would suspect it to be a sign that identifies them with a specific set of beliefs that motivate behavior. But this is exactly what the mark is. The mark of the beast will identify who or what an individual is associated with. It will enable the beast to recognize those who share his beliefs, but is it possible for Christians to know exactly what this mark is?

Most have not realized that God has a mark, and that there are parallels between His mark and that of the beast. While the mark of God identifies the people who obey Him, the mark of the

beast is a counterfeit which identifies those who obey the devil and his representatives.

God's mark is also worn in the hand and forehead. But what does this expression mean? To understand, consider God's mark as revealed to Israel in His statutes and judgments:

> Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them*… You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. **You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes** (Deuteronomy 6:1-8).



These verses express God's desire that His law be the central part of our lives. It should motivate us, guide our decisions, and by this it identifies who we serve with our mind and strength. For this reason, God's moral law is to be worn upon the hand and between the eyes. In other words, God's law is to be in the frontal lobe where we process thought. It is this part of the brain that we use to contemplate and make judgments. By this symbolism, God is telling us that His law is to be the vanguard of our minds! It is also displayed in our hand; reflecting what we apply our strength to do (Ecc. 9:10). These expressions demonstrate how those who live by God's precepts have His mark and are identified as His people (Exo. 13:9; 31:13).

Different Times and Laws

Daniel also wrote that the beast will "change times and laws" (Dan. 7:25). This means the false system has unbiblical religious observances that identify its adherents. Consider that

most people have already accepted these heretical regulations by their observance of Sunday worship, Easter, Halloween, Christmas, and their rejection of the first four of God's Ten Commandments. On the other hand, the saints will entirely reject the laws and religious observances of the beast. They recognize heresy and will not allow themselves to be defiled by it.

It is important to recognize that different forms of this beast have existed for thousands of years. This helps Bible students understand that John was not referring to only those living during the end-time. His words pertain to all of God's servants who have overcome that same ungodly system throughout the ages. Those chosen for the first resurrection will be individuals who will not compromise their faith. No matter what trials they face, they will continue to worship God in Spirit and truth, but it will be no easy task. Satan has already deceived the majority of the world's inhabitants into accepting some form of the mark of the beast, and he has influenced others to persecute those who have attempted to reject it. Even so, the 144,000 will stand their ground and not accept this blasphemous mark!

The Potential of Persecution

God's faithful have always understood that they must overcome any behavior that opposes the way of God. This means they do not simply refuse false doctrine, they openly testify against it. Faithfulness often results in persecution. Throughout history, people have been ridiculed, tortured, and even brutally murdered for their obedience to God. For this reason, Christ warned His disciples that this could well be their fate. However, the Savior also encouraged His followers with these words:

> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:10-12).

A true Christian will not accept biblically forbidden holidays, or any other pagan elements of society. In many cases this causes believers to lose friends who were once close. Family members may take their new beliefs personally and sometimes count the believer as an outcast. These losses can be upsetting, but the true Christian does not allow such losses to influence their dedication to God. They find consolation in their new family and friends in the Church. They focus on the intimate relationship they have with God. By this, they overcome the influence of the beast and will not accept its mark.

This has always been the case for those who are called to attain the first resurrection. The author of the book of Hebrews speaks of the suffering of some of God's faithful people during the Old Covenant. However, it also reveals the same willingness to sacrifice for God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin. The true heroes of faith put the Kingdom of God as their first priority no matter what they might have to endure (Heb. 11; Mat. 6:33).

Where True Values May be Found

There is something about such trials that encourages Christians to build spiritual character. When times become difficult, they discover more about God and why His values are always best. Christians who have endured persecution for their faith know this well. It can have the effect of bringing us closer to God and uniting us with others of like mind. By way of example, the Apostle Peter wrote:

> Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Many persecuted Christians have come to understand that the most important thing is to endure suffering rather than escape it. They desire to honor God with the circumstances they find themselves in rather than fleeing the ordeal.

Those who resist accepting the mark of the beast may find that they must struggle with afflictions in this life. Because they do not conform to society's ideals, they may experience persecution or even martyrdom. However, those who will be chosen to be part of the 144,000 are committed to being identified by God's mark. They meditate on His way of life and strive to live that way no matter what the consequences may be. They achieve victory over the beast by following Christ!

Chapter 13

They Follow the Lamb

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself,
and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.
~ Luke 9:23 ~

Author Leonard Ravenhill tells an interesting story illustrating the fact that leadership skills must be developed. Tourists from a church group were visiting a tiny picturesque village in Europe. As they passed by an old man sitting on his porch, someone asked him in a patronizing way, "Were any great leaders born in this village?" Without hesitation, the old man replied, "No, only babies" (*Leadership Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching,* p. 128).

The man's answer relates an important truth. We all start as babes and learn leadership skills over time. A prerequisite to great spiritual leadership is to first humbly learn obedience to God and to serve the needs of others. Even the greatest leader to ever walk the earth served others and practiced obedience by following the Father's instructions. As the Messiah stated:

> I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me (John 5:30).

> And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so *among* you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who *is* greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? *Is* it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:25-27).

God is preparing a select group of people for positions of great leadership. They will assist Christ in establishing God's government on the earth, and they will lead the nations in practicing obedience to God's holy law. Preparation for this great responsibility requires the daily practice of following the example of Christ. As the Apostle John wrote:

> These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4).

This is another verse that makes it clear that the 144,000 were people chosen from many generations. The Lamb is Christ, and the 144,000 are His followers. They keep His Commandments and strive to emulate Christ's example.

Professing Without Following

Not everyone who professes to know Christ follows Him. According to Pew Research, more than 2.1 billion people claim to be Christian. But how many of those who profess belief truly seek to obey God? The vast majority of professing Christians say that they want God in their life, but far too many simply want God to pardon them from the wages of sin. They have allowed themselves to think that Christ's compassion has done away with a need to keep the Commandments, and the Eternal will freely give them salvation because He loves them. They want His blessing, but they don't want to make the sacrifices necessary to conform to His Word. The reality is that most do not really desire to follow the only true moral authority of the universe.

As a result, various societies who once considered themselves "Christian nations" have abandoned God's Ten Commandments. The United States and most western nations have cast God out of classrooms, workplaces, and government agencies. Even most religious leaders follow a doctrine of devils claiming that Christ kept the law so that we don't have to.

We all follow someone or something whether we realize it or not. The tragedy is that the vast majority of people today do not follow the Creator. They want His blessings, but not His

correction. Such disregard for His moral standards sends a clear message that most do not sincerely want God to direct their lives. As a result, He is conspicuously absent from their business dealings, entertainment, and extracurricular activities. They follow their emotions rather than pursuing Christ. They seek role models in celebrities, pop stars, and professional athletes instead of looking to the Messiah. The Apostle Paul described the prevailing attitude of our age by writing:

> They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work (Titus 1:16).

As a result of merely professing a belief in God, without doing what He commands, the nations have lost their moral compass. They have wandered off the path of righteousness, are lost, and suffering the consequences. The world is experiencing massive government and corporate corruption. There is a constant threat of economic collapse, war, terrorism, disease, pollution, crime, and violence—all a result of moral decay.

Follow Me

Stanley Jones tells the story of a missionary who was hiking in the dense African jungle. The trail suddenly vanished, leaving the missionary with no familiar landmarks to guide him. Stumbling upon a small hut, with a sigh of relief, he asked the native living there if he could lead him out of the wild. The native nodded yes. He rose up and walked directly into the bush. The missionary followed close on his heels as they hacked their way through dense vines and grasses. The missionary began to worry and asked "Are you sure this is the way?" Receiving no answer, he became even more concerned and said "I don't see any path." The native chuckled and said over his shoulder "Bwana, in this place I am the path!"

This story illustrates an important truth. In life's labyrinth of complexities—Christ is the path. As the Savior said:

> I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6).

Christ is the example to follow. Even when we do not see where He is leading us—even if we do not want to go where He directs—we are to follow Him.

Christ drove this point home after His resurrection. He visited the disciples, shared breakfast with them, and spoke directly to Peter. Perhaps to prick his conscience after having denied Christ three times, the Messiah queried "Do you love Me?" After Peter's third affirmation, Christ explained that Peter would one day face another opportunity for denial:

> "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry *you* where you do not wish." This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me" (John 21:18-19).

Christ desired for Peter to wholeheartedly consider this aspect of God's calling before going forward. Would he disavow God when faced with martyrdom, or would he follow his Savior's example? When the time finally came, Peter followed Christ—even to the point of death. Tradition holds that when he was ordered to be crucified by the Roman Emperor Nero, Peter said that he was not worthy to suffer the same death as His Lord. Nero's brutal response was to order Peter crucified upside down.

The Sheep Hear His Voice

Peter was faithful to the point of death! It is this quality of obedience that makes the 144,000 unique among all who claim to believe in Christ. They follow the Lamb of God. He is their Master, their Consultant, and Advisor. They treat the Bible as God's personal message to humanity, and His words are the authority governing their lives.

The faithful sincerely strive to build a relationship with God. They pray consistently seeking to know and follow His will. They meditate on His printed Word to see how it should be applied to their work, rest, and play. They check in with Him frequently to share their thoughts, feelings, and to see if they are on course. The faithful will continually examine themselves to make sure they are properly pursuing Christ (2Cor. 13:5). Christ is their Shepherd and they are His sheep. Notice the words of our Shepherd:

> Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers (John 10:1-5).

Christ's sheep develop a personal relationship with Him as they follow His teachings. They identify His voice from among the many, strident, soothing, and yet dissident voices heard in this world. They will not pursue false shepherds who have an appearance of godliness while denying God's authority in their lives. From such people they will turn away! (2Tim. 3:5).

Faithful People throughout the Ages

Christ also explained that He has acquired sheep from all ages. As John recorded:

> I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep,* and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep**. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold**; them also I must bring, and they will hear My

> voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

Christ loves each one of His sheep. He cares for them with heartfelt dedication. He provides for them and gave His life for them. Christ's passion for this cause is shown in a divine illustration of a shepherd and his sheep:

> For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:11-14).

Christ revealed His mission. He is likened to a shepherd who is seeking his lost sheep. Our Shepherd has worked with His flock from the beginning of man's history. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Ezekiel, and Daniel are all examples of His sheep. There are people from the time of Christ, some from the early Church, and still more who have lived faithfully since then. There are also some during this last generation who will be a part of His fold.

Collectively, His chosen flock will number exactly 144,000. They will be brought together as one fold at the first resurrection to become God's assistants in both His earthly Kingdom and His eternal family. Qualifying for such positions can only be accomplished by following Christ in this lifetime. As our Shepherd stated:

> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand (John 10:27-28).

Only those who follow and obey Christ will become firstfruits and granted eternal life. However, such a prestigious honor does not come without sacrifice.

Self Denial

Christ indicated that it is possible for His sheep to suffer martyrdom. Nonetheless, no matter what losses life may impose, we must always follow Christ:

> Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it (Luke 9:23-24).

Christ explained that following Him means we must be willing to deny selfish motivation and make sacrifices in our lives. His words do not necessarily mean that we must be martyred. Instead, He is telling us that the way of life we lived before coming to Christ must be eliminated. The person we once were must cease to exist. Paul related this necessity and wrote:

> Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:22-24).

> Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be *in the likeness* of *His* resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him,* that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin (Romans 6:3-6).

It is this aspect of the Christian calling that separates those who merely profess Christ from those who actually follow Him. Individuals who give Him lip service will continue to follow their human nature. Those who strive to emulate the Savior will literally view human nature as their enemy while they strive to resist the pull of the natural, but carnal, mind (Rom. 8:7). The Apostle Paul explained:

> I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

Paul explained that we symbolically die with Christ in baptism. We still live, but the part of us that we put to death is the carnal aspect of our human nature. It is covetousness and pride found in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1John 2:16). As we strive to put these parts of our lives away, we die spiritually each day so that Christ can live in us more fully. As Paul noted:

> I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord**, I die daily** (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Constantly working to put to death our "old man" is a major aspect of the Christian battle and it is no small fight. Every fiber of our being struggles to keep human nature alive. Much of this struggle occurs because of a defense mechanism within each of us that helps us to survive, but ungoverned it can do us harm.

It is this internal defense that prompts us to avoid dangerous situations such as pulling our hand out of a fire. This protective function is necessary to preserve physical life, but it can be an enemy when the defense mechanism stops us from accepting correction. The defense mechanism is capable of prompting us to do almost anything to get whatever we might feel we need. Because it attempts to protect us emotionally, it will defend pride and ego. It can motivate us to rationalize ungodly

behavior in order to receive pleasure instead of pain. It can cause us to hurt others in order to satisfy recognition needs. The internal defense mechanism can even blind us to the painful truth about our own motives. It is this part of ourselves that we must defeat!

John the Baptist demonstrated that he had learned to ignore the selfish aspect of human nature's defense mechanism. He displayed subordination when he said that he must decrease so that Christ could increase (John 3:30). Perhaps this is why Christ said there was not a greater prophet than John (Luke 7:28). In this context, Paul wrote that he died each day while putting away his old man. Later, he went into more detail in his second epistle to brethren in Corinth:

> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—**always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body**. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:7-11).

True Christians follow Christ and surrender their will to God. In our pursuit we die to the self. The more we become selfless, the more He is able to live in us through the Holy Spirit. By humility, meekness, and generosity we can follow His lead in every aspect of our lives.

What is Our Profession?

The Apostle John was told to write that the 144,000 follow the Lamb so that we would understand this vital point. Professing our belief in God and His Son is not enough. We must go beyond belief! We must follow Christ in what He said and did. Our way of life must be our vocation—a lifelong career of Christian works!

Those who claim to be Christian and do not keep God's Commandments are false. The Apostle John expounded on this point in his first epistle with some extremely powerful words:

> Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked (1 John 2:3-6).

True Christians sincerely consider what Christ would do in every situation. At work they serve their employers honestly. They only participate in the kinds of activities that God would consider appropriate. They listen to music that He would approve of. Those who will be among the 144,000 do not try to cheat the government out of imposed taxes. They refrain from gossip and idle conversation. Genuine Christians not only profess Christ, they follow Him by living by His rules. Christian women are loyal; showing honor and respect for their husbands. Sincere Christian men work to take care of their families and show love for their wife and children. Christians do not drink alcohol excessively. They do not ignore the poor, fatherless, and widows. They seek to actually live with integrity the way that their Creator does. Each day they work at being attuned to God's Spirit. As the Scriptures state, the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Those who truly follow Him in this life will follow Him into the next. They will be raised in the first resurrection to be with their Savior. By this act they will be redeemed from the earth and counted among the 144,000.

Chapter 14

They are the Redeemed

So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing,
with everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness;
Sorrow and sighing shall flee away
~ Isaiah 51:11 ~

It was 9:00 p.m. on February 4, 1974 when 19 year old Patty Hearst heard a knock at the door of her apartment. A group of men and women burst in with their guns drawn. They beat up her fiancé, threw Patty in the trunk of their car, and drove off. After weeks of indoctrination, their prisoner actually came to identify with her abductors. According to the FBI:

> Hearst, it was soon discovered, had been kidnapped by a group of armed radicals that billed themselves as the Symbionese Liberation Army, or SLA …the SLA wanted nothing less than to incite a guerrilla war against the U.S. government and destroy what they called the "capitalist state."…They were, in short, a band of domestic terrorists... the kidnapping stunned the country and made front-page national news. But the SLA had more plans for Patty Hearst. Soon after her disappearance, the SLA began releasing audiotapes demanding millions of dollars in food donations in exchange for her release. At the same time, they apparently began abusing and brainwashing their captive, hoping to turn this young heiress from the highest reaches of society into a poster child for their coming revolution. That, too, seemed to work. On April 3, the SLA released a tape with Hearst saying that she'd joined their fight to free the oppressed and had even taken a new name. A dozen days later, she was spotted on bank surveillance cameras wielding an assault weapon during an SLA bank robbery, barking

> orders to bystanders and providing cover to her confederates (http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/famous-cases/patty-hearst-kidnapping, retr. 6/30/2014).

Outrageous as this story seems, even more shocking is the realization that all humanity has been kidnapped and held for ransom by a being hostile to God's government. Much like Patty Hearst, humanity has widely been brainwashed into accepting their abductor's way. Billions now live in captivity unaware that abduction ever took place (Rev. 12:9).

A World Held Captive

Most people accept moments of unhappiness and suffering as an expected facet of life. This is because we have only experienced our present state of existence. There have always been wars, famine, disease, dishonesty, and violence during every age of humanity. For this reason, each generation accepts pain and heartache as a "natural" part of our existence. However, this is not how the world was designed. We have been deceived into thinking that negative aspects of life are normal. In this way, humanity actually identifies with our captor—the devil. But how did the human race come to such a state?

We must first understand that prior events shaped the world we live in. In the beginning, God created an environment of peace, cooperation, and love. He also created an unknown number of angels to share in the joy of God's moral existence. He designed a vast physical universe which included the earth and its solar system (Gen. 1:1). God gave angels charge over the earth, and they governed the planet for an untold number of years. Eventually, the great archangel known as Lucifer rebelled (Jude 6; Eze. 28:15-18). He persuaded one third of the angels to join him in an insurrection against God (Isa. 14:13-14; Rev. 12:4). A war between good and evil ensued, but the revolt was an utter failure. Satan and his demons were cast back down to the earth in abject defeat (Luke 10:18). As a result, the earth lay in ruins and devoid of life (Gen. 1:2).

God then re-created the earth's ecosystems, designed the animal kingdom we see today, and formed the first human beings—Adam and Eve. He placed them in a beautiful garden called Eden and gave humanity dominion over the entire earth. The Creator designed them with intellect superior to any other creature on the planet (Gen. 1:26). They were also given instructions about how to live on this beautiful planet.

The Eternal gave them access to every tree in the garden with one exception; they were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree stood in the midst of the garden near another tree known as "tree of life" (Gen. 2:9-17). The two trees represent two ways of life. The tree of life pictured living God's righteous way which leads to eternal life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented rejecting God's way and deciding for one's self what is right and wrong—a way that ultimately leads to death (Pro. 14:12).

Satan came to Eve and told her an enormous lie. He said that she would not die by eating from the forbidden tree as God had warned. By this statement he planted a seed of doubt in her mind, and persuaded her into thinking she could not fully trust God (1Tim. 2:14). Satan convinced her that she would become like a god. She would have the power to decide what was good or evil. Eve was convinced. She took the fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband and he ate.

It was at this point that the first humans were taken captive and the world became corrupt. The immediate effects were attributes of pride, guilt, coveting, greed, and competition became inherent aspects of human nature. Terrible curses also came upon the planet. Women were forced to suffer terribly during childbirth. The soil brought forth thorns, tares, and poisonous plants that made life both difficult and dangerous (Gen. 3:18). Even the nature of the animals changed to reflect what we term today as "survival of the fittest." Much of the world became a reflection of Satan's selfish way.

The devil's attempt to take humanity captive was a success. Without realizing the terrible consequences, Adam and Eve rejected God's way and followed Satan who then became

like a god to our first parents. They were brainwashed into identifying with the devil. This act of defiance allowed them and their progeny to be kidnapped and humanity has continued down this path of rebellion ever since.

The Ransom Has Been Paid

God instructed ancient Israel to provide various animal sacrifices in order to atone for their sin (Lev. 4-5). These offerings were instituted so that those people would understand the enormous cost of sin (Rom. 6:23). They pictured the ultimate sacrifice that was later made by God's only begotten Son. As Matthew wrote:

> The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

All mankind has sinned. The blood of lambs, goats, and oxen could not pay for such transgressions, but were a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Heb. 9:11-28). Out of sincere love for His people, the Savior became a man, lived a sinless life, and then paid the cost of our freedom with His life.

The 144,000 are Redeemed

John heard a voice from heaven and wrote that the 144,000 are faithful people who have been redeemed:

> The hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth... These were redeemed from *among* men (Revelation 14:3-4).

This immediately identifies people who have repented and accepted Christ's sacrifice to cover their sins. They have grown to trust God and become zealous for good works while making a sincere effort to keep themselves from sin. They strive to obey God by heeding the promptings of His Spirit. They exercise self discipline and seek to live by the intent of His Commandments.

Unlike what most religions teach, salvation is not free. Humanity pays the price everyday with strife, pain, sickness, and suffering. We experience negative aspects of our existence as a result of the sin that pervades our society. Salvation requires those who are called to overcome sin and endure difficult trials in order to obtain the righteous character of Christ. But the most valuable cost of our redemption was the life of God's Son. He provided a way to free us from bondage. Those who repent of disobeying God, and strive to follow His way, can have Christ's sacrifice applied to them. This redeems them from the death penalty incurred for violating the law. As Paul wrote:

> Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us … (Galatians 3:13).

The word "redeemed" in biblical language refers to buying the freedom of a slave. It can also mean the release of someone from bondage upon receipt of a ransom. It denotes the recovery of something once lost, or even the reclamation of that which has become contaminated. Redemption can further refer to paying off a debt or returning to a former state.

Being spiritually redeemed means to be purchased back from the defilement of sin. It includes obtaining freedom from the bleak wages of sin—death. We were bought at an enormous price. It did not cost thousands or even millions of dollars. We were redeemed by something so valuable it is staggering to comprehend—the death of our Creator. As Peter wrote:

> knowing that **you were not redeemed with corruptible things**, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Christ made the supreme sacrifice in exchange for our freedom from death. That cost can only be understood by realizing who He is, and what He did for us.

The Price of Redemption

Before being born as a human being, Christ was no less than the Word who is God. He was one of two beings who are currently the only members of the family of God (John 1:1). So powerful is this noble being that the elements obey His voice (Mat. 8:26). He was the One who spoke and the physical creation sprang into existence (Gen. 1). As John noted:

> All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (John 1:3).

As second in command of heaven and the entire universe, Christ sat on the right hand of the father with power, glory, and resplendent beauty. He was the embodiment of righteousness, the epitome of dignity, and the pinnacle of integrity. He was holy and therefore morally pure. This majestic being relinquished his immortal body in order to become a human being composed of corruptible flesh and blood.

This was possible because the Word was not obsessed with His status or position, nor did He feel the need to maintain it at all costs. He did not focus on how much power He possessed or the honor He deserved. Instead, His love for humanity was so great that He was willing to experience the tainted world we live in and suffer the worst of all torments by giving Himself in sacrifice. As Paul wrote:

> Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

This transcendent Being willingly surrendered His splendor and allowed Himself to be born as a dependent infant. Throughout His human existence, Christ was tested in every way

we are (Heb. 4:15). He felt pain and all the pulls of the flesh that we experience, but would not sin. Christ became the Lamb of God who, without blemish, was the only sacrifice that could redeem humanity.

The final day of His sacrifice began with betrayal by one of His own disciples. Then there was an illegal trial in which Christ was falsely accused. This was followed by a tormenting and degrading persecution by men who were conduits of Satan's hatred. Influenced by the devil's anger, these men tortured Christ with mockery, blindfolding Him and striking his face, plucking out His beard, and spat on him which was the worst insult they could inflict. His interrogators then took Christ to the Roman governor who was unable to shake the hostility of the crowd. Pilate ordered Him scourged then asked the people to judge the matter. The angry throng shouted "Crucify Him" and Pilate found himself with no political choice but to appease the crowd. He delivered Christ to be crucified.

The Roman Punishment

Roman scourging was far different from the more merciful beatings of the Jews. Jewish law prohibited anyone from receiving more than 39 lashes. The Jews would strike 13 blows on each of the shoulders, and then apply the final 13 to the loins. The Romans had no such humane practice. There was nothing in their law to limit the number of blows, and nothing to restrict the part of the body that could be struck. For this reason, the Roman scourging has been called a "half death" because it would stop just short of killing the victim.

A centurion oversaw the beating which was carried out by a professional called a lictor. The tools of this man's trade consisted of various torture devices. Scourging required either a whip made of chords or a flagrum. The flagrum was an ornately carved round piece of wood approximately 10 inches long. Attached to the wood were several strips of leather. Woven into the leather were bits of metal or bone. These would stick deep into the skin with every blow. Bits of flesh would be torn off each time the flagrum was retracted.

Roman guards tied their victim over a short column designed for this purpose. In this way, Christ would not be able to move in order to assuage the impact of any of the blows. The lictor stood behind and brought the flagrum all the way back over his shoulder to unleash each forceful blow. With such enormous pain and physical damage to His body, the Savior never complained or cried out for reprieve (Isa. 53:7).

The lictor was trained to inflict the most damage possible to a human body without killing the victim. The horrible beating would continue until the victim became unconscious. The Roman guards would often revive their prisoner with cold water and the lashing would continue. The whip struck over and over upon already open wounds causing intense shudders of pain. The centurion carefully watched the victim's rib cage and the scourging would continue until the victim's breathing became shallow. Only then was the flogging complete.

The entire process left Christ severely battered. There were lacerations over large areas of His body. Some of His bones were likely exposed (Psa. 22:17). He was bloodied and bruised beyond recognition and yet the suffering was not over.

Victims of crucifixion were normally required to carry their own stake to the place of execution. Christ was a strong man. He had kept God's laws of health, and worked in construction much of His life. Powerful as He was, Christ was terribly weakened by the sleepless night and the blood lost during His severe beating. This caused Him to falter under the load. The fact that another man carried His stake was not an act of kindness, but rather necessity (Mark 15:21).

At Golgotha the soldiers nailed the Savior to the implement of His death. The spikes used for this purpose were five to seven inches long, and driven through each of His wrists. His legs were lifted into a bent position, and another torturous spike was driven through both feet. The guards then lifted up the stake and, with a thud, they let it fall into a hole bored in the rocky hill. The weight of His body fell on the nails causing another searing wave of pain to shudder through our Lord. The position He was in had an immediate effect. His breathing capacity was

reduced. Given enough time it would lead to asphyxiation. To enable breathing, Christ would lift His body up and put all His weight on the nail in His feet. This would give some relief to the airway, but resulted in such enormous pain it would force Him down again. He endured this excruciating process for six hours. The suffering must have been unbearably intense.

Finally, the Messiah gave His last gasp of breath and died. The blood which had accumulated in His abdomen from the internal injuries gushed out after a centurion pierced His side with a spear (John 19:34). The Word of God, our Creator and Savior, was dead!

The Highest Price God Could Pay

Christ is the Creator of the angels, the earth, and the entire universe (John 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16). He is very God who has always existed with the Father (John 17:5). As such, His life is worth more than the combined lives of all creation. The mortal life of the Messiah more than paid the debt that all humanity owed for their sins. His sacrifice fulfilled the price of our redemption, and so Paul wrote:

> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Corinthians 6:20).

There was a great deal of pain and suffering on the part of Christ in order to save us, but He did not count this to be the most difficult part of His sacrifice. His commitment to us went much deeper than that. Although He never bemoaned the pain, there was something He detested about the horrific ordeal. The author of Hebrews wrote that Christ despised the shame (Heb. 12:2).

The relationship He had with the Father is what Christ cared about more than anything. He loved the Father, and always felt His presence. He was never alone in all that He suffered because, no matter who turned away from Him, the Father was always with Him (John 8:29). However, there came a point when Christ was required to stand alone without the Father. The

Messiah had all the sins of humanity placed upon Him and He experienced the horrible revulsion of shame. This caused the Father to momentarily forsake Him, and Christ felt alone. As Matthew wrote:

> And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

With the sins of the human race laid on Him, our Savior experienced what He hated most. Christ experienced the Father actually forsaking Him while He felt the despicable shame and filth that we all experience when we have sinned. Spiritually speaking, He had to watch the Father turn His back and thereby temporarily severing the relationship. For the first time in His life, the Word of God felt the enormous weight of guilt. He despised it and yet He endured it all in selfless love for each of us.

The Almighty held nothing back! Our redemption literally cost the Messiah what He valued most. He allowed His body to be desecrated for us. Worst of all, He felt separated from the Father. That sacrifice is what it took to pay the cost of our redemption; a price so high that we must never take it for granted. Therefore, being redeemed requires that we sincerely dedicate ourselves to serving Him.

Redemption Requires Conversion

The 144,000 are the redeemed, but their redemption does not occur instantaneously. The simple acceptance of Christ as Savior at an altar call will not allow an individual to be redeemed. A mere profession of words is only the first step in spiritual development. Redemption requires a process of conversion that is often difficult.

Coming to accept and live by God's ethics is a process much like other transformations we see in life. For example, ice can be converted to water, and water changed to steam. Such changes are a result of forces working upon the elements until the

desired alteration occurs. In like manner, Christians are in a process of thought and behavior modification. They are being converted from Satan's way of selfishness to God's way of sincere concern for others.

The process begins with the individual being called. After repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands, God gives them His Spirit as a guide to all truth (John 16:13). As long as the convert continues in faith, the Eternal works with them through various trials and circumstances. They obtain more of God's Spirit and grow in grace and knowledge while building the character necessary for redemption. The Apostle Paul explained this first stage of a Christian's life stating that:

> Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:12-14).

We are redeemed from the penalty of sin by Christ's sacrifice. Then we go forward to live a life passionately seeking to do good works. To this end, the Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who are called. Paul speaks of a facet of this Spirit saying that it "is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession" (Eph. 1:14).

The Spirit of God is a much like a down payment toward a future inheritance. God gives His Spirit as evidence that He will fully redeem the 144,000 at their resurrection. For now, the Holy Spirit is given to help guide and motivate Christians toward conversion. We must not resist the prompting of this Spirit if we hope to be redeemed. As Paul stated:

> And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (KJV, Ephesians 4:30).

A true Christian will put on the whole armor of God as they fight a spiritual war against principalities, human nature, rulers of darkness, spiritual wickedness, and the pulls of this world (Eph. 6:11-18). They must sacrifice their own desires for the good of others and remember the sacrifice Christ made for them. The 144,000 are those who have the Spirit of God and are led by that Spirit as they look towards their redemption. As Paul wrote:

> We also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23).

Conversion will be complete when the elect are delivered from the bondage of this physical world at the resurrection. The prophet Isaiah was given a message from God and wrote:

> Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; Behold, His reward *is* with Him, and His work before Him.' And they shall call them the Holy People, the Redeemed of the LORD… (Isaiah 62:11-12).

The redeemed are symbolized as daughters of Zion. A portion will be sealed for protection just before the great and dreadful day of the LORD. They are encouraged knowing that their salvation is near, and with it their reward.

God's faithful people must come out of the bondage of practicing sin. With sincere efforts, and by following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they will be freed from the limits of this physical world. They will be welcomed into the glorious Kingdom of God at their resurrection. The vast majority of humanity will have an opportunity to be saved during the millennium, but it will not be to the higher calling and better resurrection. During this first stage, from Adam until Christ's return, God is only seeking to redeem 144,000 individuals. Because they will be the first harvest of souls, God calls them by a special term. They are "firstfruits."

Chapter 15

They are the Firstfruits

You shall not delay *to offer* the first of your ripe produce and your juices.
The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me.
~ Exodus 22:29 ~

During the time when the temple boldly stood, God's people joyfully anticipated the annual observance of the Feast of Weeks. Pilgrims would travel long distances to crowd the streets of Jerusalem. Celebrants brought their firstfruit offerings of wheat, sheep, barley, oxen, dates, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, silver, and gold. They came before their Creator to rejoice in deep gratitude for His blessing of the year's harvest.

For hundreds of years God's people observed this festival, yet few ever realized they were actually celebrating a magnificent spiritual harvest to occur in the future. They unknowingly celebrated God's first harvest of humanity—the 144,000! As the Apostle John was inspired to write:

> The hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These were redeemed from *among* men, ***being*** **firstfruits to God** and to the Lamb (Revelation 14:3-4).

What is in a Name?

The term firstfruit is intimately linked to the early barley and a later wheat harvests. For this reason, the Feast of Weeks is also called the Feast of Harvest (Exo. 23:16). It reflects the gathering of the harvest from seed sown by human hands. This physical process of sowing and reaping portrays the seed of the Holy Spirit that God selectively plants in the hearts of those who are called. In time, that seed will also reach parturition and be harvested at the glorious first resurrection (1Cor. 15:35-38).

The Greek word translated "firstfruits" in the New Testament is *aparche* and refers to "a beginning of sacrifice" (*Strong's*, G536). This expression is used in the sense of being first in order of time while implying a sense of primacy. There are two Hebrew words for "firstfruits." They include the terms *bikkur* which indicates "the first fruits of the crop," and *reshiyth* whose meaning describes "first in place, time, order, or rank" (*Strong's,* H1061, H7225).

All of these definitions apply to the 144,000. They point to the sacrifice Christ made for all; as well as the pivotal point when a small portion of humankind will be harvested by a resurrection from the dead. These will be the first of God's new beginning for humanity. The 144,000 are the chief ones that God will use to establish His Government on earth.

Counting to Pentecost

The Old Testament refers to this holy day as the Feast of Weeks while the New Testament calls it Pentecost meaning "fiftieth" (*Strong's*, G4005). Both of these expressions find their origin in the fact that the festival occurs after counting seven Sabbaths from the Sunday during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day after that final seventh Sabbath is the 50th day—the day of celebration. Few have understood that this sequence portrays a count that God Himself is making.

For example, God uses seven as a number symbolizing completion. Eight reflects that which is beyond completion and pictures a new beginning. In that context, the 50th day is observed on the 1st day of the week after the final seven day cycle is complete. Thus, Pentecost also becomes the eighth day and portrays a new beginning; one that will occur when God harvests the firstfruits of humanity.

The Wave Sheaf

Inextricably tied to Pentecost is a special ceremony known as the wave sheaf. God commanded that a sheaf from the first spring harvest be brought to the priest and held up and waved for acceptance. This sheaf was waved on the Sunday occurring

during the Feast of Unleavened bread—the same day the count to Pentecost begins (Lev. 23:9-16).

The wave sheaf pictured Christ. Like the sheaf which was tied in a bundle and cut from the field, our Savior was bound and had his life cut from the earth. The act of the high priest lifting the sheaf up to be accepted by God portrayed Christ's ascension to the Father. It also foreshadowed the Father's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice; by which He became the primary firstfruit. As the Apostle Paul noted:

> But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* **has become the firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The wave sheaf ceremony shows that Christ was the first to be raised and accepted by the Father. This is enormously significant, but there is another aspect of the ceremony that has great meaning for Christians.

The fact that no one was permitted to eat of the first harvest until the sheaf had been waved reflects the fact that no other human beings could be harvested until after Christ's ascension. While giving the Messiah preeminence, this also reveals that those raised in the first resurrection are intimately connected to Christ. Their inclusion will complete the first spiritual harvest. They will become like the Savior and will also be known as firstfruits.

The Wave Loaves

Intrinsically connected to the wave sheaf was another ceremony that took place during Pentecost. From the day that the sheaf was offered, 49 days were counted. On the 50th day, two leavened loaves were prepared and waved. According to God's command:

> Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring from your dwellings two wave *loaves* of two-tenths *of an ephah.* They shall be of fine flour;

> they shall be baked with leaven. ***They are*** **the firstfruits** to the LORD (Leviticus 23:16-17).

Notice that these two loaves are also called "firstfruits." However, unlike the wave sheaf, the loaves were "baked with leaven." These two loaves were the only leavened offerings ever allowed, and as such they could not be placed on the altar (Lev. 2:11). When considering the fact that leaven symbolizes sin, this indicates that these two loaves represent God's first harvest of humanity (Luke 12:1; 1Cor. 5:8).

God's faithful people are to strive for Christ's righteousness, but in this life we can never be free from sin (1John 1:8). As much as we might work at putting it out of our lives, Christians are still subject to imperfection because sin is an inherent part of human nature (Rom. 7:16-21). Christ was the only sinless human being.

Therefore, the unleavened wave sheaf pictures the sinless Savior who was the first to be resurrected. The two loaves are presented together which portrays God's chosen from every age that will ultimately be a part of the first resurrection. Though tainted by sin, once resurrected, they will be entirely pure. They will be without sin having been changed to spirit and washed by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:28; 1John 1:7).

It is also likely that these two loaves represent the two phases of God's Church—the Old Covenant Church of Israel and the New Testament Church consisting of both Israelites and gentiles. The seven weeks required to be complete before offering the loaves may also represent the seven eras of God's Church being complete before the first resurrection can occur. For more information on this subject, request our free book—*Evidence for Eras*.

The Two Offerings are Connected

The wave sheaf and the wave loaves are connected in several ways. They are both called "firstfruits." Pentecost is counted from the day of the wave sheaf, and they are both lifted up and waved before the Father for acceptance. As Moses wrote:

> The priest shall **wave them with the bread of the firstfruits *as* a wave offering** before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest (Leviticus 23:20).

As the wave sheaf pictured Christ's ascension and acceptance by the Father, the loaves were also waved portraying the ascension and acceptance of the 144,000.

Another point to consider is the fact that the loaves were considered holy and given to the priest. This likely represented the resurrected saints who shall be holy and given as a bride to Christ—our High Priest (Heb. 4:14; Rev. 19:7).

Sanctification through the Holy Spirit

Christ had the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Ten days after His ascension, on the day of Pentecost, He sent a down payment of that Spirit to His followers (2Cor. 1:22). This gift gave them spiritual insight as never before:

> When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Fully filled with the Holy Spirit, the Savior was the very first of the firstfruits. Those chosen to take part in the first resurrection will follow the path established by Him. They will receive the Holy Spirit, strive to put sin out of their lives, develop fruits of the spirit, and ultimately be harvested in the first resurrection. This connection between Christ and the first resurrection of saints was noted by Paul who wrote:

> But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming (1 Corinthians 15:23).

This is an awesome and wonderful truth! Of the many God has called He will choose a relative few for this first spiritual harvest of human souls (Mat. 22:14). These consist of the first to put their trust in Christ and set their course in life to overcome sin by living as Christ lived. As Paul stated:

> In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that **we who first trusted in Christ** should be to the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:11-12).

Those called during this age are the first to build true faith in Christ. The first resurrection will be composed of individuals chosen from those now called. Their harvest at the first resurrection will also initiate a new beginning for all humanity. The saints will then assist in helping others to trust in the Savior. For now, God is handpicking specific individuals and setting them apart by His Spirit for the transcendent purpose of being His firstfruits. As Paul recognized:

> God chose you to be the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through faith in the truth (ISV, 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

God has chosen 144,000 as the first to be reaped in the harvest of salvation. Theirs is the highest calling and most magnificent destiny that can ever be achieved (Heb. 11:35). Those called for this purpose have been given God's Holy Spirit as a down payment for what is to come (2Cor. 1:22). This spirit enables a spiritual seed to be placed within them. That seed must grow and produce fruits of the spirit before God will harvest them from the earth. As Paul noted:

> Not only *that,* but **we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit**, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:23).

Those whom God has called are the first to be given the Holy Spirit. This Spirit is a part of God's very nature (2Pet. 1:4). It enables those who are called to know God's Word, to comprehend His plan, and to understand the depth and purpose of His law. The Holy Spirit was fittingly given to the New Testament Church on Pentecost as another sign of the awesome event that this unique festival portrays. Before they can be harvested as God's firstfruits, they must prove themselves faithful and obedient—a people without deceit.

Chapter 16

They are without Deceit

Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
and in whose spirit *there is* no deceit.
~ Psalms 32:2 ~

President Richard M. Nixon served in the political arena for more than 35 years. During that time he was in a unique position to meet with, and study, world leaders. After being forced to resign as President, Nixon's fascination with leadership prompted him to author a book discussing the qualities he felt were necessary in order to be a great leader. Nixon wrote:

> In evaluating a leader, the key question about his behavioral traits is not whether they are attractive or unattractive, but whether they are useful. Guile, vanity, dissembling—in other circumstances these might be unattractive habits, but to the leader they can be essential. He needs guile in order to hold together the shifting coalitions of often bitterly opposed interest groups… He sometimes has to dissemble in order to prevail on crucial issues. It has become fashionable to try to conceal ego… (and) to present instead an outward modesty. But, I have never known a major leader who was not an egotist (*Leaders*, p. 324).

The devil was the first to use deceit and he has influenced many world leaders to subscribe to his narcissistic theory. As a result, most believe that stealth and deceit must be used in order to advance their cause. Instead of working for the common good, their primary ambition appears to be attaining power, status, and affluence as they strive to impose their will on others.

Living with Deceit

Deceit has infected all societies to the degree that it has become commonplace. Citizens anticipate politicians to be dishonest. They expect companies to inflate the reliability or value of their product. Even many who claim to be Christian will sometimes use deceit in their everyday lives. Pastors frequently preach what they know is wrong in order to retain loyalty or increase contributions. Congregants will claim to "praise Jesus" while misleading others in relationships or business dealings. Many attend church primarily to appear righteous or to feel good about themselves. Underneath the veneer of religion, many have become deeply jaded by the perverse values of our modern society.

Part of this behavior stems from media-driven ethics which have elevated the use of deceit to a marketing science. Human beings have been devalued and widely considered simply as consumers. At the same time, the advertising industry breeds discontent by cunningly manipulating viewer's thoughts and impressions. Western economies have become largely based on engendering dissatisfaction so that people will focus on money and material possessions.

To make matters worse, sociologists have learned to package real human needs as products that they can sell. This has caused marketing professionals to concentrate on stirring the emotions of people rather than advertising a product's practical use. For example, ads seldom speak of the value of their goods. Instead, companies associate merchandise with images of people having fun, feeling confident, or being the center of attention. Such methods deliberately deceive individuals into believing that a particular product will somehow make them feel confident, fulfilled, masculine, feminine, or youthful.

However, products by themselves cannot produce lasting happiness or prosperity; and the disappointment resulting from continual misrepresentation has led millions to the brink of depression. The result has been escalating drug dependence. As David Kupelian wrote about the United States of America:

> Between America's twin drug epidemics – one illegal, the other legal – well over 70 million Americans are using mind-altering drugs. And that number doesn't include abusers of alcohol, which adds an additional 60 million Americans. So we're really talking about 130 million strung-out Americans (http://www.wnd.com /2014/02/70-million-americans-taking-mind-altering-drugs, retr. 8/10/2014).

Most societies are suffering from some form of disillusionment. Their discontent, heartache, and continual frustration are the direct result of a culture built on the unstable foundation of deceit.

A People without Deceit

Deceit will never be a characteristic of God or His chosen people. Those who respond to God's call make a radical break from the ways of this world. They are entirely honest and trustworthy. As John wrote:

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

Notice that the 144,000 are "without fault" when they come before the throne of God. The word translated as "fault" is *amomos* meaning "unblemished" (*Strong's*, G299). This word reflects an aspect of the sacrifices made to God in which only the best could be offered. Each offering was carefully inspected to make sure it had no flaw. These sacrifices portrayed Christ who was without the blemish of sin. As Paul wrote, with the exception of the Messiah, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). But the 144,000 have accepted Christ as their Savior, and have overcome sin through their faithfulness and the cleansing blood of Christ's sacrifice (1Cor. 9:27; Rev. 12:11). Once resurrected, the saints will be spirit without the blemish of sin. They will have attained salvation and done so by living without deceit.

Fish Bait

The word translated as deceit is *dolos* in the Greek and means "decoy, trick, wile, craft, or guile" (*Strong's*, G1388). The definition includes using subtlety to delude, entice, or bait another person. It is interesting to note that the communities around the Sea of Galilee would have understood these words in a unique way. Their culture was associated with the fishing industry. To them, the word *dolos* described fish bait. It was a reference to something designed to trick a fish into becoming hooked. This illustrates the fact that people will often use deceit as a type of bait. They pretend to be someone or something they are not in an attempt to trick others for the purpose of gaining an advantage.

The character of the 144,000 reflects the opposite of deceit. They are transparent, sincere, and would never take advantage of others by deliberately misleading them. The 144,000 do not pretend to be something they are not. They are comprised of those who are striving to live up to their covenant name of Israel. The 144,000 understand that there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed. They know that God will bring to light the hidden things (Luke 12:2; 1Cor. 4:5). They realize that eventually everyone will know if they were the real thing or just fish bait.

The Tongue

The Apostle James addressed the subject of deceit when he said that the tongue may be the most dangerous part of the human body. The words we say can cause enormous damage when uncontrolled. For this reason, James also added that whoever can control the tongue is a perfect man (Jam. 3:2).

The 144,000 have learned to guard their lips. They do not spend their words in an attempt to elevate themselves. Neither do they stretch the truth to make others look bad. They are not found focusing on what appeals to the senses or the sensational. They do not color statements for advantage. They are mature and understand that words should only be used to encourage, edify, and declare the truth of God.

This makes it clear that guarding our speech is essential, but it is important for us to recognize where deceit begins. Notice the Savior's words indicating where sin originates:

> For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man (Matthew 15:19-20).

What a person says proceeds from their heart. This is a figurative way of saying that our words come forth from the inner being. Therefore, the battle to overcome sin takes place in our mind. The 144,000 are those who have dedicated themselves to becoming a people whose heart and mind are devoid of hidden motives, personal agendas, and hypocrisy.

An Israelite Indeed

In one striking example, Christ acknowledged a man who He considered to be a model citizen. That man's name was Nathanael. The account of his meeting with the Messiah provides a profound lesson for us:

> Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, "Behold, **an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!**" Nathanael said to Him, "How do You know me?" Jesus answered and said to him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered and said to Him, "Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:47-49).

When Christ stated that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed," He did not mean that Nathanael was simply a descendant of Jacob. The term Israel means "he will rule as God" (*Strong's*, H3478). Nathanael's character portrayed what God intended an Israelite to be. He was honest, loyal, and sincere. He believed in God and displayed that belief with works of faith.

Christ's compliment took Nathanael by surprise. He wanted to understand how the Savior could know him in such an intimate way. The Messiah answered that He had seen Nathanael under a fig tree. But the Messiah's observation ran much deeper than a casual glance. Christ could read Nathanael's thoughts, and saw what was in his heart. He could tell what manner of man Nathanael was (Psa. 44:21).

In the same way, God knows what we think and how we feel in the depths of our mind. If our thoughts are always honest, and we seek that which is good, He will know. If our motives are selfish or dishonest He sees that too. We can never fool God. This truth demands that we consider a profound question. Would Christ consider us an Israelite indeed? In other words, are we sincere and honest or do we subtly deceive? Are we worthy of standing as spiritual Israelites with one of the tribes of the 144,000?

Becoming People without Deceit

Christ was our example. He never falsely represented Himself. He did not trick others for advantage. As the Apostle Peter wrote:

> Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:21-22).

We are to follow the example of Christ in order to become people without fault before God's throne. We must be honest in all that we think and do. This is an essential characteristic of those who hope to attain the first resurrection. They practice being humble and genuine like Christ; knowing that God would never choose people who are deceitful to be a part of His family. As the psalmist wrote:

> He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house; He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence (Psalm 101:7).

God is looking for trustworthy individuals to assist Christ as He rules the earth. Christ desires those in His Church to represent honesty. They will not try to manipulate situations, or color their speech, for personal gain. God's faithful servants are true to their word. David described them in the following way:

> LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; He *who* does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the LORD; He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change; He *who* does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these *things* shall never be moved (Psalm 15).

This describes the chosen few. They are Christ's sincere followers who speak the truth in love. This is how we must be if we hope to be numbered among the 144,000.

Chapter 17

Out of Great Tribulation

We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.
~ Acts 14:22 ~

The book of Revelation reveals distinct keys that identify the 144,000. Each is a characteristic that proves this unique assembly is the entirety of the first resurrection, but what about the great multitude of chapter seven? Are they included in this first and better resurrection? Does the Bible state that they attain the same reward after experiencing the end-time tribulation? Many have assumed this to be the case, but such an assumption is made without a complete understanding of this subject. Consider John's words describing this enormous collection of individuals:

> After this 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... **These are they which came out of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (KJV, Revelation 7:9-14).

Many read these verses and assume they refer to the great tribulation which comes upon the whole world at the end of the age. The assumption is supposedly confirmed by many translations of the Bible that state "These are the ones who come out of **the** great tribulation." This has caused many to think that there is only one tribulation to consider, and that the great multitude must be a part of the first resurrection which takes place during that time. However, the Scriptures are at odds with such a conclusion.

What exactly did John mean when he wrote that this great multitude "came out of great tribulation?" The answer is found in the fact that there are different tribulations mentioned in the Bible. In the broadest sense, "tribulation" means any severe difficulty experienced by one or more individuals. The word is translated from the Greek *thlipsis* which can mean "pressure, affliction, anguish, burdened, persecution, or trouble" (*Strong's*, G2347). This definition relates the fact that one type of tribulation comes upon individuals in the form of various trials (Mat. 13:21; Rom. 5:3). Different types of tribulation have also been experienced by entire eras of God's Church (2Cor. 7:4; Rev. 2:9-22). And a much more severe type of tribulation will come at the end of this age. The question is what tribulation is experienced by this great multitude?

The Great Tribulation at the End of this Age

The end-time tribulation is a worldwide ordeal. When the disciples asked the Savior about the end of the age, Christ described that time by saying:

> For then there will be **great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).

The tribulation that Christ prophesied of in this verse occurs only once. It will be so destructive that God must intervene or there would be no one left alive. The great tribulation is precipitated by a political and military leader God calls the beast (Dan. 7:23; Rev. 13:1). His blasphemous empire leads a confederation of nations whose wicked policies will be supported by widespread religious fervor. Their combined power forges a massive military machine that will control western civilization. It will destroy any opposition. This future tribulation will span the entire globe, but its focus will primarily be upon the modern day descendants of Israel. As Jeremiah prophesied:

> Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* **the time of Jacob's trouble**, but he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7).

The modern day descendants of Jacob include the United States, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Israel, and several European nations. These nations will suffer more than any others. They will experience an even greater time of trouble than the Jews during the horrific holocaust of World War II.

Eventually, other world powers such as Russia, India, China, and Japan will be pulled into the fray, but only at the very end (Rev. 16:12). Smaller nations, which are described in Revelation as "tribes, people, and tongues," may be less affected, but only until the trumpet plagues begin. These final devastating punishments make up the year of God's wrath, and will devastate the entire world (Isa. 61:2; 63:4).

Some believe that the great multitude emerges from this end-time tribulation. This leads them to conclude that this immense group will be included in the first resurrection. But the evidence presented in previous chapters of this book proves that the 144,000 are the entirety of the first resurrection. They are sealed with God's spirit. They are part of spiritual Israel. They are the virgins that Christ marries. They are firstfruits, and only they can sing a song that no one else can learn. These facts alone make it impossible for the great multitude to be included in the same resurrection.

The subject of Revelation seven is God's two harvests of human beings. The first is the 144,000 mentioned in verses 2-8. The second is the great multitude which is clearly stated as being of all nations, tribes, people, and tongues. Instead of being rulers in the Kingdom, this second harvest is the general public who obtain salvation after the Millennium. They are the rest of humankind who will be saved through a later resurrection. This being the case, the "tribulation" spoken of in Revelation 7:14 cannot be the one that engulfs the entire world. Therefore, which tribulation does the great multitude come out of?

Tribulation Experienced by Church Eras

The seven letters in chapters two and three of Revelation were sent to seven churches on a mail route in Asia Minor. Each of these churches represents an era of God's Church during a specific time in history. Together they represent the entirety of God's Church from the Apostle John's time until Christ's return. For more information on this subject, request our book—*Evidence for Eras.*

The first Church mentioned was Ephesus. These people experienced their own type of tribulation during the first century when they faced persecution by the Jews, and later a martyrdom perpetrated by the Roman Emperor Nero. Christ also predicted ten days of tribulation that would fall upon the era of Smyrna (Rev. 2:10). Understanding God's prophetic symbolism in which a day represents a year, this was fulfilled by a persecution instituted by Emperor Diocletian in 303 A.D. which ended ten years later by Constantine's *Edict of Toleration* in 313 (Num. 14:34). Christ also declared that the era of Thyatira would suffer "great tribulation." This was experienced by God's people during the Middle-Ages. Speaking of this third Church era, the Savior said:

> Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her **into great tribulation**, unless they repent of their deeds (Revelation 2:22).

This prophecy was not a reference to the great tribulation which will come at the end of the age. The tribulation spoken of in this verse occurred during the Crusades and the Inquisition. At that time, true Christians suffered terribly at the hands of Roman Catholic soldiers who tortured and slaughtered all who refused to accept their blasphemous religion. These examples show us that the Bible speaks of one form of tribulation that occurs to specific Church eras.

Tribulation on Individuals

While imprisoned on the Island of Patmos, John spoke of being a companion to other Christians who were experiencing

tribulation (Rev. 1:9). In another case, Christ explained to His followers that Christians should expect tribulation because they are required to live in a world that commonly abhors the ethics of true God (John 7:7; 16:33). In that context, it is no surprise that the Apostle Paul also suffered difficult times as he performed God's work of preaching the gospel. His own experience likely led him to teach believers that they should anticipate tribulation. As the apostle stated:

> We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

While some form of tribulation is inherently a part of the Christian life, non-believers are not exempt. Suffering will occur in even greater degrees to those who reject God's Commandments. As the Apostle Paul stated:

> To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, **tribulation** and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil (Romans 2:8-9).

It is this kind of tribulation from which a great multitude emerges. Rather than being firstfruits, the great multitude consists of the rest of mankind who are not called to salvation at this time. They are not God's true Church, they are not sealed through the Holy Spirit, and they are not those chosen for the first resurrection. Instead, the great multitude corresponds to those who have experienced suffering in this life as a consequence of sin. They will also experience trials when they are raised and Satan is loosed after the Millennium (Rev. 20:5-8). In this way, every individual will have experienced their own type of tribulation.

Out of Great Tribulation

Every generation has experienced some form of tribulation. Violence and sorrow have covered the globe.

Atrocities have been endured and perpetrated by every tribe, nation, and ethnic group. Some have even experienced the specter of genocide. Many reading this book are currently suffering from the effects of war. In fact, over the last 3,400 years, the world has only known approximately 268 years of relative peace. This is a mere 8% of recorded history. Estimates of the number killed in these wars range from 150 million to 1 billion (Hedges, Chris, "What Every Person Should Know about War." *New York Times* 6 July 2003).

There are also untold numbers that have suffered the upheavals of earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, bitter cold, scorching heat, floods, famine, and drought. These natural disasters have exacted a heavy toll in the form of suffering in human lives. Many have lost everything. In addition, a high percentage of people on the earth have existed in poverty and squalor.

Most inhabitants of the western nations have little notion of the difficulties that afflict those who live in third world countries. For millions the greatest challenge is to find enough food or water to survive. Thus, the vast majority of humanity has experienced tribulation of one kind or another. All have borne some of the heartache, pain, and suffering that this present life brings. From the terrible ravages of illness and disease to the tragedy of accidental death; everyone has lost loved ones and ultimately must come face-to-face with their own demise.

These are some examples of the kind of tribulation the great multitude come out of. It is the suffering people experience as a direct result of the devil and human nature. Greed and self-centeredness have brought pain to everyone. Therefore, calling their experiences "great tribulation" is appropriate because the suffering of the masses down through time has been enormous! None have escaped the agonizing consequences of living in a world influenced by Satan's way of life (Jam. 4:1-5).

A Final Tribulation

Although Satan is prevented from influencing the world during the millennial reign of Christ, he will be loosed after 1,000

years. The devil will be allowed to tempt humanity once again. He will broadcast envy, greed, and discontent. He will cause people to wage war. Christ will ultimately put down this insurrection, but before He does people will again suffer tribulation under Satan's influence (Rev. 20:7-9; Eze. 38).

This is what Revelation 7:14 means when it states that a great multitude comes "out of great tribulation." It is not speaking of the great tribulation at the end of this age. It is speaking of the ordeals that each person experiences while living under the influence of the devil. It speaks of the suffering felt during human history.

The great multitude is a collection of the rest of humanity who were not a part of the first resurrection. All those who lived and died without knowing the true God will be raised. They will be given a new lease on physical life after 1,000 years of God's Kingdom on earth. This will be their first real chance at salvation. These teeming masses must overcome human nature and Satan's influence in order to be saved. The time of their salvation will be consummated at the white throne judgment when the names of those who are faithful are found written in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:5-12). For more on this subject, please request our booklet—*Three Resurrections of the Dead*.

In this way, the great multitude will follow the example of Christ and the 144,000, but they are called at a different time and for a different purpose. They are not called by God to become Christ's bride or to have divine leadership roles in God's Kingdom (1Cor. 1:26). They will receive salvation, but it will not be the same as those called to the first resurrection (Heb. 11:35). For this reason, they are not called firstfruits or Israel. They are called "a great multitude."

Even though they are not the elect, their story is a fascinating one that enables readers to understand who they are; as well as recognizing the identity of the 144,000.

Chapter 18

The Great Multitude

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations shall worship before You.
~ Psalms 22:27 ~

What happens to those who are not called to the first resurrection? Will they have an opportunity to achieve salvation? The answer is found in understanding the identity of the great multitude.

Down the lengthy corridor of time, history has witnessed numerous great gatherings. The book of Exodus describes an assembly of more than two million people leaving Egypt on foot (Exo. 12:37). Most have witnessed gatherings in Times Square on New Year's Eve and the Tournament of Roses parade where throngs of people crowd the streets. Impressive as these numbers may be, they are insignificant when compared to the number who will attend a future massive assembly.

The Apostle John witnessed a convocation that may be the single greatest collection of individuals ever to occur. Imagine John's reaction at seeing a group so vast that he could only describe them in the following way:

> After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could number**, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10).

The apostle stated that this great multitude consists of individuals from every nation, tribe, and language. The group

was so large that John said it was impossible to count them. As will be demonstrated, this is an assembly of people from the beginning of human history to its end. Such an array would likely number in multiple billions, but exactly when does this enormous gathering occur?

After the First Resurrection

Before mentioning the great multitude, John heard that an angel from the east sealed those included in the 144,000 (Rev. 7:2-8). The apostle then began to describe the multitude with the phrase "after these things." This indicates a change in prophetic time. Understanding that the 144,000 are the first resurrection, the great multitude must appear after the first resurrection has already occurred, but exactly how much later? We can know by studying John's description.

John saw this host standing before the throne of God. Because no physical being can exist in His presence, the great multitude must be a vast group of spirit beings (Exo. 33:20). Their white robes symbolize righteousness and their cry of "Salvation to our God" indicates they have been saved. For this reason, some consider these individuals to be a part of the first resurrection, and mistakenly conclude that the great multitude is raised at the same time as the 144,000. However, there are many reasons why this cannot be true.

All the evidence presented in the preceding chapters proves that the 144,000 are the entirety of the first resurrection. In addition, when we consider the extent of John's vision, his description of the multitude makes it obvious that their resurrection can only take place after the millennial rule of Christ.

The Size of the Great Multitude

Consider the immense size of this group. The multitude is so vast that John's first reaction is "behold." John uses this word to call the reader's attention to what he saw. It implies something immense was being viewed. While the apostle had not seen the 144,000 in chapter seven, he did witness a vast assembly of individuals.

John's use of the words "great multitude" is significant. "Great" is *polus* in the Greek meaning "much, many, plenteous, or large" (*Strong's*, G4183). *Polus* also implies that which is abundant, but altogether common. "Multitude" is the Greek *ochlos* meaning "throng, rabble, company, or a class of people" (*Strong's*, G3793). It can also refer to people so close together they are pressed into one another (Mark 2:4).

Perhaps most important, *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* explains that when *ochlos* is used with *polus* the words signify a very large group made up of "the common people" or preferably "the mass of people" (p. 421).

The impression created by John's choice of words is an immeasurable number of individuals that are defined as the common class. These words differentiate the great multitude from the 144,000. The multitude is common while the 144,000 are not. The multitude is so enormous that they cannot be counted while the 144,000 are an exact number.

Impossible to Count

The expression "great multitude" is used 40 times in the Bible—27 of which are in the pages of the New Testament. Nonetheless, a group of this magnitude standing before God's throne is found in only one account. This is God's second harvest of souls which does not include the firstfruits. The great multitude is the rest of humanity gathered from every part of the globe. Such a throng would be shocking to view, but why are they impossible to count?

One reason may be that John was looking at a host so large that it would extend for miles. Our human minds would be unable to number such a mass of individuals. Another possibility stems from the fact that the summation of all those who will ultimately receive salvation has not yet been determined.

During the Millennium, the earth's vitality will be restored. People will build communities, marry, have children, and the populace will prosper as never before. The number of people born in the world to come is not limited by God. For this

reason, the sum of all the people who will live after Christ returns cannot be known at this time.

In addition, the number who will ultimately choose God's way is also unknown. Human beings have free will, and God allows humanity to choose how they will live. Those who choose God's way—choose life. Those who choose their own way shall perish (Deu. 30:19; Rev. 20:15).

Unlike the 144,000, which is a predetermined number, the final resurrection cannot be confined to a specific figure at this point. Therefore, God does not assign a number to the great multitude in John's vision. He only reveals that their size is enormous. The actual number of those who will ultimately be saved will only be known after the final judgment (Rev. 20:12).

The great multitude should remind us of God's declaration to Abraham. As the Eternal promised:

> "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be" (Genesis 15:5).

The massive telescopes of today can probe the heavens and map constellations, yet we cannot know how many stars actually exist. God told Abraham that his descendants would be like the stars in the sense that every individual who chooses to live God's way will ultimately reflect a brilliant glory; and viewed together they would be so expansive Abraham would be unable to count them.

All those from every age who eventually trust in God are included in this prophecy. Abraham is known as a father of the faithful, and the faithful from both the first and last resurrections will be considered Abraham's seed (Rom. 4:16-18).

When Do the Multitude Come Before God?

God's holy days foreshadow things to come (Col. 2:16-17). Each observance depicts an important event in the Eternal's plan for mankind. Regarding the resurrected great multitude, the Day of Atonement portrays Satan being bound for 1,000 years.

The Feast of Tabernacles reflects humanity's journey toward the millennial Kingdom when Christ will tabernacle on the earth and rule with the 144,000. The Apostle John described the beginning of the Millennium and beyond, writing:

> He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God... And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection (Revelation 20:2-5).

These verses clearly reveal that there is a first resurrection to spirit at Christ's return, and that 1,000 years later the Creator will restore life to the "rest of the dead." This second resurrection is not to spirit, but to flesh. Ezekiel 37 describes God causing tendons and flesh to suddenly grow back onto dry bones—skin covering the flesh and then breath flowing back into these people that were once dead and proceed to stand up and live again. The various tribes and nationalities since the beginning of human history will be given physical life again.

It is at this time when all these people will be given their first opportunity to know Christ. The King of kings will eventually judge them based on how they choose to live—just as He judges His Church now. At a later point, all these people will be raised in judgment before the great white throne of God. For many this will be an end to their existence. However, it will be a new beginning for a great multitude that shall be saved. This eternal judgment occurs when Christ gathers all people before Him:

> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book* of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And **anyone not found written in the Book of Life** was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

Compare this scene with John's vision of the great multitude. Here are the rest of the dead, small and great, from all generations, standing before God's throne for judgment. The great multitude is the vast numbers who have finally been saved. Once they become a part of God's family, the Eternal can reveal the awesome future He has prepared for them.

Notice the difference between this group and the 144,000. The 144,000 are firstfruits. They stand with Christ on Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1). They are given authority to rule as kings and priests for 1,000 years. In contrast to this specific number also known as spiritual Israel, the great multitude is a vast accumulation of all people. They are not the firstfruits whose final judgment took place shortly after the first resurrection.

Judgment is on individuals in the Church now. Whether we qualify for the first resurrection or not will be decided prior to the change. The reward will be pronounced when those chosen stand before Christ's throne after the resurrection (1Pet. 4:17; 2Cor. 5:10).

God is not making a final decision regarding the rest of humanity at this time. Their evaluation will take place during the Millennium, and will conclude with the white throne judgment. Of these, those who obtain salvation will stand before the throne of God and shout "Salvation!" These are the great multitude.

The Symbolism of Palm Branches

Another clue to the identity of the great multitude is found in the palm branches in their hands (Rev. 7:9). These branches are directly related to God's command to build temporary living quarters for the Feast of Tabernacles. While describing this Feast, God explained:

> Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest,* and on the eighth day a sabbath-*rest.* And you shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees, the boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute forever in your generations... You shall dwell in booths for seven days (Leviticus 23:39-42).

Branches of palm trees and boughs of leafy trees were used to make temporary huts known as "booths." God's people were told to dwell in these structures for the entire seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles. At the end of the seventh day the booths were dismantled.

The branches used to build temporary living quarters portray the fact that our lives in this physical world are also temporary. Though human beings have a home in mortal bodies, all that is physical is subject to entropy and will ultimately cease to exist.

The palm branches symbolize the fact that the multitude attained salvation during a time when the earth was still in a temporary existence. Like those who are called during this age, the masses can only obtain eternal life by overcoming while living as mortal beings. Those who are finally saved will be given a new spiritual body, and they will live in God's new heavens and earth.

Palm branches are also referred to when Christ rode a donkey into Jerusalem before His final Passover. The Apostle John recorded that historic moment, writing:

> The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!" Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt" (John 12:12-15).

While God does not command the use of palm branches in the observance of Passover, it is possible He inspired their use during Christ's triumphant entry to Jerusalem. Consider the symbolism of this act.

The entry of the Messiah into the holy city while riding on a donkey was prophesied to be a sign of Israel's true King (Zec. 9:9). It also portrays Christ's return to Jerusalem to make it the headquarters of His millennial government. A great crowd excitedly responded to the Messiah's entry by taking branches of palm trees in their hands and praising the Savior by crying out "hosanna." The word *hosanna* literally means "save now" and is similar to the great multitude shouting salvation (*Strong's*, H3467; H4994).

The reaction of the crowd is strikingly similar to the great multitude in John's vision. Like those who cried out for the Messiah to save them, the multitude before God's throne loudly declare that they have been saved. Just as the throng praised Christ while holding palm branches, the great multitude declare God's glory with palm branches in their hands.

Salvation and White Robes

Another indicator that the great multitude is raised long after the 144,000 is found in the words they cry out "with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the

throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:10). Note that they do not sing a new song, the song of Moses, or the song of the Lamb. Instead of singing, the multitude enthusiastically cries out that salvation is attributed to God! Their powerful shout points to the fact that they have been saved by the Almighty through this latter resurrection.

The word "salvation" is *soteria* in the Greek and means "rescue, safety, deliver, health, save" (*Strong's*, G4991). In the Biblical sense it means to be rescued from death by a change to spirit. This indicates that the great multitude will no longer be subject to the deterioration that occurs in a mortal existence. Their unified cry reflects victory over sin through faith in Christ. It serves as a profound witness to God's ability to save.

Further evidence of their salvation is reflected by the white robes worn by these people. The timing of their salvation is revealed by the question the angel asked John:

> "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:13-14).

The angel asked this question knowing who the 144,000 are. He would not ask the identity of this second group if they were part of the firstfruits mentioned just moments earlier. Because the angel answers his own question, it appears that the inquiry may have been designed to bring John back to his senses after the shock of seeing such an enormous array of individuals. This is further evidence that the 144,000 are not included in the great multitude, and that these two groups are not raised at the same time.

The angel told John that these came out of great tribulation. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is not referring to the great tribulation at the end of the age. It refers to the various trials that come upon those who were once non-believers. It also relates to the difficult situations experienced

while in the process of conversion. Through a variety of tribulations, this great multitude will be resurrected after the Millennium. This is how they will wash their robes in Christ's blood. It is by accepting His sacrifice and overcoming the devil and human nature. When their individual time of trial is over, they will be able to stand before God's throne and shout "Salvation!" with deep gratitude and great joy.

They Stand before God's Throne

The angel continued to give more detail about the multitude by stating that "A great multitude... **stood** before the throne (Rev. 7:9). It is important to note that this throng of individuals does not **sit** with Christ in His throne as do the 144,000. Christ encouraged the ones called to be firstfruits with an amazing promise:

> To him who overcomes I will grant to **sit** with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and **sat** down with My Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

Unlike the elect, the Bible shows the multitude standing before God's throne. These astounding numbers will be from every race, era, and culture.

The teeming masses will be brought before God's throne for judgment. After each verdict is pronounced, those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life will suffer the second death (Rev. 20:11-15). Those found in the Book will stand before God's throne and shout that the Almighty has given them salvation.

If the Bible is the only source we can use to interpret the Scriptures, then the account of a great multitude standing before the throne, and the verses that depict the final judgment when the masses also "stand before God," must portray the same people. The great multitude can only be those who have come through the white throne judgment victorious!

They Serve God in His Temple

John was also told that the great multitude serve God in His temple day and night. As the Apostle wrote:

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

These words relate that they are not kings and priests like the 144,000. Instead, they attend to the needs of God's government by performing various duties. The future role of this multitude was foreshadowed by those who served in the temple of ancient Israel. Notice the distinction between the priest's service, and those who simply served in the temple:

> And, according to the order of David his father, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, **the Levites for their duties** (**to praise and serve before the priests**)... for so David the man of God had commanded (2 Chronicles 8:14).
>
> But let no one come into the house of the LORD except **the priests and those of the Levites who serve** (2 Chronicles 23:6).

Though all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests. In fact, most men from the tribe of Levi were not priests. The vast majority simply served the temple in menial ways. This same pattern will be followed by a great multitude. Those in the first resurrection serve God by ruling with Christ as kings and priests (Rev. 5:10). The Scriptures reveal that the role of the great multitude will be to "serve" in the future temple, but only in common ways (*Strong's*, G3000).

God and the First Resurrection are the Temple

Another difference between these two groups is evidenced by the fact that the great multitude serve IN God's temple. The chosen few are described as BEING God's temple.

Paul said "For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are" (1Cor. 3:17). Notice Paul's letter written to the elect:

> Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

The 144,000 are individuals whose bodies have become a temple for God's Holy Spirit. They are spiritual building blocks. They are called to be the bride of Christ and the New Jerusalem is also called "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (Rev. 21:9-10). This indicates that the 144,000 will not only inhabit this grand edifice, New Jerusalem will be a part of who they are and a facet of their identity. For this reason, Christ said:

> He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name (Revelation 3:12).

When we consider John's vision of New Jerusalem, and the fact that both "God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple," we see that the firstfruits are pillars in this magnificent holy place (Rev. 21:22). This makes it obvious that the great multitude is not God's temple—they only serve in it. They do not have the same reward, responsibility, or positions as those in the first resurrection. We also know that the temple in question is the New Jerusalem which is directly connected to God, the Lamb, and the 144,000. John described this divine tabernacle shortly after witnessing the final judgment and wrote:

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

This tabernacle is the future city of God. The size of this divine structure is described in the following way:

> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God... The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal (Revelation 21:10-16).

This city is the very same temple and tabernacle called New Jerusalem and it is massive! A "furlong" is the Greek *stadion* referring to the measurement of a stadium or race course (*Strong's*, G4712). Each side is the near 1,500 miles long! If this building were placed on the surface of this current planet, it would rise 1,200 miles beyond the atmosphere. Its foundation would cover more than half of the United States of America, and it would encompass more than 2.7 billion cubic miles. All of saved humanity could easily serve within this city. The Savior also related that this tabernacle is currently under construction in the third heaven. As Christ said to His disciples:

> In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also (John 14:2-3).

The great multitude will stand before God's throne after the final judgment when the Father brings New Jerusalem down to a newly created earth (2Pet. 3:13). They will begin to serve God "day and night." This expression is a figure of speech meaning that they will serve within Kingdom of God continually.

When does the Father Come to the Earth?

The Bible reveals that the Father will eventually come to earth. When He does, it will not be the physical earth that we live on today. The One who sits on the throne will create a new heavens and earth before the Father descends. As John attested:

> Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful" (Revelation 21:3-5).

This will occur at the end of all things. It is after Christ and the saints have ruled the earth for 1,000 years. It is after the second resurrection, and after those who are given their chance for salvation has been judged. Only then will the Father create a new universe and dwell with all who have been saved. Paul explained this order of events to the Corinthians while prophesying about the resurrections:

> But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. **Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father,** when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and

> power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death... Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

God will raise the rest of the dead after Christ's millennial rule. Only after the white throne judgment does Christ turn all things over to the Father. Thus, the Father is sitting on the throne before a great multitude and Christ is in the midst. As John's vision revealed:

> And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God **will wipe away every tear from their eyes** (Revelation 7:15-17).

Both Christ and the Father are present. The Father sits on the throne while the Lamb is in the "midst of the throne." Notice also that the multitude will no longer hunger or thirst. This means that they will have no need of physical elements. God will take away all sorrow and Christ will lead them to living waters. The clincher is that these words describing the great multitude are the same ones used when prophesying of the new heaven and earth:

> And God shall **wipe away all tears from their eyes**; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).

This is not the first resurrection. It is the time when God's plan on earth is fulfilled. Notice the following words when God says:

> It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts (Revelation 21:6).

This miraculous fountain is intimately connected to God's temple and future throne. As John saw and recorded:

> And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

The context of these verses, and those regarding the great multitude, is the time of a new heaven and earth. It is God's throne in the temple within New Jerusalem. When these verses are fulfilled it will be the end of one era and the beginning of an entirely new one!

No Need of the Sun

Further evidence of the time of the great multitude is a statement the angel made saying that "the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat" (Rev. 7:16). This does not mean that God will confine these individuals indoors so that they never see the light of day. That would be imprisonment instead of salvation. Instead, the multitude is raised when there is no longer a need for a physical sun. John saw this spiritual environment surrounding New Jerusalem and wrote:

> The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light (Revelation 21:23).

The great multitude is pictured when there is no longer a universe as we know it. Those changed to spirit no longer need physical food to sustain their body. There is no need for oceans to supply rain or the sun to generate photosynthesis (Rev. 21:1; 22:5). Such a time occurs only after the white throne judgment;

when all who will be saved are finally born again as spirit beings into the Kingdom of God (Mat. 25:31-34).

God's Second Harvest

The verses in Revelation 7:9-17 describe God's second harvest of souls. This is a much larger harvest than the first. It is comprised of massive numbers of people. They are not members of God's Church today which is described as a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). The great multitude is composed of those who will be saved, but the time of their salvation is long after the first resurrection. It takes place after the white throne judgment—a time when the physical creation will no longer exist (Rev. 20:11).

The universe that once was will have served its purpose. It was designed as a training ground for humanity to overcome their selfish ways and learn to live by the selfless love of God. After that has been accomplished, the entire physical creation will be burned up in a massive conflagration. The prophet Isaiah quoted God's words explaining:

> For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, the earth will grow old like a garment, and those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will not be abolished (Isaiah 51:6).

This is an awesome and wonderful truth! God is allowing the world to experience the result of following human nature and Satan's influence. Such selfish desire has led to violence and destruction so devastating that if Christ does not intervene no one would survive (Mat. 24:22). God will gather 144,000 chosen individuals to assist Him in restoring order to this planet. A significant aspect of His plan includes a second resurrection to flesh after 1,000 years that will give all people a chance for salvation. This reveals a time that is coming when God will save all who set their mind to do what is right. For more information about this subject, please request our booklet—*Three Resurrections of the Dead.*

The great multitude will be the conclusion of Christ's monumental work of saving humanity. The 144,000 are called to be the first harvest of God. The great multitude is the second. The Almighty is NOT trying to save the whole world at this time. Christ will set His hand to accomplish worldwide conversion after His second coming. Right now He is only working to produce 144,000 firstfruits.

A Remarkable End and a Wondrous New Beginning

The countless numbers of people who never had the chance to truly know Christ are not doomed. The anguish so many have experienced for thousands of years will fade. Loved ones once lost will be regained. The great and talented painters, writers, sculptors, musicians, and composers will live again to create magnificent works designed to glorify the Almighty God. Billions will promote and proclaim only that which is good.

All that is physical will be eliminated. The earth and the many galaxies in the great expanse of space will eventually be burned up. Satan and his demons will also be eliminated. "The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death" (1Cor. 15:26). After these things, God will create a new universe that will be more wonderful and glorious than we could possibly imagine. The Apostle Peter understood this truth and wrote a personal statement to those who are called:

> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless (2 Peter 3:11-14).

The end of all things is coming, and with it a wondrous new beginning. These words should have profound impact for those who have been called. Only a chosen few are destined to be counted among the 144,000. To be a part of the first resurrection, we must work with all diligence to be righteous before God. We must walk in all His commandments and ordinances so that one day we will become without spot and blameless (Luke 1:6). There is nothing of more value than this.

Chapter 19

The Conclusion

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
for this *is* the whole *duty* of man.
~ Ecclesiastes 12:13 ~

The Apostle John received a supernatural vision that took him on a spiritual journey deep into our future and beyond. This revelation caused John to record literary sketches of present and future history. Included among these were informative sections that, when assembled together, produce an unimpeachable case enabling readers to solve the mystery of the 144,000.

The 144,000 are sealed with the Holy Spirit. They are servants of God. They are a precise number that are redeemed from among men. They are firstfruits. They sing a unique song no one else can learn. They are without deceit. They are virgins who have not allowed themselves to be defiled by false doctrines, superstitions, and religious traditions. They are followers of the Lamb and have gotten victory over the beast. They are spiritual Israelites that will rule as kings and priests throughout the millennium and beyond. They stand on Mount Zion which is New Jerusalem. It is from this magnificent edifice that the 144,000 will assist Christ in ruling God's government.

Each piece of evidence identifies the 144,000 as the entirety of the first resurrection. This distinctive group will include the ancient prophets, the New Testament apostles, and faithful people of God from all ages who will become the bride of Christ (Heb. 11:39-40; 1Ths. 4:16-18).

A Reward Worth Working For

God will eventually save the vast majority of humanity in a later resurrection so enormous they can only be called "a great multitude." Presently, however, Christ is only working with a

relatively small number who will ultimately make up the 144,000. He is preparing these individuals for unique positions in His family as He also prepares the New Jerusalem to be the palatial estate that God the Father, the Son, and His bride will call home for all eternity (John 14:2-3). From this glorious city they will govern the new heavens and earth.

The future of the 144,000 is staggering to consider. It is a future more glorious than anything the human mind could ever conceive. Compared to what is in store for these people, the rewards and pursuits of this physical existence pale into utter insignificance. Their destiny has been the motivation of faithful men and women throughout history. People have been willing to give up everything to attain this transcendent goal. As the Scriptures state, Abraham looked to the city "whose builder and maker *is* God" (Heb. 11:10). The prophets of old also envisioned God's Kingdom and were motivated by this hope. The Kingdom is so worthwhile it has transformed ordinary individuals into extraordinary Christians willing to die for their faith. The Apostle Paul confirmed the fact that this objective is worth more than any sacrifice we might make when he wrote:

> Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8).

To "gain Christ" means attaining an intimate relationship with the Savior. Imagine the excitement of being able to work directly with the Messiah. Consider what it would be like to discuss personal details of His hopes and dreams for the universe. Just think what God might create in the spiritual realm, and visualize participating in its creation. Do we comprehend the magnitude of what God is offering those He is calling now?

Human marriage portrays the relationship between Christ and His future wife. Much like a man counsels with his wife, Christ will include the 144,000 in His decision-making

process. The thought of being able to live and work with the very God of the universe is more than thrilling! This thought should inspire us and lift our level of commitment to the highest level. For those who are called during this age, it is more than the opportunity of a lifetime. It is an opportunity that comes only once in all eternity. There is nothing greater and nothing more valuable. As Christ explained:

> Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:44-46).

In comparison to what God has planned for the chosen, no sacrifice is too great. It is worth anything that might be required to attain the first resurrection. Consider just a few of the benefits. The 144,000 will experience the excitement of life at the very center of the universe. The cultural, artistic, and musical events, sponsored in the presence of God are far beyond comparison to anything in the human realm. The fascinating discussions, projects, inventions, and plans implemented will delight and awe those who inherit God's Kingdom. Further, such activities will continue for eternity.

A New Body

Equally motivating is the fact that every chosen saint will be given a new body to complement his or her position in the Kingdom. Many have wondered what this new body will be like. The Apostle Paul gave us a few clues when he stated:

> There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for *one* star differs from *another* star in glory. So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. *The body* is sown in

> corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:41-44)

God designed life so that the physical reflects the spiritual (Rom. 1:20). Paul explained that the sun, moon, and stars vary in their brilliance. Similarly, each resurrected saint will radiate varying levels of glory (Mat. 13:43).

Our physical bodies serve as an example. Everyone has different features. Some have straight blond hair and blue eyes. Others have curly dark hair and brown eyes. Some are tall while others are petite. The differing beauty of each person pictures the fact that each individual in the resurrection will differ in glory. But it will not be the result of random DNA combinations. The future glory of the saints depends on each Christian's personal spiritual growth. As the Apostle Paul explained:

> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Human beings can be very beautiful, but God is more beautiful than we can imagine. He radiates a resplendent glory so awesome that humans cannot look upon Him and survive (Exo. 33:20). God is offering the 144,000 this same kind of glory. Paul described the change that will take place in the resurrected Christian when he wrote:

> For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will **transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body**, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself (Philippians 3:20-21).

Seek First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness

What we shall become depends on the character we develop in this life. This truth should inspire us to be diligent in our quest for the Kingdom. If we truly comprehend the value of the first resurrection, it should become a consuming desire that we seek with all our heart. It should be the supreme motivating factor in seeking Gods righteousness. As the Savior explained:

> But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

The only way to obtain the Kingdom of God is to seek the righteousness of Christ. This literally means to be of like mind in purpose and character. It requires us to strive to do the right and honorable thing in every situation in life. Certainly we will make some mistakes, and we might choose unwisely at times, but we cannot allow anything to stop us from pursuing this most magnificent quest. The problems we experience, the setbacks we might have, the suffering we endure—they are nothing compared to the glorious future God has in store for us. As Paul wrote:

> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

The glory that shall be given to the 144,000 is worth more than any discomforting trial we might experience. We should make up our mind now to give our whole heart to seeking God's Kingdom. Do not let down! Even if we have made mistakes in the past, even if we have failed in some way, don't quit! Recommit to overcoming. Fast often to draw close to God. Consistently talk to Him in prayer. Listen to what He has to say to us through the study and meditating on His Word. Strive to fill our thoughts with the things of God. Pick up the pace! Work with all diligence to understand and live by the intent of God's law of liberty.

Running the Race

We stand at the threshold of the last days. God is separating the wheat from the chaff. At this moment decisions are being made regarding who will be included in the 144,000. God is evaluating whether we will qualify or not. This time of qualifying for the Kingdom has been compared to running a race. The Apostle Paul made the following analogy to convey the urgency of striving to overcome during our lives, and wrote:

> Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain *it* (1 Corinthians 9:24).

Not all who run this race will receive the prize. This means that not everyone who is called will be chosen. God is selectively choosing Christ's bride. Being called is a precious gift from God, but it will mean nothing if we do not cross the finish line. The Apostle Paul understood God's selection process and gave us a warning when writing:

> Everyone who competes *for the prize* is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a perishable crown, but we *for* an imperishable *crown.* Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as *one who* beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:25-26).

Some will make the grade. Others will disqualify themselves. Paul realized that it was possible that even he could become unfit. For this reason, he diligently worked to bring himself into subjection to Christ in all things. His example is that we must run while there is still time!

Seek Him while He can be Found

There is still a window of opportunity open for those who are called. There is yet time to change how we live. However, the

time is coming when there will no longer be a chance to qualify. Notice God's warning:

> He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work (Revelation 22:11-12).

Now is the time to prove to God that we belong in His Kingdom. Give God reason to say about you as He did Abraham, "Now I know that you fear God." As Christ says to us all:

> Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,' then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.' But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.' There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out (Luke 13:24-28).

Time is running out. The end is nearer than we might think. Now is the time to show God why He should choose us. Seize the moment! Use this time wisely. Develop the character traits possessed by the 144,000.

Where there is a Will, there is a Way

The Scriptures reveal the characteristics of the 144,000. To be included among them, we must deeply desire this as our primary goal. We need to see that our real value lies in what God is creating within us. We should recognize who and what God is,

and the enormous price He paid to redeem each of us. That realization should motivate us to pay close attention to the still-small voice of the Holy Spirit in order to become faithful servants of God. Our calling obligates us to live up to our covenant name Israel and display the moral character worthy of the people who carry God's name.

Before God will allow us to rule over others, we must first allow God to rule over us. This requires the understanding that His law is the only way to live, and that we are to keep it as God intended. We should consistently meditate on how to apply it in our everyday life. This is God's will and our commitment necessitates seeking His will. As the Savior stated:

> I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me (John 5:30).

The way to the Kingdom of Heaven is to do God's will and develop the moral character of Christ. We must seek to emulate His holiness by keeping ourselves pure. We must eliminate deception and hypocrisy, and become a people who are completely transparent, honest, and sincere.

Armed with the truth regarding the traits that qualify 144,000 to be chosen, we must not let down. Instead, we should increase our efforts to develop God's attributes. It is His deepest desire that we succeed, and Christ promises to help us if we remain committed to Him (John 15:5-10).

Hang In There

Far too many in this era of God's Church seem willing to let this opportunity slip away. Some have completely turned off to the truth. Others complain that Church members have wronged them and they have been hurt or offended in some way. Some have simply been disappointed by their own failure to measure up. Others have become distracted by the cares of this world. Many have allowed themselves to be caught up in careers, ego, entertainment, and the pursuits of our physical existence. This age of spiritual indifference has had its impact on the Church of

God. Few have remained focused on what is truly important. Untold numbers have begun to ease up and let their precious calling slip through their fingers. We absolutely cannot let go of this opportunity!

There is a story of a fishing boat that was being tossed about in a rough sea. Suddenly, a seaman noticed a young man lashed by the biting wind while clinging to the mast. The seaman ran to the captain and exclaimed, "Look, captain, it's your son up there in grave danger. If he lets go he will be killed!" The captain looked up and replied, "He's my son. He won't let go!"

The Captain knew what his son was made of. He knew that he would never give up! What about the Captain of our salvation? Does He know that we won't let go? Will we let Him down by not using all of our strength to fulfill this magnificent calling? Is there anything that could cause us to let go of the fantastic reward God is offering those who endure to the end?

The understanding we have been given regarding God's Word is priceless! The identity of the 144,000 is revealed by their character. It is these godly traits that we must develop in order to be counted among them. Let this knowledge propel us forward in our Christian quest. Recognize what has been laid before us. Pick it up and run with it! Strive to be worthy of our calling and chosen as one of the 144,000.

Understanding the Identity
and Destiny of the 144,000

Attribute	***Application***
They are sealed	Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit
They are servants of God	God's servants are those who are converted and obey Him
They are a precise number	144,000 is a factor of 12 picturing divine government
They are spiritual Israel	Spiritual Israel is the Church
They stand on Mount Zion	They stand at New Jerusalem in heaven
They sing a song no one else can learn	They are the entire first resurrection
They are virgins who are undefiled	They have not accepted the doctrines, superstitions, or traditions of the whore
They attain victory over the beast	They have overcome Satan's ungodly system
They follow the Lamb	They are Christ's followers
They are redeemed from the earth	They accepted Christ, overcame, and are resurrected at Christ's return
They are the firstfruits	They are those in the first resurrection
They are without deceit	They are without deceit and speak only the truth

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, audio, and video messages to help people better understand the Bible. Some of the printed literature includes:

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