

*The*

144,000



# *The* *144,000*

*Twelve Keys to Understanding  
the Identity and Destiny of the 144,000*

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version  
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# *Table of Contents*

|             |   |     |
|-------------|---|-----|
|             | Introduction: Who are the 144,000? . . . . .      | 1   |
|             | Prelude: The 144,000 Revealed . . . . .           | 3   |
| <i>I</i>    | Key 1 - They are Sealed . . . . .                 | 10  |
|             | A Question of Timing . . . . .                    | 16  |
| <i>II</i>   | Key 2 - They are Servants of God . . . . .        | 19  |
| <i>III</i>  | Key 3 - They are a Precise Number . . . . .       | 25  |
|             | Are 144,000 Too Few? . . . . .                    | 32  |
| <i>IV</i>   | Key 4 - They are of Israel . . . . .              | 40  |
|             | Lessons From Israel. . . . .                      | 49  |
| <i>V</i>    | Key 5 - They Stand on Mount Zion . . . . .        | 57  |
| <i>VI</i>   | Key 6 - They Sing a Unique Song . . . . .         | 62  |
| <i>VII</i>  | Key 7 - They are Not Defiled with Women . . . . . | 67  |
| <i>VIII</i> | Key 8 - They are Virgins . . . . .                | 76  |
| <i>IX</i>   | Key 9 - They Follow the Lamb . . . . .            | 81  |
| <i>X</i>    | Key 10 - They are the Redeemed. . . . .           | 85  |
| <i>XI</i>   | Key 11 - They are the Firstfruits. . . . .        | 94  |
| <i>XII</i>  | Key 12 - They are Without Guile. . . . .          | 99  |
|             | Out of Great Tribulation. . . . .                 | 103 |
|             | The Great Multitude . . . . .                     | 107 |
|             | The Conclusion . . . . .                          | 118 |

# *Who are the 144,000?*

## An Introduction:

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

**M**ore than nineteen centuries ago, the Almighty God chose a man, the Apostle John to be the recipient of an astonishing prophetic vision. While in spirit, John was lifted into heaven and ushered into the very presence of God. There, he observed the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ, the incredible living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and the heavenly host surrounding God's breathtakingly beautiful throne.

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

Finally, John's vision culminated in an event that is the only real hope for mankind. He witnessed the return of Jesus Christ, the establishment of God's government on earth—and the ushering in of a divine age of lasting peace and great prosperity.

### ***The 144,000***

As, the shocking events that would fill the pages of the last chapter of human history continued to unfold before John's eyes, a powerful angel suddenly stepped in to temporarily suspend the sequence of events. This great spirit being announced that before God continued to execute His righteous judgment on a rebellious world, the servants of God were to be sealed in their foreheads.

After this sealing, John heard the number of God's servants. There were exactly 144,000. At that moment John must have wondered, "who are these people, and what role do they play in the extraordinary plan God has purposed from before the creation of the world?"

In our modern age, it is little different. A shroud of mystery continues to surround the 144,000. Even today, this enigma persists, piquing curiosity and stirring speculation among theologians, scholars and students of the Bible.

What does it mean when the Scriptures state that the 144,000 are sealed, and exactly when does this event take place? Is there more than one group of 144,000, and are they comprised of only the physical tribes of Israel? What is meant when John is told 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? Finally, does Scripture reveal

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 truth is that the longstanding mystery surrounding the 144,000 *is* revealed—right in the pages of the Bible! The Almighty is a God of great purpose, planning, and design. He inspired the writing of Scripture for the express purpose of revealing His blueprint for mankind. As the prophet Amos writes:

The Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets  
(Amos 3:7).

This verse is absolutely essential to our understanding of the Scriptures. Amos relays a vital, unbreakable promise from the Almighty God—to reveal all things to those who are called to be His prophets. With these words, the Eternal binds Himself to reveal His future plans to His servants *before* He acts. Therefore, if His will is to seal precisely 144,000 individuals, we can rely on His promise to reveal both their identity and destiny.

However, some might ask, “If God wanted us to know the identity of the 144,000, why has it remained a mystery for so long?” The answer to this question is found in God’s perfect timing. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, the Bible states that there is a time and a season for everything. Further, some knowledge has been specifically reserved until the time of the end. As the following verse illustrates, even the prophet Daniel was denied some understanding of the visions God had given him.

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased . . . Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end (Daniel 12:4,9).

We now find ourselves living in an age when knowledge is increasing at enormous rates. It *is* the time of the end, and our generation *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 mentioned in chapter seven and fourteen of Revelation? As Christians, we are commanded to search after knowledge, to apply our hearts to understanding, and to seek for wisdom as we would for an earthly treasure (Proverbs 2:1-9). When we follow these instructions, by digging deeper into God’s Word, a previously dark cavern of misunderstanding is illuminated.

In the case of the 144,000, the faith displayed by these individuals is commended by the Almighty God—and understanding what qualifies them to be numbered among the chosen is vital to our own Christian journey. Every single Christian seeking the Kingdom of God should desire to be numbered among the 144,000.

### ***Twelve Keys to Understanding the 144,000***

As you read this book, layer after layer of evidence will be uncovered. You will discover the twelve important keys unlocking the identity and destiny of the 144,000. These same keys also

outline the character traits by which *you* will qualify to be numbered among God's chosen servants. Once you put these keys into practice in your own life, you too can overcome your human nature, to become a person of genuine godly character.

Be warned, however! As the evidence is presented regarding this mysterious group, the effect may be unsettling. The truth about this unique assembly may threaten past assumptions. It may even cause you to rethink the place you believed you held in God's plan of salvation.

Once the identity of these people is finally understood, however, another wonderful truth becomes clear. If you are called of God, it is possible to be part of this special assembly, and the reward that God is offering those who attain this goal is both marvelous and glorious! Therefore, as you proceed through each chapter, it is hoped that two things will occur. First, each key will become yours! Each will open your mind to see the quality of character God requires of His servants, in order to be set apart as one of the 144,000, and to receive the reward that is theirs alone. Second, each chapter is written in great hope that the knowledge will serve to help motivate you with both ever-increasing enthusiasm, and greater discipline as you pursue our magnificent quest—the Kingdom of God.

# *The 144,000 Revealed*

## The Prelude:

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever  
(Deuteronomy 29:29).

When the Apostle John was given the vision which he would later record in the book of Revelation, he was on the island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. The noted historian Eusebius wrote that in 95 A.D., Emperor Domitian had banished John to this tiny island for the crime of preaching the gospel message—a fact that John himself confirmed (Revelation 1:9). The apostle was finally released eighteen months later (Ecclesiastical History, 3.20 8-9).

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 subjected to wretched conditions. 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 his Roman overseer. The only rest this apostle of God experienced was nightly sleep on the cold craggy ground.

During, this tragic time in the apostle's life, John was given an awesome revelation outlining the last traumatic days of mankind which lead up to the triumphant establishment of God's glorious government. The apostle was privileged to literally foresee the magnificent new heavens and earth.

### *The Day of the Lord*

As John's incredible revelation began, he witnessed what the Bible calls the "Lord's day." The apostle writes:

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

When speaking of the "Lord's day," John is NOT referring to a particular day of the week, but rather a particular span of time. In Biblical terminology, a prophetic "day" refers to a calendar year (Ezekiel 4:6). Therefore, the Lord's day is a year long.

Elsewhere, the Bible refers to the "Lord's day" as the time of God's wrath (Revelation 6:17). The Scriptures indicate that this "day" will be the last year of man's reign on the planet (Isaiah 61:2). It is just before this final climatic year of man's rule, that the 144,000 are revealed.

### *The 144,000 Introduced*

Immediately preceding God's wrath, John is made aware of a group of people whose number

amounts to exactly 144,000. While, John did not actually see this group, the apostle explains that an angel revealed the existence of the assembly to him. He writes:

**And after these things** I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an **hundred and forty and four thousand** of all the tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:1-4).

When John described this event, he began with the words, “After these things” (Revelation 7:1). When speaking of “these things,” John was referring to a sequence of events that were recorded in the prior chapter of Revelation. There the apostle witnessed seven seals securing a written scroll which only Jesus could open. As Christ opened each one, a great but tragic new chapter in man’s history was revealed.

### ***The Seals of Revelation***

The seven seals unlocking the unfolding events described in the book of Revelation have been a source of controversy for many students of the Bible. However, it is possible to know exactly what each of these seals represent. The true revelator, Jesus Christ, had actually spoken of them in greater detail during His ministry on earth.

Just days before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus’ disciples came to Him on the Mount of Olives. There they asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the world (Matthew 24:3).

The Greek word for “world” in this verse is “aion.” Since this term literally means “age,” the disciples were actually asking Jesus what the world would look like at the time when man’s rule on earth would end, and Christ would return to restore God’s Kingdom. Jesus responded to this query by proclaiming what is commonly referred to as the Olivet Prophecy.

This prophetic discourse, spoken to the twelve disciples on the mount of Olives, and recorded in three of the four gospels, is arguably the most famous warning ever uttered by the Messiah (Matthew 24; Luke 21; Mark 13). When giving this specific prophecy, Jesus spoke without the use of symbols, thus providing a clear chronological sequence of six end time evils that perfectly mirror the symbolic six seals listed in the book of Revelation.

When describing these evils, Jesus painted a picture of a world punctuated by religious deception, wars and conflict, famine and disease, a great persecution, and even supernatural signs in the heavens. The first four of these conditions spoken of by Jesus are now famous in Scripture, and have been used by artists and authors down through the ages.

### ***The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse***

When the aged Apostle John recorded his fantastic vision, he described a series of seals. The first four of these seals are characterized as horsemen, each riding a specific colored horse. Notice what John says about the first white colored horse and its rider:



And I saw, and behold **a white horse**: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and o conquer (Revelation 6:2).

Because of this horse's color, many mistakenly conclude that it reflects John's description of the returning Messiah who also rides a white horse (Revelation 19:11-16). This first seal is NOT Jesus Christ, however. The rider of this horse conquers men using a bow, a symbol of humanly devised weapons of war—not the supernatural sword issuing from Christ's mouth (Revelation 19:15). This white horse actually portrays religious deception. It pictures a counterfeit Christ leading a false Christianity that is influenced by Satan and enforced by the power of the state (Revelation 12:9; 17:3).

When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus explained that the time would come when many would falsely claim to represent Him. He stated:

For many shall come in My name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many (Matthew 24:5).

In the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus' words indicate that the opening of the first seal, and the revelation of this white horse portray the proliferation of a false religion. This is a specific religion—one using Christ's name and purveying a counterfeit Christianity that spread throughout Western Civilization and which will eventually dominate most of the world.

When Christ opened the second seal, He revealed events that were symbolized by a red horse and its rider. John writes:

And there went out **another horse that was red**: and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword (Revelation 6:4).

Notice that this second horse is red, the color of man's blood. The color of this horse symbolizes a world at war! When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus next stated that the time would come when "nation would rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6-7).

The Greek word "nation" in this verse is "ethnos," and it is the root word from which our English word "ethnic" originates. Ethnos pertains to race or nationality, not country or realm. Therefore, Jesus was describing a time when great racial strife would punctuate society. Jesus also stated that kingdom would rise against kingdom. This horrible violence would also spill over into armed conflict between nations.

When the third seal was opened, John saw a black horse. The apostle described this vision, saying:

I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo **a black horse**; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand (Revelation 6:5).

This horse is the color of a war scorched earth, rendered incapable of supporting vegetation. This dark symbolism, coupled with balances for measuring food, foreshadows hunger ravaging mankind—famine sweeping across the planet.

Compare this with the Olivet Prophecy where Jesus next warns that great famine would strike the earth. In Matthew 24:7, Christ's description corresponds perfectly with the vision John records in Revelation, thus confirming that the black horse is a hunger ravaged earth.

This brings us to the fourth and final horseman of the apocalypse. When describing the fourth seal, the Apostle John introduces the reader to a pale horse, the deliverer of death! John describes the grisly scene with these words:

I looked, and behold **a pale horse**: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him (Revelation 6:8).

The word “pale” used to describe this horse is of great interest. It comes from the Greek word, “chloros.” This root word is one from which we derive the word “chlorophyll” today. It describes a horse that is a pale green color, thus foreshadowing man in the throes of sickness and disease, which would ultimately lead to death.

In the world today, warfare has changed dramatically. No longer is it fought with “conventional” weapons. A more exotic warfare, whose weapons are infinitely more destructive, has now entered the world scene, posing an enormous threat to all mankind. Included in this arsenal are chemical and biological agents, such as smallpox and anthrax. The threat of bio-terrorism is very real indeed, clearly presenting a danger to all peoples inhabiting the earth.

As more and more countries strap on their chemical and biological gun belts, it is evident that this fourth horse and its rider symbolize the deadly effects of chemical and biological warfare—the destructive power of which is far greater than nuclear war. In a very real sense, biological agents have changed the face of conflict today. They have leveled the playing field between the superpower and the rogue state. In our modern world, where the new threat is chemical and biological terrorism, any day may indeed be “high noon.” The fourth horseman of the apocalypse that John describes also corresponds perfectly with the words Jesus spoke in His Olivet Prophecy. When giving this warning, Jesus stated that the world would suffer great pestilence that would come as a result of the ravages of war (Matthew 24:7).

### ***The Fifth Seal***

After describing the four horsemen of the apocalypse, John then watches as a fifth seal is removed from the great scroll. Once this occurs, John sees a company of martyrs whose blood was shed for upholding the faith. The Apostle John explains:

When He had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of **them that were 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, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their **brethren, that should be killed** as they *were*, should be fulfilled (Revelation 6:9-11).

The history of God’s true Church down through the ages has been a bloody one. Many sincere Christians were killed during the crusades and Spanish Inquisition. All of the twelve apostles except John, died violent deaths. The eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews describes some of the great sacrifices made by God’s people as they stood for the truth before the New Testament was written. The scriptures state:

(They) . . . had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were **stoned**, they were **sawn asunder**, were tempted, were **slain with the sword** (Hebrews 11:36-38).

Because Christians in all ages suffer persecution, the author of Hebrews reminds us of the sacrifices God's people have made in times past. When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus also spoke of the martyrdom of saints occurring during a Great Tribulation that would come upon the prophetic nations of Israel, Judah, and a remnant of God's Church. Jesus stated:

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall **kill you**: and ye shall be **hated** of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another (Matthew 24:9-10).

Jesus asserts that this Tribulation will cause God's people to be hated, and many will be killed. The rest of the world will eventually suffer terribly, however. As Christ says, this time will be so fierce that without His intervention, the planet and its inhabitants would be utterly destroyed. Jesus warned:

For then shall be **Great Tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened (Matthew 24:21-22).

Once again, the words of Jesus are found to be in perfect sync with those recorded by the Apostle John. The fifth seal of Revelation depicts a time that will be the most violent in human history. When the great prophet Jeremiah described this period, he stated that it would be so devastating there would be "none like it" (Jeremiah 30:7).

### ***The Sixth Seal***

The Apostle John next introduces the unveiling of the sixth seal—a literally earth shattering event. When this seal is loosened, John sees the very heavens convulse! Imagine how this vision must have appeared to God's apostle as he describes it in these words:

And I beheld when He had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places (Revelation 6:12-14).

This sixth seal rock the very sun moon and stars. It will also bring with it staggering natural disasters including great earthquakes of unimaginable intensity (Revelation 6:12). These earthquakes, coupled with the signs in the heavens, will drive even the mightiest of men to tremble in abject fear. The terror those who witness this shall be so terrifying that men will prefer death rather than face what awaits them (Revelation 6:15; 9:6).

When giving the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus also spoke of this very same great disturbance in

the heavens. Christ quoted the words of the prophet Joel, saying:

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

In these verses, Jesus further described the sixth seal of the book of Revelation. As with the preceding seals, Jesus' words in the Olivet Prophecy are found to be in complete agreement with the symbolic events portrayed in John's vision in Revelation.

### ***The Day of God's Wrath***

Following the heavenly signs, the Bible reveals one more devastating seal. Once unleashed, it will have far greater impact on the world than the preceding six. The seventh seal pictures a time of unimaginable devastation to come upon the entire world.

The period of time when this seal is executed is designated in the Bible by the terms, "the Lord's day," "day of the Lord" or the "day of God's wrath." It represents the very last year of man's reign on earth. During this period, God will rain down a judgement upon mankind that literally defies description. So great is this punishment that few will be able to survive it as John notes:

The great **day of His wrath** is come; and who shall be 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 Testament also predicted this terrible time. Joel writes:

The LORD shall utter His voice before His army: *He is* strong that executes His word: for the day of the LORD *is* great and very terrible; and who can abide it? (Joel 2:11).

## *The Seven Seals of Revelation*

| <i>Seal</i> | <i>Symbol</i>         | <i>Meaning</i>               | <i>Scriptures</i>                    |
|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1           | White Horse           | Religious Deception          | Revelation 6:2<br>Matthew 24:5       |
| 2           | Red Horse             | War                          | Revelation 6:4<br>Matthew 24:6       |
| 3           | Black Horse           | Famine                       | Revelation 6:5<br>Matthew 24:6       |
| 4           | Pale Horse            | Pestilence                   | Revelation 6:8<br>Matthew 24:7       |
| 5           | Souls under the Altar | Martyrdom of True Christians | Revelation 6:9-11<br>Matthew 24:9-11 |
| 6           | Heavenly Signs        | Announces God's Wrath        | Revelation 6:13<br>Matthew 24:29     |
| 7           | 7 Trumpet Plagues     | God's Wrath Day of the Lord  | Revelation 7-9<br>Matthew 24:30-31   |

The prophet Isaiah also describes the destruction that will occur at the time of God's wrath. He writes:

The **day of the Lord** is at hand; it shall come as a destruction . . . Behold, the **day of the Lord** cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate (Isaiah 13:6, 9).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the "day of the Lord" is not a twenty-four hour period of time. Instead, Isaiah alludes to a prophetic "day" which lasts an entire year.

God uses a prophetic principle of a day for a year in the Bible, and this is demonstrated in at least two other places in Scripture. In Numbers 14:34, God required Israel to wander in the wilderness forty years corresponding to forty days. Further in Ezekiel 4:6, The Almighty required His prophet to lay on his side certain days to represent an equivalent number of years.

Therefore, when describing the "day of the Lord," Isaiah characterizes it as a "day" of God's vengeance that will take place over a span of an entire "year." Notice the words of the great prophet as he writes:

Proclaim the acceptable **year of the Lord**, and the **day of vengeance** of our God; to comfort all that mourn (Isaiah 61:2).

Clearly the “day of the Lord” represents the last year of man’s reign on the earth. This final year, before Christ returns is a time of great judgement upon mankind. However, before executing His wrath, God makes provision to protect His faithful people. In so doing, He introduces readers to an assembly which numbers 144,000.

### ***Preparing for Judgement***

The day of the Lord represents a time when God will execute His judgement on the earth. Prior to this, the book of Revelation identifies four powerful angelic forces that prepare themselves as the instruments of God’s terrifying punishment. These angelic beings are described in the seventh chapter of Revelation. There the Apostle John records these words:

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

Notice that these four angels are situated on the four corners of the earth. They are positioned in the north, south, east, and west. The angels are poised in these strategic positions to insure that the devastation they bring will cover the entire planet. When describing these angelic beings, the Apostle John also states that they hold back the four winds of the earth. But what are these winds?

Although the Apostle John does not actually say, is it possible that these winds are additional angelic forces. In the Bible, wind is a symbol representing spirit (John 3:8). The actual Greek word for spirit is “pneuma” and it literally means a “breeze” or “blast of air.” Therefore, it is possible that the four winds described by John may, in fact, be symbolic, picturing enormous spirit forces used by God during this defining moment in all of human history.

If this is the case, these four notable angels could be considered the “winds of destruction.” They are literally holding back incredible supernatural forces that will be ultimately used to carry out God’s wrath over the earth and its entire population.

### ***Protection for God’s People***

The Apostle John next notices a special angel coming from the east. This angel instructs the four winds to withhold their destruction until he can seal God’s servants. John writes:

I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till **we have sealed the servants of our God** in their forehead (Revelation 7:2-3).

This angel arises from the east, in a manner similar to Jesus Christ at His return (Matthew 24:27). The angel performs a sealing that both identifies and protects the servants of God. This act is a consolation to the Almighty’s people, reflecting the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to comfort His people at the end. The prophet Isaiah wrote that Christ was to:

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

At this time, the saints who have mourned through much of the Tribulation will now realize

that their perseverance was not in vain. The seventh chapter of Revelation states that these servants of God are sealed. They will be protected from the destructive and terrifying judgement of God Himself. This act of God sealing His servants constitutes the first key to the identity of the 144,000.

# *They are Sealed*

## Key One:

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

We live in an absolutely amazing world where technology, education, and commerce are constantly changing. One prominent characteristic of our time is the complexity of our business dealings. In times past, business transactions were simple, and businesses more permanent. Today, however, we live in a world of mergers and acquisitions where corporations become mega-corporations. Many modern businesses actually have divisions dedicated solely to evaluating the feasibility of buying other enterprises.

Another characteristic of mergers and acquisitions in our current business world is that a multi-million dollar business transaction may now take place to secure a single, talented individual. In professional sports, for instance, a franchise can invest tens of millions of dollars in a single athlete.

Such an investment is only entered into after a great deal of analysis. Speed, strength, and a variety of physical and emotional skills are evaluated in an attempt to determine both an athlete's potential and 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*, Henry Kravis, the individual responsible for engineering the twenty-five billion dollar purchase of R.J.R. Nabisco, outlined the very process that he utilizes when considering such an acquisition. This successful business man 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?

Mr. Kravis focuses great attention on every contingency. Much thought and preparation goes into every detail of the decision-making process, prior to the purchase of any multi-million dollar corporation. Such acquisitions are never the product of whim, but rather are the result of in-depth



analysis and planning.

Similarly, when the Almighty God decides to draw an individual to Christ and ultimately a specific role in His future Kingdom, He does so only after the most careful planning and analysis. The Father and Christ are assembling the greatest leadership team in the history of the universe. As they form this body, They do so with a much deeper, and more thorough, analysis than any corporation created and governed by men.

In the corporate world, once the negotiations are completed, a contract is signed. At this point, the parties will refer to the negotiations as being “**sealed**.” The individuals involved might be heard to say, “We **sealed** the deal,” or it is “signed, **sealed**, and delivered.”

This business analogy continues to reflect a spiritual principle. When God chooses to add a member to His personal management team, He certifies their calling by sealing them.

### ***The 144,000 are Sealed***

Before the Almighty God executes His wrath on mankind, He seals His servants. The Apostle John writes:

And I heard the number of them which were **sealed**: and there were **sealed** an hundred and forty and four thousand (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. God is infinitely powerful, but He is also inestimably thoughtful. In every judgement, He displays immeasurable wisdom. Therefore, it is unimaginable to think that God has not perfectly thought through and planned out and sealing of 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 sinners, and therefore running in the spiritual “red.” However, He looks beyond the surface. He confirms each person’s inner conviction and determination to live His way of life before He acquires them.

The Eternal then pays the highest possible price to obtain each person He calls. He purchases each individual with the supreme price—the ransom sacrifice—the life of His only begotten Son.

At this point, the repentant individual is baptized and the hands of the ministry are laid on them. After this, or as in the case of Cornelius, the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and perhaps some of those chosen at the very end, the Holy Spirit is given to the person. They are sealed, and this vital phase of the conversion process moves the believer one step closer to being one of the 144,000.

### ***The Meaning of “Sealed”***

When describing the events at the end of the age, and the protection given the servants of God, the angel explained to John that they must first be “sealed.” This unique term “sealed” is translated from the Greek word “sphragizo.” It has three fundamental meanings, and all of these can apply to the 144,000.

First, sphragizo carries the sense of being sealed as a “sign of personal ownership.” Second, this unique word also denotes the setting of a seal on something in order to mark it as “authentic or genuine.” Finally, sphragizo signifies sealing an object with a “signet.” This would be a case such

as would occur when sealing a letter, scroll, or book in order to make it inaccessible and secure.

***Sphragizo and Its Applications***

(Strong’s Concordance 4972)

| <b><i>Meaning</i></b>   | <b><i>Fulfillment</i></b>   |
|---|---|
| To seal as an indication of private ownership.                                  | The giving of God’s Holy Spirit.<br>(II Cor. 1:22)  |
| An identifying mark showing one as genuine or authentic.<br>A seal of approval. | Obedience to God as evidenced by keeping His Sabbaths.<br>(Deut. 6:5-9; Ex. 13:9, 31:13-17) |
| To seal for protection, thereby making something secure and inaccessible.       | Protection from God’s end time wrath.<br>(Ezk. 9:4-6; Rev. 7:2-3)                           |

***A Mark of Ownership***

The first meaning of the word “sphragizo” is to “stamp with a mark which indicates private ownership.” Those who are sealed, are identified as belonging to Almighty God. Once sealed, they become His personal and private property.

When writing to the Church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul explained that this process of being sealed takes place by and through the supernatural power of God’s Holy Spirit. Speaking of Jesus Christ, Paul writes:

In whom also after that ye believed, ye were **sealed with that Holy Spirit** of promise (Ephesians 1:13).

Writing to the Corinthian Church, Paul reiterates that Christians are sealed with God’s Spirit. He states that Christ:

Hath also **sealed us**, and given the earnest of **the Spirit** in our hearts (II Corinthians 1:22).

The term “heart” in this verse does not mean that a Christian receives God’s Spirit in his or her physical heart. The term “heart” is an idiomatic expression used in the Bible to refer to the place considered to be the seat of human emotions. Therefore, the “heart” actually means the “mind.”

In other words, a Christian is sealed in his or her mind where our deepest spiritual feelings and convictions reside. The forehead is the location of this reasoning function of the human brain. It is the place of God’s seal, and where Christians carry His unique sign!

***Those Who are Sealed Receive His Name***

The Bible reveals that the sealing of God’s children in their foreheads identifies God’s people as His. The mark indelibly inscribed there is literally His name! The Apostle John writes:

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

It seems that when a child of God is sealed with the Spirit of God, the Father's name is placed upon the individual. Because God the Father is the head of His spiritual family, it is only logical that the family should bear His name. For this reason, the Apostle Paul writes:

For this cause I bow my knees unto **the Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, **of Whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named** (Ephesians 3:14-15).

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, God changed his name to "Abraham," meaning "father of many nations." Abraham's new name reflected his new identity. After persevering with Christ, Jacob was renamed Israel, reflecting his new status with God (Hosea 12:4). Once sealed with the Holy Spirit, the Christian's name is also modified. Just as we all carry the name of our physical father, the newly begotten Christian now carries the name of our spiritual Father.

When an individual receives the Holy Spirit, he or she takes on a new name and identity as a son or daughter of Almighty God. Each Christian must, therefore, strive to act with the dignity befitting God's holy name, the basis for the third commandment—not to take the His name in vain.

### ***Marked as Genuine***

A second meaning of the word "sphragizo" is to set a seal, a stamp, or mark, to identify something as being authentic or genuine. Therefore, being sealed could be considered as receiving God's "stamp of approval." In the world today, there are many who profess to follow Christ. Merely professing Christ is not sufficient to make one a genuine believer, however.

To be genuine, obedience is required. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the same apostle who recorded the book of Revelation writes:

**He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar**, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: **hereby know we that we are in Him** (I John 2:4-5).

This statement by the Apostle John makes it clear that in order to be sealed, and therefore identified as genuine, a Christian must not only express commitment, but must also live according to that commitment.

In our complex society it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between those who are genuine 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 mind. In order that other men might know who are His, God created an outward sign, or identifying mark for all to see. That sign is the keeping of God's Holy Sabbaths.

Before God revealed the Ten Commandments to Israel, He tested them to see whether they would obey. 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 seventh day. On that day, they were commanded to gather none. If they would keep this command, God believed that they would keep the others (Exodus 16:4-26).

So important was this commandment that God made it a separate covenant, calling it a "sign"

between Him and His people. The word “sign” is “owth” in the Hebrew language, and it also can be translated as “mark.”

In this context, consider God’s instructions concerning the Sabbath. Notice that God’s servant Moses records that God’s weekly Sabbath is His sign or mark:

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for **it is a sign** between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done, but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. **It is a sign** between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed (Exodus 31:13-17).

God claimed that the Sabbath was a sign between He and His people. By this He marked Israel as His children. For this reason, He commanded that the Sabbath be kept as a perpetual covenant. However, Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, profaning His Holy Day. As a result, God declared that He would pour out His fury upon them. He states:

The house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgements, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and **My Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury** upon them to consume them(Ezekiel 20:13).

This pronouncement takes on much greater meaning when one considers that God places a seal on the 144,000 that marks them. This seal protects them from His end time fury which comes on all those who disobey Him by not keeping His commandments.

### ***God’s Mark***

God has a sign or mark, of which the beast’s mark is only a counterfeit. Like the that of the beast, God’s mark is also worn in the forehead and hand, reflecting what God’s people think about in their mind, and labor to perform with their strength. As the Passover instructions state:

It shall be for **a sign** unto thee upon **thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes**, that the Lord’s law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt (Exodus13:9).

God instructs His people to put a high priority on keeping His annual Sabbaths, and Holy Days. As stated in the verse above, the Passover was an example. This observance was to be a memorial “between the eyes.” By this, God meant that this celebration was to be kept in the forehead—in the mind—a memorial that was to be remembered, to be thought about, and to be and practiced annually.

God also makes another point absolutely clear. His whole way of life, as expressed in the

Ten Commandments, is the mark of God, and it is also worn in the forehead and hand. This is dramatically illustrated by one of the most beautiful passages contained in the Scriptures. God speaks to the children of Israel, saying:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for **a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes** (Deuteronomy 6:5-8).

The individuals who comprise the 144,000 are those who will have been sealed in their mind by the Spirit of God. Upon receiving His Spirit, the children of the Almighty begin to take on the attributes of His mind as they strive to meditate on and live by His law in every situation in life. Their faithful obedience then becomes their sign—they marked as being genuine Christians.

### ***Sealed for Protection***

Finally, the word “sphragizo” can also mean “to seal with a signet.” This term is applied in such a way as to mean a “closing up, such as one would do to a letter, scroll, or book in order to make it inaccessible and secure.” This sealing would be much like God putting a “no trespassing” sign on His people.

Whenever God gives His Spirit to people, they come under His divine protection. This does not mean that adverse circumstances can never happen to them, but rather that nothing can happen to them without God’s divine approval. So, like Christ, historically, God’s people may have suffered persecution and even martyrdom at the hands of other men. However God always has, and He always will protect His people from His punishing wrath on mankind.

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. Only He can open the seals. In like manner, prior to God’s wrath being unleashed on the world, His people are sealed, thus making them secure, and protected from God’s last plagues. The Apostle John writes:

I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have **sealed** the servants of our God in their foreheads (Revelation 7:2-3).

### ***An Example from the Past***

The 144,000 are sealed by a method God has used to protect His people in the past. The prophet Ezekiel left us an example in which God marked His faithful in their foreheads for the purpose of protecting them from His wrath. The prophet Ezekiel writes:

The Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and **set a mark** upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others He said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite: let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: slay utterly old and

young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

This historic example of sealing the true people of God in their forehead was a symbolic type, picturing a future time when God will again seal those who are His at the end of the age. Those Christians who have sighed and cried for the terrible abuses to humanity will be protected just before God's wrath. This was pictured centuries earlier by the marking of God's faithful during the time of Ezekiel.

### ***God's Seal—An Invisible Mark***

When speaking to Nicodemus, Christ described being born again as being born of the spirit. He indicated that this birth is not visible to the human eye. Jesus explained that one born of the spirit would be like the wind—invisible but powerful. 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 God's Spirit working miracles, but cannot actually see the Spirit (John 14:17).

Spirit beings are not limited this way. They are spirit and can look beyond the physical surfaces we see. They clearly see everything taking place in the spirit dimension. Therefore, it may be that there is literally a spiritual mark, or even a name, written on the converted person's forehead. It 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 (Ezekiel 9:4-6). The sealing that takes place in the 144,000 is much like that process described by Ezekiel. The angels, who are poised to destroy the earth with the trumpet plagues, will somehow recognize the mark or name of God on each Christian. Because these people truly obey God, they are protected in this way. No matter how devastating God's punishment on mankind might be, absolutely no harm will come upon them.

### ***Sealed as Servants of God***

The first thing God reveals about the 144,000 is that they are sealed. This sealing is with the God's Holy Spirit, thus identifying them as His. They are further set apart by keeping God's law and His Sabbaths, and this marks them as genuine believers, having God's approval.

Finally, those accounted to be part of the 144,000 are also sealed with God's miraculous, supernatural protection at the end of the age.

Because the 144,000 possess God's Holy Spirit, it is certain that they are the same group mentioned in Revelation, chapter fourteen—the entirety of the first resurrection! Many readers have misunderstood this truth, however, not realizing that the Scriptures do not show the 144,000 all together in one location until they have been resurrected (Revelation 14:1-5) Shocking as it may sound at first, John does not actually see the 144,000 in one place because they are NOT all sealed at the same time! Understanding the timing in Revelation, chapter seven, helps make this clear.

# *A Question of Timing*

*To every thing there is a season,  
and a time to every purpose under the heaven.  
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

**T**he book of Revelation reveals that the 144,000 are sealed with God’s Holy Spirit to identify them as His own, mark them as genuine, and protect them from the Almighty’s end time wrath. This sealing clearly identifies these people as true Christians who will be in the resurrection which occurs at Christ’s return. They are also marked as individuals who are destined to rule with the Messiah during the millennium and beyond.

Many Students of the Bible have misunderstood this vital truth, however, assuming that the entire 144,000 are sealed all at one time. Why has there been so much confusion regarding this subject, and why has it continued so long?

The answer is primarily found in the timing of the seventh chapter of the book of Revelation. Complex as it is, this chapter sometimes seems to purposely obscure the actual sequence of events. Consequently, readers commonly make the mistake of assuming that the entirety of the 144,000 are sealed at the same time—just prior to the trumpet plagues, and the execution of God’s wrath.

## ***Revelation Chapter Seven contains an Inset Section***

While many have concluded that the 144,000 are all sealed at the same time, the book of Revelation nowhere states this. We must read these verses carefully, and when we do, it becomes clear that in verse three, the angel only speaks of God’s servants who are to be sealed, without any reference to a specific number. The angel says:

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

It is important to realize that in verse three, the apostle never sees the 144,000 stand together, nor does he witness the act of their sealing. In fact, the 144,000 are not shown standing together in one place until Revelation, chapter fourteen, where they are depicted as all assembled together only after the resurrection has already taken place.

Subsequent to hearing the angel proclaim, in verse three, that God’s servants must be sealed, a time gap occurs before the events contained in the next verse. Then, in verse four, John only hears the total number, after all who will be chosen have been sealed. At this point, the apostle explains:

I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand (Revelation 7:4).

Verse four begins an “inset” section that continues through the end of the chapter. In these

verses, John no longer focuses on the trumpet plagues. He next depicts hearing the total number of God's servants who have been sealed, and learns that they are chosen out from spiritual Israel. Finally he sees the great multitude stand before God's throne.

### ***Understanding Insets***

At this point, it is vital to understand God's use of "insets" throughout the book of Revelation. This knowledge can help readers grasp what He is revealing in chapter seven, where the 144,000 and the great multitude are introduced.

The book of Revelation is a fascinating series of chronologies focusing on future events. However, as each time-line unfolds, there are often inset portions within the chronology. These insets interrupt the normal flow of events by inserting a different theme into the text. They serve to look at something specific from a different perspective, or skip ahead to reveal the result of a specific occurrence.

Notice how these insets occur in Revelation as it progresses to chapter seven. Chapter one introduces Jesus Christ, and the seven Churches. In the second and third chapters, there are letters to each Church. In addition to bearing specific messages to each Church, these letters also serve as a prophetic history of God's Church from John's time to the end of the age.

Revelation four begins by introducing the first inset showing the throne of God, the activity surrounding His throne, and the awe-inspiring beings that accompany Him there. Revelation five through six then begin a new chronology, showing the opening of the seven prophetic seals which commence in John's time and continue to the day of the Lord.

This chronology is interrupted just before the seventh seal is opened. This break in the flow of events actually occurs in chapter seven after only three verses. At this point, another inset begins by introducing readers to the 144,000 and the great multitude.

The original Bible manuscripts were written without chapter or verse divisions. These breaks were created centuries later by the English speaking translators. While their decision to end chapter six, at the point they chose, may have had a logical basis, it can also mislead readers. Confusion can occur because while chapter seven speaks of the 144,000 and great multitude, the first three verses are actually a continuation of events recorded in chapter six which describe occurrences leading up to the trumpet plagues. As the apostle John writes:

I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, **Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God** in their foreheads (Revelation 7:1-3).

After the events pertaining to the trumpet plagues in the above three verses, the chronological flow stops, and an inset section begins, describing the 144,000 and the great multitude. The fantastic story of these two groups continues until the account of the trumpet plagues begins again in chapter eight.

This inset actually begins in verse four where the perspective changes entirely. The vision suddenly moves from a time looking *forward* to when the servants of God need to be sealed, to a time *after* the act of sealing has taken place. The inset begins by revealing the total number only after they have all been sealed. As John writes:



And I heard the number of them which **WERE** sealed: *and there WERE* sealed an hundred *and forty and* four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:4).

Understanding the timing revealed in these verses is vital. There is a time gap between verses three and four. Verse three speaks of events that WILL occur—the future. Verse four speaks of that which HAS occurred—the past. In verse three the sealing needs to occur. Verse four reverses perspective, looking at a time after they have been sealed. Only then does John hear how many were sealed.

### ***The 144,000 are not Sealed Simultaneously***

If the reader is not careful to note this dramatic change of focus, it is possible to assume that the 144,000 are all sealed at once. It is vital that we are careful in our study of what God reveals in Scripture, however, not making assumptions.

Could it be that God has sealed the vast majority of the 144,000 down through the ages? It is possible that there are an unspecified number existing at the end of the age that must be sealed before His wrath begins? The parable of the laborers in the field, with some being hired to do God's works at the very end certainly demonstrates such a scenario (Matthew 20:1-16).

The Scriptures state that the 144,000 are sealed with God's Spirit. They are later described as servants of God, and the firstfruits. From this alone, it is clear that they are the first resurrection. There is only one conclusion that is reasonable. In fact, it is inescapable—the 144,000 are not sealed all at once!

In Revelation seven, verse three, the angel stops the flow of events so that the servants of God who are alive during the end-time can be sealed. They are then seals them to bring the total number sealed to God's predestined number of exactly 144,000.

Could it be that the exact number of those who will be sealed at the end time was not revealed to John for a specific reason? Perhaps that number could not be known when John wrote the book of Revelation.

Those who are sealed are chosen for their position by Jesus Christ, but their election is based on their obedience. Like Abraham, each person must be tested, and proven, to insure that he or she is qualified.

After the father of the faithful showed His willingness to sacrifice his own son, God then said, "Now I know." At that point, Abraham was chosen. He was assured a place of high authority and responsibility among the elect of God.

As with Abraham, God must know each Christian. He must test each person to see what he will do, and where his loyalty lies. In the same way that He worked with the ancient patriarch, God works with every person He has called down through the ages. He tests and proves His believers. Only a comparative few will be accepted. Many run the race, but not all receive the prize (I Corinthians 9:24).

For this reason, the number of available positions left to be filled within the 144,000 at the end of the age could not have been a set number. It could not be predetermined because not all who are called are chosen. Some fail to respond to the calling, others neglect it, and some actually reject it.

Further, some of those who will be sealed may be converted near the very end of the age

(Matthew 20:6,9). All of God's servants who are alive before the trumpet plagues occur will be sealed, and included as part of the firstfruits. As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, the total will then be 144,000, twelve thousand of each of the tribes of spiritual Israel.

When God speaks of the 144,000 being sealed, some of those He refers to were not yet born. He includes those who have been sealed from past history with those who will be sealed at a future time. God can do this because He speaks of things that have not yet occurred as though they had already happened (Romans 4:17). To Him it is just as good as reality. It absolutely will transpire—God has the power to make it happen (Matthew 22:32).

In Revelation 7:3, God reveals that He will seal the remainder of His servants before unleashing His terrifying plagues. Then, in Revelation 7:4, He switches the time frame, telling readers the total number who have been sealed from the beginning of time. The Almighty has limited that number. It is those who will be in the first resurrection—an exact aggregate, comprised of only those who marry Christ and rule with Him. Each of these will have been sealed with God's Holy Spirit in their own time, and after the last have been included, there will be a total of 144,000 who “were sealed” as the servants of God.

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# *They are Servants of God*

Key Two:

*But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God,  
ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.  
Romans 6:22*

**P**erhaps the least understood aspect of the Christian life is that of being a servant. As little children, many of us enjoyed the process of serving. We felt a sense of personal pride in being able to help Mom or Dad. However, as we matured, many of us became jaded as a result of our modern, materialistic society.

As a consequence, many adults today view serving as foolish, unsophisticated, or even demeaning. They carry a mental image of a servant as an individual with a broken spirit—lacking strong will, self esteem or sense of purpose. Servants are often regarded much like an old mule trudging through life without meaning, dignity or sense of destiny.

Absolutely nothing could be further from the truth! When properly understood, being a servant is one of man's highest aspirations. If we were to question Jesus Christ, "What is the best we can be?" He would most likely say, "A servant, of course."

## *The Source of Serving Self*

There was a time when serving was the only recognized way of life. The physical universe did not yet exist. Only heaven existed, populated by God and the angelic beings which He created. These angels were designed to enjoy God's way of life, and were intended to later serve mankind (Hebrews 1:14).

Lucifer was a leader among the angels, however, at some point after the creation of the physical universe, he decided that he would no longer serve God or His purpose. Instead, this former being-of-light decided that he wanted to be served rather than serve—to compete rather than cooperate. God actually reveals Lucifer's thoughts as he executed his rebellion against the Almighty. In his mind, Lucifer said:

I will ascend into heaven, **I will exalt my throne above the stars of God**: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will be like the most High** (Isaiah 14:13-12).

This beautiful and powerful spirit being influenced one-third of the angels to follow him in a rebellion against God. War in heaven ensued, and the effects of this revolt are still apparent. The destructive forces unleashed by Lucifer's insurrection are indelibly written in the heavens for all of mankind to see.

As scientists probe the depths of outer space, their modern telescopes find shattered moons, asteroids and dust where beautiful planets once existed. They observe massive black holes consuming everything around them, including light itself. This incredible devastation 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 the planet. The power and impact of this evil being is such that Scriptures refer to him as the god of this world (II Corinthians 4:4). Satan now sways the leaders of the world to act in accord with his values. Instead of ministering to citizens of their nations, tyrants such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein have abused their people to serve their own ambitions.

Because of Satan's influence, the resources of entire countries have been exploited—virtually raped for the benefit of the few, while the poor have languished. This story has been written in a river of blood as man has continually waged war to gain ever more power for himself.

The great swirling galaxies in the heavens, each empire that has come and gone on this earth, and every individual who has ever lived—all have felt the influence of the devil. The whole of physical creation reflects this fact. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles writes:

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

According to this verse, the invisible world of spirit can be understood by observing the physical. Within this context, consider the cells making up the human body. The harmonious existence of the cells in the body pictures how God intended man to live together in harmony within His Church—the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:4-27). Each cell is designed to serve the body's requirements. Their job is to retain the nutrients the body ingests and then release them on demand in the form of energy when the body needs them.

Just as the body's healthy cells picture God's way of working together in unity and mutual cooperation, diseases such as cancer portray Satan's way. Cancer cells take the nutrients that the body provides, but refuse to surrender them when needed. Instead of serving the body, these rebel cells make war on the body, growing ever larger, and taking all they can for themselves. Eventually, they drain the life from the body, killing both the host and themselves.

Likewise, many in our modern world live to take all they can for themselves. As a consequence of Satan's influence on modern society, many find the notion of being a servant abhorrent. Consider the Apostle Paul's depiction of our end time culture:

This know also, that in the last days, perilous time shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy . . . heady, high minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God (II Timothy 3:1-3).

Our modern society reflects a philosophy in which each person puts himself first. With each individual looking out exclusively for his own welfare, our culture has become one in which it is accepted—even expected—that people use others for their own gain. It is no wonder that book titles such as *Looking Out For Number One* have found their way to the top of the bestseller lists. One modern magazine even carries the short, but powerful title called *Self*.

When we take a hard look at our world, it is obvious that we have adopted Satan's self-

servant ways, but it will not always be like this. God is preparing a people who believe that serving others is the highest calling of all. God will eventually use these people to restore the way of service to humanity.

### ***The 144,000 are Champions of Service***

The 144,000 are servants! They have the distinction and honor of being called “servants of God.” The Apostle John records the words of the angel to say:

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

True Christians are called servants. Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and all the great men and women of the Bible were called “servants of God.” In the New Testament, the Greek word for “servant” is “*doulos*,” meaning a slave or one in subjection to another, and this is the very word that Paul uses to describe the greatest servant of all—Jesus Christ. He writes:

(Jesus) Made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him **the form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:7).

### ***The Example of Jesus Christ***

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus kept His last Passover with His disciples. As they sat down to eat, the disciples began arguing among themselves who should be the greatest. This was not the first time the disciples had engaged in arguments concerning self-promotion. For example, James and John once enlisted the help of their mother to ask Jesus if they could sit at His side in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:21).

Imagine how disheartening this must have been to Jesus during His final hours. Nevertheless, He used this dispute to teach a profound lesson about greatness. Jesus explained:

The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and **he that is chief, as he that doth serve**. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth (Luke 22:25-27).

After speaking these words, Jesus girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, knelt before His own disciples, and washed their feet. Christ explains that His followers should emulate His example:

If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For **I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you** (John 13:13-16).

The act of washing the disciples' feet spoke volumes about God's view of greatness. While man might view the great and powerful as those who ARE SERVED, God sees those WHO SERVE OTHERS as the greatest.

Jesus' entire life was dedicated to serving His Father and mankind. Perhaps the most graphic

demonstration of Jesus' submission to the will of the Father, and His willingness to serve, was evidenced on the eve of His crucifixion.

While in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed with intensely that if it were possible His Father would remove the cup containing the horror of His impending crucifixion. But even when faced with incredible suffering, Christ expressed the mind of a servant, stating, "Not My will, but Thine be done (Luke 22:42). He laid down His life to reconcile man to the Father (Romans 5:10).

Jesus Christ was the perfect example of a faithful servant. Far from being a life without dignity or purpose, His life has profoundly affected the entire world. In his book, *Improving Your Serve*, Charles Swindol writes:

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 (p. 160).

Jesus Christ was called the servant of God, and those who follow in His footsteps are also called God's servants. The 144,000 understand that serving is the Eternal's way of life, and they have dedicated themselves to serving both God and man.

### ***What is Required of Servants?***

The Bible states that a servant is one who is in subjection and obedient to someone or something more powerful than themselves. Being a servant implies humility and dependence upon one who is greater. The Apostle Paul illustrates this principle, writing to the Romans:

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, **his servants ye are to whom ye obey**: whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Romans 6:16)

Obedience is a critical factor. A servant of God is one who obeys God's law, and submits to the Almighty's authority in his or her life. Not everyone who claims to be a Christian is God's servant. Many who claim the title of Christian do so in word only—not in deed.

Far too many people, calling themselves Christian, have been deceived by the clever spin that Satan puts on God's truth. They have been misled by the false teaching that works are not required for salvation, and that God only requires accepting Jesus in one's heart. Warning against this kind of fallacy, the Apostle John writes:

Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is **a liar**, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth His Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we 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 those who are obedient to Him, and who keep His law. They know, and live by God's code of conduct as revealed in the Ten

Commandments.

### ***More than the Letter of the Law***

Obedience goes much further than the letter of the law, however. Once one grasps what it means to be a servant, one's whole perspective changes. A true Christian understands that his life is not his own. Christ bought and purchased us with His life. Paul writes:

Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? **For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God** in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

Realizing that they belong to the Almighty, God's servants strive to obey His will in every aspect of life. In the daily decisions they make, they continually ask, "What is God's will?" They seek to submit to the Almighty in what they say, what they do, what they eat, and even what they watch on TV or in the movies.

There is no reluctance on their part when they submit to God's law. Rather they love His law, and make a real effort to understand its intent and to apply it in every situation. The servants of God understand that everything belongs to God.

They realize that they are merely stewards of what belongs to God. They value and maintain the physical things that God has committed to them. The servant makes decisions on what to purchase with the money God gives them, realizing that it is actually His money and it is only temporarily entrusted to human care.

A servant also understands that his time and talents belong to God. God has given each person his or her various abilities, as well as twenty-four hours every day in which to use them. We are not to use that time and talent for ourselves alone. Instead, we should use each day to worship God in the way we live that day.

At work we should be serving God, as well as our employer. Socially, we give our time and talents to help all of God's children, and especially those who are less privileged. It is in this way that we fulfill God's law of love (James 2:8).

### ***God's Servants Work***

As servants of God, the 144,000 perform God's work. Jesus once told His disciples, "I must do the work of Him that sent Me" (John 9:4). Earlier, Jesus said that He must do the will of the Father, and "finish His work" (John 4:34).

Jesus had a work to perform. That work was multifaceted. It included revealing the Father (Matthew 11:27), preaching the gospel of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43), establishing His Church (Matthew 16:18), calling sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32), confirming the promises made to the fathers (Romans 15:8), and redeeming man from the consequences of sin (1 John 3:5).

These are just some things Jesus was commissioned to perform, as He did the will and the work of His Father. In like manner, striving to follow Christ, the 144,000 also do a work for the Almighty God.

### ***Jesus Leaves a Work for His Followers***

Jesus finished the work that the Father gave Him to do. While praying, shortly before His

arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus proclaimed:

I have glorified Thee on the earth: **I have finished the work** which Thou gavest Me to do (John 17:4).

Before Jesus died on the stake, as He commended His spirit to God, Jesus' last utterance was, "It is finished" (John 19:30). With these few but powerful words, Jesus Christ declared that He had successfully completed the work that His Father had given Him.

Jesus finished the work that He was commissioned to do. Then, He left a work that was to be done by His apostles and all of those who would follow later. That work was to continue until the very day of His return, and Jesus said that His servants would be blessed if they were found doing this word when He returned (Luke 12:43).

### ***A Two-Fold Commission***

The Scriptures reveal a two-fold work that Jesus gives His disciples to perform. The first mission is to preach the gospel of the Kingdom as a witness to all nations. So important is this task that Jesus declares the Kingdom of God will not be restored on earth until it is completed:

This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come (Matthew 24:14).

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

### ***Feed My Sheep***

The second commission concerns the nurturing of God's children. Christ reminded Peter of the work ahead:

Lovest thou Me more than these? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, **Feed My lambs**. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? He saith unto Him, Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, **Feed My sheep**. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed My sheep** (John 21:15-17).

With the words "Feed My sheep," Jesus announced the second great commission given to His New Testament Church. His servants were to spiritually feed and nurture those individuals who the Father would call into His Church. The importance of this aspect of God's work cannot be overstated. All of God's people need to be nourished to sustain them in their daily walk.

When writing to the Church at Rome, the Apostle Paul said, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God," (Romans 10:17). This is why God established a ministry: To "edify the saints"—to faithfully teach God's way of life by word and example. The ministers are to encourage and correct God's people. They are to build the faith of God's people. By feeding Jesus'



sheep, the ministry helps prepare Church members for the future Kingdom of God.

### ***How Do They Serve?***

It is not only the leaders of God's people who are called "servants of our God." God's entire Kingdom is made up of servants. His desire is to develop a servant family, therefore God designed the structure of His Church to reflect this institution. In this way, each of His children would profoundly affect one another, and learn to serve others.

True servants also seize opportunities to advance the cause of God's Kingdom. While some preach the gospel as a witness, others finance that gospel message through their tithes and offerings. Some anoint the sick, while others pray for the sick and offer words of encouragement. Some teach, and others visit widows and orphans.

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

### ***Servants of Our God***

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

Those who are counted among the 144,000 are those who have voluntarily surrendered their will to God. Those in this esteemed company love God's law, and obey His commandments. They are true servants of God, and they have dedicated their lives to living the way God would have them live, making decisions as He would, and giving to others of their God given time and talents.

The 144,000 are dedicated to finishing the work God has given them. They have the heart of a servant, seek not their own honor, and esteem others greater than themselves. They follow the example of Jesus Christ as the perfect servant. Therefore, they see their role as a position of great honor. They are not only servants now, but aspire to be servants in the world to come. This is why God has chosen them. He is looking for those who have developed the mind of a servant to help Him serve humanity in the future Kingdom. The 144,000 are a precise number that God has called for this purpose.

# *They are a Precise Number*

## Key Three:

*And I heard the number of them which were sealed  
and there were sealed 144,000.  
Revelation 7:4*

The noted scholar and Biblical commentator, Dr. E. Bullinger, makes a profound statement in the preface of his book, *Number in Scripture*. He writes, “There can be neither works nor words without number.” From the movement of a man’s hand, as he reaches out to help another, to the wavelength of his vocal chords as he speaks, numbers play a vital part in the operation of every part of our daily lives.

The Almighty God, who created our magnificent universe, is a being of supreme order and planning. In fact, He is a great mathematical genius who created numbers and the laws of physics with His great purpose in mind. As Bullinger points out, virtually everywhere man looks, nature reveals God’s brilliant use of mathematical equations in the physical laws of creation.

What may come as a surprise to some is that the Eternal also uses numbers in His spiritual creation. He created specific numbers to reflect principles and values, as well as time frames in the fulfillment of prophecy. The Bible reveals that there are different meanings that are assigned to various numbers. This pattern is unmistakably supernatural in its design and of great spiritual importance to those seeking God’s truth.

One of the most fascinating keys to understanding the identity and ultimate destiny of the 144,000 is the meaning of the unique number God has assigned to them. After recording that they were both sealed and servants of God, the Apostle John heard their specific number. He writes:

And I heard the number of them which was sealed: and there were sealed an **hundred and forty and four thousand** of all the tribes of the children of Israel (Revelation 7:4).

God assigned the exact number of 144,000 to this special group for a purpose. Since the Almighty designed specific numbers to have special meaning, this number must denote something profound. But what values, principles, or prophetic significance does this number represent?

### *Understanding the Meaning of Some Numbers*

First, consider the meaning of several important numbers as they are used in the Bible: The number **one** signifies **unity**. For example, a man and woman are to be joined together in marriage in order to become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). In like manner, Jesus explained that He and the Father were one (John 10:30). Additionally, Christ entreated the Father that He would unite the apostles and other followers in mind and heart. He prayed, “Make them one, even as we are one” (John 17:20-22). The Apostle Paul also described the Church as many members, but “one body” (I

Corinthians 12:12).

The number **two** pictures *division*. Unless two become unified in one mind, they will remain divided. The prophet Amos states that two cannot walk together “except they be agreed” (Amos 3:3).

Christians are encouraged to avoid division, and to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind” (I Corinthians 1:10). As the Apostle James explained that a “double-minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). In addition, if the testimony of two witnesses is not in agreement, it is considered an inadequate witness (Matthew 18:16).

The number **three** denotes a *form of completeness*. Two straight lines cannot form a complete geometric figure. But when a third line is added, a complete geometric shape can be formed. Jesus 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 involving three resurrections (Revelation 20:1-15).

The next number, **four**, pictures *a foundation on which to build*. As three lines can form a figure, four lines can form a rectangle, or square—a foundation capable of bearing great weight. There are four gospels upon which the New Testament was built. The first four Commandments, which show love toward God, are the foundation upon which the other six are based.

The number **five** pictures that which God adds to the foundation. This figure represents *God’s grace*, or His favor. The first five books of the Bible represent God’s law, which are His gift to mankind. God also showed His favor to Israel when He promised that “five of you shall chase a thousand” (Leviticus 26:8). Paul also stated that he would rather “speak five words with understanding than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (I Corinthians 14:19). Nearly every measurement in the tabernacle is a multiple of five, and the holy anointing oil had five parts (Exodus 30:23-25). The fifth kingdom is that of Jesus Christ, the Rock. He returns and smashes the other kingdoms, bringing His millennial reign to earth (Daniel 2:44).

After God’s grace, the number **six** represents that which *pertains to man*. Man was created on the sixth day (Genesis 1:26-31), and God gave man six days in which he was to do all his labor (Exodus 20:8-11).

A man called the beast in the Bible is destined to be the catalyst for the Great Tribulation. He has a specific number associated with his name. It is 666—three sixes. Three is the number of completeness, and six the number of man. Therefore, this number symbolizes the epitome of the worst that man can be (Revelation 13:18). This number can also be broken down into three (completeness), multiplied times two (division), and repeated three times. This reflects that the beast is completely divided, or separated from God.

The number representing *spiritual completion* is **seven**. Man’s number (six) plus God’s number of unity (one) totals seven. Man is complete only when connected with God. The great Almighty created the Sabbath and sanctified it on the seventh day of the week. The Sabbath denotes the week’s completion. The seven-day week also pictures God’s 7,000 year plan for mankind. Based on Psalm 90:4, and II Peter 3:8, it is believed that God has given man 6,000 years to rule on this planet before Christ intervenes to establish His Kingdom for the last thousand years.

God also created seven annual Holy Days. These days foreshadow His plan of salvation for all mankind (Leviticus 23; Colossians 2:16-17). The Bible also speaks of seven prophetic times in which God’s punishment for Israel would finally be complete (Leviticus 26:18). The number seven is also used throughout the book of Revelation, picturing the completion of God’s judgement on the

world. There are seven Churches, representing seven eras of the Church, leading up to Christ's return. There are seven seals, seven angels which blow seven trumpets, and the seventh trump completes the plan of God with the resurrection of His firstfruits (Revelation 11:15; I Corinthians 15:51-52).

**Ten** is the number portraying God's *divine basis for judgement*. The Eternal God gave the children of Israel the Ten Commandments, which constitute His perfect ethical and moral code for mankind.

God's flawless law defines both sin and love (I John 3:4; Matthew 22:36-40). God delivered Israel from Egypt, a type of sin, with ten plagues. God's law regarding finances includes instructions for tithing. The word "tithing" literally means "tenth" (Leviticus 27:30).

Finally, consider the number **twelve**, which represents *perfection in God's righteous government*. This number is used extensively by God in His governing of the heavens as well as the earth. First consider the seat of His government in heaven. He is surrounded by twenty-four elders—two sets of twelve (Revelation 11:16). The number twelve also plays a significant role in the government of God's people on earth. The nation of Israel consisted of twelve tribes, and each tribe constituted a regional government. Additionally, Israel was designed to be a model of God's government on earth—a witness to the gentile nations. Tragically, physical Israel failed in this mission. They were taken captive, and eventually became lost as far as secular history is concerned.

Jesus chose twelve apostles who would constitute the beginning of His government in the Church. When Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Jesus, committed suicide, the remaining apostles felt compelled to choose a replacement. Under the leadership of Peter, the apostles appealed to God to select an individual to fill this position. Matthias was chosen, bringing the number of apostles again to twelve (Acts 1:15-26).

The number twelve plays a prominent role in the governmental structure of both the nation of Israel and God's Church. These two governmental bodies will later be intimately connected in God's Kingdom and they are therefore inextricably linked to the 144,000.

The 144,000 are the Church, and they are numbered in twelve companies, each consisting of twelve thousand servants of God. The angel indicates that they also are the twelve tribes of Israel in which 12,000 are allotted to each tribe (Revelation 7:4-8).

Although John is made aware of the 144,000 before God's Kingdom is established on earth, it is clear that these people will play a prominent role in that Kingdom. But what part are they destined to play?

### ***Government in the World to Come***

The Bible describes a time in which Jesus Christ will return to the earth with great power and glory. He will restore peace and order, ruling with a rod of iron (Revelation 11:15, 19:11-16; Zechariah 14:9). Christ will establish His millennial government, and His faithful servants, called down throughout the ages, will be raised in a resurrection to rule with Him.

To insure that this newly created government will work in perfect harmony and cooperation, Christ created specific offices for each member of His millennial administration. For example, when the Apostle Peter asked Jesus what reward he would receive in the Kingdom, Christ responded by revealing an extraordinary destiny awaiting both Peter and the other apostles. Jesus said:

Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of

man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon **twelve thrones**, judging the **twelve tribes** of Israel (Matthew 19:28).

Although the apostles are currently in the grave awaiting a resurrection, these servants of God are promised that they will live again, ultimately serving God in His magnificent millennial government (I Corinthians 15:20; Revelation 20:4). Their future with Jesus Christ is inextricably connected to the 144,000.

## *The Significance of Numbers*

| <b>Number</b> | <b>Meaning</b>                         | <b>Examples</b>   | <b>Reference</b>   |
|---------------|--|---|--|
| 1             | Unity                                  | God<br>Apostolic unity<br>Marriage<br>The Church  | Dt. 6:4<br>Jn. 17:11<br>Gen. 2:24<br>I Cor. 12:12                      |
| 2             | Division<br>Enmity                     | Double-minded   | Jas. 1:8<br>Jas. 4:8   |
| 3             | Completeness                           | Deliverance<br>from death<br>Resurrections  | Mk. 10:34<br>Jonah 1:17<br>Rev 20:1-15                                 |
| 4             | A foundation on<br>which to build      | First 4 commandments<br>4 gospels   | Ex. 20<br>Matthew, Mark, Luke, John                                    |
| 5             | God's grace                            | 5 smooth stones<br>The 5 <sup>th</sup> empire   | 1 Sam. 17:40<br>Dan. 2:44  |
| 6             | Man                                    | Man created<br>Man labors   | Gen. 1:26-31<br>Dt. 5:13   |
| 7             | Spiritual perfection<br>and completion | 7 <sup>th</sup> day Sabbath<br>7 Holy Days<br>7 seals<br>7 trumpets<br>7 plagues<br>7 prophetic times | Gen. 2:2-3<br>Lev. 23<br>Rev. 8<br>Rev. 11:15<br>Rev. 16<br>Lev. 26:18 |
| 10            | Laws for judgement                     | Commandments<br>Tithing   | Ex. 20; Dt. 5<br>Lev. 27:30  |
| 12            | Perfection in<br>government            | 12 tribes of Israel<br>12 apostles<br>New Jerusalem   | Gen. 49<br>Mt. 10<br>Rev. 21   |

In addition, the twelve apostles will assist Christ. They are promised to each preside over one of the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel (Matthew 19:28). The Bible explains that in God's Kingdom, King David will rule over all Israel (Ezekiel 37:24). Under King David, the apostles will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of physical Israel.

It is also interesting to note that the number 144,000 is a factor of both twelve and ten—twelve times twelve, times ten, times ten, times ten. This reveals that these servants of God are destined to play a prominent role in God’s divine and perfect government, making judgements based on His law.

The 144,000 will include David, the apostles, and those who will be governing various nations and cities around the world. The tribes of physical Israelites, who will live into the millennium, will also fall under the jurisdiction of David and the twelve apostles.

The meaning of the number 144,000 now begins to become much more clear. In fact, it is all beginning to make real and practical sense. This is the unique number God has assigned to be His future spiritual governmental assistants who will rule under the authority of Jesus Christ! That ruling body will consist of exactly 144,000 spirit beings, who will assist Christ ruling first this earth, and ultimately the entire universe, from New Jerusalem.

### *A Governmental Headquarters for the Universe*

There is a destiny for the 144,000 that is even greater than that which will be enjoyed during the millennial rule. Their future includes sitting in high positions of government for all eternity. The ultimate seat of God’s government will be the New Jerusalem. The magnificent holy city will come out of heaven adorned as beautifully as a bride dressed for her husband. It will be an absolutely transcendent governmental headquarters in which Christ will be the King, and the 144,000, as the firstfruits, will reign with Him.

### *A City Inscribed with the Number of Government*

In order to see this glorious edifice, the Apostle John was carried away in the spirit to a “great and high mountain” (Revelation 21:10). The term “mountain” in Scripture is used to describe a government or a kingdom (Daniel 2:35). The New Jerusalem is the seat of God’s universal government, and it will be occupied by the greatest leadership team ever assembled in the history of the universe. That team will consist of the 144,000—God’s trusted servants.

Consider the city’s dimensions, and notice the number of perfect government repeatedly expressed in the measurements. It is a flawless **twelve thousand furlongs** long, **twelve thousand furlongs** wide, and **twelve thousand furlongs** high. If this city were a cube, as was the holy of holies in Solomon’s Temple (I Kings 6:19-20), there would be twelve outer edges, each one twelve thousand furlongs long.

The surface area of this city’s foundation would be **one hundred and forty-four million square furlongs**, or approximately 1,400 miles long, and 1,400 miles wide. The length would be approximately the distance between Los Angeles, California, and Dallas, Texas. The width would be about the distance between Phoenix, Arizona, and Calgary, Canada. The height would be an astounding 1,400 miles—1,300 miles above where satellites orbit in space today. Because of its monumental height, New Jerusalem is larger than any nation on the face of this earth!

The city is also surrounded by a wall **one hundred and forty-four cubits** high. Taller than a 20-story building, it has **twelve** foundations bearing the names of the **twelve** apostles. Additionally, these foundations are garnished with **twelve** types of precious stones. Access to the city is granted through **twelve** gates, which are made of magnificent pearl. The **twelve** gates are attended by **twelve** angels. On the gates are the names of the **twelve** tribes of Israel, and in the midst of the city the tree of life bears **twelve** different kinds of fruit.

## *New Jerusalem and the Number Twelve*

| <b>The New Jerusalem</b><br>Revelation 21  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| <b>Description</b>                         | <b>Reference</b> |
| 12 gates leading to the city               | v. 12            |
| 12 angels attending the gates              | v. 12            |
| 12 pearls constituting the gates           | v. 21            |
| 12 tribes written on the gates             | v. 12            |
| 12 foundations                             | v. 14            |
| 12 apostles on the foundations             | v. 14            |
| 12 precious stones                         | v. 19-21         |
| length of city: 12 thousand furlongs       | v. 16            |
| breadth of city: 12 thousand furlongs      | v. 16            |
| height of city: 12 thousand furlongs       | v. 16            |
| height of city wall (144 cubits; 12 x 12). | v. 17            |
| 12 manner of fruit on the tree             | Rev. 22:2        |

### ***Consider the Numbers***

New Jerusalem has the number twelve literally built into its structure. The number is actually used twelve times when describing the city. Twelve is the number of perfect government, and this reveals that New Jerusalem is a city designed for those who are perfectly qualified to govern!

While the number twelve is an intrinsic part of the New Jerusalem, it also points to who will inhabit this grand edifice. Destined to each be led by one of the twelve disciples, the 144,000 consist of twelve groups made up of twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel. In addition, their number is a factor of twelve, representing perfect government, and ten, picturing judgement based on God's law. Thus, only one conclusion is possible. The 144,000 have kept God's law, are qualified to govern, and will dwell in the New Jerusalem.



### ***New Jerusalem: The Residence of God***

Imprinted with the number twelve, and designed for those who will reign with Jesus, the Holy City is being built by Christ for those who attain the first resurrection. As Jesus said:

In My Father's house are many mansions. 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 unto Myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also (John 14:2-3).

The house with many mansions is New Jerusalem. It is prepared for those in His Church who attain the first resurrection. This is why both the Church and New Jerusalem are called the bride (Revelation 19:7-8, 21:2). The Church and the city are virtually the same entity and therefore they share the same magnificent destiny!

As the apostle John describes the interior of the city in considerable detail, he states that the main street in this city is made of pure gold. He relates that the appearance is “like transparent glass,” and that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life are allowed access to this city (Revelation 21:27). This means that the great city will be the home of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the saints where they will sit on glorious thrones governing the universe (Revelation 22:1-3).

The fact that God’s throne resides in this city is of enormous significance. Without apology, Jesus Christ declared that He shared in God’s throne. At the same time, He revealed that He would share His throne with others (Revelation 3:21).

This throne that Jesus speaks of is the very seat of His government. This means that the 144,000 are designated to assist in governing with Christ—first during His millennial rule on earth—then ultimately the entire universe from the breathtakingly glorious—New Jerusalem.

### ***Numerical Perfection***

The tables on pages 57 and 60 illustrate that God’s use of number in Scripture demonstrates a pattern going far beyond coincidence. This numerical pattern reveals an extraordinary design and a great master plan.

Because of the exceptional numerical precision used by God throughout the Bible, it must be concluded that the number 144,000 is literal, as opposed to symbolic. This also makes it clear that the number 144,000 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 man can be. That number is 144,000!

This number pictures a people who have learned to submit to the government of God in their life as they strive to live by His every Word. They obey God! These are those who are maturing spiritually and actively growing in character. They practice daily in order to overcome Satan’s influence and their own human nature (I John 2:16). They study God’s Word, meditating on how to apply His law.

The 144,000 are those who have followed God with the incredible hope of one day being a part of His government. They are those who attain the first resurrection, and rule with Jesus Christ. Such people are few indeed!

# *Are 144,000 Too Few?*

*Many are called, but few chosen.  
Matthew 20:16*

**A** very fitting phrase, describing the values in society today, is “bigger is better!” We see this trend everywhere in our culture. Corporations want greater production, bigger offices, and more profits. Employees want larger homes, bigger cars, and bigger pay checks. What is worse, however, is that this philosophy of bigger is better can even creep into, and infect, our spiritual lives.

For example, many churches now mirror the secular, corporate model. Pastors appear to be driven to seek bigger member lists, larger churches, and huge campuses. Too often this seeming obsession with numbers appears driven primarily by a desire to increase financial contributions.

Large numbers definitely have a deeply profound and powerful psychological effect, even on the religious mind. The greater the count, the more a sense of validation is felt by members and clergy alike. This perceived need for bigger numbers drives the leadership to seek more and more members, until today we have mega-churches. The thousands of people who attend these churches could never hope to know even a fraction of the members in the congregation they attend. Tragically, these huge ecclesiastical bodies are often held up as the model, and ministerial success measured by numbers.

One outcropping of our obsession with self-validation through numbers is our anthropomorphism of God. We make the Almighty in our own image, ascribing our values to Him. Church leaders, writers, and preachers propagate the idea that God is also driven by numbers—that He is desperately striving to save billions in the first resurrection.

Men may be impressed by large numbers or great stature, but when God chose King David, He did not look upon his size. Neither did David need an army to defeat Goliath. The Almighty God reveals this vital truth:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith 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 and standards are vastly different from our own. He is not obsessed with **quantity**. The Eternal is seeking **quality**. He is looking for those few people who seek His perfect, holy, and righteous character.

On another level, some make the mistake of thinking that Christ requires greater numbers to assist Him after He returns to the earth. This is absolutely not the case! He does not need more people to overthrow Satan, or to help Him rule the world. Nothing is outside His control. Luke records:

For **with God nothing shall be impossible** (Luke 1:37).

God is not trying to convert vast numbers of people in order to enlist their help in the Kingdom. Instead, He is creating leadership positions and making them available out of a desire to share that is born out of His divine love.

### ***God is Not Trying to Save the World Now***

Because the 144,000 have developed godly integrity during their lifetime, they will become spirit-born children of God, changed in composition to be like Christ (I John 3:2). This is an incredible gift to those who receive it, but is this destiny limited to only the 144,000? If so, then what about the approximately 40 billion 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 mankind at this time. In general, mankind has been cut off from God.

In the beginning, God created man and woman, and placed them in the garden of Eden, teaching them the right way to live. Satan then beguiled Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she persuaded her husband to eat also. Since that time, man has taken it upon himself to decide what is right and what is wrong.

By this act, man rejected God's rule. Consequently, God separated Himself from mankind, driving Adam and Eve out of the garden, blocking the entrance so that no man could eat of the tree of life. Except for a few called and chosen individuals, God removed Himself, severing His relationship with humankind, and cutting man off from an opportunity for eternal life until Christ returns to restore all things.

From Adam until Christ, only a few prophets and chosen people knew the true God. Billions throughout history never knew of the Father, Christ or His written Word. Consider ancient, pagan countries such as Egypt, Babylon and Persia. Think of the Canaanite people before the time of Moses and Joshua. These people never heard of Jesus. What about the people of modern lands such as Asia, Russia, Africa, or South America? Many grow up practicing a way of life diametrically opposed to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Consider the millions of infants who die every year due to disease, birth complications, or the unspeakable practice of abortion. These perish without ever learning about God, or having a chance for salvation.

Even the ancient Israelites were not offered salvation. God brought them out of Egypt with His great miracles, and entered into a covenant with them. That covenant never offered eternal life! It simply promised physical blessings for physical obedience. Millions of Israelites were never offered salvation. After Christ came to this earth, and was crucified for us, God still did not offer salvation to everyone. He prevented many from coming to Him. For example, the Apostle Paul explained that for the time being, God has blinded Israel (Romans 1:7). Christ spoke in parables so people would not understand (Mark 4:10-12).

The reality is that in our modern age, as many as three billion people have never even heard the phonetic utterance of the name, "Jesus Christ," let alone heard His gospel message about God's plan of salvation. God has excluded the vast majority of mankind from His truth and salvation during this age. Mankind has been cut off from Him since the garden of Eden. As a result, the masses have not been called to be a part of the 144,000. But that does not mean they are lost forever.

### ***Now Not the Only Time of Salvation***

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 Jesus Christ in this lifetime are lost for all eternity. The Bible repudiates such a belief. Shortly after His Galilean ministry, Jesus confronted a number of unbelieving Jews, presenting them with a truth that was as difficult for them as it is for many today. Jesus explained that man does not even have a choice in coming to God:

No man can come to Me, except the Father Which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

With these words, Jesus reveals that individuals can **only** come to Him if the Father in heaven specifically drafts them into His service. Further, only those drawn by the Father have a chance to be resurrected to life at the last trump. Jesus' words strongly imply that God is not calling everyone during this current age.

The Apostle Paul also taught that God was not calling everyone during this lifetime. Writing to the Church at Corinth, Paul explains:

**Not many** wise men after the flesh, **not many** mighty, not many noble, are called (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

Paul revealed that God is not calling everyone during this age. The time will come, however, when all will have an opportunity to know the King of the universe and to decide whether to submit to Him or not. Their opportunity will come.

### ***Two Harvests***

The Bible reveals that God has a plan of salvation which includes all mankind. It may surprise some to learn that this plan is revealed in God's Holy Days. These annual Sabbaths are rooted in the spring and fall harvest seasons. They are prophetic, foreshadowing events to come (Colossians 2:16-17). One of the most astounding truths revealed by these feast days is that there are two times of salvation, as pictured by the spring and fall harvests.

The first harvest is pictured by the Feast of weeks, or Pentecost. This feast is called "firstfruits" in Leviticus 23, and it was generally a relatively small crop. Regarding this harvest, God's people were instructed not to reap any of the spring barley crop until the first sheaf had officially been cut and offered to God by the priest.

At the end of the weekly Sabbath after the first day of Unleavened Bread, the ceremonial sheaf from the crop was cut down and offered to God. Beginning with this day, the people counted fifty days and then celebrated Pentecost.

This wave sheaf pictured Jesus Christ, who was cut down, buried, then harvested by rising to be accepted by God. Only after Christ was raised could the rest of the first harvest of souls take

place. Jesus had to die and be resurrected before the Holy Spirit was given on Pentecost, fifty days later.

Pentecost, which coincides with the early summer harvest, pictures the gathering of God's elect from the beginning of man's history until the return of Christ. These are they who have been called to rule with Him, and their entrance into God's Kingdom constitutes what the Bible refers to as the first resurrection. The Apostle John identifies this resurrection with these words:

And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years . . . This *is* the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

This resurrection is described as the **first**. The fact that there is a first resurrection reveals that there must be a second. This second resurrection is God's great harvest of souls, including the tens of billions of people who never truly knew God before Jesus Christ's triumphant return.

The Feast of Tabernacles, which takes place during the fall harvest, pictures the beginning of God's second harvest of souls. This is when Christ will again tabernacle with man.

This period, when Christ will tabernacle, or live with mankind, is during the thousand-year millennial rule on earth (Revelation 20:1-5). During the time of the Messiah's rule, vast numbers of individuals will be gathered into God's Kingdom.

The apostle John also states that when the thousand year Kingdom is finally completed, there will be a great resurrection of the rest of the dead (Revelation 20:5). The rest of the dead are the billions of people who were not yet called and never knew of God's marvelous plan for mankind.

The thirty-seventh chapter of the book of Ezekiel reveals that as a part of this resurrection, the whole house of Israel will be raised to a physical life. In this resurrection they will be flesh and bone, and therefore subject to what the Bible calls the second death. This prophesied resurrection of Israel reflects the great time in human history when all the rest of the dead will be raised.

At this resurrection, the rest of mankind will, for the first time, be introduced to the true God. Then they will decide for themselves if they will submit to God's authority or not. If they choose to live God's way, they will also enter into God's Kingdom as His spirit-born children along with the 144,000. This will be their chance for salvation, and many billions will become spirit-born sons and daughters of God.

Those not called in this lifetime will ultimately be given an opportunity to be in God's Kingdom, and have eternal life. However, they are not the firstfruits! They will not be Christ's bride, nor will they rule with Jesus Christ. That distinction is reserved for the 144,000.

### ***What about the Millions who Profess Christ?***

God is not trying to save the vast majority of people on the earth today. He will raise them at a later time, and give them the chance for salvation they never had. But today there are more than one billion people on earth who claim to be followers of Jesus. What about them?

Since the 144,000 make up the entirety of God's firstfruits, most professing Christians will not be included among them. The staggering truth is that nearly all of Christianity represents a faith that contradicts the very Bible it claims to follow. Most Christian denominations do not even

remotely resemble the New Testament Church begun by Jesus Christ.

Mainstream Christianity consists of a faith built on human tradition, pagan myth and superstition. Consider its festivals and holiday seasons. As beautiful as they may appear to some, their connection to God and His truth exists only in the minds of those who celebrate them.

God forbids dragging a tree into the home, decorating it, and then kneeling down to place gifts under its branches. His Word rejects such things as bunnies that bring baskets of eggs for little children. God clearly instructs His people not to copy the ways of the heathen (Jeremiah 10:2; Deuteronomy 12:30). Despite this profound injunction, professing Christians are still taught by their ministers that these pagan traditions are legitimate ways to worship the Almighty God.

Worse yet, many religious leaders teach that God's law is done away, and that Jesus accepts everyone, regardless of their spiritual condition. Judging by such modern preaching, tolerance is the greatest fruit of God's Spirit, and all that one must do is invite Jesus into his or her heart while continuing to live a life of sin.

Lost today are words such as "sin," "repentance," and "obedience." Little wonder that Christ predicted that when His Kingdom comes, many who profess to know Him will be shocked to discover that they are excluded. Jesus warns:

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. **Many** will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, **I never knew you**: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23).

Notice Jesus said that many—not some, not few, but **many**—would appeal to Him for entrance into His Kingdom. They will be shocked and horrified to find that Christ characterizes the Christianity they practice as "working iniquity." With these words Jesus makes it clear that many who profess faith in Him will not enter His Kingdom.

### ***What about True Christians?***

God is not calling the vast majority to salvation at this time. Furthermore, much of professing Christianity has been deceived, worshiping vain traditions instead of the true God. But what about true Christians? Are there only 144,000 true Christians throughout all human history?

The Scriptures reveal that God has designed His Kingdom to start small, but grow unbounded for eternity. Jesus likened the Kingdom to a mustard seed, which in the beginning is tiny and unassuming, but grows great (Mark 4:30-32). The Kingdom will start small, beginning at the first resurrection, and it will grow ever larger through the final resurrection and beyond (Isaiah 9:7).

Jesus referred to His followers as "a little flock" (Luke 12:32). The word "little" is "mikros" in the Greek. It is the root word from which we get "micro" today. It is the opposite of "megas," the word used to describe the great multitude. Jesus tells us that the Church will be "mikros"—very small.

### ***Many are Called but Few are Chosen***

Christ discusses the size of His Church in two places in Matthew. First, He discusses the parable of the vineyard.

In this story the laborers are called to the work at various times. Those who were called first, and worked the longest, complained that they were not paid more than those who were hired at the end of the day. Telling His listeners that the laborers were paid what was agreed upon, Jesus states:

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for **many be called**, but **few chosen** (Matthew 20:16).

Jesus made it very clear that only the **few** will be chosen. He also reiterated this truth for His followers in the parable of the wedding feast. There He makes reference to the first resurrection and the marriage supper that will take place in heaven. Christ explains that the Jewish people were the first to be called to the wedding. Because they did not respond to the invitation, the call went to the gentiles.

As the parable continues, we learn that of those who responded to His call, one was found at the ceremony without a proper wedding garment. The king ordered the improperly clothed individual be cast out of the wedding supper. Notice the profound implication of Christ's statement in which He relates the words of the king, saying:

Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, bind him, hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but **few are chosen** (Matthew 22:12-14).

In this parable, the king did not cast out the individual because he could not afford better clothing. It was because he did not develop Christian integrity.

A person's garment symbolizes their character. For example, righteousness is identified as white linen which is clean and pure (Revelation 19:8). The lesson is that no one will be allowed into the wedding supper unless they have Christ-like character.

Being called, understanding the truth, and being placed into the Church does not automatically mean that a person is chosen. Some are satisfied at being called and don't go on to perfection. Others treat their calling as a badge of honor, believing that it somehow makes them superior. These are no different than the self-righteous Pharisee who prayed to validate himself (Luke 18:11).

Being called does not make anyone superior. Rather, it means that an individual is invited to run the Christian race. He is called to a higher standard of righteousness, self-sacrifice, and love. Not understanding this, some who have been called are not passionately motivated to labor at making their calling and election sure. Tragically, these will find themselves excluded because they desired the pleasures of this life more than the Kingdom. They were called, but NOT chosen.

Consequently, Christ ends His parable with a vital lesson to those in His Church. He declares, "Many are called but **few** are chosen." Jesus explained this to His listeners then, but intended for it to ring in our ears today. Jesus weeds His garden, and removes those who do not produce. He states:

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore **by their fruits** ye shall know them (Matthew 7:16-20).

### ***Strive to be Called and Chosen***

God is calling men and women to bear spiritual fruit. Because this process is so repugnant to our human nature, few are even willing to enter the battle. For this reason, Jesus both encourages us, and warns us with this statement:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

The people of God will not somehow “drift” into the Kingdom. Instead, each is focused as they strive to overcome the pulls of human nature, the world, and Satan’s influence. They are those who desire to glorify God in their lives, and subordinate their the self in order to imitate Jesus. They pray, study God’s Word, and meditate on His truth, striving to keep the intent of His Commandments. Individuals such as these are few indeed!

### ***Early Church Growth***

Christ’s never planned for His Church to grow large. It was never intended to become a huge organization such as the great Roman church. Instead, God’s Church would continue to be a “little flock,” sometimes even struggling to survive due to the great persecution it would face.

It is true that during the early stages of the New Testament Church there was considerable growth. Luke, the first Church historian, recounts the phenomenal development of the early Church in the book of Acts. When describing the beginning of the Church on the historic day of Pentecost, he documents the inspiring growth that occurred. He writes:

Then they that gladly received His Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about **three thousand souls** (Acts 2:41).

Not long after this, Luke also records another example of how the Church continued to enjoy tremendous growth. The great Church historian states:

Howbeit many of them which heard the Word believed; and the **number of the men was about five thousand** (Acts 4:4).

The early Church appeared to experience extensive growth at the start, but this initial increase was only temporary. Soon afterward, the Church suffered great persecution, and few of those early adherents showed the real conversion necessary to suffer for Christ.

Most did not endure when things got tough. Many abandoned the faith in those early years



of trial, just as many will yet again renounce the truth at the end of this age (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Paul's second epistle to the evangelist Timothy illustrates this tragic fact. All those in Asia had turned away from him. The apostle writes:

This thou knowest that all **they which are in Asia be turned away** from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15).

Paul wrote a second time of his experience with persecution. It also ended with many abandoning the faith. The apostle explains:

At my first answer, **no man stood with me**, but **all forsook me** (2 Timothy 4:16).

At another point in his life, Paul speaks of the actual number of believers who had remained faithful. After a lifetime of work, entire church congregations had fallen away. Paul explains that just as there was a remnant of seven thousand in Elijah's time, he was also left with such a remnant (Romans 11:4-5).

There were far fewer Christians who were still running the Christian race than had started it. It is quite possible that the gentile converts at the end of Paul's work literally numbered only seven thousand.

Many of Paul's converts had failed to hold fast. Many ultimately abandoned the faith. This has been the history of God's true people down through the centuries. Many would experience a "calling." Vast numbers would start the race, but few would endure to the end.

Century after century, leaders and apostles have been sent. Churches have been raised up. Sometimes the groups amounted to many thousands at a time. However, historically, after the first generation of believers passed away, zeal waned. Doctrines were watered down, commitment softened and vast numbers fell away.

This truth is reiterated by Jesus Christ in the parable of the sower. Jesus explains that the gospel will be preached throughout the world. Like seed sown on various types of soil, it takes root, grows, and produces fruit in only a **few** cases (Matthew 13:3-23).

Jesus also says that within His Church, side by side with the true believers, there will be those who are not true converts. Jesus likens these to tares which are sown by an enemy. He warns that these tares will grow alongside the real wheat, looking like and professing to be Church members. Christ promises that in the end they will be destroyed (Matthew 13:24-30).

Not all who profess to be members of God's Church are true Christians. This holds true for ministers, as well as for lay members. As small as the true Church is, the number of genuine Christians within that Church 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, however, the actual number of true and faithful believers was always remarkably small.

Noah and his family were the only ones to escape the catastrophic flood. Only Lot and his family escaped God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb were the lone faithful servants during the Exodus. Throughout the Old Testament only a few prophets and

kings knew the true God.

Even with Messianic expectations running high, the actual number of the faithful who first accepted Jesus only numbered one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). Furthermore, when Jesus Christ returns with all His saints, God's Word reveals that the number of those saints will be relatively small. Jude, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote of Christ's return and invoked a prophecy by Enoch, in which he wrote:

Behold, the Lord comes with **ten thousands** of His saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed (Jude 14-15).

Jude does not say "billions" or even "millions." Rather, he measures the number of saints as "tens of thousands." The number of saints who will return with Christ to set up His millennial Kingdom will be numbered in the tens of thousands—There will be exactly 144,000!

The 144,000 are God's firstfruits, who will establish His government and rule as kings and priests on earth. They will be used by Jesus Christ to teach all people God's truth, and His plan. As the firstfruits, they will serve in a role similar to that of the firstborn in any family. The firstborn help raise the younger children and as a result enjoy a greater reward.

The 144,000 are made up of only 12,000 from each tribe of spiritual Israel. While few in number, once resurrected, they will be all that God requires in order to fulfill the role that physical Israel failed to perform. They will be His leaders—a nation of righteous priests—Israelites indeed.

# *They are of Israel*

## Key Four:

*He made known unto me the mystery which in other ages  
was not known unto the sons of men. That the gentiles should  
be fellowheirs and of the same body.  
Ephesians 3:3-6*

Throughout the pages of the Bible, the nation of Israel plays a prominent role in God's plan. It has even been said that the Bible is primarily the story of Israel. In the Old Testament, the Scriptures chronicle the path of the physical descendants of Jacob. In the New Testament, God introduces Israel's spiritual counterpart. Clearly the children of Israel are a people of destiny! It is their history alone that is inextricably woven throughout Scripture. Bible prophecy is primarily directed toward them.

When God's Word speaks of other nations, it does so only as those people come in contact with the nation of Israel. Even the poetic books such as Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes were originally written exclusively for Israel. The preeminence of this nation in the plan of God is unmistakable—but why?

Why is the nation of Israel so important to God, and what can be learned from the relationship He has had with these people? Understanding God's purpose for Israel is paramount to understanding His plan for all mankind. It is also essential to understanding the identity and destiny of the 144,000!

Against this backdrop, the book of Revelation reveals a fourth key of enormous significance. Speaking to the Apostle John, an angel states that the 144,000 are comprised of Israel:

I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the **children of Israel** (Revelation 7:4).

Notice that the 144,000 are "of the children of Israel." The story of the children of Israel is one of the most fascinating ever told. The blueprint for their part in God's plan of salvation was envisioned before the foundation of the world, and the God who directs all history reveals His purpose for them within the pages of the Bible (Hebrews 4:3; I Peter 1:20).

God began to fulfill His plan for Israel with the patriarch Abraham. He will consummate it with the establishment of spiritual Israel, who will one day be crowned as ruling kings—a royal priesthood in the New Jerusalem.

### ***The Birth of a Nation***

The story of Israel begins in the book of Genesis when God first called Abraham. At this

time in Abraham's life, he was in Mesopotamia in a place called Ur of the Chaldees. In the twelfth chapter of the book of Genesis, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe invites Abraham to become part of an extraordinary plan. In order to participate, Abraham is required to forsake the life and family he has always known, and move to a place that is totally unfamiliar.

What God was asking Abraham to do was to enter an unknown world. Such a step would take a great deal of faith. Essentially, God was telling Abraham, "Trust Me!" God then explained what He was prepared to give to this Old Testament patriarch in consideration of that trust. Notice God's seven conditional promises to the father of the faithful.

The LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).

The Scriptures reveal that Abraham accepted God's invitation and, acting in faith, he did as he was directed. This was not the only time God would test Abraham's faith, however. Perhaps the greatest test of a man's trust in his God was presented to Abraham when God instructed him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2-10).

After Abraham offered up his only begotten son, God made His promise unconditional. It was now a guaranteed reality. The children of Abraham would inherit the birthright blessings of national prosperity. And more important, the Messianic seed would come from his heritage.

After this, Isaac married Rebecca. She bore him two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the first born. Disrespecting his birthright, Esau sold it to Jacob for a mere bowl of soup. At the instigation of his mother, Jacob then deceived his father into officially giving him Esau's birthright blessing. Consequently, Jacob became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel and Esau became the progenitor of the Edomites, most of which now reside in Central Asia and Turkey. Since Esau took wives of the line of Ishmael, many consider them to be among the Arab peoples today (Genesis 36:9; Genesis 28:9; Psalm 83:7).

After this deception, Jacob feared for his life. Thus he fled to his mother's homeland. On the way, he was met by God in a dream in which the Eternal reaffirmed Jacob's birthright promise. Jacob then went on to work for Rebecca's brother Laban, who tricked him, much as Jacob had deceived his father Isaac. Learning from this lesson, Jacob continued to work hard. He continued to live God's way. As a result, he was blessed with considerable wealth, before returning to his home.

As Jacob made his way back to the land of Canaan, a being appeared to him. The two wrestled until the break of day. Refusing to give up, Jacob prevailed in this contest of will. He was renamed Israel, which means "prince of God." Jacob later realized that, incredibly, he had wrestled with God and lived to tell about it (Genesis 32:24-32).

Jacob and his sons would now forever carry the new name, Israel. Each of his twelve sons married and multiplied to form separate tribes of Israel. Reuben, who was Jacob's firstborn, seduced his father's concubine, thereby disqualifying himself from the birthright promise. As a result, the blessing went to Joseph, the firstborn of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph was later sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He was carried away captive to Egypt.

God blessed Joseph tremendously in Egypt, and he became co-ruler with Pharaoh, marrying the king's daughter and fathering two children. Each of Joseph's two sons became separate peoples, carrying the name Israel and receiving the birthright promise given to Jacob. The younger son, Ephraim, was promised that his progeny would become a company of nations, while the elder, Manasseh, was to become the single greatest nation on earth (Genesis 48:10-20).

Joseph's offspring were prophesied to become a colonizing people. They were promised the material blessings of heaven and earth. They would be protected in war. They would be blessed with a vast population. Judah, father of the Jewish people, was given the scepter promise that the Messiah would come through his line (Genesis 49:10, 22-24).

Until Joseph's death, Israel's entire family prospered in Egypt. However, there arose a Pharaoh that viewed Israel as a threat and made them slaves. The children of Israel spent four hundred years in bondage until God sent the prophet Moses to miraculously lead them to freedom (Acts 7:6). The Israelites were then given the law of God, but they disobeyed Him and wandered in the wilderness for forty years.

When the children of Israel finally entered the promised land, they called the area after their father's name—Israel. Many Students of the Bible today, although familiar with the history of Israel, still misunderstand the modern identity of these ancient, chosen people of God.

### ***Not all Israelites are Jews***

Since its formation in 1948, the Jewish homeland in Palestine has been called "Israel." But the Jewish people are NOT called Israel in the Bible. They are only a single tribe—one of twelve tribes comprising the whole nation of Israel. The Jews are the descendants of Jacob's son—Judah. This means that all the Jews are Israelites, but NOT all Israelites are Jews.

This fact is of extreme importance when examining prophecy, because the Jews are identified as a distinct people in the Bible. They, with most of the tribe of Levi and some of Benjamin, separated from the rest of the tribes of Israel after the death of Solomon. The house of Judah actually went to war with the house of Israel. Notice the record of the kings:

When Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled **all the house of Judah**, with the tribe of Benjamin, a hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, **to fight against the house of Israel** (1 Kings 12:21).

Judah and Benjamin made war on Israel. Israel's king, Jeroboam, fearing that any tie with Judah would result in a lack of loyalty to him, ordered the place of worship changed from Jerusalem to Bethel and Dan in the north. Presumptuously, Jeroboam placed pagan idols in these two locations and changed the days of worship that God had ordained. This is recorded in 1 Kings 12: 25-33.

### ***Israel Lost to History***

This political move by the king sent the northern tribes of Israel spiraling downward into a terrible religious apostasy that ended in severe punishment from God. Israel was taken captive by Assyria, and relocated to Persia. The Persians were then placed in the land of Israel where they came to be known as Samaritans. The dispossessed Israelites eventually migrated to the north and west, but as a result of abandoning the Sabbath which was God's identifying sign, they became lost to

secular history (Exodus 31:13).

About one hundred years later, Judah also slid into a similar apostasy and they experienced a similar fate. The Jewish people were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Finally, after seventy years the captive Jews were allowed to return to their land in order to fulfill the prophesy that the Messiah would be born of them. After 70 A.D., Judah was again scattered among the nations, like her counterpart Israel. Many Jewish people continued to observe God's Sabbath, however. Consequently, they did not lose their identity, as did their sister Israel.

The location of the ten tribes of Israel was lost to secular history, but not to God. The Eternal knows exactly who and where these people are. He prophesied what would occur to each of the tribes in the last days (Genesis 49). Furthermore, during the time of the first century Church, God directed letters to be sent to these scattered peoples (James 1:1).

God knows where the people of Israel migrated. He promises to bring them back to Jerusalem when He returns to rule the earth (Isaiah 27; Jeremiah 30-31; Ezekiel 20). He will reunite the ten lost tribes with Judah, and they will once again be called Israel (Hosea 1:11). God will bless them, and they shall become a great people. They are, however, not the Israel the apostle refers to as the 144,000.

### ***The 144,000 are Not Physical Israel***

Understanding the identity of Israel today has enabled many to grasp the meaning of many end time prophecies. Unfortunately, knowing this truth has also led some to incorrectly conclude that the 144,000 are physical Israelites living at the end of the age.

Their belief is that God must protect 144,000 Israelites from His wrath in order to fulfill His promise to reunite Israel and Judah once again in Palestine in the Kingdom. Although God did foretell that He would bring Israel back to her original land after the Great Tribulation, there are two reasons why the 144,000 can not be physical Israel.

First, the Scriptures reveal that the millennial return of Israel to the promised land is far greater than the Egyptian Exodus. Consequently, those brought back during the Kingdom will undoubtedly number far more than 144,000.

God specifically foretells this future gathering of physical Israel. He also depicts their transportation back to the promised land. The prophet Jeremiah writes:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book. For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and **I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it** (Jeremiah 30:1-2).

When God brings the peoples of Israel and Judah back from their bondage after the Great Tribulation, it will be an awe inspiring miracle. He likens it to the great Exodus under the leadership of Moses. Jeremiah explains this latter re-gathering of the tribes in the following way:

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, the**

**LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither He had driven them:** and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the LORD, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks (Jeremiah 16:14-16).

After Jesus assembles the captive Israelites back to the promised land, men will no longer refer to the ancient Exodus as a great and memorable event. Instead, they will recognize as paramount the miraculous millennial deliverance in which Jesus Christ brings the scattered Israelites back to the Holy Land. This latter return will be a much greater event than the massive Egyptian Exodus.

Scripture tell us that during the first Exodus six hundred thousand men came out of Egypt (Exodus 12:37). If women and children were included in this count, the estimated number would be more than two million!

If the return of scattered Israelites from all over the world is more memorable than the original Exodus, their number will likely exceed two million. Therefore the 144,000 cannot be those physical Israelites that God brings back to Jerusalem after the tribulation.

The second evidence that the 144,000 are not physical Israel is the fact that the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are excluded from the list of tribes that make up the 144,000 (Revelation 7:5-8). When Christ returns and restores all Israel as a nation, Ephraim and Dan are included in the allotment of the land. Ezekiel records this allotment, saying:

Divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel . . . From the north end to the coast of the way of Hethlon, as one goeth to Hamath, Hazar-enan, the border of Damascus northward, to the coast of Hamath; for these are his sides east *and* west; a *portion for Dan*. And by the border of Dan, from the east side unto the west side, a *portion for Asher*, and by the border of Manasseh, from the east side unto the west side, a portion for **Ephraim** (Ezekiel 47:21-48:5).

When Christ restores physical Israel to their land, the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are among the returnees. They receive their portion of the land. But these two tribes are omitted in the list of the 144,000! This indicates that those revealed in Revelation seven are NOT physical Israelites returning to Palestine. But then, who are they?

### ***Not Two Groups of 144,000***

The 144,000, revealed in Revelation, chapter seven, are not a different people than the resurrected saints in chapter fourteen. As demonstrated earlier, chapter seven calls the 144,000 “servants of God.” Then, later in this book, Moses is mentioned as being God’s servant (Revelation 15:3). Further, the Apostle John actually states that his vision is written to the “servants of God.” After this, the messages are given to the churches, which are comprised of Christians (Revelation 1:1-3:22). Therefore, the servants of God are converted persons.

Chapter seven also describes the 144,000 as sealed in their foreheads, and they are identified with the number twelve. Elsewhere, the Scriptures state that it is Christians who are sealed with the Holy Spirit (II Corinthians 1:22). Further, the number twelve is a multiple of the measurements of New Jerusalem— God’s future governmental headquarters. Therefore, the 144,000 described in

chapter seven have God's Spirit. They are His servants. Their destiny is the first resurrection. They will rule with Christ. The fact that the 144,000 are called servants of God, are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and are identified by the number twelve leaves little doubt! They cannot be a separate group of physical people who are different from the 144,000 shown in chapter fourteen. They are the same exact people, but they are described at different times. In chapter seven, they are shown before the resurrection, while Revelation, chapter fourteen, describes them after they have been changed by the resurrection.

### ***Understanding God's Purpose for Israel***

It is clear that the 144,000 are not comprised of physical Israel. Could it be then that there is another Israel that the angel refers to when addressing the 144,000? God did design a duality within His plan of salvation. There is first a physical representation of a spiritual fulfillment to come. God made man a physical creature, but will later recreate man of spirit. There was first a physical Adam, and then a second, spiritual Adam (I Corinthians 15:45). God created a physical temple on earth to reflect the spiritual temple in heaven (Galatians 4:26). There is also a physical heaven and earth, which will one day yield to the new heaven and earth.

In like manner, God's great plan of salvation called for there to be a physical Israel that would precede the spiritual Israel. Long before there ever was a physical universe, the great Almighty God envisioned a magnificent, fabulously beautiful headquarters city populated with beings like Himself. These great spirit beings would administer His love, and His law throughout the creation. He would call them "Israel." They would be princes of God, having prevailed with Him. God would ultimately redeem them from the corruption of this physical earth.

To fulfill His vision, the Eternal created the vast physical universe. He singled out the tiny planet earth, where He created the various plants and animal life. Then, God created the first man, Adam, and the woman, Eve, to inhabit His wondrous creation.

Later, He called Abraham from the children of Seth to be the father of His faithful overcomers. From Abraham's seed, God chose Jacob, and through him the twelve tribes of Israel. God then took Israel into Egypt for four hundred years before delivering them from their bondage. Israel wandered forty years in the Wilderness of Sin before God brought an entirely different generation into the promised land. God performed all of this with the physical people of Israel as a living illustration for spiritual Israel (I Corinthians 10:6,11).

### ***Physical Israel Pictures God's Church***

God did not call the Israelites out of Egypt for the sole purpose of bestowing upon them the benefits of being His chosen people. They were called by God for a specific mission. The Israelites were to fulfill a part of God's plan that is more transcendent than they, or us, could ever have imagined. He called physical Israel to picture another people who would later be called the true "chosen people" of God. The twelve tribes were a living, historical, and symbolic type of God's Church, from which the Eternal would redeem the 144,000—spiritual Israelites who are destined to be an example for all mankind.

For this reason, ancient Israel was allowed to be taken captive in the perverse, pagan nation of Egypt. They were redeemed from their bondage by the Passover lamb, picturing Christ's saving sacrifice. They left Egypt, and wandered through the Wilderness of Sin on their way to finally possessing the promised land.



Physical Israel pictured a people Christ would later call out of this corrupt world. They are a people who spend their lives wandering in a Wilderness of Sin. Instead of eating manna, which pictured Jesus Christ, spiritual Israelites literally partake of Jesus daily in their prayer, worship, and study of His Word as they struggle to overcome sin. Finally, they would be delivered from the bondage of this world and enter the promised Kingdom of God.

The magnificent drama of the Exodus, with its corresponding Holy Days of Passover and Unleavened Bread, was played out by a cast of millions. It was a drama played out on a massive scale to picture something of supreme importance to a people who would come later, and who would understand. Paul stressed this vital truth to the Corinthian Church, stating:

Now all these things happened unto them (Israel) for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11).

The experiences of ancient Israel were an example for God's Church at the end of the age. The Church is true Israel—a spiritual nation. This new spiritual nation is not restricted to the descendants of physical Israel, however. With the resurrection of Christ, believing gentiles were accepted into the household of faith. This was shocking to the early Church, but eventually it was understood and accepted. The apostle appointed to the gentiles writes:

For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye (gentiles) are no more strangers and foreigners, but **fellowcitizens with the saints**, and of the household of God; And are built upon 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, who resisted the concept that gentiles could be included as a part of God's people. Even the early Christians did not understand what God was now doing with those who were not of the Jewish races. Paul explains that this knowledge had previously been a mystery, but is now revealed:

That the **gentiles should be fellow heirs**, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel (Ephesians 3:6).

Now Gentiles can be made a part of Christ's body. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul explains to the gentiles in the Church that they are grafted into spiritual Israel. He uses the analogy of an olive tree to make this clear:

Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded . . . And if some of the branches (Israel) be broken off, and thou (gentiles) being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them . . . Boast not against the branches . . . For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that **blindness** in part is **happened**

to Israel, until the fullness of the **gentiles be come in** (Romans 11:7-25).

Gentiles are no longer a separate tree. They are not cut off from Israel, and given a different set of rules to live by. They have actually been grafted into Israel, but not physical Israel. They have become a part of spiritual Israel—the Church of God! The Apostle Paul explains:

For they are **not all Israel**, which **are of Israel**: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children (Romans 9:6-7).

True Israelites are not those who are physical descendants of Abraham. The true Israelites are those who belong to Christ. Paul writes:

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

Abraham had many physical descendants, but from God's perspective he is actually the father of all those who are faithful. Regardless of race, individuals who choose to follow the same path of faithful living are now considered the ancient patriarch's family.

Jesus made a similar comment about His family. While surrounded by people inside a house where He was teaching, one in the crowd said to Him that His mother and family stood outside and they desired to have His ear. At this, Jesus said:

Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For **whosoever shall do the will of My Father** which is in heaven, **the same is My brother, and sister, and mother** (Matthew 12:48-50).

Christ made it abundantly clear that His family are those who seek to do God's will. They are the Israel God envisioned before there was a universe. This Israel is not limited to the physical descendants of Abraham, nor to those who perform the rite of circumcision.

During the first century, the Apostle Paul repeatedly had to deal with this issue. Teaching that, in order to become a Christian, new converts had to first become a Jew through the process of circumcision, false teachers had polluted the gospel. This controversy raged in the Church until it was finally settled by a special conference for this purpose (Acts 15).

Prior to this special conference, Paul labored tirelessly to help Christians understand the fact that God is now working with an Israel that is not physical—not from a specific blood line. The new Israel is composed of persons individually called of God and given His Holy Spirit—converting their mind. Paul explains that circumcision is a matter of the heart and mind, not of the flesh:

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; either *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that of the heart**, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God (Romans 2:28-29).

Circumcision, performed on the physical descendants of Abraham, only pictured that which

was to come spiritually. It foreshadowed a people whose heart was spiritually open to God. Paul explains this principle:

**We are the circumcision**, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3).

The Israel of God is not merely the physical lineage of Jacob. True Israelites are specific individuals, Jewish or gentile, who live by God's teachings. Paul explains:

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

### ***More Proof from the Apostles***

When God first reveals the number of the 144,000, He states that they are of the "children of Israel." God then breaks this number into a hierarchy of 12,000 in each tribe. He also reveals who will lead each of these twelve tribes.

Christ makes it clear that He plans to place His twelve apostles into governmental positions in the Kingdom. He promises that they will each sit on a throne ruling over a particular tribe of Israel:

Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a Kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; That ye may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom, and **sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel** (Luke 22:28-29).

This is an absolutely wonderful reward for the apostles. After the glorious return of Jesus Christ, He will search out and bring back the various tribes from their captivity. As their King, He will resettle them in the land surrounding Jerusalem, assigning each apostle a position to represent one of the specific tribes in world government.

In this context, it is important to consider that the each of the apostles were not from the specific tribe over which they will one day rule! Within the twelve, there were some who were related by birth. For example, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and James, the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus were three sets of brothers. Therefore, in each of these three sets, the brothers would share the same genealogical background. Both would be from the same tribe, but which ones?

From the time of the war between Israel and Judah, most of the priestly tribe of Levi, and some of the tribe of Benjamin allied with the Jewish people. Having set up residence within certain areas of the land of Judea, they were often considered Jews by those around them. However, while Matthew, who is called Levi, may have been from a Levitical background, it is likely that since the others resided in the same general location where Benjamin settled that most of the apostles were of the tribe of Benjamin.

J. H. Allen makes an interesting observation about the lineage of the apostles. It is his contention that all but one were from the tribe of Benjamin. He writes in his book, *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright*:

Although Benjamin was with the kingdom of Judah, they were the children of Rachel, and differed much from the characteristic Jew, both in looks and in speech. The Galileans were

Benjaminites: hence all the apostles of Christ except Judas, were Benjaminites for they were Galileans; and while Christ was in the Judgement Hall, some of those who stood by said to Peter, surely thou art one of them, for thy speech betrayeth thee (P. 288).

This evidence indicates that the lineage of the twelve apostles do not physically represent each of the tribes of Israel. In almost every case, an apostle will be made ruler over a tribe to which he was in no way physically connected. The lineage of the apostles reveals another proof that the 144,000 are spiritual and not physical Israel.

The inescapable conclusion is that the 144,000 are the “true Israel”—the Israel of God, His Church. They are not all physical Israelites. Instead, they are individuals from all around the world—Israelites and gentiles. All these people are then grafted into the spiritual tribes of Israel. They are specifically assigned to them by Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Israel is the nation, assembly, and Church comprised of those who live the way of the Eternal. As the Apostle Peter explained:

*Ye are* a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light: which in time past *were* not a people, but *are now the people of God*: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (I Peter 2:9-10).

Physical Israel can no longer claim the title of God’s chosen people. Instead, God’s chosen people are now individuals, from every walk of life, whom the Father has drawn to Christ (John 6:44). They are His Church. They have been drafted from every corner of the world and from every age. It is these who comprise the 144,000.

God loves physical Israel just as He does all of mankind. The Eternal God does not put great value on material things, except as they can be used for His great spiritual purpose. All that is corporeal, even including a specific race of people, is only temporary.

The physical world was created to be a training ground for mankind—a place to develop the spiritual qualities of God. The Eternal’s ultimate desire is that all mankind develop righteous, holy character and godly love as a part of their being.

For this reason, God’s calling of physical Israel was not an end in itself. Those ancient people were chosen to perform an incredible service to all mankind. They would first serve as an example for spiritual Israel, the Church that He would build.

This is not be the end of God’s plan for Israel, however. They will once again be chosen fulfill the Eternal’s purpose. Jesus will come back to this earth with His saints. He will gather the remaining Israelites from around the world and return them to the promised land. Then, Christ and the 144,000 will teach them God’s way. Ultimately, Israel will become a nation of great light to the entire world (Zechariah 8:23, 14:16-21).

The 144,000 are true Israel—the Israel of God! They are the Church that Christ promised to build and which ancient physical Israel only foreshadowed. Therefore, their example is meant for us today. But what exactly are we to learn from their example?

# *Lessons from Israel*

*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning;  
and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.  
Proverbs 1:5*

The renowned philosopher, George Santayana, once commented, “Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it.” Undeniably true, this statement reflects one of the fundamental purposes of God’s Word. He inspired much of the Bible to be a history lesson for mankind.

The history of the Bible focuses almost exclusively on the ancient nation of Israel. Whether the stories are about the heroes of faith, the most wicked despots, or terrible heretics, God intends for Christians to learn important lessons from their examples. The Apostle Paul writes:

Now all these things happened unto them (Israel) for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come (I Corinthians 10:11).

The millions of Israelites who lived through the Exodus experienced the same kinds of sufferings, joys, hopes, and dreams that we all undergo. But their lives had a transcendent meaning that they never understood. Their life experiences were preserved as lessons for God’s people who would live at the end of the age. We are that end time generation, and we need to learn the lessons!

## ***Symbolism in the Exodus***

There is much to glean from Israel’s example. Consider how the types and symbolism of the Exodus mirror the Christian experience. Israel of old pictured spiritual Israel, the Church. Satan, the devil, is pictured by the Pharaoh, who controlled a vast and powerful, but corrupt, political and religious system.

Moses and Aaron both worked true miracles. At the same time, they contended with Janes and Jambres, the two magicians of Pharaoh’s court. These tricksters performed deceitful “lying wonders.” However, God’s true miracle workers foreshadow the two witnesses who will one day face the beast and false prophet of the end times.

Egypt is a type of this sin-filled world. The slavery ancient Israel experienced pictures each Christian’s personal enslavement to the bondage of sin. Physical Israel partook of the Passover sacrifice, and was made free to become a nation of priests in the promised land (Exodus 19:6). However, it is the Church, that accepts Christ as the Passover, in order to be free from the bondage of sin (I Corinthians 5:7). Through Christ’s sacrifice, Christians leave sin behind, and it is they who

will actually become a nation of priests (Revelation 5:10).

On the original Passover, the ancient Israelites placed lamb's blood on the door posts at the entrances of their homes. But for spiritual Israel, the blood of Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice is pictured by the wine the Christian places in his mouth, which is the entrance of our tabernacle, our body (II Corinthians 5:1). The death angel's mission pictured the fate of those who do not have Christ's blood to protect them.

Israel of old was delivered from their slavery in Egypt by plagues that literally broke the back of the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. The final plagues at the end time parallel those of Egypt. They also precede the freedom of God's people from Satan's wicked system.

The waters turning to blood, the impenetrable darkness, and the terrifying hail that destroyed Egypt all portray the horrific plagues to come upon this world in the future. They picture God's terrifying plagues occurring from His end time wrath.

The Israelites left Egypt on the first day of Unleavened Bread—the day when Israel was commanded to be without leaven. The leaven pictures vanity, pride, and all that corrupts this sin-filled world. The Israelites leaving Egypt on this day pictures the Christian first accepting the sacrifice of Christ, and then beginning the process of leaving sin behind.

Israel of old was taken out of Egypt on the “wings of an eagle” (Deuteronomy 32:10-11). This symbolism foreshadows the flight of the end time Church, which will be taken on the wings of an eagle to a place of safety preceding the three and one-half year Tribulation and Day of the Lord (Revelation 12:14). And just as the Red Sea opened for Israel and closed on Pharaoh, destroying the pursuing army, God promises that the earth will open to swallow the flood—an army—that chases after the Church (Revelation 12:15).

The children of Israel also went through the Red Sea on the last day of Unleavened Bread, exactly seven days after beginning their journey. Since the number seven symbolizes completeness, this dramatic event pictures the Christian's baptism, and his or her commitment to leave sin completely behind (I Corinthians 10:1-3).

The wandering of Israel in the Wilderness of Sin is also a type for believers today. Those who are now called and chosen must wander through the wilderness of a sinful world. As ancient Israel continued her journey, she ate of the manna that God provided daily. As Christians journey on their way toward the Kingdom, they must partake daily of the heavenly manna—Jesus Christ, “the bread of life” (John 6:35).

Also notice that the Israelites who first fled Egypt did not enter the promised land. It was a later generation who actually entered the land.

This portrayed that physical Israel was not able to enter into the promised, spiritual Kingdom. It was a later generation, spiritual Israel, who will finally enter the Kingdom of God (Hebrews 4:1-11).

The entrance of physical Israel into the promised land is also a type. This event foreshadows the saints inheriting God's Kingdom one day. Notice that it was Joshua, not Moses, who led Israel into the land. This is of great significance because the name “Joshua” in the Hebrew language is the same name as “Jesus” in the Greek. Joshua was a great general who led Israel in a holy war against false gods and all who were in opposition to the Almighty God. Joshua pictures the future conquering Jesus, who will return with “ten thousands” of His saints to establish the Kingdom and take over the entire world.

The fall of Jericho is also prophetically significant. Jericho was the first city conquered by the Israelites when they entered the land. The towering walls fell after the blowing of trumpets for seven days. This event represents the future fall of Babylon, the first city to be destroyed at the onset of the Kingdom of God. After the seventh trump, the angels cry, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Revelation 14:8). The governments of this world become Christ's and His saint's.

After Babylon falls, Christ will destroy the remainder of the wicked system presently controlling this earth. He will systematically eliminate everything that is contrary to God's way of righteousness and love. He will set up His Kingdom, and begin to teach the way of God throughout all the world (Zechariah 14:16-19). The prophet Habakkuk describes this wonderful time, saying:

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14).

Habakkuk's inspiring prophecy of God's coming Kingdom is a future reality, in which we should fully trust. Christians can be absolutely certain of this because of the example God left etched in the history of ancient Israel. Just as God delivered His people then, He will free His Church from this sinful world, and lead them into His promised Kingdom. Christians who live at the end of the age have this absolute assurance. They can be certain because God already provided a symbolic type in Israel thousands of years earlier.

Before God's promised Kingdom arrives, however, there is also promised a time of terrible upheaval and trouble on the earth. The example of the Exodus also provides comfort and encouragement for those who will live through this ultimately tumultuous time.

### ***Encouraging Lessons from the Exodus***

The devastation that God rained down on Egypt to free His people is a type of the plagues that He will bring upon the earth at the end of this age. There will be wars, earthquakes, famine, disease, and terrifying trumpet plagues that will pummel the earth into submission. God's people, who are living at the end time, will witness these frightening events.

The Israelites who lived through the Exodus also experienced some of the awesome and frightening plagues which God sent to destroy Egypt. Eventually, however, the Eternal made a definite distinction between His people and the Egyptians. Beginning with the fourth plague, God supernaturally intervened to protect the children of Israel from His wrath on that land (Exodus 8:22).

The incredible set of events that played out in Egypt foreshadow what is to come. They were recorded for the benefit of spiritual Israel. God's people at the end are going to experience the most horrifying and frightening time in the history of the world!

They will see Satan venting his wrath on mankind during the Great Tribulation. They will witness the awesome earthquakes, destructive weather patterns, armed conflict, hunger, and diseases ravaging the planet. These things will finally culminate in the awesome heavenly signs and seven trumpet plagues inflicting the most terrifying destruction ever witnessed by the inhabitants of planet earth.

Like the ancient Israelites, God's people will likely experience the initial effects of these

terrible plagues. Rather than be fearful, they will actually be encouraged. Despite the unimaginable horror of what they see, they will realize that they shall be spared from God's wrath. Just as ancient Israel was spared, God promises He will safeguard those who are His! He will protect them from the most terrible earthly events to ever occur in the presence of mankind.

These are inspiring truths indeed! The events that happened to Israel of old picture God's plan to protect, and provide for, His Church. He will bring them out of this world into His glorious Kingdom.

### *A Lesson from the Old Covenant*

God's covenants constitute the core of His desire for a relationship with man. What many have not considered is that the old covenant was literally a marriage agreement between God and Israel. The Lord of the covenant was Christ. It was He who spoke from Mount Sinai, and guided Israel through the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:4-6; John 1:18, 5:37). When He gave the law at Mount Sinai, Israel agreed to obey Him as their husband. As it is written:

All the people answered together, and said, **All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.**  
And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD (Exodus 19:8).

When the people gave this answer, it was virtually the same as saying, "I do." They entered into a marriage with the Almighty. Later, when God pleaded with the children of Israel to repent of their idolatry, He reminded them of their intimate relationship with Him:

Turn, O Backsliding children, saith the LORD; for **I am married unto you** (Jeremiah 3:14).

God's covenant with Israel was a marriage contract, looking forward to, and picturing the new covenant, which is also a marriage accord. Tragically, Israel broke her marriage agreement with God by committing adultery. She worshiped other gods, and the Eternal divorced her. Jeremiah explains:

And I saw when for all the causes whereby backsliding **Israel committed adultery** I had put her away, and given her a **bill of divorce**: yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also (Jeremiah 3:8).

God considered the worship of other gods tantamount to adultery, and therefore grounds for divorce. He will not divorce those He marries in His Kingdom, however. The reason is that He has designed the perfect plan for the marriage of the saints, and that plan includes an espousal period. The Apostle Paul explains:

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

Christians today have entered into a covenant with God in which they are "espoused" to Christ. The word "espoused" means to be "engaged."

We are not automatically married, like Israel of old, when we accept His covenant. Instead,



we enter a marriage agreement in which there is a trial period.

As the fiancé of Christ, we have been given a period of time to prove our intent to complete the marriage, and to show ourselves faithful. God has the right during this time to break off the engagement before the marriage takes place, should this be necessary.

Christians should realize that this trial period is a great blessing from God. The true believers will use this time wisely, to really prove their love, loyalty, and faithfulness to Him who has proposed.

This is an awe-inspiring truth, more wonderful than man can fully imagine (I Corinthians 2:9). True Christians, who attain the first resurrection, will marry Jesus Christ. They will experience a unique intimacy—sharing in His throne, eating and drinking at His table, and enjoying pleasures with Him forever (Luke 22:30; Revelation 3:21, 20:4; Psalm 16:11).

### ***Lessons from the List***

People make lists of many different things they value. There are lists of possessions, priorities of things to do, or even friends to acknowledge on anniversaries and other events. God also makes a unique list in the book of Revelation. There He records the 144,000 by their tribes in the following order:

Of the tribe of Judah *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph *were* sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin *were* sealed twelve thousand (Revelation 7:5-8).

Christ inspired John to record the order of the tribes in such a way as to make it clear that the 144,000 are not the twelve tribes of physical Israel. When those tribes are listed in the Bible it is by birth order or location. As Moses writes:

The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun: The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin: And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali: And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid; Gad, and Asher: these *are* the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padan-aram (Genesis 35:23-25).

The list in Revelation does not follow their birth order or the tribes' positions as they assembled around the ensigns, as described in the book of Numbers, chapter two. Further, it does not reflect the list of Israel when she is placed back in her land after Christ's return. In that list, Judah is numbered last, not first (Ezekiel 48:1-8).

The Revelation list does not follow the historic geographical order of the tribes either. Overlaying this list on a map, the roster moves from Judah, at Jerusalem, toward Manasseh in the north. Then it shifts to Simeon, who was located in the southern most area below Judah. Finally, the list goes back to Zebulun, who was located the farthest north.

The fact that the tribes are not listed according to birth order, assembly by ensigns, or

geographical location is another indicator that this is not physical Israel. This register is comprised of spiritual Israel—the Church of God.

When Christ begins the list in Revelation, chapter seven, He commences with Judah, His tribe of origin. Instead of enumerating Israel according to physical birth order, this list reflects the spiritual birth order. Judah is listed first. It is the tribe of Christ, and He is the firstborn of spiritual Israel (Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:18).

The fact that the list in Revelation includes Levi is further evidence that Christ must be speaking of spiritual Israel. As teachers and judges among the people, the Levites were historically scattered throughout all the other tribes. Levi had no inheritance in the land, and therefore was never listed as being part of the other tribes. In Revelation, Levi is simply listed as the eighth tribe without comment. This is because the 144,000 are the resurrected Church in which all the members are priests (Revelation 5:10).

Additionally, both the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted from the Revelation list. However, the Scriptures reveal that these two physical tribes will exist after Christ returns, and establishes the Kingdom. This is another proof that the 144,000 are not physical Israel (Ezekiel 48:1-6).

The list of the tribes of Israel in Revelation is different from any other list documented in the Bible. The children of Israel described in Revelation, chapter seven, **are 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 other Christians throughout the ages are a part. This is spiritual Israel, created for the express purpose of first governing physical Israel, and eventually all the world.

### ***A Warning in the List***

The list of tribes found in Revelation contains an important warning to all those true Christians seeking the Kingdom of God. It is only when we understand that the Apostle John is referring to spiritual Israel that we are able to grasp this vital message from God.

The verses in Revelation, chapter seven, state that the 144,000 are “of all” the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:4). The word “of” is “ek” in the Greek, and it means “out from.” The 144,000 are 12,000 “out from” each of the tribes of Israel. The implication of this tiny word is awesome! Those sealed are a chosen “out of,” or “out from,” a larger group.

Since the Israel that is spoken of is the Church, this means that God is selecting the true Church “out from” the professing church. As Jesus said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). This is a great lesson to those who profess to be members of God’s Church. The mark of a true Christian is not what they profess, but how they perform! It is how they live every part of their lives!

### ***The Lesson of Ephraim***

Through the prophet Isaiah, God spoke of a time when ancient Assyria would attack Ephraim. There is a prophetic duality throughout the Bible, and in the early seven hundreds B.C. the first fulfillment of this prophecy took place. The second fulfillment will occur just before Christ’s return. At that time, the modern day descendants of the Assyrians will be a vast military power dominating a United States of Europe, and will again strike the people of Ephraim. Notice God’s warning to this tribe of Israel:

Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty *is* a fading

flower, which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord hath a mighty and strong one, *which* as a tempest of hail *and* a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. The crown of pride, the drunkards of **Ephraim, shall be trodden under feet** (Isaiah 28:1-4).

God indicts the tribe of Ephraim for drunkenness. In another place He says that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:10). The drunkenness of Ephraim became an embarrassment—a besmirching of the name of Israel.

For this reason, when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom, and set the 144,000 up as the civil and ecclesiastical leadership for His government, He takes steps to insure that spiritual Israel's reputation is untarnished. He, therefore, omits the name of Ephraim as being a part of His spiritual leadership team in the millennium.

This is a very important message for Christians who are seeking the Kingdom today. Character counts in our quest for the Kingdom of God!

### ***The Lesson of Dan***

The tribe of Dan is also omitted from the list of the 144,000. Many scholars suggest that this tribe is not included in the list in Revelation because of this tribe's blatant idolatry. The people of Dan exhibited a profound proclivity for idolatry from an early time. We read the following account in the book of Judges:

And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which *were* of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate. And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, *and* came in thither, *and* took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image: and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men *that were* appointed with weapons of war. And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye? And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest: *is it* better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel? (Judges 16:16-19).

The great sin of the tribe of Dan was blatant idolatry. Could Dan's sins have been so severe, and their reputation so vile, that God chose to blot out the name of this tribe as part of the resurrected family of God?

Another possible explanation lies in the future actions of this tribe. It has been speculated by Students of the Bible and scholars alike that the modern day people of Dan will eventually ally themselves with the idolatrous beast power. It is possible they will be part of the army that persecutes God's true people at the end of the age (Daniel 12:7). The prophet Jeremiah records a curious prophecy relating to Dan which reads:

The snorting of his horses was heard in Dan; the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the land, and all that is in it (Jeremiah 8:16).

In his series on Revelation, Bible commentator William Barclay describes the early church's understanding regarding these verses in Jeremiah. He explains:

That saying (Jeremiah 8:16) came to be taken as referring to Anti-Christ, the coming incarnation of evil, and it came to be believed among the Jewish Rabbis that Anti-Christ was to spring from Dan. Hippolytus says 'As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Anti-Christ be born from the tribe of Dan.' (P.25).

Is it possible that the tribe of Dan will be complicit with the beast and false prophet at the end? If so, it is conceivable that for this reason God would blot out their name from spiritual Israel.

Because the spiritual is mirrored on earth in the physical (Romans 1:20), is it possible that there are spiritual Danites in the church who will betray God's people at the end? Christ stated that some would turn their brethren over to the authorities (Mark 13:12). Daniel also foretold that some will forsake God's covenant and betray their brethren:

Therefore he (the beast) shall be grieved, and return, and have indignation against the holy covenant: so shall he do; he shall even return, and **have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant** (Daniel 11:30).

According to prophecy, some who understand the truth will betray it! Consider the incredible implications. Is there a spirit of Ephraim and Dan that exists within God's Church? Is it possible that true Christians have qualities of character, or personality traits that fit those of the various tribes? If so, there will be spiritual Danites or Ephraimites—individuals for whom the pleasures of this life exert too great a pull. Some will be infected with various forms of idolatry. Others may betray God's people in order to save themselves.

This is a vital lesson from Israel. There are those who appear to be a part of the congregation of Israel, but in reality they are not. Tragically, their names, like those of Ephraim and Dan, will be erased.

Christians who have an ear to hear will read God's Word and learn this lesson. One cannot simply drift into the Kingdom of God. In order to be true Christians, believers must honor what the name Israel means. We must be "Princes of God," and overcomers. We must persevere.

Those who will constitute the 144,000 are individuals who are chosen out of a larger group. The criteria for their election is more than what the individual professes, and more than just what they believe. It is their spiritual character! Knowledge alone is not enough. What matters is what we do with what we know. As the Apostle Paul writes:

The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal. The Lord knoweth them that are His. Let every one that nameth the name of Christ **depart from iniquity**. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. **If a man therefore purge himself** from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work (II Timothy 2:19).

The people of God must remember—true Christians must perform, as well as profess!

### *A Lesson in the Names*

William Shakespeare penned the famous question, “What's in a name?” Names have a great deal of meaning, especially when God inspires a title for His purpose. The Almighty names things for two reasons—what they are, or the function they serve. For example, when God promised Abram and Sari that He would give them a son, He renamed them Abraham, meaning “father of a multitude,” and Sarah, meaning “princess.” When Jacob prevailed with God, the Eternal changed his name to Israel, which means, “Overcomer with God.”

It is inconceivable that God would not give profound spiritual meaning to the names of the tribes that will one day make up spiritual Israel—the 144,000. In every case, except Benjamin, the names of Jacob’s children—which later became the names of the tribes—were chosen by their mothers.

The children were named, in each instance, according to the unique circumstances surrounding their births. When these names are viewed in the order given in Revelation, chapter seven, a unique pattern appears. Consider the meaning of the names:

## *The Names of Israel*

| <i>Tribe Name</i> | <i>The Meaning</i>                       | <i>Scripture</i>     |
|-------------------|--|----------------------|
| <b>Judah</b>      | <b>Praise the Lord</b>                   | <b>Genesis 29:35</b> |
| <b>Reuben</b>     | <b>He looked on me</b>                   | <b>Genesis 29:32</b> |
| <b>Gad</b>        | <b>Good fortune comes</b>                | <b>Genesis 30:11</b> |
| <b>Asher</b>      | <b>Happy am I</b>                        | <b>Genesis 30:13</b> |
| <b>Naphtali</b>   | <b>My wrestling</b>                      | <b>Genesis 30:8</b>  |
| <b>Mannasseh</b>  | <b>Making me forget</b>                  | <b>Genesis 41:51</b> |
| <b>Simeon</b>     | <b>God hears me</b>                      | <b>Genesis 29:33</b> |
| <b>Levi</b>       | <b>Joined to me</b>                      | <b>Genesis 29:34</b> |
| <b>Issachar</b>   | <b>Purchased me</b>                      | <b>Genesis 30:18</b> |
| <b>Zebulon</b>    | <b>My husband<br/>will dwell with me</b> | <b>Genesis 30:20</b> |
| <b>Joseph</b>     | <b>God will add</b>                      | <b>Genesis 30:24</b> |
| <b>Benjamin</b>   | <b>Son of His right hand</b>             | <b>Genesis 35:18</b> |

The Almighty God inspired the names of the tribes of Israel in such a way that they tell the wonderful story of every true Christian's struggle and ultimate triumph. Notice how a paragraph placing the meaning of these names in their order might read:

I will praise the Lord for He has looked on me, and good fortune comes. Happy am I because my wrestling with God makes me forget (my trials). 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.

The order and names of the tribes themselves reveals the ultimate destiny of the 144,000. Realize that those names will be emblazoned on each gate of the New Jerusalem. From any direction that individuals enter the holy city they will read the names, and the message will be clear. It is the story of those who will then reside within these gates.

This is the incredible hope of those who are now called to seek the Kingdom of God. As with Abraham and Jacob, God will change each Christian's name accordingly. He will give every overcomer a new name which will likely include the term, Israel, but also the tribe to which they

are assigned (Revelation 2:17; 3:12). Carrying the name Israel, each overcomer will one day stand on Mount Zion with Christ and all the holy saints.

# *They Stand on Mount Zion*

## Key Five

*For the LORD hath chosen Zion;  
He hath desired it for His habitation.  
Psalms 132:13*

**F**or millennia, thoughts of Zion have stirred the deepest sense of reverence among the people of God. So important is Zion that readers of the Bible find more than one hundred and fifty references to this holy place. Psalmist and prophet alike record ancient memories and future hopes for the city of Zion.

Tragically, Zion has also been the site of war, as well as worship. Israeli, Christian, and Muslim alike claim a God-given right to call Zion their homeland. The resulting political and theological conflict promises to culminate in a final clash that will only be resolved when Jesus Christ returns.

Upon His return, Christ will claim Zion as His. The city will then become the flourishing headquarters for God's divine government. Finally, more than a thousand years later, the fulfillment of all that God has envisioned for Zion will occur. The heavenly city will descend to an entirely new earth. The magnificent New Jerusalem will then be the source of peace, happiness, and joy for eternity (Revelation 21-22).

As the headquarters for Christ's new government, Zion is inextricably tied to the 144,000. The Apostle John reveals that after the resurrection, this place, unique in all the universe, is where the illustrious group of spiritual Israelites will stand with Christ. John writes:

A Lamb **stood on the mount Sion**, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His father's name written in their foreheads (Revelation 14:1).

In these verses, the Lamb portrays Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:19). The Messiah is standing with the 144,000 on what the Bible identifies as Mount Zion. What is this Mount Zion, and where is it located, and where do the 144,000 stand with Jesus?

### ***Where is Zion?***

The term "Zion" comes from the Hebrew word, "Tsiyown," meaning "permanent capital," or "mountain of Jerusalem." The word implies both an "erect structure," and "protection," and the first time that the Bible refers to Zion, it is described as a fortress (II Samuel 5:6-8).

King David captured this Jebusite city that sat upon a hilly ridge south of the current Temple



Mount. The king renamed it the City of David, and brought the ark to this spot with great rejoicing. Thereafter the city was considered sacred. Later, Solomon relocated the ark to the newly built Temple, and all of Jerusalem came to be called Zion.

From that time, the Bible frequently refers to the capital city of Jerusalem, or to the sacred area of the Temple as Zion. The term is also used figuratively to picture the Church, or even the magnificent Jerusalem above. Which of these is the “Mount Zion” where the 144,000 stand?

### ***Zion in the Millennium***

The Bible reveals that Zion will be the capitol city for Jesus Christ after His triumphant return to this earth as King of kings. The psalmist writes:

Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is **mount Sion**, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a **refuge** (Psalm 48:2-3).

When Jesus Christ returns, He will gather all His faithful people from around the world. After pouring out the vial plagues, He will then bring these resurrected saints with Him as He descends from the clouds to finally touch down on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:4).

From that time forward, the resurrected saints will be with the Lord in Mount Zion, the capital city of God’s government. The prophet Isaiah refers to the time when Christ reigns triumphant with His servants:

Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall **reign in mount Sion, and in Jerusalem**, and **before His ancients** gloriously (Isaiah 24:23).

Christ will rule with His ancients—resurrected Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Moses and the faithful members of His Church throughout the ages. They will assist Him as He rules the earth from Mount Zion. The prophet Obadiah makes this clear as he writes:

And **saviors shall come up on Mount Zion** to judge the mount of Esau; and the Kingdom shall be the LORD’S (Obadiah 21).

Christ is the Savior of the world, but the resurrected saints will also be fellow saviors of mankind. Christ will use His faithful servants in His noble work of salvation. They will rule in Christ’s throne, and serve as judges in various cities around the world (I Corinthians 6:2; Revelation 20:4; Luke 19:17-19).

It is clear that Mount Zion refers to Jerusalem, and that the millennial verses speak of Zion as the place from which Christ will one day rule. Is this the Mount Zion upon which the 144,000 stand, or was the Apostle John referring to the physical temple?

### ***Zion as God’s Temple***

At one time, God’s presence filled the holy of holies within the Temple. Then, His dwelling place was also called Zion (Isaiah 8:18; Psalm 9:11). For this reason, the sanctuary in Jerusalem is

sometimes synonymous with Zion (Jeremiah 50:28). The psalmist writes:

Send thee help from the **sanctuary**, and strengthen thee out of **Sion** (Psalm 20:2).

So we see that historically the physical Temple on earth was also called Zion. This holy building was a symbolic type of the future spiritual temple, the Church which Christ would later build. Made without hands, this spiritual temple will be comprised of individuals from every nation who are called to be members of God's Church. Paul writes:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **a holy temple** in the Lord (Ephesians 2:19-21).

The apostle speaks of God's servants as being built up unto a holy temple. Paul is referring to the process whereby individual Christians are being formed and prepared for offices of responsibility in that future edifice.

The Temple of old was merely a physical type of the spiritual temple to come. God's New Testament Church is now being formed, and fashioned in order to be that temple. In that sense, God's Church today and the millennial temple of tomorrow share the same identity. However, the Church cannot be the Mount Zion upon which the 144,000 stand.

### ***John's Vision is of Events in Heaven***

What occurs during the millennial, earthly reign of Jesus Christ is only a precursor of future events. Just as the Jerusalem of old is a type of the millennial Zion, the millennial Jerusalem is a precursor of the eternal and spiritual Zion yet to come—the New Jerusalem.

This is the Mount Zion on which the 144,000 stand with Christ! Notice John's perspective in Revelation, chapter fourteen. The apostle was not viewing these events from the standpoint of earth. He was actually taken to heaven in vision and shown events taking place there. He writes:

After this I looked, and behold, **a door was opened in heaven**: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, **Come up hither**, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne (Revelation 4:1-2).

The events the Apostle John sees can only be occurring in heaven. There he sees the very throne of God! It is while viewing events taking place in heaven that he sees the 144,000. John writes:

And I heard **a voice from heaven** as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song **before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders**: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were **redeemed from the earth** (Revelation 14:2-3).

### ***The Father and Mount Zion are in Heaven***

In this vision of the resurrected 144,000, John reveals that they sing a song set to heavenly music. The music is produced in heaven. The beasts and elders are in heaven. God's throne is in heaven, and 144,000 sing with the heavenly chorus to the One seated on the throne. Clearly, John's vision of the 144,000 shows them in heaven.

Notice the end of verse three which states that the 144,000 "were redeemed **from** the earth." This suggests that at the time of their resurrection they are taken from the earth. Then the chosen are presented at the throne of God as this celebration of triumph takes place.

The timing of this vision is after the resurrection which takes place at the seventh trumpet. At this point, the faithful enter the marriage supper, and this occurs just prior to the vial plagues being poured out (Revelation 15:1). The 144,000 are joyous participants in this absolutely fabulous wedding feast—

a celebration unparalleled in the history of God's creation.

This celebration will undoubtedly be held in the most magnificent of all possible settings. It takes place in heaven where our great God resides. The faithful saints are taken to the very throne of the Father. It is absolutely inconceivable that the Father would allow the magnificent fulfillment of the marriage of His Son to take place anywhere except in His presence.

The 144,000 are standing on the sea of glass, and before the Father's throne (Revelation 14:3,15:2). They are standing with the beasts, the elders, and Jesus Christ. They are in heaven, and are standing on Mount Zion—the New Jerusalem. This Mount Zion is the Jerusalem above—the final, spiritual fulfillment to which the original tabernacle, the ancient temple and the millennial temple all point.

### ***Zion after the Millennium***

As a human being, it was no accident that Jesus was a builder. He was in the construction business long before He ever came to earth. Christ was the builder and creator of the entire universe (Ephesians 3:9). Before He left the earth to return to heaven, He told His followers that He was going to build mansions, or offices, for them in His Father's house (John 14:2-3). Christ has been working on this building project for thousands of years. He is building something of extraordinary brilliance and supreme magnificence. He is constructing residences and offices, within the beautiful New Jerusalem, for His wife to be. It is the abode for all those who are chosen to be in the first resurrection.

This is a great hope for all Christians throughout history—to one day stand with Christ on the Mount where this magnificent edifice stands. It is no less than the future headquarters for God's government for the rest of eternity. The author of the book of Hebrews inspires Christians throughout all ages with this vision:

Ye are come **unto mount Sion**, and unto the **city of the living God**, the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect (Hebrews 12:22-23).

This verse in Hebrews makes it incontrovertibly clear that it is converted Christians who

come unto Mount Zion. They have not come there yet, but once resurrected they will be taken to the city of God. This is exactly where the Apostle John witnessed the 144,000. They were on the Mount which is their future abode.

### ***New Jerusalem is the Bride***

The Church is the bride of Christ, but New Jerusalem is also called the bride (Revelation 19:7). The angel that speaks with John reveals the holy city to him in the following words:

There came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee **the bride, the Lamb's wife**, and he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that **great city, the holy Jerusalem**, descending out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:9-10).

The angel shows the Apostle John a vision of Christ's bride, and it is New Jerusalem. Therefore, the heavenly city is the bride. And yet we saw earlier that the Church is Christ's bride! How is it possible that both the resurrected Christians and New Jerusalem are Christ's bride?

The answer is that the Church and New Jerusalem are one and the same! Christ is creating a grand edifice in the New Jerusalem that awaits in heaven. Christ is also building the Church as the spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:19-20). He is doing this by forging each Christian's spiritual character so that they will be fitting residents of this heavenly structure. Glorious New Jerusalem is the exterior of the temple. The converted, resurrected and glorified Christians are the interior.

The Church is New Jerusalem, called Zion. The resurrected saints, therefore, are also Zion. The 144,000 are the resurrected Church, and they stand on Mount Zion in heaven where the New Jerusalem awaits its future with them as its inhabitants. The 144,000 are the bride of Christ. They are the first resurrection, and as such will be married to Jesus Christ while standing before the Father's throne.

In this marriage, the 144,000 will actually become one with Christ, and with the New Jerusalem. They will then be one with the holy city, the headquarters for God's divine and holy government throughout the universe for eternity.

### ***Is Heaven the Reward of the Saved?***

It is important to realize that while the 144,000 will stand in heaven on Mount Zion with Christ for the marriage supper, they will not remain in heaven, as some teach. As the apostles watched Christ ascend from the Mount of Olives, they were told He would return the same way they saw Him go (Acts 1:9-12). After the marriage supper, Jesus Christ will return with His saints to this earth. He will fight against His enemies (Zechariah 14:3). After His victory in the battle of Armageddon, His feet will again stand on the Mount of Olives. The prophet Zechariah records:

His **feet shall stand** in that day upon the **mount of Olives**, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south (Zechariah 14:4).

Christ will establish His authority over the nations. Then, He will rule with His saints from an earthly Jerusalem for one thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

This is what Jesus meant when He said that the meek would inherit the earth. It is why John recorded that the saints will reign on the earth (Revelation 5:10; Matthew 5:5; and Psalm 37:11).

After Christ's millennial rule, the saints still do not go to heaven. Instead, God the Father will come to the earth. The Father will create a new heaven and earth. Jerusalem above will then descend to this new planet.

The 144,000 will inhabit this spiritual Zion. They will rule forever with God, from an entirely new creation, over a spiritual universe (Revelation 21:1-3). It is on the Mount of this heavenly Zion that the resurrected saints will stand. It is in this setting, filled with joy, awe, and gratitude that they sing a new song unto the Lord.

# *They Sing a Unique Song*

Key Six:

*Sing unto the LORD a new song; For He hath done marvelous things:  
His right hand and His holy arm hath gotten Him the victory.  
Psalms 98:1*

**S**ong has always held a prominent role with the people of God in their worship. So important is music to God that He placed the book of Psalms in the center of His Word, and made it the largest volume in Scripture. In this unique book are found sacred songs of triumph and tragedy, as well as rejoicing and lament, by kings and prophets alike.

The ancient Levitical singers in the temple reflected God's immense regard for music. Alfred Edersheim, author of *The Temple: Its Ministry and Service*, explains that the song ceremony was second only to the sacrifices in importance, and that it was carried out with enormous splendor. He writes:

John could find no more adequate imagery to portray heavenly realities and final triumph of the church than that taken from the service of praise in the temple. Thus, when the twenty-four elders, representing the chiefs of the twenty-four courses of the priesthood, and afterwards the 144,000. . . sing a new song—they appear just as in the temple services as harpers, with their harps (p. 49).

## ***Christ Leads the Saints in Song***

Alfred Edersheim realized there was a connection with the weekly temple song service and the vision of the 144,000. That correlation runs deeper than most realize, but it must be understood that John did not describe his vision based on the temple service. The opposite is true. The temple and its service drew its observance from the heavenly (Hebrews 8:5). John describes the 144,000 singing before His Majesty:

I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of **many waters**, and as the **voice of a great thunder**: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And **they sung as it were a new song** before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty four thousand (Revelation 14:2-3).

The apostle heard a voice from heaven, but the sound is not likely that of the resurrected saints. Resounding loudly over the others, it is more probable that this voice belongs to Jesus Christ. Ezekiel describes the Lord's voice:

Behold the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and His voice was like a noise of **many waters**: and the earth shined with His glory (Ezekiel 43:2).

Christ's voice is also likened to thunder. Job writes:

Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou **thunder** with a voice like him? (Job 40:9).

It appears that after the resurrection, Jesus Christ will lead the angelic chorus and 144,000 in song. This great choir will sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

### ***The Heavenly Song Service***

Magnificent harpers, referred to as the four beasts and twenty-four elders, will accompany the song service. John describes them in a majestic scene that occurs before the seals are opened. He writes:

And when He had taken the book, the four beasts, and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having everyone of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8).

In the next verse, the grand angelic chorus begins to sing about the saints who will one day be resurrected. The beasts and elders sing their own new song:

Saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth (Revelation 5:9-10 ASV).

This vision portrays the future resurrected saints that are being sung about, but it does not reveal their number. Only Revelation, chapter fourteen, states how many sing. There it is revealed that there are exactly 144,000.

### ***On the Sea of Glass***

In yet another breathtaking segment of John's vision, the Apostle sees the resurrected saints. This time the setting is just after the seven terrifying trumpets have sounded, but prior to the pouring out of the seven vial plagues. In the book of Revelation John writes:

I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God; and I saw as it were a **sea of glass** mingled with fire: and them that had gotten **victory over the beast**, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name **stand on the sea of glass** having harps of God (Revelation 15:1-2).

When the Apostle John describes those who "had gotten victory over the beast," he is not referring only to those people living at the end. He means the servants of God who have overcome this apostate system throughout the ages.

The beast has Nimrod as its founder and has existed as early as the time of Babel. It is pictured in Daniel's vision with Babylon as its golden head, followed by the silver chest of the Persian empire, and then the brass thighs of Greece. The beast evolved into the iron legs of Rome, which existed during the time of Christ. And this same beast will again manifest itself as a resurrected holy Roman Empire, pictured by Daniel as feet partly of iron and clay, and ruling over ten kings (Genesis 10:8-10; Daniel 2:31-44; Revelation 13:1-4).

John's vision also shows the resurrected saints standing on a beautiful sea of glass. It is believed that this massive crystal sea was foreshadowed by the great brass laver used in temple worship. The priests were to wash in this laver before approaching God (Exodus 40:7-12), picturing our need for washing and purity before coming near to God.

The 144,000 stand on this great crystal foundation on which the throne of God rests. The crystal sea is beautifully resplendent, with colors radiating out from God's majestic light. It is carried by the four cherubs wherever the Almighty God's throne travels, and it serves as the foundation for the throne when it sits stationary (Ezekiel 1:22; Revelation 4:6).

### ***The Song of Moses***

At this time the saints have been resurrected and changed from their human form. They have been made perfect, and are now like Christ (1 John 3:3). They stand in purity and holiness on the sea of glass. On this sea of lustrous crystal, they are inspired to sing a new song. The Apostle John writes:

They sing the **song of Moses** the servant of God, and the **song of the Lamb** saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, thou King of saints, who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou only art holy: for all **nations shall come and worship before Thee**; for Thy judgements are made manifest (Revelation 15:3-4).

Notice the millennial imagery in these verses. The first song the 144,000 sing foreshadows the Kingdom to come. They will accompany Christ as He returns to the earth to teach God's law and bring righteous judgement to all men. At this time, all the nations will come to worship before their God. These verses picture the glorious time of the first resurrection. It is the fulfillment of the lasting hope that has inspired God's people throughout the ages. The mood and spirit of those who attain the first resurrection is obvious. They are upbeat, filled with joy, zeal, and anticipation at the thought of bringing the knowledge of God to the entire world.

In this setting, the resurrected saints sing the song of Moses. This song harkens back to the imagery of the Exodus and Israel's liberation from the bondage of Egypt. Israel passed through the Red Sea unharmed, but the pursuing Egyptians were destroyed as God brought walls of water that were hundreds of feet high cascading down on Pharaoh's army. Once freed from their enemies, and from bondage in Egypt, Moses led all the people in a glorious and prophetic song.

First the song addresses the triumph of God over the Egyptians. Next it looks forward to the Israelites building a dwelling place for God. Notice this in the lyrics that follow:

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, 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 (Exodus 15:1-2).

The lyrics first picture Israel building a tabernacle, but as the song continues, the words take a dramatic turn, referring to an edifice which God Himself builds:

Thou shalt bring them in (the redeemed) and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance, *in* the place, O LORD, *which Thou hast made* for Thee to dwell in, *in* the Sanctuary, O Lord, *which Thy hands have established* (Exodus 15:17).

These concluding words of the Song of Moses speak of God's redeemed as being planted in the mountain of His government. It speaks of a sanctuary which God's hands have established. This part of the song refers to the time of the resurrection, the saint's ultimate liberty from bondage, and their inclusion in Mount Zion above. The resurrected saints sing the Song of Moses to celebrate their new freedom.

It is no coincidence that the 144,000 sing the Song of Moses. The Exodus story pictures the salvation of the people of God at the end of the age (I Corinthians 10:11), and the Song of Moses foreshadows the 144,000 and their future habitation in God's sanctuary, New Jerusalem.

### ***The Song of the Lamb***

The 144,000 also sing the "song of the Lamb." This song is different from the song of Moses. It is Christ's song, which is likely composed by Him, for this unique occasion. It is an entirely new song that He teaches the saints. It is a song which the Bible says is humanly impossible to learn. The Apostle John explains:

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

John writes that no man could learn this unique song except the 144,000. This statement has profound ramifications. First, it means that the 144,000 are no longer men. They have been resurrected and changed to spirit.

Those in this resurrection will be omniscient, like Christ (I John 3:1-3). As Jesus demonstrated when He was here on earth, He knew the thoughts of men (John 1:48, 4:17-19). The Apostle Paul explains that after we are raised, we will know Christ in the same way He knows us (I Corinthians 13:12).

This makes it undeniably clear that the 144,000 are the totality of those who are raised in the first resurrection. There are no others shown in the vision, and there is no one else who can learn this new song. If there were any others raised in the first resurrection, they would know Christ's mind. Therefore, they could learn this song.

### ***A Lesson for Us***

We see that God pictures the resurrected Church singing before God's throne. We understand

that God sings, the angels sing and mankind sings, but why is this?

It is important to understand the purpose and importance of music. God designed music to have a powerful effect on man's emotions. It can change a person's mood.

Noted psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that listening to music was man's second highest peak experience. He discovered that the human body is designed so that music can change the way that we feel. Music literally affects pulse rate, blood pressure, the adrenal glands and other pain fighting organs. Possessing a passionate power, music can alter our body chemistry and transport us to emotional highs.

In *The Closing of the American Mind*, Professor Allen Bloom discusses the emotional impact of music. He writes:

Music always involves a delicate balance between passion and reason, and even in its highest and most developed form—religious, warlike, and erotic—that balance is always tipped . . . toward the passionate. Music, as everyone experiences, provides an unquestionable 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. Armed with music, man can damn rational doubt.

As Professor Bloom states, music is emotionally powerful! It is designed by the great God to affect how we feel. God's intention is that music generate positive, beautiful emotions in man to uplift and motivate him to pursue that which is eternal. Music was designed to enhance our worship. Therefore, when we come before God, we should sing passionately. We should sing loudly, with a spirit of celebration, enthusiasm, and a profound sense of great joy.

### ***The Importance of the Song Service***

Each week, on the seventh day, God's people rest from their labor and assemble to worship Him (Leviticus 23:1-3). The Sabbath is the first of God's feast days and was instituted as a separate and distinct covenant. The Sabbath was meant to be a sign between God and His people (Genesis 1:14; Exodus 31:13). A sign points to something, and the seventh day rest points to the future millennial rest (Hebrews 4:1-9).

Because the Sabbath pictures the millennial Kingdom, believers are commanded to assemble each week to be reminded of this glorious future—a time when they will be resurrected, changed to glory and rule with Jesus Christ. They are also to celebrate this wonderful time in song. Each Sabbath God's people take up their hymnals, and sing songs of praise to Him. But do they really sing with understanding?

Far too often, when God's people assemble to worship, they do not always sing out to praise Him the way they should! Some believe they don't possess a good voice. They feel embarrassed to sing with their whole heart. Others may be tired from a strenuous week, or perhaps mothers are busy getting their children settled. But there really is no excuse for a half-hearted effort. The song service is of great importance to God, and must be of equal importance to every Christian.

When believers come before God at week's end, rising to sing foreshadows the 144,000 standing before the throne of God. They are singing a new song, accompanied by the beasts and elders, and led by Christ singing out so powerfully that it sounds like Niagara Falls or crashing thunder!

When the saints rise to sing, they should not worry about their voices being good enough. They should not let anything distract them. They should not be self-conscious. Instead, they should all sing! Sing loudly! Sing cheerfully! The people of God should sing through the knowing smile that they are indeed headed toward this moment of supreme triumph and unmatched glory—the Kingdom of God.

When they sing praise to God, they should sing with the vision of the 144,000 fixed in their minds. This is their destiny, if they do not become defiled.

# *They are Not Defiled by Women*

Key Seven:

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit,  
after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world,  
and not after Christ.  
Colossians 2:8*

**A**s the Apostle John continues to reveal the vision regarding the 144,000, he records a curious statement. The angel tells John:

These are they which were **not defiled with women** (Revelation 14:4).

With only a cursory reading, this perplexing verse can become one of the most misunderstood Scriptures in the Bible. What is actually meant by the angel's words? Does God have a cynical view of women? Did He create them with qualities that defile? Is the Eternal issuing a warning that His awesome plan of salvation is only applicable to men?

It must be understood that God does not have an unbalanced or warped view of women. The wife and mother described in Proverbs 31 is an incredibly beautiful picture. The stories of Deborah, Esther, and Ruth reveal women who were paragons of virtue. The women who assisted Christ in His ministry, and those who later helped the Apostle Paul, were invaluable to God's work.

## ***Comprehending the Symbolism in Revelation***

The Eternal reveals that He is not a respecter of persons—He does not value men over women (Acts 10:34). He explains that the marriage bed is “undefiled” (Hebrews 13:4). Further, in the following passage, the Apostle Paul declares that there is no spiritual difference between men and women. The Apostle writes:

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

It is clear that nothing inherent in women defiles, but then, what does God mean by the words “defiled with women”? While the Bible may sometimes appear difficult to understand, The confusion regarding the meaning of this particular passage need not exist! God tells us that He is not the author of confusion, and that He reveals the truth in His Word (I Corinthians 14:33; II Timothy 2:15).

Perhaps it would be helpful to consider the Bible's sixty-six books as being like a giant jigsaw puzzle. Each piece of the puzzle must be properly placed to create a clear picture. The various pieces in the puzzle can be either literal fact, historical narrative, figurative analogy, or prophetic symbolism.

In this case, it is obvious that when John defined the 144,000 as "not defiled by women," his words were meant to be understood symbolically. We can be absolutely certain that this part of John's vision is symbolic for two reasons. First, the term "women" is obviously used figuratively in many other instances in the book of Revelation. Secondly, attempting to apply the verse literally puts it in direct conflict with God's view of women found throughout the entirety of His Word.

### ***The Term Woman in Symbol***

John's use of the term "women" is meant to be understood as a symbol. When the Bible speaks of a woman in symbol, it is always to portray a church. For this reason, when referring to His people, God alludes to New Jerusalem, the future abode of His Church, as the "mother of us all." The Song of Solomon is written in rich imagery, depicting Christ's love for His Church. John the Baptist mentions Jesus as the "bridegroom," foreshadowing His purpose to marry the Church (Galatians 4:24; Song of Solomon 6; John 3:29). Paul actually speaks of a woman in the marriage relationship, and likens her to the Church. He writes:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the **husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church**: and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let the wives be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, **love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church**, and gave himself for it . . . For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great **mystery**: but I speak **concerning Christ and the church** (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Paul speaks of the marriage relationship in this way because human matrimony pictures the marriage of Christ to the Church. John also writes:

Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him: for the **marriage of the Lamb** is come, and His **wife hath made herself ready**. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints (Revelation 19:7-8).

It is clear that God refers to His "called out" people, whether ancient Israel or the modern day Church, as a woman. It must also be understood, however, that while God's Church is pictured as a woman in symbol, 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 come should 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 for birth and life (Romans 1:4, 8:21-23; John 3:3-6).

### ***The Woman that Defiles***

There can be no doubt that when God uses a symbol to represent a church in the Bible, He uses the image of a woman. By way of example, when the Apostle John records his vision, he makes use of this metaphor no less than eighteen times within Revelation's twenty-two chapters.

God's true Church is portrayed in the book of Revelation seven times (the number seven pictures spiritual completeness) as a woman that is persecuted by Satan. John records that the earth helps this woman by hiding her, and she is given protection by God (Revelation 12:6-16).

The Church is represented in one other case. This could be considered either the first or the eighth, and therefore, the number pictures either "unity" or a "new beginning." Here, the apostle speaks of a woman in heaven (Revelation 12:1). This symbolism portrays Jerusalem above, the Christian's spiritual mother, the ultimate destiny of the Church (Galatians 4:24).

Finally, ten times in Revelation the Scriptures make reference to a great and powerful false church that defiles. God uses this number, to picture His perfect judgement that comes upon her. This church is so vile that the angel identifies her as a whore!

*A Woman in Symbol in  
The Book of Revelation*

|  |
|--|
| <b><i>Jerusalem Above Our Mother</i></b> |
| Revelation 12:1                          |

| <b><i>The True Church</i></b>        | <b><i>Scripture</i></b> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| The woman gives birth to Christ.     | Revelation 12: 4        |
| The woman is protected by the earth. | Revelation 12: 6        |
| Satan persecutes the woman.          | Revelation 12:13        |
| The woman is taken to her place.     | Revelation 12:14        |
| Satan casts a flood after the woman. | Revelation 12:15        |
| The earth helps the woman.           | Revelation 12:16        |
| Satan attacks the woman.             | Revelation 12:17        |

| <b><i>The False Church</i></b>       | <b><i>Scripture</i></b> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| The woman seduces the saints.        | Revelation 2:20         |
| A 144,000 are not defiled by women.  | Revelation 14:4         |
| The woman rides the beast.           | Revelation 17:3         |
| The whore is steeped in riches.      | Revelation 17:4         |
| Her name is Mother of Harlots.       | Revelation 17:5         |
| The woman is drunk on saints' blood. | Revelation 17:6         |
| The woman rules over 7 heads.        | Revelation 17:7         |
| The woman sits on 7 governments.     | Revelation 17:9         |
| The ten kings hate the whore.        | Revelation 17:16        |
| The woman sits on a great city.      | Revelation 17:18        |

***Who is the Whore?***

The Bible leaves little doubt as to the identity of this whore. The angel describes the woman that defiles as follows:

I will shew unto thee the judgement of the **great whore** that sitteth upon **many waters**: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been **made drunk** with the wine of her fornication (Revelation 17:1-2).

The angel describes this church as a great whore who deserves judgement. She gives herself to others in exchange for money or power. She sits upon many waters, representing great numbers of people (Revelation 17:15). This powerful church spreads its influence over many nations, and has relations with their kings. At the same time, she corrupts most of the earth's people with her intoxicating false doctrines (Matthew 24:4-6; Isaiah 29:9-13). The angel further describes her, saying:

I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured **beast**, full of **names of blasphemy**, having seven heads and ten horns (Revelation 17:3).

This woman sits on a beast, but what is this beast with seven heads and ten horns? The book of Daniel, chapters four and seven, reveal that beasts are various empires. The horns are symbolic of power, and represent kings ruling over nations. This woman rides atop, or controls, seven different governmental systems, and will ultimately rule over ten kings. She is a church that is political and powerful. By calling herself "holy" and "Christ's church," the whore blasphemes!

Unlike Christ's bride, this great, politically powerful church is not clothed in the white linen that pictures righteousness. Instead, God pictures this woman as influential and wealthy, but corrupt, unclean, and filthy. The angel describes the whore:

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

John is describing the church that historically "defiled" Christianity. Her priests wear purple and red. Her religious artifacts are made of gold, pearls and precious jewels. Her church buildings are decked with gold and splendor.

She is also the church that held the reigns of the beast power, controlling governments throughout various stages of the holy Roman Empire. She took on Christ's name, adopted detestable doctrines of pagan origin, and has defiled millions throughout the ages. She deceived people by teaching that the only way to properly worship God is through her. Such worship is valueless, however, because it is based on human tradition instead of God's commandments (Mark 7:7), and John's next statement reveals exactly who this woman is! The apostle writes:

Upon her forehead was a name written **MYSTERY BABYLON** the great **THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS** and abominations of the earth (Revelation 17:5).

Rather than having the Father's name written in her forehead, she has the name "Mystery Babylon," and "Mother of Harlots" emblazoned there. The title, "mother," indicates that the whore has daughters.

Her children also prostitute themselves. This means that today there exist thousands of churches that have adopted various twists on the doctrines of the whore. These churches defile



people by mixing the Biblical truth of Jesus Christ with empty, false, pagan traditions.

### ***Mystery Babylon***

The Apostle John identified the harlot as “Mystery Babylon.” This system of worship actually originated with Nimrod, the founder of Babylon who was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah (Genesis 10:6-8,10). Instead of spreading out and replenishing the earth as God had commanded, Nimrod formed cities. One of his most noted accomplishments was the construction of the famous tower of Babel. Some believe that he built this great tower to make a name for himself by reaching into heaven similar to the act of Lucifer (Genesis 11:4; Isaiah 14:14).

The Scriptures reveal that Nimrod was “a mighty hunter before the Lord” (Genesis 10:9). The word “before” could also be translated “against.” Nimrod is translated from the Hebrew word “marad,” which literally means “he rebelled.” Ancient tradition tells us that Nimrod rebelled against God, creating a vast apostasy in the world that then existed.

According to tradition, Nimrod married his mother, Semiramis. After his death, Semiramis used her son’s name to maneuver herself into the position of Queen of Babylon, the home of the Chaldee Mysteries. She came to be regarded as the “Queen of Heaven” and “the mother of the divine son.” After generations of these idolatrous practices and traditions, Nimrod became known as the son of Baal, the sun god. He and his mother became the Madonna and Child, which has been carried over even to modern day worship.

Various forms of the Babylonian mystery religion spread widely. In Egypt, Semiramis and Nimrod became known as Isis and Osiris. In Asia, they were Cybele and Deonius. In Rome, Fortuna and Jupiter were their names.

Remnants of mother and child veneration, combined with a strange mixture of sun, tree, fertility, and season worship were long ago absorbed into modern religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, the Babylonian mystery religion is still very much alive and well today! It is this religion that defiles, but it now goes by another name. Shocking as it may sound, this very system of ancient Babylonian pagan worship now calls itself “Christian.”

### ***The Woman’s Transformation Begins***

A transformation within God’s Church started soon after Christ’s resurrection. The process began with Gnostic corruption from within, and it continued as the church absorbed Roman paganism. It was finally made complete by the birth of many daughter churches, who now reflect their Roman mother.

The doctrines instituted by Christ, and observed by the apostles, were first perverted by men influenced by Gnosticism, an esoteric religious system based on the acquisition of knowledge. False teachers, swayed by Gnostic heretics such as Simon Magus and Cerinthus, infiltrated God’s Church. While professing belief in Christ, these false teachers brought in damnable beliefs (II Corinthians 11:13-15; II Peter 2:1).

At the core of the Gnostic system was a belief that anything physical took a person away from God. Those things that were intellectual, and therefore believed to be spiritual, brought one closer to the Deity. Consequently, only those things of the mind were valued by disciples of this false religion.

In time, two sects emerged from this belief. An ascetic view was propagated which advocated that, since the physical led man away from God, 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 (and) taste not” (Colossians 2:21).

Another sect of this movement also developed, carrying the name Epicurean. These believers put an ironic twist on the teaching. 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. The perversion actually went so far as to teach that an individual could perform any depraved act. The belief was propagated that as long as a person had love in their heart and mind, it was not sin.

When addressing this part of the gnostic movement, Paul writes, “shall we sin that grace may abound? God forbid” (Romans 6:1). The Apostle John also combated this first century heresy, writing that whoever says that they do not sin deceives himself (I John 1:8).

This gnostic movement continued to affect the church for two centuries. It caused the importance of following God's law to be minimized as false teachers propagated the belief that love for God in the heart was more important than actual obedience to His commands. Then, in the fourth century, a historic precedent catapulted the church into greater apostasy.

### ***Emperor Constantine furthers the Transformation***

The Roman Emperor Constantine came to power in the early 300s when it was still a violation of Roman law to practice Christianity. During this time in history, those who professed the Christian religion were hated by the state and subjected to great persecution. This included torture, and even burning at the stake.

The new Emperor took control of the Roman Empire at a period when it was beginning to crumble due to excess. At the same time, the now corrupt Christian religion was growing. Despite great persecution, these professing Christians seemed dedicated to their faith. They taught moral living and hard work, coupled with loyalty to the state. Constantine was so impressed that he decided to use this religion as the glue to hold his failing Empire together.

Constantine issued “The Edict of Toleration” in 313 A.D., and later made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. State persecution of Christians stopped immediately with this edict, and believers throughout the empire rejoiced. They were convinced that God had saved them through this pagan dictator.

Few could have anticipated what would occur next. Because Christianity was now the state religion, the church became political. The woman began to ride the beast described in Revelation, chapter seventeen, and professing Christianity was further metamorphosed. Jesse Hurlbut describes this, stating:

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. Worldly, unscrupulous men sought office in the church for social and political influence . . . 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 (a change in) worship (*The Story of the Christian Church*).

### ***The Transformation becomes Complete***

Legalizing Christianity solved one problem for the church, but caused yet another. Millions of pagans were made “Christians” overnight, but they had no desire to give up their old ways. The priests tried to change the new converts from the paganism their culture had embraced, but could not! Finally, the church decided to accommodate the pagan practices. The church historian, Guignebert explains how this process occurred. He writes:

At the beginning of the fifth century, the ignorant and the semi-Christians thronged into the church in numbers. 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. *To properly teach new converts* 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 . . . This “later date” never arrived, and the church adapted to herself, as well as she could, them and their customs and beliefs . . . *converts* were content to dress their paganism in a Christian cloak (*The Early History of Christianity* pp. 208-210).

This so-called Christianity attempted to bring the pagan world under its control through a process of assimilation. But instead of converting the pagans to their beliefs, this practice actually fueled the spread of the false pagan worship, like a cancer from within. Ultimately, this attempt at mass conversion worked to further defile true religion. Will Durant writes:

Christianity did not destroy paganism; it adopted it . . . From Egypt came the idea of a divine trinity . . . and the adoration of the Mother and Child. . . . 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*, p. 595).

Instead of being separate from the world, this form of “Christianity” was driven by a desire to increase their numbers. They invited the world inside.

Believing they could “Christianize” the pagans, the church began accepting a wide range of Babylon’s beliefs, symbols, and practices. In so doing, it became more corrupt. Alexander Hislop writes:

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

This form of Christianity believed it could meet the pagans half way by accepting them, if they in turn would accept Christ. What occurred in actual practice was that the pagans so defiled this church that it was assimilated by them!

The church remained in this state for more than a thousand years. As it grew more and more powerful, it was finally able to take control of the holy Roman Empire— fulfilling the prophecy,

“the woman rode the Roman beast.” The formerly persecuted church became the persecutor. She lived deliciously—drunk on the blood of the true saints (Revelation 17:6).

In the 1500s, the Protestant reformation was born. Millions believed they were now free from defilement by the woman. While free from Papal authority, their new freedom was actually a birth of the daughters of the whore who would bear her likeness in belief, tradition and symbol.

### ***Many have been Defiled***

From Nimrod, to the Gnostics of Paul’s day, through the Spanish Inquisition, and for over five hundred years after the reformation, the whore and her daughters have influenced religion. As a result, millions have been defiled with seductive, deceptive and false doctrine (II Thessalonians 2:7). The spread of this false system has been absolutely phenomenal. Very little has remained untouched by its insidious poison.

In the book of Revelation, the Apostle John records how pervasive this defiling system has become. The apostle states this shocking truth:

The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan, **which deceiveth the whole world** (Revelation 12:9).

While many would agree that believers in religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Taoism are deceived, few would admit that believers in Christianity have been misled.

But this is exactly how deception works. The deceived do not know they are deceived. What about you? Are you deceived? Consider the chart on page 149. It lists just a few of modern Christianity’s beliefs that conflict with the Bible.

### ***The 144,000 have Not been Defiled with Women***

This list of false doctrines is limited to just a few of the most obvious ones, simply to fit on a single page. Shocking as it may sound, the number of beliefs and practices in the modern professing Christian church that differ from the Bible literally reaches into the hundreds!

False teachings regarding the nature of God, His purpose for man, the place of His law, and the authority of Scripture have polluted men’s minds with mistaken ideas. They have replaced God with idols, and worshiped Him with pagan holidays. These false beliefs have defiled people, blinding them so they cannot clearly see and properly understand the truth of God.

False doctrine acts like a virus in a believer’s mind. It corrupts the way a person thinks, and therefore what he or she does. What a Christian does then molds what their character will ultimately be. For this reason, those who strive to be God’s true servants must resist the all too pervasive doctrines, and influence of the ancient mystery religion.

## *Doctrines That Defile*

| <i>False Churches Teach</i>                                     | <i>The Bible Declares</i>   |
|---|---|
| Crucifixes or statues of Christ are legitimate aids to worship. | Man is to make absolutely no image of God (Deut. 4:15).                       |
| Religious leaders are to be called Father or Reverend.          | Call no man Father (Mat. 23:9). God is called Reverend, not men (Psa. 111:9). |
| We can earn God's favor by doing penance.                       | God wants repentance, not ritual (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 2:38).                     |
| Man is an immortal soul inside a physical body.                 | Only God has immortality (I Tim. 6:15-16; Psa. 146:4).                        |
| The first day, Sunday, is the day to worship.                   | God commands Saturday, the 7 <sup>th</sup> day (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. 5:17-23, 19:17).                    |
| We should dress up as devils, ghosts, or goblins on Halloween.  | We must have no fellowship with the devil (I Cor. 10:20).                     |
| Those who don't accept Christ are burned alive in hell forever. | The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23; Psa. 146:3-4).                          |
| We should bring a tree into our house and decorate it.          | Do not cut down a tree and decorate it (Jer. 10:2).                           |
| 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 born again at the resurrection (John 3:6; Isa. 66:8).                  |
| Easter is the main Christian holiday.                           | God punished Israel for worship of Easter (I Kings 11:5).                     |
| Believers go to heaven when they die.                           | No man has ascended to heaven (John 3:13; Act 2:34).                          |

The 144,000 are those who have resisted and overcome! They have come out of this false system—honestly and sincerely striving to weed out false belief and wrong practices in their lives.

They have replaced error with God's truth.

The 144,000 absolutely must not be defiled because of who they are. They are the servants of God, spiritual Israel— those who will be in the first resurrection standing on Mount Zion singing praise to God! They are those who will assist Christ as He rules the earth for a thousand years. They are the bride that Christ marries. They are those who are destined to inhabit New Jerusalem, in which nothing that defiles will be allowed to enter (Revelation 21:27). The 144,000 are not defiled by the harlot or her daughters. Jesus Christ will not use defiled leaders to teach others in God's Kingdom. He will not marry a defiled bride. Therefore, His true Church keeps itself pure and clean in order to be presented to Him as a chaste virgin.

# *They are Virgins*

## Key Eight:

*That He might present it to Himself a glorious church,  
not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing;  
but that it should be holy and without blemish.*  
Ephesians 5:27

The thought of a virgin elicits mental pictures of youthful innocence, wholesome beauty, and purity. This is exactly how the Lord God looks upon His faithful. He sees them as clean, pure and righteous. For this reason, God inspired the Apostle John to describe the 144,000 as virgins. He writes:

These are they that are not defiled by women, **for they are virgins** (Revelation 14:4).

The 144,000 are individuals who have kept themselves from being tainted by the world. Instead of being defiled by false religious beliefs or practices, they have kept themselves morally and ethically pure. Each one has worked diligently to remain unblemished—ready to marry Jesus Christ upon His return.

### ***Who is Qualified to Marry the High Priest***

John's statement that the 144,000 are virgins is reflected in God's law concerning the marriage of the high priest. In the old covenant, the high priest was a type, picturing Jesus Christ. Consequently, he was required to maintain extremely high ethical and moral standards.

When it came to marriage, the high priest was not permitted to marry anyone he might desire. Even in such a personal area of life, he was held to the highest of standards. He had written stipulations to follow, which state:

And he shall take a **wife in her virginity**. A widow, or a divorced woman, or profane, or a harlot these shall he not take: but he shall **take a virgin** of his own people to wife (Leviticus 21:13-15).

The temple and its priesthood were patterned after the heavenly. The high priest pictured Jesus Christ, whose character is pure and holy (Hebrews 8:5; 9:11). Jesus, like the high priest, must

marry a woman that is holy. He cannot marry a harlot, or one who has been married to another. The Church He marries, the 144,000, must be clean and pure—they must be virgins.

### ***The Friend of the Bridegroom***

Because the high priest pictured Jesus Christ, and His virgin portrayed the Church, the Apostle Paul writes:

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

In this letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is making an allusion to the ancient Jewish wedding ceremony in which there was an official position called the Shoshabin. This post was given to the best friend of the bridegroom, and in some cases there was a Shoshabin for both bride and groom.

In Jewish tradition, this was literally an office appointed by God Himself. The belief is that the Eternal God presided over the first wedding of Adam and Eve, while the archangels Michael and Gabriel served as the Shoshabins.

The Shoshabin was responsible for the success of the wedding. It was his responsibility to deliver the invitations, arrange the wedding details and then preside over the wedding functions. Finally, it was he who would present the bride to the groom at the time of the wedding.

This “friend of the bridegroom” acted as a liaison between the bride and the bridegroom, and it was his responsibility to guard the bridal chamber. He was to let no false lover have access to the bride under any circumstance, and he would open the bridal chamber door only when he heard the bridegroom’s voice.

The Apostle Paul portrayed himself as the friend of the bridegroom. As the Shoshabin, he saw it as his responsibility to prepare the bride for the marriage supper. He would strive to keep the Church pure and clean, and then present her as a chaste virgin to Christ at His coming.

The symbolism is clear regarding the 144,000. They are the Church that will marry Jesus Christ at His return. For this reason, they will be presented to Jesus Christ as holy, pure, and clean—virgins.

### ***The Marriage Ceremony***

To further understand the symbolism Christ used when describing the 144,000, it is important to consider the marriage ceremony as it existed during the lifetime of Jesus.

While sometimes planned for many months, the average marriage service today takes between fifteen and twenty minutes to perform. Matrimonial ceremonies in the time of Christ were much larger affairs, however, often lasting an entire week or even longer. The arrangements included two phases. Guests were first “bidden” to the wedding. Later they were “called” to actually attend.

A person was “bidden” when they were notified that a wedding would be taking place. This notice constituted the person’s invitation. The individual was told that he or she were on the guest list and given a general time frame to expect the wedding. The host sponsoring the ceremony would



return home, and make all the necessary preparations. Once everything was ready, the guests were then called to the wedding.

Christ provides considerable insight into these extensive preparations when He gives the parable of the wedding. Matthew records Him to say:

The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding . . . saying, tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage (Matthew 22:2-4).

Once called to the marriage, the guests would arrive and partake of a ceremony that included two parts, a feast followed by the actual marriage ceremony.

The feast would include a great supper with an abundance of both delicious food and refreshing drink. After this elaborate banquet, there would be a formal ceremony in the evening. At this time, the Shoshabin for the bride and groom would bring the pair together, and present them to the officiating Rabbi for the marriage ceremony.

Following this, the couple was escorted to their new home in a torch light procession. There was a canopy held over their heads as they went along the way. All this helped draw attention to the procession, as they took the longest route possible, so that many along the way could wish them well. The couple's personal friends accompanied them, carrying torches to light the way. Anyone without a torch was not considered part of the wedding party.

The newlyweds did not go out of town on a honeymoon as we do today. Instead, they were taken to their new home where they were officially pronounced married. The couple stayed in their abode for an entire week, holding open house. During the week-long celebration, there was a spirit of joy and mirth in the whole town. The entire community celebrated the couple's happiness. People put aside their business and traveled to the newly married couple's dwelling to enjoy the jubilant celebration before returning home.

The couple entertained guests who would visit, and during this time the bride and groom often wore crowns. They were treated as a king and queen, and their word was considered law at this week long wedding celebration.

### ***Spiritual Insight from the Ceremony***

Jesus Christ made use of the imagery contained in the Jewish wedding ceremony as an educational tool to help His future bride understand the magnificent spiritual wedding supper to come. The wedding ceremony of Christ's day provides rich insight, because it is a representation of what the spiritual virgins of the Church will experience in the future.

Christ has bidden many to His wedding. Many have been called during the first six thousand years of man's existence, but not everyone who is bidden will attend the wedding (Matthew 22:14). Some who are bidden will not value their invitation enough to respond, and therefore will not prepare themselves.

Some will be distracted by the cares of this world, while others will become defiled (Matthew 13:22). As a consequence, none of these will have a part in the wedding supper!

Those who do respond to having been bidden will prepare themselves and be ready. They will be active participants in one of the most wonderful blessings ever bestowed on man. They will

marry their Creator! John writes:

And he saith unto me, Write, blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, these are the true sayings of God (Revelation 19:9).

What a blessing this event will be! The supper will likely consist of fantastic feasting, with incredible food and drink. Perhaps it will all be laid out as a massive banquet on the resplendent sparkling sea of glass. The resurrected saints will eat and drink at Christ's table as promised (Luke 22:30).

There they will enjoy the hospitality of the Almighty God and all the heavenly hosts. They will fellowship with other saints who have fought the good fight, and meet heroes of faith from all ages. They will celebrate this long-awaited event with Enoch, Moses, Abraham, David and thousands of others.

After this glorious feast, the marriage ceremony will follow. It will likely be officiated by God the Father, Himself. The virgins will become the wife of Christ, and will be given crowns, and made kings and priests (Revelation 5:10). Instead of going off somewhere to be alone, they will be visited by the whole host of angels, who will come to honor them.

The bride will then meet the angelic host mentioned in the Bible. They will see the magnificent archangels Gabriel and Michael. The resurrected saints will likely be introduced to their personal guardian angels, who may then recount the times they miraculously protected them.

This event, and all it portends for those who are called, is so important and so wonderful, that Jesus warns His people not to miss it. By this, He is warning all of us—don't ever let down! Be prepared!

### ***The Parable of the Virgins***

Toward the end of His ministry, Jesus was with His disciples on the Mount of Olives. His followers asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the world. In Matthew, chapter twenty-four, Jesus explains the chronological events that will occur, and then relates several parables exhorting His followers to be prepared.

These parables first begin with Christ reminding His followers that His return will be unexpected (Matthew 24:42-44). Secondly, He explains that more than passive watching is required, and that Christians must be actively overcoming until His return (Matthew 24:45-51). Thirdly, there is the need for vigilant preparedness in the face of a seeming delay (Matthew 25:13-33).

Finally, Christ gives the parable of the ten virgins for those in His Church in the last days. The virgins are His people who have been "bidden." It is to them that Jesus gives this warning so that they will be ready, and therefore "chosen" to be a part of the wedding ceremony. Jesus explains:

Then shall the Kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five *were* foolish. They that *were* foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, *Not so*; lest there be

not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not (Matthew 25:1-12).

In this parable, the virgins are representative of true Christians at the end of the age. The tarrying is the delay in Christ's anticipated return (Luke 12:45). It is this delay that actually determines who is wise and who is foolish. The overall theme is a reminder that we must stay prepared while we wait for Christ to return.

### ***They Took their Lamps***

Christ states that all the virgins took their lamps with them. The word "lamp" is "lampes" in the Greek, and it can mean either a "lamp" or a "torch." In this parable the story is about a marriage procession, and torches, rather than lamps, were used in these events.

The torches that were generally used in these processions were simply lengths of wood, tightly wrapped with linen cloth around one end. The linen wrapped end was soaked in oil. The linen absorbed the oil and held it so that it would not evaporate quickly.

The oil soaked linen caused the torch to burn for some time. Eventually, the oil burned up, however, and the torch began to sputter, fizzle, and finally go out. More oil was needed to cause the torch to burn vigorously once again. Some of the virgins wisely brought an extra supply of oil with them. Expecting the groom to come immediately, the other virgins foolishly brought no extra oil.

While the groom delayed, all of the virgins dozed off and slumbered. Suddenly, the cry went out, "The bridegroom is coming!" By this time the torches the virgins carried had begun to sputter and go out.

Those virgins who were wise were prepared for the unexpected. They had brought extra oil in a vessel so they could pour additional oil onto the linen cloth and refuel their torches. In this way, they insured that they were allowed to continue in the wedding procession, and take part in the ceremony inside the bridegroom's home. The others were required to go and buy oil, but this took too much time. They found themselves locked out of the ceremony.

### ***The Parable is for our Time***

The meaning of the parable is clear. Oil has always been used as a reference to the endowment of the Holy Spirit when anointing kings or priests (I Samuel 16:13). The torch portrays God's Word, which is able to light our way in the darkness of this world (Psalm 119:105). The virgins are those who have been bidden to the wedding. They are to prepare themselves for the marriage ceremony, but now there has been an unexpected delay.

Because Christ did not come when many expected Him, some Christians are now spiritually asleep. Many have given up running the race altogether. Others have let down, are drifting along, and no longer actively striving to overcome. Make no mistake, however—regardless of their spiritual state, the cry will go out. The virgins will be called to the wedding ceremony.

This parable is a warning to all the virgins—to the whole Church. Christ's admonition to the Church at the end time is to be prepared, to stay alert and be in a state of readiness at all times. So,

even if events have turned out differently than expected, don't let down in prayer, Bible study, and obedience to God. If circumstances are not exactly what you anticipated, realize they are still exactly what God planned.

It is imperative that each of us continue to develop spiritually as time goes on. We must continue to live in a state of preparation so that we are not caught off guard.

The call to the wedding will come soon. Five of the virgins were prepared for Christ. The other five were not. Follow the advice that God gives to His virgins. Remain actively involved in overcoming human nature and developing godly character right up to the end. Strive to keep yourselves pure, and undefiled by the doctrines of the false system. Use God's Holy Spirit and His Word to remain prepared during the delay we now face. Work at having a full supply of the oil of God's Spirit so that your light still be shining when He returns.

# *They Follow the Lamb*

## Key Nine:

*If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself,  
and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.  
Luke 9:23*

**W**hat does it take to develop righteous leadership? For the true Christian, it is a process of spiritual growth that begins at conversion, and continues over a lifetime of following the leadership of Jesus Christ.

Leonard Ravenhill tells a story that illustrates this truth. 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 in the tour asked in a patronizing way, “Were any great spiritual leaders born in this village?” Without hesitation, the old man replied, “No sir! Only babies.”

The old man’s answer was profound. There are no instant leaders, whether in this world or in the world to come! We all start as babes and learn by following Christ.

Most recognized leaders will acknowledge this to be true. A prerequisite to great leadership is to first humbly learn by following other respected authorities. Even Jesus Christ, who was the greatest leader to ever walk the earth, learned obedience by following the Father’s direction (Hebrews 5:8).

Jesus is preparing His saints for positions of enormous leadership. They will one day assist Him in the restoration of God’s government and lead the people of the various nations to obey God’s holy law. Their preparation for this great responsibility consists of the daily practice of following the example and commands of Jesus Christ. The Apostle John explains:

These are they which **follow the Lamb** whithersoever He goeth (Revelation 14:4).

This verse makes the identity of the 144,000 absolutely clear. The Lamb is Christ, and the 144,000 are His followers. They are the children of God, who keep His commandments and sincerely strive to learn godliness by emulating Christ’s example during their lifetime.

### ***Professing Without Following***

Not everyone who professes to know Christ follows Him. According to one United States national poll, ninety-six percent of Americans profess a belief in God, but how many of those really seek to obey Him?

The vast majority of professing Christians say that they want God in their life, but what do they really mean by this? Far too many simply want His favor. It’s as if they see God as a sort of spiritual insurance policy against hard times. They want His protection and blessing, but they don’t

really want to make the sacrifices necessary to conform their lives to His Word. The reality is that most do not want to follow the great moral authority of God.

As a result, while we may call ourselves a Christian nation, we have abandoned God's Ten Commandments. We have cast God out of the class room and courthouse. Instead of teaching the need for repentance for our disobedience, many religious leaders proclaim that Jesus did away with God's law.

Whether we realize it or not, we all follow someone or something. The tragedy is that the vast majority of people today do not follow their Creator. The truth is that most people do not really want God in their lives. He is conspicuously absent from their business dealings, their lifestyles, and their entertainment. Rather than pursuing Christ, they follow their emotions, celebrities, rock stars, sports stars or politicians. Titus describes our age today by saying:

**They profess** that they know God; but **in works they deny Him**, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate (Titus 1:16).

As a result of merely professing a belief in God without doing what He commands, our nation has lost its moral compass. We have wandered off the path. We are lost, and are suffering the consequences of disobeying God. We now find ourselves threatened by pollution, nuclear or biological war, terrorism, disease, drugs and 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. Eventually, 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. Upon rising, he walked directly into the bush.

The missionary followed close on his heels as they hacked their way through a dense wall of 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 African leader chuckled, and said over his shoulder, "Bwana, in this place there is no path. I am the path!"

In life's labyrinth, with its maze of complexity, Jesus is the path. Christ says:

**I am the way**, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me (John 14:6).

Jesus is the way, the path, and 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 us—we are to follow Him in faith.

After the resurrection, Christ drove this point home to His leading apostle. Jesus visited the disciples, shared breakfast with them and spoke directly to the Apostle Peter. Perhaps to prick Peter's conscience after his triple denial, Jesus queried him three times, asking, "Do you love Me?" After the third affirmation of Peter's love, Jesus explained that the apostle would face a future opportunity for denial. Would Peter deny Christ a fourth time? Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying

by what death He should glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, **Follow Me** (John 21:18-19).

Faced with martyrdom, would Peter disavow Christ, or would he follow his Savior's example? When the time finally came, Peter followed Jesus, even to the point of death. Tradition says that when he was ordered to be crucified by the Roman Emperor, Peter stated that he was not worthy to suffer the same death as His Lord. At that statement, the Roman tyrant responded by ordering God's apostle to be crucified upside down.

### ***The Sheep Hear His Voice***

Peter was obedient to the very point of death! It is this quality of obedience that makes the 144,000 unique among all who believe in Christ. They follow Christ. He is their Lord and Master, their consultant, and advisor. They treat the Bible as Christ's personal revelation to man, and His Word becomes the authority in their lives.

The 144,000 are also those people who sincerely strive to build a friendship with Jesus Christ, their Shepherd. They pray each morning, seeking to know and follow His will. Meditating on His Word throughout the day, they "check in" with Him frequently to see if they are on course. They also pray at night, reviewing their progress. The 144,000 examine themselves daily to make sure they are properly following Christ (II Corinthians 13:5).

Christ is their Shepherd, and they are His sheep. Notice the words of Jesus:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep **FOLLOW HIM**: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:1-5).

Christ's followers have developed a personal relationship with Him as they practice following His teachings each day. They can identify His voice from among the many strident voices heard in the religious world, and they will not follow false shepherds.

### ***Other Sheep***

Christ also explained that He has sheep from all ages and from all parts of the world who have entrusted their lives to Him. They, too, have become His followers, pursuing Him above all else. Jesus continues:

I am the good shepherd, and know My *sheep*, and am known of Mine. As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I 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 shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, *and* one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

Jesus Christ is the good shepherd. He loves each one of His sheep, caring for them with a deep dedication. He protects them, provides for them, and even gave His life for them.

Our shepherd has worked with His sheep from the beginning of man's history. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Ezekiel and Daniel are all examples of His sheep. There are others from the time of Christ—some from the early church, and still more who have lived since then. Many are alive during this last generation.

Collectively, His sheep will number 144,000. They will be brought together as one flock at the first resurrection to be God's governmental assistants in both His earthly Kingdom and His eternal family forever.

Qualifying for such leadership roles can only be accomplished by following Christ in this lifetime. Jesus states:

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and **they FOLLOW Me**: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of My hand (John 10:27-28).

Only those who follow, and obey Christ in everything will be chosen to be among the 144,000. They will be in the first resurrection, and granted eternal life. However, such a high reward does not come without sacrifice.

### ***An Element of Self Denial***

After Peter had denied Jesus three times, Christ told him that he would suffer martyrdom. Jesus has a similar message for devoted Christians today. No matter what losses life may impose, we must follow Christ. Jesus warns:

If any *man* will come after Me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross, and follow Me** (Matthew 16:24).

Jesus explained that following Him means that we must be willing to be crucified with Him. Christ's words do not necessarily mean that we must die a physical death on a stake like both He and the Apostle Peter did. Instead, He is telling us that the old self must die! The way of life we led, before we came to Christ, must be destroyed. Our "old man" must indeed go!

It is this aspect of the Christian calling that separates those who only profess Christ from those who actually follow Him. Individuals who only give Him lip service continue to follow their human nature. Those who have chosen to emulate Jesus, literally view their own human nature as an enemy. They are continually at war with its pull on them. The Apostle Paul explains:

**I am crucified with Christ**: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

In the previous verse, Paul explained that we die with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:3-6). Actually, we still live, however. The part of us that we put to death is the deceitful aspect of our human nature. It is our vanity, lust, greed, and selfishness that we must fight to put down (Jeremiah 17:9; I John 2:16). As we put this part of ourselves to death each day, Christ can more fully live in us.



This is part of the Christian battle, and it is no small fight. Every fiber of our being struggles to keep our human nature alive. Within each of us, there lies a defense mechanism that helps us survive. It is what prompts us to pull our hand out of the fire or avoid dangerous situations.

This protective function is necessary to preserve physical life, but it can also become the Christian's enemy. It works to protect us from every injury—physically, emotionally, and psychologically. However, this defense mechanism is capable of prompting us to do almost anything to get what we feel that we need. It can motivate us to rationalize and justify our human behavior so that we blind our selves to the painful truth about our motives. It compels us to put the self first—even hurting others to get our way.

It is this part of ourselves that we must defeat! John the Baptist demonstrated that he had learned to subordinate the self when he said that he must decrease so that Christ could increase. This is why Christ said there was none greater than John the Baptist (John 3:30).

In this context, Paul first wrote to the Church at Corinth explaining that he had to die daily (I Corinthians 15:31). Later, he goes into more detail in a second letter:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; **always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.** For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh (II Corinthians 4:7-11).

By dying to the self, the true Christian follows Jesus Christ. The more we become selfless, the more Jesus is able to live in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Christian can then follow Christ's lead in every aspect of his or her life.

The Apostle John was commanded to write that the 144,000 follow the Lamb so that we would understand this vital point. Profession of faith is not enough. We must do more than believe. We must act on our belief. We must follow Christ in what He says, and in what He did. We must be followers—doers of His Word—literally imitating Christ's example.

There are untold millions of professing Christians in the world today. There are more than one hundred and thirty million in the United States alone. On the other hand, the 144,000 are a relatively small number. The unique criteria that sets them apart is that they actually follow Christ! The 144,000 do NOT simply give God lip service. Instead, they sincerely strive to live God's way in every aspect of their lives.

The 144,000 follow Christ, and any who claim to be His, and do not follow His commands, are false. The Apostle John expounds on this theme in his first letter with some extremely direct and powerful words. He states:

And hereby we do know that we know Him, if **we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.** But whoso keepeth His word, in Him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in Him. He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to **walk, even as He walked** (I John 2:3-6).

True Christians follow Christ! In every circumstance, they sincerely ask, “What would Christ do?” At work they serve their employers faithfully, giving a full day’s work, because that is what Jesus would do. They will only participate in the kinds of activities that He would, watch only movies that Christ would see, and listen to music that He would approve.

Those who will be among the 144,000 do not try to cheat the government on their taxes because Jesus would not do so. They refrain from gossip and idle words, excusing themselves from conversation unbecoming God’s children.

Genuine Christians not only profess Christ, they follow Him, striving always to live by His rules. Christian women are loyal, showing honor and respect for their husbands. Men who are sincere believers show the proper respect toward women, maintaining appropriate boundaries. Believers don’t lie to protect themselves or others. They don’t use God’s name in vain, do not drink to excess, and do not ignore the poor, fatherless, and widows.

In every area of life they seek to practice actually living the way that their Creator does. In a daily process, they strive to put the old self to death, and be led by Christ’s Spirit. This is accomplished by studying Jesus, learning how He thinks and acts. Then, each day they work at being attuned and sensitive to God’s Spirit in order to follow Him.

As the Scriptures state, the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever He goes. By following Him in this life, they will follow Him into the next. They will be raised in the first resurrection—redeemed from the earth (I Thessalonians 4:17).

# *They are Redeemed*

Key Ten:

*Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.*

*Isaiah 51:11*

**J**n our modern world, abduction is a growing concern. Shocking newspaper headlines cry out, “Columbia is the Kidnaping Capital of the World!,” “Kidnapping in the Philippines is a Growth Industry!,” and, “The Ransom Industry is Big Business in Delhi!”

Many large corporations are now finding that part of doing business in a worldwide economy includes the purchase of ransom insurance. One international insurance company explains that while the government keeps quiet, and private companies rarely release details, its sources suggest that worldwide incidents reach as high as 20-25,000 per year. This reflects a 70% increase since the early nineties.

Outrageous as these international kidnapping statistics are, it is even more startling to consider that the whole world has been abducted, and held for ransom. But it has! Even worse, since this seizure occurred at the beginning of man’s history, billions now live their lives completely unaware that such an event ever took place.

## ***A World Held for Ransom***

Because all that humanity has ever experienced is its present state of captivity, most people have accepted deception, suffering and unhappiness as the natural course of life. In some ways, we are like Patty Hearst, who was abducted from a life of privilege with her wealthy parents, and then temporarily brain washed by her kidnapers into preferring a life of crime. Like Patty Hearst, we also have come to identify with our kidnapper—Satan!

How did the world come to be in such a state? It must first be understood that we have been born late in the stream of history, without prior knowledge of the events that shaped the world we live in. Therefore, it is of immense value to reflect upon what occurred before man’s existence.

In the beginning God created an environment of total peace, happiness, cooperation and love. He also brought a myriad of angels into existence to share in His wonderful way of life. These angels were to be ministering servants to mankind, which He would later create. Next, God produced a vast physical universe to be inhabited. Then the great angelic being Lucifer rebelled. He attacked God’s throne and was cast down to earth in abject defeat.

After this God created the first human in His own image and placed him in a beautiful garden called Eden. The Eternal then created the woman to be a helper, compatible with the man. Adam and his wife, Eve, were given dominion over the entire earth, where they were to faithfully administer God’s government. God gave Adam and Eve access to everything in the garden with one exception.

The Eternal explained to the first humans that of the two trees in the midst of the garden, one would lead to eternal life and the other to death. The two trees represent two ways of life. The tree of life pictures living God's way. Choosing this tree requires faith, and a determination to keep God's commandments over a lifetime. Choosing this tree results in eternal life in the Kingdom and family of God.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents the way of self-determination. Taking of this tree means distrusting God, rejecting His law and His government. It means choosing to decide for one's self what is right or wrong. God warns mankind, as He warned Adam and Eve, that eating of this tree results in death.

Lucifer, now called Satan, came to our first parents and seduced them into eating of the tree that God had forbidden. He told them the great lie, that they could not trust their Creator, and that by choosing to determine what was good and evil themselves, they would be like God. Moses explains:

The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:1-5).

It is at this very point that the world became corrupt. This is the choice that the first man and woman made, and mankind has continued down that path to this very day. Without realizing the horrific consequences, Adam and Eve had rejected God's government by submitting themselves to the leadership of Satan. Thus they were kidnapped by the Devil, and mankind has been held hostage to this very day.

The immediate effect of Adam and Eve's rebellion was that the attributes of self-centeredness, coveting, lusting, greed, and competition became a way of life on this earth. Man became the servant of sin, and therefore of Satan (Romans 6:16).

This action, by our first parents, also caused man to reject the true God, and accept Satan as the god of this world. Terrible curses came upon the earth. The soil brought forth weeds and thorns, women suffered in childbirth, and even the nature of the animals was changed. From that day forward, they began to devour one another. Satan's influence was once again reflected in the world.

Paul writes to the brethren in Corinth explaining how Satan continues to blind people's minds to the truth. He states:

The **god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not**, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them (II Corinthians 4:4).

Satan became the god of this world by seducing Adam and Eve into serving him instead of the true God. He spiritually abducted our first parents, setting up the rest of humanity to continue on the same path. From this catalyst to our time today, humanity has been held captive by the sway

of the devil, and mankind has willingly continued to follow the way of its kidnapper.

### ***The Ransom has been Paid!***

Thankfully, the Father has paid the price of our ransom in order to redeem His children. That price was no less than the life of His only begotten Son, Jesus. Matthew writes:

Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give **His life a ransom** for many (Matthew 20:28).

All mankind has sinned, and the penalty for sin is death (Romans 3:10, 6:23). However, Jesus Christ paid the consequences for our sin with His life.

### ***The 144,000 are Redeemed***

By paying the ransom, Christ provided a means to free us from our bondage. Those who repent of following Satan the devil, and follow God's way, by submitting to His government, can accept Christ's payment for their sins. This redeems them from the penalty of the law. As Paul writes:

**Christ hath redeemed us** from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13).

The 144,000 are those who have been redeemed. God's apostle states:

The hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand (are they) which **were redeemed** from the earth... (And) These **were redeemed** from among men (Revelation 14:3-4).

The 144,000 are the ransomed. They are those who have been bought back from among men, and are redeemed from this earth. Immediately, this identifies them as those who have accepted Christ's sacrifice to cover their sins. They have received His Spirit, been placed in His Church, and now follow Him, despite living in a world held captive by Satan. They develop godly character, hold fast until the end, and will be raised in the first resurrection.

### ***The Meaning of Redemption***

The word "redeem" has great meaning. Simply stated, it means to "buy back." In Biblical language, it refers to buying the freedom of a slave. It can also refer to the release of someone from bondage upon receipt of a ransom. It means the recovery of something lost, or even the reclamation of that which has become contaminated. It also refers to paying off a debt, restoration to an original place, or return to a former state.

In the context of these definitions, being spiritually redeemed refers to being purchased back from the degrading defilement we have experienced as a result of our sins. It includes regaining the freedom we lost while in bondage to that sin. It involves the return of our lost position as God's children, and the dismissal of the awful curse of death hanging over the head of every single human being.

Christ was the very Creator of all mankind (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16). As such, His life is worth more than the combined lives of all His creation. Therefore, the life of Jesus more than pays the debt we owe for our sins. By dying in our place, His sacrifice paid the price of our redemption. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul states:

For **ye are bought with a price**: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Corinthians 6:20).

We are bought with an enormous price. It was not our life savings, hundreds of thousands of dollars in a corporate reserve account, or even millions from an insurance company. We were redeemed by something so valuable, and at a cost so high, it is staggering to comprehend. Peter writes:

Forasmuch as ye know that **ye were not redeemed with corruptible things**, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; **but with the precious blood of Christ**, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (I Peter 1:18-19).

Jesus Christ made the supreme sacrifice in order to redeem us. That cost can only be understood by realizing what He was, who He was, and what He did for mankind.

### ***The Price of Redemption***

Before giving Himself to pay our ransom, Jesus Christ was no less than the Word. He was God. He was the One who created both the physical universe and the magnificent, beautiful angelic beings. So awesome was this noble being that the creation obeyed His every command. The spirit beings before His throne serve and honor Him daily. They worship Him unabashedly.

As second in command of the heavenly realm, Christ was awesome in power and influence. He sat on His throne, glorious and resplendent in beauty. He literally radiated light, power, might, and majesty. There was absolutely nothing He could not do.

Jesus Christ was holy, and therefore morally and ethically pure. He always conducted Himself in absolutely perfect, moral, and ethical behavior. He was the embodiment of holy, righteous and perfect character. He was the epitome of dignity, the height of honor and integrity. He was the great God, the Almighty, the King of creation.

This same great majestic being emptied Himself of all the beauty and glory He enjoyed. He gave up His awesome power and majesty. He gave up being worshiped in splendor and might. He became a human being, composed of corruptible flesh and blood.

He was not obsessed with His status or His position, nor did He feel the need to maintain it at all costs. He did not focus on how much power He possessed. Instead, His care for His creation was so great that He put Himself last, and mankind first, by giving Himself in sacrifice (Philippians 2:1-6).

This transcendent being, called “the Word,” knowingly left all that splendor, and was born a helpless little baby. As a young boy, He no doubt was different from other children. He was probably misunderstood, and thought of as “overly good.” He most likely experienced ridicule from

the other children in the community, even from His own brothers.

As a human being on earth, Christ was tested in every way that we are (Hebrews 4:15). Growing to manhood, Jesus experienced the aching need for human contact all of us feel at times. He felt the natural desire to have a wife. He felt the same pulls of the flesh that we all experience in our lives, but He denied Himself. Christ came to be a sacrifice for man.

While Jesus was here on the earth, He gave of Himself with complete unselfishness. He did so every measured minute of every day of His human life. Eventually, it all came down to that final day, Abib fourteen—His last Passover. This day was a full twenty-four hours of complete agony for Christ, but this was the very reason He came to earth—to die for man in a most unjust way.

His final sacrifice began with the betrayal by Judas, who not only was trusted with the treasury, but was an individual whom Christ loved. Then there was an illegal trial in which Jesus endured false accusations, and terrible twisting of the truth. There was the tormenting harassment that lasted all night long. First He was sent to Annas, and then to Caiaphas, the high priest. There He was mocked, struck in the face and ridiculed.

Consider the fact that sadists often seek positions of power over those who cannot fight back. In such positions, they can take out their own emotionally tortured frustration, anger, and resentment on those who are defenseless. In all likelihood, what these twisted men did to Christ, they did with glee.

While paying the price for us, Christ allowed Himself to be completely under the power of these men, as Satan broadcast his own twisted resentment and hatred into Christ's tormentors. Influenced by the devil's anger, these men tortured Christ all night long. Jeering and laughing with an insane mockery, they repeatedly spit on Him, which to a Jew at that time was the lowest insult. Then, covering His face, they pelted our Savior with their fists.

This torturing punishment was not inflicted by just one person. It was done in groups. There is no doubt that, as Christ stood there with His hands tied behind His back, He was severely bruised and bloodied, with spittle literally dripping down His face and beard.

After this, His interrogators took Him to the Roman governor, Pilate, who attempted to extricate himself by doing no more harm to Jesus. Pilate was unable to shake the anger now infused into the crowd. As the angry throng shouted, "Crucify Him," Pilate found himself with no political choice but to order Jesus beaten and finally crucified.

The guards then made a crown of thorns and jammed the crown down onto Christ's head. The thorns ripped through the flesh around His head, tearing lacerations, perhaps even piercing His skull. They then put a robe on Him and mocked the true Messiah as their "clown king." After this, they led Him out to be beaten and finally executed.

### ***The Roman Punishment***

As most historians and Biblical scholars admit, Roman beatings were far different from those of the Jews. Jewish law prohibited a man receiving more than thirty-nine lashes. The Jews would strike thirteen blows on each of the shoulders, and then apply the final thirteen to the loins.

The Romans had no such humane practice. There was nothing in their law to limit the number of stripes, and nothing to restrict the part of the body that could be struck. Instead, the Roman scourging was called the "half-way death." It stopped just short of killing the victim.

The Romans used a paid professional called a “lictor.” His weapon was a short, round piece of wood called a flagellum, to which were attached several strips of leather. At the end of each strip were sewn chunks of bone or metal. These would cause massive blood loss as they literally tore pieces of flesh off the body with every stroke of the whip.

The lictor was trained to do the most damage possible to a human body without killing the victim. The Roman guards tied Jesus in a bent forward position, over a short column designed for this purpose. In this way, He would not be able to move in order to assuage the impact of any of the blows. The lictor stood about six feet behind Jesus. From there, he brought the flagellum all the way back, as far as he could reach, and then let it fly toward its intended victim.

It is said that the whip made a ghoulish “thud” as it struck the rib cage. The bits of bone and metal curled around the body, ripping into Christ’s side, cutting deeply into his skin and lacerating Him severely. One can imagine, a low moan issuing from Christ’s lips at each blow. His lips would be moving in prayer to the Father, but not to complain or cry out (Isaiah 53:7).

This horrible beating continued until the victim became unconscious. The Roman guards then revived their prisoner with cold water, and the pounding continued. The whip struck over and over again, upon already open wounds, causing terrible shudders of unimaginable pain.

The lictor was a professional, and he carefully watched the victim’s rib cage. He continued the beating until Jesus’ breathing was ready to stop, yet He was still alive. Only then was the flogging complete.

The entire process left Christ battered and flayed open. He was cut and lacerated over most of His body. He was no doubt severely blackened with bruises, and unrecognizable to most people. Yet this was only the beginning.

Victims of crucifixion were normally required to carry their own stake to the place of execution. Jesus was strong. He had kept God’s laws of health, and had worked much of His life as a stone mason. Powerful as He was, however, Christ was terribly weakened by this beating. He actually faltered with the load, and the fact that another would be required to carry His stake was not a kindness, but rather a necessity.

Once at Golgotha, the soldiers attached Jesus to the implement of His death. The spikes used for this purpose were five to seven inches long, and driven through the 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 with our Savior on it. With a thud, they let it fall into its hole. The whole weight of Christ would have fallen on the nails, and another agonizing, searing wave of pain would shudder through the body of our Lord.

The position He now found Himself in had an immediate effect. It first reduced His breathing capacity. Given enough time, it would lead to asphyxiation. To enable Himself to breathe, Christ lifted His body up, putting all His weight on the nail in His feet and those tearing at His wrists. Once raised in this fashion, He experienced some relief. His breathing came easier and more rapid. Christ held Himself in this position until the pain in His feet, and the attendant muscle cramps, forced Him down again.

Any foreign object in the body becomes extremely painful as it continues to irritate the flesh surrounding it. In order to breathe, Christ had to keep putting His full body weight on the spikes which were now tearing at His flesh. He endured this excruciating process a full six hours. The pain simply screamed out from every cell around His wounds. The suffering must have been unbearably intense.



Finally, a centurion jammed a spear into Jesus' side. Christ gave His last gasp of breath, and died. The blood which had accumulated in His abdomen from the internal injuries gushed out. The rest of His blood drained out the ragged holes torn in His feet. The Christ, our Creator, was dead!

### ***The Highest Price God Could Pay***

The Eternal God and Creator of this universe became a man—human, like we are. He suffered terribly for us and then died, paying the penalty for our sins.

Christ's sacrifice was an awesome price to pay in order to redeem mankind. The grace of God did not come cheaply. There was a great deal of pain and suffering on the part of Jesus Christ to save us, but He did not count this to be the greatest cost. His sacrifice went much further than simply His pain and horrible, gruesome death.

Christ never complained about the pain of His suffering, but there was something very difficult for Him to bear. There was something He despised about the horrific ordeal. The author of Hebrews wrote that Christ "despised the shame" (Hebrews 12:2).

The relationship He had with the Father is what Christ cared about more than anything else in life. He loved and adored the Father, always feeling His wonderful presence. He was never alone in all that He suffered because no matter who turned away from Him—no matter how much He lost or suffered—the Father was there comforting and reassuring Him.

There came a moment, however, when Christ was required to give up His relationship with the Father. Jesus experienced the horrible revulsion of the shame of sin for mankind, and He despised that shame. Matthew writes:

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, **why hast Thou forsaken Me?** (Matthew 27:45).

Christ had to experience the Father actually forsaking Him. Spiritually speaking, He had to watch the Father turn His back on Him, thereby severing the relationship. At this point all the sins of the world—our sins—were placed on Jesus Christ, and the Father turned away!

With the sins of mankind laid on Him, our Savior experienced what He hated most. Christ felt the terrible, despicable, and filthy emotions that we all experience when we have sinned. The holy God felt shame!

For the first time in His life, Jesus felt the terrible weight of guilt and shame. He shuddered in revulsion at the detestable experience. He despised it! He hated it! It was repulsive to Him, and the experience sickened Him, yet, He endured it all in selfless love for each of us.

Our redemption literally cost God what He valued most. The Almighty held nothing back! He sacrificed His only son, even allowing His holy character to be debased for us. That sacrifice is what it took to pay the cost of our redemption, however—a price so high that we must never forget it, never deprecate it, and never treat it lightly. Therefore, being redeemed requires that we accept His payment for us, but it also means that we sincerely dedicate ourselves to serving Him.

### ***Redemption is Conversion***

The 144,000 are the redeemed, but their redemption is not something that occurs instantaneously by signing a religious tract, or the simple acceptance of Christ as Savior at an altar call. Instead, their redemption is a lifelong process of conversion.

Spiritual conversion is a process much like other transformations we see in our physical lives. For example, ice can be converted to water, and water changed to steam. Such alterations are simply a result of forces working upon the elements until the needed change occurs.

In like manner, true Christians are in a process of being changed from Satan's way of being prideful and self-centered to eventually becoming spirit beings who are holy, and composed of spirit just like Christ (I John 3:1-3; Ephesians 4:12-13). The process begins with the Christian first being redeemed from his old behavior influenced by Satan the Devil. It finally culminates with their ultimate redemption from the bondage of this physical world at the resurrection.

Paul writes to explain the first stage that Christ performs in the Christian's life. The apostle states that it was Jesus who:

Gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem us from all iniquity**, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

We are first redeemed from our iniquity by Christ's sacrifice. Then we go forward to live a life of good works. To this end, Christ gives the Holy Spirit to those the Father has called. The apostle Paul calls this Spirit:

The **earnest** of our inheritance until the **redemption of the purchased possession** (Ephesians 1:14).

The word "earnest" refers to the term, "earnest money," in Christ's day. Today we call it the "down payment." God gives us His Spirit as evidence that He will redeem us completely. For now, His Spirit is to help Christians change their lives as He motivates and leads them (Acts 20:35). For this reason, Christians must not resist the prompting of His Spirit, as Paul states:

Grieve not the Holy Spirit . . . whereby ye are **sealed** unto the day of **redemption** (Ephesians 4:30).

The Christian must put on the whole armor of God as they fight a spiritual war against human nature and the pulls of this world (Ephesians 6:11-18). They must sacrifice for others, remembering the sacrifice of Christ as they look to their final redemption. Paul writes:

Not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, **the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23).

Mankind's rule on this earth will eventually come to an end. The Great Tribulation will fall upon the world, and finally the last year of man's reign will bring God's fury upon humanity.

But before that day, Christ will insure that those He has chosen will be sealed and protected from the time of God's punishment. The prophet Isaiah speaks of that time with these words:

Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the **daughter of Sion**, Behold, thy salvation cometh; 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 the daughters of Zion! They are the undefiled woman—God’s true Church. Isaiah speaks of them during the time when they are to be sealed for protection, just before the “day of the LORD.” They are encouraged knowing that their salvation is near, and with it their reward—assisting Christ in the establishment of God’s Kingdom on the earth.

Notice that God’s prophet also speaks of those who will resist Christ at His triumphant return. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, Christ says:

I will tread them in Mine anger, and trample them in My fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon My garments, and I will stain all My raiment. For the day of vengeance *is* in Mine heart, and the **year of My redeemed** is come (Isaiah 63:3-4).

Before the seven trumpet plagues are unleashed, those individuals who constitute the final ones to be redeemed, are sealed. When the last trumpet blows, all those who have ever been sealed will rise in the resurrection to meet Christ and marry Him on the sea of glass. They will sing gloriously before God’s throne, having been redeemed from the earth. The Apostle John writes:

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast **redeemed** us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Revelation 5:9).

Finally, those resurrected from the earth, and redeemed from mankind, will return to the earth and inhabit Zion. Isaiah records the very words of God regarding this time:

Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock *whence* ye are hewn . . . Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah *that* bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the LORD shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. Hearken unto Me, My people; and give ear unto Me, O My nation: for a law shall proceed from Me, and I will make My judgement to rest for a light of the people. My righteousness *is* near; My salvation is gone forth, and Mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon Me, and on Mine arm shall they trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be forever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished. Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart *is* my law; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings . . . Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old . . . *Art* Thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for **the ransomed** to pass over? Therefore the **redeemed** of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Sion; and everlasting joy *shall be* upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; *and* sorrow and mourning shall flee away (Isaiah 51:1-11).

God encourages His people that they need not fear the attacks or insults of men. He then reminds them of the time when He redeemed physical Israel from the Egyptians. He brings up that past act of redemption because the physical salvation of Israel during the Exodus was a type, symbolically picturing

the greater redemption of His people at the end.

In this life, God's people must first be redeemed from the bondage of Satan, their human nature, and the pulls of this world (Titus 2:14). Then at Christ's return, they will literally be freed from the limits of this physical world. At the resurrection, they will be catapulted into the glorious world of spirit and ultimate liberty as the sons and daughters of God.

After the millennial reign of Christ, the vast majority of humanity will also be redeemed. For now, however, God is only seeking to redeem the 144,000. During this age, it is only they who are called to overcome, to one day be the bride of Christ, and constitute His future leadership team. Because they are the first to be redeemed, God calls them by a special name. They are His "first fruits."

# *They are The Firstfruits*

Key Eleven:

*Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors:  
the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me.  
Exodus 22:29*

**D**uring the time when the Temple proudly stood, the faithful thronged to Jerusalem each year to celebrate the Feast of Firstfruits. From the Days of Unleavened Bread, seven weeks were counted in joyful anticipation of the coming celebration on the fiftieth day.

As this unique festival approached, pilgrims from far away places crowded the streets of the capital city, carrying offerings to place before the alter of the true God. They came with their offerings of wheat, barley, dates, figs, grapes, pomegranates and olives. They came to rejoice in deep gratitude before their Creator, who had blessed them with the year's first harvest.

Year after year, for centuries, the faithful observed the Feast of Firstfruits, never realizing that they were celebrating a spiritual harvest that would take place far into the future. Unknowingly, they celebrated the harvest of the 144,000.

The 144,000 are the fulfillment of all that the firstfruits observances foreshadow. They are God's first harvest of human souls—the first resurrection. The Apostle John, inspired to describe the 144,000, states:

They are **the firstfruits** unto God and the Lamb (Revelation 14:4).

The Greek root of the word firstfruits is “rosh,” which means “head.” This term is used in the sense of being the “first part,” “point of departure,” or the “beginning.” The Hebrew word firstfruits is the word “rehiyth,” and it means “first in place, time, order or rank.” The Greek word for firstfruits is “aparche.” This word also means “beginning,” but further implies a sense of “primacy.”

All these definitions apply to God's firstfruits. They are God's “new beginning.” They represent a pivotal point in all of human history when the “first” of humankind will be harvested by God in a resurrection. They will also be the “principle,” or “chief” ones that God will work through as He reestablishes His government on this earth.

## ***The Individual Firstfruit Offering***

The first fruit offerings, foreshadowing God's first harvest of souls, were observed both individually and nationally. God proclaimed that the firstfruit of every single person's increase was

His. Moses records God's instructions:

Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it (Leviticus 23:10-11).

Each individual was to give God the firstborn of either his livestock or the produce of his land. The Eternal even required the redemption of the firstborn of every family's children (Exodus 13:13).

The ceremonial selection of the firstfruits was commonly a family affair. At the birth of a firstborn among the flock and at the first appearing of new fruit in the field, the entire household would prepare for the ceremony. Generally, one of the children in the family would be chosen for the privilege of marking the newly born animal or crop so that it would be preserved for the Lord.

The firstfruits remained thus marked so that every man, woman, or child seeing the identifying token would be reminded both of God's grace to each individual, and His ownership of the first of all that man produces. When harvest time arrived, these firstfruits would be gathered with prayer and taken to Jerusalem. There they would be offered to God on the altar and eaten by the priests.

### ***The Wave Sheaf***

The priests also performed a similar rite for the entire nation. Near the close of the first weekly Sabbath after the first day of Unleavened Bread, delegates from the Sanhedrin would mark out and tie off the best grain stalks into sheaves. They would measure an omer from each field chosen for this purpose. As the Sabbath sun was setting, the priests and their helpers would go out to the field. Once there, the assistants would surround the priest, who carried a sickle. The assistants observed to insure that all was done correctly. Finally the priest would ask, "Is the sun set?" Those surrounding him would answer, "Yes!" Next he would say, "Shall I reap?" They would answer, "Reap!" Only then would the ceremonial grain be cut. The sacred grain was then beaten with reeds so as not to crush the produce. After this, it was parched with fire. The grain would then undergo the grist mill, in which it was sifted thirteen times, while the priests added oil and frankincense. The following day, it was taken to the high priest who lifted it in the air, waving it before God for acceptance.

This elaborate ceremony pictured the sacrifice of Jesus. The wave sheaf, like Christ, was chosen in advance. The sheave was first tied in a bundle and then cut off from the field. This pictured our Savior, who was first bound that Passover night, and then cut off from the rest of Israel by His arrest on charges of blasphemy.

The grain was then prepared for the high priest's offering. It was first beaten, picturing Christ's brutal scourging, which was designed not to break a bone of His body. The parching of the grain, the grinding and the sifting pictured the absolutely grueling ordeal Christ endured during His painful sacrifice. The oil and frankincense represented the Holy Spirit and prayers of our Savior, which were also a part of His offering for mankind. The act of the high priest waving the grain as an offering to God portrayed Christ. This pictured Him being raised the third day, ascending to the Father where He was accepted as the firstfruit.

Through this process, Christ became the first raised from the dead—the beginning of God’s spiritual creation. Paul writes:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and become the firstfruits* of them that slept (I Corinthians 15:20).

Rich with symbolism, the imagery of this unique celebration continues. God commanded a second firstfruits offering to be harvested and offered after the wave sheaf was presented.

### ***A Second Part to God’s First Harvest***

The wave sheaf was only the first part of the firstfruits ceremony. It pictured Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and ascension to be accepted by the Father. The second aspect of God’s plan is revealed in the rest of this celebration. It is here that the 144,000 are represented. Regarding this offering, God states:

And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the self-same day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: *it shall be* a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings (Leviticus 23:14).

The offering which followed the wave sheaf is vital to fully understand God’s first harvest of souls. The Almighty commanded that the firstfruits were not to be harvested until after the wave sheaf had been offered. This pictured a great spiritual truth. No other human beings would be harvested until after Jesus Christ had first been raised, presented to, and accepted by Him.

While giving Jesus preeminence, this also makes one other essential point perfectly clear. Those whom God raises in the first resurrection are joined with Jesus Christ to complete God’s first harvest. They are the firstfruits.

From the day that the wave sheaf was offered, each head of household was to count forty nine days, or seven weeks. Each family then offered a “meal” offering of two loaves of bread from their harvest of grain on the fiftieth day. Moses writes:

Even unto the morrow after the seventh Sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations **two wave loaves** of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; **they are the firstfruits** unto the LORD (Leviticus 23:16-17).

These two loaves were baked with leaven, and therefore not placed on the holy altar. They, along with two lambs, were waved and eaten by the priests. This ancient ceremony provides fascinating insight into the plan of God. The firstfruit offerings were symbolic, foreshadowing Jesus Christ and His Church in accurate detail. The exact timing of Christ’s sacrifice, His resurrection and ascension to the Father was prophesied by this marvelous feast. Even the exact timing of the giving of the Spirit of God is spelled out perfectly.

Christ was the wave sheaf offering, the first of the firstfruits. He was cut down (crucified), and then lifted up (resurrected) Sabbath evening after being exactly three days and three nights in

the grave. The next morning, a Sunday, Christ ascended to heaven. There He was waved, or passed before the Father and accepted by Him.

After the women had come to the tomb and found it empty, later on that famous Sunday morning, Jesus told Mary not to touch Him. He had not yet ascended to the Father (John 20:17). Later that same morning, Christ did ascend to heaven to present Himself before the Father.

No doubt this took place about 10:00 a.m.—precisely when the wave sheaf was offered by the high priest. After He was accepted by the Father as the first of the firstfruits, Jesus returned that very day to meet with His disciples (Luke 24:15-31).

That Sunday, the fifty day countdown to the Feast of Firstfruits began. During these days of counting, Christ met with His followers, instructing and encouraging them a full forty days. Then He ascended to be with the Father, leaving His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit. Speaking of Christ, Luke writes:

To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being **seen of them forty days**, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God, and, being assembled together with *them*, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, **but wait for the promise** of the Father, which, *saith He*, ye have heard of Me (Acts 1:3-4).

After forty days, His followers were told to wait ten more days until the promise of being indued with power by the receiving of a comforter would be fulfilled. Finally, when the fiftieth day arrived, another aspect of the fulfillment of this day occurred. Luke records:

When the **day of Pentecost** was 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 all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were **all filled with the Holy Ghost**, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

Pentecost is a Greek word meaning “count fifty.” On this day God sent His Spirit. He made this wonderful gift available to all those who would follow Christ in the first century. He also has made that Spirit available to all those He would call down through the ages and into future generations.

This was a partial fulfillment of what this festival foreshadows. Those who were destined to be the first harvest, could now be planted. The seed of God’s Spirit was offered to mankind. It would be sown in the lives of thousands of God’s people from that day forward. As Paul writes:

And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the **firstfruits of the Spirit**, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, *to wit*, the **redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23).

This verse makes it clear that, while Christians are part of the firstfruits, they have not yet actually been harvested. The final fulfillment of this day will occur when those who have been



sealed with the seed of God's Holy Spirit are harvested in the first resurrection.

The total number of those who will be included in the first resurrection will be 144,000. These are those who are represented by the two loaves that are to be lifted up and waved for acceptance by the Father on the fiftieth day, Pentecost.

### ***Two Lambs and Two Loaves***

In the ancient celebration of the Feast of Firstfruits, there were two lambs and two loaves of bread which were included in the offering. Jesus is the Lamb of God, and therefore the two lambs likely represent Jesus Christ in the two roles in which He functioned. He was the Savior during the Old Testament time, and He is Savior to those in the New Testament era.

It is also interesting to note that the two loaves were the only offerings ever made with leaven. Leaven is a symbol of sin, strongly implying that the two loaves are God's first harvest of human souls. While God's people must strive for perfection, the truth is that in this life they are not perfect! True Christians sin (I John 1:8). The leavened loaves reflect the fact that no one except Jesus Christ will go into the Kingdom of God having been sinless.

These two loaves represent God's two Churches—the Old Testament Church in the wilderness and the New Testament Church throughout the world. They reflect all of God's chosen from every age who will ultimately be in the first resurrection. Though having been tainted by sin, they will be accepted by God, having been justified through the blood of Christ.

Jesus is the very first of the firstfruits—He is portrayed by the wave sheaf. Those who are also firstfruits will follow Christ's pattern. They will ascend to heaven, be accepted by the Father, and then return to earth with Christ. As Paul reminds us:

But every man in his own order: Christ the **firstfruits**; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming (I Corinthians 15:23).

Those who are true members of Christ's Church are considered firstfruits along with Christ. James writes:

Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that **we should be a kind of firstfruits** of His creatures (James 1:18).

This is an awesome and wonderful truth! God has not called everyone to have this opportunity now. He has only chosen a select few for this harvest of human souls. They are called to be the first. Paul explains:

That we should be to the praise of His glory, who **first trusted in Christ** (Ephesians 1:12).

Those called during the era of man's rule are the first to trust in Christ. Later there will be others who will also have faith in Him. For now, however, only the firstfruits are being given the opportunity to know God and follow His ways.

Jesus Christ is pictured by the wave sheaf as being the first of the firstfruits. He was the first to be harvested in a resurrection, ascend to heaven and be accepted by God. The two loaves comprise the firstfruit offering which was given seven weeks later. The loaves portray God's chosen

from various times throughout history. They too will be harvested in what the Bible calls, the first resurrection, after seven successive church eras have passed.

This resurrection will include the entirety of the faithful throughout all ages. Those alive when Christ returns will join the dead who will rise from their graves all around the world. Collectively, they will marry Christ on a sea of sparkling crystal at the foot of the magnificent New Jerusalem. Then, as God's firstfruits they will return with their Husband King, and assist Him in ruling the rest of mankind.

This is the ultimate destiny of those who are the Eternal's new beginning! God has chosen them, and He set them apart by His Spirit for this transcendent purpose. As Paul writes:

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the **BEGINNING** chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth (II Thessalonians 2:13).

The word Paul uses for "beginning" is the Greek word "arche." It is very similar to the word "aparche," which is translated "firstfruits."

"Arche" literally means "commencement," or "chief." This word could be translated as "first (estate)," "magistrate," "power," or "rule." Therefore, if the translators of the King James version had understood exactly who the firstfruits were, they might better have translated this verse to read:

God has chosen you to be the **firstfruits** of salvation.

Moffat translates this same verse: "because God has chosen you as the **first to be reaped** for salvation." Knox is more direct, translating this verse as: "God has picked you out as the **firstfruits** in the harvest of salvation."

The 144,000 are the **firstfruits!** They are the first to be harvested by God. This means they are those who have been chosen to be in the first resurrection—a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:45). It is no less than the highest calling and most magnificent destiny that can be achieved.

Those called in this age, and given God's Holy Spirit, have the seed of the firstfruits within them. They are only sealed with that Spirit, however. They are not yet harvested. Before they can finally be harvested as God's firstfruits, they must continue to be faithful and obedient—a people without guile.

# *They are Without Guile*

## Key Twelve:

*Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth  
not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.  
Psalms 32:2*

**F**or more than thirty-five years, former United States President Richard M. Nixon served in the political arena. During this time, he was in a unique position to meet with, and study, world leaders. After leaving public service, his fascination with leadership traits prompted him to author a book in which he asks the question, “What are the qualities needed to be a great leader?” He writes:

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 (also) become fashionable to try to conceal ego . . . to present instead an outward modesty. But, I have never known a major leader who was not an egotist (Leaders, p. 324).

In our deceived world, many leaders believe that they must use treachery, deceit and guile. Their struggle is to stay on top—to maintain power, status, and position as they strive to impose their will on others. However, many notable leaders have misunderstood the nature of true leadership.

### ***Leaders without Fault before God***

Those God is calling to be in the first resurrection are preparing to be the servant leaders in the world to come. The 144,000 are being made ready to make a radical break from the ways of this world’s leadership. John states:

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

The Apostle John was inspired to write that the 144,000 are without fault before the throne of God. These words have profound meaning for every Christian! The word translated “fault” is “amomos,” in the Greek, and it literally means “without blemish.” This word refers to 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. Each one pictured Christ, the perfect sacrifice, who was without any blemish of sin.

As Paul writes, with the exception of Jesus Christ, no human being is without fault. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), but the 144,000 have overcome! They have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior, been justified, and overcome sin through His blood (Revelation 12:11). They will stand before God’s glorious throne in the first resurrection. They will be like Christ, mirroring Him as rulers in the very government and family of God (I John 3:1-3).

Once resurrected, the saints will be perfect, having no blemish. They will have attained this resurrection, and done so by becoming a people who lived their lives without guile.

### ***Living with Guile***

Today guile has infected our whole society. It has become an accepted way of life, even for many professing Christians. The same people, who give God ten percent of their income and compliment the preacher on his sermon each week, sometimes have no qualms about deceiving or misleading others during the rest of the week.

When it comes to doing business today, many who pride themselves on their ethics and morals seem satisfied with doing inferior work while charging top dollar. After using deceit to make more money on a business deal than is fair, they have no problem attending church services saying, “God blessed me.”

We have become a society where many who attend church only *appear* righteous. They attend the church of their choice, wear their best suit, and “chit-chat” about God as though they were close to Him, while at the same time gossiping about others in the very place where they worship. Underneath the veneer of professing belief in the Almighty, many are deeply jaded by the perverse values of our society. As a consequence, their families are often toxic, and they, along with their mates and children, are deeply unhappy.

Further, our media-driven society has raised the use of guile to a science. Today the advertising industry has become a chief exporter of dissimulation. Our economy is based on greed, and life has become all about money and doing whatever it takes to obtain more of it. To this end, sociologists package our real human needs into products they can advertise for sale.

Consumers today do not buy products because they need them, but because they believe the product will make them feel good. We purchase drinks, clothing, or cars because we want to feel more masculine, more feminine or more youthful. For this reason, television commercials seldom speak to the value of a product. Instead, they display images of people having fun, feeling secure, being competent, and the center of attention. Using guile, advertisers artfully link their product with these feelings. Viewers then subconsciously believe that if they acquire the product, it will produce these same feelings in their life.

### ***People without Guile***

In contrast to this world, the resurrected saints are without guile. The word “guile” is “dolos” in the Greek, meaning to “decoy” or “trick.” The definition includes using deceit or subtlety to delude, entice or bait another person. In contrast, the 144,000 are transparent, honest, and sincere.

They would never take advantage of others by deceiving or misleading them.

The Apostle James writes that the strongest muscle in the body, the tongue, is the most dangerous to us. He tells us that whoever can control this appendage is a perfect man (James 3:2-10). We are also told that the 144,000 are without fault before God, and that they have no guile.

The 144,000 guard their lips. They do not spend their words in an attempt to make themselves look good in other people's eyes. Neither do they adjust what they say to make others look bad. They are not found focusing on what appeals to the senses or the sensational. They do not color statements to stir others up or to gain advantage. As the psalmist writes:

He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house. He that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight (Psalm 101:7).

While realizing that carefully guarding their speech is essential, the 144,000 also understand that guile includes what comes from the heart. As Jesus warned:

For **out of the heart proceed evil thoughts**, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matthew 15:19).

What a person says comes from the heart and mind. Therefore, the battle to overcome sin and human nature, originates in the mind. Therefore, 144,000 are those who have dedicated themselves to becoming a people whose heart and mind are without hypocrisy.

### ***An Israelite Indeed***

More than two thousand years ago, there existed a unique man who will be included in the 144,000. Christ pointed him out to those who would later read his story. That man's name was Nathanael, and the account of his meeting with Jesus Christ provides a profound lesson for us. The Apostle John describes this meeting, saying:

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and saith of him, Behold **an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!** Nathanael saith unto Him, Whence knowest Thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto Him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel (John 1:47-49).

When Jesus said that Nathanael was "an Israelite indeed," He meant that he was not just an Israelite by birth. Rather, he was an Israelite worthy of the name. He was what an Israelite was intended to be. Nathanael had a right spirit—a right attitude. He exhibited genuine integrity, believed in the promises of God, and his life reflected his faith.

Further, when Christ referred to Nathanael as being an Israelite, He spoke of the true Israel of God. Jesus was referring to the 144,000—the Israel that would one day lead the world, ruling under His divine authority. Nathanael exemplified this vital leadership characteristic of the 144,000—a person in whom was no guile.

### ***Not being Fish Bait***

Having grown up around the Sea of Galilee, Nathanael understood Christ's words in a very unique way. This community was generally comprised of people associated with the fishing industry. To these fishermen, the word guile actually meant "fish bait." It referred to something that was designed to trick a fish into taking the bait and being hooked.

In like manner, people often use guile like fish bait. They pretend to be someone or something they are not in order to trick others and gain an advantage. For example, before Jacob was converted, he did not hesitate to use guile to trick his father into giving him the birthright (Genesis 27:18-19).

Nathanael was without this ugly trait of guile. He was not without sin. All have sinned, but Nathanael made no attempt to pretend to be what he was not. He was without hypocrisy. He did not disguise motives, and was not fraudulent or deceitful.

What about us? Are we Israelites indeed? The 144,000 are spiritual Israelites who have no guile. They are comprised of those who are striving to live up to their covenant name—to be Israelites in deed—true Israelites in the way they live.

Christ's compliment took Nathanael by surprise. He wanted to know how Jesus knew him. How was He able to speak of his character? Christ answered that before Nathanael came to Him, He had spotted him under a fig tree.

The fig tree represents two concepts to Israel. First, as a symbol of peace and prosperity, it portrays the millennium when each man will have time to sit under his own fig tree (Micah 4:4). Secondly, men would sit and meditate under the fig tree's leafy shade. As such, sitting under the fig tree had the connotation of being in fellowship with God. Nathanael was likely meditating or praying when Christ saw him.

God knows our character by what we pray and meditate about, as well as what we do NOT pray and meditate about. Christ knew what Nathanael was thinking and praying about under the tree. He could discern his inner character.

In the same way, God knows how we think and feel in our innermost thoughts. He hears our prayers, and knows our meditations. He hears what we say, and sees what we do. If our thoughts are to do good and right, He sees it. On the other hand, if our motives are not good and right, He sees that, too.

We can never fool God. He is not to be mocked. He is aware of everything we think, feel, and do. Are we sincere in those things, or do we have guile?

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 (I Corinthians 4:5). They realize that eventually everyone will know if we were the real thing, or just "fish bait."

### ***Becoming People without Guile***

Jesus Christ was our example. He did not falsely represent Himself. As Peter writes, Jesus:

Did no sin, **neither was guile found in His mouth** (I Peter 2:22).

We are to follow the example of Christ. We are to become true Christians who can stand before God's throne without guile. We must be honest and sincere in all that we think and do, like

the unleavened bread of Christ (I Corinthians 5:7).

Unlike leavened bread, which is puffed up, we should be flat, humble, unpretentious, and unassuming—as was Christ! This is the nature of the character of those unique individuals who will stand without fault before God's throne in the first resurrection.

They are genuine, humble and teachable. They are like Christ was when He walked on the earth. They are not trying to impress others. They are sincere and without hypocrisy—a people without guile. Christ is looking for trustworthy helpmates to assist Him as He rules the family of God. Christ desires a wife who will represent herself sincerely. She will not try to manipulate, or intimidate, Him into doing her will instead of His.

His bride will be made up of individuals who are true to their word. They will be individuals who will not color things to make themselves look better, or others look worse. David describes such persons in the following way:

LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and **speaketh the truth in his heart**. *He that* backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. **He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not** (Psalm 15:1-4).

This describes the 144,000. They are Christ's sincere friends, speaking the truth in love from their hearts. This is how we must be, if we are to be numbered among them.

# *Out of Great Tribulation*

*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting  
them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much  
tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.  
Acts 14:22*

**T**he book of Revelation clearly reveals twelve distinct keys that identify the 144,000. Each key is a characteristic that unmistakably proves that this unique assembly is the first resurrection in its entirety—but, what about the great multitude? Are they not also in the first resurrection? Doesn't the Bible state that they attain this reward, having gone through the Great Tribulation that comes on the whole world? The Apostle John continues his vision, he states:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues . . . These are they which came out of **great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7: 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. Armed with this assumption, readers may then conclude that the great multitude must be a part of the first resurrection.

All the evidence, presented thus far, has shown that the 144,000 are the entirety of the first resurrection. They are spiritual Israel, the redeemed, and the firstfruits. Therefore, the great multitude cannot be part of the first resurrection.

If this is true, then what does the Scripture mean when it states that the great multitude come out of great tribulation? The answer is found in the fact that there are different tribulations mentioned in the Bible. One type comes upon individuals, another upon specific churches, and one is a worldwide ordeal that lasts three and one-half years at the end of man's misrule. Which of these does the great multitude experience?

## ***The Great Tribulation that Comes on All the World***

The word "tribulation" has a wide range of usage in the New Testament. In the broadest sense, it means any difficulty or trouble. In all but one case in the New Testament, the word "tribulation" is translated from the Greek word "thlipsis," which can mean "trouble," "pressure," "affliction," "anguish," or "persecution."

When the disciples asked Jesus about the end of the world, the Savior used this word, "thlipsis" to describe the time of terrible trouble called the "Great Tribulation." The Lord answered them, saying:

For then shall be **Great Tribulation**, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this



time, no, nor ever shall be (Matthew 24:21).

The Tribulation that Christ speaks of in this Olivet Prophecy occurs only one time in the whole history of mankind. It is so awesome, frightening, and destructive that if God did not intervene, there would be no flesh left alive on the earth (Matthew 24:21-22).

This Tribulation is a three and one-half year period of Satan's wrath, beginning shortly after the armies of the beast surround Jerusalem and the abomination that makes desolate is set up (Matthew 24:15-16). It culminates in Christ's triumphant return to rule the earth as King of kings.

This end time Tribulation is perpetrated by a political, military leader the Bible calls the beast. This beast leads a united Europe, fueled by religious fervor. This combined European power forges an awesome military machine that will control Western Civilization. It will destroy any opposition, whether it be military or religious.

This Great Tribulation will span the entire globe, but it primarily focuses upon the modern day descendants of Israel. As Jeremiah states:

Alas! for **that day is great**, so that **none is like it**: it *is* even the **time of Jacob's trouble**; but he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7).

The modern day descendants of Jacob, including the United States, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, will suffer more than any other people ever have. They will experience an even greater time of trouble than the Jewish people suffered during World War II.

Eventually, the other great powers, such as Russia, India, China, and Japan will be pulled into the fray, but only at the very end (Revelation 16:12). Small groups in many third world countries, described in Revelation seven as "every tribe and tongue," may be little affected by the Tribulation until the day of the Lord. This "day," which lasts an entire year, is God's wrath. It will affect all the inhabitants of the world.

Some believe that this is the "Great Tribulation" from which the innumerable multitude emerge. However, such a belief contradicts all the evidence previously shown. All the evidence presented thus far makes it clear that the 144,000 are the entirety of the first resurrection.

Consider the fact that the majority of those who lose their lives in the end time Tribulation are physical Israelites. The description of the great multitude as being "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," cannot possibly apply to a group primarily composed of Israelites.

Is it possible that the tribulation which the great multitude comes through is not *the* Great Tribulation that engulfs the whole world at the end time? Could it be that the Bible be speaking of another type of tribulation?

### ***Tribulation Experienced by Specific Churches***

The Bible also speaks of tribulation that is to come on specific churches. The messages in Revelation, chapters two and three, were sent to seven churches on a mail route in Asia Minor. Each of these individual churches were representative. Each pictured the entirety of God's Church during a specific era of time as history flowed down through the centuries culminating at Christ's return.

The first church on the route was Ephesus, and Christ explained that this church experienced tribulation (Revelation 2:9). This tribulation was the persecution by the Jews and the martyrdom perpetrated by the Roman Emperor Nero.

Jesus also predicted ten day (years) of tribulation that would fall upon the church of Smyrna (Revelation 2:10; Ezekiel 4:6). This was actually fulfilled by a ten year persecution against Christians instituted by Diocletian in 303 AD and abolished by the edict of toleration in 313 AD.

Christ further threatened Thyatira, representing the Church during the Middle Ages, with “great tribulation.” Jesus Christ said:

Behold, I will cast her (Thyatira) into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into **great tribulation**, except they repent of their deeds (Revelation 2:22).

The “great tribulation” spoken of in the above verse was actually the Crusades and the Inquisition, not *the* Great Tribulation which will come at the end of the age. It is not the tribulation the great multitude experiences, nor is it the one to come on the entire world at the end of the age. The great multitude come out of a kind of tribulation different than either of the two types mentioned thus far.

### ***Tribulation on Individuals***

While imprisoned and suffering on the Island of Patmos, John spoke of being a companion to other Christians who were in tribulation (Revelation 1:9). In another case, Christ explained to His followers that Christians should expect tribulation simply because they were required to live in this world (John 16:33).

Paul also suffered many difficulties and troubles as he performed God’s work of preaching the gospel. As a result, this great apostle reminded believers down through the ages that Christ’s followers should also anticipate tribulation. Paul taught Christians:

To continue in the faith, and that we must **through much tribulation** enter into the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

While tribulation is certainly part of the Christian life, non-Christians are by no means exempt. Suffering occurs in even greater degrees to those who know nothing of the truth. Paul states that every person who does not obey the truth will suffer tribulation.

**Tribulation and anguish**, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the gentile (Romans 2:9).

It is this kind of anguishing tribulation from which the great multitude emerges. Rather than being firstfruits, the great multitude is all the rest of mankind who are not now called to salvation. They are not God’s true Church, and are not sealed with the Holy Spirit during this life. Instead, they are those who, in their lifetime, have experienced the tremendous suffering that all mankind has

endured throughout the ages—the consequence of sin.

### ***Out of Great Tribulation***

Every generation has suffered tribulation in its lifetime. Violence has covered the globe. Terrible atrocities have been endured, but also perpetrated, by virtually every race and religion throughout the history of mankind.

Jews, Albanians, Rhuandans, Kurds, Armenians and Africans, to name just a few, have all suffered terrible tribulation during their lifetime—some even the specter of genocide. Many who will read this book are facing some sort of suffering and tribulation of their own even now.

Beginning with Cain and Abel, man's history has been a parade of violence, and a path of blood. Since mankind was evicted from the garden of Eden, and cut off from God, the character of our world has not changed. In the last four thousand years, the world has only known some two hundred and fifty years of relatively calm and peaceful times!

The vast numbers of people, since the time of Adam and Eve, have experienced tribulation of one kind or another! All have borne some of the heartache, pain and suffering that this present life brings. All have witnessed the terrible ravages of illness and disease such as smallpox, cancer, AIDS, and more recently mankind's latest affliction, SARS. Everyone eventually loses loved ones, and everyone eventually comes face-to-face with his or her own death (Hebrews 9:27).

In the course of human history, there have been millions who have suffered terrible upheavals of nature. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, bitter cold, scorching heat and floods have exacted a heavy toll in the form of human lives. Many have lost everything.

The earth naturally responds to the anguish mankind has brought upon it. From God's perspective, the planet actually groans with the suffering of this world. It convulses within itself as a consequence of all the destruction inflicted upon both it and mankind (Romans 8:22-23).

In addition, the vast majority of people on earth exist in suffocating poverty and oppressive squalor. Most inhabitants of the West have no idea of the tribulation that afflicts those who live in third world countries on a daily basis. For many millions of people around the world, the greatest challenge, each day, is to find enough food to survive one more day.

The tribulation this world suffers is a direct result of man's human nature. Man's greed and self-centered way of life have caused pain to everyone. None have escaped the tragic consequences of living in Satan's world (II Corinthians 4:4; James 4:1-6).

This is the kind of great tribulation the innumerable multitude comes out from. It is the tribulation each person experiences from living in Satan's world.

Although Satan is prevented from influencing the world during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ, he is once again loosed at the end of the thousand years. He will once again create the kind of suffering that man has repeatedly known for 6,000 years. He will influence men to wage war.

Christ will put down this rebellion, but people will again suffer under the devil's power and influence. Those who live at this time will be required to overcome his sway, both in the world and in their personal lives.

This is what the Scripture means when it states that the multitude come out of “great tribulation.” It is not speaking of *the* Great Tribulation that comes on the whole world just prior to Christ’s return. It is speaking of the tribulation that each person experiences while living in a world influenced by Satan, both during the first six thousand years of human history and the “little season” when Satan is once again free to sway the minds of men.

The great multitude is the collection of all those who will be saved after a second resurrection. All those who lived and died without knowing the true Jesus Christ will be raised.

They will be given physical life at the end of one thousand years of God’s Kingdom, and with that new life, their real and first chance at salvation. This is their time of judgement (Revelation 20:5-6:12). During this time, the great multitude must overcome Satan’s influence. In this way, they follow the example of the 144,000, but are called at a different time and for a different purpose. They are not called now. They are not called to be Christ’s bride, or to have rulership roles in the Kingdom.

They will receive salvation and have eternal life, but not the same reward as those who are called to the first resurrection. For this reason, they are not called the firstfruits, or Israel. Instead, they are called the “great multitude.” Their story is a fascinating one, and it also proves the identity of the 144,000.

# The Great Multitude

*All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD:  
and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee.  
Psalms 22:27*

**D**own the lengthy corridor of time, history has witnessed numerous great gatherings. For example, the Bible records an instance in which multiple millions of angels shouted for joy as they beheld earth's creation (Job 38:4-7). Scriptures in Exodus describe a great assembly, which when women and children are included, numbered more than two million leaving Egypt on foot (Exodus 12:37). In our modern world, we view gatherings such as the Tournament of Roses, where on any given New Year's morning a throng of more than a million people crowd the five and a half mile parade route. Looking forward, an incredible army numbering two hundred million is prophesied to march into earth's final climactic battle (Revelation 9:16).

Impressive as these numbers may seem, they almost pale to insignificance when compared to the number of people that will attend a future massive gathering of humanity. The Apostle John witnessed a convocation that will be the single greatest collection of individuals ever to have occurred.

Anyone who has attended a gathering, such as a concert or sporting event where upwards of 100,000 people may be jammed into a single stadium, can attest to the fact that seeing so many people packed into one place is an awesome sight. Imagine the Apostle John's reaction at seeing a group of people so vast that he could only describe it as being innumerable.

After receiving the vision of the 144,000, the Apostle John next viewed this incredibly enormous assembly. He describes it in the following way:

**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; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-10).

Stunned by the sight of such a vast assembly, the apostle states that there were so many that he found the multitude impossible to number. The Scriptures indicate that this great crowd embodied the vast majority of people who ever lived and died throughout human history. John viewed these generations consisting of various nations, races, and cultures from the beginning of man's history as they stood all together before the majestic white throne of God Almighty. Such an array of humanity would no doubt number well into multiple billions, but exactly when does this enormous assemblage occur?

## ***The Timing of the Great Multitude***

The Apostle begins his description of the great multitude with the phrase, "After this." By

this phrase, John makes it clear that the multitude appears after the 144,000, but exactly how much later does this occur?

John sees this multitude standing before God's throne after having been resurrected. Their white robes, symbolic of righteousness, and their cry of "Salvation to our God," indicate that they have been saved. For this reason, some commentators interpret this vision as occurring immediately following the first resurrection. By this, they mistakenly conclude that the great multitude are included in this momentous event.

There are several reasons why this cannot be the case. First, all the evidence presented in the preceding chapters have confirmed that the 144,000 are the entirety of the first resurrection. Further, as the following critical reading of John's description of the multitude unfolds, it will become obvious that their resurrection can only take place after the millennial rule of Jesus Christ on this earth has been completed.

### *The Size of the Multitude*

One major piece of evidence that the great multitude is not resurrected at the same time as the 144,000 is the immense size of this group. This army of people is so vast that it causes John to be awe-struck! His first word is "Lo." This word implies that something unique and very important is going to follow. It is akin to the word "behold" in English, and John uses it to call the reader's attention to what he sees.

While John did not actually view the 144,000 in chapter seven of Revelation, he did view a vast sea of people he calls a "great multitude." John's use of these two words to describe the vision is significant. The first term is the word "great." This word is "polus" in the Greek. It means "much," "to abound," "number," "multitude," "great," or "large." Polus also implies that which is "common."

The second word John uses to describe those he sees is the word "multitude." This word is "ochlos" in the Greek, and means "throng," "rabble," or "a class of people." "Ochlos" can also include the meaning of "riot," such as when people are so close together they are pressed into one another.

*Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* explains the meaning of the word "multitude" in the following way:

When used with polus, "much" or "great," (the word Ochlos) . . . signifies "a great multitude" . . . or the common people . . . perhaps preferably "the mass of the people" (p. 1082).

The impression created by John's choice of words is twofold. First, the Apostle John is gazing at an incredibly vast number of people. A second point is that the crowd is defined as the "common people," or as being of the "common class." These words specifically distinguish the great multitude from the 144,000, who are destined for leadership roles with Christ. Reminiscent of God's declaration to Abraham, John refers to a group of people so large in number that it cannot be counted. The Eternal promised the patriarch:

Look now toward heaven and **tell the stars**, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, **So shall thy seed be** (Genesis 15:5).

Today, with our massive telescopes, we can probe the heavens and map the stars. Still, we have no idea how many actually exist in the many galaxies of our universe. God is telling Abraham that his descendants would be innumerable, much like the stars in the universe. Further, those who would eventually trust in Christ would be numbered as Abraham's seed. This includes the entirety of mankind—all who will eventually come to Christ. This is an awesome number to contemplate.

The impression John conveys is that he may have been looking out at a throng of people so large, and so closely pressed together to be in the presence of God's throne, that it was somewhat like the tens of thousands compressed around the stage of a modern rock concert. The only difference is that in John's vision this throng no doubt extended for hundreds, or even thousands of miles.

A group of this magnitude standing before God's throne is found in only one account in the Bible. It can only be true of God's second harvest of souls. This harvest is not the firstfruits, comprised of 144,000. Instead, it is the rest of humanity from every part of the globe. It will include all who ever lived during the first six thousand years, those who live in the millennial period, and those who live after that.

This vast collection of humanity is from every race, culture, and historical period. It consists of every nation, kindred, and tongue. Such a throng of people would likely be so awesome as to be both shocking to view and impossible to number.

### ***When does this Multitude Stand before God?***

The Bible reveals that God's Holy Days are prophetic in nature, foreshadowing things to come (Colossians 2:16-17; Leviticus 23). Each feast depicts an important event in the Eternal's plan for mankind. For example, Christ actually died on the Passover and the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost.

Regarding events yet to be fulfilled, the Feast of Trumpets pictures the future seven trumpet plagues, culminating in the last trump when the kingdoms of this world become Christ's. The Day of Atonement pictures Satan being bound. The Feast of Tabernacles reflects the time when Christ will tabernacle with man on the earth, ruling with the 144,000 for a thousand years. The last day of this feast pictures the rest of mankind being raised in judgement before God. The Apostle John describes this chronology of events, stating:

And he (the angel) laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgement was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But **the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished**. This *is* the first resurrection (Revelation 20:2-5).

These verses clearly reveal that a thousand years after the 144,000 are raised, Christ will resurrect the rest of the dead. These are those who were not called to know Jesus Christ, and were not chosen in this lifetime. All the different races and nationalities, from every generation since the

beginning of time, will be given physical life again, and they will all live at the same time. Jesus refers to this resurrection when He says:

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here (Matthew 12:40-41).

In the above verse, Jesus refers to a time after His thousand year reign. This is the time when “the rest of the dead” will live again. Christ explains that the inhabitants of Nineveh, along with the Queen of Sheba, will be raised to live at the same time as the Scribes and Pharisees of His century.

All of these people will finally have their first chance to really know Christ, and make their choice to follow Him. All the unique generations, different races, and fascinating cultures from every nation and tribe will be present. Christ will then judge them by how they live, just as He judges His Church now.

The last Holy Day, the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles, pictures the conclusion of God’s plan of salvation for man and a new beginning for humanity. Once mankind has been saved, and is part of God’s family, the Eternal can reveal the awesome future He has prepared for His sons and daughters.

This grand destiny begins when Christ gathers all people before God’s throne. There He pronounces judgement on each one. John describes this event:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that 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, stand before God**; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was 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 judgement. The great multitude is this very group which has been saved through this final judgement.

Notice the difference between this group and the 144,000. The 144,000 are spiritual Israel, and they stand *with* Christ on Mount Zion, the headquarters of God’s government. They sit *with* Christ in His throne. This means that they will also rule in various positions under the authority of His throne all around the earth for a thousand years. Finally, they will rule from the New Jerusalem when it descends to the new earth.

Rather than a small specific number called Israel, the great multitude is a vast accumulation of all peoples and tongues. They are not firstfruits. They do not stand with Christ, sit in His throne,



or have the Father's name in their foreheads.

Instead, this vast assembly is pictured as standing before the throne of God after having been judged. While judgement is on the Church now (I Peter 4:17), God is not presently judging the rest of mankind. Their time of judgement will come. It will begin one thousand years after the millennial reign of Christ, and be completed at the White Throne Judgement. Then, those who have been granted eternal life will stand before the throne of God. This is the great innumerable multitude.

### ***The Symbolism of the Palms***

Another indication of the timing regarding the great multitude is found in the symbolism of the palms carried in their hands (Revelation 7:9). These branches were commanded to be used to build temporary living quarters for the Feast of Tabernacles. While describing this feast, God explains:

In the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day *shall be* a Sabbath, and on the eighth day *shall be* a Sabbath. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, **branches of palm trees**, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days (Leviticus 23:39-40).

These palms are also referred to when Christ rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. The Apostle John records this historical moment, writing:

Much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, **took branches of palm trees**, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed *is* the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord (John 12:12-13).

While God does not command the use of palm branches in the observance of Passover, it is possible He inspired their use at this triumphant completion of Christ's ministry. The entry of Jesus into the holy city was a type, symbolizing His victorious return to this earth to take Jerusalem, and rule in justice and righteousness. God may have inspired the use of these palm branches, germane to the Feast of Tabernacles, because this event foreshadowed what that feast looks forward to—our God returning to Jerusalem in triumph to again tabernacle with man.

The palm branches that the great multitude held in their hands represent the time period in which these people will attain salvation. These people are the product of Christ's salvation during the time when He will again walk, and live, among mankind. It is a time when a second resurrection will occur, and an ultimate final judgement will take place.

### ***The Great Multitude Cry Out***

Another indicator that the great multitude exists at a different time than the 144,000 is found in the words they utter. Together they cry out, saying, "Salvation to God on the throne and to the Lamb."

First note that they are not singing a song of triumph, as do the 144,000. Neither do they sing a song that no one else can learn. The great multitude cannot learn the song that the 144,000 sing.

That song is reserved for them alone. Instead of singing, the multitude cries out loudly, literally shouting, “salvation to God, and to the Lamb.”

The word “salvation” is “soteria” in the Greek, and it means “rescue,” “safety,” or to “be saved spiritually.” More importantly, the word implies God’s *final* manifestation of His power to save. These words that the great multitude shout reflect God’s victory over sin for all time after a long, arduous experience. They point to this massive group as *finally* being saved. They were not saved through the first resurrection.

This incredible multitude is composed of those who will ultimately be saved in and through the second resurrection, and the corresponding great White Throne Judgement.

### ***What are These?***

The vision of such a massive crowd stunned John. As the apostle stood speechless, an angel asked:

**What are these** which are arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? (Revelation 7:13).

The angel asks this question knowing that the 144,000 are the first resurrection. He would not ask the identity of this second group if they were part of the firstfruits mentioned earlier.

His question was likely designed to jar John back to his senses after the shock of seeing so great a multitude, but the angel’s query is further evidence that the 144,000 and great multitude are not in the same resurrection. The angel states:

These are they which came **out of great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

The angel tells John that these came out of great tribulation. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is not referring to *the* Great Tribulation that comes on the whole world at the end of the age. Instead, it refers to the enormous trials that come upon those who are *not* believers during this lifetime.

The multitude are those who have been resurrected after the millennium. This is when they have washed their robes in Christ’s blood, accepted His sacrifice, and overcome their human nature. As such, they are now able to stand before God’s throne, and shout, “Salvation!”

### ***They Stand before God’s Throne***

The angel continues to explain more detail about the great multitude. He next states:

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

The Scriptures explain that the great multitude stand “before God’s throne.” It is important to note that they do not sit in His throne as do the 144,000 who rule with Christ. Instead, the Bible shows a vast multitude standing before God’s throne at the time of the White Throne Judgement (Revelation 20:11-12).

The incredible numbers of people that will exist together at this time will be from every race, every time period, and every culture. There will be every possible language and dialect represented before God, awaiting His judgement. After they are judged, those found written in the Book of Life will rejoice, shouting that God has brought about their salvation.

If the Bible is the only source used to interpret the Scripture, then the account of the great multitude, and the verses depicting the judgement of the rest of the dead, are parallel verses. They portray the exact same people. The great multitude can only be those who come through the White Throne Judgement.

### ***They Serve God in His Temple***

The Apostle John is also told that the great multitude “serve God in His temple.” The word “serve” is “*Latreuo*” in the Greek. Its root is “*latris*,” meaning one hired for menial labor. The use of this word indicates that this group ministers to God, in religious homage, doing service in the temple. This is a far cry from the position of those who attain the first resurrection.

Those in the first resurrection assist God by ruling with Christ. They will wear crowns, and serve God and the rest of mankind in leadership roles. The vast multitude is not part of this resurrection, and therefore, the Scriptures reveal that the future role of the great multitude is menial or commonplace.

Another difference between these two groups is evidenced by the fact that the great multitude serves *in* God’s temple. Those who are in the first resurrection are described as *being* God’s temple (I Corinthians 3:17; Ephesians 2:19-21). The 144,000 are the temple, which is the New Jerusalem!

The Church, during this age, is called the bride of Christ. The bride is also described as the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven (Revelation 21:9-10). Those who are the 144,000 are Christ’s bride, and therefore, their identity is also New Jerusalem. They will inhabit this grand edifice, and it will be a part of their new married name (Revelation 3:12).

Those who are in the great multitude are not God’s temple. They only serve in it. Therefore, the great multitude is not the first resurrection. Neither do those in the great multitude have the same reward, responsibility, or position in the Kingdom as those in the first resurrection.

### ***In What Temple do They Serve?***

The great multitude is said to serve God in His temple. But in what temple? Is it the temple during the millennium, or one that comes later?

The temple in which the great multitude serves cannot be the one on the earth during the millennial period. That temple is described in detail in Ezekiel, chapters forty through forty-eight. This earthly temple is not large enough to house even a portion of so great a people. According to Barnes’ commentary on Ezekiel, this temple is five hundred square cubits, and the precincts associated with it are under three thousand square cubits (Barne’s Notes, p. 397-398).

The people that comprise the great multitude are so incredibly large in number, it literally shocks the Apostle John to see them. They number in the billions, and would never fit in the millennial temple or its courts. For that matter, all the land adjacent to the temple would not hold these people. The only temple which could house such a massive group would have to be the one which is described as Christ’s bride—the New Jerusalem. Only this temple is big enough to shelter all of mankind. John describes this tabernacle, writing:

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

This tabernacle, or temple, is the future City of God. It is the New Jerusalem, and the size of this grand edifice is described by God's apostle in the following terms:

The city **lieth foursquare**, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal (Revelation 21:16).

According to Barclay's commentary on Revelation, this spiritual temple is massive. It is beyond human comprehension! The famous commentator writes:

Each side of the city was twelve thousand stades. A stade is very nearly a furlong; therefore, each side was 1,500 miles long, and the total area of the city was 2,250,000 square miles . . . a city with that area would stretch nearly from London to New York (Commentary on Revelation Vol. 2 P. 212).

If the New Jerusalem were a cube, it would encompass more than four billion cubic miles of inhabitable space. Therefore, all of saved humanity could easily serve within New Jerusalem's gates.

In all likelihood, the temple that the multitude will serve in is the one presently located in the third heaven. This means that the time frame for these people to stand before God's throne must be after the end of all things. It is the time when those who are the second harvest of mankind have been saved—the third resurrection.

### ***They Serve God Day and Night***

The Scriptures also state that the great multitude will serve God "day and night." This could mean that there is still a sun and moon in existence when John sees this vision. However, it is more likely stated this way because the angel who speaks to John realizes that the apostle only knows and understands time in terms of day and night. The angel is saying that the great multitude serves God unceasingly, or around the clock.

The word "day" is the Greek word "hemera," and Strong's Concordance explains that when it is used figuratively, the meaning must always be understood by the context in which it is used. Since in this case, it is used symbolically in the book of Revelation, we should expect to understand the word "day" figuratively. According to this famous Greek dictionary, "day" could mean "age," "always," or "forever."

According to Strong's the meaning of the word "day" also can include the concept of "judgement," and "time." Therefore, the Scriptures convey a strong implication that the great multitude have come up in a resurrection, have been judged, and now serve God for eternity.

### ***Who Sits on the Throne?***

Several verses in the last part of Revelation, chapter seven, shed light on the timing of the chapter, and define the time period when the multitude stands before the throne of God. The final part of verse fifteen in Revelation, chapter seven, states that “He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.” The one who sits on this throne is none other than God the Father. Verse ten makes this clear:

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

Notice that there is a distinction made between God, who sits upon the throne, and the Lamb, Jesus Christ. Another verse in this same chapter is similarly worded. It states:

For the Lamb which is **in the midst of the throne** shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes (Revelation 7:17).

John’s account indicates that there are two separate beings in the picture—Christ and God the Father. It is the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who feeds the multitude while the Father wipes away all tears.

In addition, the angel speaks of the Lamb being in the “midst” of the throne, not “on” the throne. The word “midst” is “mesos” in the Greek, and it means, “among,” or “before.” The importance of this is that the Lamb is in, not **on**, the throne.

Furthermore, the word “midst,” comes from the root word, “meta.” When this word is used as an adverb, it denotes “accompaniment.” It is the Father who sits on the throne, and Christ accompanies Him.

### ***When does the Father Dwell with Man?***

The Bible reveals that there is a time when the Father will dwell with mankind. This will occur at the end of all things. It is after Christ has ruled over the earth, with the saints, for a thousand years. It is after those who are raised in the second resurrection have been judged by Christ, and their names entered in the Book of Life. Only then does the Father dwell with man. Paul explains the order of events to the Corinthians when writing of the resurrection:

But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. **But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then cometh the end**, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under *Him*, *it is* manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him. And **when all things shall be subdued unto**

**Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him** that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all (I Corinthians 15:20-28).

After Christ returns to the earth, He will set up the Kingdom. He will then begin to bring the nations under His control. After ruling for a thousand years, He will raise the rest of the dead. Finally, God's plan for mankind culminates in the White Throne Judgement. Only after this does Christ turn all things over to the Father.

It is the Father who sits on the throne before the great multitude. Christ is there also, but He is in the midst of the throne. He has turned all things over to the Father, and is now in the role of accompanying the Father in His rule.

This group, called the great multitude, is shown when Christ has turned everything over to the Father. It is composed of those who are the second harvest of mankind, and the time frame is after the White Throne Judgement.

### *Fountains of Living Waters*

As the verses depicting the great multitude are further probed, it becomes even more obvious that the time period in which it is revealed comes after the White Throne Judgement. Notice the next words the angel speaks:

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

Christ will now lead these people who have suffered through so much during their individual lifetimes. God will wipe away the tears from their eyes. This is the same imagery that God uses when describing the time of the new heaven and earth. Speaking of this time, which occurs after the White Throne Judgement, the Apostle John writes:

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. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new . . . (Revelation 21:4-5).

The angel tells John that the great multitude will no longer hunger or thirst, and they will be led to fountains of living waters. This is not the time of the first resurrection. Neither is it the second resurrection. This is the period that Christ calls the end of all things. It is the time when the entire plan of God written in the Bible is finally fulfilled. Notice the very words of Christ as He says:

It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, **the beginning and the end**. I will give unto him that is athirst of the **fountain of the water of life freely** (Revelation 21:6).

Christ tells us that He is the beginning and the end. Clearly, Christ is speaking of the end of

all things—the end of all that man has ever known in history past. The context of these verses is the time of a new heaven and earth. With them, comes the end of an era, and the beginning of another!

### ***No Light of the Sun***

Another evidence regarding the timing of the great multitude is the statement the angel makes saying that the “sun will not light on them nor any heat.” This does not refer to God confining individuals in the temple so that they never see the light of day. That would be more like prison than the final fulfillment and demonstration of God’s love. Instead, the multitude is revealed at a time when there is no more sun!

The vast innumerable multitude stand before God when the light and heat of the sun are no longer needed to sustain life. They are depicted as standing before God just prior to the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, and the Father living among men now changed to spirit. The Apostle John writes of this wonderful time, saying:

And the city had **no need of the sun**, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for **the glory of God did lighten it**, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof (Revelation 21:23).

The great multitude is pictured at a time when there is no longer a physical universe as we know it. Those changed to spirit no longer need to eat to sustain themselves. There is no longer the need for the oceans, the sun, or even air (Revelation 21:1-3, 22:5). Such a time occurs only after the White Throne Judgement, when all who will be saved are born as spirit beings into the family and Kingdom of God.

### ***God’s Second Harvest***

The verses in Revelation, chapter seven, describing the great multitude make it clear that this is God’s second harvest of souls. This is the greatest of His harvests, comprising massive numbers of people. The great multitude is not a “little flock.” Rather it is an indescribably large group. The great multitude is composed of those who will be saved after the first resurrection. It includes those who lived before Christ’s return, and never had a chance for salvation. Further included are those who were born and lived during the millennium. It also comprises those raised to physical flesh in the second resurrection. Finally, it includes all of Israel, who are now blinded, but who are promised to be saved one day (Romans 11:7, 26).

This is an immense multitude indeed! Made up of untold billions who will be brought into the Kingdom and family of God, they will live forever, but the time of their salvation is far into the future. It is after the White Throne Judgement—a time when the physical earth, the great seas, and even the sun no longer exist! All the vast galaxies in the heavens, along with our earth, will be made new, and the physical creation will be replaced by the spiritual.

The universe that was will have served its purpose. It was only a training ground for man to overcome his way of selfishness and greed by learning to live by the selfless love of God. After that has been accomplished, the physical universe will no longer be needed. Therefore, God will roll it up like an old garment and discard it. The book of Hebrews states:

Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the

works of Thine hands: **They shall perish; but Thou remainest**; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall not fail (Hebrews 1:10-12).

The physical universe is destined to be burned up in a massive lake of fire, which will vaporize all that is in it. The prophet Isaiah writes:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but My salvation shall be forever, and My righteousness shall not be abolished (Isaiah 51:6).

This is an awesome and wonderful truth to consider. There is a time coming when God will set His hand to save all mankind. He is first allowing the world to experience the result of following human nature and Satan's influence. This will bring the world to the brink of such evil, and war so devastating, that man would destroy all flesh (Matthew 24:21). Before man destroys himself, however, Christ will intervene, return to this earth as King, and restore the government of God.

He will gather the 144,000—resurrecting the dead saints, and changing to spirit His chosen who are still alive. Jesus will then bring them to Jerusalem, and use them to assist Him as He begins the awesome process of saving mankind. A time will then follow when all who so desire can come to God. Joel speaks of this, saying:

It shall come to pass, *that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered*: for in Mount Sion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call (Joel 2:32).

The time these verses depict is coming—it is the mission Christ undertakes at His return. He will begin work on a second harvest of human souls by setting His mind and hand to save anyone who comes to Him desiring to be saved. The great multitude will be the final conclusion of His monumental work of saving mankind.

The 144,000 are called to be the first harvest of God. Throughout this first six thousand years of human history, Christ has been choosing 144,000 individuals to work with and mold their character. He is preparing them for marriage to Him, and positions of rulership for all eternity.

These individuals will sit with Him in His throne, rule with Him, and eat at His table (Luke 22:30). This group will consist of only 144,000. These are the weak of the world now (I Corinthians 1:26). They are called to change, however—to grow and overcome their weaknesses.

God is not trying to convert the whole world now. He will accomplish this at a future time. Right now God is working with the first fruits—the 144,000. After the six thousand years, the time of decision will come for all the rest of mankind, who will make up the immense, great multitude.

### ***An Incredible End to the Story***

Those whom God has called to be in the first resurrection are called to a wonderful and



fulfilling responsibility. They are prophesied to help Christ save humanity. Finally, there will be absolutely unspeakable joy as the great multitude also attains salvation. All who did not know Christ in this life are not lost.

The anguish, so many have experienced over the centuries, will be healed. Their pain and suffering will be eliminated. Loved ones once lost will be regained. The great and talented artists, writers, sculptors and composers will live again to create magnificent work designed to glorify the Almighty God and created for the rest of the family of God to enjoy.

All that is physical is in the process of decay. The entire universe is only temporary. The earth and the many suns and galaxies in the great expanse of space will one day be burned up. It will be replaced with a universe more wonderful and glorious than man could ever possibly imagine.

The Apostle Peter understood, and wrote to those called to be part of the 144,000. He said to those then, and to us now:

*Seeing then that **all these things shall be dissolved**, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, where in the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless **we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness**. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless (II Peter 3:11-14).*

For those whom God is working with now, these words must have a profound impact. Our destiny is to be a part of the 144,000, and to achieve this destiny, we must work to be blameless and without spot. The sacrifice is well worth it.

# 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*

While imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos, more than nineteen centuries ago, the Apostle John received an extraordinary vision that took him on a spiritual journey far into the future. As his supernatural vision unfolded, twelve vital keys were revealed. Each key is a clue that helps solve the longstanding mystery surrounding the 144,000. Together these twelve keys form a body of unimpeachable evidence that finally reveals the identity of this fascinating group of people.

The 144,000 are sealed with the Holy Spirit as servants of God. They are an exact number of people who have been redeemed from among men. They stand on Mount Zion—the New Jerusalem, a city whose dimensions are multiples of twelve and which has the names of the twelve tribes inscribed upon its gates. The 144,000 are destined to rule from this magnificent structure. They are the first fruits—spiritual Israel—God’s true Church. They will rule alongside Christ, as kings and priests throughout the millennium, and beyond, for all eternity.

The 144,000 are those who have not allowed themselves to be defiled by the false doctrine, superstition, and practice of the counterfeit religions of this world. They are virgins—clean and pure—ready to marry Christ at His return. They are part of a better covenant with better promises—heirs to a better citizenship and a better resurrection (Hebrews 8:6, 11:16, 11:35).

The 144,000 are the first resurrection, raised up to work personally with Jesus Christ. The final members of this elite group will be finally be chosen before God executes His wrath on the earth. These will join the New Testament apostles, ancient prophets, righteous kings and holy people of God from all ages. They will be Christ’s bride. They will be His friends and coworkers for eternity.

The rest of mankind will come up in another resurrection. Unlike the first resurrection of 144,000, this resurrection will not be limited in number. Rather, it will be a multitude that is so vast it cannot be numbered by men. Because of God’s love and never ending mercy, He desires that all people who ever lived on earth be saved. The Apostle Peter tells us that:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that all should come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

God loves all mankind, no matter what color or culture. No matter how squalid our lives once were, He loves us all. For this reason, He will give every man and woman a chance for salvation. Once God makes that chance available, most of mankind will likely be brought into the family and Kingdom of God by choosing to live His way.

### ***A Reward Worth Working For***

Although the vast majority of mankind will one day be saved, the greatest rewards are reserved for the 144,000. Jesus will marry only one bride. At present He is working with a comparatively few number of people who will be included in the 144,000—the elite group that will be His bride.

At the same time, He is preparing a wonderful home in excited anticipation of His bride to be. The New Jerusalem will be the home of Christ’s beloved wife. This magnificent edifice will contain the palatial estates where God the Father, Jesus Christ, and His bride will live and work for all eternity.

The future of the 144,000 is truly staggering to the imagination. It is a future more glorious than anything the human mind could ever conceive. Compared to it, the material rewards and physical pursuits of this life pale into utter insignificance. Nothing else can equal the promise of such a wonderful and stupendous future.

This incredible future has been the motivation of the faithful men and women of God throughout history. They were willing to give their lives, if necessary, to attain this goal. They understood the magnitude of what God is offering. Do we?

Abraham looked to a city “whose builder and maker is God”—the New Jerusalem! The inspired prophets of old also envisioned the time of the Kingdom, and they were fueled by this same hope. It is what transformed the apostles—men who once ran in fear—into men willing to die if necessary, to continue preaching the gospel message of the Kingdom. The Apostle Paul also confirmed that this future, which God offers us, is worth more than any sacrifice we might make. He writes:

**I count all things *but* loss** for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and **do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ** (Philippians 3:8).

Winning Christ means having the exhilaration of working directly with God the Father, and Jesus Christ. Imagine the excitement of eternally sharing an intimate relationship with Jesus, discussing intimate details of His projects, hopes, and dreams for man and the universe. Imagine enjoying God’s sense of humor, and sharing in the pleasures He experiences. For those who are called during this age, it is more than the opportunity of a lifetime. There is nothing greater, and nothing more compelling. Christ explains:

The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and **for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field**. Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly 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).

Christ is saying that in comparison to what God will give His servants, no sacrifice is too great. It would be worth losing literally everything we count valuable in this life, if it means gaining the Kingdom.

In the Kingdom, the 144,000 will experience the intense excitement and interest of life at the very hub of the universe. The cultural, artistic, and musical events, sponsored in the presence of the Father and Christ, are no doubt elevated to a level beyond comparison to that in the human realm. The fascinating discussion of ideas, projects, and inventions conceived and implemented will delight and awe the inheritors of God's Kingdom. This itinerary of incredibly creative activities and projects will continue for all time, uplifting and enthralling all who are included therein.

At present, among those who enjoy this glorious atmosphere at the throne of God are the twenty-four elders. These magnificent and glorious beings, who apparently act as advisors at God's throne, are so awed by the decisions and judgements they witness that they cast their crowns before God in praise. These twenty-four elders are not simply programmed to do this automatically. Instead, this is a spontaneous reaction done in deep and profound admiration (Revelation 4:10).

Is it possible that in His Kingdom, Christ will include the 144,000 in His decision-making process, much as a man counsels with his wife? The thought of being able to think and plan with the very God of the universe is more than thrilling! This thought should inspire Christians everywhere, lifting our imaginations to the very heights of God's throne.

### ***A New Body***

Each individual included in the 144,000 will be given a new body to complement his or her position and office of responsibility in the Kingdom. Christians often wonder, "What will this new body be like?"

Paul explains that what is sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption. What is sown in weakness and dishonor will be raised in power and glory. These weak, corruptible, physical bodies will be changed into powerful, glorious, spirit bodies (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The new spirit bodies will shine with the brilliance of the sun and the stars (Matthew 13:43; Daniel 12:3).

Just as stars vary in brilliance, some spirit bodies will shine much brighter than others. God designed life so that the physical reflects the spiritual. Therefore, Paul explains that each spirit body has a different glory, as do the sun, the moon and the stars (Romans 1:20; I Corinthians 15:40-41).

In this life, some have more beauty than others. Some people are blessed with hair and skin that seems flawless—their bodies sleek and beautiful. The differing beauty of each human being pictures the fact that each person in the resurrection will also differ in glory.

Human beings can be very beautiful, but God is much more than beautiful. He is glorious. He radiates a resplendent glory, majesty, and dignity so awesome that humans cannot look upon Him and survive. Christ's hair is white as snow, and His feet appear as brilliantly burning brass. Looking into the face of Jesus as He now appears is likened to looking into the very heart of the fiery sun (Revelation 1:15-16).

God is offering those who will be the 144,000 this same kind of glory. Paul describes the change that will take place in the resurrected Christian. He says that Christ will:

Change our vile body, that it may be fashioned **like unto His glorious body**, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself (Philippians 3:21).

Those who are a part of the 144,000 will have greater glory than the great multitude. They will be more beautiful to behold. As John writes in his first letter:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, **we shall be like Him**; for we shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2).

When the 144,000 stand before Christ, He will perform a miracle in each one. He will put each person's reward in their body. It will be visible—evident to all. The Apostle Paul explains:

For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that **every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done**, whether *it be* good or bad (II Corinthians 5:10).

Our spiritual reward will be reflected in our body. Even in this life, to a greater degree than most people realize, a person's body is a reflection of who and what he or she is. Most psychologists realize that personality traits, talents, and abilities are tied to a genetic code that is reflected in the physical body.

In a similar way, our spirit bodies will reflect who and what we are in the family of God. Depending on the gifts that God has given us, and what we do with those gifts, our new spirit bodies will shine brightly, radiating a beauty and brilliance befitting our reward.

### ***Seek Ye First the Kingdom and His Righteousness***

With the realization that all we will become depends on what we do in this life, we should be more diligent in our quest for the Kingdom of God. If we truly comprehend the glory of the first resurrection, it will become our consuming desire. We should, and yes, we must, seek it with all our might and with all of our strength (Matthew 6:33).

We cannot allow anything to stop us from pursuing this most magnificent quest. The problems we experience, the setbacks we endure, the pain we suffer—these are nothing compared to the glorious future God has in store for us. As Paul writes:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *Him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that **the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us** (Romans 8:16-18).

Unimaginable glory can be yours, if you have been called to be one of the 144,000. The glory which shall be eventually given to us is worth any sacrifice—any effort. Make up your mind now to push toward the “finish line” in this extraordinary race. Pick up the pace and give your whole heart to seeking God’s Kingdom. Commit all resources to it!

Do not let down! Even if you have let down in the past, even if you have failed miserably in some way—don’t quit! Instead, commit yourself to overcoming. Fast often to draw close to God. Talk to Him in prayer on a continual basis. Listen to what He has to say through reading and meditating on His Word. Strive to fill your thoughts with the mind of God. Work at truly understanding and living God’s perfect, spiritual laws of liberty.

### ***Seek Him while He can be Found***

There now exists a window of opportunity for each of us who has been called. There is still time for us to change our lives. There is still time to overcome, and to succeed in attaining the first resurrection.

The time is coming, however, when the window will be closed. The door will be shut, and there will be no more time left (Revelation 10:6; Matthew 25:1-5). There will be no more time to overcome, and no longer a chance to qualify for this magnificent reward. Notice God’s warning:

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward *is* with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be (Revelation 22:11-12).

Right now is the time to begin to DO more and to BE more. Now is the time to prove to God that you belong in His Kingdom. Now is the time to give God reason to finally say about you, as He did Abraham, “Now I know.” Seize the moment! Give God the best that you have. Use this remaining time to rededicate your life to God, and strive to develop the qualities of the 144,000.

### ***Twelve Keys to the Kingdom***

The Scriptures reveal twelve keys that identify the 144,000. These keys are the character traits that qualify these individuals to attain the first resurrection. Therefore, these are literally our keys to God’s Kingdom.

We must recognize who and what God is, and the incredible price He was willing to pay to redeem each individual. We must see that our real value lies not in our material possessions, or even our own talents and abilities, but in what God is creating within us.

We must strive to be led by the Holy Spirit which seals us. We must become faithful servants of God—not servants of the self, or Satan. We must live up to our covenant name— Israel.

Before God will allow us to rule over others, we must first allow God’s Spirit to rule over us. We must study to understand God’s law and meditate on how to apply it in everyday life. We must then strive to live by that law. We cannot permit ourselves to be defiled by the doctrines, and practices of this world’s counterfeit religions.

We must seek to emulate God’s holiness, and work at keeping ourselves pure. We must strive to follow Christ in every way—to think and act as He would in every situation.

To be His firstfruits, we must eliminate hypocrisy, and become a people who are completely

sincere. We must become what Christ saw in Nathanael—a people who live without guile.

*Twelve Keys to Understanding  
the Identity of the 144,000*

| <i>Key</i> | <i>Attribute</i>                                  | <i>Application</i>   |
|------------|---|--|
| 1          | They are sealed.                                  | Christians are sealed by the Holy Spirit.                        |
| 2          | They are servants of God.                         | God’s servants are converted, obey Him, and will be resurrected. |
| 3          | They are a precise number, consisting of 144,000. | Their number is a factor of twelve picturing divine government.  |
| 4          | They are spiritual Israel.                        | Spiritual Israel is the Church.                                  |
| 5          | They stand on Mount Zion before God’s throne.     | They stand at the base of New Jerusalem in heaven.               |
| 6          | They sing a song no man can learn.                | They are the only ones in the first resurrection.                |
| 7          | They have not been defiled by women.              | They have not accepted doctrine from the false churches.         |
| 8          | They are virgins.                                 | They are qualified to marry the High Priest, Jesus Christ.       |
| 9          | They follow the Lamb.                             | They are Christ’s followers.                                     |
| 10         | They are the firstfruits.                         | This is the first resurrection.                                  |
| 11         | They are redeemed.                                | They accepted Christ, overcame and are resurrected.              |
| 12         | They are without fault, having no guile.          | They lived without deceit, and are raised as faultless.          |

***Run the Race***

We are now living in the lull just before the storm of the last days. It is a time of sifting in the Church. God is separating the wheat from the chaff. It is a time of final decision-making about who will be accounted worthy for inclusion in the 144,000.

The Scriptures tell us plainly that judgement is now upon the Church (I Peter 4:17). God is

watching, and making decisions about where we will fit in His Kingdom, or even if we will fit there at all. Our purpose should be to dedicate ourselves to proving to Him that we do!

This time of proving ourselves has been compared to running a race. The Apostle Paul makes this analogy to convey the urgency of this critical time in our lives. He writes:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? **So run, that ye may obtain** (I Corinthians 9:24).

Not all who run this race will reach the finish line, and not everyone who is called will automatically be chosen. Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). Christ is very selective when it comes to choosing whom He will marry. Many run the race, but not all will obtain the prize. The apostle Paul reaches down and pulls from his vast personal experience in order to give us an important warning message. He writes:

And **every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things**. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, **when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway** (I Corinthians 9:25-26).

Some will be castaways! Paul realized that even he could be disqualified. For that reason, he ran the race with diligence. He worked to bring himself into subjection to Jesus Christ in all things. While there is yet time, we must also run the race. The end is nearer than before. We must be diligent, and continue to run with renewed zeal.

### ***Hang In There***

Far too many in God's Church today seem willing to let the prize slip through their fingers. Some are completely turned off to the Church. They complain that the Church has wronged them or failed them. Perhaps they have been hurt by the ministry or offended by another Church member. Some have simply been disappointed by their own failure to measure up.

Others have become distracted by the pressures and cares of this world. They have been caught up in careers, investments, and the pursuits of this physical life. In this age of spiritual indifference, few pay real attention to the spiritual anymore. Many have become weary of well-doing and have begun to let this precious calling slip through their fingers. What about you?

Perhaps you have seen the poster that captures the image of a somewhat frantic little kitten suspended in mid-air, while desperately clinging in wide-eyed panic to the most precarious of paw holds. The caption under the kitten reads, "Hang In There, Baby."

Many of us have felt like this kitten during difficult times in our Christian walk. Sometimes the trials we face while striving to live God's way can make us feel as if we are desperately holding on for dear life, but we cannot afford to give up. We must hang in there! The following story is a fitting illustration of this point:

Off the coast of New England many years ago, a fishing boat was being tossed about in a



rough sea. Suddenly, a seaman noticed a young man clinging to the mast, lashed by the biting wind. In horror, the seaman ran to the Captain and exclaimed, "Look, Captain, it's your son up there in grave danger. If he lets go, he'll be dashed to pieces!" The Captain looked up calmly and replied, "He won't let go. He's my son! He won't let go!"

In the story, the Captain knew what his son was made of. He knew that he would not let go! What about your Captain, Jesus Christ? Does He know that you won't let go? Will you let go of the magnificent calling God has given you? Is there anything that could cause you to let go of the fantastic reward God offers to those who endure to the end?

The understanding of God's Word that you have been given is priceless. You now know who the 144,000 are. You now know what it will take to be counted among them. Let this knowledge motivate you. Realize that you are being given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with absolutely fabulous rewards that will last for all eternity. Recognize what has been laid at your feet. Pick it up and run with it. Overcome! Strive to be worthy of your calling and be chosen as one of the 144,000!

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