

**The Book of Revelation**  
**Revelation 7 (NIV)**  
**“The 144,000 and The Martyred Multitude”**

**Introduction**

As chapter seven begins we see a pause between the 6th and 7th seals. (There are similar breaks between the 6th and 7th trumpets, as well as, bowl judgments.) The Holy Spirit shows John the protection that God provides for His elect during the great tribulation. John sees the four angels (agents of Gods wrath - **Zechariah 6:1-8**) ready to unleash the destruction of the 7th seal. God sends another (the Greek “allos”, meaning “another of the same kind”) angel with the command to wait until the servants of God are sealed. The winds of the most severe judgments are held in check until Gods servants can have His seal applied to their foreheads (c.f. **Ezekiel 9**).

Before the worst of the Tribulation begins, God provides a means for His chosen ones to be able to endure, and He has them marked for their protection (**vs. 3**). It is interesting to note that in the **Ninth chapter of Ezekiel**, God commands a “tav” (last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, translated “mark” in **vs. 4**) be placed on the foreheads of those remaining loyal to Him in Jerusalem. The letter tav in ancient times was in the shape of an “x” or a “t”. In other words, God will put the sign of the cross upon the foreheads of those who are truly His. It is a great comfort to know that as a child of God, we have been sealed with the cross! What a loving and protecting God we serve!

It is also important to realize that this chapter contains two completely separate visions. The first vision is that of the 144,000 sealed “missionaries” from the tribe of Israel. They are sealed in order to preach the gospel to their countrymen, as well as, all the other nations of the earth. These Jewish evangelists will set the world on fire with their preaching. And they will be protected from harm as they carry out their mission.

The second vision is an innumerable multitude of martyrs out of the Tribulation, who are gathered around heaven’s throne. They are representative of the many who will be added to the number of martyrs in **Chapter 6**. They are those who refused to take the mark of the beast and will instead place their faith in Jesus Christ. Many of these will come to faith as a result of the preaching of the 144,000. These faithful believers will willingly forfeit their lives, rather than deny the Savior. And God will gather them to Himself to offer comfort and shelter for all eternity.

**The Missionaries (vs. 1-8)**

**After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. Revelation 7:1-8**

In the midst of the tribulation period God will call 144,000 Jews to evangelize the nation of Israel, as well as, any other people groups who will listen. These missionaries are sealed (protected) by God in order to fulfill their mission. When I was just a boy, I heard a preacher say, The safest place a man can be is in the center of Gods will. I believe this is true. If God has called you to a particular task, you are invincible until that task is accomplished. In other words **“He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6 ESV)**. During the Great Tribulation these

sealed believers will be divinely kept safe so they can preach Jesus to the world. Remember God's ancient promise to Abraham that through his offspring, all the nations of the world would find blessing.

**The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and ALL peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** **Genesis 12:1-3 (emphasis added)**

The 144,000 Jewish evangelists (descendants of Abraham) will be chosen from among the 12 tribes of Israel. Twelve is the number of governance in scripture (for those of you who are interested in Biblical numerology). In God's order of all things, ruling bodies are comprised of 12; 12 disciples, 12 tribes of Israel, 12 judges of Israel during the time of the judges. Jesus came to the temple to display His authority at the age of 12 (and the list goes on).

These sealed missionaries are not to be the only ones who shall be saved in Israel. But they are the ones that God will set aside in order to preach to Israel and the nations. They will be preserved upon the earth, saved from the reach of the antichrist, so that they are able to freely carry out their gospel mission. We know from reading both *Old and New Testament* prophecies that a great number of Jews will be saved during the Great Tribulation.

#### **Zechariah 12:10-14**

**"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be as great as the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.**

#### **Romans 11:25-32**

**I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.**

The 144,000 (12 x 12,000) will be given authority to proclaim the coming kingdom of God. The tribe of Dan has been noticeably omitted in this list (It is replaced by Levi). Ephraim is also left out with his father Joseph being named in his place. It is interesting to note that these two tribes were excessively idolatrous throughout Israel's history. This is a possible explanation for their omission from the list. It is also interesting to note an early church tradition that the anti-Christ would come from the tribe of Dan, based on his father Jacob's depiction of him in **Genesis 49**.

**Dan will be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward. Genesis 49:17**

Of course both of these theories call for speculation, for only God Himself knows why He listed the tribes of Israel in thus fashion. The most important thing to note is that all of these evangelists are Jews, and therefore, descendants of Father Abraham. This is not a symbolic list, as some have speculated, but an actual distribution of Jewish believers, the first fruits of the nation of Israel (**Revelation 14:4**). I can only imagine what fiery preachers these converted Israelites will be! Multitudes from Israel, as well as, from every corner of the earth will be saved, because of their impassioned preaching (**vs.9**).

### **The Multitude (vs. 9-17)**

**After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."**

**All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"**

**Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'**

As mentioned previously, large numbers of people will be saved as a result of the preaching of the 144,000. We must always remember that God wants people to be saved. First Timothy 2:4 says that "He desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." The purpose of the tribulation period is not simply to bring judgment, but also to offer salvation to those who would repent and believe. There have been great revivals in world history when many came to Christ; Pentecost, the Reformation of the 16th century and the "Great Awakening" of the 18th century, but nothing will compare to the revival of the Great Tribulation when multitudes of people from all around the globe (vs.9) will turn to Christ and be delivered from God's wrath.

I am reminded here of a quote from the book, *A Tale Of Two Cities*; "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." The tribulation period, though terrible in judgment, will also be a triumph of God's grace. God is good, and He has promised His servant (Jesus) that this revival would indeed happen in Isaiah's prophecy of the end times.

**He says: "It is too small a thing for you to be My servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Isaiah 49:6**

It is wondrous to behold the similarities in the celebratory worship as these martyred believers gather around the throne, in comparison to the raptured church in chapters 4 and 5. Both groups are clothed in white robes and are singing loud praises to God. There is no hierarchy. No special privilege in status between the raptured saints and the martyred believers who come out of the tribulation. God's people: The Church, Israel, and the righteous dead are made one in Christ. The rewards and inheritance for joining in the last hour is the same as for those who got there first. Remember the parable of Jesus:

#### **Matthew 20:1-16**

**“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. “About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.**

**“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’ “‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. “He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’**

**“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’**

**“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’**

**“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’**

**“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”**

It is a good for us to remember that it is only by grace, that we are saved! We must be ever grateful that God is in the saving business, for we could never hope to earn so great a salvation.

It is also important to notice that this massive group of martyrs are no longer crying out under the altar “How long, O LORD?”. For they all know that the time has come for the most horrifying judgments of God upon this wicked world are now at hand. The final half of the Tribulation, known as The Great Tribulation, has arrived. No longer will the martyrs wonder when God will pour out His wrath upon those who had so savagely tormented them. The four angels now stand poised at the four corners of the earth to release the whirlwinds of devastation, the likes of which this world has never seen.

The waving of palm branches (**vs.9**) is a sign of deliverance and celebration. They are reminiscent of the feast of tabernacles in **Leviticus 23:40** that celebrated God’s miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage. During this festival, booths were constructed from palm branches to commemorate the Lord’s provision for the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. The palm branches are symbolic of the coming millennial kingdom, when God will tabernacle among His people. The Tribulation will be over soon. The devil and his antichrist will be evicted and Christ will reign upon the earth!

No one will ever be able to harm these faithful martyrs again. God will be with them and will **“shelter them with His presence forever” (vs. 14-17)**. The original text here actually says that God will **“shelter them under His tabernacle”** or will **“spread His tent over them”**. What a glorious thought. I am reminded here of the words of The apostle Paul:

#### **Romans 8:35-39**

**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The everlasting love of God is the wondrous inheritance of every believer. He will always be among them and will wipe every tear from their eyes. The suffering of God’s people will be forever done away with, and the Lamb shall be their Shepherd (**vs. 17**). We will serve Him, and He will provide for our every need. It is a great comfort to know that God has such wonderful things in store for those who love Him.

Have you surrendered your life to Christ? He wants you to be with Him forever. **“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11.**

And let all those who are resting in Him say... TRUTH!!