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Revelation 7:1-8 "The JWs: 144,000 Jewish Witnesses" April 28, 2021

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Revelation 7:1 as we continue our journey, step-by-step, through this final book that the Lord gave to the old apostle John to sum up, to fulfill and bring to an end all that God has promised and all that we can look forward to.

Chapter 1:19 the Lord said to John, "Write the things which you've seen, the things that are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Verse 19, John had already seen the Lord in all of His glory. In chapters 2 and 3, he saw the Church Age. And then, in chapters 4 and 5, beginning with the words "after these things," the church caught up into heaven. We've gone through all of those. In chapter 6, as we arrived there, we went over the chronology of what the Bible has to tell us about this final seven years called the Great Tribulation in the Bible, the time of Jacob's trouble. We did an overview - all that we know historically, biblically about the chronology from beginning to end, those seven years. We then started in chapter 6:1 with the opening of the first seal which brought forth the Antichrist (verses 1 and 2 actually). And we told you, at that time, that that is probably the only thing in the book of Revelation that takes place before the halfway point of the Tribulation; it's the only thing that takes place in the first $3\frac{1}{2}$ years where the Antichrist, through deceit and through lies and through hustle, is able to convince the world that he's the promised Messiah. At the halfway mark - $3\frac{1}{2}$ years in - the Temple will be complete in Israel. He will arrive there, probably, to the dedication and to declare that he's God; that from now on everyone worships him, "You want to buy and sell, you take my mark. You don't take my mark, you die." And really everything that rolls beyond verse 2 of chapter 6 is isolated to that final 42 months. We looked at the second, third and fourth seals which were all fallout of this revelation of this Antichrist, this devil-filled man. War and famine and death; $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's population dies. Horrible time of judgment. But understand the people that are here are here because they refused to walk with God, and they decided to defy Him.

Last week, as we looked at verses 9-17 of chapter 6 - the fifth and the sixth seals - we saw a couple of things. Number one - with the fifth seal we saw the souls of those who had been killed for their faith, that were caught up in all of the suffering. And they are found now in heaven, under the throne of God; crying out

to the Lord for justice; asking how long do they have to suffer and wait; asking the Lord to bring justice to their death. And they were told, as they were given white robes, that they should wait because many more would follow them, and they would be joining them soon. In the sixth seal, there was a tremendous earthquake. The sun was blackened, the moon turned the color of red. We are told of asteroids hitting the planet, man cowering in fear. He realizes that the wrath of Him who sits on the throne has come - the day of His wrath. But rather than repent, they ask the mountains and the rocks to hide them.

Tonight, in chapter 7, at least in the first eight verses, which is what we're going to look at tonight as we're also having communion, John is given a respite in terms of how this must have overwhelmed his senses as he began to watch the horror that was unfolding. And he is given a new vision. Most of the time the new visions in the book of Revelation are introduced with the words "after these things." "After these things I saw." You'll see it happen a lot; not always the case but much of the time. This new vision - in this whole, actually, chapter, but this week and next week - seemed to be very parenthetical in nature. By that I mean the progress of the opening of the seals and then whatever follows stops, and you're given a step back, and you get a panoramic view of what's going on. You're not focused upon one event like we are as we go through these, but you are rather given an overview, if you will, of what takes place before and what prepares for the seventh seal, which starts in chapter 8:1. And the seventh seal just introduces the next seven judgments and so that it goes. It's still very much in chronological order. Like I said, in chapter 4 we read, "After these things." In chapter 7 we read, "After these things." And then you get to chapter 8, and you read, "And when He opened the seventh seal." So we opened the sixth one back in verse 12 of the last chapter, and now we kind of take a pause.

We are introduced, in chapter 7, to two different groups of people upon the earth. We'll look at one of them tonight, verses 1-8 - the ones that will survive the entire Great Tribulation and end up in glory. We will look at the other group next week - those who will die. They'll die for their faith. They'll be gathered together in the arms of the Lord. They are the tribulation saints, added to what we read beginning in verses 9, 10 and 11 last week of these tribulation saints.

So here's what we're going to read tonight. Verse 1, "After these things I" (John) "saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any

tree. Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, 'Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.' And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed."

I guess you get the message: twelve thousand were sealed of twelve different groups. Like I said, I want to remind you that everything after chapter 6:2 occurs during the final $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year timeframe. We don't doubt that some of these were intertwined. By that I mean it is impossible in the Scriptures to determine how long each seal or judgment lasts. When you get a little bit further on into the bowl judgments, we are told that they are almost immediate, and they're over very quickly. The only difference between the bowl and the judgment that we're going to look at next - the trumpet judgment - is just the severity of the punishment. They're the same, but they're more severe. But we can't tell you how far apart each of these was. They do have a definite starting time in heaven. That's what we're told. As the seals open, the trumpet is blown, the vials are poured out. But how long that those last and how much of an overlap there is, I can't even begin to tell you, and there's really nothing in the Scriptures, I think, that we can determine at all. But we will move towards the next set of judgments, like I said, in chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 where these seven trumpet judgments were.

So, this is a new vision of John's. Notice in verse 1, "After these things I saw." John says first he "saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth." This reference to the main compass points as these judgments are to be

worldwide. They're across the earth, if you will. The word "standing," in Greek, is in the perfect tense which means "have stood." The word "holding" is in the present tense. So it literally says they've been standing for a long time and holding on just for the moment when the Lord gives the order to let go or to go forward. So these have been standing at their posts. Now they're going to be.....the winds of judgment in every direction, the calm before the storm.

And notice that there is, in verse 2, a fifth angel. He comes from the east where the sun rises. By the way, the term "from the east" is often used in the Scriptures to talk about God's deliverance or God's judgment. It's a move forward, if you will. And this angel had the seal of the living God on him. He's not marked by the idols of men, but he is marked by the living God, and he cries to these four who've been granted authority, if you will, by the Lord to hurt the earth but not until these 144,000 have been sealed as servants of God upon their foreheads. Now we are told several chapters down the road - chapter 14:1 - that what the name on their forehead is is the name of their Father. Sealed by their Father's name. You can mark it down and go look at it. Not sure if those names would be visible to those on the earth. Not told. But the Lord knows who are His; they're marked as such.

The term "wind," in verse 1, is the typical word for the description of the work of the Holy Spirit. Here the judgment of God is about to fall upon the earth still, and it is specifically going to fall on the earth and the trees and the seas. When we get to chapter 8, and the judgment of the trumpets begins, the first things to suffer on the earth are those three: the earth, the trees and the seas - all things that are supportive of human life. The fellows that are on the earth at this time worship the creatures rather than the Creator, the creation, if you will. So they are slowly removed from the land. There's going to be less of them to support them. Where they look for life, they're not going to find it. If you go ahead to chapter 9:4, where the locusts are released (and we'll cover them as we get there), they are told not to hurt the sea, the plants or the earth. Stay away from those things; just hurt man. And so the target goes to the individual who has separated himself, if you will, from the Lord.

We are told, in verses 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, in no uncertain terms that those who were to be sealed are the servants of God: twelve thousand from each of twelve tribes of Israel. Therefore we've called our study, "The JWs: 144,000 Jewish Witnesses." There has been a lot of damage done to the Scriptures and great confusion, I think, wrought by many groups seeking to identify themselves as these

144,000 folks. All of them follow the same basic interpretation, and here's what it is: if I twist the Scriptures, I can make it say whatever I want. And that's pretty much their approach. They're not willing to let the Scriptures speak for themselves. Some want to identify this group as the church, which is hard to believe since, in chapters 4 and 5, the church is represented by twenty-four elders who sing a song of redemption that only the church can sing. It is unique to the lips and to the hearts of the people that the Lord has redeemed. We clearly have heard and read of the trumpet sound and the rapture taking place in chapter 4. The Scripture teaches you, everywhere you'll turn, that God has delivered us from His wrath by the blood of His Son. So this isn't you, and this will never be you.

The Jehovah Witnesses use this and Revelation 14 (we'll look at it in a minute) to say that there are only this amount of people that will ever be allowed into heaven. I guess they must have stopped reading at verse 8 because verse 9 says (and verse 13 says and verse 14 says) that the multitudes without number showed up in heaven. But then if you're a cult, you're going to ignore the Scriptures. You're going to teach what you want in a way that you want it. After years of encouraging their workers to give it their all so that they may attend to this select group of 144,000, the Watchtower Society eventually declared that the tickets to heaven had been sold out. You just couldn't get in anymore. Now you were left out. Heaven was full. As you might suspect, it resulted in the loss of membership, and the leaders had to look for other ways to motivate people. So they turned to chapter 7:9, and they spoke of this great multitude who was doing well, and they said as a result of them doing well, they could live forever upon the earth; they couldn't live with the Lord as the 144,000, but the next best thing - they could live forever upon the earth. I said to someone the other day, "It's easier to believe the gospel."

Before the revolutionary repentance and restoration of the gospel to the Worldwide Church of God, Herbert Armstrong and his son - you might remember his name, Garner Ted Armstrong - taught that they alone had the truth. Their magazine, for years, was called "The Plain Truth" magazine. When you joined the church, you were obligated to tithe 20%, a rule we will not impose here. When you did, you were promised that when this Great Tribulation began, they would send you a direct telegram guiding you to a secret place where food and water would be stored for you, where you could last for 3½ years; and they defined this word "sealed" to mean get a pass to be let in and to be let out. That was the teaching of the church. Now, fortunately, for many in that movement, they have turned to

Jesus in faith. A lot of those false concepts have been removed or rescinded. But for any group claiming to be this group, know that to do that means you have to twist the Scriptures from what it clearly says. And unless you spiritualize the word "tribes" and spiritualize their names, it's going to be very difficult to join this group that God has chosen to seal. If God didn't mean the Levites and didn't mean those of Issachar and didn't mean those from Benjamin, if He didn't mean those from Asher, then who did He mean? And what tribe do you belong to?

Let me give you at least a word of warning when it comes to biblical interpretation, and it works every time. You should always take the Bible literally unless there are alternatives which the Bible clearly suggests that you should read figuratively. And if that's the case, then you should find plenty of other Scriptures to support that less-than-literal interpretation of what you're reading. Else just stick with what's written there.

After all, the basic premise of our understanding of God is that God wants you to know Him. If He doesn't want you to know Him, you're not going to get to know Him. If He wants to hide, you won't find Him. But God is a God of revelation. He comes to reveal Himself, and He certainly says to us, "If you will study diligently, you will seek Him with your whole heart, you will find Him" (Jeremiah 29:13). God is not cryptically looking to hide behind incongruous, misleading Scriptures which obscure the truth to an honest seeker. God wants you to know Him. And so be careful when those begin to hammer out Scriptures and start to tell you what they think it means and there's no basis for it whatsoever, there's no biblical support. Stick with the literal. Beware of the context. Let the Bible interpret itself. Look for recurring types and similes, metaphors and lessons. God is interested that you know Him. He repeats Himself a lot. Because we're kind of hard of hearing, aren't we? And we need to hear. If you speak to a Jehovah Witness on your doorstep or out in public, and you ask them, "Where did you get the idea that God did not mean the twelve tribes of Israel here?" they won't have an answer because they are told what to believe. They are not willing to examine the Scriptures for themselves. I guarantee you if you handed this Book to anybody - anybody - and you said, "What do you think this is talking about?" they'd go, "Tribes? Twelve thousand, tribes?" That's what they're going to tell you because that's what it says. The church is not spiritual Israel; never implied in the Bible. They're two separate groups. But if you're going to teach false doctrine, understand this: you have to teach that to people. You don't want to say to them, "Here's a Bible, go read it for yourself." I remember Pastor Chuck used to say to us when we used to be involved in spiritual

leadership with him - training - he'd always say, "I'm never afraid to let people go read the Bible and see what they're going to come up with because we don't need to reinforce something that it doesn't say." If the Jehovahs will tell you, and they will still say to you today, "Read our books for two years, and you'll see the light" (it's one of their catch phrases), the moment anyone wants to sell you their books to explain their position, rest assured they have a weird doctrine to sell you. Don't wait two years; leave immediately. And don't bother to buy the books. Go read your Bible. God wants you to know Him.

Well, here in chapter 7 verses 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, the Lord says (well, in the whole chapter but here, what we're reading), what He means, and He means what He says; 144,000 people divided by 12: twelve tribes of 12,000, each representing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. We can conclude that these 144,000 Jews have come to know Jesus sometime after the rapture because they didn't leave. They're not with you in glory. They've given their lives to the Lord now. As we studied when we looked at the book of Daniel (if you were with us), chapter 9 especially those four verses (24-27), as Daniel is given by the Lord His timetable for His dealings with Israel nationally, as a nation (not individually with man, but His relationship and promise to Israel as a nation), we read about the seventieth week of Daniel when, after the Church Age is taken out, God has seven more years to fulfill in that promised relationship with national Israel. And God will, indeed, during these seven years of Great Tribulation, reach the world with His love through His people Israel, the ones that He has chosen. He will then return to Jerusalem, their capital. He will rule and reign amongst them, and all of the world, the Bible says, will come to worship God there. So it falls right in line, if you will, with all that we know that the nation of Israel was chosen by God - not by merit; He didn't choose us by merit. He didn't choose Israel because they were the strongest or the most affluent or the most powerful. They were really not much of anything. But He chose them by His sovereignty. To them He gave the trust to record the Old Testament. Right? It was given into their care, if you will, the Scriptures. It was given to them to bring forth through the nation the Messiah that was promised. And Jesus came. Instead of, as a nation, being a faithful vessel, the nation became proud, became very elitist in its position. It rejected the Gentiles, and then it rejected Jesus when He came, even though He was the very fulfillment of the Scriptures that they had been given by God and held dear to themselves. So Jesus set aside the national dealing with Israel after sixty-nine of those seventy weeks. Right? And the church was born. We don't really have a timeframe for length of the Church Age, but we know that it will take place from then - the birth of the

church - until the rapture. And then the Church Age will be over, and God will again return to the nation which He has promised to finish the work that He has begun. Today, during the Church Age, every individual can be saved. There's no Jew or Gentile in God's economy. There's no male or female. We're all equal in His sight. We're souls that He has given His life for. You have to come to Jesus by faith.

You might remember, and I'll read to you just real quickly, in Matthew 21, there was that parable that Jesus told, beginning in verse 33, about the wicked vinedressers. And it says that Jesus told a parable to them about "a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when vintage-time drew near," He says, "he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance." So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore," Jesus said, "when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on this stone' " (speaking of Himself) " will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.' Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet."

So God, today, is still dealing with individuals.....through the church. Right? We're the ones that are now tending the vine, if you will. We're in the world witnessing to the Lord. But we've been given that responsibility. But when the church is taken away, God will turn again, as He has promised, to Israel which will then fulfill all of the promises that haven't been fulfilled - His relationship with them. God has made many unconditional promises to Israel regarding their eternal future. If you

read Romans 9, the whole chapter is about His election of His people Israel. God chose them. In chapter 10, it's their rejection of the One who chose them. They did not choose God. In chapter 11 of Romans, the story is about their restoration into a relationship again with Him, as God fulfills His promises. And even as Paul writes to the nation being set aside, he writes, in chapter 11:25, "I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." This seventieth year of Daniel, this seven-year period, is God's dealing again through and with national Israel. So it is a small wonder then that you get to this chapter, and you read that God sets aside for His ministers, servants, 144,000 Jewish believers - believers in Christ - who are sent forth at a very precarious time to reach out to Israel and to reach out from Israel to the world with the gospel of Jesus. Their ministry, from what we will read, was extremely successful. And they will stay alive until the end of the Great Tribulation and find themselves standing in Jesus' presence in the Kingdom Age. We know from the Bible that the work of the Holy Spirit in restraining evil through the church stops when the church is removed. It doesn't mean the Holy Spirit stops working, but that aspect of the restraining of evil - through the church and God's people in the world - is no longer an issue as the church is removed. So there'll be great sin, but yet the work of conviction and salvation that He carries forth is the same.

So when you read, in verse 3, that the Lord "seals" His servants, the word "seal" is a mark of ownership. We read, in chapter 1:22 of 2 Corinthians that the Lord "has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee." The word literally is "*arrabon*." It's a word for engagement ring. It literally means, "Let me give this to you now so you'll be assured that when you get there, I'll finish the work that you've started." It's God's promise to you and me to be sealed with His Holy Spirit. God marks His people. Paul said to the Ephesians, chapter 1:13, "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." God begins a work, He's going to finish. That's your assurance. God is at work, if you will, in your life. In chapter 4:30 of Ephesians, it says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." So that's exactly the same word that you find here - God sealing. And I want you to notice the repetition in verse 3 and then verses 5, 6, 7 and 8: God sealed, God sealed, God sealed, God sealed. He put His name, He put His hand upon these servants of God, and they will go out to declare the mercy and the grace of God even as much of the

church went out on Pentecost, sealed by the Holy Spirit to begin to preach the good news of salvation. So, being sealed by the Lord will provide protection from the enemy, we will read, and it will also provide protection from the judgments of God that are going to be poured out in the midst of a world that they're living in, and yet God has put His hand upon them. We will read, in chapter 9:4, "They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads." So they were protected. God protects them as He sends them out.

Now, there is biblical precedent for this sealing as the judgment of God falls. You might remember (or maybe you haven't read lately) the book of Ezekiel. But in chapter 9, there is the story of the LORD pretty much leaving the Temple. The abominations there are just sickening to the LORD. And that place of worship and that place of meeting God is pretty much moving away from, at least for a time. In chapter 9:1 of the book of Ezekiel, there's a loud voice that cries out, "saying, 'Let those who have charge over the city draw near, each with a deadly weapon in his hand.' And suddenly" (Ezekiel writes) "six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his battle-ax in his hand. One man among them was clothed with linen and had a writer's inkhorn at his side. They went in and stood beside the bronze altar" (the place of sacrifice). "Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, 'Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of' " (anyone you find that is broken-hearted because of what they see) " 'the men who sigh and cry' " (and are moved) " 'over all the abominations that are done within it.' " Mark them. "To the others He said I my hearing, 'Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark.' " The judgment of God began to fall. And then He said this, " 'Begin at My sanctuary.' " Start at the place where people are gathering to worship. So the marking is the same here. God marks those that He keeps, that have been marked for Him; these, in particular, chosen by the Lord. These secure saints will be a thorn in the side of the Antichrist. They will be, during this time, a constant reminder that the Antichrist can't win because they can't even get to God's people. God will have the last word.

You might want to read in light of this, and maybe write it in your margins: Psalm 91. It does seem to have almost a reference to their marching order. Verse 7, "Ten thousand will fall at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. With your eyes, you'll see the salvation of the LORD and the judgments of God to fall." So, check it out for yourself. But these are the ones that God chooses.

What becomes of them? If you'll flip ahead with me just for a few minutes to Revelation 14 - and we'll certainly cover this in great detail when we get here because we're trying to not blow through anything, want to get the full lesson out of every morsel - verse 1 says this. "Then I looked," John wrote, "and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads." John now sees a mountain - Mount Zion - and he sees the victory of all 144,000 that we just read about standing; none of them lost, all of them secure; not one of them lost their salvation. They didn't lose any along the way. And they are now standing victoriously with, on their foreheads, the seal of His Father's name. The Jehovah Witness again will take this verse and say to you, "We alone take the name of the Father," and they'll say, "Jehovah."

Well, remember that the Hebrew name for God was considered way too holy for the Jews to pronounce, so they didn't. They would even write the name, go and change clothes, wash themselves, and then go back and continue to transcribe the manuscripts. In fact, they wrote this name with four letters - YHVH. There're no vowels. In fact, you can't pronounce it without deciding where you're going to put the vowels to be able to pronounce the name of God, the Becoming One. It should be noted, however, that there are no hard "J" sounds in Hebrew at all. So it's not Jerusalem, it's Yerushalayim. It's not Jacob, it's Yaakov. And so it goes. And if you go to Israel, you'll hear that. One of our tour guides this time, his last name is Yosef; it's not Joseph, it's Yosef with a "Y." So I guess you could make the argument that Jehovah is probably not right. YHWH (Yahweh) probably better. But it's an argument from language. But because there're no vowels, we obviously can't make a case. What does interest me, at a time when men, in order to buy and sell, were obligated to take the mark of the beast or die, these had the mark of the Father, and they lived. They were marked, and they were set aside for the Lord's glory, if you will. And that's pretty amazing. I mean, that's pretty amazing to me.

So they're going to carry on this vigorous campaign, if you will, for the commitment of the hearts of men, preach the word of *God*, while Satan and his forces, seeking to deceive men into eternal damnation, are hard at work. As now, it'll be a time for men to decide their eternal destinies. I suspect that associating with these 144,000 could put you right in the crosshairs of the enemy. So they survive, having been marked.

In verse 3 you will read, here in chapter 14, about a new song that is given to these 144,000 Jewish redeemed witnesses for Christ. Few have experienced what they've gone through, walking in the fire without getting burned. We read that in Isaiah 43:2. And here, defying the beast and the dragon, who the world cowers before, but they do not. It kind of reminds me of Daniel's friends in the fire or Daniel in the lions' den or, for that matter, Noah and his family in the ark.

Now, we are told about them in verse 3, "They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to *God* and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of *God*." "Not defiled with women, they are virgins." It would make the suggestion that they were single. It could very well be - and we're not told anymore, so I'm just giving you what may be - that they took a Nazirite vow. After all, that's Old Testament again, and *God's* dealing with the Jews again. So that would have been certainly true for them. Jewish practices will be back in vogue. It could simply be a statement of their spiritual condition. The church is seen as a chaste virgin; the unfaithful are called the harlots, in a small sense.

But notice that their role is to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They're obedient to His will, and they are the firstfruits among those out of that Great Tribulation. They are the taste and the beginning of a work of salvation during this time. Now I think it might be on your notes, but there's a prophecy in Zechariah 13, and this is what it says. Verse 8, " 'And it shall come to pass in all the land,' " says the LORD, " 'that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, "This is My people"; and each one will say, "The LORD is my

God." " " So there is at least an indication that it would seem that maybe as many as 1/3 of the entire Jewish population will be saved during this time. There are approximately 15 million Jews in the world; about 55% of them live in Israel. All but 3% live in New York (Laughing), and then the rest are here. Well, they're close. Lot of Jews in New York, obviously.

Notice, in verse 5, "no deceit found in their mouth; without blame," they're honest and truthful. They are walking with God. If you read through these passages, here're some clues. Verse 1 it says they are in Mount Zion. In verse 2 it says, "I heard a voice from heaven." In verse 3 it says "they sang before the throne." Verse 5 it says they sang "before the throne of God." So if we're going to try to determine where is Mount Zion, there is a Mount Zion upon the earth. It does seem like this is maybe the spiritual Mount Zion, the place where the Lord has brought victory. And so they stand in John's vision later on, towards the end of all of these things, if you will, or they stand upon the earth as the Lord comes back, and this is all that they see. I can't tell you one way or the other. But those are the little clues that we're given in verses 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. So it's important to grab hold of them.

All right. Let's go back to chapter 7 here before we finish up and have communion. With the listing of these twelve tribes - and I wanted to take you through it a little bit - you should realize that Israel has no official records in their possession any longer of who belongs to what tribe. They were pretty much destroyed in 70 A.D. with the overthrow by the Tenth Legion of the Roman army under Titus. There are no records. There are many Jews who use their name like Cohen, and they'll say, "Well, that's a priestly name. We can track that." Well, maybe that's so. But just so you know, there's really no way to determine clearly what tribe you belong to. There are twenty-nine listings of the twelve tribes of Israel found in the Bible - the sons of Jacob. The first one is way back in Genesis 35. If you go through those twenty-nine lists, there is some switching around in various places. Oftentimes Levi, who is the priestly family - and they're given no land at all because the LORD said, "You're My inheritance, and you're there to serve the people" - they're left off the list. Other times, rather than Joseph.....Joseph had two sons, right? Ephraim and Manasseh; and because their grandfather, Jacob, loved Joseph, he, you might remember (in Genesis 48) gave a double portion, a blessing to both of those boys of Joseph so that Joseph really holds two spots - and so you could, I guess, argue there'd be thirteen rather than twelve. Joseph gets a double portion; his sons each get a portion of a blessing from the LORD.

In this list, Revelation 7, Levi is listed. Dan is excluded. Joseph is represented by Manasseh, and Ephraim is omitted. So neither Dan nor Ephraim will have any representation among these 144,000. Why is that? I think you can find the reason for it in a couple of places in the Old Testament. It was the tribe of Dan who first involved the nation of Israel in idolatry. They became the center of calf worship. They were instrumental in the fall of the northern kingdom; you can read about it in 1 Kings 12. In God's estimation of Dan, you will find a decreasing role in spiritual history. And when you find these lists of tribes, when Dan is included, he is oftentimes listed right at the bottom. He's the last to be mentioned. Ephraim was known in the land, for years, as pursuing idolatry with great vigor. The LORD said of them, in Hosea 7:14, "They won't cry to Me with their hearts. They just wail on their beds. They assemble just to get the grain and the new wine, but they absolutely rebel against Me." And He goes on to describe Ephraim as just a rebellious group that worships a lot of idolatry, if you will.

Since this was a time, and will be a time, of unprecedented idolatry and demon worship, it could very well be that this is why they're left off. Let me give you one last picture. If you go to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 48, you will get a picture of the Millennium. And the Temple that will be built upon the earth during the millennial reign of Christ won't be there for sacrifice. It'll just be there as a reminder of what Jesus did; it'll be a memorial place, a place dedicated to the Lord. Everyone's going to come and see it and think about what the Lord did. In that chapter (chapter 48 of Ezekiel), there is the last, by chronology anyway, listing of who and where the tribes will be assigned. When you read there, in Ezekiel 48, Dan is listed first. It's the only place. He goes right to the top. Whatever his problems were, he found the grace of God, and when all is said and done, he's exalted in the Kingdom Age, if you will. Ephraim is also found there by God's grace. And Levi, who is oftentimes left out, is given this special place around the Temple and around where all the worship takes place. They get a front-row seat. Right? They get the VIP seats. So God exalts those who've suffered, those who have rebelled, those who belong to Him. And yet, when all is said and done, you will find them, in Ezekiel 48, in just a glorious place by God's grace. That's what you're going to encounter as well. God's going to embrace you by His grace.

For now, as we're back to our chapter here, we know the 144,000 Jewish saints of God, sealed with His name upon them for protection and ownership, will bring the gospel of Jesus to the earth at a time of tremendous tribulation, and it will lead to a worldwide revival in the midst of a worldwide judgment. As these 144,000 are

doing their thing, they are going to be joined by an angel of God flying through the sky with the everlasting gospel in his hands. In fact, let me read to you.....I know I'm bouncing you around. Revelation 14:6 says this, "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people - saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' " And so there will be the 144,000, there'll be this angel flying through the heavens, if you will, declaring the word of the Lord, sealed, kept, watched over, protected. There will also be (Revelation 11) two witnesses that will do phenomenal things like fire breathers and miracles, and people will have no excuse. And still many won't believe. So, there's a lot going on. Right? The Lord is bringing judgment, but He doesn't want to lose anyone so He provides, even at this late hour, not only the means by which people can hear but the blessings that will follow. In fact, verse 9 of chapter 7 (and we won't go over it tonight) tells us, at the beginning, there's "a great multitude which no one could number" of all of these folks that have come and have gathered now around the throne of God and begin to sing. And when asked who these white-robed dwellers are, it is John who says, down in verse 14, "I don't know, you know," and they say to him, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." So, as awful as what we read sounds, know that God isn't giving up on anyone till the last minute. Right? He's holding out precious last minute in the hopes and in the desire that everyone gets a chance to be with Him forevermore. He doesn't want to lose out. There's no joy with the Lord for judgment. He's all about salvation.

Next week we're going to finish this chapter and talk about the fruit that God will bring forth from our lives. I just love the chapter, especially since we have to then do chapter 8, which is hard. So let's enjoy chapter 7, shall we? And tonight, if you are somewhere away from the Lord, whether you're here or next door or listening online, know this: God is more than able and more than willing to bring you to Himself. No matter where you've gone, what you've done, how you've said it or what you think you deserve, God, by His grace, can give you life. All you have to do is read this last book, and you stand in amazement at the harshness of judgment but also the graciousness of God's willingness to pull you out of it. You're going to have to die, then, for your faith. You just have to live for your faith now. It's much easier. Go the easy route. Surrender tonight. So we'll have communion together, and shall we pray?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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