

EXPLANATION of REVELATION chapter 7

THE PROTECTION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH AND THE GLORY OF THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH

PART 1. THE PROTECTION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH (7:1-8)

PART 2. THE GLORY OF THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH (7:9-17)

The Militant Church is sealed and thus protected at Christ's first coming and is assured by the vision of the glory of the Triumphant Church at Christ's second coming.

PART 1. THE PROTECTION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH (7:1-8)

The Militant Church is the Church engrossed in spiritual warfare on this present earth between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. The Triumphant Church is the same Church celebrating its victory after Christ's second coming.

Before the seven trumpets of judgements are sounded (8:2) and before the four winds of destruction strike (7:1), John is allowed to see a vision of the Militant Church protected on earth throughout these judgements.

a. Explanation of the symbols

7:1 "After this"¹ The phrase 'after this' is used to introduce a new vision (4:1; 7:1; 18:1; 19:1). The visionary state of John (being in the Spirit) that began in Revelation 4:1-2 continues in Revelation 7:1. But while in Revelation chapter 4 to 6 the vision is a closely connected unit, in Revelation chapter 7 the vision is less connected. Although this is another vision, there is no break in John's visionary state or in the vision as a whole. Thus, the truth God reveals in chapter 7 has a bearing on chapter 6 that precedes it and on chapter 8 that follows it. Revelation chapter 7 is a chapter in between.

"I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth"² Angels are God's servants, on the one hand serving those who will inherit salvation (Hebrews 1:14) and on the other hand executing God's judgements (7:1; cf. 14:18; 16:5; 20:1-3). The picture is of four good angels holding back the four winds of the earth until the servants of God have been sealed on their foreheads. They are the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea by means of the four winds (7:2). They should not be equated with the four evil angels who are bound at the River Euphrates (9:14). They are pictured as standing in the four compass directions (Jeremiah 49:35-36; Matthew 24:31). This is a symbol for God's angels being everywhere on 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."³ The four winds are instruments of God's wrath and judgement, a picture of destruction (Job 1:19; Psalm 83:15; Isaiah 41:16; Jeremiah 4:11-12; 49:35-36). They surround the whole earth on which people live and can strike everywhere and at all times as God determines! They do not represent distinct judgements, but symbolise God's terrible judgements, which threaten the earth and its inhabitants. They are not mentioned again in the book of Revelation and therefore probably *summarize all God's destructive judgements* that occur under the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. The fact that God's angels are holding the four winds back symbolises that *God's destructive judgements are also under God's sovereign control!* God's destructive angels can do nothing unless God permits them to act. God sovereign authority 'gives'⁴ them their power to harm (7:2).

¹ μετα τουτο (or μετα ταυτα)

² ειδον τεσσαρας αγγελους εστωτας > ιστημι (vpra) επι τας τεσσαρας γωνιας της γης

³ κρατουντας (vpra) τους τεσσαρας ανεμους της γης, ινα μη πνεη (vspra) ανεμος επι της γης μητε επι της θαλασσης μητε επι παν δενδρον

⁴ εδοθη (viap)

7:2a “Then I saw another angel coming up from the east.”⁵ He is not Christ, but in the service of Christ, because he says, “our God” (7:3). He comes from the east, the direction from where light and comfort rises. He does not determine who will be sealed, but seals those God tells him to seal. It is the Lord who knows the people who are his (2 Timothy 2:19) and he determines that they be sealed.

“having the seal of the living God.”⁶ A seal may symbolise one of the following three things:
Ownership: the Christian belongs to God. The seal consists of the Holy Spirit and signifies that the Christian has been born again (has been baptised with the Spirit) (Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:16; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Timothy 2:19).
Genuineness: whatever the Christian possesses (the righteousness of Christ) is genuine (cf. Esther 3:12). God gives the baptism with water as the visible sign and seal of his invisible baptism with the Spirit (cf. Romans 4:11).
Protection: the Christian is protected against tampering (Matthew 27:66). He is especially protected against eternal damnation (John 10:28-29; Romans 5:9-10).

7:2b “He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea.”⁷

7:3 “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.”⁸

The first four trumpet judgements affect the land (earth), sea, water sources and heavenly bodies and thus people indirectly (8:6-12). In Revelation 8:7 a third of the earth, its trees and green grass were burned up. Thus the servants of God were sealed *before* the sounding of the seven trumpet judgements! God does not start his judgements until he has sealed his own people, his servants!

In Ezekiel 9:1-11 God gave Ezekiel a vision about sealing. God was going to punish the grievous sins of Israel and Judah. First God sent a man with a writing kit to put a mark on the foreheads of those people who grieve and lament over all the detestable things done in Jerusalem. Then God sent city guards with deadly weapons to kill everyone who had no mark of protection on his forehead! The people with this mark on their foreheads represented the spiritual remnant of Israel (Isaiah 1:8-9; 4:2; 6:13; 10:20-22; 28:5; 37:4,31-32; 46:3; Joel 2:32; Romans 9:29) that would NOT be killed in God’s judgement.

Likewise in Revelation 7:2-3 God gave John a vision about sealing. God was going to bring seals of oppression, persecution and affliction (chapter 6) and trumpets of warning judgements (chapter 8 and 9) and bowls of final judgements (chapter 16) over the earth. But first God’s seal of protection is put on the foreheads of his servants. Then God’s decrees about oppressions, persecutions, afflictions and judgements that effect people directly and indirectly are executed (set in motion).

The people with this mark on their foreheads represent God’s elect, the born-again Christians (the servants of God). This sealing consists of God’s name and Christ’s name that is symbolically written on their foreheads (cf. 14:1; 22:4). The ones sealed are called the servants of our God, because what distinguishes them from other people in the world is that they *serve* the God of the Bible! They do not serve the gods of commerce and materialism and they do not serve the gods of any other religion!

There is not the slightest indication that they must be limited to Jews, the physical descendants of Israel, or that only the believers from Jewish background are intended. Also the believers from Gentile background are the servants of God. All genuine Christians on earth are intended! The book of Revelation was written to the servants of God or Christ (1:1), to everyone “who reads the words of this prophecy ... and take to heart what is written in it” (1:3). The servants of Christ in Revelation 2:20 are certainly Christians from Gentile background, people that belong to “all the churches (congregations)” in the world (2:23,29)! The servants of God in Revelation 5:10 are people saved by the blood of Christ and are from every tribe and language and people and nation on earth! The servants of God are Christians!

⁵ και ειδον (viaa) αλλον αγγελον αναβαινοντα (vppa) απο ανατολης ηλιου

⁶ εχοντα (vppa) σφραγιδα θεου ζωντος (vppa)

⁷ και εκραξεν > κραξω (vppa) φωνη μεγαλη τοις τεσσαρσιν αγγελοις οις εδοθη (viap) αυτοις αδικησαι (vnaa) την γην και την θαλασσαν

⁸ λεγων (vppa), Μη αδικησητε (vsaa) την γην μητε την θαλασσαν μητε τα δενδρα αχρι σφραγισωμεν (vsaa) τους δουλους του θεου ημων επι των μετωπων αυτων

7:4 “Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144 000 sealed people from all the tribes of Israel”⁹

7:5-8 “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.”

John did not see these sealed people, but only *heard* their number! On earth, we cannot discern who are genuinely sealed, who are born-again Christians. Only the Lord can see in the heart of each person and only he knows who belong to him (2 Timothy 2:19). That is why also John is not given the opportunity *to see* these sealed people.

WHO ARE THE 144 000?

The number 144 000 in Revelation 7:4 is a *symbolic* number and represents *the entire Militant Church before* Christ’s second coming. They consist of all God’s people of the Old Testament and the New Testament periods *on earth*. They all are sealed throughout world history, that is, they all are *protected*, not from the seals of oppression, persecution and affliction or from the trumpets of judgement, but from eternal doom (the bowl judgements) throughout world history (Matthew 24:24; John 6:39; 10:28; 18:9)!

The number 144 000 in Revelation 14:1 is also a *symbolic* number and represents *the entire Triumphant Church after* Christ’s second coming. They consist of all God’s people of the Old Testament and the New Testament periods *in heaven*. They have all been *redeemed* from the earth throughout world history. Throughout world history they have all been acquired as property, bought as it were by the blood of the Lamb and thus saved from God’s wrath (in the final judgement)(Romans 5:9-10)!

See the symbolism of numbers in supplement 2. The number 144 000 is a symbolic number. The number 3 represents the Triune God and the number 4 represents the entire earth. Thus, 3 x 4 represents God’s work of salvation carried out everywhere in the world, resulting in God’s people. The number 12 represents God’s people, either in the Old Testament represented by the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12), or in the New Testament represented by the twelve apostles (21:14). The number 10 represents completeness and the number 1000 (10 x 10 x 10) represents the absolute complete number. Therefore, *the number 144 000 represents the absolute complete number of God’s people, God’s elect during the Old and New Testament periods of time, from the creation to the re-creation of the earth* (cf. Romans 11:25-26).

The number is *an even number* and expresses that there will be complete equality and no cause for rivalry among God’s people (e.g. Jewish believers and Gentile believers) (Ephesians 2:11-22; Romans 10:12-13)! From Revelation 14:1-7, we gather that they are those who fight the good fight on earth in the cause of Jesus Christ and who face difficult circumstances on earth because of their faith.

In Revelation 7:1-8, they are sealed as a sign that they are *owned and protected* by God *before* his seal judgements (6:1-17), his trumpet judgements (chapters 8 and 9), his thunder judgements (10:3-4) and his bowl judgements (chapters 15 and 16) are executed on earth.

In Revelation 14:1-7, *after* everything that happens during the period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming has happened, they are still seen in their full number in the direct presence of Christ! *After* God’s judgements have been executed (chapter 8 and 9), *after* the bitter struggle of witnessing has been completed (chapter 10 and 11), and *after* the battle between Christ and his enemies has been fought on earth (chapter 12 and 13), thus, at the end of world history they are still seen in their full number in the direct presence of Christ! Not one of them has gone lost! Whoever God seals, that is, owns and protects, is secure forever (John 6:39; 10:28; 17:12; 18:9; Romans 8:1,29-30; Philippians 1:6)! Thus, the number 144 000 refers to the entire Church throughout world history!

Conclusion. The sealing of the 144 000 signifies the protection of *the entire Church (all genuine Christians) from eternal damnation*. They are not protected from the seals of oppression, persecution and afflictions, or

⁹ και ηκουσα (viaa) τον αριθμον των εσφραγισμενων (vnp), εκατον τεσσαρακοντα τεσσαρες χιλιαδες, εσφραγισμενοι (vnp)
εκ πασης φυλης υιων Ισραηλ.

from the trumpets of judgement, or from the onslaughts of the antichrists. But they are sealed *throughout the whole New Testament period* as a sign that they belong forever to God (Christ) and are saved forever! They are exactly the same as the uncountable multitude in Revelation 7:9¹⁰.

WHO ARE THE TWELVE TRIBES?

The name '12 tribes' is symbolic. The book of Revelation is on purpose written in symbolic language¹¹. Just as their number 144 000, their description as being from every tribe of the children of Israel is symbolic. This is evident from the direct context and from the rest of the Bible. Although the way of speaking and the way of picturing the people of God is taken from the Old Testament, the names of the Old Testament tribes are not literal and their order is not regular.

The names of the twelve tribes are not literal. The literal list and order of the names of the twelve sons of Jacob are: from Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun; from Rachel: Joseph (with his sons: Ephraim and Manasseh) and Benjamin; from Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali; from Zilpah: Gad and Asher. (Genesis 35:23-26). In the list of the twelve tribes of Israel, the two sons of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) would inherit a part of the land instead of Joseph and Levi (Numbers 1:20-47; Joshua 14:1-5; 18:5-7). Although Simeon and Levi due to their violent anger lived dispersed in Israel, they are counted as two of the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 49:5-7; Joshua 19:9; Joshua 21:1-3).

However, in Revelation 7, Ephraim and Dan are missing from the list of the twelve tribes of Israel and are replaced by Joseph and Levi, who were never regarded as tribes with a particular area of land where they lived! The half tribe of Ephraim is left out and replaced by his father, Joseph (now regarded as a tribe!), because Ephraim was responsible for the division of the kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms and caused the northern kingdom of Israel to fall away from the Lord into idolatry (1 Kings 11:26; 12:19-20,27-33; Psalm 78: 9-11, 67). The tribe of Dan is left out and replaced by Levi, because Dan was guilty of being a centre of idolatry with heathen priests up to their exile (Judges 18:30-31; 1 Kings 12:29). Dan was a deceitful serpent (viper) (Genesis 49:17). Likewise nominal believers among both the Jews and non-Jews will not be included in 'God's people' (Matthew 7:21; 8:11-12; 21:43)!

The order of the twelve tribes is not literal. The name of Judah is mentioned first instead of Reuben, because the Messiah, Jesus Christ, came from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 35:23-26). Thus, the twelve tribes of Israel in the book of Revelation are described in the light of the New Testament fulfilment!

The Christian Church is called by Old Testament names of God's people. See the introduction to chapter 7. The name: "the 12 tribes of Israel" is symbolic for the Church, just as the names: "Christ's flock of sheep" (John 10:16), "God's temple" (2 Corinthians 6:16), "Abraham's seed and heirs" (Galatians 3:29), "Jerusalem above" (Galatians 4:26), "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), "God's chosen people" (1 Peter 2:9), "Gods' holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9) and "a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9) are symbolic for the Church!

They do not comprise only of Jews, because all 144 000 have literally been redeemed by Christ and have the name of Christ written on their foreheads (14:1-7)! Neither do the 144 000 comprise of only a smaller privileged portion of Christians, because all Christians have literally been redeemed by Christ and all Christians are literally Christ's servants (1:1; 2:20; 5:9-10; 6:11; 19:2,5).

Conclusion. The twelve tribes of Israel are spiritually the New Testament Israel (Romans 9:6b; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 6:14-16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1)¹². They are God's people, the spiritual Israel, the elect whom God through Christ will gather from both the Jews and the Gentiles throughout world history. They consist of the absolute complete number of God's people, God's elect during the Old and New Testament periods of time, from the creation to the re-creation of the earth (Romans 11:25-26).

¹⁰ Hendriksen pp. 132-135, Groenewald pp. 93-96

¹¹ ἐσημαῖεν (viaa), "he made it known by signs, symbols and pictures (1:1)

¹² Greijdanus pp. 130-131, Hendriksen p. 134, Groenewald pp 95-96

b. Different views about the sealing of the 144 000 (7:4)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) The sealing of the 144 000 signifies the protection of a literal number of Jews that wait for the coming Messiah (Malachi 4:2; Luke 2:25). They probably become believers in the Messiah through the sudden disappearance of the Church (the rapture). They are visibly sealed on their foreheads at the beginning of the first half of the future tribulation period after the removal of the Church (the rapture) in order to protect them from later harm and torture of the antichrist. Therefore they will not have to pass through the great tribulation (the second half of the future tribulation period). This is the pre-tribulation millennial kingdom view¹³.

Second view. (The second futurist view) The sealing of the 144 000 signifies the protection of a literal number of Jews that constitute the remnant of Israel. They are sealed at the beginning of the second half of the future tribulation period after the rapture of the Church in order to protect them during 'the great tribulation' during the second half of the future tribulation period (7:14; Matthew 24:21) from the harm and torture of the antichrist. This is the mid-tribulation pre-millennial kingdom view¹⁴.

Third view. The sealing of the 144 000 signifies the protection of a small number of specially privileged Christians. They are sealed throughout the whole New Testament period in order to protect them amidst difficulties during their special service for Christ. They are a smaller part of the uncountable multitude in Revelation 7:9¹⁵.

From Revelation 14:1-7 the following is concluded. They especially fight the good fight on earth in the cause of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:11-12). They face difficult circumstances on earth because of their faith (2 Timothy 3:12). They have been redeemed¹⁶ from the earth, that is, they have cut all ties with this sinful world (14:3; cf. Matthew 10:37-39; 19:27-29). They have not defiled themselves with women and have kept themselves pure - literally they are 'virgins'¹⁷, that is, kept themselves free from every form of spiritual adultery and pollution by sin and injustice (14:4). They follow the Lamb wherever he goes, that is, they are particularly devoted to Christ and his cause (14:4). They have been offered as the 'first fruits'¹⁸ to God and the Lamb, that is, a particular privileged group among Christians (14:5). Compare the firstborn sons among all other children and the firstborn animals among all other animals as specially set apart and dedicated to God (Exodus 13:2; 22:29-31). They are 'blameless'¹⁹, that is, perfect, without defect, free from anything that would disqualify them in the service of God (Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3; 3:1,6; Matthew 5:48; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

Critique.

There is no biblical warrant to assume that there is a special privileged group of Christians. Are not all the genuine people of God in Old Testament and New Testament 'redeemed'²⁰, that is, purchased, acquired as property for God by the blood of the Lamb in order to be a kingdom and priests (5:9-10; cf. 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23)? Are not all genuine Christians presented as pure virgins²¹ to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2)? Do not all genuine Christians follow Christ (Luke 9:23)? Are not all genuine Christians as a part of the batch holy, because the cake offered as first fruits²² is holy, that is, are not all Christians holy, because they are grafted on the holy root of the patriarchs and its 'Seed', Christ (Romans 11:16)? Are not all genuine Christians chosen to be blameless²³ in Christ's sight (Ephesians 1:4)?

¹³ Larkin, Revelation pp. 65-66

¹⁴ Tenney pp. 74,78

¹⁵ Greijdanus pp.128-131

¹⁶ ηγορασμενοι (vprp)

¹⁷ παρθενοι

¹⁸ απαρχη

¹⁹ αμωμοι

²⁰ ηγορασμενοι (vprp) (14:3)

²¹ παρθενον αγνην (14:4)

²² απαρχη (14:4)

²³ αμωμος (14:5)

The word 'first fruits'. Christ is the 'first fruits' of all those who will be resurrected, that is, Christ is the first to be resurrected from the dead. Thus the word does not express 'a part of the whole', but rather expresses 'priority' (1 Corinthians 15:20,23)!

And Christians are the 'first fruits' of all those created, that is, of all people that will ever live only Christians are God's people. Thus the word expresses 'quality' (James 1:18).

In Revelation 14:4 the word 'first fruits' also refers to 'all Christians that will ever live' and expresses 'quality' rather than 'priority'. Thus, the number 144 000 cannot refer to a group of specially privileged Christians!

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The sealing of the 144 000 signifies the protection of the entire Church (all genuine Christians) from eternal damnation. They are not protected from the seals of oppression, persecution and afflictions or from the trumpets of judgement or from the onslaughts of the antichrists. They are sealed throughout the whole New Testament period as a sign that they belong forever to God (Christ) and are saved forever! They are exactly the same as the uncountable multitude in Revelation 7:9²⁴.

c. Different views about the twelve tribes of Israel (7:4-8)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The twelve tribes of Israel are literally the twelve tribes of the Old Testament Israel (Romans 9:6a)²⁵.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The twelve tribes of Israel are spiritually the New Testament Israel (Romans 9:6b; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 6:14-16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:2-6; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1)²⁶. They are God's people, the spiritual Israel, the elect whom God through Christ will gather from both the Jews and the Gentiles throughout world history. They consist of the absolute complete number of God's people, God's elect during the Old and New Testament periods of time, from the creation to the re-creation of the earth.

PART 2. THE GLORY OF THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH (7:9-17)

Before the seven trumpets of judgements are sounded and the four winds of destruction strike, John is allowed to see a vision of the Triumphant Church, the final goal of God's people.

a. Explanation of the symbols

7:9 "After this I looked, and behold"²⁷. Again John is aware that he receives this part of the vision later than the previous part of the vision. It is not a simple continuation of the previous part of the vision, yet easily leads to that part of the vision.

"there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language"²⁸ The great multitude from every nation is *figuratively the Triumphant Church*, that is, all the saved *throughout all of history*, another description of the 144 000 of Revelation 14:1-7.

The number of the fellow servants and brothers of the souls under the altar in heaven has been completed (6:11)! They are *the genuine uncountable multitude of Abraham's spiritual descendants* from every nation on earth throughout the centuries (Genesis 15:5; 32:12; Galatians 3:7-8,26-29). They are the result of the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (which is the same as the gospel of grace, Acts 8:12; 19:8-10; 20:24-25; 28:23,31) as a testimony to every nation (Matthew 24:14). The *Triumphant Church* consists of all God's people of the Old and New Testament periods already in heaven (7:15; 21:12,14) after the one and only second coming of Christ. They will consist of every people group, including the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fact that in this vision all the angels were standing around the throne, etc.

²⁴ Hendriksen pp. 132-135, Groenewald pp. 93-96

²⁵ Larkin, Revelation pp. 65-66, Tenney pp. 74,78, all futurists

²⁶ Greijdanus pp. 130-131, Hendriksen p. 134, Groenewald pp 95-96

²⁷ μετα ταυτα ειδον, και ιδου

²⁸ οχλος πολυς, ον αριθμησαι (vnaa) αυτον ουδεις εδυνατο (viin), εκ παντος εθνους και φυλων και λαων και γλωσσων

(7:11) proves that all people ever saved, including saved Jews, were standing there! Otherwise we will have to assume that the angels serving God's cause were still busy on earth (Hebrews 1:14) and then not all angels would be standing around the throne! And then also not all Christians would be standing around the throne.

“standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb”²⁹. They have come to stand and are now continually standing before God's throne, which means, they fellowship with God, serve God and share in all the glory of God.

“They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”³⁰ They are wearing flowing robes, which symbolise the festivity and blessedness of the occasion. The white colour of their clothes symbolise their righteousness and holiness. The palm branches symbolise salvation. Compare John 12:13 with Revelation 7:10.

7:10 “And they cried out in a loud voice, ‘The salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’.”³¹ ‘Hosanna’ in John 12:13 is a Hebrew word and means ‘Save!’ or ‘Victory!’ (1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). The salvation does not refer to general salvation, like protecting them or rescuing them from the antichrist and his persecution, but *the* salvation from sin and all its consequences (the dominion, slavery, corruption, defilement, guilt, judgement and everlasting doom of sin). This kind of salvation is the work of only the throne occupant and the Lamb. The same emphasis on salvation is made again in parallel passages: after the fall of the dragon from heaven (12:10) and after the fall of Babylon (19:1).

7:11 “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 worshipped God.”³² At that moment in salvation history all the angels were continually standing in a circle around the throne, the elders and the four living creatures. The final judgement had just taken place before the (white) throne of Christ in the clouds in the air (Matthew 25:31; 1 Thessalonians 4:17) and the earth was at the point of being renewed (20:11-15). Everyone standing around the throne worshipped, that is, they rendered him spontaneous and wholehearted devotion of heart.

7:12 “saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’ ” These are seven praises! See Revelation 4:11; 5:12.

7:13 “Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?’ ” The elder did not ask because he did not know, but in order to rivet John's attention on the amazing miracle, namely, that all these individuals, who once were sinners and doomed, were now righteous and holy and saved! Then John desired an explanation.

7:14 “I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘They have continually come and are come out of the great tribulation’”³³ The great tribulation *in this context* does not refer to the final great tribulation just before Christ's second coming (as in Matthew 24:21; cf. Revelation 3:10; 2 Timothy 3:1).

In the previous paragraph (7:1-8) the Militant Church is the Church in tribulation throughout the whole New Testament period and not just during the final tribulation just before Christ's second coming. The tribulation is ‘great’ because it is so all-inclusive: all the sufferings and trials, temptations and anxieties, which the Militant Church goes through throughout the entire history of the world. They are symbolically summarised by

- the seals of oppression, persecution and trials described in Revelation chapter 6
- the trumpets of judgement described in Revelation chapters 8 and 9
- the onslaughts of the beast out of the sea and the beast out of the earth in Revelation chapter 13
- and the onslaught of the great prostitute in Revelation chapter 17.

²⁹ εστῶτες (vpa) ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου

³⁰ περιβεβλημένους (vprp) στολάς λευκάς, καὶ φοινίκες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν

³¹ καὶ κράζουσιν (vira) φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες (vpra), Ἡ σωτηρία τῶ θεοῦ ἡμῶν τῶ καθημένῳ (vrrp) ἐπὶ τῶ θρόνῳ καὶ τῶ ἀρνίῳ

³² καὶ πάντες οἱ ἀγγελοὶ εἰστήκεισαν (vila) κυκλῶ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν τεσσαρῶν ζῶων καὶ ἐπεσαν (viaa) ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου ἐπὶ τὰ πρόσωπα αὐτῶν καὶ προσεκύνησαν (viaa) τῶ θεῷ

³³ καὶ εἰρηκα > λέγω (vira) αὐτῷ, Κυριε μου, σὺ οἶδας (vira). καὶ εἶπεν (viaa) μοι, Οὗτοι εἰσὶν (vira) οἱ ἐρχόμενοι (vrrp) ἐκ τῆς θλιψεως τῆς μεγάλης

However, the Church will not forever remain the Militant Church because God will bring the Christians out of the great tribulation they suffer on earth throughout the whole New Testament period into heaven, where they will become the Triumphant Church! The Triumphant Church is the picture of the full number of people saved from every nation in the world throughout the history of the world, just before they descend as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth (21:1).

“They have *once for all time* washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”³⁴ All genuine Christians put their trust in the completed work of salvation of Christ, his sacrifice of atonement for their sins, which he made in their place (1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:14). In themselves Christians are sinners, their best deeds are like filthy clothes (Isaiah 64:6). But Christians have received forgiveness of all their sins (Micah 7:18-19) and their clothes have become whiter than snow (Isaiah 1:18)! They have been saved by grace!

7:15 “Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple”. There in heaven they will continually *serve*³⁵ God day and night in his temple, that is, in his direct presence. God’s temple in heaven is not a literal temple, but *figurative* for the place where God dwells. Heaven is wherever God (Christ) is.

“and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.”³⁶ This is a picture of the most intimate fellowship with God (21:3). He spreads his presence like a tent over them and they dwell forever in the direct presence of the living God (Psalm 27:4-5; 91:1-16)!

7:16 “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.”³⁷ What God promised to the remnant of Israel during the Old Testament period (Isaiah 49:10) he will certainly fulfil perfectly to all his people from Jews and Gentiles in heaven before his second coming and on the new earth after his second coming (2 Corinthians 1:20)! What God threatened to the impenitent in Israel during the Old Testament period, he will certainly fulfil perfectly to all the impenitent of all nations on earth (1 Corinthians 10:6-11). *Negatively, their salvation consists* in that they will never again suffer (Isaiah 65:13). With these expressions, everything that could harm them physically or spiritually will be absent.

7:17 “For the Lamb at the centre 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.”³⁸ *Positively, their salvation consists* in that they will be shepherded by Christ and they will enjoy springs of eternal water, signifying the fullness of eternal life (Isaiah 55:1; John 7:38-39). And “God will wipe the tears out of their eyes” (Isaiah 25:7) means that nothing but perfect joy, blessing, glory, sweetest fellowship and the most abundant life remains forever. When they enter God’s presence, he will cause them to forget all previous hurts and sufferings (21:4).

b. Different views about the great multitude (7:9).

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) The great multitude from every nation is *literally* the great mass of Gentiles that will become *believers in the Messiah* through the preaching of the gospel of the future millennial kingdom by the 144 000 Jews *during the first half of the future tribulation period*. This is the pre-tribulation pre-millennial kingdom view.³⁹

Second view. (The second futurist view) The great multitude from every nation is *literally the universal removal of believers (Christians)* or the so-called rapture of the Church *in the middle of the future tribulation*

³⁴ και επλυναν (viaa) τας στολας αυτων και ελευκαναν (viaa) αυτας εν τω αιματι του αρνιου

³⁵ λατρευουσιν (vira)

³⁶ και ο καθημενος (vrrpm) επι του θρονου σκηνωσει > σκηνω (vifa) επ αυτους

³⁷ ου πεινασουσιν > πεινω (vifa) επι ουδε διψησουσιν > διψαω (vifa) επι, ουδε μη πεση (vsaa) επ αυτους ο ηλιος ουδ παν καυμα

³⁸ οτι το αρνιον το ανα μεσον του θρονου ποιμανει (vifa) αυτους και οδηγησει (vifa) αυτους επι ζωης πηγας υδατων.

και εξαλειψει (vifa) ο θεος παν δακρυον εκ των οφθαλμων αυτων

³⁹ Larkin, Revelation pp. 66-67

period before the horrors of the second half of the future tribulation period close in upon humanity. This is the mid-tribulation pre-millennial kingdom view.⁴⁰

Third view. The great multitude from every nation is *figuratively the Triumphant Church*, that is, all the saved *throughout all of history*, a greater number than the 144 000 of Revelation 14:1-7⁴¹. They will consist of all people groups, including Israel. They will not only consist of the *dedicated* servants of God, but also of the *ordinary* Christians, who do not always experience the persecutions and trials which the 144 000 experience.

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The great multitude from every nation is *figuratively the Triumphant Church*, that is, all the saved *throughout all of history*, another description of the 144 000 of Revelation 14:1-7⁴².

c. Different views about the great tribulation (7:14)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The great tribulation is the first half (the first 3½ years) of the so-called future tribulation period⁴³.

Second view. (The correct explanation) The great tribulation (7:14) is the whole period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ Tenney p. 74

⁴¹ Greijdanus pp. 131-132

⁴² Hendriksen pp. 135-136, Groenewald pp. 97-100

⁴³ Larkin, Revelation p. 67

⁴⁴ Hendriksen pp. 136-138