

# REVELATION CHAPTER 7

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

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. At Christ's first coming the Militant Church is sealed and thus protected and may know that at Christ's second coming she will be triumphant.

### PART 1. Revelation 7:1-8. THE PROTECTION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH.

*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.

#### (1) The angels.

7:1 After this. 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 (*aoi*) four angels standing (*Greek: istemi, steso, esteka, hesteka*)(*participle, perfect, aorist, active*) at the four corners (*Greek: gonia*) of the earth. Angels are God's servants, on the one hand serving those who will inherit salvation (Heb 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). The four good angels 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 (*Greek: krateo*)(*present*) the four winds (*Greek: anemos*) of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing (*Greek: pneo*)(*subjunctive, present*) on the land or on the sea or on any tree (*Greek: dendron*). 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; Jeremiah 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 specific demonstrable 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" them their power to harm (7:2). Compare this with God's four worst judgements: sword, famine, wild animals and pestilence (Ezekiel 14:21).

#### (2) The sealing.

7:2a and (then) I saw (*aoi*) another angel coming up (*Greek: anabaino*)(*present*) from the rising of the sun (the east)(*Greek: anatoles*). This angel 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 (*present*) the seal (*Greek: sphragis*) of the living (*zao*)(*present*) God.

A seal may symbolise one of the following three things:

##### ▪ Sealing signifies 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).

##### ▪ Sealing signifies genuineness.

The Christian is genuine. What the Christian possesses (e.g. the righteousness of Christ) is genuine and guaranteed (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).

##### ▪ Sealing signifies protection.

The Christian is protected against tampering by the enemy (Matthew 27:66). He is especially protected against eternal damnation (John 10:28-29; Romans 5:9-10).

7:2b He called (*Greek: krazo*)(*aorist*) out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given (*aorist*) (power) to harm (*Greek: adikeo*)(*aorist*) the land and the sea:

7:3 saying (*present*): Do not harm (*Greek: adikeo*)(*subjunctive, aorist*) the land or the sea or the trees until (*Greek: achri*) we seal (*Greek: sphragizo*)(*subjunctive, aorist*) the servants of our God on their foreheads (*Greek: metopon*)f.

▪ Sealing during the Old Testament period.

In Ezekiel 9:1-11 God gave the prophet 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 which people were doing in Jerusalem. The Hebrew letter, Tav, the 22<sup>nd</sup> (last) letter of the Hebrew alphabet does not have the form of a “T” (one possible form of the cross). It simply means “mark”. 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 judgements.

▪ Sealing during the New Testament period.

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 destroyed by hail and fire mixed with blood. 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!*

Likewise in Revelation 7:2-3 God gave the apostle John a vision about sealing. God was going to bring the following judgements onto the earth”

- *seals* of oppression, persecution and affliction (6:1-17)
- *trumpets* of warning judgements (ch.8-9)
- *thunders* of God’s unrevealed judgements (10:3-4)
- and *bowls* of God’s final wrath (ch. 15-16).

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 seal consists of the name of God/Christ.

The people with this mark on their foreheads represent God’s elect, the born-again Christians. 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!

▪ The sealing protects from eternal damnation.

*After* everything that must happen between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming has taken place:

- *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, the people of God are still seen in their full number (144 000) in the direct presence of Christ (14:1-7)!

Thus, the number 144 000 represents the entire Old Testament Church (all genuine believers in the Messiah that would still come) and the entire New Testament Church (all genuine believers in Christ that has already come) throughout world history! The sealing signifies the protection of *the entire Church (all genuine believers) from eternal damnation*. Christians are not protected from the seals of oppression, persecution and afflictions, or from the trumpets of judgement, or from the onslaughts of the antichrists. Opposed to the teaching of dispensationalism, Christians will go through “the great tribulation” (7:14)! 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 people as “the uncountable multitude” in Revelation 7:9!<sup>1</sup>

*Not one of God’s people is ever lost in the whole history of the world!* 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)! Jesus Christ says, “I have not lost one of those you gave me” (John 18:9).

(3) The twelve tribes.

7:4-8 and (then) I heard (*aorist*) the number (*Greek: arithmos*) of those who were sealed (and remain sealed now)(*Greek: sphragizo*)(*perfect, passive*):

<sup>1</sup> Hendriksen pp. 132-135, Groenewald pp. 93-96  
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144 000 (*Greek: hekaton tesserakonta tessares chiliades*) sealed people (*Greek: sphragizo*)(*perfect, passive*) from all the tribes (*Greek: phule*) of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah 12 000 (*Greek: dodeka chiliades*) were sealed (*perfect, passive*),

from the tribe of Gad 12 000,	from the tribe of Reuben 12 000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12 000,	from the tribe of Asher 12 000,
from the tribe of Simeon 12 000,	from the tribe of Manasseh 12 000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12 000,	from the tribe of Levi 12 000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12 000,	from the tribe of Zebulun 12 000,
	from the tribe of Benjamin 12 000 were sealed ( <i>perfect, passive</i> ).

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.

▪ The description and the number of the twelve tribes are symbolic.

The name “12 tribes” is symbolic. The book of Revelation is on purpose written in symbolic language and symbolic numbers (1:1). Both the description as “twelve tribes of Israel” and the number “144 000” are 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 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, Rachel’s maidservant: Dan and Naphtali; from Zilpah, Leah’s maidservant: 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; Joshua 18:5-7). Although Simeon and Levi due to their violent anger (Genesis 34:25) 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!

• **Ephraim.**

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; 1 Kings 12:19-20,27-33; Psalm 78:9-11,67).

• **Dan.**

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; Matthew 8:11-12; Matthew 21:43)!

▪ The order of the names of the twelve tribes is not normal.

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 names of God’s people in Old and New Testament are the same.

In the New Testament God’s people are called by the same names as God’s people in the Old Testament.

- God’s firstborn son (Exodus 4:22; Jeremiah 31:9; Hebrews 12:23)
- God’s sons and daughters (Isaiah 43:6-7; 2 Corinthians 6:18)
- The city of Jerusalem is called a woman or bride or wife (Isaiah 54:1,11-12; Revelation 21:9-10)
- The twelve tribes (Genesis 49:28; Revelation 7:4; 21:12; James 1:1)
- A kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6)
- A holy nation (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6; 1 Peter 2:9)
- God’s covenant people (Leviticus 26:12; 2 Corinthians 6:16)
- A dispersed people, strangers (Deuteronomy 30:1; Psalm 105:10-13; Ezekiel 12:15; Esther 3:8; 1 Peter 1:1)
- The first fruits of his harvest (Jeremiah 2:3; James 1:18)
- Sheep of the sheep pen of Israel and of other nations (Ezekiel ch. 34; John 10:16)
- Israel (1 Samuel 7:23; Galatians 6:14-16)
- Jews (Zechariah 8:22-23; Romans 2:28-29)
- Zion (also a symbol for God’s people) (Isaiah 51:16; Isaiah 52:7; Hebrews 12:22-24)

- The Jerusalem below and the Jerusalem above (Galatians 4:25-26)
- Temple of God (also a symbol for God's people) (2 Corinthians 6:16)
- God called his Church to himself through the proclamation of the gospel during the Old Testament period (Romans 10:18-21; Galatians 3:8; Hebrews 4:1-3) and the New Testament period (Acts 20:24; cf. Acts 13:44-49).
- Believers from the Jews and from the Greeks are baptised by one Spirit into one Body (also a symbol for God's people). They are given one Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- Church (Hebrew: qahal; Greek: ekklesia) (Psalm 107:32; Matthew 16:18; Acts 8:2; Acts 9:1).
- Christians (anointed people) (Hebrew: meshichi; Greek: christoi) (Psalm 105:15) (Acts 11:26) (christianous) in the midst of non-Christians in the world!
- Members together of one Body (Ephesians 3:6)
- Heirs together with Israel (Ephesians 3:6; Galatians 3:29)
- Sharers together in the promises (Ephesians 3:6; 2 Corinthians 1:20)

The 144 000 do not comprise only of Jews, because:

- all of them (not just a smaller privileged portion of Christians) have literally been redeemed by Christ (14:3)
- all of them have the name of Christ written on their foreheads (7:3)(14:1-7)!
- all of them are Christ's servants (7:3)(1:1; 2:20; 5:9-10; 6:11; 19:2,5).

▪ The twelve tribes is a symbol of God's people, of God's servants.

There is not the slightest indication in the Bible that the people sealed 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 people of God, the servants of God. All genuine Christians on earth are sealed! 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 and are people that belong to "all the churches (congregations)" in the world (2:23,29)! The servants of God (i.e. the kingdom of priests that serve 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! Thus, "the servants of God" are Christians!

Conclusion. "The twelve tribes of Israel" is a symbol for God's people in the Old Testament and for God's people in the New Testament. They are the elect whom God through Christ will gather from both the Jews and the Gentiles throughout world history (Romans 9:6b; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 6:14-16; Ephesians 2:11-22; Ephesians 3:2-6; James 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1).<sup>2</sup> They consist of the absolute complete number of God's people from the creation to the re-creation of the earth (Romans 11:25-26).

(4) The 144 000.

▪ The Militant Church on earth before the second coming of Christ.

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 on earth* during the Old Testament period and during the the New Testament period. 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; John 10:28; John 18:9)!

▪ The Triumphant Church in heaven after the second coming of Christ.

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 in heaven* during the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. Throughout world history they have all been "redeemed", that is, 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)!

▪ The number 144 000 is a symbol.

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 in the Old Testament, represented by the twelve tribes of Israel (21:12). The number 12 also represents God's people in the New Testament, represented by the twelve apostles (21:14). The number 10 represents completeness on earth 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) (Romans 1:16; Romans 10:12-13; Ephesians 2:11-22)! 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.

<sup>2</sup> Greijdanus pp. 130-131, Hendriksen p. 134, Groenewald pp 95-96

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

A 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 view (Larkin)<sup>3</sup>.

A 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 view (Tenney)<sup>4</sup>.

A 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 7:9 (Greijdanus)<sup>5</sup>. 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 redeemed (Greek: agorazo)(perfect) 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' (Greek: parthenos), 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' (Greek: aparche) 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' (Greek: amomos), 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).

Remarks. 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'(Greek: agorazo)(perfect) 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 virgins (Greek: parthenos agnen) 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 fruits (Greek: aparche) 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 blameless (Greek: amomos) in Christ's sight (Ephesians 1:4)?

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!

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 7:9<sup>6</sup>.

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

A futurist view. The twelve tribes of Israel are literally the twelve tribes of the Old Testament Israel (Romans 9:6a) (Larkin)<sup>7</sup>.

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).<sup>8</sup> They are God's people,

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<sup>3</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 65-66

<sup>4</sup> Tenney pp. 74,78

<sup>5</sup> Greijdanus pp.128-131

<sup>6</sup> Hendriksen pp. 132-135, Groenewald pp. 93-96

<sup>7</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 65-66, Tenney pp. 74,78, all futurists

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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. Revelation 7:9-17. THE GLORY OF THE TRIUMPHANT CHURCH.

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.

##### (1) The multitude coming from the earth.

7:9 After this I looked (*aorist*), and behold. 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 (*Greek: polus*) multitude (crowd)(*Greek: ochlos*) that no one could (*Greek: adunamai*)(*imperfect*) count (*Greek: arithmeo*)(*aorist*) it, from every nation (*Greek: ethnos*), tribe (*Greek: phule*), people (*Greek: laos*) and language (*Greek: glossa*) 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.

In this vision *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; Genesis 32:12; Galatians 3:7-8,26-29).

They are the result of the proclamation of "the gospel of the kingdom" as a testimony to every nation (Matthew 24:14). "The gospel of the kingdom" is the same as "the gospel of grace" (Acts 8:12; Acts 19:8-10; Acts 20:24-25; Acts 28:23,31) 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. (7:11) proves that all people ever saved, including saved Jews, were standing there! Otherwise we would 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 (*Greek: istemi*)(*perfect*) before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They have come to stand and are now *continually* standing before God's throne. This means they have continual fellowship with God, serve him and share in all his glory.

wearing (*Greek: periballo*)(*perfect*) white robes (*Greek: stole*) and (holding) palm branches (*Greek: phoinix*) in their hands (*Greek: cheir, chersin*). 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 (*Greek: krazo*)(*present*) in a loud voice (*Greek: phone*), saying (*present*) 'Salvation (*Greek: soteria*) (belongs) to our God, who sits (*present*) on the throne, and to the Lamb'. 'Hosanna' in John 12:13 is a Hebrew word and means 'Save (please)!' (Psalm 118:25; 1 Maccabees 13:51; 2 Maccabees 10:7). The salvation does not refer to liberation from or protection against the attacks of the antichrist and his followers, 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 Bible passages: after the fall of the dragon from heaven at the first coming of Christ (12:10) and after the fall of Babylon at the second coming of Christ (19:1).

##### Conclusion.

- The great multitude of people is not literally the great mass of Gentiles that will become believers in the Messiah through the preaching of the gospel about the so-called future millennial kingdom by the 144 000 Jews during the first half of the future tribulation period. This is the view of futurists who believe in the rapture of the Church before the great tribulation and before the so-called millennial kingdom of peace.
- The great multitude is not literally the universal removal of believers (Christians) in the middle of the great tribulation before the so-called millennial kingdom of peace.
- The great multitude is not limited to a special group of Christians that have suffered on earth.
- The great multitude from every nation is a symbol of the Triumphant Church, that is, of all the saved people throughout all of history, another description of the 144 000 of Revelation 14:1-7.

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<sup>8</sup> Greijdanus pp. 130-131, Hendriksen p. 134, Groenewald pp 95-96

(2) The multitude in heaven.

7:11 And all the angels were standing (*Greek: histemi, steso, estesa, hesteka, heistekeisan*)(*pluperfect*) in a circle around (*kuklos*) the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell down (*Greek: pipto*)(*aorist*) on their faces (*Greek: prosopon*) before the throne and worshipped (*Greek: proskuneo*)(*aorist*) God. From 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 great 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 (*Greek: eulogia*) and glory and wisdom and thanks (*Greek: eucharistia*) and honour and power (*Greek: dunamis*) and strength (*Greek: ischus*) (be) to our God for ever and ever. Amen!' These are seven praises! See Revelation 4:11; 5:12.

(3) The Militant Church coming out of the great tribulation on earth.

7:13 And (then) one of the elders asked (*Greek: apokrinomai*)(*aorist*) saying (*present*) to me, 'These dressed (*Greek: periballo*)(*perfect*) in white robes - who (*Greek: tines*) are (*present*) they, and from where (*Greek: pothen*) did they come (*aorist*)?' 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 (*Greek: lego, ero, eipon, eireka*)(*perfect*) him, 'My Lord (*Greek: Kurie*), you know (*Greek: oida*)(*perfect*).' And he said (*aorist*), 'They are (*present*) those who continually come (*Greek: erchomai*)(*present*) out of the great tribulation (*Greek: he thlipsis tes megales*). "The ones coming out" is a participle in the present tense signifying the final result of an action over a long period of time.

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). It also does not refer to the first half (the first 3½ years) of the so-called future tribulation period in the pre-tribulation pre-millennial kingdom view mentioned above. It refers to the whole period between Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming.

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.

Summarised: "the great tribulation" in Revelation 7:14 consists of the following seven events:

- the seven seals of oppression, persecution and trials described in Revelation chapter 6
- the seven trumpets of judgement described in Revelation chapters 8 and 9
- the seven thunders mentioned in Revelation chapter 10
- the persecution of the two witnesses by the beast, the city and the inhabitants of the earth in Revelation chapter 11
- the persecution of the male child and the woman and her offspring by the dragon in Revelation chapter 12
- 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 beast with seven heads and the woman sitting on him in Revelation chapter 17.

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 (cf. Romans 11:25-26), just before they descend as the New Jerusalem onto the new earth (21:1).

and they have *once for all time* washed (*Greek: pluno*)(*aorist*) their robes and made them white (*Greek: leukaino*)(*aorist*) in the blood of the Lamb. 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)! Christians have all been saved by grace!

(4) The Triumphant Church being shepherded by Christ in heaven.

7:15 Therefore (*Greek: dia touto*), they are (*present*) before the throne of God and serve (*Greek: latreuo*)(*present*) him day and night in his temple (*Greek: naos*). There in heaven the great multitude of Christians that have come out of the great tribulation on earth will *continually serve* 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 (*present*) on the throne will spread his tent (*Greek: skenoo*)(*future*) over them. 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; Psalm 91:1-16; cf. Isaiah 8:14)!

7:16 never again (*Greek: ou eti*) will they hunger (*Greek: peinao*)(*future*); never again will they thirst (*Greek: dipsao*)(*future*). The sun (*Greek: helios*) will not beat (fall) (*pipto*)(*subjunctive, aorist*) upon them, nor any scorching heat (*Greek: kauma*). The promises God has made to the remnant of Israel during the Old Testament period (Isaiah 49:10), he will certainly fulfil 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)! The threats which God made to the impenitent in Israel during the Old Testament period, he will certainly fulfil 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). Everything that could harm them physically or spiritually will be completely absent.

7:17 For the Lamb in the centre (*Greek: ana meson*) of the throne will shepherd (*Greek: poimano*)(*aorist*) them; he will lead (*Greek: hodegeo*)(*future*) them to springs (*Greek: pege*) of living water. And God will wipe away (*Greek: exaleipho*) every tear (*Greek: dakruon*) from their eyes. *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; Revelation 21:4) 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.

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

A 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 (Larkin)<sup>9</sup>.

A 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 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 (Tenney)<sup>10</sup>.

A 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 14:1-7 (Greijdanus)<sup>11</sup>. 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.

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 14:1-7.<sup>12</sup>

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

A futurist view. The great tribulation is the first half (the first 3½ years) of the so-called future tribulation period (Larkin)<sup>13</sup>.

The correct explanation. The great tribulation (7:14) is the whole period between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming (Hendriksen)<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Larkin, Revelation pp. 66-67

<sup>10</sup> Tenney p. 74

<sup>11</sup> Greijdanus pp. 131-132

<sup>12</sup> Hendriksen pp. 135-136, Groenewald pp. 97-100

<sup>13</sup> Larkin, Revelation p. 67

<sup>14</sup> Hendriksen pp. 136-138