

**“144,000 + + + +”**  
**Revelation 7:1-5, 9-17**

**1** After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.

**2** Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea:

**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.”

**4** Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

**5** From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed... (12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel)...

**9** After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

**10** And they cried out in a loud voice:  
“Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”

**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 worshiped God,

**12** saying: “Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!”

**13** Then one of the elders asked me,  
“These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?”

**14** I answered, “Sir, you know.”  
And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

**15** Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

**16** ‘Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

**17** For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ ”

### **Introduction**

In Cuba baseball rules, except when Fidel Castro wanted to play. Years ago, during an exhibition game with Venezuela, the 75-year-old Cuban dictator stepped up to bat. Not to be outdone, 45-year-old Hugo Chavez, went in to pitch. After the count went to 3 balls and 2 strikes, Castro watched the next pitch sail through the middle of the strike zone and the umpire called him out.

“No, no,” Castro said. “That was a ball.” And he jogged to first base. No one argued. Chavez said nothing, the opposing team said nothing, and the umpire said nothing. Later Castro joked, “Today just wasn’t Chavez’s day.”

I guess it’s hard to get a batter out when he has the power to overrule the umpire’s calls. However, in God’s economy, dictators can’t do that. Everyone will face God’s ultimate judgment. His word is final.

The Book of Revelation is filled with images of judgment. Chapter 8 envisions “hail and fire mixed with blood hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up...” Then, “something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the living creatures in the sea died...” Then, “A great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water... Many people died from the waters that had become bitter...” “As I watched,” writes John, “I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: ‘Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded.’ ”

In Chapter 9, it says, “During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.” In Chapter 10, “There will be no more delay... The mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” And in 14, John says that he saw “another angel flying in midair. To every nation, tribe, language and people he said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.’ ”

### **I. Sealed/Saved from God’s Judgment (vs. 1-12)**

But first, the vision from Chapter 7. John writes, “I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”

Notice how the visions of judgment are preceded by a time of grace – holding back the winds preventing any harm until all the servants of God are sealed. Strong winds from north, south, east, or west can be very destructive. God’s angels were holding destructive winds at bay. The seal was like the signet ring that a king would seal his proclamations. The seal on the foreheads of God’s servants demonstrated that they belong to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

I believe biblical prophecy, like we find in Revelation, has threefold meaning and fulfillment: back then, right now, and in the future yet to come. The churches receiving this apocalyptic letter from John were living in a time of grace as many were coming to faith in Jesus in the midst of persecution. Judgment wouldn’t come until all the believers were sealed with the ownership seal of God. In our day, judgment will not come until all those who the Lord will save in our era are reached. And, in the end of time, all the servants of God will be sealed.

In the meantime, then, now and to come, it is a season of grace. We still live in the age of grace. But, make no mistake. Chapters 8-19 will come. Judgment will come.

It's like the autoroute system in Switzerland. Motorists pay an annual fee of 40 Swiss francs. When you pay, you get a windshield sticker you display for the rest of the year.

Traditionally, traffic police give motorists the whole month of January to purchase the sticker. There is no fine for driving without it during that month — it is a month of grace. But when the first days of February come, people expect to see the traffic police on exit ramps checking for cars without the sticker. No more excuses are accepted; no more time is given. The grace period has ended.

Seattle's famed Kingdome was home of the Seahawks and Mariners. It was destroyed 2000 to make room for a new stadium, now Century Link Field. A controlled demolition company was hired to do the job of imploding the 25,000-ton structure.

Extreme measures were taken to ensure no one was hurt. Engineers checked and rechecked the structure. The authorities evacuated several blocks around the Kingdome. Safety protocols were in place to allow the countdown to stop if there were any concerns. Every reasonable measure was taken to warn people of the impending danger.

The Bible warns of a final judgment on this sinful, cracked, worn-out world. Like the engineers who blew up the Kingdome, our heavenly Father has spared no expense to make sure everybody can "get out" safely. He has warned us through our consciences, through his prophets, through the Word of God, through the Holy Spirit, through the Church, and through his Son.

In Romans 1:20-22, God's Word says, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools."

Revelation is a vision of final judgment. There will be no excuse.

## **II. No More Hunger or Thirst**

"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed," John tells us. "144,000 from all the tribes of Israel... After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"

Here's where "literal" interpretation of the Bible can get us into trouble. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that exactly 144,000 faithful Christians from Pentecost of 33 AD until the present day will be resurrected to heaven as immortal spirit beings to spend eternity with God and Christ. They believe the resurrected righteous and the unrighteous will be given an opportunity to live forever in a restored paradise on earth. Today, about 20,000 individual Witnesses claim of being "anointed." Of course,

the members of the Governing Body who exercise teaching authority over Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide claim to be among the anointed 144,000.

John could not possibly have meant this. And the churches could not possibly have heard it to mean this. Friends, I always teach believers to interpret the Bible not “literally” but “literarily.” You shouldn’t read Revelation the same way you read Genesis. You shouldn’t read the Psalms the same way you read Romans. You shouldn’t read Jesus’ parables the same way you read the Sermon on the Mount. After all, you don’t read the poetry of Maya Angelou or Bob Dylan the same way you read a history by David McCollough or Arthur Schlesinger, or a novel by James Joyce or Margaret Mitchell.

The symbolic 144,000 isn’t rocket science:  $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ . It’s symbolic: perhaps 12 tribes x 12 apostles x 1,000 a whole lot of people. And that’s not the limit of God’s grace! Immediately it says, “There before me was a great multitude that no one could count (countless), from every nation, tribe, people and language.” The precise number isn’t important. It’s the immense vision of God’s extensive salvation.

The whole point of Chapter 7 and certainly the whole Book of Revelation for the church under trial, tribulation and persecution is found in verses 16 and 17. “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

This is the hopeful gospel for the people of God.

### **Conclusion**

There are two tracks to follow throughout the vision recorded by John. Judgment and Salvation. Heaven or Hell. The presence of God or his complete absence. Death or Life.

“For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd.” John certainly remembers the Jesus of his Gospel Chapter 10: “I am the Good Shepherd... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:10-29).

What assurance John gives to the churches that their shepherd ‘will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’

“Let whoever has ears hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.”

### **I Corinthians 15:42-57**

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.