

## Chapter Seven

The subject of the 144,000 has led cults and “ism’s” to lay claim to this number for themselves as being God’s chosen people. The Jehovah’s Witnesses finally dropped their belief that it was literal number, while other long-time proponents admitted that such a number can not possibly be interpreted as literal.<sup>1</sup> The Mormons teach that the 144,000 represent an elite caste in their group. Calvinists believe they are the “predestined” of God.

### The Sealing of the 144,000

**7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.**

*Four angels:* The number ‘4’ is indicative of earthly things. These four angels are *standing*, meaning they are spiritual messengers ready to work an earthly ministry. (See notes on 3:21) Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation? (Heb 1:14)

*Holding back the four winds:* In speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, “He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect *from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth*, to the farthest end of heaven.” (Mark 13:27) The winds of earth and the winds of heaven seem analogous to one another. (Dan 8:8; Zech 2:6) Thayer translates *anemos* as *a very strong, tempestuous wind*. Angels are called winds. (Heb 1:7) Being “scattered to the winds” means to be exiled. (Jer 49:32, 36) God’s breath comes from the four winds. (Ezek 37:9) In Daniel’s vision, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the sea (unstable nations), which brought forth four kingdoms. (Dan 7:2-3)

*No wind should blow:* While wind may mean different things in scripture, verse 3 clarifies this wind as *something that causes harm*. Opposing winds are the doctrines of men. (Eph 4:14) Being driven and tossed by the wind is a picture of one who doubts. (James 1:6) Satan is the prince of the power of the air (spirits) of disobedient men. (Eph 2:2) The wind is stopped from blowing upon the earth—specifically, upon *mankind*. It stops blowing on the sea, implying that Gentile nations no longer have false teachings tossing them to and fro (See notes on 4:6). It also stops blowing on the trees, a metaphor for people. (Psa 1:3; 37:35; Isa 10:17; Ezek 31:16-18, etc.) A single tree speaks of a nation or king. (Dan 4:20-22; Luke 13:18-19) The trees being burned up in 8:7 compare with Jesus’ parable: “Every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matt 3:10) The context suggests that the spiritual forces of this world are temporarily restrained so that God’s chosen can be marked. Note how the following verses suggest a binding, or restraining:

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<sup>1</sup> I heard this on a Christian radio talk show, even though I couldn’t confirm it by searching the Internet. When cults re-write their doctrines, they do it quietly and efficiently.

To execute vengeance on the nations, and punishment on the peoples; *to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron*; to execute on them the judgment written; this is an honor for all His godly ones. Praise the Lord! (Psa 149:7-9)

This woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been *released from this bond* on the Sabbath day? (Luke 13:16)

This is the connection: Satan is bound *prior* to the first resurrection. (Rev 20:2) The four winds are bound *prior* to the sealing of God's servants. The restraining of wind and the binding of Satan may be different descriptions of the same event. Things opposed to God's will—things that cause “tossing and turning”—are temporarily restrained because the Truth of the Gospel is being preached for a season. Jesus came and preached the Good News. The truth was being spread in the darkness. Satan was beginning to be bound. After the resurrection and Day of Pentecost, the devil was truly bound. The winds were restrained. Who is doing the restraining? Are they literal angels? If so, then the winds would have to be literal winds. Note:

There is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. (Rom 13:1-3)

Higher power—seats of government authority—have their origin in God. In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, these were King Agrippa, the king of Syria, and the Roman governor over Judah. These were the ministers ordained of God to carry out justice. As such, they acted as a restraint in order to crush any insurrection by maintaining law and order. Indeed, if it were not for these Gentile authorities, the unbelieving Jews would have had free reign to persecute and destroy the Christianity.

Josephus records numerous accounts wherein the president of Syria, the procurator of Judea, and different tetrarchs and kings, such as Agrippa, put down revolts, quieted tumults, and composed insurrections, forestalling and postponing the war with Rome until its appointed time.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Luke records the general protection afforded the church in Palestine and the world by Roman law and administration. (Acts 18:12-17; 21:30-32; 23:19-31; 25:26)...The point of the imagery is to show God's overruling providence on behalf of his church in the midst of tumultuous times.<sup>3</sup>

**7:2 And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,**

*Ascending from the rising sun:* The eastern direction, considered by the Jews to be the *front* or point from which the other compass points were referenced. It is generally considered the starting point, or beginning, as the sun begins its day in the east.

I have aroused one from the north, and he has come; *from the rising of the sun* (from the

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<sup>2</sup> Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II, xii, 1-6; xiii, 2-7; xvi, 3, 4; cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, x, 1-26 for a record of Roman decrees providing for the security and preservation of the Jewish nation.

<sup>3</sup> *Consummation of the Ages*, p. 158, 159

beginning) *he will call on My name*; and he will come upon rulers as upon mortar, even as the potter treads clay. (Isa 41:25)

Concerning the birth or earthly *beginning* of Christ:

(The magi) went their way; and lo, the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. (Matt 2:9)

Considering angels, we may understand the symbols to mean *a messenger coming from the east*, from the beginning. It is the culmination of the plan of redemption founded from before the beginning of the world and prophesied in Genesis 3:15. His mission is to seal the 144,000.

*Seal of the living God*: Abraham received the seal (mark) of righteousness (circumcision) for his faith in God. (Rom 4:11) A seal is proof of ownership. (1 Cor 9:2) According to Thayer, *sphragis* means ‘brand’ or ‘stamp,’ and signifies ownership. It only appears in Revelation. When the angel of death went through Egypt killing all of the first-born, the mark of blood on the door posts kept those inside safe. A mark was put on the forehead of the righteous prior to God slaying the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Ezek 9:4), a chilling portent of what is to happen in the following chapters.

*Cried out to the four angels*: This messenger has authority over these other messengers. These four angels have authority to harm people, yet they themselves submit to a higher authority. All of these symbols surrounding this messenger seem to portray Christ Himself.

**7:3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”**

Harm is about to come upon the world of men, but only after God has “labeled” His servants. The seals are symbols of Christ’s conquering and judgment. Once done, inhabitants of the conquered kingdom were called into the New Kingdom, much like a conquering king enslaving a captured city under his command.

Thanks be to our God that though you used to be slaves of sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin (old king), and have become slaves to righteousness (new king). (Rom 6:17-18)

*Foreheads*: The Law of Moses was fastened to the priests’ foreheads as a reminder for them to obey. The Pharisees kept words of the Law on small scrolls in a box, which was then fastened to the forehead by means of a ribbon tied around the head. The seal this angel is about to put on the Christians’ foreheads is indicative of the High Priest’s seal:

You shall also make a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it, like the engravings of a seal, HOLY TO THE LORD. And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. And *it shall be on Aaron’s forehead*, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and *it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord*. (Exod 28:36-38)

Ezekiel was to put a mark on the foreheads of the righteous. The Lord's ministers who were not marked were subsequently executed. (Ezek 9) The beast of chapter 13 also marks its followers on the forehead, denoting identification with it. It also speaks of the OT sacrifices, when a person placed their hand on the animal's head in order to *identify* with it as a substitute for blood atonement. (Lev 1:4) This marking or identifying by both God and the beast divides those followers dedicated to either serving God or Satan.

**7:4 And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:**

*144,000*: 12000 X 12. These are the faithful *remnant* from Israel, referring to Christians being sealed with the Holy Spirit. (Eph 1:13, 14; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22)

Note that John *hears* the number. *Hearing* in scripture almost always refers to *understanding*. God wanted him to *understand* that this wasn't just a large crowd he saw before him. The key phrase to understanding is *every tribe of the sons of Israel*. Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, *it is the remnant that will be saved*. (Rom 9:27) When Elijah cried out to God that he was alone in his predicament, God's response was, "I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (Rom 11:4) The surviving *remnant* of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a *remnant*, and out of Mount Zion, *survivors*. The zeal of the Lord shall perform this. (2 Kgs 19:30-31) There has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. (Rom 11:4-5) This sealing, or setting apart by God, protects His followers from the coming wrath.

They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it...For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. (Exo 12:7-13)

"Go through the midst of the city, even through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare. Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark." (Ezek 9:4-6)

**7:5-8 from the tribe(s) of Judah...Reuben...Gad...Asher...Naphtali...Manasseh...Simeon ... Levi...Issachar...Zebulun...Joseph...Benjamin, 12,000 (from each) were sealed.**

The tribal *names* here are literal, while the *numbers* are symbolic. These are Christians called out in apparent reference to being first-fruits. They are redeemed from the *earth*.

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the number of the sons of Israel be like the sand of the sea, it is the remnant that will be saved; for the Lord will execute His word on the earth, thoroughly and quickly." And just as Isaiah foretold, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth had left to us a posterity, we would have become like Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah." (Rom 9:27-29)

In Jesus' parable concerning the man who planted a vineyard, "When the season of the fruits came, he sent his slaves to the vinedressers to receive his fruits." (Matt 21:34) This refers to a *collecting* or *harvesting*. They were marked for the Master's purpose.

God expected the Jewish nation to be a nation of righteousness, walking in His laws and decrees. These were the fruits He expected to collect. Israel was to be holy—set apart—the first-fruits of His increase. (Jer 2:3) As the scriptures show, however, the aristocracy and priests refused to listen, preventing God's attempt at reaping a good harvest. Only when Jesus came was He able to redeem those from the Jewish nation. The first Christians were Jews, the Gentiles being later grafted in as "wild olive branches." (Rom 11:17-20)

*12,000*: Ishmael was promised by God to beget 12 princes to make him a great *nation*. (Gen 17:20) There were 12 tribes of Israel, making up the Jewish *nation*. This is the understanding of '12.' The number '1,000' signifies a *great number*, or *all*, including *eternity*. (See notes on 20:2) Believers will reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev 20:6) Yet it also says they will reign forever. (22:5) The idea seems to be that a great many are saved for Christ from among the Jewish nation (12).

The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are not mentioned, even though they had an inheritance. This is probably due to their great idolatry. When Jacob blessed Dan, he said, "Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward." (Gen 49:16-17) (See Judges 18; 1 Kgs 12:29-30; 2 Kgs 10:29) Ephraim (meaning *fruitful*) was often used in reference to the nation Israel. Hebrew prophets such as Hosea chastised Ephraim for idolatry (Hos 4:17), spiritual unfaithfulness (8:9-10), and relationships with heathen nations. (12:1) Because of their idolatrous tendencies, this is *perhaps* why Ephraim and Dan are not included in this list.

**7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;**

*After these things*: After the sealing of the Jewish Christians, we see here a *great multitude* from the Gentile nations. The idea that a literal and exclusive 144,000 will be in heaven falls apart in light of this scripture.<sup>4</sup> Cults see the "great multitude" and 144,000 as two separate camps, the former made up of "regular Christians," the latter comprised of the elite, typically so-called apostles and exalted leaders from their particular group.

*I looked*: Unlike the 144,000, which he *understood*, John now *sees* a great multitude. He sees a number no one could *understand*—a number too great for comprehension, like Abraham's posterity of the sand and stars, which no one could count.

*Clothed in white robes*: Made righteous (See notes on 6:11)

*Palm branches*: Note the mention of a *great multitude* here:

The great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to

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<sup>4</sup> Early beliefs in the Jehovah's Witness movement taught that only 144,000 would ever be in heaven. They no longer teach this and deny that they ever embraced the doctrine. However, when I was a young man, under the JWs, I clearly remember reading this in *Watchtower*, their monthly publication at the time.

Jerusalem, took the *branches of the palm trees*, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel.” (John 12:12-13)

The palm tree connects to leaders:

So the LORD cuts off **head** and tail from Israel, both **palm branch** and bulrush in a single day. The **head** is the **elder and honorable man**, and the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail. (Isa 9:14-15)

There will be no work for Egypt, which its head or tail, its palm branch or bulrush, may do. (Isa 19:15)

Palms were considered as one of the “beautiful trees.” (Lev 23:40) They were used to construct temporary shelters in the Feast of Booths (Feast of Tabernacles). This commemoration was to remind the Israelites of their wandering in the wilderness. (Lev 23:42-43) It was essentially a victory celebration of their redemption from the bondage of Egypt. This is a symbol of Christ’s salvation bestowed on all, imputing to them righteousness (white robes) and holding a reminder (palm branches) of their sojourn out of sin, and their victory over the world.<sup>5</sup>

*Great multitude, which no one could count:* This confirms God’s promise to Abraham, where his descendants would be as “numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore.” (Gen 22:17) This is the church universal.

There are two extremes concerning those who make it to heaven. One belief teaches that because of Christ’s atonement, every person who has ever lived will be saved (Universalism). The other extreme is that regardless of Jesus’ sacrifice, only a handful will get to heaven. Like most extremes, both positions are wrong. One side applies God’s mercy and forgiveness to everyone, regardless of whether or not they embraced it. The other side seeks to restrain His mercy and forgiveness if one doesn’t belong to a particular church or hold to a particular doctrinal viewpoint. This verse suggests that there will be many in heaven, a great uncountable multitude.

**7:10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”**

*Loud voice:* A voice heard throughout Creation (See notes on 5:2). Salvation belongs to God the Ruler, and to Jesus Christ, the Supreme Sacrifice for our sins.

**7:11-12 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”**

*Amen, blessing, etc:* There are seven things given to Christ here, denoting a complete receipt for His redemptive work of salvation. In chapter 5, the Lamb receives power, riches, glory, etc. Here, He is given seven honors from the heavenly assembly.

<sup>5</sup> Egypt is used as a type and shadow of the world. The Jewish exile from Egypt reflects men being brought out from the bondage of sin and into the rest of Christ (the Promised Land). See Figure 3.

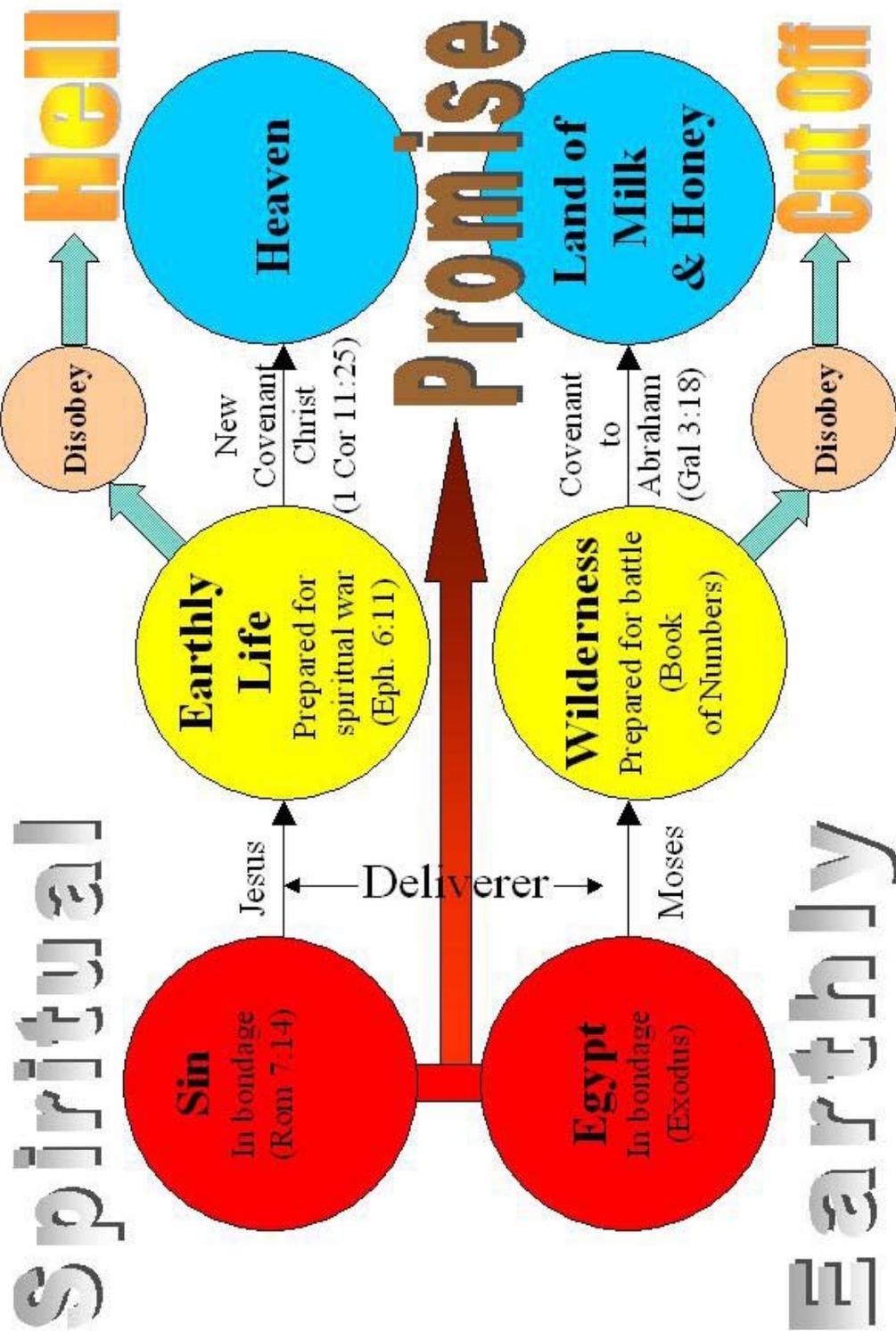


Figure 1 - Egypt as a type

Once the sealing takes place, we see multitudes of saved standing before the throne. They worship God; salvation has finally come. Although the multitudes praise the Lamb, the angels only worship God in their song. Neither do the 24 elders and 4 living creatures worship here as they did previously. Angels are not included in the salvation plan, so they sing to God on the throne. It is not an issue of exclusion, but shows the relationship between each of the entities to Christ and God. We have heavenly hosts, glorified saints, and a white-robed multitude, all in distinctly different yet harmonious relationship to God.

**7:13-14** And one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?” And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

“*You know*”: This shows the apostle’s humility. This attitude is later reflected in his bowing down to an angel (Rev 19:10; 22:8), even though he was improper in doing so.

So that your trust may be in the Lord, I have taught you today, even you. Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, to make you know the certainty of the words of truth that you may correctly answer to him who sent you? (Prov 22:19-21)

The vision John is asked to interpret is not a difficult one. Yet the apostle defers to the elder for an explanation. If most modern-day scholars were whisked into heaven and asked to interpret a vision, they would no doubt do so with great confidence.

*The great tribulation*: The Greek does not include the definite article, and so should be understood as “those coming out of great tribulation.” In speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus told his apostles, “...for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.” (Matt 24:21) The notion of The Great Tribulation, a future time of trouble, is premillennial fancy.

This poses an interesting puzzle. The 144,000 are clearly identified as Jews, while the great multitude is comprised of Gentile nations. One of the elders asks John, “Who are these from *every nation, tribe, people, and tongue*?” Paul and Peter preached to the Gentiles, and John presumes not to know who this group is. The elder then tells him, “These are those who suffer great tribulation, and have been made righteous.” The Gentile nations did not suffer in the destruction of Jerusalem. Neither did Christians, thanks to Jesus’ warning to get out before it was too late. Jesus told the disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. *In the world you have tribulation*, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

The palm branches signify their victory, while the white robes represent Christ’s righteousness covering their nakedness (shame and guilt). Every Christian suffers the troubles of trying to live righteously in an evil world. (2 Thess 2:1-2) All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Tim 3:12) We rejoice in hope and persevere in tribulation. (Rom 12:12) The idea that all of one’s troubles are gone once you becomes a Christian is a false teaching. The true believer trying to follow God’s Word will be reviled by the world. That person is a light, exposing evil deeds, and is despised as a result. If you don’t think this is so, try standing on a street corner anywhere in America, with a sign proclaiming, “Homosexuality is a sin!”

Christ’s righteousness gives these suffering great tribulation the merit and confidence to stand

before the holy throne of God. They have been *made righteous*, referring to justification.

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men *made perfect*, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Heb 12:22-24)

The Hebrew writer speaks of Christians *now standing* before the throne, having been *already* made righteous in Christ. Jesus' atonement at Calvary makes a person acceptable before God. They are, judicially speaking, *made perfect*, or complete. Note the similarity between the text in Hebrews text and Revelation:

Hebrews 12:22-24	Revelation
Myriads of angels	Myriads of angels (5:11)
The general assembly	24 elders, 4 living creatures (4:4ff)
Church of the first-born enrolled in heaven	144,000 sealed by God (7:4)
God, Judge of All	One sitting on the Throne (4:2)
Spirits of righteous men made perfect	Souls under the altar given white robes (6:9-11)
Jesus, the New Covenant Mediator	The Lamb as the new temple (21:22)
Sprinkled blood	The purchase price (5:9)

Some interpret these as linear events that culminate at their entrance into heaven when they die. Thanks to rank legalism and lack of expository teaching in today's church it's hard for many Christians to fathom how they have *already* come to Mt. Zion, the heavenly assembly, etc. Christians have become regimented through rote and ritual. Those promoting it say, "God is not the Author of confusion." (1 Cor 14:33) Expository sermons (those that explain the scripture's meaning) have been replaced with topical sermons containing funny stories, anecdotes, and feely-good punch lines. Similarly, those who reject Christ have *already* been judged. (John 3:18) Those who trust in Jesus' word, *have* eternal life, and do not come into judgment, but *have passed out of death into life*. (John 5:24) God's promises are sure. If He speaks, it is done. The plan of redemption was done "before the foundations of the world." (Eph 1:4; Heb 4:3; 1 Pet 1:20) Although we die physically, we possess eternal life *now*. The shedding of the fleshly body is merely part of the resurrection process. (1 Cor 15:35ff)

**7:15 "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them.**

This same language is seen in chapter 21, where God will dwell among men, and will "wipe away every tear, etc."

*For this reason:* By virtue of their imputed righteousness and salvation by Christ, they stand before the throne. You're not going to stand before God because of the particular church you attended. You're not going to heaven because you preached to thousands of people. You're not going to heaven because you did missionary work in Africa. You will get into heaven because of what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross.

*Serve Him day and night:* They serve God constantly. The Israelites were to meditate on the Law “day and night” so that they would not forget and return to idolatry. (Josh 1:8) The upright person constantly meditates on God’s Word (Psalms 1). Singers were engaged in “day and night” service in the OT temple, and were considered “free from other service.” (1 Chr 9:33)

*In His temple:* The righteous are in God’s temple serving Him. A similar picture appears later in the book:

...the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in (the New Jerusalem), and His bond-servants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads (Rev 22:3-4)

*Spread His tabernacle over them:* The tabernacle was considered God’s dwelling place. The word ‘spread’ means ‘to establish,’ as when Nebuchadnezzar established (spread) his throne over Egypt. (Jer 43:10) Poetically speaking, the Lord spread His “skirt” over Israel to cover her nakedness. (Eze 16:8) The word of the Lord is also spread over men. (2 Cor 8:18; 2 Thess 3:1) In other words, God’s dwelling place protects us. This protection is seen in preventing evil influences from entering into the church, the New Jerusalem, the New Covenant.<sup>6</sup> (21:27)

**7:16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;**

*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst:* This is a direct quotation from Isaiah 49. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matt 5:6) “I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) The bible uses common speech to teach spiritual lessons. Paul and his counterparts certainly suffered from hunger and thirst. (1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor 11:27) Contrary to popular books, becoming a Christian does not exempt one from suffering.

*Sun shall not beat down on them, nor any heat:* As hunger and thirst are *spiritual* concepts, sun and heat are likewise spiritual. These are those elements that *cause* spiritual thirst. Like wind, the sun is a symbol for many things. The context suggests that the sun and heat are antagonistic to spiritual survival. The OT also describes the sun and its heat as a source of spiritual suffering:

They will not hunger or thirst, neither will the *scorching heat or sun* strike them down; for He who has compassion on them will lead them, and will guide them to springs of water. (Isa 49:10)

In this sense, the source of trouble is the sun’s heat that drives men to thirst. Scorching fire is also a symbol for the words of evil men. (Prov 16:27) It may also refer to the tribulations of the world. (Matt 20:12) Be it is words or trials, God will protect His chosen ones from those elements that cause men to wither up and die. Those who reject God must endure the sun and die, or seek His protection for relief.

God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, only the rebellious

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed explanation on the New Covenant, see comments on Revelation 21 and 22.

dwell in a parched land (i.e., scorched by the sun). (Psa 68:6)

**7:17 for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”**

The springs of water are the end result. God protects us from spiritual hunger and thirst. This is considered being under the protection of the Lamb, who is Himself their Shepherd. These are consolations given to saints *while on the earth*, not at their final reward. Many take these things to mean something that will happen when we're in heaven. Having to be in heaven to enjoy Christ's protection contradicts this notion. (Rom 8:28ff)

*Center of the throne:* Jesus Christ sitting in the epicenter of all power and authority, the Great Shepherd. (Heb 13:20)

*Guide them to springs of the water of life:* Water in scripture is frequently used to mean God's word and the Holy Spirit. "You will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." (Isa 12:3) The same phrase appears in Isa 49:10. Later in Revelation, calamity falls on springs of water, signifying a catastrophic failure of all sources of spiritual relief.

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst...the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of *water springing up to eternal life*. (John 4:13-14)

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes on Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.'" *But He spoke this about the Spirit...* (John 7:37-39)

In Amos' predictions, God's word is compared to water, where people faint from not having it. (Amos 8:11-13)

*Wipe every tear from their eyes:* This same language is used to depict weeping as a result of God's salvation when the Jews were to be returned out of exile from Babylon:

With weeping they shall come, and by supplication I will lead them; *I will make them walk by streams of waters*, on a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born. (Jer 31:9)

In speaking of Christ's coming kingdom in the church, Isaiah wrote:

I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying. (Isa 65:19)

In speaking of Israel's redemption from her exile in Babylon, Jeremiah writes:

"In those days and at that time," declares the Lord, "the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the Lord their God they will seek." (Jer 50:4)

The texts mentioned above refer to tears of *joy*, while Revelation suggests tears of *pain*. “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome.” (Rev 5:5) This is the weeping being referred to—the idea that there was no one except Jesus who could fulfill God’s plan of redemption.

*Tears* refer to a condition resulting from God’s salvation, not something experienced only in heaven. The text says *He shall guide them to the springs of the water of life*. Guiding speaks of providing direction toward our *goal* of heaven, not something done in the afterlife.

Hunger, thirst, heat, sun, and springs of water are all *spiritual* metaphors. The application to tears must remain consistent with this. Context and scripture itself must guide our understanding.

...though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible (no more tears) and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:8-9)

There are two reasons Christians see this as something in heaven and not in this life.

- They don’t have “joy inexpressible” in this life to begin with. Joy gets confused with *happiness*, a condition based on external circumstances. True joy comes from within, from the Holy Spirit. (Gal 5:22) As a result, “only in heaven will there be no more tears.” Our salvation is “going to church,” grinding out our days waiting for Jesus to come. In the grief and tragedy of Jesus’ life—and that of the apostles and early Christians—they all had joy; it was not a worldly gaiety. Jesus, “who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.” (Heb 12:2) We do not understand how such a painful death could be considered joy. The Greek word literally means ‘peaceful assurance.’
- Christians see this as a future heavenly state and not a current one because preachers keep confirming it as such. They set aside good bible exegesis for sermons designed to make us feel good about our impending death. While it is certainly indicative of heaven, this is not the thrust of the text’s meaning.

Chapter seven describes a “setting apart” of Jewish believers after a period of Christ conquering certain earthly arenas and securing reassurance for those killed (souls under the altar). A sealing, or *setting apart* of Israel’s remnant is carried out prior to *unsealing* the scroll in the next chapter. It describes a tribulation set upon the Jewish people who are not sealed, a story that’s told several times in the OT.