



## A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 47: The 144,000, Part 1

April 30, 2023

Instructor: Steve Schmutzer

### Review:

- A. For the last dozen weeks or so, we've been invested in studying the Seal Judgements of **Revelation**.
- B. It's taken some time as we've needed to correct some misconceptions, we've needed to face some hard truth about our own times, and we've needed to take a fresh look at what the Bible is REALLY saying.
- C. Last week, we did a final review of the Seal Judgements, and I shared a summary of my reasons for why I feel the Seal Judgements, at least up through Seal Judgment five or six, occur PRIOR to the start of the Tribulation.
- D. I know some of you have arrived at the same conclusion after taking in these lessons. I also know some of you still hold to the conventional view that the Seal Judgments occur within the seven years of the Tribulation period.
- E. These particular differences in perspective do not need to invite discord of any sort. We are all instructed to be as the Bereans and study the Scriptures for ourselves.

**NOTE:** But now, with all that said, we now approach the content of **Revelation Ch. 7**. This chapter contains a description of a group of 144,000 individuals which have been the subject of much debate and controversy.

I believe some of the text in **Revelation Ch. 7** concerns a timeframe that marks a transition from a pre-Tribulation point INTO the seven years of that terrible time known as The Tribulation.

**NOTE:** It is also known as the time of "*Jacob's Trouble*" (**Cf. Jeremiah 30:7**):

*"Alas! That day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of trouble for Jacob; yet he shall be saved out of it."*

**NOTE:** A few things are worth observing about this passage in **Jeremiah**:

- F. It is interesting to see this description of the Tribulation as a time of "*Jacob's Trouble*."
- G. I say it is 'interesting,' because **Jeremiah chapters 29-33** are a portion of Scripture which mostly contain prophecies that speak of a "*future and a hope*" for the exiled nation of Israel.
- H. For example, there is that familiar verse of **Jer. 29:11** that manages to find its way on to many plaques and get-well cards and FB posts. It is generally taken out of context, to imply something it is not really saying. It reads:

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

- I. It's God talking to the Jewish people about the promises He made to them all the way back in **Genesis**. It's not God talking to you and I about the bills we cannot pay or about a bad diagnosis the Doctor gave us.
- J. It is a bell-weather passage about God's assurances to the Jewish nation that ties into the overall theme of **Jeremiah chapters 29-33**.
- K. Again, these chapters are stout with prophecies which describe Israel's "*future and hope*" during a time when the nation was displaced and in exile.
- L. So, admittedly, it is a little curious to find the thrust of **Jeremiah 30:7** which talks about "*Jacob's Trouble*" right in the middle of all these prophecies which are primarily concerned with Israel's "*future and hope*."

**NOTE:** Drilling down more into these chapters in **Jeremiah** reveals some additional details that are very important. We need to pay attention to these things as we prepare to study the 144,000 **Revelation Ch. 7**.

- M. As a case in point, there is the passage just a few verses before the one about "*Jacob's trouble*." It's **verse 3**, and it reads:

*"For behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the LORD, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall take possession of it."*

- N. God's mention of both the Northern Division of the Jewish Nation (Israel) and the Southern Division (Judah) indicates that this prophecy is directed not just to one part or the other, but to the entire nation, to all the Jews.
- O. This prophecy was given after the Northern ten tribes had been taken into exile in Assyria (722BC) and at a time when the Southern 2 tribes would soon be taken into exile in Babylon (586BC).
- P. The "fortunes" of the divided nation were essentially bankrupt, and God was reassuring the Jews that He would once more restore their fortunes, their future, and their hope.
- Q. Some commentators argue that God restored their fortunes after Judah's return from their Babylonian exile.
- R. But this view fails to take in the words of **Jeremiah Chapter 30:24** which tell us that "*....in the latter days you will understand this*." There is that clue once more that we are talking about the time of the end.
- S. In other words, the intent of **Jeremiah Chapters 29-33** look beyond Jeremiah's present day, and his near future, to a time much more distant: the very latter days instead.
- T. Between Jeremiah's time and our present time, there was also the great diaspora of the Jews in 70 AD after the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple by the Romans.
- U. It was this great dispersion of the Jews in 70 AD that resulted in Jewish populations being established throughout the entire world and in many different nations.
- V. In summary of this background to **Revelation Ch. 7** and the 144,000 that are mentioned there, we have some things we are instructed from the Scriptures to keep in mind:

1. The Jewish people were sent into their exiles, and were scattered among the nations of the world, in penalty for their sins and for their rejection of their Messiah.
2. **Jeremiah chapters 29-33** is one part of Scripture that acknowledges this situation, and it prophecies that in the "*latter days*" God will "*restore the fortunes of His people, Israel and Judah.*"
3. Among the other prophecies is God's reminder that the Jews will once again take possession of the land He gave to their forefathers.
4. God will give the Jews a "*future and a hope,*" and this is assured in **Jeremiah**.
5. However, these prophecies about a future or fortune for the Jews will not culminate without them also enduring the "*time of Jacob's trouble*" (AKA as the seven-year Tribulation).

**NOTE:** It is with all those things taken into account that we now need to read **Revelation 7:1-8**

**I. Jumping into some high-altitude stuff first:**

- A. NOTE: "*After this*" (**Cf. vs. 1**) some translations say "*After these things...*" (meaning, it is AFTER the events that are detailed in **Revelation chapter 6**.
  1. It is AFTER Seal Judgements #1 through #6.
  2. It is AFTER the rise of the antichrist, AFTER the wars, the famines, the economic ruin, the unprecedented pandemics and persecutions.
  3. It is AFTER the rise of the one-world false religious system and all the things we've been studying for the past dozen weeks or so that a new stage is prepared.
  
- B. Angels will take a prominent role. I mentioned last week that angels are a part of each judgement to come from this point onwards, and here we are introduced to four of them.
  1. Here are four angels at the four corners of the earth. (meaning this is a north, south, east, west reference intended to communicate that this is a global situation).
  2. These four angels hold back the "*four winds*" which is best understood as being the sovereign judgment of God which is about to "blow" across the land as it has done in the past.
  3. God will use these angels "*who have been given power to harm the land and the sea and the trees.*" He will use them in judgments to come, but for now, these angels are instructed to hold back for a short time.
  4. It's pertinent to note that in the first three Trumpet Judgments (which are next), it is the land, the sea, and all the plant life which are devastated.
  
- C. There is a fifth angel mentioned, and he has "*the seal of the living God*" with him. It is this fifth angel which instructs the other four to hold back the winds of judgement.
  1. Now, we don't know what exactly this seal is, but the text states plainly that it will be put on the forehead of 144,000 who are called "*servants of our God.*"

2. This angel carries the means or the instrument by which the 144,000 will be sealed.
3. This text does not say what this seal is or what it presents, but **Revelation 14:1**, which is part of another passage that discusses these 144,000, states the seal is the name of the Lamb and of His Father. (**Revelation 14:1**)
4. It's worth mentioning that the false prophet in **Revelation 13:16-17** forces the antichrist's followers to receive a mark.
  - a. This mark, like the aforementioned seal, can also be placed on the forehead.
  - b. This mark is also the name of the beast or the number of his name.
  - c. These things are detailed as they are to show a direct counterfeit to God's own plans. Satan is always deceptively counterfeiting God.

## II. The identity of the 144,000.

**NOTE:** This is where a lot of controversy about this portion of Scripture begins.

- A. There are several "camps" who are at the forefront of most of the controversy.
  1. A big controversy is all the churches, denominations, and "Christians" which have bought into various elements of Replacement Theology. (The idea that the church has replaced Israel in God's plan). They refuse to accept that the text here means what it says.
    - a. Consequently, these folks allegorize or spiritualize this part of God's Word. They try to explain this VERY CLEAR passage any other way except through a plain and literal meaning.
    - b. Today, some studies suggest that up to 80% of all churches and denominations subscribe to some sort of belief in Replacement Theology.
    - c. I need to make it very clear that God's Word means what it says, and it says what it means.
    - d. Replacement Theology is a cancerous heresy in the church today. It is a huge sign of spiritual poverty and willful apostasy.
    - e. I am deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of those who have chosen to subscribe to this heresy. It is incompatible with very basic and plain teachings of the Bible.
  2. Also, there is the way various Christian movements have manipulated this passage in **Revelation Ch. 7** to serve their own agendas.
    - a. For example, in a 2012 article produced by The Gospel Coalition, a subtle and dangerous organization which has seduced many lukewarm churches and their equally shallow church leaders, a literal interpretation of **Revelation Ch. 7** is actively put down.
    - b. Instead, they state the following about the 144,000 that are listed:

*The bottom line is that the number and the list and the order of the tribes are all stylized to depict the totality of God's pure and perfectly redeemed servants from all time over all the earth. That's what Revelation means by the 144,000.*

- c. This, of course, is nonsense. It is the same sort of allegorical fanaticism that got the church off-track in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and which moved men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Augustine into virulent antisemitism.
3. Then, of course, you have the cults. They too, have managed to manipulate this important portion of Scripture to suggest it means something other than what it is plainly saying.
    - a. Perhaps no cult is more "famous" in this respect than the Jehovah's Witnesses.
    - b. They believe that only 144,000 persons since the time of Jesus can ever go to heaven. There, they will be co-rulers with Jesus over the inhabitants of a paradise earth.
    - c. Basically, their "take" is that the soul dies when the body dies. It must wait in that state until the resurrection before God "remembers" the personality of the deceased and matches it to a new, physical body.
    - d. Those who are part of the 144,000 will be given spiritual bodies, but everyone else will be given a fleshly body.
    - e. Of course, none of this is true, none of this premise is supported in Scripture, and all this heresy can be rebutted by adopting a literal view of interpretation.
    - f. It goes to show that a responsible reading and interpretation of the Bible is fundamental to a strong and genuine Christian faith.
  4. Lastly, there is a group of people who are not cultists. For the most part, they are not impressed with so-called Christian movements like The Gospel Coalition, and they would not choose to identify with most of the tenants of Replacement Theology.
    - a. Some of these folks are sound and well-meaning in their faith. But I would respectfully suggest they have become misguided, and perhaps they have their own motives for ending up this way.
    - b. They have, in various ways, and to lessor or greater degrees, fallen victim to the idea that (a.) they themselves are "true Jews," or (b.) those that ARE Jews are really not.
    - c. The last time I was in Israel, there were several people on our tour that claimed to be part of the tribe of Dan, or of Ephraim, or whatever.
    - d. They had names like Johnson, Smith, Williams, and so on, ordinary names. I had conversations with some of these people to try to understand their backgrounds.

- e. I concluded their claims held no legitimate water that I could discern, but I could see they felt important saying the things they did, and they brought these angles up all the time.
  - f. Somehow, and for whatever reason, these folks had bought into the teachings of British Israelism, made popular by the Worldwide Church of God and folks like Herbert Armstrong.
  - g. Ultimately, this sort of teaching leads to the idea that England and the US inherited the covenant promises God made to Israel. It's not quite the same thing as Replacement Theology, but I would call it a first cousin of that.
  - h. I would also add that the Bible does not regard well those who "*say they are Jews and are not*" (***Cf. Revelation 2:9; 3:9, Et al***).
  - i. Bottom line: I believe it is best to take God's Word at face value and interpret it for meaning what it plainly says....
5. That leads us into the most responsible thing we can do at this juncture and that is adopting a literal interpretation of ***Revelation 7:1-8***. In other words, this list is referring to exactly what it says it is: 12,000 Jews from the tribe of Judah, 12,000 Jews from the tribe of Asher, and so on. The total is 144,000.
- a. There is no good reason that I can conceive of to suggest that these 144,000 are Jews FROM Israel proper at the time they are sealed.
  - b. There is nothing to reinforce that 12,000 from each of these twelve tribes are selected from within the borders of the Jewish state. In fact, I think chances are stronger that they are not....
  - c. I mentioned earlier that the Jews have been scattered all over the face of the earth since the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and the diaspora in 70 A.D.
  - d. Many of these Jews are now settled in cultures and societies that are very foreign to Jewish customs and traditions. Pick any country of the world, and chances are strong there have been traditional Jewish communities located there for centuries.
  - e. These locales of Jews have, in many cases, become familiar with the language and ways of the nations in which they are located.
  - f. They have friends and associates which are not Jewish as they are, and they themselves have become part of the fabric of each nation and community of which they are a part.
  - g. Now, they may no longer KNOW which tribe of Israel they belong to, but God knows. God has not lost track of any of the important information.
  - h. The context in ***Revelation 7:1-8*** makes it very clear that God sovereignly selects these 144,000 for salvation AFTER the time of the Rapture, and somewhere around the start of the Tribulation.

- i. This group of 144,000 comes to saving faith following the supernatural departure of the church from the earth. God sovereignly selects and saves them, much as He did with Abraham.
- j. Remember too, according to **Daniel 9:24**, “70 sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city...” These are 70 sets of seven years each.
- k. The last set of seven years is The Tribulation. It follows the parenthetical pause of the Church Age which will be approximately 2,000 years. IMPORTANT: God will once again refocus His attention on the restoration and redemption of the Jewish nation, and I believe the sealing of this 144,000 is part of that process.
- l. The result is these 144,000 Jews become strong evangelists. They proclaim the Gospel. They tell the truth about Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- m. The text does not specifically call them evangelists, but the effect of their ministry is very clear.
- n. In **Revelation 7:9** where it says, “After this,” we see a great multitude that no one could count from “every nation, tribe, people, and language,” and it is evident that this throng has come to true salvation.
- o. I believe it is from the ministry of these 144,000 which were already entrenched (due to the diaspora) around the globe in “every nation, tribe, people, and language.”
- p. They were already sovereignly positioned by God to have a HUGE Gospel impact, and this they will, apparently have!

**NOTE:** In fact, I believe Jesus references this worldwide evangelistic impact in **Matthew 24:14** where He says:

*“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”*

- q. It’s pertinent to note that the Olivet Discourse was a message to the Jews and was primarily about Jewish matters and concerns relative to prophetic events. For example:
  - There was mention of the Sabbath in **vs. 20**
  - There is mention of the temple in **vs. 15**
  - There is mention of “those who are in Judea” in **vs. 16**, and so on...
- r. I believe it is the stronger set of arguments that ties **Matthew 24:14** directly to the evangelistic impact of the 144,000 mentioned in **Revelation 7:4-8**.
- s. It’s a FANTASTIC and INCOMPARABLE thing to consider the beauty and details of God’s plan here.
- t. The Jews were dispersed across the globe in 70 AD due to their rejection of their Messiah. In the end times, their geographical

diversity, a sign of their punishment, will be a key factor that will bring many others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

6. Another thing to consider from this text in **Revelation 7:1-8**): The list of the twelve tribes here in **vss. 5-8** are uncharacteristically out of proper order:
  - a. Throughout God's Word, the order of names within a family structure, or the order of people groups and so on, often carries significance.
  - b. Typically, insofar as a family is concerned, you start with the firstborn and you end with the lastborn. That's the approach for Biblical genealogy, and it is the typical chronological pattern with the twelve patriarchal sons of Jacob, but that's not what we see here.
  - c. These twelve tribal patriarchs are not listed here in **Revelation 7:5-8** in their chronological birth order. This contrast from the norm is significant.
  - d. For example, Judah, listed first, was actually the fourth son of Jacob and his wife Leah, and Manasseh, Joseph's son, is listed before his father.
  - e. Similarly the other names in the list are not arranged in any apparent conventional order.
7. It is in this list's UNCONVENTIONAL order that a beautiful truth emerges, a message that is easy to overlook.
8. Each of these names of each of the twelve tribes carries a certain meaning. Back in Biblical times, you gave a name to your child that carried a significant message.
9. Here is the meaning behind each of the names listed in this text:
  - a. Judah- Praise God;
  - b. Reuben- behold a son;
  - c. Gad- good fortune;
  - d. Asher- happiness;
  - e. Naphtali- my wrestling or struggle;
  - f. Manasseh- God has caused me to forget;
  - g. Simeon-hearing;
  - h. Levi-joining or grafting in;
  - i. Issachar- God hath given me my hire, or has reinstated me;
  - j. Zebulun- elevated or elevated position;
  - k. Joseph- adding or increasing;
  - l. Benjamin- son of the right hand.
10. So, if you arrange all the meanings of each name in the order that is laid out in this text, there is a coherent message that emerges. This message is an important one, and it is only apparent with this particular order of names.
11. With a little modern paraphrasing to help us better understand it, that message which emerges from the meaning of these twelve names essentially reads as follows:



*“Praise God for the gospel of Christ, a Son of good fortune and happiness. My struggle with sin and the Mosaic Law, God has caused me to forget. Hearing of the mystery of our grafting in with the Gentiles, God has reinstated me into an elevated position of ministry once again, and is increasing those being saved through Christ, the Son of the right hand.”*

**CONCLUSION:** I believe this passage of **Revelation 7:1-8** is about 144,000 ethnic Jews sovereignly selected and destined for spiritual greatness. They may not know who exactly they are – but God knows.

Dispersed across the globe due to the Jews’ rejection of their Messiah, they will witness the Christian Church vanish from the earth in the Rapture. This is the likely event that prompts them to realize that Jesus Christ was, is, and will always be the Messiah!

Left behind, these sealed and protected individuals will come to saving faith, and will administer the gospel of Christ in a very dangerous period of time. They will be supremely effective in doing so, amounting to the impact of 144,000 “Pauls” all over the globe.