

God's Eternal Plan #26
Evangelization During the Tribulation
Revelation 7:4-17

At the Rapture of the Church, God, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, will snatch every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ out of this earth and bring him or her into glory. When that translation has been completed there will not be a single individual on the earth who acknowledges Jesus Christ as his personal Savior, not one who personally knows the salvation that God has provided through Christ, not a person who has God's answer to the problem of sin, who knows experientially the way to eternal life. Those left on earth will be those who were rejected the Gospel and consequently in unbelief and were under judgment. **The tribulation period – a period of apostasy, unbelief, and rejection of Jesus Christ as personal Savior – will begin.** The world will truly be in its darkest hour.

Yet, according to Revelation 7:9-10, seven years later there will be "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And when John beheld that great multitude he could identify them, therefore, he asked the question in verse 13, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" **John had to confess his ignorance.** He does so by acknowledging the insight of the person to whom he was speaking, "Sir, you know." And the explanation is given in verse 14, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Think of it! Seven years before, not a single individual on earth knew Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, but at the end of that seven-year period there is "a great multitude" to huge that "no one could number" from every nation on the face of the earth who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." **Something supernatural has been taking place, for this cannot be explained naturally.** God has an eternal plan to bring multitudes to Himself, and this plan will be accomplished within a seven-year period.

Just before John was shown this scene in heaven of this innumerable multitude who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, he was given a picture of the sealing of the servants of God, as seen in verse 4, "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed." **Who are these**

144,000 who are being sealed by God to preach for His during the tribulation period? Opinions differ.

For example, the *Seventy-day Adventists* say these 144,000 pertain to their communion, and represent those who are found observing the Jewish Sabbath when the Lord comes again, and they are raptured up to glory. The *Jehovah's Witnesses* say these 144,000 belong to them. They believe these are the great "Over-comers," and each one of these Jehovah's Witnesses is trying to be one of that select number. And finally, there are those who believe these 144,000 represent the true *Church*.

But who does the Bible say they are? After all, that is the foundation for our belief. Revelation 7:5-8 gives us the answer, "Of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed."

John saw God set aside 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Each received a seal in their foreheads. In Scripture, a seal is a mark of identification; and God supernaturally and sovereignly put His identifying mark on these 144,000 physical descendants of Abraham. This is a mark of ownership. It is also a mark that guarantees preservation, and John was told that nothing could happen to these 144,000 because God was preserving them for that for which they were called.

I believe these 144,000 are exactly what the Scripture says – 144,000 physical descendants of Abraham – 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. I have repeated myself because those that would object to this line of thinking say that no physical descendant of Abraham knows his tribal lineage. And they question is: "How can we have 144,000 Israelites set apart by God when nobody knows their real tribal inheritance?" Let me answer that by telling you this – while an individual may not know his tribal inheritance, God certainly does. Up until the time of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the rolls were carefully kept according to the laws of Levitical inheritance so that every physical descendant of Abraham has a tribal inheritance and a physical lineage, and each could consult the scrolls if there were any doubt about his or her inheritance. Since that time those records have been kept in the mind of almighty God so that God can fulfill His purpose in His own time.

Another objection that is frequently raised is the 144,000 cannot be from the twelve tribes of Israel because ten tribes have been lost. Those who would put forth this line of thinking are simply revealing their lack of knowledge of the Scriptures - there is no such thing as ten lost tribes. Satan is simply trying to blind the minds of men as to the purpose and program of God. **You will remember that the ten tribes went into captivity to Assyria in 722 B.C., and that the two southern tribes went into captivity to Babylon in 586 B.C.** But when the seventy years of the Babylon captivity were over, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, representatives from all twelve tribes came back. Not just representatives from the two southern tribes what event into Babylon, but representatives from the twelve tribes came back into the land, and were established in the land, and had their inheritance in the land. In fact, Ezra 2:70 says “all Israel” returned. Therefore, when someone says God can’t possibly fulfill this prophecy because ten tribes have been lost and nobody knows where they are, not even God, then that person is ignorant of Scripture, denying the purpose that God has for His people Israel.

According to Exodus 19:16 when God chose Israel as His own people He chose them to be a “kingdom of priests.” **He chose them to be His representatives, and Israel in the Old Testament was the light of the world.** Israel was to carry the light of the knowledge of God to the Gentile nations around them. Sadly, Israel did not fulfill that function for which they were set apart by God. **Therefore, when the New Testament opens, as the apostle John records it, Christ came as the true light that lightens every person that comes into the world.** In other words, Christ came to bring the knowledge of God to nations that were in darkness. He came to perform that function that God had originally entrusted to the nation Israel. **That is why He is called the true light as opposed to Israel, who was a false light.** God who chose the nation to perform a special function will one day perform that function through that very people, and it is to that end that John sees God sealing the 144,000 representatives of the twelve tribes so that they in that day can fulfill that purpose for which God originally chose them, that they should be *light* to the world.

In 1 Corinthians 15:8 there is a clue concerning the way God will work after the Church is raptured. After the apostle has listed those to whom the resurrected Christ appeared, so as to authenticate His resurrection, Paul says, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” This phrase “born out of due time” means a premature birth. But what is Paul really saying here? **Comparing Revelation 7 with Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 15 we conclude that after the rapture of the church, God will perform the same miracle He performed in Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road 144,000**

times over. The experience that Paul had on the Damascus Road is what these 144,000 Jews will experience in that day when God sovereignly reveals Himself to these descendants of Abraham and brings them to Himself. I do not mean in the same *physical* manner, but in the same *spiritual* manner.

Look at what God did in the life of Paul. Saul of Tarsus has his religion. He was perfectly satisfied with it. **He had risen to prominence in his generation because he was so zealous and so knowledgeable, and yet he did not know Christ.** He had the ability, the talent, the personality, the education, and the experience to be a witness for Christ. He had everything but Christ! God sovereignly brought him to Himself and equipped him and used him as an instrument to bring the Gospel *not to Israel* but to the *Gentiles*.

And what Christ did for Saul of Tarsus He will do 144,000 times over to call and equip and empower these witnesses so they can bring the Gospel to every kindred and tongue and tribe and nation. It will take a sovereign work such as this because after the rapture of the church, believers will be gone. There will be no missionaries, no evangelists, no preachers, and no witnessing Church. **There will be an apostate, Christ-rejecting church, but they will not suddenly become evangelists for Jesus Christ.** God has no use for them at all. **How then are men and women going to hear the gospel of salvation?** God will convert and equip these physical descendants of Abraham so that they can go to every nation and kindred and people and language and declare the gospel to them. But these people just may not be able to speak all the languages of the world, then what? I take you to Acts and to the Pentecostal experience, where Acts 2:6 says, “every man heard them speak in his own language.” My friend, we serve an awesome God!

In addition to the 144,000, Revelation 11:3 tells us that God will raise up two witnesses, “And I will give them power to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.” **These witnesses are raised up by God to support and to authenticate the ministry of the 144,000 evangelists proclaiming the Gospel.** From Revelation 11:1-2 it is clear these two witnesses minister in Jerusalem, which according to Daniel 11, is where the world dictator will establish his headquarters. The two witnesses minister for 1,260 days or 3 ½ years, which would be the last half of the tribulation period.

Revelation 11:3 tells us they appear “clothed in sackcloth.” **You might remember that John the Baptist appeared in the desert with a camel’s hair garment that was “sackcloth.”** The Old Testament prophets clothed themselves with *sackcloth*, which was a sign of mourning and repentance, and

by their very clothing these two witnesses will be calling people to repentance, and to confession of sins.

The message of the 144,000, as well as the two witnesses, will be the “gospel of the kingdom.” We need to be careful not to understand this to be “another gospel,” because it isn’t. Go back with me to Matthew 3:2 when John the Baptist appeared on the scene, and his message was, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” **That was God’s message to the Jews.** In fact, Matthew 4:23 tells us, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.” Matthew 24:15:31 are scriptures that relate to the tribulation period, but in Matthew 24:14 Jesus made this statement, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

The “gospel of the kingdom” has to do with the prophecy of Messiah coming to ascend the throne of David and establish His literal and visible kingdom. But Acts 20:24 says, “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” The “gospel of the grace of God” has to do with the Church, while the “gospel of the kingdom” has more to do with Israel. **But, watch this, God’s total message to this world is that Jesus Christ is the answer to both Israel and the rest of the world.** There really isn’t “another gospel.”