

Who Are the Great Multitude of Revelation 7?

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In the book of Revelation, John describes for us two unique groups. John describes them both as standing before the throne of God the Father in heaven there with God the Father and Jesus Christ. As he goes on to tell us more about both of these groups, we can see from his description that what he's saying is in both cases they were physical human beings who lived a physical life on Earth, and then they received salvation. And in the resurrection to eternal life, they became God beings. And they are pictured as God beings standing before the throne of God in heaven. However, John describes both of these groups separately. He gives them different titles or labels, you might say. And if we look at the details of his descriptions, in some ways they're very similar and in other ways they're different and even contrasted with one another.

The two groups I'm referring to are the 144,000 and the Great Multitude. Now, what we're going to do today is to talk about these two groups, and particularly the Great Multitude. The reason I mention that is particularly over the last several decades, at least in my personal experience in the Church of God, there tends to be a wide agreement as to who the 144,000 are and how they fit into God's plan of salvation. Most Church of God members, at least that I've been familiar with, would generally agree that the 144,000 is a description of the Firstfruits, and their description there in Revelation 14 is telling us that this is picturing the Firstfruits having received the resurrection to eternal life standing in heaven before the throne of God.

However, when we get to the Great Multitude, there's a lot more speculation and questions in regards to exactly who this group is and how exactly do they fit into the overall plan of salvation that God has for mankind. Where exactly do we fit them in and explain all the details? What we're going to do today is to look at these two groups, and particularly with a focus on seeing if we can clarify the details of exactly who this Great Multitude is and exactly how they fit into God's plan of salvation. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

Who Are the Great Multitude of Revelation 7?

So, let's start off by turning over to Revelation 7. Because this is the only section of scripture where we will see this title "Great Multitude" directly referenced. Let's turn over to Revelation 7 and first read this description. It starts in verse 9.

Rev 7:9 *"After these things I looked, and behold, 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, 10) and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* (NKJV)

Notice again, they're directly described here as standing in heaven before the throne of God the Father. And as we continue to read this, this description here that John gives us, it becomes very obvious that these are former physical human beings who accepted Christ's sacrifice and then endured to the end. They're being pictured here in heaven as having received the resurrection to eternal life. But let's continue on now in verse 11.

"11) All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12) saying: 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.' 13) Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?'" (NKJV)

So, he's asking exactly who is this group and how do they fit into the greater plan here?

"14) And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.'" So he said to me, "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." (NKJV)

Now we know, obviously the Lamb is Jesus Christ. This is referring to Christ's sacrifice being applied to them. They received salvation. This is former physical human beings we're talking about. And if we just can continue reading, it's obvious that they're being pictured here as having received salvation. They're God beings in heaven at this point.

"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 dwell among them. 16) They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17) for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NKJV)

Again, if we look at all the details of this description, it's pretty obvious it's referring to them as having received the resurrection to eternal life. They're now spirit beings that are going to live forever and they're in heaven before the throne of God. But again, to understand all of the details of exactly who this group is and how they fit into the whole picture of God's plan we also need to understand the 144,000. Because as we're going to see, some of the details here in this description are actually a contrast with the 144,000 who were addressed in the first part of the chapter. So, we have to understand all the context and the details there to get the references that are meant as a contrast and how to interpret them.

Now, the 144,000 are actually mentioned in two different sections of scripture. They're referenced here in the first part of chapter 7. They're also mentioned in chapter 14. Now, I think it's easier to quickly nail down who they are from chapter 14. So, let's turn over to Revelation 14 and go through this description.

Rev 14:1 *“Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. 2) And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3) They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.”* (NKJV)

Notice once again, we have this group described as being in heaven before the throne of God the Father. They're there with the Father and with Christ. And it again tells us they're redeemed from the earth. This sounds very similar to what we just read about the Great Multitude. Continue on in verse 4,

“4) These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5) And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.” (NKJV)

Now, again, it's told us multiple times that they're in heaven before the throne of God, and we have God the Father and Jesus Christ there with them. So, obviously they're spirit beings at this point. And it's told us multiple times they were redeemed from the earth. So, obviously they were at one point physical human beings. That is who we're talking about.

Now, again, it's generally agreed upon in the Church of God as to the exact identity of this group. But let's just take a moment to nail this down from scripture and see that we can conclusively prove exactly who this group is. We don't have to really speculate here. Now, there's three important clues that are given here in these five verses. One is they're directly referred to as Firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. Now, that's pretty much a dead giveaway right there. It also mentions having the Father's name written on their foreheads. It also refers to them as virgins. Now, if we just let the Bible interpret itself, we can take all three of those clues and just very conclusively nail down exactly who this is. We don't have to guess at all. Now, if we just start with the most obvious clue here, it refers to them as Firstfruits. Well, who does the New Testament refer to as Firstfruits? Turn over to James 1 and we'll start reading here in verse 16.

James 1:16 *“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18) Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”* (NKJV)

So obviously we're referring to God the Father here, and we're saying that we are a type of Firstfruits for Him. Well, again, what did Revelation 14 say? These were Firstfruits to the Father and to Christ. Okay, well, what it's referring to here is those called to

salvation prior to the return of Christ. That's who the Firstfruits are. So, this is directly telling us what Revelation 14 is referring to. It's describing the Firstfruits. That's who it's talking about.

But just to absolutely nail this down. Notice it also referred to having the Father's name written on their foreheads. Well, turn over to Revelation 3 and we're going to read verse 12. Now, you're probably familiar with Revelation 2 and 3 and the letters to the seven churches. There's a couple of ways to look at those. One is there were seven literal churches on a mail route in Asia Minor at the time that John wrote this. That's one application. Now, many believe, myself included, that this also refers to church eras. You know, kind of common themes throughout the history of the New Testament Church. If we pick up here in verse 12, this is referring to the Church in Philadelphia, or you might even say the Philadelphia era.

There's a trend in all seven of these letters that will mention "he who overcomes". It'll make that statement, and then it makes a reference basically to receiving salvation. There's a number of different ways it's referred to, but if you compare them all, what you're going to see is they're all basically describing receiving eternal life. Receiving the gift of salvation is what they're all getting at. Just notice here how this is referred to here in verse 12.

Rev 3:12 *"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."* (NKJV)

Notice it's referring to Christ talking here, and He says, "I'm going to write upon them the name of My God." Well, who is Christ's God? It's God the Father. Well, what did Revelation 14 refer to? One of the descriptions of the 144,000 is they have the Father's name written on their foreheads. Again, we're talking about the Firstfruits. It's pretty clear. Now, there was one other clue that was given to us. It said that they were described as virgins. Now, again, this is another obvious clue. Just turn over to 2 Corinthians 11. We'll start here in verse 1.

2 Cor 11:1 *"Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. 2) For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."* (NKJV)

Paul is writing to the Church at Corinth here, and he's referring to Firstfruit Christians as virgins. You know, to be later married to Christ. Well, who's he referring to? Again, the Firstfruits, that's the description here. So, again, if we put all this together, it's very obvious what Revelation 14 is referring to. This is a picture of the resurrected Firstfruits in heaven standing before the throne of God the Father with Jesus Christ. That's what's being described there. So, it makes it very obvious who's being referred to as the 144,000.

But there's another time that the 144,000 are referred to, and that's in Revelation 7. Let's look at this because it's going to be important to understand some of the details here because these are the verses that precede the description of the Great Multitude. As we're going to see here, once we understand all the details and identify this group, and understand all the references here, what it's really getting at, the way it describes the 144,000 in these verses, we'll then understand that some of the initial verses that talk about the Great Multitude are meant as a contrast to this description of the 144,000. That's a key to understanding and identifying who they are and how they fit into the greater plan of God's plan of salvation. So, let's start off here reading in verse 1 of chapter 7.

Rev 7:1 *"After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. 2) Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, 3) saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." 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: 5) 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; 6) 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; 7) 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; 8) 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." (NKJV)*

Now, in my experience, there's basically two arguments involved with identifying this group here in Revelation 7. One is the argument that I'm going to make -- just to give you a spoiler alert here -- is that the description here in Revelation 7 is describing the exact same group that Revelation 14 was talking about. It's talking about the Firstfruits. Now there's another popular argument for this as well, which is saying, "Well, no this is too detailed, and it's specifically talking about the descendants of Israel. It even discusses all the tribes. So, this has got to be talking about the physical descendants of Israel that God's just protecting through the Day of the LORD." That's one of the arguments.

Now, let's also consider as we look at this, because we're going to look at multiple factors that I think lead us to the conclusion that this isn't just physical descendants of Israel we're talking about here. This is the same group mentioned in Revelation 14. This is a description of the Firstfruits. Keep in mind here that we're talking about the Book of Revelation. So, we also have to consider when we get into some of the details here, that maybe there's figurative references that we need to consider are symbolic references that are not always just straightforward and literal. Because oftentimes the

argument for this being just descendants of Israel that God protects through through the Day of the LORD period is based upon all the details here that are laid out about all the different tribes, and these details are interpreted very literally.

But just to lay out a case here for why I would say that this is really referring to the same group. This is also referring to the Firstfruits. Now, there's two important clues here. They're referred to as "servants of God", and they're referred to as being "sealed on their foreheads". Now, I think if we dig into those two issues, they point in the direction that this is the same group mentioned in Revelation 14. Now, first of all, just think logically about being mentioned as "servants of God". Now, you can be described as an Israelite, you know, a descendant of the tribes of Israel based on genealogy. That's just a matter of genetics that has nothing to do with how you behave. That's just a statement of fact to say this individual has descended from a particular son of Jacob, and they're part of Israel, and its descendants. But describing someone as a "servant of God", that is normally more often a description of one's behavior.

When we describe someone as being a servant of God, that's normally a statement that they live a life of obedience. That is typically what that phrase is used to refer to. So, that description points in the direction of this is referring to the Firstfruits. The other very important clue is them being referred to as being "sealed on their foreheads". Now, the Bible makes multiple references to being sealed. God marking His Firstfruits with a seal. And we're going to see, there's a number of scriptures that point to this. That, again, would point us in the direction that what this is referring to here is a description of the Firstfruits, just like Revelation 14. And just to look at a few scriptures that point us in that direction, turn over to 2 Timothy 2:19.

2 Tim 2:19 *"Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'"* (NKJV)

See, he's using the language of a seal that identifies God's people, but it's not in the context of the physical descendants of Israel. This is referring to the Firstfruits who are called to salvation and who are living a life of obedience to God. But let's also notice there are numerous references to the Holy Spirit being a seal that identifies God's servants, you know, those who are following Him. Turn over to 2 Corinthians 1:21.

2 Cor 1:21 *"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22) who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."* (NKJV)

Notice, he's saying that God has sealed the Firstfruits by giving them His Spirit. That's the identifying seal of His servants. Notice that this is consistent. This is the language used in Revelation 7, and it's consistent then with a description in Revelation 14. These 144,000 groups, it's the same group. It's the Firstfruits. But let's just notice that in the book of Ephesians, Paul uses this same language several more times.

Eph 1:13 *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14) who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."* (NKJV)

So, notice once again, we have this language of the Holy Spirit being a seal that identifies us as God's servants, as His Firstfruits. So, turn over now to Ephesians 4. Let's see, Paul uses this language, again, Ephesians 4:30.

Eph 4:30 *"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32) And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."* (NKJV)

So, once again, we have this language of the Holy Spirit being a seal that identifies the Firstfruits as God's servants. So again, if we look at what's described there in Revelation 7. Not only do we have to look at the fact that Revelation 14 refers to the Firstfruits. The description there is obvious who that's referring to there, and who's identified as the 144,000. So that's a big clue that we would expect to see Revelation 7 being consistent with Revelation 14. But when we look at the fact that they're described as "His servants" and they're "sealed on their foreheads", well, that's totally consistent with the Firstfruits as well.

But oftentimes, the argument that is made that, "Oh, but Revelation 7, that's just too detailed. It specifically says it's Israel, and it lists the tribes. So, that's just got to be referring to just physical human beings or just physical descendants of Israel." Well, again, let's remember we're in the Book of Revelation. The Bible, even in other places, oftentimes can use figurative references or symbolic references. But that's particularly true of the Book of Revelation. But we also notice numerous times in the New Testament, it refers to the New Covenant Church as spiritual Israel. So, we'll see, this is consistent as well. So, turn over to Romans 2:25.

Rom 2:25 *"For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26) Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27) And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? 28) For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29) but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."* (NKJV)

See, the New Testament refers to those who are converted, who've received the Holy Spirit and live a life of obedience as spiritual Israel. So, we have to consider that this could be what Revelation 7 is actually referring to. Let's just notice a couple other

references that are very consistent with this. Turn over to Galatians 3, we'll start reading in verse 26.

Gal 3:26 *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (NKJV)

See, he's saying that physical lineage, your genealogy and your genetics, that's not the issue. It's an issue of having received the sacrifice of Christ and the Holy Spirit and living a life of obedience. If you're called at this time, and you're living a life of obedience, well, you're a spiritual Israelite. You're considered spiritually a descendant of Abraham. And let's just notice that he states this again in Galatians 6:16.

Gal 6:16 *"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."* (NKJV)

See, the "Israel of God", this is the New Covenant Church. This is those who have been called to salvation now and have received the sacrifice of Christ and the Holy Spirit. If we've received all that, and are living a life of obedience to God, we're considered spiritual Israel. See, when we read through Revelation 7, and remember, we're in the Book of Revelation. That's particularly a book where we have to consider when we read things it's not always just as literal interpretations as it might sound. We also have to consider that there might be symbolic or figurative references here that are a possibility of the meaning as well. We have to consider that.

So, now turn back over to Revelation 7. I want you to notice something else here. I'll just summarize this rather than going into all the details. And I'll refer you to a study paper that's on my website that'll lay this out in a lot of detail, and even give you a chart and make it easy to see. If you want to find my website, it's SearchingTheScriptures.org. If you're watching this sermon on YouTube, just look below this video. You're going to see a little link with a finger icon next to it, and it says, "For Further Study" and it gives you the URL to the website. You can just click on that. It'll take you straight to the website.

There's a paper that's on my website. It's titled, "The 144,000 and The Great Multitude". Now, it's going to go into great detail on what I'm just going to summarize for you today. Because I don't have the time to go through all the finer details of this. But just take your eye and look down at the list here from verse 5 down through verse 8. It lists out the tribes. Now, first of all, I want you to notice that the tribe of Dan is missing. They're not listed at all. This is also an unusual order of how the tribes are listed. It's not in birth order, and it's not in any order that you're going to find anywhere else in the Bible. This is unique.

You'll also notice that Joseph and Manasseh are both in this list. Now, Manasseh is Joseph's son. As you know, Ephraim and Manasseh are Joseph's sons. They split out

as individual tribes, but you actually get 13 when you look at it that way. You know, because Joseph is a direct son of Jacob, and we normally think of the 12 tribes as being Jacob's sons. Well, this list has 12, but Dan is missing. And Manasseh and Joseph, Manasseh being a son of Joseph, are both in the list. Well, that's kind of odd. There's an order here that you won't find anywhere else in the Bible. Now that suggests to us that there's something to this that maybe we should take a closer look at it.

Now, again, I'm just going to summarize this, and the details are in the paper that I just referred to on my website. If you look at the Book of Genesis when all of these individuals were originally born, it tells you the story of when each child was named. In almost every case there's a phrase stated as the meaning of the name as to why that child was given that name. Now, if you take those phrases out and you put them in a chart in the order in which they are listed here, you can read it as a story. It's basically a story of the resurrected Firstfruits celebrating and praising God that they have now endured to the end and received salvation. It'll actually read like that. It's pretty interesting if you look at it. And it's another piece of evidence that kind of screams that this isn't referring to the physical descendants of Jacob here. You know, those just living at the end time that God protects from the Day of the LORD. This is a description of the Firstfruits just like the description in Revelation 14. Both 144,000 groups are consistent. They're just described differently.

Now, the other issue here is oftentimes people look at this and go, "Okay, well, why are the numbers so specific here?" You know, it gives this number of 144,000, and it lays out 12,000 for each tribe. Now, oftentimes, we look at that as a head count. And I want you to consider -- let's keep in mind we're in the Book of Revelation here. The Book of Revelation uses lots of symbolic language. Lots of figurative references, and everything is not -- very often when we read through the book of Revelation and what's talked about isn't just this straightforward, literal description. We have to consider symbolic meanings. You know, references that may be figurative. So, I want you to notice here in Revelation 7:4.

Rev 7:4 *"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:"* (NKJV)

Now, if you look at the Greek word there that's translated as "number", you know the number of this group. It's the exact same Greek word that's used for the number of the beast in Revelation 13. Now, think about the number of the beast. You know, as soon as you mention that everybody goes, "Well, that's 666!" But does anyone ever interpret that number as a headcount? Does anyone ever think 666? "Well, that's 666 individuals." No! Nobody thinks that. There's a million theories as to what 666 means. Nobody considers it a head count. Now, I won't go into this in great detail. There's a sermon and a study paper on my website explaining my take on all of this. You know, my take on the mark of the beast. You have to consider the Firstfruits as a group, as a whole, are described in Revelation 20 as those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast. Now, think about that! The Firstfruits is everyone who was called from the time of the Garden Eden all the way up to the return of Christ. If that group as a whole can be

described as those who rejected the mark of the beast, well, then the mark of the beast is not just an end time reference.

It's not just something that's relevant to events that occur just right before the return of Christ, or you couldn't describe the whole group that way. I'm just summarizing this. You can look at that paper and that sermon to go into all the details. What 666 is referring to there is it's not a head count. It's not even a code. You know, jumping between languages and trying to take letters and attribute them to a numerical value and get somebody's name and identify some leader. Because it's not one specific point in time that you're referring to here. You're talking about all of the time from creation up to the return of Christ. That is how the Firstfruits are referred to as rejecting this mark. Well, 666 is symbolically a reference for just being in direct rebellion against God. That's really what that's referring to. It's a symbolic identity that's being expressed in the number. It's not a code. It's not a head count. It's not a code that tells you about a specific individual. It's a symbolic identity.

Now, let's consider that the number 144,000 that's laid out here. This is just a symbolic identity telling us it's the Firstfruits. And to give you a Biblical reference that's consistent with that, turn over to Revelation 21. If you turn over to Revelation 21, what we're going to read here is the description of New Jerusalem. Now, I won't go into all the details of New Jerusalem. There's a study paper and a sermon on my website that specifically deals with that and will deal with all the associated questions with this. But I just want you to follow the logic that I'm going to lay out here. Notice in particular verse 9.

Rev 21:9 *"Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.'"* (NKJV)

Notice what he's about to describe to him is what? It's the bride, the Lamb's wife. Now, who does the Lamb, Christ, marry? It's the Firstfruits, right? That's described in Revelation 19, the Marriage Supper. That's who's going to marry Him? So, that's the description that follows. Now, this is pictured as a city. And as I explained in the study paper and in the sermon addressing New Jerusalem, it's basically symbolically pictured as a city. Because what you have here is the resurrected Firstfruits dwelling together with God the Father, and Jesus Christ directly with one another and they're working with the rest of mankind through the Millennium and beyond.

But, that's the symbolic picture here. But now notice as it describes this symbolically as a city, the numbers that are used in making this description. Because you're going to see the number 12, the number 12,000, even 144. You're going to see these numbers pop up in this symbolic description here.

"10) And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11) having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12) Also she had a great and high wall with twelve

gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13) three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west.” (NKJV)

12 is being used here again to symbolize spiritual Israel. That is the point it's getting across. Because what are we describing? The bride, the Lamb's wife. Who is that? Spiritual Israel.

“14) Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15) And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16) The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal.” (NKJV)

Now we have the number 12,000. Each of the tribes was listed as what? 12,000. You know, coming up to a total of 144,000. Keep reading and we're going to see 144 described here.

“17) Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. 18) The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19) The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20) the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21) The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.” (NKJV)

Notice again when we started in verse 9, what did the angel tell him? I'm going to show you the bride, the Lamb's wife. Who is the bride, the Lamb's wife? Spiritual Israel, the Firstfruits. And again, it's symbolically pictured as this city. But what did we see here? You know, a lot of numbers. We saw 12. We saw 12,000. We see 144. Again, this is a symbolic description, and it's of the bride, the Lamb's wife -- spiritual Israel. So, see, we need to consider here that 144,000, it's oftentimes looked at as a head count. Let's also consider, again, we're in the Book of Revelation, using lots of figurative and symbolic references. Let's consider that the number 144,000 is not a head count. It's a symbolic identity. It's basically just a way of expressing this is spiritual Israel.

Also, think about the other problems that this solves for us. Most often, at least as I've experienced in my life, once it kind of became popular in the Church of God to understand that the 144,000 is the resurrected Firstfruits. It's oftentimes looked at as a head count. But just think that one through. If only 144,000 people make it into the resurrection of the Firstfruits, you know, to eternal life. Okay. Now, who are the Firstfruits? That's everybody from the Garden of Eden all the way up to the return of Christ that make it into the Kingdom of God. Now, just in my lifetime, I'm not quite 60

years old yet, I'm in my late 50s. But just in my personal experience, I remember even back in the days of Worldwide, Feast attendance got to like 140-150,000 people. Now I know there's been massive attrition and huge amounts of those people walked away from the truth and rejected everything that they understood. But still, a large number of them did not. And that's in one moment of time and that doesn't speak to the 2000 years since Christ and the Apostles formed the New Covenant Church.

We also then have to add in the small group of people in the Old Testament that were the exception. You know, that we're given the opportunity for salvation. We know from Hebrews 11 there's a number of individuals there that make it into the resurrection to eternal life with the Firstfruits as well because it directly states that they do. Now, if we add all that together, and we're not even to the end yet, we don't know how much time there is going forward from here. Doesn't only 144,000 just based upon our own experience when we consider all that seem a little low as a number?

Then you also have to factor in free moral agency. You have to put this into the equation because that gets a little complicated too. Because God offers people the opportunity, but everybody has to make their choice. And you have to endure to the end to make it into the Kingdom. It'd be a little challenging to ensure that there is exactly 144,000, not 144,001, or one less. You know, to have it exactly when you can't control other people's choices. See, it makes a lot more sense if you think it through that this is a symbolic identity, identifying a particular group. It's not about a head count. Now, if we understand that, that's going to really help us when we start looking at the Great Multitude. Because, see, we needed to understand all of this foundation and what all the different details of the 144,000 we're referring to. So now, when we read about the Great Multitude, now we have a context from which to understand the references that are made.

So, let's turn back over to Revelation 7 and let's read again the description here of the Great Multitude. Because again, our main purpose here is to figure out who exactly is this group and how exactly do they fit into God's overall plan of salvation. But as we read through this, let's keep in mind that the first half of this chapter was the description of the 144,000. And it gave us this list. It referred to the number that were sealed and then it broke them down in all these specific numbers. But again, let's consider that that's maybe not a head count, that that's a symbolic number. And again, it's similar to the numbers we see in Revelation 21. It's a symbolic reference to the bride, the Lamb's wife. The Firstfruits who make it into the Kingdom, and who marry Jesus Christ. Okay, let's use that as a context to work from because we're going to read this in context.

Rev 7:9 *"After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number,"* (NKJV)

Now, most often, at least in my experience in my lifetime, we read this and think, "Well, it must be a group that's just so big you just can't put a number on it".

Now, think about that.

God can number the sands of the sea. He can number the stars of heaven. I think He could put a number on this. But if we consider that the number of the 144,000, that wasn't a head count, that was basically expressing a symbolic identity. And that symbolic identity is this group that is defined as spiritual Israel. That that's the label. They're a single nation and that nation is spiritual Israel. That's symbolically how they're looked at. Well, now, if no one could number them, maybe that's because they're every other nation. And all we have to do is read the rest of the sentence to back that up. Continue reading.

“...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,”
(NKJV)

See, if we take the perspective that the numbering is not a head count of the 144,000. It's a symbolic identity, and it's to identify them as a single nation. And then the next comment you make in describing this other group. Well, they couldn't be numbered because, again, they're not one nation. They're not symbolically a single nation that we identify with a single number. They're every other nation because they're every nation, tribe, tongue, etc. See, I'm going to get ahead of myself here, but what we're looking at here is the 144,000 are the Firstfruits. The Great Multitude is the rest of mankind.

Now, we're going to get to verse 14 here in a minute and explain how that trips us up typically when we read this description. But just follow the logic here. If the 144,000 is not a head count, it's a symbolic identity and that was the “numbering” of this group. It wasn't counting the number of people involved. It was giving them a symbolic identity and identifying them as a single nation. But this is a group that we couldn't number because they're not a single nation. And the next phrase tells us, well, they're not a single nation. They're all the nations. They're everybody else. Let's consider that. They're the rest of mankind. They're the fall harvest is who they are. Let's just pick up now in verse 10.

“10) and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11) All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12) saying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen.” 13) Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?”” (NKJV)

Who are they and how do they fit into the greater picture of God's plan? Let's pick up in verse 14. Because we're going to see here that there's a phrase here that always trips us up because we assume it means something and we jump to a conclusion the Bible doesn't support.

Rev 7:14 *“And I said to him, “Sir, you know.” So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,”* (NKJV)

That's what trips us up. But we're about to look at that in greater detail.

"...and 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 dwell among them. 16) They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17) for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (NKJV)

Now obviously, you can see a lot of similarities in this description to what we read in Revelation 14. They're standing before the throne of God. They're in heaven with Jesus Christ. They've received eternal life. They're human beings who've been redeemed from the earth by the sacrifice of Christ. We're obviously referring to individuals who were former physical human beings and they've received salvation.

But oftentimes we look at the phrase here, they "come out of the great tribulation" and in our minds -- and we're going to look at this in great detail in a minute, and I think you're probably going to be shocked because I was when I first discovered this. We take this phrase "the great tribulation" and in our minds it means one thing and only one thing, and it can never mean anything else. We lock onto the idea that "the great tribulation", that's a time of trouble that occurs before the heavenly signs, which we know proceed the Day of the LORD. Because the Book of Revelation tells us that the heavenly signs are right before the Day of the LORD. And that's the timeline we have in our mind. And we decide that well "the great tribulation", that always means that, and it can only mean that, and it can never mean anything else.

See, once you lock onto that idea, then your brain locks onto that conclusion and it locks out any other possibility. Then you're blind to looking at any other possible explanation. And what we're going to see here in a minute is even the conclusion we've had about what "the great tribulation" has to mean. That it's not as valid of an idea as you might think. But I'm getting a little ahead of myself here.

But now let's just use a little common sense. We've already seen here that the description of the Great Multitude, it's very similar to the description of the 144,000, particularly the Revelation 14 description of them. But the Revelation 7 description of the 144,000, when it gets into the Great Multitude, it kind of contrasts the groups with each other showing that there's differences here.

Now, think about this. Who are the Firstfruits? The Firstfruits, as most everyone agrees, myself included, well, that's everyone who is called to salvation from the story in Genesis of Adam and Eve in the garden. From that point all the way up to the return of Christ. Everybody who was offered the chance of salvation and who's successfully endured to the end and makes it into the resurrection to eternal life. That's who's being described as the 144,000 and the Firstfruits. But then we read verse 14 here and we go, "Well, this group came out of "the great tribulation". Well, that must mean that they were

offered salvation during that time of distress right before Christ returned and they're going to receive salvation then."

Doesn't that make them part of the Firstfruits?

Doesn't that mean they have to be included in the Firstfruits?

Because that's the definition of who the Firstfruits are. Don't they have to be included in the definition of the Firstfruits? And if that's the case, how does it make sense to contrast them with the Firstfruits? How does that make sense? What are we supposed to do with that one?

Let's keep in mind the only reason that we assume that this group is called right before the return of Christ is because of the phrase, "the great tribulation". Now, let's take a closer look at that. I think you're going to be surprised at some of the stuff we're about to discover. Take a Bible search program and type in the words "the great tribulation". Make sure you include "the" great tribulation and do a search. You're going to find one verse and only one verse in the entire Bible comes up with those three words together. This is not only true in English. This is true in Greek as well. And that's Revelation 7:14.

We throw around the phrase, "the tribulation", "the great tribulation" and in our minds, it means one thing. It can only mean that one thing. And it can never mean anything else. And we think that we have solidified that idea from the Olivet Prophecy. But "the great tribulation", the way we throw the phrase around is only found one time in the Bible and it's not used anywhere else. That one time is here in Revelation 7:14. You won't find that exact phrase anywhere else. Again, this isn't just in English. This is true in Greek as well. Where you actually see the Greek equivalent of the definite article "the" used.

Now, if we look at the words "great tribulation". That's actually used four times in the Bible. I'm including using the Greek words because typically if you look like in the New King James, that's the translation I typically use, the words "great tribulation" together only appear three times. And we're going to look at all of those. But if we consider the Greek words that are put together, that are translated there, there's actually four references. But in that fourth reference, it doesn't say "great tribulation". So, when we read it in English, we don't even consider that in this part of the equation.

What you're about to see here is in all four references, they all have a different context and a different application. In our COG culture, we've decided "great tribulation". That means one thing and only one thing, and it can never mean anything else. That's just not a valid idea. Now, let me share with you the Greek words that we translate into English as "great tribulation". Those appear together in the New Testament four times.

Now, the Greek words, there's two, there's two of them. One is "megas" and that basically just means "great". It's basically equivalent to our English word "great". Now, the word for "tribulation" in Greek is "thlipsus". Now again, we throw around the word "tribulation" as if it can mean one thing and only one thing and can never mean anything

else. Now, this word, thlipsus, is actually used 45 times in the New Testament. And in a variety of contexts. Let me read to you a definition for this Greek word. Now, the definition I'm going to give you comes out of The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. This is Strong's # 2347, and here's the definition that Zodhiates gives for "thlipsus".

"Tribulation, trouble, affliction....Tribulation may be produced by various causes. The famine caused the inhabitants of Egypt and Canaan great tribulation (Acts 7:11). The captured Joseph suffered tribulation in Egypt (Acts 7:10). At least part of the tribulation of the Corinthians was poverty (2 Cor. 8:13). By ministering to Paul's need, the Philippians had fellowship with his tribulation (Phil. 4:14). The lot of the fatherless and widows is tribulation (James 1:27). Such tribulation may be relieved (1 Tim. 5:10...). Sometimes tribulation is the punishment of sin. To those who troubled the Thessalonian Christians, God would recompense tribulation (2 Thess. 1:6). There shall be "tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2:9). God will cast the woman, Jezebel, out of the church of Thyatira and those who "commit adultery with her into great tribulation" (Rev. 2:22)."

So, what I want you to see is the word tribulation, or "thlipsus" in Greek, can refer to trouble, affliction, distress, you know, difficulty people are facing. It can mean a lot of things, and not just events in the end time as we typically throw the phrase around. Now, we oftentimes think of the tribulation, the heavenly signs, and the Day of the LORD in a timeline. Now that concept does come out of two scriptures in the Bible, and we're going to look at them today. But take note of the fact that when it mentions these in a timeline it doesn't say "great tribulation". It doesn't say "the tribulation". You're going to see it says the "tribulation of those days", or it refers to "that tribulation". That is what it refers to when it actually puts that timeline together. There's only one verse in the Bible that refers to "great tribulation", "megas thlipsus" in Greek, in an end time timeframe but it's talking about the Day of the LORD. Turnover to Matthew 24:21.

Matt 24:21 *"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22) And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened."* (NKJV)

Now, we're obviously talking about an end time timeframe. If you look this up in an interlinear, you'll see here where it says "great tribulation", that's "megas thlipsus" in Greek. This is one of the four references that I mentioned. But notice here, we oftentimes think of tribulation, heavenly signs, Day of the LORD in a timeline. And we're about to see later in this chapter the word "tribulation" is used with a timeline like that. But notice when it's referring to "great tribulation", it was very specific about the meaning of what it was referring to. It's a time more severe than anything that's happened before and anything that'll ever happen later. And if it wasn't shortened, nobody would live through it. You're talking about the Day of the LORD. That's what it's obviously talking about. And that would obviously be a time of "great tribulation". You know, that would be

great distress. It's horrific destruction that's hard to just even wrap our minds around. But, notice again, we think of "the great tribulation". "Well, that's what happens prior to the heavenly signs".

The Bible never actually says that!

Fact, check me on this! Look it up! It's not there! You will see again the word "tribulation" and it will be in that timeline. Let's keep in mind, "tribulation" can be used broader than we typically use it. Now jump down to verse 29. And you'll see here where we get our timeline where we put tribulation, heavenly signs, and then Day of the LORD in a timeline because that is a valid idea.

Matt 24:29 *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days..."* (NKJV)

It doesn't say "the great tribulation". It says, "the tribulation of those days". In other words, it is a time of distress. And it's a specific time of distress it's referring to. But this one, after that, it says,

"...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken." (NKJV)

Now, we won't take the time to turn to the Book of Revelation, but you'll see there that it's obviously the heavenly signs being referred to here that revelation directly tells us precede the Day of the LORD. Now, this is obviously where we get our concept of tribulation, heavenly signs, and then Day of the LORD in a timeline. Again, it is a valid concept because we'll see it gets mentioned twice in the Bible. It's here in Matthew. It's also in the Book of Mark that we're going to look at here in just a moment.

But just take notice of the fact that it doesn't say "great tribulation". It doesn't say "the great tribulation". It just uses the word "tribulation" and puts it in that timeline. And where it used the word "great tribulation". Again, the only reference in the Bible that uses the words "great tribulation" in an end time context was clearly referring to the Day of the LORD. That's what it actually said, because it made it very obvious. It's a time worse than anything before and anything that would occur afterwards. And no one would live if it wasn't shortened. You're talking about the Day of the LORD. There's no other possible explanation. So, just look at the parallel account here over in Mark. Turn over to Mark 13 and we'll start reading in verse 19.

Mark 13:19 *"For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. 20) And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days."* (NKJV)

Now, obviously, this is a parallel account to what we just read in Matthew 24:21-22. It's obviously mentioning the same thing because it is very clearly indicating the Day of the LORD. Now here, it just describes it as "tribulation". And, again, it's the same Greek

word of “thlipsus”. It doesn't say “great tribulation”. But again, we're obviously referring to the Day of the LORD here. But now jump down to verse 24.

Mark 13:24 *“But in those days, after that tribulation,...”* (NKJV)

We refer to the “tribulation of those days”. And now we refer to “that tribulation”. It is a specific one.

“...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25) the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” (NKJV)

So, obviously, again, a reference to the heavenly signs, which we know precede the Day of the LORD. So, this verse and what we've read previously in Matthew 24 is where we get our concept of tribulation, heavenly signs, and then Day of the LORD as a timeline. That is a valid concept. However, what we have done is we've taken the phrase “great tribulation”, or “the great tribulation”, and we've attached it to those references. And we've decided that that's what it means. It always means that, and it can never mean anything else. And it's just not a valid idea. I mean, yes, there is a time of distress referred to there. I'm not going to get into all the details of prophecy here, but let's just notice the terminology and the language.

I mentioned previously that there are four times in the Bible, in English there's three times where the words “great tribulation” appear. If we look at it from a Greek perspective, there's four times in the New Testament where “megas thlipsus”, you know, the Greek for “great tribulation” is used. And one of the references as I mentioned, because it doesn't say “great tribulation” in English, it often just escapes us that that's there. But now let's look at the other two references. What you're going to notice here is in all four references, these all refer to something different. So, we can't stop and say, “Well, it says “great tribulation”. So, that must mean the period right before the return of Christ, and it can't mean anything else.” Again, if we lock on to that, we've made a false assumption and we've locked out any other possibility to consider.

Turn over to Revelation 2. We'll notice the other reference here, or one of the other references. Revelation 2 and we'll start reading in verse 18. Now, again, we're back in the letters to the seven churches. And, as I mentioned, there's several ways to look at this. One is churches that were on a physical route in Asian minor at the time that John wrote this. The other is church eras throughout time. But take note of the fact that this is the Thyatira era that we're talking about here. This is prior to Sardis. We typically attach Laodicea to the very end time. Well, this is prior to Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, but we're going to see a reference here to “great tribulation”. And again, if we just put it in its time context, we can see it's referring to a time of great trouble. But it's not talking about what happens just right before the return of Christ. Now, start reading here in verse 18.

Rev 2:18 *““And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19)*

"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20) Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21) And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. 22) Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. 23) I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works." (NKJV)

He's referring to a time of "great tribulation" that will come upon them if they don't repent. But again, let's just place this in the context of history where it belongs. He's not referring to the end time that we oftentimes think of when we throw around the term "great tribulation". You know, it's a time of "great distress", a time of "great trouble" for the people he is referring to, but it's not, again, how we typically pigeonhole that particular phrase and say, "It must mean this, and it can only mean this". Now, let's look at the fourth reference, and this is the one that's typically missed, because again, the English doesn't have "tribulation", but the Greek is the same. Let's turn over to Acts 7. It's Acts 7 in verse 9.

Acts 7:9 *"And the patriarchs, becoming envious, sold Joseph into Egypt. But God was with him 10) and delivered him out of all his troubles, and gave him favor and wisdom in the presence of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11) Now a famine and great trouble came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan, and our fathers found no sustenance." 12) But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first.* (NKJV)

Now, if you look at the Greek there, it's the same "thlipsus". You could just as easily translate this as "great tribulation". You know, you could easily read this as "Now a famine and great tribulation came over all the land of Egypt and Canaan and all the fathers found no sustenance. But, when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first". So, see, it's referring to "great tribulation", but it obviously has nothing to do with the end time. This is back in the Old Testament in the book of Genesis.

So, see, we can't just look at this and go, "Okay, well you have the words "great tribulation". Well, that means one thing and only one thing, and it can't mean anything else". See, if we assume that in Revelation 7:14, first of all, let's notice that's the only time in the entire Bible that the words "the great tribulation" ever appear. Not only in English, but in Greek as well. So, we don't have other references to validate that that has to be referring to the end time. But again, as I pointed out earlier, we have a major logical problem to solve if we go down that road. Because if we insist that, well, these people that are described in this group, they had to be called before the return of Christ,

and they accepted Christ's sacrifice and made it into the Kingdom prior to the return of Christ.

Doesn't that by definition make them part of the Firstfruits?

Now, what sense would it make now to contrast them with the Firstfruits? See, it doesn't logically add up. The only reason we got down that road is we didn't look more carefully at this phrase "the great tribulation". We just assumed that it meant what we assumed it meant, and then we closed our minds to looking at any other possibility and not realizing the obvious contradictions.

Well, as I mentioned before, the Greek word there that's translated as "tribulation" -- "thlipsus" -- is used 45 times in the New Testament. Now, we're obviously not going to look at every other reference of all those 45 times. We don't have time for that. But I want you to notice a couple of other references of how that particular word is used and the context it's used in, because this gives us some insight as to what "the great tribulation" might be referring to here. And it makes more sense when we add this definition in and then consider the contrast of the Great Multitude with the 144,000. Then it starts to make more sense. Turn over to Acts 14 in verse 21.

Acts 14:21 *"And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22) strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."'" (NKJV)*

See, "thlipsus" can also refer to the tribulations, you know, the hard trials, the persecution, the suffering that we have to successfully endure to make it into the Kingdom of God. That's another common way that this word is used throughout the New Testament. Now turn over to 2 Thessalonians. We'll see another reference where it's used exactly like this. 2 Thessalonians 1 in verse 3.

2 Thess 1:3 *"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4) so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5) which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer;" (NKJV)*

See, the word "tribulation" is there in verse 4. That's "thlipsus". This is the harsh trials, the persecution, the hard times we have to go through. It's a requirement for us to build God's character and to make it into His Kingdom. There's a paper on my website and even a sermon I did called "Framing the Picture of Prophecy" that covers that subject in detail. That's a requirement for everyone. That's not just for the Firstfruits. The New Testament has numerous statements that are all inclusive and dogmatic that everyone

has to face that to make it into the Kingdom of God. Everyone has to successfully endure through that tribulation, through those trials, those hard times.

Now, think about this. If you have the rest of mankind called to salvation where everyone is now being given their opportunity, and this is during the Eighth Day period. This is what Christ said in John 7. This is the time everyone can come to Him to receive salvation. This is also as Revelation 20 tells us. After the millennium, what happens? Satan is released. So, now they have to overcome Satan because he's the persecutor that creates all the harsh trials that everyone has to overcome.

Well, what would you call a timeframe where all of mankind is being offered their chance at salvation, but they're all required to go through tribulation, thlipsus, you know, hard trials as a part of their qualification for the Kingdom of God. You might even refer to that as "the great tribulation", you know, "the great trial". See what the Great Multitude is. It's the rest of mankind. If we just take the description there in Revelation 7, the Firstfruits, they're numbered. Which is a symbolic identity, not a head headcount. They are symbolically one nation. Well, this is every other nation. This is the rest of mankind. That's the simple picture.

That's why they're both described as being in heaven before the throne of God and receiving salvation. See, that's why there's two groups described there. One is the spring harvest. The other is the fall harvest. Because there's two resurrections to eternal life that are described in the Bible. Turn over to Daniel 12:1.

Dan 12:1 *"At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book."* (NKJV)

And notice we just read an obvious reference to the Day of the LORD and an obvious reference to the Book of Life. Now notice verse 2.

"2) And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life,..." (NKJV)

Some to the resurrection of eternal life. That's the Firstfruits. Obviously, we have a Day of the LORD timeframe, and they're resurrected to eternal life

"...Some to shame and everlasting contempt." (NKJV)

Well, that's all those who were offered the chance to be Firstfruits, to receive salvation, but they rejected it. They rebelled. They were thrown in the lake of fire. That's how an agricultural harvest takes place. You deal with both at the same time.

Well, see, there's another resurrection to eternal life after this one where the rest of mankind has their chance to receive the resurrection to eternal life and that's in Matthew

25. This is basically describing the same group -- the Great Multitude -- that John is describing in Revelation 7. Turn over to Matthew 25. We will pick up in verse 31.

Matt 25:31 *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32) All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." (NKJV)*

Notice how did Revelation 7 describe the Great Multitude? All the nations of every nation, tribe, tongue, etc. What is this? All the nations. It's the rest of mankind that's being judged.

"33) And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34) Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35) for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36) I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' 37) 'Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38) When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39) Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40) And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' 41) 'Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: 42) for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; 43) I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' 44) 'Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' 45) Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' 46) And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'" (NKJV)

Notice here again we have another group receiving the resurrection to eternal life. And who is it described as? All the nations. How did Revelation 7 describe the Great Multitude? All the nations. It's the same group. See, the two groups that are described in Revelation standing before the throne of God having received eternal life are just the two harvests that the Bible describes. The 144,000 -- again, not a head count, it's a symbolic identity. That's the Firstfruits. All those called prior to the return of Christ. The Great Multitude -- that's the rest of mankind that later receive salvation in the resurrection to eternal life.