

Rev. 7:1-17 “144,000”

For the Children: When I was a boy I had a very large collection of marbles – for playing “marbles” at school. You could add to your collection by buying marbles, or winning them off other kids. A stranger might have looked at my collection and thought there were too many to count. But I knew them all! I could tell almost instantly if one went missing. Similarly, God knows each of His children. There are too many for us to count, but He knows when each one is in danger. He guards us so closely, that not a single one can be lost or destroyed.

Questions: What sort of dangers do God’s children face? How does the Lord protect us? Why does the Lord allow His children to suffer?

Introduction:

First Point: The 144,000 Sealed Bond-Servants

- 1) The Four Winds: The destructive “winds” are like the “4 Horsemen” – agents of God’s judgement sent out to all the earth after Christ’s victory. See Zech. 6:5, Is. 19:1, 66:15; Mt. 24:30
- 2) Temporarily Restrained: The angels hold back the winds until God’s bond-servants are all “sealed.” This seal implies God’s ownership and protection of His “slaves.” See Ezk. 9:4. It is similar to being sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22, Eph. 1:13, 4:30). It is a mark of covenant-membership, that sets us apart from those with the mark of the Beast, that gives power to witness to Christ and to enter God’s heavenly City. It is the mark of Christ’s Name upon us
- 3) The 144,000 Sons of Israel: Symbolically there are “144,000” of these sealed bond-servants = 12 from the OT (the 12 tribes) X 12 from the NT (under 12 apostles) X 1,000 (a very large number). For the whole church is the true Israel, the “12 tribes dispersed abroad” (Jam. 1:1). That is how the number is used in Rev. 21, like the 24 elders in 4:4. It would be very strange if God were only to protect the remnant of physical Israel, or only the last generation of believers. This is about the protection of the whole church from the judgements beginning after Christ’s victory
- 4) A People Numbered: As in the Book of Numbers, the 144,000 implies that God knows each individual in His “army” of witnesses. He has assigned a place and task for each one, and can protect each one. This army will emerge victorious (vss. 9ff) because of Christ’s victory

Second Point: The Uncountable Multitude

- 1) The Crowd Defined: In a new vision (“after these things...”), John sees the same body of the elect described this time as an uncountable multitude drawn from every nation. This fulfills the covenant promise of Gen. 15:5, 17:4, 32:12 etc. They are seen standing before the throne in white, waving palm branches – symbols of purity and victory, also due to Christ’s victory and the cleansing His blood accomplishes. This also fulfills the OT Feast of Tabernacles, which dealt with Israel’s deliverance through the Exodus. See Lev. 23:40f. Those who are redeemed are made able to serve like priests in God’s Presence. This applies to all believers in principle, in this life; and to the next life
- 2) The Great Tribulation: Many see the Great Tribulation (also in Dan. 12:1) as a terrible, future event, just before the End. However, the background in the OT covenant promises indicates that the whole church is in view here. The 4 Horsemen/winds indicate that the context is God’s judgements on all the earth, starting after Christ’s victory. The NT shows that Tribulation has been present since then (Rev. 1:9, 2:9-10, 22; Mt. 24:21; Jn. 16:33; Rom. 5:3 etc. V. 14 therefore uses the present tense, that these “are coming out” of Tribulation. A massive, uncountable number of saints have continually been drawn out of Tribulation since Christ’s victory
- 3) What Awaits: Once the elect are all rescued from tribulation, they will enter a new creation where there is no more tribulation – no more hunger or thirst, tears or death. See Is. 48, 65 for background to this language. This outcome is guaranteed for the elect, because God will spread His “tabernacle” (tent) over His people, ensuring our ultimate protection

Conclusion:

