

The Revelation 7

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 09 June 2015 14:37

““...out of tribulation...””

Many, including the unbelieving Jehovah's Witnesses cult, have made this text, as with many others in this Book, say whatever they wish it to say. In particular, JW's make the number of 144,000 in verse four refer only to their own kind. This is an absurdity when we read this text as it ought to be read, as scripture itself allows. Indeed, the number itself is not an exact number but is representative of an uncertain number. Though this Book is heavy with symbolism, it does not give us freedom to make it say whatever our imaginations dictate!

Verses 1-3

1.

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

2.

And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea,

3.

Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.”

After 'these things' – the vision of the last days of this earth – John is given further revelation, this time concerning the final state of Israel and those who suffered troubles as a result of their faith. Four angels are shown standing on each 'corner' of the earth. Obviously, these angels represent God's total power over the earth He had made. The angels cover the globe with God's mighty power and authority. The angels held the four winds. That is, they withheld the awesome power of nature, as determined and controlled by God, so that they would not harm the people of the earth.

We must always remember that even when we see and hear of great natural tragedies, that the

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elements that caused them are under the direct control of God. I hear Christians talk about this or that natural tragedy or spectacular phenomenon, as though they were outside God's command. This is not true, for if only one seemingly insignificant event was outside His command, then He would not be the sustainer of this earth or the true source of everything. If a tiny ant was born without His knowledge, then His knowledge could be held in question.

It is likely that we do not wish to think of God bringing a natural disaster upon people, because it clashes with our meagre notion of God being all-loving and nothing else! For His own purposes, He will unleash a hurricane, or a flood, or a volcanic eruption, though it might kill many thousands. Sometimes these will show us His power and might, His judgement upon unbelieving peoples, His anger, or His reminder to worship Him. It is useless to suggest that this is 'not the God I believe in', when this is the God we have in scripture!

Yes, He loves with a love that is boundless and beyond anything we could manage ourselves. But, equally, He is a God of wrath and anger, Who can judge a people swiftly and decisively, and once His will is set, it cannot be altered, not even by a later repentance, if His will has already been declared. (If God says He will not do this or that *if* we repent, then repentance will have effect. But, if God declares judgment and offers no such possibility, then repentance will not stop the judgment).

Readers might say we can predict the weather and many other natural forces. This is broadly true, but it is true only because God gave us the ability to do so, and because it is He Who decided nature would act fairly predictably, so that we could manage earthly affairs. Thus, we have seasons, etc. However, we ought to note that even though we have this ability, given by God, we do not have total control or ability to predict truly accurately, or 100% of the time. God can and does override natural cycles and predictability when He so wishes. This is an important realisation: we either believe in Almighty God or in a god of our own making, with humanly-devised boundaries to what He can, and cannot do.

It seems the four angels were ready at God's bidding to unleash all manner of 'natural' disaster upon the earth, which explains the words of the angel that came from the east, or from the direction of the light/sun. Some think this angel was Christ, but there is no real evidence for this assumption. At any rate, the angel had the authority of God (the seal) to speak. Note that it was the seal of the 'living God', meaning it was not merely a 'rubber-stamped', historical authority, but was the actual, present, personal and in-force command, of God. Our relationship with God is dynamic. (*The word "seal", sphragis, in this text is the same as the word 'seal' used to refer to the seals binding the book of life. In this text, it means that whatever God says is confirmed or authenticated by His own word*).

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The angel from the east called loudly to the four angels who were holding back the elements, and who had authority to 'hurt' the earth by God's command. The majority of meanings for 'hurt' involve sin, but as we are referring to God's appointed angels in heaven, we must take the minor meanings, which simply are: to bring hurt or damage.

The angel advised that the four angels of the elements must hold back until the servants of God were 'sealed... in their foreheads'. That is, the servants of God had to be marked out as being of God; the final onslaught against the unsaved will not take place until all who are elect are saved. A seal can also denote ownership, but in this case it means to show others who the servants belonged to. Evidently, as the four angels were about to unleash the elements upon the earth, it was necessary to put the mark of God upon His chosen people so that they would escape danger (just as blood was painted on the door-posts before the Hebrews escaped Egypt, to protect them from the angel of death sent by God).

Why the foreheads? It was traditional at that time and for many years previously, for owners of slaves to brand their owner's mark on the forehead of their slaves, making the mark permanent, distinctive, and unable to be covered-up. Thus, God's mark is put clearly upon His own. The idea that this will, some time in the future, be an actual mark, is without foundation. For example, the 'mark' we already have is in our hearts, this being easily recognised by God. We ought not make more of these symbols than is given in the Book. It is always possible that Christians will be physically identified, as were Jews during the holocaust, but such a meaning is not in this text.

Verses 4-8

1.

"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.

2.

Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.

3.

Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve

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thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.

4.

Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

5.

Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.”

Here we come to that number of 144,000 – an almost ‘magical’ number in the eyes of so many! We can dismiss the JW idea concerning this number, because it is absurd. Does it refer to the actual number of Jews to be saved? No, it does not. Such a number must have been easily achieved in the first century after Christ. Look at the Day of Pentecost alone, when several thousands were saved in just one day! And to suggest that a rounded figure of 12,000 would be saved in every one of the 12 tribes is rather incredible. Nor can it refer to the total number of Jews to be saved throughout time, because it would not square with the facts.

For example, men of God were saved by their faith, as Paul correctly says in his letters, though they were not saved through the preaching of Christ after Christ’s arrival on this earth. At times in the history of God’s chosen nation, the Hebrews did some rather silly things that brought God’s wrath upon them in swift judgement. But, equally, they were suddenly brought to repentance and true worship, as a nation. No doubt many in these times died in their faith and were accepted in God, just as Moses and others were saved by faith. The numbers of these alone must be well into the millions.

It is generally agreed that the figure is simply an expression of a very great number that cannot be determined. The rationale behind this claim is that 144,000 is the summation of 12 times 12, the number 12 being used by God many times for perfection and so on.

Also, without doubt, the number speaks only of the people of the Hebrew tribes mentioned by the angel, so they cannot apply to JW’s and other non-Jews. Also note, as Matthew Poole does,

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that certain tribes are not included in this count. 'Joseph' includes, for example, the tribe of Ephraim, whilst the tribe of Dan is left out, because of its grave idolatry. Overall, then, the list given and the numbers quoted should be taken to mean a countless number of Jews will be saved. These can be included in the words of Paul, who says that one day the people of God, the Jews, will again be favoured by God with their salvation (in Christ, and not by Jewish rites, etc) in large numbers. It is also thought by some that this number of 144,000 only refers to Jews saved from the final assault on Jerusalem. Frankly, no man can know what truly refers to, though we have its general meaning.

Verses 9-12

1.

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

2.

And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

3.

And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

4.

Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

John did not see the Jews accepted by God, he only heard the number given by the angel from the east. Next, he saw a 'great multitude' from non-Jewish nations (all nations, kindreds and tongues). No number was given because it was so vast. We should know that though the numbers who are saved throughout history are only a 'remnant' compared with the whole number of humanity that was, is, and will be, born, that number, over time, constitutes a huge numerical figure.

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This vast and countless number all stood before the throne of God and before Christ. They were the saved from every time and place, as their white garments signify. They carried palms in their hands, this signifying their honouring and adoration of the Christ and God the Father. These were the top leaves of the date palm, emerald green in colour and measuring up to 20 feet in length, and they were often used to welcome royal or high-status visitors to cities and courts, being waved above their heads.

The masses cried out "Salvation to our God... and unto the Lamb". They were, then, attributing salvation to God. The entire population of God's angels stood around this vast crowd, including the elders and the four beasts, and they bowed their faces to the ground in homage, worshipping God... "Amen: Blessing and glory...", etc. They began their homily and ended it, with 'Amen'. The first Amen means 'what I am about to say is the full truth', or 'surely'. The final Amen means 'so be it' or 'let it be fulfilled'. Today, we say Amen after a public prayer to show that we are as one with the words spoken (so we ought to beware of what we lend our amen to).

Verses 13-17

1.

"And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

2.

And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

3.

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

4.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

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5.

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Then, one of the elders asked John if he knew who constituted this vast crowd. He again replied, as he had done before, ‘You know’. The elder replied that the crowd consisted of all who had known tribulation. Not only had they known trouble, but they had successfully come through it with their faith intact and, no doubt, strengthened.

Too many Christians today insist they know what ‘tribulation’ is, when they know nothing of the sort, and especially because they avoid it studiously! The ‘tribulation’ spoken of in this text refers to affliction, persecution and immense burdens, through oppression, hatred, and cruelty, bringing distress and putting them under continual pressure.

Few know this kind of trouble, under which men may either buckle and give in, or rise up and be counted (in my own life I have done both). This vast crowd evidently had known the worse, for their garments had originally been soaked in the stains of their own blood. But, they now washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. That is, they were saved on the earth, knew immeasurable suffering because of their faith, but had come through it all with God’s blessing, by way of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Because of their trials and adherence to their faith, they were ‘Therefore... before the throne of God’. They were to serve God night and day in His temple. Of course, there is no night and day in heaven as we know it, so it means ‘continually’. And, to show His approval of them, God will be amongst them eternally.

Having known suffering on this earth, including terror, physical abuse and harm, hunger and deprivation, those who had come through the ordeal will never again know hunger, thirst, the ravages of desert heat on bodies torn and unclothed, or any other harm. In heaven there is no harm and no recollection of being harmed. Instead, the Lamb would feed them with holy food and living waters, and they will know only what is good and pure and joyous.

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Though all this is symbolic of reality, it is also true for us in our everyday lives, to a point. We cannot know the fullest of joys or blessings yet, because we are still in a sin-laden world. Even so, we can certainly know a portion of such blessings, for this is promised to us if we are faithful.

It is very sad to witness Christians praying earnestly to God for this or that privilege or blessing, or for relief of this or that problem, when they have not come to grips with the life of holiness and truth. Many Christians live in a world of their own making, and worship a God of their own invention. They are saved by grace, but have succumbed to the lies of Satan when it comes to living out their salvation as God demands. Their beliefs tend to be a mish-mash of often opposing opinions, rather than the whole truth and doctrine of God, as found in His word. They then wonder why God does not speak to them!

God *does* speak to them. He will use other men, preachers and teachers, to show them the truth... which they often reject, preferring their own ideas and beliefs. There is a direct correlation between truth and blessings... the more we are faithful to God's word the more we will be blessed. However, many fight against the truth of God by grounding themselves on opinion and traditions.

Thus far in this Book, God has been giving the 'big picture'. He began with instructions to the seven churches of Asia Minor and then started to show John matters from His own holy perspective. Up to this juncture and beyond, John was being given information primarily for the churches of his own time, with secondary application to all others to come in the future.

Note: Concerning the figure of 144,000, which is held to mean the sum total of all who will be saved... it cannot refer to such a number, because verse 9 says otherwise... AFTER the 144,000 are dealt with, "a great multitude, which no man can number... stood before the throne..." So, the 144,000 cannot refer only to JW's (indeed, they DO NOT refer to them, because they are unsaved and believe heresy; they are not part of heaven's number). Also, the number of people seen by John AFTER he saw the 144,000, were all believers who had come through great troubles. The only 'troubles' known by JW's are from their own elders, who place inordinate burdens of work upon the 'foot-soldiers' who duly tramp the streets, uselessly, to gain supposed spiritual status before God. They are told that being rejected at the door by so many is proof that they are loved by God and that those who reject them are sent by Satan! And so they are boosted by a lie – they do not realise that people reject them simply because they are telling lies or do not portray the truth of God.

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As always, the 'fountains' of living waters are waters that are in abundance and overflowing. God never gives His bounties in meagre amounts, but in abundance. If you have to strain every ounce of truth from scripture or experience, then it is possible that your source is not God, for when we stretch our hands to grasp Him and His benefits, He will give them in unstopped quantity and quality. Not only does He give in abundance, but He LEADS us to the living waters, and when we see what He gives to us, tears of dismay turn to smiles of joy.

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