

A New Look at One of the Great Mysteries -

Who Are The 144,000 of Revelation?

No question has perplexed Christians more concerning Bible prophecy! Are the 144,000 of Revelation the original Jehovah's Witnesses? The Worldwide Church of God? The "Philadelphia" Church? The "Laodicean" Church? Descendants of "physical Israel"? All truly converted people from Christ's time till now? Will they live to meet Christ? Or are they all destined to DIE in the Great Tribulation? Will they have a "lesser reward" than the "Philadelphia" brethren? What is the PLAIN TRUTH?

William F. Dankenbring

Just who are the 144,000 of the book of Revelation, anyway? This question has mystified Biblical students of prophecy probably more than any other. Interpretations and explanations are rife. Everybody, it seems, has their own idea about this mysterious group. No doubt many are very sincere in their ideas -- but everybody can't be right!

For decades the Jehovah's Witnesses have explained the mysterious group as the original members of their own sect -- that is, until their numbers grew beyond the number given. The new members of their church, they then explained, would be members of the "great multitude" who followed the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 7!

Herbert Armstrong in his booklet "Key to the Book of Revelation" explained the 144,000 as men and women who would be converted DURING the "Great Tribulation," 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel, with Joseph getting a double portion (Ephraim and Manasseh getting 12,000 each), and the tribe of Dan -- understood to be the Irish -- being left out of the group because of massive idolatry. The tribe of Dan was the first tribe of Israel to go into idolatry, in history (Judges 18:1-31). Because of this fact, this tribe says to God, prophetically, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen.49:18). Salvation will come to them later than to the other tribes, because they are so steeped, today and historically, in idolatry and the worship of images. The Irish, of course, are among the most staunch worshippers of the Roman Catholic faith, with its countless images of Christ, Mary, and various saints, to which they bow down and give homage, not realizing such worship is forbidden by Almighty God, who says in His Word:

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them nor worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the

children for the sin of their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations, of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exo.20:3-6, NIV).

Later on, however, as he neared the end of his life, Herbert Armstrong wrote to members of the Worldwide Church of God, who he consistently said were the Philadelphia Church era of the book of Revelation, that they constituted the 144,000, and would be taken to a place of safety on this earth during the Great Tribulation. When top ministers pointed out to him how this conflicted with his statements in booklets he had written, and asked whether the booklets should be revised or rewritten to reflect this new "understanding," he demurred, and said to leave the booklets as they were. Apparently he was never fully convinced of his new theory, himself! Furthermore, it was pointed out to him the difficulty of calling the entire Church of God the 144,000, since thousands of members are, according to Church teaching, not physical descendants of Israel at all, but Gentiles by birth and race! Herbert Armstrong never explained this anomaly before he died.

Now a new theory of the 144,000 has arisen. A former minister of the Worldwide Church of God, Gerald Flurry, who left the Church in December 1989 due to severe differences of opinion with current Church leaders, and who feels the current leadership has gone astray from the truth, and entered into apostasy, has come up with a novel approach to this question. Gerald Flurry rightly points out that the Worldwide Church of God, under Joseph Tkach, has departed from the standard of the Worldwide Church of God under Herbert Armstrong. It has become the LAODICEAN CHURCH because, in no small measure due to, this departure from truth and refusal to accept new truth presented to it!

Flurry points out that the Laodicean church was prophesied to be "rich and increased with goods" (Rev.3:16). The Greek literally means, in the original, "have become enriched," "I am rich and have gotten goods." Thayer's Greek English Lexicon defines the expression as meaning, "to be rich, to have abundance . . . outward possessions." Flurry shows how this can certainly apply to the Worldwide Church of God with its \$200,000,000 annual income, real estate, and because of its arrogant, proud attitude. All this is well and good. He shows that unless they repent, they will be cast into the Great Tribulation!

But then Flurry says, the promise in Revelation 3:21, "To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne," which comes after the passage about the Laodicean Church, does

NOT refer to the Laodiceans at all -- that this promise is not meant for them -- but to the Philadelphian Church!

In fact says Flurry, the Laodiceans are all who do not repent, and who go into the Great Tribulation. They will all be martyred and die in the Tribulation. These, he says, will number 144,000, and will constitute the 144,000 of Revelation. They are identified, by him, as all the DEAD LAODICEANS who are martyred in the Great Tribulation!

According to his new theory, "all the Laodiceans who enter God's Kingdom must DIE for God. . . . The Laodiceans must *prove themselves by dying for God*. That is when they are sealed."

This sealing, he says, could only apply to the Laodiceans. He goes on, "These Laodiceans make it into the Kingdom. However, the 144,000 Laodiceans will not be in God's temple, or at Headquarters forever, as the Philadelphians will be (Rev.3:12). The 144,000 Laodiceans won't qualify for assignment to God's Headquarters, but they will enter God's Kingdom and assist Christ for all eternity."

Is Flurry correct? His 'inspiring new truth' is not the same teaching of Herbert Armstrong, which he so often says we must get back to. What is the truth about the 144,000? Where do they fit in Bible prophecy? And what about the Laodiceans? Is there any connection? Let us explore this question, carefully, and see just what the Scriptures really say -- and don't say!

The Philadelphia Church of God

In Revelation 3, we read: "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan [those who apostatize and depart from the truth and faith], who claim to be Jews [spiritually] though they are not, but are LIARS -- I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have KEPT MY COMMAND TO ENDURE patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev.3:7-13).

Notice several things about these verses. Those who belong to the "Philadelphia" Work of God are a relatively "small group," with "little strength." They are NOT rich and powerful and numerous. They really have nothing to be "proud" about. But spiritually they are strong, and close to God, despite their physical lack of goods, relative poverty -- or should I say, they are spiritually strong BECAUSE of their lack of these physical things, which tend to distract one from God and true faith and reliance upon Him!

Notice, too, God blesses them because of their OBEDIENCE to His commandments, and their patient endurance and faithfulness. Obedience is the key here -- obedience to the laws of God! This has nothing directly to do with remembering the teachings of Herbert Armstrong, some of which were in error, or clinging to his mistakes, as if they were inspired of God. Not at all!

Herbert admitted some of his mistakes -- but not all of them. Many of his errors, such as keeping Passover and Pentecost on the wrong days, he most likely never understood -- or else, I believe, he would have repented and changed. But on some things, he was simply ignorant -

blinded -- and remained so till the day of his death. Therefore, he did NOT "restore all things," as the Elijah to come is prophesied to do. Herbert Armstrong only restored SOME things -- the truth about the Sabbath, that the holy days should be observed, the truth about hell fire, the error of the immortality of the soul, the supreme purpose of human life, the truth about law and grace, what it means to be "born again." BUT HE DID NOT "RESTORE ALL THINGS"! He left the job unfinished; undone; incomplete!

For the most part, Herbert Armstrong finished his work in 1967 when his wife died. He himself said that by 1972 he had preached the gospel to the world, and his commission was finished. After that, he began to appear to wander, became confused, and from that time till his death in 1986 he grew old and lonely, made many mistakes, married the wrong woman, became difficult to contact or to approach, was blinded to true loyalty and was a victim of "court flatterers," who deceived and misled him. He visited dignitaries around the world -- but in effect CEASED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL, and instead gave general "talks" on world events, principles of success, and talked about "a strong hand from someplace" which would have to intervene in world events. But he ceased preaching CHRIST, did not mention His name to these world leaders, left he offend them. He did not go to them as a "prophet," rebuking them for their sins, but "bought" his way in to their presence with gifts, and "Steuben crystal."

Does this sound like something the fiery prophet ELIJAH or John the Baptist would have done?

Gerald Flurry says that Herbert Armstrong was the "Elijah" to come. I can only say -- Balderdash! In many ways, no doubt Herbert Armstrong BEGAN to fulfill some of the work of Elijah -- he BEGAN to "restore" much truth. But then he bogged down,

became distracted, disoriented after the death of his wife, and allowed great sins and mismanagement to invidiously creep into the Church of God! Great problems arose, and horrible sins were covered up and swept under the carpet rather than being exposed, rebuked, and excoriated -- as Elijah would have done!

Thus Herbert Armstrong FAILED to live up to his "advance billing" and self-proclaimed announcement that he was in the office of "Elijah." He fell short of the mark! He failed! Elijah was prophesied to turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and children to their fathers -- but Herbert Armstrong failed to reconcile his own family, and died estranged from his own son, whom he would not even see or allow to visit him the last few years of his life! He was most definitely not "Elijah."

However, I do not mean to minimize his importance, as a link in the chain, and as one whom God did use to restore much truth since 1927, when he was converted, and 1934, when he stepped out on faith to begin "the Philadelphia era" of God's Church, though he did not know it at the time. Despite his personal problems and failings, in the beginning, and over the years after he repented of his gross sins, God did use him to restore much foundational truth -- something we should all be very thankful for! If it were not for that truth, and the one God used to restore it, where would we be today? Truly, Herbert Armstrong laid a foundation in many respects -- one which we must build upon. Just because he himself to some degree went astray, like Solomon, in his latest years, and began teaching error in some areas, does not mean we should

"throw the baby out with the bath water"!

God forbid! Let's carefully preserve and nurture the baby, even as we get rid of the dirty bath water!

Why is it that so many people can't get their balance, and always go to extremes? They become offended at some small (or large) thing, and leave the Church, and the truth of God -- just as people became offended at Christ, when He told them they would have to eat His flesh and drink His blood to be saved! Should we be offended at the sins of Herbert Armstrong -- and so jettison the truth? Should we allow any man's mistakes to distract us, personally, from serving God and obeying His commandments? Should we allow another's faithlessness to also render US "faithless"? I have seen this sort of thing happen all too often, over the past 40 years, since becoming a member of God's Church! We should be ashamed!

The truth is, we should neither worship nor condemn Herbert Armstrong, or other leaders whom God has used. They are not worthy of worship, placing on a pedestal, as some do -- they were human and made sometimes very serious mistakes. On the other hand, we should not condemn them and consign them to hell fire -- it is for God to judge their lives. Only He can know their true hearts, how deceived they might have been, or how responsible they were for their own actions and decisions.

In many respects, God did begin the "Philadelphia" era of His Church through Herbert Armstrong and his wife, Loma. But as the 1970's grew on, the Church seemed to flounder, lost its way, and became disoriented. Serious doctrinal problems arose, with the failure of the Church's prophecy that Christ would return by 1975. Many became discouraged. Others began to question and uproot basic doctrines. Hundreds of ministers left the Church over one thing or another. Some of them probably felt justified. But God did not really use them to continue His Work. He remained, even as they left, working with what was left of His Church, no doubt lamenting its condition, and bemoaning its lapse into lethargy, and Laodiceanism. Yet the Word of God had foretold it would happen!

The Laodicean Church Becomes Dominant!

Notice what God foretold would happen after the Philadelphia branch or era of His Work did their early work:

"To the angel [messenger, or leader] of the church in Laodicea write: "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of Gods creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm -- neither hot nor cold -- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

"You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcome and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev.3:14-22).

Here, in all its ugliness, the Laodicean, End-time "Church of God," the final age of Gods Church, before the coming of the Messiah -- the LAST and SEVENTH of the Church ages or eras -- is described, in all its loathsome, horrid, execrable detail. It is, according to Christ Himself, filthy, disgusting, wretched, miserable, abominable, detestable, and worthy of nothing but to be spit or vomited out. It is like rancid food, which when it reaches the stomach causes the stomach to recoil and cause a spasmodic regurgitation of the unpalatable food.

This End-time Church is full of members who are well off financially, drive new cars, enjoy the social activities at church. They seldom pray or read the Bible, except in Church. They are not in earnest seeking God and studying His Word like the Bereans (Acts 17:11). They do not enjoy Bible study, or prayer. They may pray on the average 5 minutes a day. They are not really in touch with God throughout their day, and close to Him. They have become lovers of the world, and its society, its luxuries, and pastimes, its pleasures and activities. Their minds are largely on the around, the physical, the sensual, the pleasurable. They are not really fasting and praying and seeking truth and new knowledge in the Word of God. They are not WATCHING world events rapidly fulfilling Bible prophecies. They are turned off to "prophecy," and despise those who do prophesy, treating prophecy with 'contempt' because of previous errors or misunderstandings (I Thess.5:20). They are not seriously "proving all things," and continually checking up on doctrine and new truth, searching out the plain truth of God (see I Thess.5:21).

The Laodicean age of God's Church is now full-blown and upon us! Indeed, when Herbert Armstrong "passed the baton" to Joseph Tkach, the pitifully weak remnant of the Philadelphia Church age ended, and the LAODICEAN AGE BEGAN -- with a VENGEANCE! Herbert Armstrong, weak and frail, and largely unaware of what was happening around him, died in 1986. Six months before his death, he wrote:

"A final personal word. In a few days I will be 93 years of age. *For some years now*, there have been some, like vultures, *waiting for me to die*. They would like to come back and take over the leadership of the Church in my stead. I have been deeply concerned about this, but in no sense worried. This is the Church of God, not of any man. Jesus Christ is the living Head of this Church. I am not" (Worldwide News, June 24, 1985).

When he died, the baton of Church leadership was passed on to Joseph W. Tkach, or "Chicago Joe." Since that time, enormous changes have taken place in Church doctrine. The healing doctrine has been scuttled, with all sorts of medical treatments and any kind of surgery now permissible to brethren, if they want it or think they need it. The healing power of God is relegated to limbo, except as an "afterthought"! Marriage and divorce has been watered down -- divorce is now permitted on almost ANY grounds, including mere 'we don't get along.'

Remarriage is permitted within the Church, even though one divorces a mate who also remains in the Church, even though both of them had been married within the Church!

Prophecy, of course, has been toned down, written off as of no real worth, as merely a "curiosity item." No stress is placed on the SOON coming of Christ the Messiah -- but rather stress is placed on looking at your own self-interest, your own personal "spiritual temperature." Herbert Armstrong used to say that if you only think of your own spiritual welfare, and growth, you become self-centered, and shrivel up and die, spiritually. He had a larger, broader view, and said that you only grow spiritually as you get your mind OFF "self" and onto doing God's Work, and begin to think about OTHERS! He was right; "Chicago Joe" was dead wrong!

Herbert Armstrong was dead set against College Accreditation by this world's agencies. He wrote in a letter, June 24, 1985:

"The liberals at Pasadena wanted accreditation. They did not want to be accredited as a Bible college, but as a full competing college or university. As such the college would fall under rules of the secular accrediting society, which would more or less determine policy and curricula.

"Finally this effort on the part of the liberals increased the enrollment of the college from the approximate 500 limit that I had set to about 1,400 and going up. IT WAS NO LONGER GOD'S COLLEGE. I had realized the danger of a student body in excess of 500 students, in residence on campus, and had set that as a definite college policy. But during those years when I was absent from Pasadena headquarters most of the time, changes were being gradually made in college policies as well as Church doctrines."

Herbert Armstrong went on to say, "Jesus Christ had founded this college through me as God's college. I had realized the state into which higher education had drifted into materialism. Moral and spiritual values were being overlooked almost entirely in college and universities. I had realized the tremendous responsibility to avoid neglecting this missing dimension in education at the time of founding Ambassador College."

But today, Chicago Joe has rejected the wisdom and policy of Herbert Armstrong, and is strongly pushing for accreditation of the college at Big Sandy, Texas. He has CLOSED DOWN the college campus at Ambassador College, Pasadena, California. Thus he has REJECTED the prime truth about this world's materialistic educational system, and has EMBRACED it!

Herbert Armstrong also condemned the evil of the world's scholarship, and those who sought to inject error into Church teachings, by "DISproving the TRUE DOCTRINES Jesus Christ put into His Church through His apostle, and inject false doctrines into the Church of God." He then declared:

"This very thing happened in the days of the apostle Paul and the original apostles. And Satan DID BLIND AND DECEIVE THOSE WHO, WITH HONEST HEARTS, HAD ACCEPTED GOD'S TRUTH!"

Herbert then asked this pointed question:

"Brethren, do we think we are superior to those of the first, second and third centuries that Satan could not have tried to pervert God's TRUTH today?"
(*Good News*, August 1979, article "How Satan Injects False Doctrines").

Since the death of Herbert Armstrong, the Worldwide Church of God, or "Church of Laodicea," has flip-flopped completely on ALL MAJOR DOCTRINES -- including the nature of God, the Trinity doctrine, the identity of the United States and Britain in prophecy, being "born again," the nature of the "kingdom of God," eating "unclean meats," whether the Sabbath is still in force, whether the annual holy days must be observed, and has even embraced the pagan holidays of Christmas and Easter, at least in theory if not in complete practice!

A Revolution in the Church!

Few have realized it, but a literal REVOLUTION has occurred within the Worldwide Church of God, since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong. A massive REBELLION has occurred!

For years I have been saying this, shouting the warning. Since March 1987, when Prophecy Flash began with its first issue, I have been crying out concerning the apostasy in the Worldwide Church of God, the descent into error, the fact of the Church becoming a CULT, and even wrote an article "35 Places Where the Church Went Astray." I wrote articles "Where Is the LAODICEAN CHURCH?" and "Who Is Shebna in Bible Prophecy?" I wrote articles in Prophecy Flash about "Can An Entire Church of God DIE?" and "History Repeats Itself -- Apostasy of the End-Time Church of God!"

But how many are paying attention? How many are still awake? How many haven't fallen into a deep spiritual slumber and profound sleep? Can YOU still WAKE UP?

Prophesying of our day, today, the apostle Paul declared: "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him ... Don't let anyone DECEIVE you in ANY WAY, for that day will not come until THE REBELLION occurs and the MAN OF LAWLESSNESS is revealed, the man DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything . . ." (II Thess.2:1-4).

As students of the Bible know, the Bible is filled with "types and anti-types." Although this Scripture is warning about the end-time Beast power rising up in Europe, and its mad, crazed leader who will literally sit in a rebuilt Temple of God, in Jerusalem, claiming to be God, it has a DUAL fulfillment! It is also a warning to THOSE IN GOD'S CHURCH! It is a warning that in the end-times a great APOSTASY will occur in God's Church, just as happened during the time of the first century apostles. This apostasy will be a WHOLESALE REBELLION against the precious truths of God! It will be led and orchestrated by a "man of sin," a "son of perdition," WITHIN THE CHURCH -- a modern LEADER of the Worldwide CHURCH of God!

The Phillips Translation has, "That day will not come before there arises a DEFINITE REJECTION of God and the appearance of the LAWLESS MAN. He is the product of all that leads to death, and he sets himself up in opposition to every religion [but his own!]."

Phillips goes on to describe how insidiously this craftily deception occurs within the Church -- this diabolical, Satanic CHANGE and PERVERSION of truth into error! "You will probably also remember how I used to talk about a 'restraining power' which would operate until the time should come for the emergence of this man. EVIL IS ALREADY INSIDIOUSLY AT WORK, but its activities are restricted, UNTIL what I have called the 'restraining power' is removed. When that happens the lawless man will be PLAINLY SEEN [by those who have eyes to see, and haven't been totally blinded!] -- though the truth of the Lord Jesus *spells his DOOM*, and the radiance of the coming of the Lord Jesus will be his *utter destruction*. The lawless man is produced by the spirit of evil [Satan the devil actually engineered his taking over the Church leadership in the last days!] and armed with all the force, wonders and signs that falsehood can devise. To those involved in this dying world he will come with evil's undiluted power to deceive, for they have refused to LOVE THE TRUTH which could have saved them. God sends upon them, therefore, *the full force of evil's delusion*, so that they put their faith in an UTTER FRAUD and meet the inevitable judgment of all who have refused to believe the truth and who have made evil their playfellow" (II Thess.2:5-12).

Type and anti-type -- the principle of DUALITY -- plays a major part in Bible prophecy. Just as there will be a future "Man of Sin," rise up in Europe, to lead the Beast power of Revelation (Rev.13:1-4), so a "man of sin" is prophesied to RISE UP inside the Church of God, in this end-time generation, to lead thousands astray, and straight into the lake of fire, if they don't repent! Those who follow him will go straight into the GREAT TRIBULATION! Those who will not repent, even with the suffering imposed on them from the Great Tribulation, will find their spot in the lake of fire and brimstone -- Gehenna fire! They will accompany this "beast," this "MAN OF SIN," this "SON OF PERDITION," this end-time Judas Iscariot, this horrible traitor, quisling, and Benedict Arnold, to his final fate (Rev.19:20-21).

Terrible things are in store for the Laodicean Church!

Jesus Christ says to them: "I counsel you to buy from me GOLD refined in the FIRE" (Rev.3:18). This refers to the fiery wrath of Satan poured out in the Great Tribulation! The small remnant of the Philadelphia Church of God will be spared the horrors of the Great Tribulation. Christ says to them, "I will also keep you FROM the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth" (Rev.3:10). Somehow, supernaturally, Christ will protect them from or through the Great Tribulation (see Psalm 91 to see how this promise is amplified). But the Laodiceans have no such promise.

Notice how this will come about. We read, "When the dragon [Satan] saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman [God's Church] . . . The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert [a place where she will be protected by God from the Tribulation], where she would be taken care of for a time, times, and half a time [three and one half years -- see verse 6], out of the serpents reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth [even as the armies of Pharaoh were swallowed up in the Red Sea when they pursued after the children of Israel].

"Then the dragon was ENRAGED AT THE WOMAN and went off to make WAR against the REST OF HER OFFSPRING -- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev.12:13-17).

Indeed, the Laodiceans will suffer the full wrath of Satan against them. They will be persecuted, hunted down, harassed, destroyed, martyred, and even tortured, before being put to death, for Jesus' sake! Many of them will die in the Great Tribulation. John records in chapter 6 of the book of Revelation, "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar **the** souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, UNTIL THE NUMBER OF THEIR FELLOW SERVANTS AND BROTHERS WHO WERE TO BE KILLED AS THEY HAD BEEN was completed" (Rev. 6:9-11).

The Laodiceans will go into great tribulation. Many of them will be martyred. They will at this time repent of their sins, and foolishness, and lethargy, and nakedness, and will prove their faith and dependence on Christ by literally being whipped, beaten, scourged, imprisoned, and tortured on the rack, and suffer other fiendish tortures, and by giving their lives for Him. This will be their "final test" Many will die for Christ Some will recant their faith, and give up the truth -and still die. Some may survive, in some dungeon or prison somewhere, but their lives spared due to God's mercy and intervention, as He sees fit.

But for those who do repent, and come to a deeper conversion, and dedication to Christ, He says to them: "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev.3:21). This verse clearly follows the discussion of the Laodicean Church -- and it applies to THEM, to those who come to repentance, during the Great Tribulation -- those whose gold is REFINED IN THE FIRE! In no way does this verse go back to apply to the Philadelphia Church (Rev.3:7-13). This is very clearly the promise which Christ gives to the repentant Laodiceans who "OVERCOME" by their suffering during the Great Tribulation! What could be plainer than that?

Many who remain in the Worldwide Church of God, out of a blasé sense of loyalty, thinking that they should remain and that God will take care of the problems, fall into this category. Many also who are members of the Church of God, International, Global Church of God, and United Church of God, and other groups, also fall into this category. They are presently asleep, slumbering, catching 40 winks, oblivious to the rapid-paced fulfillment of vital Bible prophecies all around them.

The Tribulation is even now in its first stages. We have entered the final SEVEN YEARS of this world's existence, before Christ's return. It began slowly, quietly, inadvertently. Millions did not even know at first that we have slipped into the "lean years," the years of plague, drought, and incredible suffering. It will seem gradual. But the waters will heat up, and there will be no relief, no respite, no intervention. The rains will stop; and they will not return. Business will dry up. Economies will collapse -- not all at once, but increasingly, intensifyingly.

All of us will go through the first 3 1/2 years of this Tribulation, even as ancient Israel suffered the first of the plagues that God sent on Egypt. But after the first 3 1/2 years, God will make a plain and clear distinction between the Philadelphia Spirited brethren, and the Laodicean Church. He will draw the line. He will make a division between them. The Philadelphia brethren will be spared!

God says of them: "Then those who FEARED the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name [the Philadelphia brethren -- their names will be written down in this scroll, listing those who will be spared the Great Tribulation]. 'They will be mine,' says the LORD Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will SPARE THEM, just as in compassion a man spares his son who SERVES him [does his part in God's great Work!]. And you will again see the DISTINCTION between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not" (Malachi 3:16-18).

This division is also prophesied by Ezekiel. Notice! God said, "Now, son of man, take a sharp sword and use it as a barber's razor to shave your head and your beard. Then take a set of scales and divide up the hair. When the days of your siege come to an end, bum a THIRD of the hair with FIRE inside the city. Take a THIRD and strike it with the sword all around the city. And SCATTER a THIRD to the wind. For I will pursue them with drawn sword. But take a FEW STRANDS OF HAIR and tuck them away in the folds of your garment. Again, TAKE A FEW OF THESE and throw them into the FIRE and bum them up. A fire will spread from there to the whole house of Israel" (Ezek.5:1-4).

What is the meaning of this prophecy? Ezekiel is told, "A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword" (verse 12).

But notice! A "few strands of hair" are saved, and protected, in the folds of Ezekiel's garment. This represents the Church of God! But even some of them are to be taken out and thrown into the fire -- the Great Tribulation! Thus the Philadelphians will be spared, and safely tucked away, but the Laodiceans will be thrown into the fiery Tribulation, as their final opportunity to repent, and turn to Christ and be saved spiritually!

Who, Then, Are the 144,000?

Now notice what Almighty God says about the mysterious 144,000. They are not even mentioned until we come to Revelation, chapter 7. Revelation 6 describes the world-shaking events of the Tribulation period, beginning the final seven years of this end-time age -- Daniel's Seventieth Week. These final years begin with the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev.6:1-8). The White Horse symbolized the end-time work of God, the work of "Elijah," going forth in great power as a witness to the world (v.2). The Red Horse symbolizes war. (verses 3-4). The black horse symbolizes famine (verses 5-6). The Pale Horse represents plague and pestilence and natural disasters (verses 7-8). These plagues begin in fall of 1990 and grow in intensity through 1994.

After this beginning, the Great Tribulation erupts in incandescent fury and incredible intensity (Rev.6:9-11), lasting 2 1/2 years -- a short but violent period of unparalleled suffering and woe, never before seen on planet earth, even during the world years of the Black Death, of Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, or Hitler's ovens. The coming "Beast" will make them all seem like pikers by comparison. He will be Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, Hitler, Nero Caesar, and Antiochus Epiphanes, all rolled into one! Millions will die; millions will be taken into captivity, as slave labor. Millions will suffer incredible persecution, suffering, and anguish, from which they will finally cry out to God for deliverance and salvation -- even as the ancient Israelites did who served Pharaoh as slaves in Egypt and built his cities, and pyramids.

God will see their suffering, and hear their prayers. He will begin to intervene in world affairs! "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

"Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?'" (Rev.6:12-17).

These heavenly signs occur AFTER the Great Tribulation, and BEFORE the "day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31; Matt.24:29). Now notice what happens NEXT!

The 144,000 Revealed

John describes the scene after the heavenly signs, following the Great Tribulation:

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four comers of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the SEAL of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a SEAL ON THE FOREHEADS of the servants of our God.' Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

"From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad, 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000" (Rev.7:1-8).

Who are these people? Notice, first of all, they come from ONLY the tribes of Israel! None of them are Gentiles! This fact alone shows us that these people are NOT ANY PARTICULAR

CHURCH, OR BRANCH OF GOD'S END-TIME CHURCH!

Among the Worldwide Church of God are numerous Gentiles -- peoples who are Oriental, Black, Brown, as well as Germans, Italians, Poles, and so forth. If all the Church members were looked at according to their ethnicity, perhaps only HALF of them might be considered descended from "Israel," as the Church understands their identity. Therefore, this group of men and women cannot be the Worldwide Church of God!

Also, this group cannot be the Philadelphia Church of God, per se, nor can it be the Laodicean Church, per se. All these churches contain members who are from various and sundry nationalities and races! None of them are exclusively Israelite! Therefore, no Church group can constitute the 144,000, as it stands!

Notice also! Gerald Flurry says these are the Laodiceans, or Worldwidiers, and that they DIE in the Great Tribulation. That, also, is not the truth. As we go through the story flow of the book of Revelation, we find the Tribulation occurring in chapter 6, then the heavenly signs (Rev.6:12-17), and THEN the "Day of the Lord" is held back UNTIL the 144,000 are "sealed." This proves that they are sealed AFTER the Great Tribulation and heavenly signs! Therefore, they must be ALIVE after that time, and *could not* have died during the Great Tribulation!

What does it mean to be "sealed"? This seal is put on their foreheads -- the part of the mind where we think, determine, choose, make decisions (Rev.7:3). A "seal" is a mark which sets one apart from others. This seal is not the Holy Spirit in this case, because these men and women are already called "THE SERVANTS OF OUR GOD" (Rev.7:3). This means they are converted BEFORE they receive this particular seal. They are already God's servants. Very likely these are people who turn to God, and repent, DURING the Great Tribulation. And, having passed THROUGH the Great Tribulation, and still being alive, by God's mercy, at this time they are "sealed" before the "Day of the Lord" begins, when God will vent His own wrath and fury upon the earth, upon the disobedient and wicked! Therefore, they will be protected from the wrath of God which will be poured out during the final "day" or "year" of His wrath (a "day" often equals a year in being fulfilled (Num.14:34; Ezek.4:6).

These 144,000 are from the 12 tribes of physical Israel! They are NOT THE JEWS! Only ONE TRIBE among them is of the tribe of JUDAH! And ONE tribe is the tribe of LEVI! The other ten tribes are from the remnants of the so-called LOST TEN TRIBES of Israel -- those peoples who migrated into northwestern Europe, the British Isles, Ireland, and North America! If you have not read them, I urge you to read the books *LOST ISRAELITE IDENTITY* and *EPHRAIM*, by the Jewish scholar Yair Davidy, and the book *THE LOST TEN TRIBES . . . FOUND!*, by Steven Collins.

It appears that these people, 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel, will be physical human beings, who will then be the CONVERTED LEADERS of the nations IN THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD! They will constitute the foundational, physical GOVERNMENT LEADERS in the World Tomorrow! They are not the same as the Church of God members, who either go through the tribulation, or who are protected from it. Rather, they constitute those people who turn to God in full repentance DURING the tribulation, so they will be protected

during the Day of the Lord, and then become the leaders of the world in the coming Kingdom of God -- that is, the physical leaders!

What, then, is this particular "seal" that they are sealed with?

It is simply an identifying sign, or sign of protection! We find the same kind of mentioned in Ezekiel. Notice!

"Then I heard him call out in a loud voice, 'Brings the guards [angels] of the city here, each with a weapon in his hand.' And I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with a deadly weapon in his hand. With them was a man clothed in linen who had a WRITING KIT at his side. They came in and stood beside the bronze altar.

"Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. The the Lord called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side and said to him, 'Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and PUT A MARK on the FOREHEADS of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.'

"As I listened, he said to the others, 'Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but DO NOT TOUCH ANYONE WHO HAS THE MARK" (Ezekiel 9:1-6).

These 144,000, therefore, all from different tribes of Israel, will be physical Israelites who turn to the Messiah, during the Great Tribulation. They have repented of their sins during the Great Tribulation. But they are not members of the true Church of God which have the Spirit of God as a begettal, prior to the Great Tribulation. Therefore, they are not present-day members of all the branches of the Church of God extant during the End Time. Their number their number does not include Philadelphians,

repentant Laodiceans, surviving members of the Sardis Church (Church of God Seventh Day -- Rev.3:1-6), survivors among the Thyatira Church (Seventh Day Adventist Church -- Rev.2:18-29), survivors among the Pergamum Church (Rev.2:12-17 -- Seventh Day Baptists), as well as survivors among the Jewish Messianic groups (Rev.2:1-7) -- and others. All these Churches, to one extent or another, keep the Commandments of God, including the Sabbath day, and are converted PRIOR to the Great Tribulation!

These new converts, these 144,000 servants of God, who turn to Him during the Great Tribulation, will be SEALED and MARKED, and therefore PROTECTED from the plagues of God which will be poured out immediately afterward, during the wrath of God which will fall on rebellious mankind in the "Day of the Lord," that great and terrible day mentioned in so many of the Old Testament prophets!

Only the "survivors" of the Great Tribulation need to be "sealed" for protection during the "Day of the Lord." Dead people don't need to be "sealed." Therefore, Flurry's idea that the 144,000 constitute "dead Laodiceans," who are sealed by "death," is pure nonsense-- the dead need no further "sealing." You can only kill a person once. No matter what happens to their

bodies afterwards, whether burned, butchered, or cremated, they are already dead. No matter how many times you shoot a corpse, it cannot die again. Therefore, there is no need for God to "seal" those who have already died.

The 144,000 and the Lamb of God

Another group of 144,000 is also mentioned in Revelation 14. Here John says:

"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and *his Father's name written on their foreheads*. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been *REDEEMED* from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women [a type of false Churches, but also literal, who did not commit sexual sins, adultery, fornication and the like after they repented], for they kept themselves pure. They *follow the Lamb wherever he goes*. They were purchased from among men and offered as *FIRSTFRUITS to God and the Lamb*. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless" (Rev.14:1-5).

Notice that these 144,000 will be with Christ at His coming. They will stand with Him on Mount Zion, at the southeastern tip of Jerusalem. They are called "firstfruits." *Those of us who receive God's Spirit during this present age are the "firstfruits" of God*. As the apostle James wrote, 'He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of FIRSTFRUITS of all he created' (James 1:18). Also, the apostle Paul wrote of true Christians, "but ourselves also, which have the FIRSTFRUITS of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves" (Rom.8:23).

Those of us in God's spiritual Church, from the apostles till now, including the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, are God's "firstfruits." All who have a part in the first resurrection when Christ returns, are "firstfruits." We are compared in the Scriptures to the first or spring harvest, which culminated with "Pentecost." However, the vast majority of mankind will not be saved until AFTER the Messiah returns. They are compared to the "fall harvest" which is always greater in numbers than the smaller spring harvest. This group is not made up of physical Israelites alone, as is the group in Revelation 7. This group is composed of ALL races of men, who have believed and obeyed the gospel of the truth of God, from the time of Adam till the present time! As Paul wrote, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all ONE in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and HEIRS according to the promise" (Gal.2:28-29).

It is fascinating to observe that this group who constitute the "firstfruits" -- that is, those who will be in the first resurrection -- from the time of Adam to now -- number precisely 144,000 men and women! That is, from Adam till now there have been 150 generations of mankind (40 years to a generation *divided* into 6,000 years = 150 generations). Thus when all is said and done, God has been saving roughly 1,000 individuals out of each generation since Adam -- that is all -- who will be in the first resurrection! In some generations there have been far fewer than

that! In the first century, after the Church began, thousands were saved -- and tens of thousands were converted, the apostle James tells us (Acts 21:20). But before the end of that century, most of them had apostatized, and fallen away -- had become deceived by the false ministers of Satan the devil (II Cor.11:1-4, 13-15; Acts 21:28-31; Gal.1:6-9; II Thess.2:7; II Tim.4:3-4, 10-11; II Tim.1:15; II Pet.2:1-4; I John 4:3; II John 7; Jude 4).

How truly blessed it is to be one of the "firstfruits" to God, during this time -- one of the truly called, and "chosen" few! The vast, overwhelming majority of so-called "Christians" have been deceived and seduced and misled by the minions and ministers of Satan the devil, who disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness!

We ought to truly pray that we might be counted worthy to be among this special group who are the "firstfruits" to the Lamb, those who will reign with Him, from Mount Zion!

Notice what reward the "firstfruits" will receive from Christ!"

John writes, in the book of Revelation: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. *They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.* (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the *first* resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the *first* resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6).

How wonderful it is to be called of God now, and to be a potential partaker of this marvelous promise and destiny, with Christ! But remember -- this reward will only be given to those who OVERCOME -- who remain *faithful* to Christ and the Word of God -- who keep His commandments and testimony!

Those who apostatize -- who go astray and depart from the truth of God -- will either one day wake up, come to their senses, and REPENT during Great Tribulation -- or PERISH in the flames of the lake of fire!

Who, Then, Is the "Great Multitude?"

Now notice something else. After the sealing of the 144,000 living servants of God, after the heavenly signs and before the Day of the Lord, among the 12 tribes of Israel, something else happens. John describes the event this way:

"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'

"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in the white robes -- who are they, and where did

they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come OUT of the GREAT TRIBULATION; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 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 spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes'" (Rev.7:1-17).

Who is this mysterious group? Notice that they hold palm branches in their hands. The palm branch was the central feature of the "four species" – composed of one etrog, one palm branch ("lulav"), three myrtle branches, and two willows – seven in all. These were waved before the Lord GOD at the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival symbolizing the Kingdom of God (write for our article, "The Deep Meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles"). This vast number of people, who turn to God in the very end of days, will be gathered together and will worship the Lord, waving their palm branches or lulav bundles, in praise and thanksgiving! These will still be PHYSICAL HUMAN BEINGS, and they will live out the rest of their lives as obedient, worshipful, reverent sons and daughters of God, true believers in the Messiah.

Again, we see from the context that these are servants of God who also came out of the Great Tribulation. But these are people from EVERY NATION who turn to God during the Great Tribulation, repent of their sins, and come to believe that Jesus Christ -- Yeshua -- is the true Messiah! This group is composed of people from ALL NATIONS under the earth -- not just the tribes of Israel! These are "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev.7:9). They number in the thousands of thousands -- a great multitude no man could count (same verse).

What, then, is the difference between this group, and the 144,000? Simply that the first group constitutes physical Israelites who turn to God during the Great Tribulation. They become God's true servants among the end-time generation of the children of Israel. They will be the leaders of physical Israel during the beginning of the Millennium. When they have lived out their full lives, in obedience to God, they will be changed, and transformed, at the moment of their natural death, to be spiritual members of God's Kingdom!

This "great multitude" from "all nations" constitutes the Gentiles who turn to God during the Great Tribulation and who are saved from destruction. They will live on into the Millennial Kingdom of God, like the 144,000 from Israel, and constitute the LEADERS among the Gentile nations. They will be clothed with white robes (Rev.7:9). White indicates righteousness. They are "they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white, in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev.7:14). These repent of their sins and become true believers in the Messiah during the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord. They become TRUE SERVANTS OF GOD -- TRUE CHRISTIANS -- and they will live out their lives under the reign of Christ, and when they die, they will evidently be resurrected to immortal, spiritual life at that time. !

During the Millennium, this vast group of people will serve Christ, as it says: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and *serve Him* night and day in his temple . . . They shall *hunger no more*, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 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" (Rev.7:15-17). Who are these people?

They are similar to the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel, who will serve God and Christ at the beginning of the Millennium, except that they come from all nations. Neither one of these groups should be confused with the 144,000 mentioned in Revelation 14 – those will be the **FIRSTFRUITS OF GOD AND OF THE LAMB!** They will become spirit beings – born Sons of God – at the return of Christ! There will be precisely 144,000 of them, and they will constitute the “bride of Christ” – all true servants of God from the time of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, and the prophets, and all the **TRUE** Christians from the first century down to the present time!

Which group will you be in?

A Time of Testing

Brethren, we are living in the "last days." There can be no question about it! Rampant apostasy is one more proof that these are the "end times" spoken of by Daniel the prophet. The fact that the love of many is growing "cold," is one more shuddering evidence that the End is upon us. It is time to get our spiritual houses in order. It is time to repent, and draw close to God, and to come out of spiritual "Babylon," and to become zealous for God, His Work, His Truth, and your spiritual Calling!

If you are a member of a Church which is departing from the truth, and embracing fables, error, and false doctrine, then you need to get off the fence -- don't be a fence sitter! Get out of such fellowship and error, lest you also become polluted. Be a **WITNESS TO THOSE IN THAT CHURCH!** Rebuke them, reprove them, and stand up to them -- even if they cast you out of the Church! The apostle Paul declared: "For there must be also **HERESIES** among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor.11:19, KJV).

Paul also asserted: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, **BUT RATHER EXPOSE THEM.** For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed in the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible" (Ephesians 5:11-13).

The apostle Jude wrote: "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; **SNATCH OTHERS FROM THE FIRE and SAVE THEM;** to others show mercy, mixed with fear -- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 17-23).

What kind of a witness are you? Will you stand up for truth? Do you love the truth?

