

IDENTIFYING THE GREAT CROWD

As reviewed in STUDY 10 the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses teaches that there are two classes of Christians with two different destinies. The 144,000 are claimed to be the Christian “**holy ones**,” but “the great crowd” of Christians are not “the holy ones.” However, an examination by comparing the details of the relevant passages in the book of Revelation reveals that all the points held in common by the 144,000, “the holy ones” and “the great crowd” point to the conclusion that two parallel pictures have been painted of the same Christians in Revelation 7, although in different circumstances.

THE 144,000

7:1-4:

“After this I saw four angels standing upon the four corners of the earth, holding tight *the four winds of the earth*, that no wind might blow upon the earth or upon the sea or upon any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the sunrising, having a 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, saying: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until after we have *sealed* the slaves of our God in their foreheads.” And I heard the number of those who were sealed, *a hundred and forty-four thousand*, sealed out of **every tribe of the sons of Israel.**”

14:1-5:

“And I saw, and, look! the lamb standing upon the Mount Zion, and with him a *hundred and forty-four thousand* having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound out of heaven as the sound of many waters and as the sound of loud thunder; and the sound that I heard was as of singers who accompany themselves on the harp playing on their harps. And they are singing as if a new song **before (Gk *enopion*) the throne** and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one was able to master that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have been **bought from the earth**. These are the ones that did not defile themselves with women; in fact, they are virgins. These are the ones that **keep following the Lamb** no matter where he goes. These were bought from among mankind as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb, and no falsehood was found in their mouths; they are without blemish.”

THE HOLY ONES

3:5-12:

“He that conquers will thus be arrayed in **white outer garments**; and I will by no means blot out his name from the book of life, but I will make acknowledgment of his name before my Father and before his angels. Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations.’ “And to the angel of the congregation in Philadelphia write: These are the things he says who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens so that no one will shut, and shuts so that no one opens, ‘I know your deeds—look! I have set before you **an opened door** (to throne-room 4:1, 2), which no one can shut—that you have a little power, and you kept my word and did not prove false to my name. Look! I will give those from the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews, and yet they are not but are lying—look! I will make them come and do obeisance before your feet and make them know I have loved you. Because you kept the word about my endurance, I will also keep you from *the hour of test*, which is to come upon the whole inhabited earth, to put a test upon those dwelling on the earth. I am coming quickly. Keep on holding fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ““The one that conquers—I will make him **a pillar in the temple** (Gk *naos*) of my God, and **he will by no means go out [from it]** anymore, and I will write upon him the name of my God

and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from my God, and that new name of mine.”

5:9:

“And they sing a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slaughtered and with your blood you **bought persons for God out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation**, 10 and you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth.”

6:11:

“And a **white robe** was given to each of them; and they were told to rest a little while longer, until the number was filled also of their fellow slaves and their brothers who were about to be killed as they also had been.”

11:1, 2:

“And a reed like a rod was given me as he said: “Get up and **measure the temple [sanctuary]** (Gk *naos*) of God and the altar and **those worshiping in it**. But as for the courtyard that is outside the temple [sanctuary], cast it clear out and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations, and they will trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”

13:7:

“And there was granted it [*The Beast*] to wage **war with the holy ones** and conquer them, and authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

15:2, 3:

“And I saw what seemed to be a glassy sea mingled with fire, and those who *come off victorious from the wild beast* and from its image and from the number of its name **standing by the glassy sea**, having harps of God. 3 And they are singing the song of Moses the slave of God and the song of the Lamb,”

19:7, 8:

“Let us rejoice and be overjoyed, and let us give him the glory, because the marriage of the Lamb has arrived and **his wife** has prepared herself. Yes, it has been granted to her to be **arrayed in bright, clean, fine linen**, for the fine linen stands for the *righteous acts of the holy ones*.”

THE GREAT CROWD

7:9-17:

“After these things I saw, and, look! *a great crowd*, which no man was able to number, **out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing **before (Gk *enopion*) the throne** and before the Lamb, **dressed in white robes**; and there were palm branches in their hands. And they keep on crying with a loud voice, saying: “Salvation [we owe] to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell upon their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength [be] to our God forever and ever. Amen.” And in response one of the elders said to me: “These who are dressed in the white robes, who are they and where did they come from?” So right away I said to him: “My lord, you are the one that knows.” And he said to me: “These are the ones that come out of **the great**

tribulation, and they have **washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**. That is why they are **before (Gk *enopion*) the throne of God**; and **they are rendering him sacred service day and night in his temple** (Gk *naos*); and the One seated on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will hunger no more nor thirst anymore, neither will the sun beat down upon them nor any scorching heat, because **the Lamb**, who is in the midst of the throne, will shepherd them, and **will guide them to fountains of waters of life**. And God will wipe out every tear from their eyes.”

MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

From the above passages it can be deduced that the holy ones [*Christians*] of 144,000 are most likely to be also “the great crowd” as shown in the following summary:

1. The 144,000, are “*sealed against four winds*” of the coming Great Tribulation so that, as the Holy Ones, they are kept “*from the hour of test coming upon the whole world*” when “*the Beast wages war with*” them and, as the Great Crowd of Christians, they are “*coming out of that same Great Tribulation.*”
2. The 144,000 detailed in chapter 7 as the “**tribes of Israel**” must refer to “the Israel of God” i.e. Christians. Yet chapter 14 shows that they are “**bought from mankind,**” that is, just as the Holy Ones are “**ransomed out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation.** This points to the same origin as the great crowd who also are “out of **all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.**”
3. *NOTE: The use of the word tribes may indicate that those from natural Israel are within the great crowd.*
4. The 144,000 “**keep following the Lamb** wherever he goes” just as “**the Lamb...will guide**” the great crowd to “fountains of waters of life” And so making two descriptions likely to be of the same group.
5. Because the “**bright, clean, fine linen**” = *the righteous deeds of the holy ones*” this must be the case for the great crowd who also are dressed in priestly “**robes – made white in the blood of the Lamb**” and who therefore must also display such righteous deeds as holy ones.
6. The 144,000 are “**before the throne**” in the temple as are the Holy Ones who enter through the **open door** to the throne-room (4:1, 2) to be made **pillars “in the temple (naos) and will by no means go out [from it] anymore**” as “*those who worship there in the naos.*” They are also seen as cleansed priests “*standing beside the sea of glass.*” The great crowd “*are also before the throne of God, and are rendering him sacred service day and night in his temple (Gk naos).*” These factors strongly indicate that they must all be of the same group.

A single point would perhaps not be conclusive. However, the balance of the evidence of these 5 strong points leads naturally to the conclusion that the picture of the “great crowd” is of the same body of Christians as the picture of the 144,000, although at different times in the time of the end scenario. There are also other similarities of the 3 categories which add to this conclusion.

THE SANCTUARY AND THE TEMPLE COMPLEX IN HEAVEN

The temple mentioned throughout Revelation is called in Greek the *naos*. In its form on earth this was the building housing the *Holy Place* and the *Most Holy* and was called the **sanctuary**. The Greek word for the whole temple complex (courtyards etc) is *hieron*. This word is not used in the book of Revelation.

The symbol of the “sea of glass” in Revelation is based on the copper sea which the priests of the ancient temple would wash in. It was placed in the inner courtyard – the courtyard of the priests. So the

statement that: “before the **throne** there was a *sea of glass*, like crystal” (4:6) means that “the throne” also must be in the spiritual temple area in heaven.

Rev. 11:19 God’s temple (*naos*) in heaven is opened

“ 15:5 The sanctuary (*naos*) of the tent of witness – in heaven

“ 14:17 The angel comes out of the temple (*naos*) in heaven

The great crowd in heaven described in Revelation 19 are not angels, but are the same as the great crowd described in Revelation 7. However, the “the great crowd” are not at any time literally in the temple where the heavenly throne is? Please see Volume 2, STUDY 4.

“BEFORE THE THRONE”

Whatever destiny “*the great crowd*” have, it will be the same as that of the 144,000. To try to make a distinction of destinies between them, as the Governing Body does, just because the Greek phrase *enopion tou thronou* translated “before the throne” means literally “*in sight of the throne*” (*Revelation –Its Grand Climax at hand!*, p. 123) is patently misleading. The fact is that the 144,000 standing upon the Mount Zion are also “*in sight of the throne*” (Rev. 14:3). Furthermore, the angels, the 24 elders and the four living creatures are also “in sight of the throne” (Rev. 7:11). This demonstrates that the great crowd are positioned in the same place as the 144,000 in the spiritual temple:

❖ “...the great crowd are “**in sight of the throne**”” (*Rev. 7:9*).

This is a unique description used by the apostle John only in Revelation. The throne is also associated with: the 7 lamps, the glassy sea, the golden altar, the 7 spirits, the 4 living creatures, the 24 elders, the angels, and the 144,000. (Please see STUDY 12. THE 144,000 DO NOT GO TO HEAVEN and Volume 2. STUDY 3 which demonstrates that the phrase “before the throne” does not mean that Christians literally go to heaven).

To further justify the Governing Body’s false distinction between the 144,000 and “the great crowd” an article was written in the WT magazine of August 15, 1980 which tried to promote the idea that “the *naos*” could also be the entire temple complex. It was presented thus: “The Greek word *naos* refers often to the inner sanctuary representing heaven itself

- BUT it was the entire temple (*naos*) that had been 46 years in the building.
- It was the entire temple (*naos*) that was destroyed as a judgment from God.
- It was from the courts of the outer temple (*naos*) that Jesus drove the money changers.
- It was in the outer temple (*naos*) that Judas threw back the 30 pieces of silver.
- HENCE it is consistent that the “great crowd” serve God in the earthly court of the spiritual temple.”

However, an examination of all the relevant verses from the Kingdom Interlinear Translation reveals that for:

Point 1

This is probably correct. Evidently it was not just the sanctuary that took 46 years to build as mentioned by the Jews in John 2:20. However, it may be that the Jews or Matthew used the word *naos* rather than *hieron* in response to Jesus’ statement; “Break down this temple (*naos*) and in three days I will raise it up” in reference to his body. Or the Jews may still have focussed on the actual sanctuary building as being part of what took 46 years to complete.

Point 2

All the accounts (Matt 24:1, 2, Mark 13:1-3 , Luke 21:5, 6) concerning the entire temple that Jesus prophesied would be destroyed use the Greek word *hieron* and not the word *naos*. So this 2nd point from the Governing Body is false.

Point 3

All the accounts (Matt 21:12, Mark 11:15, Luke 19:45 and John 2:14, 15) concerning the event when Jesus drove out the money changers show that it was from the *hieron* and not the *naos* that they were driven. So this 3rd Watchtower point is also false.

Point 4

In Matthew 27:5 the New Jerusalem Bible correctly translates *naos* as sanctuary: “And flinging down the silver pieces in the sanctuary he [*Judas*] made off, and went and hanged himself.” Because *Judas* intended to hang himself he may have thought nothing of breaking the Law and entering the courtyard of the priests so that he might throw the money into the sanctuary as the NJB describes. So this 4th Watchtower point is very weak.

The NWT is very inconsistent in its translation of this Greek word *naos*. There are 19 occurrences where *naos* is translated as “sanctuary” e.g. Matt. 23:35, but at certain significant times it is translated simply as “temple” e.g. “...they [*the great crowd*] are rendering him sacred service day and night in **his temple**” (Rev. 7:15). However, in the Kingdom Interlinear Translation the Greek word *naos* for temple is translated consistently as “divine habitation,” and “sanctuary” is used in the NWT in the 19 places other than in 7:15. At this point the Governing Body had applied Revelation 11: 2 to the “great crowd” so that they were viewed as spiritually “in the courtyard outside the temple [sanctuary].” However, this is the courtyard of the Gentiles according to the description, the context and all scholarly commentary. This, then, portrayed the “great crowd” as enemies of true worship.

THE GOVERNING BODY’S MODIFIED VIEW

The February 1, 1998 issue of the WT magazine noted the fact that Solomon’s temple did not have a court of the Gentiles. From this it was reasoned that, in relation to the spiritual temple the great crowd are not in a separate Court of the Gentiles. The modified view is expressed thus:

“The great crowd worships with anointed Christians in the earthly courtyard of Jehovah’s great spiritual temple (Rev. 7:14, 15; 11:2).”

The boldening is mine and emphasizes the fact that by the citing of these two Scriptures the WTBS has firmly linked the *naos* in 7:15 with the courtyard that is outside of the *naos* in 11:2. The reference to the lack of a Court of The Gentiles in Solomon’s temple has no legitimate bearing on the explanation because the court that is outside of the *naos* in 11:2 is to be: “cast out and do not measure it, because it has been given to the nations (Gentiles), and they will trample the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”

So now both these artificially distinguished classes are worshipping in what is evidently the spiritual equivalent of the Court of The Gentiles which God has now rejected. However, this is not the *naos* that the great crowd are shown to be inhabiting according to Revelation 7:15. To fit their own theology the Governing Body has tried to adapt the meanings of terms. The fact is that throughout the book of Revelation the word *naos* consistently refers to the sanctuary containing the Holy Place” and “the Most Holy” It refers to no other temple area. The Governing Body cannot get away from the fact that it is in this sanctuary that the great crowd are shown to be serving God according to Revelation 7:15.

THE TOTAL OF ALL ANOINTED CHRISTIANS
MUST BE MORE THAN 144,000

- ❖ “...for the **children** (*Anointed Christians*) of the desolate woman are **more numerous than** those (*the Israelites*) of her who has the husband.” (Gal. 4:27).

A figure of 144,000 is not more numerous than the millions of Israelites whether according to any census in ancient times or at the time John wrote Revelation or at the time of the end. Therefore the full number of anointed Christians will be vastly more than 144,000. Even in the 1st and 2nd centuries there were already 100's of thousands of *anointed* Christians. In fact, history shows that the figure of 144,000 for anointed Christians was reached within 5 years of the historic Pentecost speech by the Apostle Peter. So if the Jehovah's Witnesses interpretation was correct then all 144,000 positions were clearly filled long before the 19th and 20th centuries. The fact that 144,000 is a fixed number in contrast to "a great crowd which **no man** was able to number" may be because the use of such an organizational structure is simply God's way of saying that it is complete with not a single Christian missing. So He uses 12 squared then multiplied by 1000 - numbers with significant figurative meaning. In Revelation 21:16, 17 the 12,000 furlong measurement of the New Jerusalem and the 144 cubit high wall are taken in Watchtower literature to be figurative numbers. (*Revelation—Its Grand Climax at hand!*, p. 307). So for consistency the number 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 should also be understood as a symbolic number. This would then match the figurative 12 tribes of "the Israel of God."

NOTE: Unlike the Jehovah's Witnesses teaching the Scriptures never speak of a remnant of 144,000 but rather of a remnant of Israel (Micah 2:12, Hosea 3:5, Romans 9:27).

THE "GREAT CROWD" ARE *ANOINTED* CHRISTIANS

As shown earlier the great crowd are anointed Christians because they serve in the Sanctuary (*naos*). Added to this are the many more details the great crowd holds in common with "the holy ones." Furthermore, the context of Revelation 7 indicates that *the great crowd* are the end-time Christians who undergo *the great tribulation* and so this body does not include those Christians who died before the beginning of the great tribulation and will be resurrected after it is over.

Please see Volume 5 STUDY 19 for a fuller discussion.

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