

THE BELIEFS OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST — PART 1

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this lesson to **Mr. Jean-Marie Koku Hulete, Mr. Gabriel Opoku, Mr. Gordon Oppong-Agyare** and **Mrs. Beatrice Oppong-Agyare**; their assistance motivated me to dedicate enough time to embark on this godly project.

(A) INTRODUCTION

It is very unfortunate how the present Church has forgotten so easily the beliefs and/or doctrines of its faith with regards to the foundation of Christianity. If Christ is one and has not been divided (see Eph 4:5; 1 Co 1:11–13), why then do we see different churches of diverse faith and practices? Gradually, the Church is losing its *value* and *glory* as its *power* crumbles in the eyes of men.

Instead of knowing to acknowledge, practice, secure and spread the doctrine of Christ (Rom 6:17) through the Church (Eph 3:8–10), Christians today tend to defend personalities (1 Co 3:4), doctrines of men (Mark 7:7–9) and teachings of demons (1 Tim 4:1). The problem is that, “*We have forgotten and neglected the beliefs of the Church of the first century*”.

Belief (*p̄sti* in modern Greek) is the acceptance of [religious] practices of claims and facts, through faith in a personality, one’s action or word. When beliefs are organized, taught, and practiced, they become doctrines. Thus, the **doctrine** of the Church (*dóigma* in the modern Greek) is a belief or set of beliefs held and taught by the Church and secured to promote the glory and power of its existence.

The fact is that, a doctrine or belief needs to be taught —but it should first be identified and well understood by the teacher.

Nonetheless, this particular study tends to highlight what the Church must know and understand concerning the doctrines of Christ taught and practiced in the churches —as the scheme of our faith.

(B) LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. explain briefly the concept of “church doctrine”;
2. identify the beliefs or doctrines of the New Testament Church which need to be adopted by the Church today;
3. understand every single belief of the Christian faith;
4. adopt and practice the doctrine of Christ in our churches.

(C) OVERVIEW

“THE BELIEFS OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST” in this context does not intend to promote the agenda of any church. The motive is to search through the Scripture to know how each branch of the Lord's Church in the first century CE held and practiced their beliefs. After identifying the beliefs, we then trace them to assess the origin of our faith in the various churches —to know whether or not we are part of God's field or God's building (see 1 Co 3:9).

If the Church in the Bible is the same Church we behold today, then definitely the doctrine should be the same.

The study here will emphasize on each of the beliefs and briefly explain them scripturally.

As you enjoy freely the content of the study, prepare the heart to embrace the truth regardless of your origin of faith and practices.

(D) UNDERSTANDING HOW CERTAIN TERMS ARE USED IN THE STUDY.

(i) Church: This is used for the universal Church. The “C” in the upper case indicates Christianity as a nation.

(ii) church: This is used for individual congregations, as part of the universal Church.

(iii) churches: This is used for all the branches or congregations of the same Church.

(iv) churches of Christ: Used for all the congregations of the Lord's Church in the first century CE, and sometimes used for the same or similar churches existing today that follow the same pattern of faith.

(v) Belief: Used for any doctrine taught and practiced by the Church or in congregations.

CHAPTER 1: THE KEY BELIEFS OF THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST FROM THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The **churches of Christ** hold so many beliefs as doctrines of the Church, from the biblical perspective. The author of this lesson has compiled and briefly discussed *more than 100 beliefs of the Church*; they have been categorized into at least 10 parts.

In this chapter of the study, *each point is framed as belief*, and then it is further discussed from the biblical point of view. The **chapter 2** of the study shall not be discussed in the first nine(9) parts separately prepared; it shall be treated in the 10th part.

Each belief listed below is briefly explained and concluded, biblically.

1.1 Jesus Christ Is The Head Of The Church.

The **churches of Christ** believe that Christ is the builder of the Church (Matt 16:18–19; 1 Co 3:10–11; Eph 2:20–22). In this sense, Christ is the Head of the Church (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22; 4:15; Rev 1:5).

The idea of “head” or “headquarters” on earth is rejected by Christ Himself and the Bible, according to the given tests. If your church has a head as man like you and I, think twice about it.

Leaders in the various churches are “workers in the vineyard” (1 Co 3:9) to serve the Church, but are not the bosses of the Church: The biblical assertion here is that, “*The Church is led physically by men but spiritually by its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ*”. Any congregation with anyone adored as “boss” of the church does not belong to God.

1.2 The Church Was Established In Jerusalem, in 33 AD.

The **churches of Christ** believe that the Lord's Church was fully established with *power* (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8) and *glory* (Acts 2:47; Eph 5:27) in Jerusalem (Luke 24:46–48) according to Acts 2: It was never established in Galilee or Corinth, but in Jerusalem.

The churches in the first century, according to the Scripture and historicism, believed that **Christ was baptized at age 30** (see Luke 3:23), and worked for **3½ years** before his death according to the prophecy of Daniel: “The 70 weeks of Daniel” explained by archangel Gabriel in Daniel 9:24–27 contextually and exegetically reveals that Christ would be anointed (baptized) at age 30 and would work for half of 7 years before he would be cut

off. Therefore, **30 + 3½** (approximately 3 years, because we don't round numbers in dating) gives **33 years**.

In spite of this, the Church was established in Jerusalem after the ascension of Christ, on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 1, 2).

1.3 The Church is God's Kingdom On Earth.

The **churches of Christ** believe that the New Testament Church is part of God's kingdom, but not the only kingdom of God; the Church believes that *Heaven is the mother of the New Testament Church* (see Gal 4:26).

The Christians of the first century believed that the established Church is God's kingdom on earth, and its establishment was the answer to the prayer "*Thy kingdom come*" in **Matthew 6:9–13**. The kingdom was received in Acts 2 on the Pentecost day, and we continue to receive it (Heb 12:28) in our hearts (Luke 17:20–21) sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit through immersion baptism (Eph 4:30).

The Church believes that ***Christ is the King of the Kingdom*** (Rev 17:14; 19:13, 16; Eph 1:20–2), ***the Church is the subject*** (1 Pet 2:9–10; 1 Co 3:9), ***the earth is the territory of the Church*** existing today, and ***the blood of Christ is the covenant*** (Matt 26:27–29; 1 Pet 1:19–21) of sound doctrine and divine law (Rom 6:17; 1 Co 9:21).

The Church believes that, **(1)** the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of God (Eph 5:5) because Christ is God (Jn 20:28; 1 Jn 5:20; 2 Pet 1:1); **(2)** the kingdom of Christ/God is the combination of the kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of the Church; and **(3)** only those in the kingdom are regarded or recognized by God (1 Jn 5:19; 2 Tim 2:19).

It is weird for any existing church to teach that "the Church is the only kingdom of God" rejecting to understand that Heaven is the eternal kingdom (2 Pet 1:11) and mother of the kingdom of the Church (Gal 4:26).

The Church, in the first century, plainly rejected the belief of the *Replacement theology* (the doctrine that the New Testament Church has replaced Israel), and the *Fulfillment theology* (the doctrine that the Church is part of Israel but has not necessarily replaced Israel as it fulfills all predictions made in the Old Testament about Israel making it the true Israel of God): The Church believed and practiced the *Change theology* (the doctrine that there has been a change from the Old Testament Church, Israel, to the New Testament Church).

The **Change theology** does not teach that the Church has replaced Israel; it teaches that Israel forms part of the Church and is governed by new laws in

Christ (Rom 8:1–2; 1 Co 9:21). The doctrine does not teach that the Church has fulfilled Israel; it rather teaches that the Church fulfills all the prophecies written about her kingdom reign and sovereignty, as independent state of perfection (see Isaiah 2:2–4; Micah 4:1–3)... (*Seth Nyarko 2023a: 110*).

If your congregation does not regard the Church as God's kingdom on earth, it is not from God: If your church is still hoping for God's kingdom to be established [physically] on earth to fulfill the prayer in Matt 6:9–13, it is not from God: If your congregation teaches that the Church is the only kingdom of God without emphasizing on the kingdom of Heaven, it has rejected the sound doctrine of Christ: If your congregation asserts that the Church has replaced Israel or has fulfilled all prophecies about Israel without acknowledging to practice the “Change theology”, it is off the divine path to salvation.

1.4 The Godhead Is The True Mystery Of God.

The **churches of Christ** believe that the **Godhead** (which some believers call “Trinity”) spoken of in Acts 17:29, Romans 1:20, and Colossians 2:8–10 is the true path to unlocking the mystery of God (1 Tim 3:16).

The Church believes that **the Father** is God (2 Pet 1:17; 2 Jn 3), **the Son/Word** [i.e. Jesus Christ] is God (Jn 20:28; Rom 9:5; 2 Pet 1:1; 1 Jn 5:20; Titus 2:13; Rev 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), and the **Holy Spirit** is God (Acts 5:3–4). The Church, according to the Bible, understood that “God” is not a name but a title for the Almighty, the Creator or the Supreme Being. As every “human being” possesses “spirit, soul and body” (1 Thes 5:23), so as God is triune in nature (i.e. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

This sound doctrine of the Church hindered many liberals in the first century in many ways, even till now. In AD 300s, the scriptural text, *“For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one”* —recorded in **1 John 5:7** was removed permanently by some Christians who opposed the divine message from the original manuscript and the copies of the New Testament Canon of Scripture, but was maintained for God's sake thanks to the KJV and NKJV [and few modern versions]. The removed text remains the most powerful and the most debated text in the history of textual criticism. That is why all the versions with the exception of KJV and NKJV [and few versions] have removed such important message from the Bible. The issue is that, many of the believers could not accept what was written to believe that “Jesus Christ is God, and reigns as the Almighty God (Rev 1:8)”.

If your congregation disagrees with the fact that Jesus Christ is the Almighty God in control of all things now till the final judgement of mankind (Matt 28:18; Phil 2:5–11; compare Jn 5:22; 12:48; 1 Co 15:28), such is a deviant church and has fallen from the ultimate faith of the New Testament Church.

1.5 The Bible Is The [Only] Inspired Word Of God.

The **churches of Christ** believe that the 66 canonical scriptures are the only inspired word of God.

The Church believes that the Bible is the library of sixty-six Holy Spirit inspired books and letters, handed over to God's chosen people for perfection in Him; it is a collection of scriptures sacred to Jews and/or Christians.

The Church of the first century did not think above [or below] what was written to them (Rom 12:3; 1 Co 4:6) by God's holy men (2 Pet 1:20–21); they lived according to the Scripture alone, hence the Latin term *Sola scriptura* which means “by Scripture alone”. The Church believes that believers in Christ do not need any external document or information that goes contrary to the Bible or that seems to add up anything special to the Bible: Everything we need concerning mystery and salvation into eternity has been given to the Church in the scriptures (see Deut 29:29; John 20:30–31; compare Eph 3:10).

One surprising thing which may seem weird to many today about the Church in the first century is that, *the Christians were guided orally* by the teachings of the Apostles (Acts 2:42) for about 14 years before God's word was written down as a book, since the establishment of the Church in 33 AD/CE. The fact is that many people could not live to see and read the message of God written down; blessed were those who had the chance to get the written form of God's word to read and understand, in Christianity (Rev 1:3).

However, *Paul was the first to write God's word*, which began in AD 47 (the book of Galatians), *in the New Testament Church* —and his holy message was first written on **Vellum** also known as parchment (see 2 Tim 4:13) —unlike the Old Testament word first written on **stone** (Exo 31:18; 34:1, 28) and then on **Papyrus** (paper made from papyrus plant that grew along the bank of the Nile River in Egypt).

This means that many believers could not live to read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John written in the AD 60s, and the conclusion of the whole canonical scriptures with Revelation in 65–96 AD. But, they strongly believed in whatever message the Apostles gave and taught.

Those in the first century who lived to witness most of the New Testament books in addition to the Old Testament Canon of Scripture, believed in the Bible alone and advised themselves in the faith not to change its doctrine (Gal 1:6–10; 2 John 9–11).

One of the most important aspects of the Church of the first century is that they did not turn to prioritize any of the *Apocryphal writings* of the first century such as Aratus, Menander, Epimenides, etc. discussed by Paul in Acts 17:28, 1 Co 15:33, and Titus 1:12 respectively. The Church did not also accept to embrace the *Old Testament Apocrypha* (the Deuterocanonical and the Pseudepigraphical books) such as Judith, Tobit, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Susanna, 6th and 7th books of Moses, the Seven Patriarchs, Bel and Dragon, Baruch, etc. All what they knew was “the scriptures” (Acts 8:32, 35; Gal 3:8, 22; 2 Tim 3:16), the “Holy scriptures” (Rom 1:2), the “Oracles of God” (Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12; 1 Pet 4:11), the “word of God” (Mark 7:13; Rom 10:17; Heb 4:12), or the “sacred scriptures” (2 Tim 3:15) — which all make reference to the 66 canonical scriptures we have today.

If some of them did not get books like 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation to read but still had faith in the few books provided for their learning and regarded them as sufficient, how and why should one think that the Bible today is not sufficient?

The Church believed in the Scripture alone; they never agreed to any word of condemnation against the sufficiency of the Bible.

The Church today must do same, and act accordingly; *the Scripture alone and nothing else.*

1.6 There Is Life After Death.

The **churches of Christ** believe that mankind does not cease to exist after death; there is life after death, and that, immortality is assured for eternity depending on one's fate in sin or righteousness.

The Church believes that [physical] death (Rom 5:14; 6:23) is not the end of mankind; death is just “the separation of the soul and spirit from one's body”.

The New Testament Church believes that after death the human spirit which is God's image and likeness (Gen 2:7; 6:3; Mal 2:15–16) returns to God [the Father] in heaven (Luke 23:46; Eccl 12:7); the soul also makes transition to the hadean world (Hades) either to Paradise (Luke 16:22) or Tartarus (Luke 16:23); and the mortal body returns to the dust (Gen 3:19).

The Church believes that after death, the human soul faces immediate judgement personally/individually before the final judgement of the whole world (2 Co 5:10) concerning the living and the dead (Jn 5:28–29; Matt 25:31–46). And in that, the soul begins a new life in Hades (Paradise, Tartarus) until the Second Coming of Christ. Thus, there is no principle of second chance or an opportunity for the dead to return [by violating the natural order] to live as ghost in men or to scare humanity (see Psalm 89:48; Jer 22:10; Job 7:8–10; 14:13–14; Luke 16:27–31).

The Church, however, believes that death is meant for all (Heb 9:27) and there is life for the human soul in Hades after death, to wait for the final judgement of mankind. We all need to assess the faith of our various congregations, about this unshakable belief of the first century Church.

*[For detailed study and biblical analysis on Death, Hades (Tartarus and Paradise), read from **THE GREAT REVELATION**, Vol. 1, pp. 67, 74–75, 77–81.]*

1.7 Reincarnation Is Not Biblical.

The **churches of Christ** believe that the soul of the dead (ghost) cannot be forced out of Hades to live again as a man or is not destined by divine order to reincarnate.

“Reincarnation (*metensárkosí* in Greek) means ‘the transmigration of the soul.’ It is the belief in the birth and rebirth of a person’s soul over and over again in different bodies throughout history” (*Seth Nyarko 2023a: 63*). The Church believes that reincarnation is a deviant doctrine from the demonic world. However, some believers try to couple incarnation or resurrection with reincarnation, but they are absolutely different from the biblical point of view.

Incarnation is “the process by which a spiritual body becomes embodied in flesh or is given a physical body, especially a human form” (*The Great Revelation*, Vol. 1, p. 56). The spirit of **Elijah** in the Old Testament Canon of Scripture incarnated in the era of Jesus as John the Baptist to prepare the way before Christ (Mal 3:1; Matt 11:10, 14–15; Mark 1:2; Matt 17:11–13; Mal 4:5–6; Luke 1:7): **Jesus Christ** in the realm of the spirit also incarnated in the flesh without any sexual intercourse (*Isaiah 7:14; John 1:14, 18; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 2:14; 2 Pet 1:16*). This means that *incarnation* is done with the *spirit* of the one who has never tasted of [physical] death and has been sent by God to accomplish a [divine] task on earth. *Reincarnation* on the other hand, is believed to be possible with the *soul* of the dead.

“**Resurrection** (*anástasi* in Greek) simply means ‘brought back to life’ by divine order ... Resurrection can only take place in this physical world ...

When the dead is brought back to life, he comes in the form of the same species. This means that it is the same body (1 Co 15:42–44) which rises again” (*Seth Nyarko 2023a: 62*). The fact is that, the soul of the dead is released from Hades and God gives back the spirit taken, and both are brought back into the physical body of the dead, in the case of resurrection. But, reincarnation is not based on any of such biblical principles, just as outlined.

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ believes in Incarnation from the biblical point of view, in the sense that it worked on the side of Elijah and Jesus Christ: The Church believes that God will raise to transform the dead in Christ's Second Coming (Jn 5:28–29; 1 Co 15:50–54). **The churches of Christ believe and teach that reincarnation is not biblical**, because there is no second chance for the dead after death, unless the Lord Himself decides according to His own plans through resurrection (Deut 32:39).

Reincarnation is not biblical, because the Bible seriously condemns it (Psalm 89:48; Jer 22:10; Job 7:8–10; 14:13–14; Luke 16:27–31).

1.8 Judgement Of God Shall Begin At The Church.

The Church of the first century believed in God's judgement: They believed that the Great White Throne Judgement is still ahead and shall occur on the day of the Second Coming of Christ (2 Co 5:10; Rev 20:11–15).

The Christians of the first century understood that the churches of the Lord are the major target in Christ's Second Coming and the final judgement, and thus, began to put things in order to embrace the great day of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is written; “*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator*” (1 Peter 4:17–19, NKJV). This motivated the Church to prioritize Heaven (Col 3:1–4) much more than any material thing in this world (1 John 2:15–17).

Today, the actions and beliefs of many congregations of the same Church of Christ go contrary to what the early Christians held profoundly in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*[For more on God's judgement, read from **THE GREAT REVELATION, VOL. 1, PP. 66, 124–157.**]*

1.9 666 Is At Work.

The New Testament Church in the first century believed that the number “666” was at work in their era. Though the vision about the number was unveiled in the Apocalypse of John the apostle in Rev 13:15–18 and Rev 14:9–11, the Church knew and understood the exact interpretation of it figuratively and apocalyptically.

The Church understood that “666” was not a physical mark but spiritual. Thus, the number symbolizes the mark of the devil in the lives of the wicked or sinners. “The mark of God (Rev 7:1–3) is the mark of Christ which one spiritually bears in his body (Gal 6:17; 2 Co 4:10; Col 1:24; 2 Co 1:5). In the same way, the mark of Satan which one bears in the body (Rev 13:16–17) is the mark of the Beast, which is the mark of mortality, incompleteness and damnation (see Rev 13:18)” ... (*Seth Nyarko 2023a: 102*).

This belief of the Church has not been abolished, scripturally today. The present Church must know and understand that the same mark that worked in men against the Church, in support of satanic activities in the first century, is at work and shall continue to work till the Lord comes for the Second time to judge the living and the dead. This has nothing to do with any beasts rising from the sea or earth to physically torment mankind (especially Christians) to denounce their faith in Christ either before or after the “rapture” (see Rev 13:1–14).

Just as the mark of Christ is at work, so as the mark of the devil against humanity is still in force: The Church must adhere to this truth to secure the Christian faith.

Interpretation to the key phrases in Revelation 13:18.

“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Revelation 13:18, KJV).

Meaning:

Here is wisdom: This calls for pure knowledge and understanding in the use of apocalyptic literature to contextually interpret the number of man.

John speaks of true wisdom which should be used to interpret and understand completely what exactly he meant in his vision. True wisdom is a gift from God to those who ask it (Job 28:12–28; Prov 3:13–18; Rom 1:22; 16:27; 1 Co 1:17–21; 2:6–8; James 1:5). In this sense, one needs “*Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (1 Co 1:24) to fully understand the nature of the numbers used in reference to the “sea beast and earthly beast.”

It is stated clearly that Christians and all readers of this message today should not literally interpret the vision out of its context.

Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: One would assume that the wisdom to the understanding of John's message is "a moral rather than an intellectual quality." Bible students should not try to literally count the number 666 and affirm it to be 666 years.

John in this context asked his audience to "calculate the number of the beast," which calculation would base on the *Hebrew gematria* (a system of communication through the use of numbers) devoid of human inventions and mathematics. John knows that the number referring to the beast can be understood by the immediate readers.

The "beast" in context of Rev 13 does not refer to the Anti–Christs or Caesar Domitian, or even the Popes existing today.

The word **Antichrist** simply means "against Christ, or an opposition Christ, a rival Christ." Antichrist is one who works against the teachings of Christ. It is simply a figure who opposes Christ. Remember this "antichrist" is a biblical term used in the apostolic age (to define the apostasy) as a reference to those who were/are opposing Christ and His law (1 Jn 2:18–19, 22; 1 Co 9:21), but not specifically used to strictly tag the kings who were either opposing [some of or all] the 613 Mosaical laws or the Christians in history. The term cuts across everywhere.

Caesar Domitian cannot also be biblically credited as the "beast" in Rev 13:18; neither can he be credited as the "man of sin" in 2 Thes 2:3. Thus, analyzing critically the context of 2 Thes 2:1–10 reveals that "That man of sin" is not referring to a specific individual as the Antichrist, since Paul is using apocalyptic language in this context; it could be referring to a body or an institution or general environment of sin in which Christians would dwell. One should not believe to teach that "the man of sin" would be an incarnation of Satan to deceive many; the term would be in reference to those bodies influenced by Satan to persecute the saints in order to pull down Christianity. Again, if one credits the beast to a particular person, even to Domitian, then the calculation of the 666 which they assume as years but not gematrical numbers cannot fit the total period of the king's reign; since Domitian reigned for only *15–16 years* (that is, A.D 81 – 96) but not historically for six hundred and sixty-six years.

It is quite pity and very unfortunate for some readers of this message to go to the extent of attributing the "beast" to the Roman Popes. It is very sad for them because they have missed the context of John's message, which vision speaks of the kingdom reign of Rome as a nation but not a Catholic or a modern technological kingdom. All other comparisons like these are not biblical.

The exact context of John's reference was to the Roman empire, which was fragile before God, as it ruins its own fall, even in A.D 476. As verse 10 stated the end of the "sea beast" (Roman government), so **verse 18** signals the end of the "land beast" (imperial religion/the false prophets); these two parts of the Roman attacks launched on the Church were from the same Rome State. The message was that, both government and religion were earthly and totally insufficient. Hence, the "beast" in Rev 13:18 contextually refers to the Roman kingdom, but not specifically the kings who reigned to ruin it; that kingdom was marked by the number **666** which symbolizes her complete doom, after harming and persecuting God's kingdom ("the Church"), even in Asia Minor.

For it is the number of a man: John identifies the beast by the number of man. It is not the number of a man. The indefinite article "a" does not need to be placed in the text before the word "man." It is simply the "number of man." The same word structure is used in Rev 21:17 in reference to the measuring of the holy city "according to the measure of man." The indefinite article here does not signify a specific man. It means only that the calculation was according to man's numbering rules (Roger Dickson, Revelation, p. 57) —which one was according to the Hebrew gematria.

His number is Six hundred threescore and six: "Score" is an archaic word for the number twenty, used in the way that we still use a dozen for twelve. The "threescore" here is sixty, that is, three times twenty ($3 \times 20 = 60$). Now the number under discussion here is six hundred and sixty-six (666) and not six, six, six (6, 6, 6).

Considering chapter 17, John briefly concludes the vision of Rome's overthrow that was discussed in chapter 16. Chapters 17–19 are an expanded panoramic view of the fall of Rome that is given in greater detail than previous visions.

The analysis given here would mean that the kingdom of Rome is fragile, as she faces the judgement of God (Rev 6:9 – 9:1–21).

According to the *Hebrew gematria* (a system of communication through the use of numbers), **the number six(6)** as used in Rev 13:18 would mean something that is *imperfect* or *incomplete*, or signifies that which is *earthly*, or simply "incomplete earthly kingdom;" it is also the number of "**man**." The triple six (666) is a reference to the Roman kingdom which originates "out of the earth," but tries to claim heavenly origin (because it's used three times as something that is perfect in its ways); such a kingdom was "triple" incomplete. And this was as a result of God's judgement that led to the destruction of Rome in the 1st century; and finally, the city of Rome fell in A.D. 476.

Thus, one whose mark (vs 16) was on the **forehead** (“total psychological allegiance”) and those who had it on their **hands** or wrists (“total physical allegiance”) all sold their souls to Rome and the devil and had the chances of benefiting from the kingdom, and all fell with Rome.

Though Rome has fallen away and the remnants have propagated to raise Italy, the devil who was behind this is not dead yet. He now uses scary movies, pictures and some satanic activities of the antichrists, false Christs, false prophets and prophetesses, occults, satanists, spiritualists, as well as some other religious priests who form parts of the "body of deceitful workers" (2 Co 11:13–15) to deceive many about the mark.

1.10. Not Only The 144,000 Souls Shall Inherit Heaven.

The **churches of Christ** believe that “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim 2:19), and that, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). However, the Church believes and teaches that God has not intimidated the churches with a definite number of people who have been registered to [compulsorily] inherit Heaven at the end of time. No man on earth knows the number of those who shall inherit Heaven. Only God knows.

The Church boldly points out to **Revelation 7:4–8** that the **144,000 souls** are not the very people chosen to inherit Heaven: The study in Rev 7 according to the context of the 144,000 souls spoken of in Rev 14:1, is apocalyptic. The event happened in the kingdom of the Church situated in Rome. God sealed the faithful perfectly from harm against the State persecution and tribulation. The number used was perfect, as divided as “ $12 \times 12 \times 1000$ ” or “ 12×12000 ”.

Therefore, any congregation on earth that believes and teaches that the 144,000 are the very and only people chosen to inherit Heaven, is not from God but the devil.

Interpretation to the key phrases in Revelation 7:4–8.

“4 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand,,, of all the tribes of the children of Israel. 5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. 6 Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Naphtali were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. 7 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. 8 Of the tribe of Zebulun were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand” (Revelation 7:4–8, KJV).

Meaning:

I heard the number of them which were sealed: God spoke to John about the exact people to be sealed; they were not directly from the twelve tribes of Israel in the literal sense, but would be a symbol of God's complete people.

There were sealed a hundred and forty and four thousand: Deducing the exact figure from the KJV, “a hundred” is in hundred thousands (100,000); “and forty” is in ten thousands (40,000); “and four thousand” is in thousands (4,000). Now, using the place value system, we have “one hundred and forty-four thousand” and written in figures as **144,000**.

This division idea taken from the KJV can help Bible students to clearly understand the meaning of these 144,000 souls as used in this context, relating to the Hebrew gematria.

All the tribes of the children of Israel: The contextual meaning proves that God's emphasis was not on the number of Israelites who ought to be sealed for eternity, but was on the significance of the number twelve (12).

The tribes of Israel were **12** (Gn 35:23–26); the sons of Ishmael were **12** (Gn 25:12–16); **12** pillars were erected at Mt. Sinai (Ex 24:4); **12** men were selected by God to conduct the census of the tribes (Num 1:2–16); **12** princes of Israel brought gifts to the Sanctuary on **12** days (Num 7:10–83); **12** spies sent to reconnoiter/scout Canaan (Num 13:1–15); Joshua picked **12** stones from Jordan (Joshua 4:1–7); **12** statues of oxen held up the water basin in Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:25); Elijah picked **12** stones for the altar (1 Kings 18:30–32); the months of Israel are **12** (Tishri – Elul); Jesus is **12** years old when He questions the scholars in the Temple (Luke 2:41); the Apostles of Christ were **12** (Mat 10:1–4); **12** legions of angels (Matt 26:53); the remaining bread were **12** baskets (Jn 6:12–13); the **12** Apostles would sit on **12** thrones (Mat 19:28; this was about the kingdom reign of the Church through the proclamation of the gospel of Christ, which reigned in the hearts of men because of the ministry of the 12 chosen Apostles, which started in Acts 2); **12** gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12); **12** foundations of the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:16–17); the Trees of Life in the new creation will bear **12** kinds of fruits (Rev 22:2); etc.

The **number 12** symbolizes "governmental perfection" or “governmental control” according to the Hebrew gematria, and thus, would find its meaning in these 144,000 souls.

However, God uses the 12 tribes of Israel in this context because they are the pillars of the Mosaical dispensation which ended completely when Christ nailed the old laws to the cross (Col 2:14).

The Exact Meaning Of The 144,000

The reference here is to those faithful saints in such period of apostasy, who were affected by the persecution of the Romans.

Thus, the revelation **is not referring to an exact number of 144,000**, but **the numerical symbol of the complete body of God's community** (Rev 14:1,3); which is a reference to the Church, as the body of Christ (Col 1:18).

Bible students should understand that the 144,000 saints sealed in this context are not the souls of the dead from the 12 tribes of Israel; they were those who were still living and suffering from the great persecution. Simply, these saints were not ghosts which were given up from the dead in Asia Minor (Job 3:11), out of their sufferings.

The fact that the number 144,000 finds its symbolic meaning in the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament who were God's called out people, does not mean that these people were those chosen to go to heaven. The 144,000 souls would be a reference to the complete number of those living saints sealed from being harmed in God's judgement upon Rome (Rv 7:3–4).

[We would also believe that God in all dispensations of time, can choose the complete set of His faithful saints to prevent them from being harmed.]

Deducing The Meaning From The Hebrew Gematria.

Applying the *Hebrew gematria* (a system of communication through the use of numbers), the perfect numbers are used; **1, 3, 7, 10, 12** (and sometimes its multiples), **24,...100** (and its multiples),...**1000** (and its multiples), etc.

According to the Hebrew gematria, **3, 7, 10 & 12** are considered to be the first four perfect numbers, neglecting 1; because 1 finds its meaning in 2, especially in marriage where **1 + 1** is not equal to 2 but 1 (Gen 2:24; Mat 19:4–6, Eph 5:31).

In Rev 7:5–8, the context gives **12 x 12,000** which equals **144,000**. And by using two or more perfect numbers in comparison to standardize the 12,000 souls in each tribe, 12×1000 best suits the context. Thus, $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ equals 144,000; *12 is the symbol of governmental perfection or control, and 1000 is a sign of completeness.*

Hence, the number “ $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ ” would represent the complete/perfect and total number of the redeemed saints on earth during the tribulation of the saints in Asia Minor and the judgement of the enemies (i.e. the Romans). These people were to be sealed from being harmed by the calamities afflicted on the Romans by the four angels (Rev 7:1–3).

NB:

1. *The book of Revelation is purely apocalyptic*, and it deals with the four major arms of apocalypticism or apocalyptic literature; **numbers, colors, cryptic images, and symbols**. Bible students should not be in haste to interpret such numbers; they should be compared with the Hebrew gematria for better interpretation. Otherwise, one would assume that the **144,000** in **Rev 7:4–8** literally represents the number of Israelites who would go to heaven, or the number of the ghosts of all faithful saints in the past years selected divinely for eternity.
2. In **Revelation 7:9**, John now sees an infinite number of people. The 144,000 (living saints) are those who have been sealed, and thus protected by God. **The great multitude** are those triumphant saints who have been registered in Heaven (Heb 12:23). All the 144,000 souls were to be sealed out of the tribulations completely; and this great multitude shows the indefinite number of people who have won the victory of eternity. The context extends to our present age as well, till the end of time.

TO BE CONTINUED...

(WATCH OUT FOR PART 2)

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