

The Great Multitude

Those who did not follow Russell, those who were lukewarm and undiscerning, yet Christian, would become part of the great multitude but would never rule and reign with Christ.¹ The great multitude, by being apathetic and associating with corrupt Christendom, had associated with spiritual Babylon and was defiled.² Russell believed the great multitude would come from believers in apostate Christendom, this group was spoken of somewhat disparagingly. Russell taught the great multitude was destined to go to heaven.³ He said that when members of the great multitude die, they do not go directly to heaven but sleep until the resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous. When resurrected, they will have fleshly, not spiritual, bodies even in heaven.⁴ If Armageddon were to occur while they were alive, God would protect them.⁵ The great

¹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Aaron as a Priest," *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, November 1880, 160, accessed May 22, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1880%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. "When that is done, all are rewarded,—Christ his saints and the great multitude who are to serve before the throne. That the great multitude are Christ's in the sense we have presented seems evident even from the fact that they have robes; that is, they had been counted holy, or had Christ's righteousness imputed to them. But they had defiled their garments by contact with Babylon, and therefore their loss of the crown, and the need of the judgments to separate them."

² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Gathering to Christ," *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, November 1880, 156, accessed May 22, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1880%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. "The 'Great multitude' must wash their robes, and make them white. Rev. vii. 14. Had their garments not been 'defiled' they would not have needed washing. Christ gives all His people clean robes, but the mass have suffered their garments to become spotted with the flesh and by contact with the world."

³ Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, "Revelation 7: Seventh Seal and Great Company," *The Finished Mystery: "The Winepress of God's Wrath" and the Fall of Babylon*, (Brooklyn, New York: Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society), 130. accessed March 21, 2021. <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Books/Teachings/1917-1918%20Studies%20in%20the%20Scriptures%20Vol7-The%20Finished%20Mystery-Posthumous%20work%20of%20Pastor%20Russel%20DIGITAL%20EDITION.pdf> And there were sealed 144,000. — On this point one of Pastor Russell's coworkers has well said: "That this is not a symbolical, but an exact number, seems certain from the fact that, in the same chapter reference is made to another company, also spirit-begotten. In the 9th verse we read: 'I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number.'" It is not probable that this multitude is so great that no one could actually count them, but rather that none can state their number, God having left it indefinite."

⁴ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Zion's Watchtower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, October 1879, 37, accessed May 4, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1879%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. "I know of no scriptures which teach that any but the "little flock" or "bride company" and the company that comes out of the tribulation (Rev. vii 14.) will ever be given spiritual bodies."

⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Remaining Organized for Survival into the Millennium," *Watchtower*, September 1, 1989, 19, accessed May 17 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1989%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. "Only Jehovah's Witnesses, those of the anointed remnant and the 'great crowd,' as a united organization under the protection of the Supreme Organizer, have any Scriptural hope of surviving the impending end of this doomed system dominated by Satan the Devil."

multitude will worship God and serve Jesus and the ‘little flock’, but they will never rule. Because this great multitude has second hand status, it exists to support the 144,000. Therefore, most of the New Testament does not apply to the great multitude.⁶ They are not part of the New Covenant.⁷ They are not part of the Congregation of God.⁸ They are not born again.⁹ They do not have Jesus as their mediator.¹⁰ They are not Jesus’ brothers.¹¹ They do not inherit the earth.¹² And finally, the Spirit does not pray for them.¹³ This is the earthly hope to which the Jehovah’s Witnesses aspire. It is essentially a hope to be resurrected to a 1000-year probation where they can prove themselves by being perfected, doing what Adam could not do, thereby receiving eternal life.

⁶ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Serve with Eternity in View,” *Watchtower*, June 15, 1974, 376, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1974%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “Also, it is to the spirit-anointed Christians who will rule in that kingdom that of the Christian Greek Scriptures is directed, including the promises of everlasting life.” Spirit anointed Christians are members of the little ‘flock,’ the 144,000 thousand.

⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Questions from Readers,” *Watchtower*, April 1, 1979, 31, accessed May 17, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1979%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “The new covenant will terminate with the glorification of the remnant who are today in that covenant mediated by Christ. The ‘great crowd’ of ‘other sheep’ that is forming today is not in that new covenant.”

⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Congregation,” *Insight*, Vol. 1 (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1988), 498, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/1200001021>. “This congregation is referred to as ‘the congregation of the firstborn who have been enrolled in the heavens,’ the full number of which, under Christ the head, is 144,000.”

⁹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “The Triumph of True Worship Draws Near,” *Watchtower*, July 1, 1996, 21, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1996%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “They are not born again as spiritual sons of God with heavenly citizenship. Does this make them feel envious or covetous? No. Rather, they rejoice in their privilege of supporting the remnant of the 144,000, and they show deep appreciation for God’s purpose in adopting these spiritual sons, who will share with Christ in uplifting mankind to perfection.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.* “So in this strict Biblical sense Jesus is the ‘mediator’ only for anointed Christians.” Anointed Christians are members of the little ‘flock,’ the 144,000 thousand.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 377. “And what reward did Jesus hold out for the ‘sheep’ who help and serve with his anointed ‘brothers’ but who are not themselves such ‘brothers’ of Christ who have heavenly life in view? He promised that these righteous ones will enter into ‘everlasting life,’ yes, life right here on earth.”

¹² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Blessed Are the Meek,” *Watchtower*, March 1, 1958, 139, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1958%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “However, the principle enunciated at Matthew 5:5 applies also to Jesus’ other sheep who, as meek ones, will receive everlasting life on earth. How so? In that they will hold the earth in trust for Christ and his bride, permanent tenants, as it were.”

¹³ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Jehovah’s Spirit Leads His People,” *Watchtower*, September 15, 1992, 16, accessed May 21, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1992%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “Those holy ones for whom God’s spirit pleads are Jesus’ anointed followers, with a heavenly hope. But whether you have a heavenly calling or an earthly hope, as a Christian you can have the help of God’s holy spirit.”

Over time there have been significant changes made in the composition and location of the great multitude. Russell had taught that the great multitude was composed of those who were lukewarm. They were members of Christendom who did not really give of themselves. Because of their failings, they became the “other sheep.” They were not going to rule and reign, but instead they would be servants. They would live in heaven but would have physical bodies. In 1932, just prior to the changing the great multitude from a heavenly class to an earthly class, Rutherford himself wrote that it would be a mistake to consider the great multitude to be an earthly group.¹⁴ They had to be spiritual. However, under the same Rutherford, who three years previously had denied that it could be true, the identity of the great multitude changed, and the negative associations diminished.¹⁵ Rutherford, perhaps realizing that a 144,000 was not a large enough group for a growing denomination, made some startling changes. In 1935, he announced during a presentation that it had been revealed that the great multitude was actually the grouping of faithful Jehovah’s Witnesses.¹⁶ It was not made up of the lukewarm or of other denominations of Christendom. In addition, it was revealed that rather than being in heaven they would live on a recreated perfect earth. Amazingly, this revelation was well received, and Jehovah’s Witnesses are content to be relegated to a second hand status where most of the New Testament does not apply to them. They are even comfortable in the belief that they have an

¹⁴ J.F. Rutherford, *Vindication: The name and work of the Eternal God proven and justified by Ezekiel's Prophecy and revealing what must speedily come to pass upon the nations of the world.* Book 3, (Brooklyn, New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1932), 204. accessed March 21, 2021, [http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Books/Teachings/1932%20Vindication%20Vol3%20\(v-3\).pdf](http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Books/Teachings/1932%20Vindication%20Vol3%20(v-3).pdf) This picture shows the position of the "great multitude". Ever and anon someone advances the conclusion that the "great multitude" will not be a spiritual class. The prophecy of Ezekiel shows that such conclusion is erroneous. The fact that their position is seven steps higher than the outside shows that they must be made spirit creatures. The statement in The Revelation that the "great multitude" 'wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb' shows that they are approved by Jehovah by manifesting their abiding faith in Christ Jesus' shed blood at the time the crucial test comes upon them. The "great multitude" will be in God's organization, but not high up 'in the mountain of the Lord's house'. They must be spirit creatures in order to be in the outer court of the divine structure, described by Ezekiel. Agreeable to this it is written, in Revelation 7: 15: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them." The "great multitude", by reason of coercion exercised by unfaithful shepherds, and by reason of fear, is held for a long while in "prison cells" of Satan's organization. In time of the great tribulation they will be released from these prison cells, and then, being changed from human to spirit creatures they will be brought into the "chambers" or places of refreshment and blessings of God's organization:

¹⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 170, “At that time it was seen that the great crowd of Revelation 7:9, 10 are included among the "other sheep" to which Jesus referred (John 10:16); they are the ones that come to the aid of Christ's "brothers" (Matt. 25: 33-40); they are the people marked for survival because they are appalled at the disgusting things done in Christendom and shun these (Ezek. 9:4); they are like Jehonadab, who openly identified himself with Jehovah's anointed servant in carrying out that one's God-given commission (2 Ki. 10:15, 16). Jehovah's Witnesses understand that these are loyal servants of God who will survive Armageddon with the prospect of living forever on an earth restored to the condition of Paradise.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166. “For years, even down till 1935, they were not understood to be the same as the sheep in Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats. As already noted, it was thought that they were a secondary heavenly class, secondary because they had been negligent about obeying God. However, that view gave rise to persistent questions. Some of these were discussed early in 1935 at the noon meal at the Watch Tower Society's headquarters. Some among those who expressed themselves at that time suggested that the great multitude was an earthly class.”

earthly calling where they can anticipate a millennium of testing before they are adopted and given eternal life.