

# The 144,000

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## WHO? WHEN? WHY?

Two chapters in Revelation bring to view this significant number of 144,000. These are Revelation 7 and 14. The main description is in Revelation 14.

“I looked and lo a lamb stood on Mount Zion and with him an hundred and forty four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters and as a voice of a great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers, harping with their harps. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures, and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the one hundred and forty four thousand which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Revelation 14:1-5

What a description of this special group of people. They exist in the last days of the world’s history, prior to the Second Advent of Christ. The above passage of scripture is located between Revelation 13 and the Three Angels’ Messages of Revelation 14:6-12. Revelation 13 reveals the united powers of earth under Satan, who will oppose God and his people in the last days. Revelation 14:6-12 gives God’s answer to Satan’s final effort. In between these two, are located the 144,000. In other words they are in the centre of the great final conflict that ensues before the second advent of Christ.

The 144,000 are pictured as being “with the lamb.” This is in contrast with the rest of the world who are pictured as being with the Beast.

“All that dwell on the earth shall worship (or obey) him (the Beast) whose names are not written in the Book of Life of the lamb.” Revelation 13:8

The 144,000 are also pictured as being on Mount Zion. What is Mount Zion? It is a symbol of the kingdom of God.

“But you are come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” Hebrews 12:22

Originally Lucifer’s high and privileged position was on Mount Zion, “upon the mount in the sides of the north” Isaiah 14:13. The Psalmist enquired, “Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?” Psalms 24:13.

Some have already ascended to the hill of the Lord. Enoch is there, having been translated without seeing death. Moses is there. He was resurrected and taken to heaven and later appeared on the Mount of transfiguration. Elijah is there for he also was translated without seeing death. Another group of saints is there. These were resurrected when Jesus was resurrected and ascended with him to heaven.

They have since been associated with Christ in the services of the heavenly sanctuary. (Revelation 4 & 5.) Thus in answer to the Psalmist’s question: “Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord?” The answer comes that finally the 144,000 will stand on Mount Zion as a special group.

When we read Revelation 7 it reveals that the 144,000 are of the 12 tribes of Israel. In the New Testament era an Israelite is a true Christian.

“If ye be Christ’s then are you Abraham’s seed, (Israelites) and heirs according to the promise.” Galatians 3:29.

“He is not a Jew which is one outwardly ... in the flesh, but he is one inwardly ...in the spirit ...whose praise is not of men but of God.” Romans 2:28-29

This means that one who is ‘born again’, a true child of God - has the praise of God - he is an Israelite. Why does Revelation 7 mention the twelve tribes and a certain number from each tribe? In scripture, names are significant. A name denotes character and the name of the tribe denotes the particular characteristics of that section of the 144,000. When we examine Revelation 7 we find that two of the tribes are missing. These are Dan and Ephraim. Those two tribes were unfaithful and therefore they are not counted amongst the people of God in the last days. The term Israel has a spiritual significance. The word Israel means ‘overcomer’, ‘a prince with God’, or, one who is ‘God-ruled’. This represents God’s people through the ages who have given themselves to Jesus Christ, who have accepted him as their king and have been ruled as it were, by Christ. The 144,000 also are a special group in the Christian church, of various characters, who have overcome - who have allowed God to rule in their lives. They have overcome the evil conditions of the world in the last days and are victorious in Christ.

The next point to note is that the 144,000 have God’s seal in their foreheads.

“I heard the number that were sealed and there were sealed 144,000.” Revelation 7:4

This reveals the period of time in which the 144,000 exist. The final seal of God is given at the close of probation. This is generally believed to be one year before the Second Advent of Christ.

(For an exposition of the seals of God see the tract or chapter “When God Seals His Saints”.)

The seal of God also involves the keeping of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. God declares:

“Hallow my Sabbaths and they shall be a sign (or seal) between me and you that you might know that I am the Lord your God.” Ezekiel 20:20

The Sabbath is the sign (or seal) that reveals to whom we really belong in the last days. In Revelation 14 it indicates that instead of having the seal in their foreheads, the 144,000 have God’s name in their foreheads.

“I saw an 144,000 having his Fathers name written in their foreheads.” Revelation 14:1

This indicates that the seal and the Father’s name are synonymous. As stated above, in scripture a name denotes character. Therefore in this application of Revelation 7:1-4 the seal also represents God’s character. It indicates that the 144,000 have reached a stage of spiritual development in which their characters have become like Christ’s character. They have reached a stage of character development where they are ready for translation. The 144,000, by the grace of God have reached perfection or maturity of Christian character. In the last days God sets himself to produce a group of people that reflect his image and the outward sign of this, will be the true observance of the seventh day Sabbath.

“I gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.” Ezekiel 20:12

The Sabbath is a sign that God is sanctifying his people, or making them holy, of perfecting their character. Thus in the last days, there will be two groups - two strikingly contrasting groups. There will be the followers of the Beast who will reveal the character of Satan, and there will be the followers of the Lamb, who will reveal the character of Jesus. One will have the Mark of the Beast, and the other will have the Seal of God.

The next point in connection with the 144,000 is that they have experienced great tribulation or passed through great trouble or persecution.

“These are they that have come out of great tribulation.” Revelation 7:14

There are two main tribulations in the Bible that involve the people of God. There is the tribulation of the Dark Ages as recorded in Matthew 24 and the second tribulation which commences just before the 7 last plagues and climaxes in “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble”. The 144,000 also sing the song of Moses and the lamb of Revelation 15:2-3. What is the song of Moses? It was a song sung by Israel after they had passed through the divided waters of the Red Sea when God marvelously delivered them from Egyptian bondage. When Israel looked back and saw their enemies destroyed and realized that after hundreds of years of cruel captivity they were forever free, they burst into a song of gratitude to God. The song of Moses denotes deliverance from earthly foes. But what of the song of the lamb? This song is a song of deliverance from spiritual foes, from Satan, and the thralldrom of sin. Thus the song of Moses and the Lamb, that the 144,000 will sing, will be a song of their experience.

Now the scripture indicates that all the redeemed will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb because all have been delivered by the Lamb. All have been delivered from spiritual foes. But the redeemed will sing only a part of the song, because a special section of the song, the 144,000 alone can sing, for ‘no man could learn that song but the 144,000.’ Revelation 14:3. They sing a particular portion of it because they have gone through an experience that no other group on earth, has passed through before. They will be delivered from ‘the beast and his image.’ They will be delivered from earthly powers that have united together against God in the last days. They will be delivered from the evil world that will be intent on destroying them. And of course like the rest of the redeemed they also have been delivered from the guilt and power of sin.

“I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire and then that had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God, and they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, Thou King of saints.” Revelation 15:2

What a song that will be! A song of marvelous deliverance. The next point concerning the 144,000, is that they do not experience death. They “were redeemed from the earth. These were redeemed from among men.” Revelation 14:3-4.

The 144,000 are redeemed from among the living. In other words they do not die. Speaking of the righteous dead who will be resurrected, the prophet says ‘I will redeem them from death.’ Hosea 13:14. i.e. from the grave, but the 144,000 will be redeemed from the earth, from among men, from the living. Therefore they do not die, they do not see death. They are living at the time when Christ returns, and behold him when the eastern heavens part asunder. They see the small dark cloud in the distance, which turns into a glorious white cloud. What an event! What a privilege to behold it!

Does this mean then that only 144,000 will see Christ come? Is this the total number saved from among the living at the second advent? Not necessarily. The 144,000 is a number which is featured in the Book of Revelation and Revelation is a book containing symbolic prophecy. In Revelation, numbers can also be symbolic. For example, the Book of Revelation is based on the Old Testament and in order to understand it aright, we must always go back to the Old Testament. The Book of Daniel is very closely connected with the Book of Revelation. We cannot understand Revelation without the Book of Daniel. Likewise with many of the other great books of the Old Testament they are necessary for the understanding of the Book of Revelation.

Now the Old Testament method of counting, was not by counting single individuals but by counting the heads of families. Therefore when Revelation speaks of 144,000 it could mean 144,000 heads of families. If

this is correct then 144,000 could involve many more people.

Another point to consider is that the number 144,000 is a multiple of 12 ( $12 \times 12 \times 1000 = 144,000$ ). 12 is the number of the church of God throughout scripture especially concerning church government. There were 12 tribes, 12 patriarchs, 12 apostles and the number 144,000 is the number of the Remnant church in the last days. It is a multiple of 12. 12 is associated right through scripture with church government. The number of patriarchs before the flood was 12 if Shem and Japheth are included in Genesis 5. After the flood there were 12 patriarchs. The church in the wilderness consisted of 12 tribes. Actually there were 13 tribes altogether, if you count the Levites, but only 12 are ever mentioned because 12 denotes the number of God's church. There were 12 judges of Israel and 12 apostles in the early church. The New Jerusalem, mentioned in Revelation 21 and 22 has the number 12 mentioned 12 times. This includes the number 144 of Revelation 21:17 which in the original is  $12 \times 12$ .

The number 12 denotes ruler ship and it is connected with Israel, which means 'God ruled.' The number 144,000 therefore, we suggest, is a symbolic number of the Remnant church that stands ready for the second advent - ready for translation. In Revelation 7 there are two tribes that are missing in the list. These are the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. This indicates that the Israel of Revelation cannot be literal Israel because in literal Israel there were thousands belonging to Dan and Ephraim. The reason that these two names are missing is because they persisted in disobedience Dan means 'judging'. He represents those who persist in destructive criticism, those who are backbiters, the slanderers in the church of God. For them, like Dan, if they do not repent, there is no inheritance.

The word Ephraim means, 'those joined to idols'. That name represents those amongst God's people who mix with the world and are unfaithful to Christ. The scripture says,

"Whosoever will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God. Jams 4:4

We cannot belong to the world and belong to Christ at the same time.

It is important to note that the order of the names of the tribes given in Revelation 7 is also very significant. In the Old Testament the list of the 12 tribes always starts with Reuben, the first-born son. But in Revelation we find that the tribes are not listed in order of birth. What is the reason? The order of names given in Revelation conveys a very significant message. The first name is Judah - which means 'praise'. The second name is Reuben 'a son'. The next is Asher which means 'happy'. Next is Naphthali which means 'wrestling', then Manasseh which means 'forgetting'. After this is Simeon which means 'hearing'. Levi means 'joined'. Issachar means 'service'. Zebulon means 'dwelling', Joseph means 'added' and Benjamin means 'son of the right hand'. If we put all these together in their order in sentence form, they speak a very beautiful message. Here it is:

"Praise God, a son, a company of sons, redeemed and happy, after wrestling in prayer, forgetting self and the past, hearing God's word, joined to God as servants, dwelling with added joys and blessing, as sons of the right hand."

This is a description of the condition that the 144,000 will reach by the grace of Jesus Christ in the last days. The next feature brought to view concerning the 144,000 is that,

"These are not defiled with women, for they are virgins." Revelation 14: 4

Some have concluded that the 144,000 must be all males, but in the Greek 'virgins' applies to both male and female. It does not mean that the 144,000 are unmarried, because scripture is clear that marriage does not defile.

"Marriage is honorable and the bed is undefiled." Hebrews 14:4

What then is the significance of the statement, 'They are virgins'? We suggest at least two reasons. The first reason is that they are morally pure. 'The blood of Christ has cleansed them from all sin.' In a time of

extreme moral corruption and perversion, the 144,000 have resisted the all-pervading immorality, and have overcome.

The second reason is that women in prophecy represent churches. When we read Revelation 17 there is brought to view, 'Babylon the Great', the counterfeit religious organization inspired by Satan - she is called 'the Mother of Harlots'. This means that there are daughters - daughter churches - who are following in the steps of the mother church.

On analyzing Revelation 17 we find that the great 'Mother Church' is none other than the church of Rome and the harlot daughters are those churches which have come out of Rome but who now follow in the mother's footsteps. These are the apostate churches of Protestantism. The 144,000 'are not defiled with women'. They are not defiled with the harlot churches of Christendom. In other words, the 144,000 have come out of Babylon, They have obeyed the call:

"Come out of her my people that you be not partakers of her sins and that you receive not of her plagues." Revelation 18:4

The 144,000 have not been defiled by the false doctrines and practices of spiritual Babylon. The next point concerning the 144,000 is that

"They are the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb." Revelation 14:4

What is meant by the first fruits? It means first in importance, not necessarily the first in regard to time. Jesus Christ is described as 'the first-fruits of them that slept'. (the dead) 1 Corinthians 15:20. Jesus was not the first to rise from the dead but he was the first in importance to rise from the dead. Because of his resurrection, all others can be raised. 'Because I live ye shall live also' John 14:19. In the Old Testament the first fruits were the best fruits or the chief fruits of the crop, not necessarily the earliest of the fruit.

"All the best of the oil and all the best of the wine and of the wheat, the first fruits of then, which they shall offer to the Lord." Numbers 18:2

"The first (margin chief) of all the first fruits." Ezekiel 44:30

This means then that the 144,000 are not just the first to be reaped, in the great harvest at the Second Advent of Christ, but they also represent the best of the harvest. The 144,000 are without fault.

"There is no guile in their mouths for they are without fault before the throne of God." Revelation 14:5

This tells us what God plans to accomplish with the last generation of believers.

"Here is the patience of the saints, here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12

Generally in our endeavor to keep the commandments of God our obedience is imperfect. However, God accepts our best effort. While we are growing in grace, His righteousness covers our lack. But with the last generation who are awaiting translation, they will indeed come to the state where they fully 'keep the commandments of God'. This is very significant. We believe that in a special way the 144,000 will be used by heaven to vindicate the character of God.

From the beginning, one of Satan's leading accusations has been that it is impossible for his people to keep his law. However God exposed the falsity of Satan's accusation by showing that Jesus while on earth, in the same nature as man, perfectly kept the commandments of God. In a final demonstration, in the last generation of earth, the weakest generation of all time, God displays to the universe that these also can keep the commandments of God. This demonstration will be made when there is no mediator between God and men, when the high priestly intercession of Christ has ceased, when the Holy Spirit has completed His work on earth. This final generation, which has inherited all the weaknesses and degeneration of the ages,

out of it, God will take a people and make them without fault. 'There is no guile in their mouth'. What a demonstration of the grace of God this is going to be!

This could explain why the Dragon is so enraged against the Remnant and endeavors to blot them out of existence. This explains the great tribulation through which the 144,000 pass. God permits Satan to try them to the uttermost. Satan exerts super efforts to cause them to sin but he fails. The 144,000 justify God. They prove before the universe that God's law can be kept.

The final feature concerning the 144,000 is that they stand "with the lamb."

"A Lamb stood on the mount and with him a 144,000. They follow the lamb whithersoever he goes." Revelation 14:1, 4.

This means that not only have they been delivered, but a glorious privilege and reward will be theirs. Will there be special rewards that God will give to his people? While we are saved by grace alone, while eternal life is a gift, while we cannot reach the kingdom by our own works, yet for the works that we do accomplish by his grace, God will accordingly reward us, in the kingdom.

"Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple and he that sits on the throne will dwell among them. For the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them into living fountains of waters and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Revelation 7:15, 17.

This reveals the tremendous privilege that will be given to this group. They will probably be at the headquarters of God's kingdom - 'they are before the throne' they are 'in the temple'. They have a position of high responsibility. They escort Christ, they are 'with him'. It is believed by some that they will take the place of the fallen angels - not that they will become angels - but they will take the place of the fallen angels. What a privilege!

But what of the view that the 144,000 is a number representing "the great multitude that stand" before the throne, and who have come out of great tribulation. (Revelation 7:9, 14)

At first glance one may be led to draw such a conclusion but on analyzing the whole chapter, the above conclusion must be completely rejected.

After introducing the 144,000 in Verses 4-8, John then beholds "a great multitude which no man could number of all nations" (V9). This means that this group is innumerable - they cannot be numbered. What good news that so many of the human race are going to be in the kingdom. Today, even with our population explosion it is still possible to number the world's population. Now if the saints at the end time are so abundant that no man can number them, then the saints would comprise the great majority of the world's population.

If this conclusion is correct this means that the biblical doctrine of the remnant is untenable. Do the exponents of the above view believe that God's people in the end time will be a remnant or do they believe that they will comprise the majority of the population?

The only conclusion is that the great multitude of Revelation 7:9 comprises the saved of all ages as the Spirit of Prophecy so clearly states. ("The Great Controversy" page 665) God's people have always been a minority - a remnant "Fear not little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

For the same reason the conjecture that the 144,000 proclaim the "Loud Cry" and win "the great multitude" must be rejected. If the number won in the Loud Cry amounts to an innumerable group of people, who would be left to support the leaders of Babylon and persecute the great multitude?

But what of Revelation 7:13-17? “What are these in white robes and whence came they?” The only ones described as having white robes are “the great multitude” (Verse 9). If this were correct then the 144,000 cannot be clothed in white. This is unthinkable because the white robes represent “the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8) and all the redeemed will be so clothed.

It is quite obvious as to who comprise the great multitude and from whence they have come, for V9 says that they are from “all nations and kingdoms and people and tongues”. The elder of Verse 13 must be referring to a group in white robes which is distinctive. The distinction is that they “came out of great tribulation” Verse 14. The Greek reads “the great tribulation”. Those who endure the final time of tribulation are “the remnant” of Revelation 12:17 not “a great multitude which no man could number”. Note the contrasts between the 144,000 and the great multitude.

### **THE 144,000**

1. A limited number.
2. Of the 12 Tribes of Israel.
3. Sealed in their foreheads
4. Exist in last days

### **THE GREAT MULTITUDE**

- An unlimited number.  
Of all nations, kingdoms and tongues.  
No mention of being sealed  
From all ages (8 Testimonies, 44-45. Great Controversy, 665)

It is informative to recall the description given by the prophet of the redeemed when they stand before the throne, as recorded in Great Controversy p 665. At least four groups are pictured in their order.

1. The 144,000 or those represented by that number “Those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan... and have followed their Savior with deep intense devotion.”
2. “Those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void.” This would include faithful Seventh-day Adventists.
3. “The millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith.”
4. “Beyond is the ‘great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, kingdoms and people and tongues... with white robes and palms in their hands’.” Great Controversy, 665.

### **12 IDENTIFICATION MARKS OF THE 144,000**

1. A special group that exist in the last days.
2. They are Israelites - of spiritual Israel true Christians.
3. They are sealed: which involves the observance of the true Sabbath and receiving the mark of protection at the Close of Probation.
4. They are not defiled by the teachings and practices of Babylon.
5. They attain to perfection of character.
6. They experience the Great Tribulation of the End Time.
7. They are victorious in the conflict with the Beast and his Image.
8. They will experience being without a mediator.
9. They vindicate God by displaying to universe that man can keep God’s law.
10. They do not experience death.
11. They represent the living righteous who will be translated.
12. They receive a special reward in the kingdom.

## PARALLELS BETWEEN

### REVELATION 7:1-17 and

### REVELATION 14:1-5

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. 144,000 in number V4              | 144,000 number V1   |
| 2. Seal of God in Foreheads          | Name of God in Foreheads  |
| 3. Seal received in the End Time     | Name received in End Time   |
| 4. Washed their robes                | Not defiled   |
| 5. Come out of the Great Tribulation | Located in centre of the conflict<br>(Between Revelation 13 & Revelation 14:6-12) |
| 6. They are before the throne        | They are before the throne  |
| 7. Special reward in the kingdom     | Special reward in kingdom   |

The question may then be asked, 'Can I be among those represented by the 144,000?' If one is permitted to live until the Second Advent and his trust in Christ continues, and he follows Christ "with deep intense devotion", the answer is yes. You may have the privilege of being one of that number.

The 144,000 'follow the lamb whither so ever he goes'. If we follow the Lamb now by his grace, we will surely follow Him in the Kingdom.

How do we follow Christ? In obeying him. 'If you love me' he said 'keep my commandments'. God help us to 'follow the Lamb whither so ever he goes', till we finally, stand before the Throne, with all the millions of the redeemed.

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