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THE 144,000 WILL SOON APPEAR



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The 144,000 Will Soon Appear

The subject of the 144,000 servants of God in Revelation often produces more heat than light. No group of people in the Bible has attracted more attention. Because of the 144,000's unique and special mission, it is not surprising that several denominations claim them to be their own. For example, The Church of Christ, The Church of God, Mormons, Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others teach that the 144,000 are *their* offspring. Still, these churches are quite diverse in defining the identity of the 144,000.

Some people claim the number 144,000 is symbolic. Others say the 144,000 represent the numberless multitude that go through the Great Tribulation and are redeemed when the Lord appears. Some believe only 144,000 individuals are going to be *alive* when Jesus returns. Still others think the 144,000 are converted Jews who carry the gospel to the world during the Great Tribulation. So, what does the Bible say about the 144,000?

Old Testament Background

There are thirteen texts in Revelation 7 and 14 that discuss the 144,000. However, the subject of the 144,000 involves far more than what these texts state. Subsequently, some Old Testament background is essential to understanding their identity.

Abraham was the father of two great nations: the Arabs and the Jews. Ishmael became the father of twelve tribes¹ and Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, also became the father of twelve tribes.² God loved Ishmael but would not allow the trusteeship of His covenant of faith to be passed to future generations through Ishmael, even though Abraham asked God to accept his son. **“And Abraham said to God, ‘If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!’ Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.’”**³

In firm but gentle tones, God told Abraham that the covenant of faith belonged to those who would live by faith. For this reason, God chose the lineage of Isaac to be the trustee of His covenant. The birth of Isaac *symbolizes* the reality of faith because Isaac was the product of faith.

As time passed, the twelve sons of Ishmael scattered throughout the east and became great leaders of tribal nations. The sons of Jacob, however, were quite different. They generally stayed together as one large family.

Eventually, Jacob and his family moved to Egypt to reunite with Joseph because of a famine. After their stay, God miraculously delivered the tribes of Jacob out of

1 Genesis 17 & 25

2 Genesis 35

3 Genesis 17:18-19

Pharaoh's hand and took them into the wilderness because He had a three-fold plan for them.

First, God would teach them to trust Him. Next, He would bless them with a rich land that flowed with milk and honey. Last, He wanted them to tell others of the great joy and fullness of life that comes from loving and serving the God of heaven.

Twelve Sons Become Thirteen Tribes

Jacob had twelve sons when he entered Egypt at the age of 130, but seventeen years later, just before Jacob died, he did something unusual. He gave Joseph a double portion of his blessing by adopting Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own — displacing Joseph in the lineage of his twelve sons.¹ So, when the Exodus occurred, *the tribes of Israel totaled thirteen*.

A few months after the Exodus, the Israelites met God at Mt. Sinai. When Moses came down from the mount, he saw the Israelites dancing around a golden calf. Moses was indignant at Aaron's apostasy and angrily asked if anyone in the camp was on the Lord's side. During the revelry accompanying the worship of the golden calf, only the tribe of Levi had not apostatized. So, when Moses called to identify who was on the Lord's side, the Levites responded promptly and Moses sent them through the camp to kill those who led the apostasy.

¹ Genesis 48:5

About 3,000 idolaters died.¹ The Lord honored the loyalty of the Levites and subsequently blessed the tribe of Levi with the responsibility to take care of His temple.²

After two years of wilderness living, the Lord planned to take the Israelites into Canaan; so the Lord had Moses send out twelve spies. Notice that the tribe of Levi was excluded.³ While the spies were away, God told Moses: **“Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one.”**⁴ **“You must not count the tribe of Levi.”**⁵

The Biological Tribes Fail

The Israelites, as a body, did not have a faith experience in the Lord when they reached Canaan. Perhaps the saddest story ever written is the repeated failures of the nation of Israel. Certainly, no nation ever had greater potential; yet, fell so far from God's purpose. When Israel rejected Jesus, God abandoned this nation as trustees of His covenant.⁶ This point is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture.⁷

Because the thirteen tribes of Israel forfeited their calling, God installed a whole new economy. Think of it this way: Because Plan A had failed, God would im-

1 Exodus 32:28

2 Exodus 32:29

3 Numbers 13:4-16

4 Numbers 1:2

5 Numbers 1:49

6 See the 70 week prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27.

7 Numbers 3-6

plement Plan B. As you know, Jesus chose a total of thirteen disciples. Matthias was the thirteenth¹ to carry the gospel to the world. Some argue that Jesus did not choose Judas; however, Jesus clearly considered him to be chosen even though He knew Judas was a devil.² Under Plan B, God eliminated the matter of nationality. Now, there would be no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female. Paul said, **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**³

Savor the words of these verses. If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed—an heir of the promise—the promise of a beautiful homeland and eternal life! The real truth is that the trusteeship of the faith covenant was taken away from the nation of Israel and given to those who would live by faith. The people who live by faith would become the spiritual nation of Israel. In fact, Paul clearly says, **“A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.”**⁴

1 Acts 1:21-26

2 John 6:70

3 Galatians 3:28-29

4 Romans 2:28-29

So, there was a transition. The opportunities granted to the biological descendants of Abraham became the opportunities of the spiritual descendants of Abraham. The privileges granted to the descendants of Abraham (Plan A) were transferred to those who would live by faith in Jesus Christ (Plan B). If God could not fulfill His purposes through one nation called Israel, He would seek out people from every nation who would respond to His call.

The laws and ceremonies given to Israel were abolished at Jesus' death, but the purposes behind the ceremonial system are now revealed so that Gentiles might understand the economy of salvation. *Even though the sacrificial system has been abolished, the purposes behind the sacrifices remain.*

For this reason, God's *purpose* for the twelve tribes remains intact. The chosen people of God today are not the biological descendants of Abraham but, instead, followers of Jesus. Now, the promises offered to the descendants of Abraham have been improved and belong to the followers of Jesus which are reckoned by God as descendants of Abraham. Notice how this works: **“While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, ‘Who is my mother, and who**

are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’”¹ Jesus clearly says those who do the will of the Father are His family.

What is a Tribe?

A tribe is a group or family having a certain distinction. (Those living in multi-racial communities often speak of this phenomenon.) Notice three aspects of the twelve tribes:

First, the twelve tribes must exist at the end time because God takes 12,000 from each tribe as firstfruits.

Second, since no one living upon Earth today can trace his biological ancestry back to Jacob, and since biological heritage means nothing when it comes to salvation,² the reason for twelve tribes is that God groups all of the people on Earth according to twelve personality types. This idea comes from the fact that each of the sons of Jacob had a unique characteristic that was passed to his offspring, and Jacob blessed them accordingly.³ From this, we can deduce the twelve tribes at the end time are grouped according to personality traits, similar to the sons of Jacob. Jacob's sons had very diverse personality traits as will the 144,000. God will use these ordinary

1 Matthew 12:46-50

2 Ezekiel 14:12-21

3 Genesis 49 and 1 Chronicles 4:21-23

individuals as His messengers in achieving His intricate plan for us.

Third, God will choose 12,000 from each personality type as a practical matter. By dividing the population of the world into 144,000 segments, each prophet will have a parish of less than 56,000 people to serve during the end time. If we divide 56,000 people by 1,260 days, each prophet will need only to speak to an average of 44 people per day to get the job done!

Some people insist that the original twelve tribes of Israel still exist, but no one has offered credible evidence to back up this claim. When Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, genealogical records were eradicated and Jewish ancestral tracing ended. Even if the original thirteen tribes still existed, the divine amendment to the covenant allows any person who receives Christ to be an heir of Abraham.¹

Twelve Tribes Not Biological

The apostles used the term “twelve tribes of Israel” in a spiritual sense. Notice this text: **“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.”**² To whom was James writing? The biological tribes of Israel who had rejected Jesus, or the followers of Jesus who had been scattered because of religious persecu-

¹ Galatians 3:28-29

² James 1:1

tion? The text clearly shows it is addressed to those who have accepted Jesus. This is not discussing biological progenitors. James said, **“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.”** James is obviously speaking to Christian believers.¹

When Paul was captured and taken prisoner for preaching Jesus Christ, he stood before King Agrippa and said, **“And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me.”**² Look carefully at this verse and you will see that Paul spoke of “ancestors” in the spiritual sense; descendants of Abraham who lived by faith. He contrasts those who have been earnestly serving God, the twelve tribes, with the biological descendants of Abraham by calling them Jews.

If any question remains about God's method of determining lineage, consider Jesus' words. Jesus clearly defined the principle of spiritual descendancy when He was on Earth. Here's the story: **“They answered him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?’**

¹ James 2:1

² Acts 26:6-7

“Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.’

“‘Abraham is our father,’ they answered.

“‘If you were Abraham’s children,’ said Jesus, ‘then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the works of your own father.’

“‘We are not illegitimate children,’ they protested.

“‘The only Father we have is God himself.’

“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the

father of lies.”¹ These verses demonstrate how God reckons offspring.

Twelve Tribes Recognized in Heaven

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”²
“It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel.”³

Why does New Jerusalem have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates? Because all who enter the Holy City will enter through the gate according to their tribe. When the redeemed enter through the gates into the Holy City, each person will enter through the gate that marks his personal experience of faith. In other words, there are twelve unique experiences in the Lord, and each person enters through the gate that identifies his faith experience.

How does this work? Just as the children of Israel were divided into tribes, so the family of God will be divided into tribes. Each family will be unique. Think of it this way, each tribe in heaven will be a great family having a large number of similarities. This will be fellowship at its best.

1 John 8:33-44

2 Revelation 21:10

3 Revelation 21:12

144,000 Come From Twelve Tribes

Notice the tribal lineage of the 144,000 according to Revelation 7:5-8:

Judah	12,000	Simeon	12,000
Reuben	12,000	Levi	12,000
Gad	12,000	Issachar	12,000
Asher	12,000	Zebulun	12,000
Naphtali	12,000	Joseph	12,000
Manasseh	12,000	Benjamin	12,000

Notice two items in this listing of the twelve tribes.

First, the tribe of Levi is *included* and the tribe of Dan is *excluded*. The tribe called Joseph in this list is probably a name substitution for the name of Ephraim since all the descendants of Joseph were to fall under Ephraim or Manasseh. The omission of Dan has been the subject of much discussion. However, the reason Dan is omitted may be quite simple. The tribe of Dan might have been destroyed by repeated invasions from the north during the apostasy of Israel. The tribe of Dan inhabited the northernmost territory of the Promised Land and would have been exposed to more violent and more frequent attacks than tribes further south. It was not unusual for entire tribal nations to be eliminated during war campaigns.

Second, unlike both census accounts in the book of Numbers, the number taken *from* each tribe is identical.

This suggests that these servants are God's chosen from each tribe. Also, 144,000 is a very small number when compared to the population of the world. However, the real clincher is found in Revelation 7:9-14. The Bible clearly says that the people who go through the Great Tribulation who are victorious are *numberless*. Notice the distinction: One group, the chosen *from* each tribe is numbered (144,000), the other group is numberless.

End-Time Perspective

The 144,000 will accomplish, through God's power, a feat that mere men and women cannot do. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the 144,000 will proclaim the everlasting gospel to every living person on Earth in 1,260 days! This will result in a numberless, international harvest of people!

What is the everlasting gospel? The everlasting gospel is the truth about God and the terms and conditions of His salvation. The 144,000 will proclaim this truth and it will stand in opposition to the teachings of every religious system on Earth! God is not going to use an existing denomination to proclaim the everlasting gospel during the end time. The book of Revelation does not identify a "true denomination" at the end of time. Rather, Revelation identifies a "true gospel" and those who cling to it are identified as "the remnant of the woman."¹

¹ Revelation 12:17; 14:12

Why will God “leapfrog” the great religious organizations existing during the end time and use just 144,000 ordinary people? If we consider the vast resources that certain religious organizations have to work with, it would seem foolish that God will not use the great religions of the world to speak for Him during the end time! However, here are six reasons explaining why God can’t use them:

1. The glory of doing the impossible, proclaiming the gospel to the whole world in 1,260 days belongs to God, not man.
2. The seven religious systems of the world are corrupt. They cannot and do not speak for God. They cannot correctly explain the everlasting gospel, nor can they properly explain God’s plans and purposes for the Great Tribulation.
3. Most people agree that God does not propose to save people because of church affiliation. Salvation is not gained through membership in an organization. In fact, if God were going to use a religious organization to proclaim the everlasting gospel during the end time, church affiliation would prove to be an insurmountable problem. Consider the human frailty called prejudice. You and I know people who would rather die than join another church. For example, let us suppose that God looked down on Earth and declared a particular sect within the Moslem faith to have the

truth for the end time. How many Catholics, Jews, and Christians do you think would join that church in order to be saved? Now turn the table around and ask yourself, how many Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and Moslems would join your church to be saved?

4. God cannot save a person because his biological great-grandfather was Abraham. The Lord has made it very clear in the book of Ezekiel that one's ancestry has nothing to do with salvation.¹
5. One man cannot prove the superiority of his religion over that of another. History has proven this point to be true beyond question. Do you think Elijah could have proven His God was greater than Baal if fire had not fallen from heaven? So, how can one religious group argue its superiority over another without manifestations of supernatural power?
6. God knows that religion has far more to do with social structure than with a personal love for truth. (95% of people remain loyal to the religious system in which they were born, even if they do not practice that religion.) Because the properties of religion are so influential within the human race, because social relationships can be more important than loving truth, because there is a distinction between serving God and serving the church,

¹ Ezekiel 14:18; 18:4-28; Matthew 3:9

A Test for Mankind

God must test mankind to see if we love Him and His truth above all. The test will be simple and applied without partiality. God will require everyone to leave his or her church for the sake of truth. Then the object of our deepest affection will be revealed. At that time, some will discover they loved their church more than they loved God. When a contest exists between God and church, then, and only then, can humans detect the distinction that exists between serving God and serving the church. Until the test is applied, this is a distinction and a problem most people cannot understand. Remember, in Jesus' day, the Pharisees could not figure out how they could be as blind as Jesus claimed. However, the day is coming when this test will be applied and everyone will have to make a choice. Sadly, many people cannot separate themselves from their church of birth, even when presented the plainest truth.

To help people make up their minds, God is going to allow the devil to appear on Earth. The devil, embodied as the Antichrist, will dissolve all religions and forcibly create a new global church. This event will help motivate some people who could not leave their church for truth's sake. On the other hand, all of the cowardly will prostitute their faith and join the newly created church. This is because the devil will establish stringent laws so that all who refuse to join his church must be put to death if caught. It is interesting to note in this context

that God considers cowardice as great a sin as murder and sexual immorality. **“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — they will be confined to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”**¹

To level the religious playing field for everyone during the end time, God will choose 144,000 loyal men and women from all religions of the world to proclaim His truth. Just as Jesus gave Ezekiel and John little books to eat in their day, Jesus will give the 144,000 the words to speak in our day. All the religious systems or denominations of the world will be arrayed against God's truth. The line of demarcation will be very clear. Those who love God will leave Babylon and step across the line to God's side.

Conversely, those who will not surrender to the truth will have no other option than to join with the devil and receive his mark so that they might have, through buying and selling, the necessities of life. The mark of the beast will be a tattoo or brand showing either the literal number 666 or the name of the devil which signifies church membership in the devil's church. Consider the outcome: If a person sides with God, the devil's wrath will be focused on him. If a person sides with the devil, God's wrath will be focused on him. Surely, no one will escape this time of wrath.

¹ Revelation 21:8

Before leaving this section, a question should be asked. Why does God use a literal number of 144,000 individuals to proclaim the everlasting gospel during the end time? Given that nearly eight billion people now live on Earth, it would seem that God would choose 1 million or 10 million to accomplish his task. The answer is the 144,000, like Gideon's army, are too few to humanly accomplish the task. By choosing such a tiny number, God will again demonstrate that He is not dependent upon man. The reason the 144,000 are taken from the twelve tribes has to do with God's original plan for proclaiming the everlasting gospel through Jacob's twelve sons.

After the flood, God chose Abraham and his descendants as trustees of the gospel. Later, God renewed the trusteeship of His covenant with the thirteen sons of Jacob. Remember, Joseph had two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. They were counted at the Exodus as two tribes, thus the nation of Israel was reckoned as thirteen tribes until the tribe of Dan disappeared. As trustees of the gospel, the twelve tribes were appointed as "the light of the world."¹ When the tribes of Jacob failed to let the light of God's truth shine, Jesus modified His covenant with Israel and put into effect a constitutional amendment. This amendment offers gospel trusteeship to the disciples of Christ.² Under the provisions of the amendment, every one who receives Christ as Savior, becomes

1 Matthew 5:14; Acts 13:47

2 Matthew 28:18-20

an heir of Abraham and a member of Israel.¹ Paul wrote, **“If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”**² This is why Paul says, **“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”**³ And again Paul said, **“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**⁴

When Are the 144,000 Sealed?

The 144,000 are selected and sealed just before the Great Tribulation begins. **“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”**⁵

1 Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 2; Romans 10 & 11

2 Galatians 3:29

3 Romans 10:12

4 Galatians 3:28

5 Revelation 7:1-4

The four winds that are held back until the 144,000 are ready are the four terrible judgments contained in the fourth seal: sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts. Jesus delays the opening of the fourth seal until the 144,000 are selected. Then, upon opening the fourth seal, the seven angels having the seven trumpets commence their destructive work. I believe the seven angels were given the seven trumpets in March 1994 — at the termination of the 70th Jubilee cycle. Since that time, they have been waiting for the sealing of the 144,000. When that is accomplished, the first four angels of the seven trumpets will commence to harm the earth. Specifically, the first two angels of the seven trumpets will harm the land, trees, and sea — the very elements protected until the 144,000 are sealed.¹

What a Character!

John describes the characters of the 144,000, **“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”**²

What an interesting statement about ordinary people. **“They kept themselves pure. . . . No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”** In the past, some

¹ Revelation 7:1-4; 8:7-8

² Revelation 14:4-5

popular evangelists in the USA have brought embarrassment upon Christianity due to impropriety with women and money. Men claiming to be servants of God have been exposed as serfs of Satan. Perhaps the greatest sin in such cases is that these men did not come forward to confess their sins until “caught.” After reading the story of Achan,¹ one wonders how sincere such a confession can be. God rightfully expects those “talking the talk to be walking the walk.”

John’s comment, **“they are not defiled with women”** does not mean they are unmarried, for the marriage relationship is holy—ordained by God. This statement simply indicates these people are morally pure and fully committed to Jesus. I like the way the New Living Translation translates verse 4, and believe it’s the verse’s intended meaning. It reads, **“They have kept themselves as pure as virgins, following the Lamb wherever he goes.”**²

Some people insist the 144,000 are not defiled with the false doctrine that comes from the daughters of the harlot (women) mentioned in Revelation 17 as though there was one true religion on Earth today. I do not believe there is a true religion on Earth today. I believe there is one God and one truth, and it is the privilege of human beings to enjoy greater fellowship with God

¹ Joshua 7

² Revelation 14:4

the closer they come to understanding and practicing that truth. The statement about not being defiled with women speaks of dedication to God. See Nehemiah 13 for a parallel of the purity required of the Levites to serve God. One fact is certain, these 144,000 servants are blameless before God. Even the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah says of the remnant, **“The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.”**¹

According to John, the Father's name and the name of Jesus will be written on the foreheads of the 144,000.² These names will serve as an indication of their high rank in heaven's administration. The word “blameless” in Revelation 14:5 means that these men and women walk humbly in uprightness before God just like Noah, Abraham, and others. They speak truth, live truth, and as a result of living by faith, fully reflect the loving character of Jesus. They are sinners who have overcome besetting sins. The key to their being selected as one of the 144,000 is their perseverance for “overcoming.” Review the promises Jesus made to each of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, **“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”**³

1 Zephaniah 3:13, KJV

2 Revelation 14:1

3 Revelation 3:21, NKJV

John also says the 144,000 are “offered as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” Firstfruits is a term describing a special offering presented to the Lord at various feasts. At the Feast of Passover, Feast of Pentecost, and final feast of the religious year, the Feast of Tabernacles, an offering of firstfruits was presented. The firstfruits became the property of the high priest after they had been presented at a sacred service. The term firstfruits refers to the firstfruits of the coming harvest. If a man grew peaches, then his firstfruits would be the first peaches to ripen.

Old Testament feasts are shadows of the pattern of the heavenly Temple. In this light, Jesus, our High Priest, will receive the firstfruits of the coming harvest shortly before the great harvest takes place, and the 144,000 will become His special property. This elite group will form a special entourage accompanying Jesus at the Second Coming and, later, throughout the eternal universe. John says, **“They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”**¹ Think of the privilege that belongs to this group of people: being a personal attendant of Jesus!

Twelve Tribes

The Holy City, New Jerusalem, has twelve gates and twelve foundations. Each gate bears the name of a tribe and each foundation, the name of an apostle.² This should be an important point for those who think that

¹ Revelation 14:4

² Revelation 21:12-14

God is going to use the twelve original tribes of Israel to comprise the 144,000. The twelve foundations of the Holy City bear the names of the twelve apostles, not the twelve tribes! Perhaps the saints will enter the Holy City through the gate corresponding to their personality type and unique faith experience. If so, a group of 12,000 servants of God will lead their kinsmen through their gate. Each person will belong to a tribe. Everyone will have a family! Think about God's generosity. There will be an elite group from each character type of the human family to assist the newcomers as they move into their new homes. Even more interesting, modern science classifies humans into sixteen *personality* types, but God finds perfection in twelve. He certainly did not create members of the human race to be identical.

The Sealing

When the end time arrives, God will test the faith of every person on Earth. Those who pass the test will be transformed. No longer will sin be attractive to them; attraction for sin will be gone. Because the 144,000 are the first to be sealed, they are the firstfruits. Then, all of God's children will be sealed with a nature like Adam and Eve before they fell; their natures permanently changed. At last, the saints are free from the influence of sin! This is why at the close of mercy (seventh trumpet) Jesus declares, **“Let the one who does wrong continue to do wrong; let the vile person continue to be**

vile; let the one who does right continue to do right; and let the holy person continue to be holy.”¹

A few texts confirm this point: Hebrews 8:10-12; 1 John 2:28-3:2; Zechariah 3:1-7; Revelation 11:12. Notice in the Revelation text, the 144,000 are taken to heaven prior to the Second Coming, and their ascension as "first-fruits" proves their natures were transformed before the Second Coming. In fact, they were sealed before the Great Tribulation began.

The 144,000 servants of God live through the most extreme circumstances of Earth. Because they are special servants of Jesus, Satan's wrath is especially fierce against them. John saw them as more than conquerors. These true prophets are victorious over the false prophet, Satan, even though many of them will die. They will sing a new song that no one else can sing. No one else can sing their song because no one else will have their experience, and therefore, those who are not part of the 144,000 cannot sing that testimony!²

Glory to God

The 144,000 will proclaim the everlasting gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people during the time period of the trumpets. Because they walk with God as Enoch did, these servants will reach a level of spiritual maturity that pleases God, and He will allow them to ex-

¹ Revelation 22:11

² Revelation 14:3

perience the sufferings and burdens of Christ. The highest honor God can bestow upon a Christian is to grant him the privilege of entering into Christ's suffering.¹

The 144,000 will have the spiritual maturity to know what it means to live by faith as Jesus lived by faith. These people know what complete and full submission to God's will means. They would rather die than willfully commit a sin. The 144,000 carry the responsibility of the gospel during the judgment hour to a reeling world — a compelling burden that many cannot grasp or understand. The 144,000 are serious about following after God, and are the first recipients of the latter rain, which is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Their lives are both a demonstration and proclamation of the character of Jesus. These servants are the choicest fruits of heaven's harvest.

I believe this spiritual maturity will occur when the 144,000 are sealed just before the first trumpet sounds and the Great Tribulation begins. **“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”**²

Literal Number

Is 144,000 a literal number? If this number is symbolic and does not represent a literal number of people, then, according to the rules of interpretation, a Scripture must tell us the meaning of the symbol. Since no such expla-

¹ 2 Corinthians 6:3-10; Mark 10:38-39

² Revelation 7:3

nation exists for the number 144,000 or for, that matter, any number in Revelation, we should regard the number as literal. I see no value in treating numbers as symbolic. For example, in Revelation 17, John saw a beast having seven heads and ten horns. The heads and horns are symbolic, not the numbers. The number 144,000 is a literal number. The term “servants of God” suggests that these people will powerfully lead the proclamation of the everlasting gospel. In fact, in Revelation 10:7 the servants are called prophets. So, the work of the 144,000 will be to gather God's remnant. Jesus said, **“I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen [Israel]. I must bring them also [into my kingdom]. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd [when I claim all that has been given to me].”**¹

144,000 Notified

The question is often asked how the 144,000 are to be notified of their appointment. Of course, the only way to answer this question is to consider relevant texts and look at a biblical parallel. In Revelation 10, John is given an open book and told to eat it. The book is sweet in his mouth and bitter in his stomach. Then, John is told to prophesy again before kings and nations. Within the context of Revelation 10, John is representing the experience of the 144,000. The book

¹ John 10:16

represents God's message to Earth. The final proclamation of the gospel is not a matter of human prowess. God will give the 144,000 His words, and the Holy Spirit will provide the power.¹

A parallel of Revelation 10 is found in Ezekiel 2:8-3:4. From these verses, we learn three facts: First, God gave Ezekiel a book to eat that was sweet in his mouth. The book represents an understanding of God's will. Second, Ezekiel is told to speak to the people, whether they will listen or not. This is the bitter part; having to speak the words of God and creating so much personal offense. This is why the lifespan of prophets is usually short. Last, the Spirit of God was the enabling power within Ezekiel. In other words, the Holy Spirit enabled Ezekiel to say and do what was beyond mere human capability.

When we combine the context of Revelation 10 with the parallel in Ezekiel 2 & 3, we can conclude the following: God will notify the 144,000 of their selection by a direct and powerful confrontation. Perhaps this revelation might be similar to Saul's experience on the road to Damascus. However, until God speaks, the identity and selection of the 144,000 remain unknown.

The 144,000 – Identified Three Ways

First, the 144,000 will present a message that conforms with Scripture. Remember, they will operate during the

¹ Matthew 10:19-20

Great Tribulation. They will proclaim and explain the everlasting gospel. As a result, they will stand in opposition to the prevailing religious doctrines of that time.

Second, they will speak with power, simplicity, and clarity. They will speak with the power of John the Baptist. People went to the Jordan to hear this man because he spoke with power and authority that comes through the Spirit.¹ People also marveled at Jesus because of the authority with which He spoke.²

Last, God will give the 144,000 the ability to perform signs and miracles. However, this manifestation of power will not prove very much in those days because the devil's servants will also be performing signs and miracles.³ During the Great Tribulation, many will find it easier to put faith in "miracle workers" than to yield to the "faith-testing" terms and conditions of salvation. If a "prophet" can perform a miracle upon demand, many will use the false testimony of the miracle worker to justify rebellion against God. If God cannot persuade mankind with a clear and penetrating presentation of truth, then a miracle will not do much either.

The Ministry of the 144,000

The 144,000 are those who know how to live by faith. As trustees of the covenant of faith, they will receive

1 Luke 7:24-26

2 Mark 1:22

3 Matthew 7:20-22

the fullest outpouring of the Holy Spirit during the last days.

They will powerfully proclaim the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 and the world will hear their message. These messengers are Jesus' personal representatives before His second coming just as John the Baptist was Jesus' representative before His first coming.

The designated work of the 144,000 will be to proclaim the everlasting gospel.

The five doctrines of the gospel are: worshiping God, God's sanctuary, His salvation, His second coming, and man's nature and condition in life and death.

God knows there are many people on Earth in all religions who love Him and serve Him to the best of their ability. To gather these people into His sheep pen, He has to first separate the sheep from the goats. Therefore, in Revelation, He has revealed the process of how He intends to separate the sheep from the goats.

First, He will empower the 144,000. Next, to arrest the whole world's attention, God will have the angel's begin sounding the first four of the seven trumpets. These calamities will sharply awaken the inhabitants of Earth to the enormity of their sins. When the survivors are awakened and have "ears to hear," God will have His servants speak. Those who take the informa-

tion presented by the 144,000 to heart will be saved. Those who have ears but refuse to hear will be destroyed.

I believe the 144,000 could appear any day. They will not show up on video. They will not receive a round of applause or a glittering reward. However, when they appear, you will know God has taken control of Earth and the time of the end has come.

No wonder Paul wrote, **“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.”**¹

As a result of their powerful ministry, a numberless multitude will receive Jesus as Lord and Savior and be saved. The most beautiful element about this entire subject is the 144,000 will be people like you and me, who have come to the place where they live only to serve Jesus.

Twenty-Five Characteristics of the 144,000

1. The number, 144,000, as in any census, is a literal number. God required a census of the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land and He will carefully number all of the redeemed before they enter the kingdom even though it will be a number beyond human comprehension.

1 1 Corinthians 1:27

2. The 144,000 will be composed of men and women coming from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.
3. The 144,000 will not come from one particular church or denomination.
4. The 144,000 will be selected from the twelve tribes of Israel just before the Great Tribulation begins. The twelve tribes of Israel are not the biological offspring of Abraham. Ever since the end of the 70th week, the twelve tribes of Israel are reckoned as believers in Jesus Christ.
5. The 144,000 will come from all personality types. Most of them will not have been professional clergy. Membership in this group is a divine appointment. In other words, one cannot appoint or qualify himself to be a part of this group.
6. The 144,000 will be remarkably dedicated and loyal to God's service.
7. The 144,000 will be distributed throughout the world according to population. Nations with large populations will be blessed with a larger number of the 144,000.
8. The 144,000 will be God's "servants, the prophets." They will be anointed and appointed to speak for Jesus during the Great Tribulation.

9. The 144,000 will not, for the most part, know one another; yet, their unique message and ministry will be the same around the world.
10. The 144,000 will begin their work at the same time.
11. The 144,000 have not yet appeared.
12. The 144,000 will be sealed just before the Great Tribulation begins.
13. The 144,000 will be sealed first as “firstfruits” of the numberless harvest who will live during the Great Tribulation. Their sealing will be a final and permanent transformation of human nature. God will seal all believers during the 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses. The sealing will be a transformation of man's nature from “a propensity for sin” to “a propensity for righteousness.”
14. The 144,000 will be empowered by the Two Witnesses for a limited time of 1,260 days.
15. The 144,000 will be greatly outnumbered by the prophets of the Antichrist.
16. The 144,000 will perform many miracles as Moses and Elijah did which will testify that they are God's spokespersons. Of course, the devil's prophets will also produce many miracles, signs, and wonders during this time period. Naturally, the miracles of the devil's prophets will be inferior to that of God's prophets.

17. The 144,000 will accomplish in a short time what denominations have failed to do during the past 2,000 years.
18. The 144,000 will complete God's plans for them.
19. The 144,000 will suffer much rejection and torture for their plain and truthful testimony.
20. Many, if not all, of the 144,000 will perish during the Great Tribulation.
21. The 144,000 will be taken to heaven just before the seven last plagues begin.
22. The 144,000 will become servants of Jesus when they ascend to heaven. They will be His personal entourage throughout eternity.
23. The 144,000 will wear the names of Jesus and the Father on their foreheads throughout eternity.
24. The 144,000 will sing a song of experience and victory that no one else can learn to sing.
25. The 144,000 will return with Jesus when He comes for the righteous at the Second Coming.

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