

## **THE 144,000**

The 144,000 have held such a fascination for Christians as a mystical number of perfect saints at the end-time. They are viewed as so far beyond earthly origins that no sinners could attain such heights. Although some diehards have worked hard to become one of the 144,000, none have yet achieved that status.

Why should we be interested in the 144,000? Because they are God's wheat harvest that come through the great tribulation victorious. They are so in love with Jesus that His gospel purifies them without let or hindrance. They are sealed. As a living demonstration of what the cross of Jesus can do, they are translated without seeing death at His second coming. They have no thought for themselves. Their hope is that Jesus may be glorified in them.

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree." Revelation 7:1.

The four living beasts are angels who are universally holding the cosmic hurricane from destroying the earth, sea, and trees. Hurricane Katrina destroyed the Gulf Coast and flooded New Orleans. It was the costliest hurricane in American history. It was the first time in history that a major American city had to be evacuated.

When the angels shall let the cosmic hurricane blow, the seven last plagues will be unleashed upon the earth. The result will be catastrophic, universal devastation. There will be no survivors when God's wrath shall punish the dwellers upon the earth.

The last verse of chapter 6 focuses the issue, "For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Revelation 6:17. Here the answer is given.

"And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." Revelation 7:2, 3.

Those who have the seal of God will be able to stand through the seven last plagues. God's agents assigned to restrain the destructive forces, await the sealing of the 144,000.

Jesus is the angel rising from the east. Jesus gives the seal to His servants. "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Rev. 14:1). When you wrap up a package and seal it with tape to be shipped off to its destination, you write on it the name and destination of the one to whom it belongs. Likewise, the address that Jesus writes on your forehead is "God, the New Jerusalem."<sup>1</sup> You belong to God and your destination is the New Jerusalem. You are ready to be shipped, overnight express.

Jesus' shipping agent is the Holy Spirit "whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). The Father's name or character is "God is love" (1 John 4:8). This is not just any kind of love that is wishy-washy, weak and vacillating. God's love is as strong and powerful as Jesus' steadfast adherence to truth, when He died upon the cross to uphold God's law and mercy for sinners.

God's ten commandment promises are His love. They are the eternal foundation and Constitution of His government. They are His everlasting covenant of love and salvation. "If ye love me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15), said Jesus.

The seal of God's everlasting covenant is found in the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). "Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you" (Ex. 31:13).

The Sabbath is the sign of God's ownership. We belong to God. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God" (Ex. 20:10). The Sabbath belongs to God because after His six days of creation labor, He rested on the seventh day. Jesus rested on the seventh day after His painful labor and death on the cross on the sixth day. His shed blood ratified the new covenant. "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16).

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<sup>1</sup> "The 144,000 were all sealed, and perfectly united. On their foreheads was written, 'God, New Jerusalem,' and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name." Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 15.

We live in a so-called “Christian age” when those who call themselves Christians worship on Sunday as did the ancient pagans in honor of the sun. Sunday could never be God’s day of rest for He began His work of creating on the first day of the week and no day of work can ever be a day of rest.

True Sabbath-keeping is the rest of God and not our works. We rest in the completed work of God’s creation and redemption in Christ Jesus. We cease from our labor on the Sabbath because the old covenant is “all that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” The old covenant is our promises and works. The new covenant is God’s promise to forgive our sins and perform His work in us. His Sabbath is the seal of His covenant. Thus the sealing of God’s servants by the Holy Spirit is our crucifixion of self with Christ, compelled by His love; and the sign of God’s law engraven in our minds is the seventh-day Sabbath. This is the deeper meaning of the Sabbath.

At a time when all the world wonders after the beast whose resurgent religious power joins with the state to enact civil laws enforcing Sunday, in order that they might “receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads” (Rev. 13:14); the 144,000 servants of God will have “His Father’s name written in their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). Fear of punishment by civil law, the old covenant motivation, is the mark of the beast and its sign is Sunday worship. The compelling love of God which is the new covenant, is the name and character written in the foreheads of the 144,000; and the seal of the everlasting covenant is the seventh-day Sabbath.

There are six characteristics of the 144,000 given in Revelation 14. First, “these are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” Revelation 14:4.

These women are Babylon and her daughters. “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” Revelation 17:4, 5. The 144,000 “virgins” compose corporately God’s faithful wife who are not seduced by “Madam Babylon” into a spiritual life of whoredom.

Second, “these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14:4). Here the Lamb is “that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). Their life is not precious to them. They follow the Lamb to His cross. Like Isaac of old, they

willingly lay down upon the altar of sacrifice and die with Christ. Like Abraham who raised the knife, God stays the hand and substitutes the life of His own dear Lamb.

Third, “these were redeemed from among men.” Revelation 14:4. They are released from slavery. They no longer belong to the world. They are redeemed at the price of the blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

Fourth, they are “the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” Revelation 14:4. The 144,000 are redeemed or purchased as the firstfruits of the end-time wheat harvest (the wheat harvest, Rev. 14:14-16), in contrast to the unbelieving nations about to be judged (the grape harvest, Rev. 14:17-20). The 144,000 redeemed are set apart for God as His special offering and are now brought to the heavenly sanctuary on Mount Zion.

Fifth, “and in their mouth was found no guile.” Revelation 14:5. No one who speaks a lie will be found in the New Jerusalem. “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie.” Revelation 21:27. Paul spoke of “the mystery of iniquity,” “that Wicked,” earthly religious center, “even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:9, 10). Satan and his church deal in the trade of lies and deception. God’s end-time people hold firmly and faithfully to the truth. They have a consciousness and a thirst for the truth.

The special truths for this time are righteousness by faith which is the legal justification of life for all sinners as God’s gift, and responded to by faith; and if not hindered, leads to obedience to all of God’s commandments, including the fourth commandment, the seventh-day Sabbath. Justification by faith, understood as Jesus’ gift from the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, produces a harvest of firstfruits for God. Finally—

Sixth, “for they are without fault before the throne of God.” Revelation 14:5. They were born with bad natures and inclinations to evil, yet they have permitted their great High Priest to cleanse their hearts of all evil. What a wonderful work Jesus has done for them! In their characters will be seen the practical results of Christ’s closing work in the heavenly sanctuary. The sealing of their characters occurs as the last act of Jesus’ priesthood before the door of salvation is closed for all eternity. This is prior to the outpouring of the seven last plagues. They are thus protected from the

brunt of the plagues which fall upon the wicked, but they must go through the great tribulation following the Lamb, the great Shepherd of the sheep, withersoever He goeth. They will be sorely tempted because they dwell in flesh which is not changed until the second coming of Jesus after the plagues. They choose to say, No! to the flesh. They walk with the Spirit of Christ. They are crucified with Christ. Self is completely lost. Christ is more important than all else. This time of crisis and test such as has never come upon the world before, is the catalyst for their intimacy with the Bridegroom that they have not had heretofore. Their trials are turned to joy, for everything of the world is left behind, because they would rather have Jesus.

Of course, what everybody wants to know is, are there only 144,000 in number who will be sealed and translated at Christ's coming? If so, what hope does one have of being a living witness for the gospel in the final crisis? Is God limiting, paring down, this group? or does God want as many as possible to be part of vindicating His gospel?

"And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel." Revelation 7:4.

Here a census is taken of the draftees. When I was a young man in college, I received a census card indicating my potential for being drafted into the armed services of our country. I was called in for a physical, during the time of the Vietnam War. The government kept a count of all potential young men eligible for service.

Likewise, the Lord has a census kept of all eligible draftees into His army for the battle of Armageddon which is soon to come. You are on that list. If you do not put a "Stop" order on it, the Lord will call you up for service.

This census calls for 12,000 from the tribes of Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Nephthalim, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph, and Benjamin. These names did not compose the original tribes or sons of Israel (Jacob). Reuben was the first born, Judah, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Simeon, Issachar and Zebulon were sons of Jacob, but Levi was not counted in the land inheritance for they were the priestly tribe. The two sons of Dan and Ephraim were left off John's census list because the Lord judged them apostates and idolaters (Gen. 49:17; Hos. 4:17). Joseph, the grandson of Jacob, was given a double portion of the inheritance along with his brother Benjamin.

The list of the tribes in Revelation differs from any list given in the Old Testament. This along with the fact that after the ten northern tribes of Israel were taken into captivity by Assyria in the eighth century B. C. and never returned, becoming assimilated into the nations of the Middle East, indicates that the tribal identifications have been lost. Israel must now be understood as a spiritual entity, i.e., the followers of Christ are the true Israel today. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Both the number and Israel must be understood symbolically with reference to the church as the true Israel of God. Paul explained “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Romans 9:6-8. John was in agreement with Paul that the followers of Jesus Christ are the true Israel of God, the recipients of all the privileges and promises which were formerly given to the Israel of old.

The symbolic representation of the sealed 144,000—12,000 from each tribe—is especially important for the correct identification of this group as well as the great multitude. The number 144,000 is not meant as a limitation of those sealed. God wants as many as possible to be sealed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is not trying to limit the number. All are written in His book of life. Potentially everyone living could be part of the 144,000 if they would not hinder the power of His gospel from working in their lives. The number 144,000 indicates the moral, character perfection of those who are sealed by God as a result of Jesus’ priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

Christ has drafted the 144,000. They have accepted the call. They are about to engaged in the greatest of all battles in the history of this planet—the battle of Armageddon. Jesus has them organized into military units after the model of ancient Israel’s army in the time of war. Each tribe, with each of their unique characteristics, has twelve military units consisting of 1,000 soldiers, a total of 144 units from all twelve tribes.

Jesus is the five star general leading His army into battle. John hears the number of the enemy’s army, and then he sees them ready for battle. “And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them.” Revelation 9:16, 17. God’s army is sealed by God’s name and

His Sabbath day. None of them will perish. They are marked with protection from God and assured of salvation.

Motion picture directors and theme park designers have a favorite technique. They want you to first *hear* what is coming and then *see* it. For example, you hear the birds and animals in the forest canopy begin to talk to one another, and then the trees and foliage begins to rustle in the breeze. Then you hear the faint rumble of thunder followed by seeing the dark cloud on the horizon building to a storm and sudden downpour of rain. What you hear and see is one and the same thing.

Likewise John hears “a loud voice as of a trumpet” behind him (Rev. 1:10), when he turns around, he does not see a trumpet but Jesus walking in the midst of the seven lampstands (Rev. 1:12, 13). John hears the Lion from the tribe of Judah has overcome; when he turns to see the lion, he sees the Lamb as having been slain (Rev. 5:5, 6). John first hears of “the bride, the wife of the Lamb,” but he actually sees “the holy city Jerusalem” in its glory (Rev. 21:9-12).

John first hears the number of 144,000 as God’s embattled, sealed people on the earth. “And I *heard* the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand” (Rev. 7:4). “After this I *beheld*, and, lo, a great multitude” (Rev. 7:9). When he sees this same group, the 144,000, they appear to him in actual fact as a great multitude that no one can number.

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” Revelation 7:9.

The 144,000 were standing on the threshold of “the great tribulation” (Rev. 7:14), “the hour of trial” (Rev. 3:10), ready to engage in Armageddon. “Who is able to stand?” Revelation 6:17. The great multitude who John sees standing before the throne of God. The great tribulation is behind, and the battle is over. That is why God’s faithful people are no longer organized into military units, but are portrayed as a rejoicing crowd returning from the battle and celebrating the triumphant victory. They are clothed in white robes and waving palm branches of victory and triumph.

“And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. . . . And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed

in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 7:10, 13, 14.

This triumphant celebration is not marred by any praise of self. The triumph in battle is because of “the blood of the Lamb.” Christ has given the victory to end-time Israel. It is an extension of His victory on the cross. Jesus’ faith on the cross has been demonstrated in the 144,000. They have gone through His experience on the cross and the gospel has been proven to work in the hearts and lives of a great multitude. The gospel of the Father and the Son has been triumphant against all odds and it has been vindicated.

“And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” Revelation 7:11, 12.

All the holy angels, the twenty-four elders and the four living beings join with the great multitude in worshipping God.

“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.” Revelation 7:15.

The temple is God’s administrative center of the universe. There the redeemed serve as members of God’s council, participating in the governmental affairs of the universe.

“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.” Revelation 7:16.

They have come through the seven last plagues. All of that is behind them.

“For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” Revelation 7:17.

No more tears. No more death. The Lamb, Christ, will be the Shepherd of His people. We will eat and drink from the hand of the Lamb. The gourmet food of heaven will delight the pallet of every individual taste.

You have been given a formal invitation by the Host for this banquet. Will you accept? Send in your R. S. V. P. immediately!