

## Who Are The 144,000?

Ezekiel 9:3 to 11: 'The Lord called to the man clothed with linen who had the writer's inkbottle at his side, "Go through the midst of Jerusalem and set a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations committed in the midst of it." To the others He said in my hearing, "Follow the man with the inkbottle through the city and smite; let not your eye spare nor have any pity on the wicked but do not touch anyone on whom is the (Lord's) mark. Begin at My temple" ... Behold, the man clothed in linen who had the inkbottle at his side reported the matter saying, "I have done as You have commanded me."

Revelation 7:3 to 8: 'Harm not the earth, the sea nor the trees until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads. I (John) heard how many were sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel. There were 144,000. Twelve thousand were sealed out of the tribe of Judah; twelve thousand of the tribe of Reuben; twelve thousand of the tribe of Gad; twelve thousand of the tribe of Asher; twelve thousand of the tribe of Naphtali; twelve thousand of the tribe of Manasseh; twelve thousand of the tribe of Simeon; twelve thousand of the tribe of Levi; twelve thousand of the tribe of Issachar; twelve thousand of the tribe of Zebulun; twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph and twelve thousand of the tribe of Benjamin'. The tribe of Dan was omitted from the list of tribes and was replaced with Manasseh, Joseph's son. It is possible, although the Bible does not state directly, Dan was omitted because he led Israel into idolatry (Judges chapters 17 & 18; Amos 8:14).

Revelation 14:1 to 5: 'I (John) looked and behold, the Lamb (Jesus) stood on Mount Zion and with Him 144,000 men who had His name and His Father's name sealed on their foreheads. I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of great waters and like the rumbling of mighty thunder. The voice I heard seemed like the music of harpists accompanying themselves on their harps, and they sang a new song before the throne of God, before the four living creatures and before the twenty-four elders. No one could learn to sing that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are they who have not defiled themselves by relations with women for they are pure as virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They are they who have been redeemed from among men as the firstfruits of God and the Lamb. No lie was found to be on their lips for they are blameless before the throne of God'.

As always, we will start with the Bible because that is God's word. In Ezekiel, the scribe with the inkbottle was asked by God to put a mark on the heads of specific righteous men who were living in Jerusalem, therefore they would have lived in Israel and they did not leave Israel. Other men were told to slay the wicked people who lived there, but were told not to touch or go near anyone on whom was the Lord's mark. The mark or seal of God is invisible to us, but is known to God. We can see the above verse in Ezekiel was a prophecy that was to happen in the future, because the whole chapter was written in the future tense. The book of Revelation speaks about 144,000 men who are sealed with the seal of God. There has been great confusion about who the 144,000 are and what their role is. In Ezekiel they are mentioned as men who are deeply disturbed by the sin in Jerusalem. In Revelation they are described as servants of God and by the number of them. A few religious sects have assumed the 144,000 relates only to them, but when the sect grows beyond that number they are forced to change their minds. A lot of Christian preachers talk about these men as being special international evangelists in the latter days, but that is not scriptural. There is not one verse describing them as evangelists or that they ever left Israel like the Apostles did. If we look closely, we see they were elite, honest, pure Jewish men who were distressed at the sin in Jerusalem, were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, followed Jesus everywhere and sang a holy song of praise. Nowhere in the Bible does it say they preached or evangelised. When we follow the pattern of the New Testament, evangelists were named as being evangelists, just as apostles were named as being apostles. The 144,000 men were never named as being evangelists. The 144,000 men may have shared the Gospel while they were on earth, but their main ministry was in song, not evangelism. They are not 'spiritual' Jews nor are they from some 'exclusive' religion. All of these 144,000 literal men were pure hearted, unmarried, Jewish men from Jerusalem, who once lived in Israel, accompanied Jesus everywhere He went and who sang a song of praise, they were sealed by God and are now with the Lord. The twelve apostles were not the only people who followed Jesus everywhere and there are many verses that tell us multitudes followed Jesus. Multitudes are not a couple of dozen people, multitudes are thousands of people.

In Revelation, these men were sealed as servants and that verse was written in the past tense. "I saw how many were sealed." John did not say, "I saw how many were yet to be sealed." That passage of scripture places those men in the present tense in Apostle John's time frame. "They are blameless ... " Not they will be blameless; not they were blameless, but they are (right now) blameless and they are (right now) before the throne of God. They are with the Lord. They were on earth, they were in Jerusalem, they were sealed, they sang, they are with the Lamb and they are near the throne of God. Just because John saw these particular events happening in visions of heaven, does not mean all of the events recorded in the Book of Revelation are for the future, although some most definitely are. Many people alive today who are walking closely with God, see visions of heaven and what is going on up there, and those events are happening now.

They are not future events but current heavenly events, revealed to God's people as He opens their spiritual eyes. There is one very important point we need to remember, there is not one indication in the scriptures telling us, what happens in heaven, in the Book of Revelation, will be seen and heard by people on earth. Only those whose spiritual eyes and ears are opened by the Lord, have seen and heard what goes on in heaven, men like Daniel, Ezekiel and John. Even the heaven-dwelling holy angels do not understand everything that goes on up there (1 Peter 1:12). There is no scripture that says the people on earth or the church will see and hear what happens in heaven. There are many scriptures however, saying these mysteries are hidden from us unless the Lord opens our spiritual eyes (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 14:24; 1 Corinthians 4:1, plus many other scriptures). Remember the Apostle John heard the voice of God speaking while he was on earth (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35) so hearing the thunderous voice of God was not new to John when he penned Revelation.

In the book of Ezekiel we read about the men who were noticed by God because they sighed and groaned over the wickedness in Jerusalem. In Revelation we read about an elite group who are sealed (marked or chosen) by God, then later in Revelation we are told that same group are sealed with the name of the Lord and their role was to sing. Having been sealed by God did not make these men unique because from the day the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers, all Christians who receive the Holy Spirit are sealed by God (Ephesians 4:30). Notice Revelation 14:4 says the 144,000 men were 'firstfruits' of God and the Lamb. In Hebrew, firstfruits (bikkurim) means just what it implies, the first fruit of the harvest, the first and the best, the first 10% of the produce, whatever that produce was. Firstfruits are the first of all the harvest (Deuteronomy 26:2). Jesus was the Firstfruit to be raised from among the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20). As the word firstfruits implies, the 144,000 men would literally have been the firstfruits of Jesus' ministry. If the Bible says they were the firstfruits of God and of the Lamb, then that is what they would have been. That means they knew Jesus while He was on earth, were some of the very first converts to the teachings of Jesus, the firstfruits of the Lamb. The New Testament was written by Hebrew-speaking Jewish men, who lived in Israel, and who lived within the Jewish culture. They attended the synagogues and obeyed the laws of Moses. When the word firstfruits is written, we must not look to our modern English culture but to the ancient Hebrew culture of the Bible. Firstfruits means exactly what it says in Hebrew, and the 144,000 specially selected men were the firstfruits of God and of the Lamb (Jesus). To back up this statement we only have to look at where James said 'we' are of the Lord's firstfruits. When we are born-again, we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). 'Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth so we should be a kind of firstfruits of His new creation' (James 1:18). James lived in the correct timeframe to be one of the firstfruits of Jesus' ministry and the 'we' James was talking about were the earliest Christians, not the modern-day Christians. Paul said they enjoyed the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit and that was very soon after the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:23). Paul goes on to describe the first handful of dough offered is the firstfruits (Romans 11:16). So only the first 'handful' of Christians who received the Holy Spirit could be called the firstfruits. In our time, 2,000 years after Jesus came and because there would have been millions of converts between then and now, this present time would be a long way past the firstfruits of Jesus' ministry. There is no possible way we could consider these 144,000 special men as coming in the future because they were the 'firstfruits' of God and the Lamb, the first 'handful' among the converts. If they were to come in our generation, they would not have been called 'firstfruits'.

We know the temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 70 AD, just as Jesus said it would be (Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6). Remember how upset Jesus became because of the wickedness within the temple? He overthrew tables and yelled at and whipped the people who had made the temple a den of thieves (Matthew 21:12 & 13; Mark 11:15 to 17; John 2:14 to 19). These 144,000 men who accompanied Jesus everywhere He went, sighed and groaned over the wickedness in the city of Jerusalem, the city where the temple was. In Ezekiel 9:2, we read the men who destroyed Jerusalem held battle-axes. The Roman soldiers destroyed the burned-out temple in Jerusalem with battle-axes and with an implement similar to a modern-day crowbar. The soldiers prised the stones apart to get at the gold that had melted in the fire and ran between the blocks of stone. Barely a stone was left one on another, just as Jesus foretold. The total destruction of Jerusalem as described in Ezekiel 9:6 to 10, in the Gospels and Revelation place the 144,000 men within the correct time frame of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the wickedness that made them sigh and groan, the wickedness that so angered Jesus. It also places them at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Who 'seals' all believers. Now they are with the Lamb on 'Mount Zion' in the heavenly Jerusalem. Revelation says the 144,000 men stood with the Lamb (Jesus) on Mount Zion. Mount Zion is a real mountain situated on the northern side of Jerusalem (Psalm 48:2). Mount Zion is also another name for the tribe of Judah and the Lord chose the tribe of Judah to lead Israel (Psalm 78:68). Jesus came from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). The Mount Zion mentioned in Revelation is the spiritual 'place' where born-again, Holy Spirit-filled believers and angels gather. 'You have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to countless multitudes of angels' (Hebrews 12:22).

Amen and God bless you.

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