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A Study of the 144,000

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THE 144,000

NUMEROUS QUERIES have been received of late concerning the 144,000 brought to view in Revelation 7. Who are they? At what age of the world are they developed? Is the number to be taken in a strictly literal sense? or is it a representative number, meaning a larger and indefinite company, of some particular class?

This number is first mentioned in Revelation 7, and the circumstances under which they are brought to view furnish a very clear indication, in a general way, to the correct application. They are a certain class who are sealed out of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel; and they are sealed at a certain time, when "the four winds" are about to blow upon the earth, to the hurt, or desolation, of the earth and the sea (verses 2, 3); and the blowing of the winds is restrained till this number, which the angel calls "the servants of our God," are sealed.

It will hardly be called in question that the "four winds" of which this prophecy speaks, are the same as "the great whirlwind" prophesied of in Jer.25:32,33, and that the same scene is brought to view in both these passages of scripture. Jeremiah says: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Behold evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the the coasts of the earth. And the slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth, even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried: they shall be dung upon the ground."

This scene is certainly future; for nothing like it has ever yet occurred since the prophecy of Jeremiah was written; and no such scene will be witnessed till this earth's final time of trouble shall come. Dan.12:1. Now if the blowing of the four winds of Rev.7:1 is the same scene (and what would four winds blowing from "the four corners of the earth" produce but "a great whirlwind"?), then the scene of Rev.7:1-8 applies in the last days, and is a work preparatory to the closing up of all earthly scenes. The 144,000 must therefore be found in the last generation of "the servants of our God" on the earth; and the sealing of them must be the last special religious movement among men. It is the closing Christian movement of the Christian age.

But the thought with some will at once arise, that this cannot be, because the sealed ones are from "all the tribes of the children of Israel" and as those

tribes do not now exist, this prophecy must apply to some time in the past when the genealogy of the tribes was kept, and the distinction was preserved. So far as this may appear as an objection to the view above stated, it is easily removed by another thought, - that though men have no distinctive record of the tribes, God may have such a record, and that is sufficient. Heb.12:23. And the objection is still further barred out by the fact that the people of "Israel" are not confined to the descendants of Abraham after the flesh, but that true Israelites are Jews inwardly (Rom.2:29); not "children of the flesh," but "children of the promise" (Rom.9:6-8); wild scions grafted into the good olive-tree and partaking of its nature (Rom.11:17,24); members from the Gentiles, of the "commonwealth of Israel." Eph.2:12,19. And all this pertains to Christians, who are in consequence of their relation to Christ, "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal.3:29. Hence James, addressing Christians at the time - when "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (the very time to which Rev.7:1-8 applies), greets them as "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." And the New Testament city, the New Jerusalem, whose builder and maker is God, which bears on its foundation jewels the names of the twelve apostles, shows on its twelve gates, through which the whole host of the redeemed are to pass in and out through all eternity, the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. The 144,000 may therefore be made up from the last generation of Christians, and yet be drawn from the twelve tribes of the children of Israel.

The sealing implies protection and salvation. It is a work of the gospel through which all who effectively share in it will secure everlasting life. The threatened condition that is restrained in order that the sealing work may be accomplished is such that when it takes effect, no further work of the gospel can be accomplished; hence, with the sealing of the 144,000, probation ends; the winds of destruction blow from every quarter, and the great whirlwind of God's indignation, His last testimony in this mortal state against sin, will sweep the world into its final aspect of ruin and desolation.

The number, 144,000, must mean a definite number, composed of just so many individuals. It cannot stand for a larger but indefinite number, for in verse 9 another company is introduced which is indefinite in its proportions, and hence is spoken of as "a great multitude, which no man could number." If the 144,000 were designed to represent such an indefinite number, then John would have said, in verse 4, "And there were sealed a great multitude, which no man could number, out of all the tribes of the children of Israel." But instead of this, he says, 144,000, twelve thousand from each tribe a

number, which can be easily enumerated. The reason for this distinction is apparent if we take the innumerable multitude of verse 9 to be the whole host of the redeemed, who will have part in the first resurrection, and the 144,000 to be Christians who will be alive on the earth when Christ appears. And that the 144,000 are the ones who will be thus alive, and meet Christ at His second coming, appears from the prophecy where they are next mentioned; that is, Rev.14:1-5. Here they are represented as coming triumphant out of the last religious conflict in this world (Rev.13:12-18), and as being "redeemed from the earth," and "redeemed from among men." Rev.14:3,4.

Will there, then, be only 144,000 saved from among the living when the Lord appears? May not this number be so far representative as to include many others? There seems to be quite a plausible supposition that this latter may be the case; that is, that the 144,000 may include only the adult males connected with the great Advent movement while the women and children associated in the same movement would be so many additional ones to be saved from among the living in that day. The plausibility of this idea lies in the fact that the Hebrews were so numbered when delivered from Egyptian bondage which was a figure of the deliverance of the remnant of the true Israel from the Egypt of this world at the coming of the Lord. Some three millions, in all, came out of Egypt, yet there were numbered only those who were able to go forth to war, from twenty years old and upward, amounting in all to 603,550. Num.1:2,3,46. This would be about one to five of the whole multitude, as is computed by Dr. Clarke, on Ex.12:37, where the number of fighting men is given as only about 600,00. If the enumeration of Rev.7:4 is founded on the same basis (of which, of course, there is no positive proof), it would give the number to be translated probably over seven hundred thousand, instead of only one hundred and forty-four thousand. It would indeed be most gratifying to think that so many would be ready for the Lord's appearing; but looking over the condition of the world, and marking the rapid religious decline of these days, the wonder is where so many as 144,000 will ever be found who will be ready for the Lord when He shall appear.

And lastly do the 144,000 represent only those who have never passed through death? - Not at all. The conditions of the prophecy make it necessary that many who are now in their grave should be included in the 144,000. The third message of Revelation 14 is the sealing message of Revelation 7. Though in different chapters, and presented under different circumstances, they are not two messages, but one and the same thing. The

third message will therefore result in fitting 144,000 for the coming of the Lord. This is called, in Revelation 7, sealing them with the seal of the living God in their foreheads. The seal of God being the Sabbath, the work brought to view is the message which involves the Sabbath reform movement of these days. Then all those who have a genuine religious experience terminating in this movement, must of course be included in the number of those who are sealed by the message. Their connection with the message results in their being sealed; and being sealed results in their salvation. Now there are many who are in their graves, who will be saved, whose whole religious experience, from a state of sin to full acceptance with God, has been in connection with this message. They will be saved because of this experience. Are not such sealed by this message? - Most assuredly. But the message seals only 144,000. Therefore such must come up from their graves, and be counted among the 144,000.

But it may be said that the time has not yet come when anyone is sealed; and the ones referred to are dead; and how can dead men be sealed? Let such ask themselves the question, How can dead men be saved? They can be sealed in the same way that Daniel, long dead, can stand, as he did stand, in his lot at the end of the 2300 days. The record of the sealing message goes upon the books above. Those whose experience has led them into that message have their names there. If they die in that message, when their names come up in the Judgement, they are written among those sealed by the message. It can be no other way; for in that company their closing religious experience (and in many cases their only religious experience) found them. And this explains what the voice from heaven commanded John to write: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth (that is, from the beginning of the third message): Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Though resting quietly in their graves, they are numbered at last among the 144,000 just the same as if they had lived all the years of their slumbering, and passed through all the toils and trials and conflicts which the living have to endure. This view gives to Rev.14:13 its wonderful significance, of which it is entirely robbed by any other position. Those who deny that those who die under the third message can be numbered among the 144,000, fail to see the connection between that message and Rev.7:1-8.

It is urged, further, that the 144,000 must all be those who have never died, because they are "redeemed from the earth" and are "redeemed from among men." But this is no objection; for these very expressions will apply to those who have died in the Lord under this message, as well as to those who

never die. It will be asked how this can be; and the answer is that they come up in the special resurrection, embracing a limited number of both righteous and wicked, as mentioned in Dan.12:2 and Rev.1:7. Those who, in this resurrection, come up to everlasting life (though not then made immortal) are those who belong to the 144,000 because they have died in the message; and those who rise to shame and contempt are those who had a part in Christ's crucifixion, and perhaps others in different ages, especially the last, who have shown pre-eminent activity in opposing the work of God. That such a resurrection, embracing these characters, will take place, the scriptures referred to plainly enough affirm; and the only point where the prophecies make a place for its occurrence is at the time mentioned in Rev.16:17. This is at the beginning of the seventh plague, when the great voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne utters the solemn words, "It is done!" This voice shakes both heaven and earth, but speaks deliverance to the people of God. Jer.25:30; Joel 3:16; Heb.12:26,28. Of this time, "Great Controversy," pages 636,637, speaks very clearly, as follows: "That voice shakes the heavens and the earth. . . . Graves are opened, and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth . . . awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' All who have died in the faith of the third angel's message come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God's covenant of peace with those who have kept His law. 'They also which pierced Him,' those that mocked and derided Christ's dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory, and to see the honor placed upon the loyal and obedient."

Who are those here referred to "who have kept His law"? - Those, certainly who have been engaged in the Sabbath reform movement of these last days; and from this it appears that those who have died in this work are still regarded, in God's sight, as an integral part of the living company; for when the covenant of peace is spoken to them, those of them who are then in their graves are raised up to hear it with the living. They are raised up glorified; and the living saints are then also glorified; but none of them are made immortal. This is shown by the following words from page 45 of the same book. Speaking of the moment when Christ appears, it says: "The living righteous are changed' in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.' At the voice of God (referred to above) they (the living saints) were glorified; now they are made immortal, and with the risen saints are caught up to meet their Lord in the air." But those who were raised at the voice of God to hear the covenant of peace with the living, were also glorified at that time (another

point of identity), and of course are made immortal when the rest of the company are changed to that condition. Now look at these risen ones. They came up at the voice of God, quite a space of time before the Lord appears; they are raised to the plane of mortality only; they take their stand with the living saints, as a part of them, and though glorified, not yet made immortal; they come up to the day of Christ's appearing in the same condition as the saints who have never died, and then, with them, are made immortal, changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Thus these are just as emphatically "redeemed from the earth," and "redeemed from among men," as those who do not go into the grave at all. In this connection the pioneers of the third angel's message are deserving of a passing thought. Imagine such men as Elder James White, Elder J. N. Andrews, and Elder Joseph Bates, who led out in the beginning of this work, who identified themselves as fully as men could with this message, whose whole souls were absorbed in the grand thought of helping to call out a sufficient number to join them in the work to make up the privileged and happy company of 144,000, and who went down in death with their hearts and minds full of this blessed anticipation - imagine such men waking up after what will seem to them no longer time than the tick of a clock, and finding that they have dropped out of their coveted position, and are no part of the 144,000! The idea is not supposable. If it is, then to die in this message, instead of being the blessing which the voice from heaven proclaimed it to be, is about the greatest calamity that can befall a believer. This is not possible.

Finally, it may be said that those who die in the message cannot be a part of the 144,000; this company come "out of great tribulation" (Rev.7:14), which would not be of those who sleep in the grave till six of the seven plagues are fulfilled. This conclusion should hardly be accepted without a little further consideration. Mark the situation. Raised at the beginning of the seventh plague, they pass through the whole period of that judgment, and witness all its accumulated calamities. From certain passages of scripture it is to be concluded that the plagues will cover the space of one year. This would give nearly two months after the seventh vial began to be poured out, before the end. But the plagues are cumulative. The first does not cease when the second begins; but the second adds its horrors to the first, the third adds to the others, and so on to the seventh. In the seventh is therefore found the climax of them all. And thus whatever degree of inconvenience and suffering falls to the lot of the saint on account of the plagues (and they will not be free from this, though the plagues themselves

do not touch them. See "Great Controversy," page 629), whatever sounds of anguish the others hear, and whatever sights of woe and desolation and despair the others see, those who are raised at the voice of God will hear and see and pass through, the same as those who have not been through death. The accumulative horrors of the seventh plague will overbalance all the others; and those who are delivered from it may be said to have come "out of great tribulation," though having no experience with the other six.

Thus the evidence seems clear and conclusive that the 144,000 are gathered from the last generation before Christ comes; that they are brought out by the third angel's message; that even those of them who die in the message are blessed, being restored to the number by resurrection before Christ appears; and that all crowned at last with the peculiar privilege of composing the cabinet of the King of kings and Lord of lords, to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (Rev.14:4), joyful in His constant presence, and sustained by His unfailing grace. Rev.7:15,17.