

## Who Are The 144,000?

The book of Revelation speaks about 144,000 people who are sealed with the seal of God. There has been great confusion about who the 144,000 are and what their role is. The fact is, they are only mentioned as 'men' once in Ezekiel, as servants of God and by number in the book of Revelation. Many 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 evangelists in the latter days, but that is not scriptural. If we look closely, we see that they were elite, honest, pure Jewish men who were stressed at the sin in Jerusalem (therefore they must have lived in Israel), 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. The 144,000 are literal Jewish-born men who once lived on earth when they were sealed by God, and now are with the Lord. They are not 'spiritual' Jews nor are they from some 'exclusive' religion.

As always, we will start with the Bible because that is God's word. Read the prophecy in Ezekiel 9:4; 'And the Lord said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark (seal) upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in the midst of it'." Verse 6; "Slay the wicked; but do not touch or go near anyone on whom is the mark."

The 'mark' or seal of God is invisible to us, but is known to God. We can see that verse in Ezekiel was a prophecy that was to happen in the future, because the whole chapter was written in the future tense. Now turn to Revelation 7:3 to 8; 'Harm neither the earth nor the sea; nor the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God upon their foreheads. And then I (John) heard how many were sealed (or marked; or chosen) out of every tribe of the sons of Israel: there were 144,000. Twelve thousand were sealed (marked) 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'.

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." Just because John saw these particular events happening in visions of heaven, doesn't 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 that tell us, that what happens in heaven, in the book of Revelation, will be seen and heard by those 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 angels don't 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 what happens in heaven. There are many scriptures, however, that says 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).

Revelation 14:1 to 5 continues with the description of these specially chosen people: 'Then 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 inscribed on their foreheads. And 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 and 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 upon their lips, for they are blameless; spotless, untainted, without blemish; before the throne of God'.

That passage of scripture places those men in the present tense in the Apostle John's time frame; circa 70 AD. "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.

In the book of Ezekiel, we read about men who were noticed by God because they did sigh and groan over the wickedness in Jerusalem. In Revelation 7 we read about an elite group who are sealed (marked or chosen) by God, and then in Revelation 14 we are told that same group are sealed with the name of the Lord and their role was to be singers. All of these 144,000 are pure hearted, unmarried, Jewish men, from Israel, who accompany Jesus everywhere and who sing a song of praise. They were not unique because they were sealed by God, because all Christians who receive the Holy Spirit are sealed by God (Ephesians 4:30). Remember that the Apostle John heard the voice of God speaking while he was on earth (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35 & 36) so hearing the thunderous voice of God was not new to John when he penned Revelation.

Notice verse 4 says the 144,000 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. Deuteronomy 26:2 describes firstfruits as the first of all the harvest. 1 Corinthians 15:20 & 23 says Jesus was the firstfruits to be raised from among the dead. As the word firstfruits implies, the 144,000 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 likely would have known Jesus while He was on earth; some of the very first converts to Christianity; the firstfruits of the Lamb. The twelve apostles were not the only people who followed Jesus everywhere and there are many verses that tell us that.

The New Testament was written by Hebrew-speaking Jewish men, who lived in Israel, and who lived within the Jewish culture; that is 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 James 1:18 where he said 'we' are a kind of the Lord's firstfruits. 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. In Romans 8:23 Paul said they enjoyed the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit and that was very soon after the initial outpouring. 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 that the temple in Jerusalem was completely destroyed in 70 AD, just as Jesus said it would be in Matthew 24:2; Mark 13:2 and Luke 21:6. Jesus said there would not be one stone left upon another. 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; Mark 11:15 and John 2:15). 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 that 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 upon another, just as Jesus foretold. All that is left of the temple is the Western Wall. Ezekiel, the Gospels and Revelation place the 144,000 within the correct time frame of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and the wickedness that made them sigh and groan and that so angered Jesus. It also places them at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which now 'seals' us. Before the Holy Spirit came, no one was sealed by Him. Now they are with the Lamb on 'Mount Zion' in the heavenly Jerusalem.

Revelation 14:1 says the 144,000 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) and we know that Jesus sprang from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). In Hebrews 12:22 we read; 'But rather, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem and to countless multitudes of angels in festal gathering'. The Mount Zion mentioned in Revelation 14:1 is the spiritual 'place' where born-again, Holy Spirit-filled believers and angels gather.

We can see that the tribe of Dan was omitted from the 12,000 and replaced with Manasseh, Joseph's son. It is possible, although the Bible does not state directly, that Dan was omitted because he led Israel into idolatry (Judges chapters 17 & 18; Amos 8:14).

The 144,000 men may have shared the Gospel while they were on earth, but their main ministry is music, not evangelism. The scripture says they accompanied Jesus everywhere He went. They and the apostles were not the only close friends Jesus had. Jesus described Lazarus as His friend (John 11:11). When we eventually go to be with the Lord, we will meet up with all the Godly people mentioned in the scriptures.

Amen and God bless you.