

The 144,000 in the Book of Revelation

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The 144,000 in Revelation 14

The number 144,000 appears in two passages in Revelation. Many wonder who they are. The first mention is in Revelation 7:2-4:

*“Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, ‘Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. **One hundred and forty-four thousand** of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed...”*

Revelation 7 goes on to say that 12,000 of each of the tribes of Israel were sealed. So, these 144,000 are the Jews who are still faithful to the old covenant. They will be sealed right before the great day of God’s wrath.

The second mention is in Revelation 14:1:

*“And I looked and behold, the LAMB standing on Mount Zion: and with Him were **one hundred and forty-four thousand**, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads” (NIV).*

The 144,000 here were standing together with the **LAMB**, Jesus Christ Himself, on Mount Zion, having **His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads**. These must refer to the matured Christians who have been raptured (caught up) to **the heavenly Mount Zion before God’s throne** at the second coming of Jesus Christ; these are not the Jews in Revelation 7 since the Jews do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God. This Mount Zion does not refer to the earthly Zion in Palestine. However, we read in Hebrews 12:22-23, 28: **“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the festal**

gathering and the church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect...*a kingdom which cannot be shaken.*” There are many Christian gatherings everywhere; but where is Mount Zion to which we Christians can come today? Where is the kingdom of priests that God desires (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:10)? We must ask ourselves and earnestly seek God in these matters. If we are not in Mount Zion, the church of the firstborn today, would we then be raptured to stand with the LAMB on the heavenly Mount Zion before God’s throne on that day?

Revelation 14:2-3 goes on to say:

“And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpers playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who had been redeemed from the earth” (RSV).

The voice of the 144,000 came from heaven, so these would be the ones who must have already been raptured to the heavens before the throne of God.

They sang a new song that no one else could learn, which means that not all Christians could learn that song. Songs reflect the personal experiences of the writer just like the Psalms. We Christians should always have new, fresh and richer experiences of the unsearchable riches of Christ every day. These experiences are like new songs, not mere biblical teachings and doctrines that one can learn.

They were redeemed from the earth, further indicating that these 144,000 would be Christians and not Jews because they had been purchased, redeemed by *“the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”* (1 Pet. 1:18-19). The Lord Jesus Christ came to *“give His life a ransom for many”* (Mk. 10:45).

Revelation 14:4-5:

“These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

These 144,000 are virgins. They are undefiled, pure, and holy. It does not mean that they are unmarried women. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: *“...I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a **chaste virgin to Christ**”* (2 Cor. 11:2). We Christians should always cleanse ourselves *“from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor. 7:1, see also 6:16-18).

The 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever He goes. The Lord Jesus said, *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and **follow Me**”* (Matt. 16:24). To receive salvation is simple, for it is a gift of God, and it is by grace through faith and not by works. But to follow the Lamb, one must first deny himself and also take up his cross. Not many believers are willing to do so. Our Christian life is a journey, a race. The Lamb never stops moving on to lead us to the ultimate goal; but unfortunately, we Christians like to just remain in our comfort zone. For example, some believers are satisfied with the teachings of Martin Luther, that we are justified by faith and not by works. They feel that is good enough and do not want to press onward. Many are satisfied with the traditions and biblical teachings and are not open to receive new revelations from the Lord. History proves this. To follow the Lamb is to press on with Him. Philippians 3:12-15 show us a good example in the apostle Paul: *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on...Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus...”* Therefore, we have to learn to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross and follow Him wherever He goes!

These 144,000 were not only redeemed from among men, but they have also reached spiritual maturity to be **firstfruits to God and to the Lamb**. Revelation Chapter 14 is about the harvest. In His first coming, Jesus came as the Sower to sow the seed of life (Matt. 13:3, 23). At His second coming, He will come as the One with the sickle to harvest (Rev. 14:14). We Christians need to grow and mature spiritually and bear fruit while we are still alive. It is impossible to grow once we pass away. Growth can only occur during our life on the earth, not in the land of the dead. As long as we live on this earth, we need to grow up in all things into Christ.

Paul told the church in Corinth that they are God's farm (1 Cor. 3:9, *Gk.*). He sowed, and Apollos watered. However, the believers there did not grow. Paul wrote: *"And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"* (1 Cor. 3:1-3). The Christians in Corinth remained as babes.

The church in Ephesus had a similar problem. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:13-14: *"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."* If we remain as children, we will be tossed to and fro by teachers, preachers or even current events, and are unable to take a solid stand - we will fall into error.

Hebrews 5:13-6:1 also warns us: *"for every one who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God..."* (RSV).

All the above verses are a strong warning to us that if we Christians remain as spiritual babes, unfruitful, and do not mature, when the Lord comes, we will not be the firstfruits raptured to God's throne. A part of the inheritance that God desires to give to us is that we should reign together with Christ in the millennial kingdom. But Galatians 4:1 tells us that *"the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all."* This means that as God's children we are heirs positionally, yet we will not be able to receive the inheritance if we are not mature spiritually. May we take heed to be perfected and reach maturity before He comes.

The Lord Jesus Himself warned us that every branch in Him as the vine *"that does not bear fruit He takes away"* (John 15:2, 6). Just as the five foolish virgins were not qualified to enter into the wedding feast when the bridegroom came (Matt. 25:10-12), many will not be able to partake of that wedding feast at the Lord's coming. Only the wise virgins who were well prepared with an extra portion of oil could enter in. This concept is similar to the rapture of the firstfruits to Mount Zion.

God told Moses in Exodus 34:26: *"The first [best choice] of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God..."* He also said concerning the livestock: *"Consecrate to Me all the firstborn...both of man and beast; it is Mine"* (Exod. 13:2). To God, the firstfruits and the firstborn are very special. He desires them for Himself.

The Lord described one characteristic of the firstfruits: ***"And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God."*** We do not become without fault overnight. We need to be saved to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25), to be sanctified completely and be preserved blameless at His coming (1 Thess. 5:23). 2 Corinthians 3:18 also tells us that we need to be transformed into His likeness from glory to glory by His Spirit. Besides, James 3:2 says, *"...If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body."* Let us pursue this glorious goal!

Since Christ's second coming is drawing near, let us consider God's timeline for the rapture of the firstfruits. In the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27, the 70th week (the last 7 years before the Lord returns)

begins with a covenant with many in the Middle East. In the middle of the week, the covenant will be broken and the great day of God's wrath (which many call the "great tribulation") will begin. Shortly before this, the firstfruits will be raptured to the heavenly Mount Zion (Rev. 14:1-5), and immediately thereafter, the 144,000 Jews will be sealed (Rev. 7:2-4) to protect them from the plague of the 5th trumpet during the great tribulation. The rest of the believers who are not raptured will have to go through the heat of the great tribulation to ripen.

By His mercy, God has given us so many warnings in His word, because He wants us to be the firstfruits at His coming. Let us be prepared. Let us take the Lord's warning in Revelation 3:10 to the church in Philadelphia: *"Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."* May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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Revelation 14:1-5