



*"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*

The subject of the 144,000 is an interesting one, and the Bible identifies the 144,000 so that there can be no doubt as to their identity.

The 144,000 are mentioned in two places in the book of Revelation, and these two statements give the key to the understanding of the identity and the time that these 144,000 were selected. They were chosen from "...all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation 7:4), and they are "the firstfruits unto God and unto the lamb" (Revelation 14:4).

These 144,000 were being gathered even during the days of Paul: "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God Forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? How he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine alters; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith, the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:1-5). Here we are told

that, in the day of Paul, God had a number that was accorded grace. This number was made up exclusively of Israelites.

The Bible plainly tells us that the 144,000 are of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is the number that God has chosen according to the election of grace, and these people were part of the beginnings of the New Testament Church of God. "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. 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. 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 7:1-4).

The first group to be sealed were all Israelites and added up to the exact number of 144,000 or 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel. The gospel went to Israel first, then to the nations of the world.

Jesus did not want the Apostles to begin the gospel work until they had received the Holy Ghost, and then that they should start their work in Jerusalem, then to Judea, then to Samaria, and then to the uttermost part of the earth or nations. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Therefore, the first to be sealed would be Israel, and then the Gentiles. Let us read Paul's words as he turns to the Gentiles: "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of their people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, And I should heal them. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:25-28).

Before this terrible pronouncement, God had sealed the 144,000 of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are all buried in the dust of the earth having been sealed with the Holy Ghost and shall come forth in the first resurrection.

In that great day, when Jesus returns, and the righteous dead are resurrected to be caught up to meet Him in the air, the 144,000 that were saved in Israel in the days of the apostles, and the great multitude that is being saved out of all nations will be with Christ after the resurrection. "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount of Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the

firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God" (Revelation 14:1-5).

Two important things in the above verses identify the 144,000 as Israelites: First, "they are virgins"; and Secondly, "they are the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb", or of the gospel age.

These 144,000 are said to be virgins "not defiled with women," "in their mouth was found no guile," and that they were "without fault before the throne of God." In other words these are the Israelites that made up the original Church of God in the days of apostles, before there were so many churches. "Women" mean churches in prophecy so these are they which were not defiled with other churches, or teachings. Since the nation Israel constituted the Church during the Old Covenant times, a Jewish convert to Christianity would keep intact his place in the Church of God. He was not defiled with women (other churches). However the Gentiles must come out of pagan philosophies which he has learned in other churches and accept something entirely different. The doctrines of Israel were the doctrines of God, only they had to accept Jesus

as their atonement.

They were the firstfruit unto God and to the Lamb. These were the first of Israel to accept Jesus as their Saviour and to accept Him and "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

James 1:1,18 identifies these firstfruits of the gospel age: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greetings...Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." James is here declaring that those who were converted of twelve tribes are the firstfruits of God's converted creatures.

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6). After the message went to Israel, then another angel bearing the same gospel went to the Gentiles.

The 144,000 have already been sealed. They are the firstfruits of the gospel age, composed of Israelites of the twelve tribes as named in Revelation 7:4-8. They were sealed by the Holy Spirit during the time of the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. The best any of us can do is be a part

of the great multitude of Revelation 7:9, and we should be very glad to be a part of that great multitude which does not contain the 144,000 and consists of all nations, kindreds, and tongues.

Before closing this study on the 144,000 we should understand why the twelve tribes are under different names in Revelation 7 than they are in Genesis 49. The tribes of Ephraim and Dan are not mentioned in Revelation 7 in the make-up of the 144,000 whereas in Genesis 49, where Jacob is telling the future of the tribes, these two are listed.

Let us take a look at the tribe of Ephraim. In Revelation 7, this tribe is listed as Joseph. Ephraim was one of the two tribes of Joseph through Joseph's two sons, Mannaseh and Ephraim. Although Mannaseh was the eldest son and the birthright was to go to the eldest son, Jacob gave the blessing of the birthright to Ephraim. When Jeroboam led the rebellion against Rehoboam, God made a promise to Jeroboam upon condition. Jeroboam was an Ephramite and established his throne in Ephraim. Now let us read what Jacob said to Judah. We shall read Genesis 49:10, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh

(Jesus Christ) come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." God here made it very plain that as far as His throne over Israel was concerned, it would always be in Judah, that the real possessor of the throne was Shiloh or Christ, and that He would come out of Judah. God never changed this statement of Jacob.

God did, however, make a conditional promise to Jeroboam, the Ephramite. Let us read this in I Kings 11:29-31, "And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee." Take notice here that God never promised to give Jeroboam the kingdom or throne of Judah, which is the throne of David.

Now let us read the conditional promise in verse 38: "And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my com-

mandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee."

Then the question arises, Did Jeroboam do the will of the Lord so that his kingdom would be a sure kingdom? Let us see. In I Kings 12:25-31 we read, "Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If these people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not sons of Levi." Jeroboam did not do as God told him

to do. Since he disobeyed God, God did not make him a sure house either. Because of this sin and the continued sin of the ten tribes, God finally gave up the kingdom of Israel, or the ten-tribe northern kingdom and its wicked inhabitants. Because of this great sin, Ephraim is not named as one of the tribes with the spiritual seed of 12,000, but rather Joseph himself, who remained faithful, is named for the tribe.

Now we come to the tribe of Dan. What we have just read from the Scriptures should give you a hint why the tribe of Levi is mentioned Revelation 7 as one of the tribes with the spiritual seed and not Dan. But let us investigate. What did Jacob say about Dan? In Genesis 49:16,17 we read, "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward." The elders of the tribe of Dan permitted Jeroboam to place one of his calves in their tribe. In this manner they judged Israel. It was the judgment of a serpent because the worship of idols is of the devil. In this way, Dan made the pure rider topple. All of this is symbolic language, which Jacob used to prove a truth. The people of Israel, we are told, went

to Dan to worship the calf that was set up there. So Dan entered into the conspiracy that caused Israel to fall. For this reason Dan cannot have any of the spiritual seed and therefore is not mentioned in Revelation 7. However, Levi is mentioned. Why Levi?

Let us answer the question, Why Levi? The children of Levi were cast off by Jeroboam from doing the service of God. Did the sons of Levi turn from God and stay with Jeroboam, or what did they do? Let us turn to II Chronicles 11:13-17, "And the priests and the Levities that were in all Israel resorted to him (Rehoboam) out of all their coasts. For the Levities left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the Lord: And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made. And after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem, to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers. So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years: for three years they walked in the way of David and Solomon."

God rewards faithfulness. In this hour of trial, the Levities remained true to God, but Dan and Ephraim failed. Joseph and Levi are mentioned as tribes with 12,000 each of the 144,000 of the spiritual seed which were chosen as part of the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb which were called out by Christ and His apostles. Because of disobedience, Dan and Ephraim are not mentioned in connection with the seed according to grace. May god help us that we will not fail because of disobedience.

The 144,000 are waiting in their graves for the resurrection. They consist of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. Twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes have been sealed.