

Who Are the 144,000 of Revelation 7 ?

In chapter 6 of Revelation, the focus is on the end times just preceding the second coming of Christ when God pours out a series of judgments upon the earth. The Old Testament prophets called this era the awesome and powerful "Day of the Lord". The first four judgments are often called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who represent a terribly destructive world war along with accompanying famine and pestilence. There is also a powerful world wide earthquake at the end of chapter 6. Before God pours out anymore of these judgments there is an interlude in ch. 7 in which the angels are told to wait and hold off until God selects and "seals" 144,000 "bond-servants" of God. The text gives us in great detail how many and who these bond-servants are. They are 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

There is a second group of believers identified in Revelation 7 beginning in verse 9. They are a great multitude from all over the world including every race of people. This group is located in heaven before the throne of God. They represent a huge number of people who have become saved during the tribulation and are seen after they have died and gone to heaven. It is not hard to connect the two groups and see that God will select a large number of Jews during the tribulation time to represent Him on earth as evangelists. This is why they are called bond-servants just as all the Apostles were called bond-servants. The Apostles were sold out to the Lord and called to spread the Gospel to the whole world, and so shall these end time servants of the Lord. In the beginning of ch.7 God held back anymore judgments of destruction until this group was chosen and "sealed" meaning a sign of preservation and protection from God. This group will be preserved and protected during this intense and dangerous time so that they can evangelize the world.

Therefore, during this time of carnage and destruction God will simultaneously be saving a large part of the world's population. As Jesus said about this time in Matt.24:14, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come".

You Said Last Week the Church Was Raptured Out of the Tribulation

Yes, the tribulation begins without the church, but God's offer of redemption to the world will not cease. God will not be left without a witness. You may ask then, "if all believers are gone, then who are His witnesses?" In the same way a Jew named Saul was chosen and confronted by Christ on the road to Damascus in Acts 9, these 144,000 representatives of the Jewish race will be converted by the intervention of God in their lives to give them a special commission to take the gospel to the whole world. God is not through with Israel. Though Israel failed in its original calling to be a witness to the world in the Old Test., that will not be the case in the future. From the Jewish race will come the greatest missionary movement ever. The 144,000 are a "first fruits" (Rev.14:4)

of a redeemed Israel which was also predicted by all the O.T. prophets and by Paul in Romans 11:25-27.

Is This the Majority View ?

Unfortunately, the traditional denominations teach a different method of interpretation which views virtually all of Revelation as metaphorical. Therefore, the answer to who the 144,000 are will depend on the interpretive approach you take in studying Revelation. The traditional or “preterist “ view says it was written only for the first century church and should only be interpreted symbolically. The “futuristic “ view uses a literal interpretation as actual real events in the future. The book of Revelation makes this claim for itself in ch.1, “The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bondservants the things which must take place...Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy...”. I interpret that to mean that these things will take place, and that it is predictive prophecy. It sure seems to me that the author intends us to read it literally except where figures of speech are used, and that he believes the events will take place in the future. The passage in Rev.7:4-8 clearly expects to be taken literally as it details a select group of 12,000 taken out of each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

So What is the Other Side’s Argument ?

The preterist position is that the 144,000 symbolically represent the church, meaning all believers during the church age. Their argument goes as follows:

1. The 144,000 are described as the servants of God in Rev.7:3, a term that refers to the church.
2. The New Testament church is called the Israel of God in Gal.6:16. Both Jews and Gentiles are members of the church and share the same promises. The church is Abraham’s offspring according to Eph.3:6 and Gal.3:6-9
3. God seals all believers with His Holy Spirit, not just a part.

What About the Confusion Over the Tribes of Israel ?

People make a big deal over the fact that in the listing of the tribes here in Rev.7, Dan and Ephraim are omitted. Also, Judah comes first even though Reuben was the first born. Others object on the grounds that 10 of the tribes were “lost” and the tribal records were lost when Jerusalem was destroyed so how could God know who was in what tribe?

The fact that there are exactly 12,000 from 12 different tribes speaks to God's elect purpose in choosing these people. Mere random human choice by merit would not come up with this even division. God knows in His omniscience who has descended from what tribe, and so the records may be lost to us, but not to Him. There is no standard way in the Bible of listing the 12 tribes. There are at least 19 different ways they are listed in various places. Dan may be omitted because of their terrible idolatry. Ephraim was not one of the sons of Jacob—Joseph was, so in this listing it is Joseph instead of Ephraim. None of these issues present a problem.

What is the Main Point of Revelation 7 ?

In the midst of His wrath upon the earth, God will remember mercy and grace. There will be unprecedented evangelism. The time of the Tribulation with its judgments, disasters, and death; will also be for many people the time of salvation. God will raise up for Himself an elect group of evangelists from Israel. God knows who they are and God will call them as He called Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus. The prophecies of Isaiah will be fulfilled, "I will also make you (Israel) a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT US ? We need only compare the bliss of the redeemed in heaven of Rev. 7:15-17 to the pain and anger of those in ch.6:15-17 who are the victims of God's wrath. All of us today have the same choice to make of which group we will be in. God's people throughout history can take great comfort that in the end, in spite of current circumstances or difficulties we will be in heaven with God.

Rev.6:16-17, "hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come and who is able to stand?"

Rev.7:17, "the Lamb will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes".

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