

Considering the 144,000 "Firstfruits"

In the Book of Revelation, we're introduced to a group of Individuals that has proven Enigmatic to Disciples of nearly every persuasion. What is it that we need to consider about their Identity and their Significance in the Plan of God?

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In two chapters of the book of Revelation, and in only those two places, we're introduced rather graphically to a large group of individuals that apparently are of significance in the Plan of God. Chapter 7 calls attention to them first, and chapter 14 reflects back on them in their resurrected state, standing with the returned Christ on Mount Zion.

But as with so many things in scripture, we are not given all of the answers that we would like to have. Not that we aren't given a number of key details. It's just that some considerations are left 'open' and what is given is not sufficient to explain to us exactly who these multiple thousands are.

Theology students have pondered the issue, while others, noting subtle differences, have speculated that there are two groups of 144,000. With information given to us in chapter 7 compared against that given in chapter 14, it's hard for some to envision both accounts representing the same aggregation. Thus the idea that there must be two separate groups of 144,000, despite the conundrum that that conclusion creates.

What IS Presented?

Before moving ahead with any conclusions as to their identity and their significance, we should first consider the information that we do have.

Revelation 7:1 *"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.*

[2] *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,*

[3] *Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the **servants of our God** in their foreheads. (See verse 1 of chapter 14.)*

[4] *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.*

[5] *Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.*

[6] *Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephtalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand.*

[7] *Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.*

[8] *Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand."*

Seven chapters later we encounter them again:

Revelation 14:1 *"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*

[2] *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:*

[3] *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.*

[4] *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.

[5] *And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*”

In these few passages we find quite a number of significant details.

Sealed into Tribal Assignments

First, let's notice that there are a specific number to be identified by God and assigned to each of the twelve tribes of Israel. In fact, twelve-thousand each! We are introduced to them as they are in process of being 'sealed'. World events are actually held-up until the sealing process is completed. Angels are set to intervene in the world conditions and cause supernatural events, but not until these elect are 'sealed'. To what are they sealed? That too has been a point of speculation.

The common assumption is that they are sealed for protection against any harm. Let's consider that their sealing is to establish their destiny, not necessarily to protect them from being 'perfected' as Daniel 11:32-35 might indicate. In other words, their sealing may protect them from what these destroying angels might do, not necessarily from all other things, such as things Satan might do. Their destiny is certain, (their assignment to an important position in the world to come) no matter what they might experience individually as world events draw to their prophesied conclusion.

But, what is the point of their being sealed into each of the twelve Tribes of Israel? We'll come to that.

Fast Forwarding to That Day!

Now, the next place where these are presented after chapter 7 is seven chapters later. Here we see the 144,000 actually standing with the returned Christ. They stand with Him in a scene which leaves little question as to the time setting. This is at or shortly after the Second Coming. They have been made Spirit by this point in time.

From this, we can discern what 'sealing' means. The Father's Name is written in their foreheads. They bear His Name, they think like He does. They 'follow' His Son where-ever He directs them. These are, at this point, 'redeemed' from the earth, and unmistakably, are the 'firstfruits' unto God and the Lamb.

Spiritual Virgins

Describing them as 'virgins', being unpolluted by 'religious contaminations' suggests they are of the Bride of Christ also. Their being without fault and without guile (a Christ-like characteristic) would suggest the same.

Being the 'firstfruits', we can know something else about them. These are the result of the 'first harvest', the first redeemed from the earth. In other words, the **first resurrection**, spoken of in Revelation 20, has already occurred. These at this point in time are already 'born' into their Spirit form of existence.

What students of the bible have failed to consider, which can cause them to regard the two accounts as being of separate groups of 144,000, is the time settings. In chapter 7 we see them in advance of the Second Coming. But in chapter 14, we see them pictured AFTER it.

Another 'problem' is ethnicity, the fact of their being 'of' each of the 12 Tribes of Israel. Carrying the matter to its logical conclusion, we know that there will be more raised in the first resurrection than just ethnic Israelites. (And this doesn't mean just Jews! ¹ Those known today as 'Israel' are primarily the descendants of the southern kingdom (Judah) today incorrectly identified as Israel as though they comprise all of the ancient nation.)

¹ The Jews account for just one of the "Houses" of Israel, as Ezekiel 37 shows. The northern kingdom was removed and exiled from the land by Assyria more than a century before the captivity of the southern kingdom by Babylon. The northern "House" never returned to the land, and are considered 'lost' in history. In fact, their modern identities are well-known among those who have researched their exiled migrations. Modern worshippers would be astounded to know their present identities. But that's another topic.

IF these are all there will be in the first resurrection, it is a **disturbingly small** number. And, if those in the first resurrection are to be of Israelite origin **only**, that would be even more disturbing and difficult to accept. Astute students of the Bible have struggled with that consideration, as Revelation 14 doesn't specifically suggest that there are to be any others among the 'firstfruits'.

Are there to be only this small a number raised in the first resurrection? Have there been only that few truly converted in 2000 years? Can we pose a logical answer to this troubling consideration?

A Matter of Perspective

When we consider these passages, we naturally consider the whole congregation of saints of all time. But is that the issue that Christ is revealing in the book of Revelation? Is it all-encompassing, as we would naturally consider it to be, or is there another relevant consideration being presented?

In Matthew 19:28 we are given a detail about this matter that most denominations brush aside. The question is asked by Peter, "...Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"

[28] *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*" This brief mention is extremely revealing! It offers us a direct glimpse into their assignment in Christ's earthly Kingdom.

But, what about other nations? There are going to be more nations than Israel and its 12-Tribes on earth in the millennial kingdom. It doesn't say.

Another important passage we should consider in this same vein is found in Ezekiel 37. This chapter graphically describes the second resurrection, the event in which those who never had a chance for conversion will be raised, restored to a physical existence. It shows also the reunification of the ancient ethnic nation, showing that they remain "two houses" even at this late date.

Again, what about all the other nations? There are going to be more nations than Israel and its 12-Tribes on earth in the millennial kingdom. More peoples, tongues and nations will arise with them at the time of the second resurrection. What about them? Here it doesn't say either. WHY?

And there's the matter of David, former King of unified Israel. He will be raised to rule over the reunited nation. (Ezek. 34:23-24 & 37:24)

But, what about the 'kings' of other nations? There are going to be more nations on earth than just Israel in the millennial kingdom. Conspicuous by absence is the mention any other kings here either. But they will exist. There will be others!

Hidden in Plain Sight?

Perhaps the answer is abundantly obvious. When we consider all of these instances when the various political conditions of the millennial age are related, WE tend to think unilaterally. God, in these instances, is not addressing the matter of leadership of all nations unilaterally. We can see that! He in these places is revealing the conditions as they specifically relate to His Model Nation! The ethnicity that He will use to represent and teach of His Ways to the rest of the world. Though not mentioned specifically, we can reasonably deduce that there will be a similar political organization set-up within each of the other nations.

The revelation of these 144,000 firstfruits addresses the political structure in God's Model Nation, the lead nation in His Kingdom, not the entirety of the world. Twelve thousand spirit-born individuals will be assigned to serve under each of the twelve original Apostles who each will head one Tribe. In turn, the twelve Apostles will serve under the king-ship of the resurrected King David, king of God's Model Nation, and he ruling under Christ, the aptly-named "King of kings".

Perhaps with this consideration we can resolve the disturbing aspect of the Saints in the first resurrection being so alarmingly few in number. They are special to God and to the Nation, but they are not all of whom are to be so blessed as to be raised (or changed) at the sound of the Last Trump! 