

Author:

Dr Neville Westerbeek
van Eerten D.Miss BVSc

The 144,000
of
Revelation



1. Introduction

144000 Jews, made up of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes, are found in Revelation 7. Some cults, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and other misguided people, have claimed to be part of the 144,000 or one of the lost tribes of Israel mentioned in these verses. It is essential to understand that this is the actual number of Jews who were marked by God as born again before the siege of Jerusalem, and is not a number that we need to look for now. So far in our series on the Great Tribulation, we have learned:

- When was the Great Tribulation?
- What was the Abomination of Desolation?
- Had the gospel been preached to all nations before the Great Tribulation?
- Why does Revelation equate Jerusalem to Sodom and Egypt?
- Who was Josephus, and is he a credible historian?
- What are the Seven Seals?
- How did the seals relate to the Great Tribulation?
- Was one quarter of the population killed, as Revelation says?

In this lesson, we will answer these questions:

- Who were the 144,000?
- Was it a literal number?
- When did this number finish?

Then, in the following lessons, we will answer these questions:

- Understanding the various calendars of the Great Tribulation.
- Who were the armies crossing the Euphrates in Revelation?
- Why did Jesus say His coming would be like lightning from the east to the west?
- How long was the Great Tribulation — seven years or 2300 days?
- Was one-third of the population killed, as Revelation says?
- When did the Great Tribulation begin?
- When did it end?
- When did the Christians flee Jerusalem?
- How many people were killed during the Great Tribulation?
- Why was there thirty minutes of silence in heaven?

Author:

Dr Neville Westerbeek
van Eerten D.Miss BVSc

The 144,000
of
Revelation



- When was the forty-two-month prophecy of Revelation?
- What is the significance of the five-month prophecy in Revelation 9?
- What was Daniel's 1290 and 1335-day prophecy about?
- What is the importance of Antioch in the prophetic calendar?
- What was the blessing to those who lasted 1336 days?

2. Who are the 144,000?

REVELATION 7:4

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:

A. Of all the Tribes of Israel

The first important finding is that this says the tribes of the children of Israel. The word for tribes in Greek is

- φυλή phylē; Tribe or clan or nation

In the New Testament, this primarily refers to the tribes of Israel. John goes on to make a clear distinction between these. They are the tribes of the children of Israel. This terminology is never used in reference to Gentile tribes.

Revelation 7 lists 12,000 from each of the tribes of Israel who have the mark of God on their foreheads.

REVELATION 7:5-8

**OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF REUBEN TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF GAD TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF ASHER TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF NAPHTALI TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF MANASSEH TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF SIMEON TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF LEVI TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF ISSACHAR TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF ZEBULUN TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF JOSEPH TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED;
OF THE TRIBE OF BENJAMIN TWELVE THOUSAND WERE SEALED.**

B. Heard the Number

In this verse, John uses an interesting terminology, the same as he used to hear the number of the "myriad horseman army, myriad army" crossing the Euphrates. We will examine this in a separate lesson on the Roman armies crossing the Euphrates.

Author:

Dr Neville Westerbeek
van Eerten D.Miss BVSc

The 144,000
of
Revelation



Some might say he heard the sound of 144,000 people and estimated their number. The word he uses for "hear" is ἀκούω (akouō).

If he were referring to the noise of 144,000, John would have used the Greek word for sound: ἦχος qōl; or ἦρ qol;—a totally different word, as you can see.

C. Approximate or Exact Number?

Some have reasonably suggested that 12 stands for "government" and is therefore symbolic. Although it may be possible, the Greek here does not support this interpretation.

The word for number, 'ἀριθμός (arithmos)', is the origin of the word arithmetic and refers to the act of counting a specific number. If it were an estimate, there would have been the addition of a Greek word.

When it is an indefinite number, the word ὡς hōs, or about, is used, as in this scripture:

ACTS 4:4

HOWEVER, MANY OF THOSE WHO HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED, AND THE NUMBER OF THE MEN CAME TO BE ABOUT (ὍΣ HŌS;) FIVE THOUSAND.

ὡς hōs; is not used in Revelation 7:4.

D. Lost Tribes of Israel

Some cult groups, like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, have misled individuals, claiming to be part of the 144,000 or one of the lost tribes of Israel mentioned in these verses. However, we must always return to the primary purpose of the Book of Revelation: to prepare the people alive in 63-65 CE for imminent judgment and persecution. In our [Introduction to Revelation](#), we argue that it was written to the believers of that time, who were, first and foremost, Jews.

3. Time limit

A. Finishing Date

This verse contains a sentence that tells us when each of the twelve tribes of the Jews will have reached 12,000 who have accepted Christ.

REVELATION 7:2-3

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."

Later in this series, we will find that on April 14th, 70 CE, Titus issued instructions to his four armies to cut down the trees and flatten the earth. This sets the date by which 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes must have received the mark of God. That is, they accepted Christ.

Author:

Dr Neville Westerbeek
van Eerten D.Miss BVSc

The 144,000
of
Revelation



4. Sexual Purity

When we look at the other passage concerning the 144,000, it seems like they are virgins.

REVELATION 14:4
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.

A. False Doctrine Forbidding to Marry

However, this interpretation has a flaw. Paul warned about false doctrine in the last days and predicted it would prevent marriage.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1,3
NOW THE SPIRIT EXPRESSLY SAYS THAT IN LATTER TIMES SOME WILL DEPART FROM THE
FAITH, ... FORBIDDING TO MARRY, AND COMMANDING TO ABSTAIN FROM FOODS WHICH
GOD CREATED TO BE RECEIVED WITH THANKSGIVING BY THOSE WHO BELIEVE AND
KNOW THE TRUTH.

This means we need to delve deeper into this verse in Revelation

B. Virgins?

When we look at the Greek for the word for a virgin it is broad:

παρθένοϛ parthenos includes:

- *a man who has abstained from all uncleanness and whoredom attendant on idolatry, and so has kept his chastity*

It may of course include either a man or woman who has not married or had sexual intercourse as yet, but it is not restricted to these.

The 144,000 are not necessarily physical virgins. Paul taught it was a false doctrine to forbid marriage. The word for virgins means sexually pure.

Author:

Dr Neville Westerbeek
van Eerten D.Miss BVSc

The 144,000
of
Revelation



5. Much More Than 144,000

A. Specific to the First Generation

When we read this, it does not specify that there will be only 12,000 from each tribe; it means that by the siege in Jerusalem, 144,000 Jews had accepted Jesus.

B. Messianic Jews

Many cults have sought to limit the total number to 144,000, claiming that membership is restricted to a select 'special' group within the cult. However, here are some facts for this time in history, without even taking into account Jews who have accepted Christ over the last two thousand years since April 14th, 70 CE.

- Twenty per cent of millennial Jews believe Jesus was "God in human form".
- In the USA alone, there are between 175,000 and 1.9 million Jewish believers.
- In Israel, there are over 15,000 attending known fellowships even though the government have declared them to be a sect.

6. Summary

1. The 144,000 refers to the actual number of Jews who were born again before 14th April 70 CE.
2. There must have been at least 12,000 from each tribe
3. There may have been more than this number.
4. Many more have been born again since then.
5. Virgins means sexually pure Jews.
6. People who believe they are part of the lost tribes of Israel have been misled and could be involved in a cult like Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons.

In the next lesson, we begin to explore the calendars of the era. Understanding this is essential to explaining how all the dates align precisely with the prophecies of Jesus and Daniel.