

Who Are The 144,000?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | April 19, 2018



I received the following question from an online listener:

I have always wondered if the specific number, 144,00, refers to individuals or people groups, and if individuals, then is this quoted number telling us that, at the close of earth's history, only this number of believers will be left alive, and that all other believers will have died and will be resurrected after Jesus descends from heaven? Or is this number representing select people from across ALL of history whose experience with Jesus is of a quality that no one else has?

There are many theories and explanations regarding the 144,000. Our preconceived ideas, assumptions, premises and beliefs about the Bible and how to understand it impact how we understand the meaning.

My view is that Revelation is a highly symbolic book and most of what is written there is written in imagery or similar to a code. Reading everything literally would cause one to misunderstand the true

meaning. But what are the keys to understanding the code? First, here are some guidelines and then we will unpack Revelation 7 to better understand the meaning.

- Recognize much of what is written is symbolic
- Understand that the Bible provides corresponding interpretations to most of the symbols
- Interpret the meaning through God's design law and refuse the human concepts of law (imposed rules requiring imposed punishments)

Before we get to the list of the 144,000, here is a scene described in Revelation 7:1-4:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³ "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." ⁴ Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

The book of Revelation is Jesus' message to the people at the end of time to prepare them for His soon return. Thus, we must keep in mind that this message is about salvation, restoration, and rescuing God's people, while bringing about an end to sin.

The angels at the four corners of the earth represent God's agencies holding in check evil powers all over the entire world.

In Bible symbolism, trees represent people:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners...but his delight is in the law of the Lord...**He is like a tree** planted by streams of water... (Psalms 1:1-3)

I have seen a wicked and ruthless **man flourishing like a green tree** in its native soil... (Psalms 37:35)

But **I am like an olive tree** flourishing in the house of God... (Psalms 52:8)

Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. (Isaiah 7:2)

This understanding is why, when Daniel was interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he knew so quickly that the great tree which was cut down was Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 4)

The winds represent conflict, strife, and distress. The seal of God is the work of the Holy Spirit restoring in people the perfection of Jesus Christ, settling them into the truth about God both in their comprehension and in their heart motives.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit... (Ephesian 1:13)

The servants of God are God's prophets. They are not those who prognosticate (i.e. tell the future). They are spokespersons for God and come to the people with a message from God for the people at that time in history.

The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through **my servants the prophets.**" (2 Kings 17:13)

(See also 2Kings 17:23, 21:10, 24:2, Ezra 9:11, Jeremiah 7:25, 25:4 and many more.)

So, the first scene of Revelation 7 is this: At the end of time, God sends his messenger to tell his agencies who are holding in check the powers of evil to continue to hold and limit the damage that can blow upon the human race, until God's end-time spokespersons are settled into the truth, both cognitively, but also in their character. Then the four winds are loosened.

Several outstanding questions from this chapter remain to be answered:

- Who are the 144,000?
- Why let the four winds loose?
- Who comprise the great multitude described later in the chapter?

The 144,000 are described as being composed of 12,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel. However, you will note that the tribe of Dan is not included and Joseph is represented twice by one tribe being one of his sons. These are big clues that, as most things in Revelation, this is symbolism and the people represented by this number are not literally 144,000 people, nor are they genetic descendants of Abraham. Ancient Israel was God's actor in a great play to act out the plan of salvation. The 12 tribes of ancient Israel took the role of actors in a theater and they represented the various people groups of the entire world. (1 Corinthians 4:9) Thus, the 144,000, composed of equal parts from the twelve tribes, symbolically represents God's spokespersons from every group of people in the entire world.

After this group of spokespersons are sealed, then the four angels will "let go" their hold and troubles will happen like never before on planet earth. These troubles are not caused by God, but by evil forces, as God lets go His restraint. God doesn't require evil forces to cause trouble, but that is their nature and thus they do. God allows this, so that the millions of people so caught up in the entertainment, busyness, and responsibilities of life, such that they never consider eternal realities, will be shaken out of their complacency and ask, "What is happening?" The 144,000 spokespersons of God, who have already been sealed and who are among every people group in the world, present God's end-time message. From the witness of the 144,000, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language" will be saved. (Revelation 7:9)

Thus, the 144,000 are a group of people who will function as spokespersons at the end of earth's

history, to give an end-time message to prepare people to meet Jesus. Only those people who are end-time messengers of God would be included in the 144,000. The prophet Daniel and the apostle John very well may be included in this group, because their writings were specifically intended as end-time messages.

What God appears to be waiting for is a group of people from all corners of the earth to be sealed and settled into the truth about Him and His methods, so that they are able to tell the truth about God and His kingdom of love. When this group is sealed, then the four winds will loosen and the end will come!

I invite you to open your heart to God and ask Him to enable you to be one of His end-time spokespersons!