

Daylan W. Jewell

Dr. Gallos

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The Remnant of the End of the Age – Revelation 14:1-5

Revelation 14 stands out among the chapters of Revelation, especially amongst Adventist theology. Containing the second description of the 144,000, the Three Angels' Messages, as well as the harvest at the end of time, it stands as one of the most memorable chapters in the Bible as a whole. As with most of Revelation, however, there is unfortunately little understanding of the content within this chapter. If the harvest concluding this chapter gives any exhortation, it is to learn that which is essential to developing the End-Time Christian character and mission. This paper will take a deeper look into the former, analyzing those who become part of the 144,000, how they become part of God's End-Time church, and how they interact with the rest of the world.

Let's begin with the King James Version:

“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.” (*The Remnant Study Bible*, Rev. 14.1-5).

The Sealed 144,000 on Mount Zion

The scene starting with verse 1 introduces a Lamb on mount Sion, an alternative spelling of Zion, with the 144,000 from Revelation 7. This, very clearly, refers to Jesus and His followers, as is confirmed by the name of both the Father and the Son being in the 144,000's foreheads. This description is consistent across translations, the only variation being the spelling of Zion. The text goes on in verses 2 and 3 to say that the 144,000 standing on the mountain are simultaneously said to be singing before God's throne and the others present in the heavenly throne room, creating a connection between the two descriptions. Looking elsewhere in the Bible, we get from Psalms that God has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion (Ps. 2.6), indicating that Zion is emblematic of God's kingdom. This is in stark contrast with the description given for those who receive the mark of the beast, which are "them that dwell on the earth" (Rev. 13.14), creating a duality of those who follow God being in heaven while those who do not remain on the earth.

This presents an issue, however. If Jesus' followers are in the throne room on Zion, then how can they be on the earth to give the 3 Angels' Messages "to them that dwell on the earth"? Well, granted that the entire description is rich in metaphor and simile, or symbolic language, it would make more sense to take this symbolically as well. The 144,000 standing on Zion with Jesus indicates that they have inherited their citizenship of heaven and wait for the Great Harvest of Revelation 14:14-20. This is further proven by the fact that the 144,000 have the name of God and Jesus in their foreheads, which parallels with the seal that is mentioned in Revelation 7:3. Having the seal declares them part of God's people and, thus, citizens of heaven.

The Seventh-Day Adventist commentary adds that their stance on Mount Zion indicates a triumph over the beast and its image in Revelation 13 (Andreasen et al, p. 825). With John's prior vision of the 144,000 enduring great trial in Revelation 7, their appearance here with the Lamb and singing the song of salvation before the throne room plainly says that they have come out of the trial and reside in peace with their Savior. Who, then, are the 144,000? To understand this group, it is best to look at their first appearance in Revelation 7.

The 144,000, first and foremost, have the qualities already mentioned: they stand on Zion, in the throne room, with Jesus, and have overcome some great trial. But where did the 144,000 come from? In Revelation 7, the 144,000 is comprised of 12,000 sealed members from a modified list of the 12 tribes of Israel. According

to Stefanovic, the reason for the modifications of tribe order – and even inclusion – is because of Jesus’ membership to Judah (it is mentioned first rather than Rueben, who was Jacob’s firstborn) or because of their links with idolatry/apostasy (Stefanovic, p. 96). The 144,000, then, are comprised both of God’s chosen people and, of those chosen, those who are faithful to His covenant. It is not enough to be shown favor by God: to be part of God’s kingdom, it is wholly necessary to be simultaneously *faithful* to God.

The other key quality of the 144,000 is the seal which they receive. In Revelation 14:1, this seal is described as the name of the Lamb and the Father. This echoes the promise that was made to the Philadelphian church in Revelation 3:12, where Jesus promises that He will “write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God... and I will write upon him my new name”. Not only so, but the 144,000’s triumph over the great trial is further fulfillment of the promise in Revelation 3:10, which was to be kept from the hour of temptation.

It's clear the seal is God’s name, but how is the seal given? There are two places in the Bible that we can glean details from, one from the New Testament, and one from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, Ezekiel 9 speaks on the issue of sealing and *how* it takes place. Ezekiel is in vision and sees a man clothed in linen with a writer’s inkhorn being instructed by God:

“and the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.” (Ezek. 9.4). Here is found another condition upon which sealing is done. Those who “sigh and cry for all the abominations” that are being done in the world – and in the church in particular – will be sealed. The Lord goes on to instruct other characters in the vision to slay everyone excepting those who are sealed, beginning in the sanctuary. This instruction is a little confusing until we take into account a verse from the Psalms: “May He send you help from the sanctuary, and give you support from Zion.” (*YouVersion Bible App (NRSV)*, Ps. 20.2). The sanctuary is equated with Zion, or the resting place of God and His people. Thus, beginning the pruning of the unsealed in the sanctuary is a rooting out of those who claim to be of the people of God but are sorry pretenders.

The process of the sealing is further detailed in Revelation 7. The sealing angel in verses 2 and 3 tells the angels holding back the four winds of the earth to continue holding them until the sealing is finished. In Revelation 14, however, these people are already sealed, just like those in the previous chapter who have received the mark of the beast. This indicates that by the moment depicted in Revelation 14:1, the time for the four winds to be unleashed has come. The 144,000 emerge from one trial in which all people are affected and enter into a new trial which will only harm the unsealed, which based on the chronology of the chapters, is the 7 Last plagues introduced by Revelation 15 and described by chapter 16.

Now that the *how* of the sealing process is answered, there only remains the *what* or the *who* that will actually do the sealing. The answer to it can be found in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 30. Here Paul writes: “And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” (*The Remnant Study Bible*). Evidently, the Holy Spirit Himself will be placing the seal of God upon His people. Well, how exactly? In his gospel, John elaborates with Jesus’ words that the Holy Spirit, when Jesus returns to heaven, will come to “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:” (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit works to guide people in the right direction, bearing witness of Jesus in His followers and writing His words in the heart. God’s ownership of His people is indicated by the indwelling of His Spirit and the outpouring of Jesus’ holy conduct as a result.

The Voice from Heaven

In verse 2, John describes a voice from heaven with simile, comparing it to roaring waters or ocean waves, as the New Living Translation puts it, to thunder, and to the playing of harps. We know this is the 144,000 based on the grammatical continuity of the first three verses. The first descriptor that John uses for the voice here is that it was “as the voice of many waters” (Rev. 14:2). Again, this is symbolic, as indicated by the use of simile. But what is it symbolic of? In Revelation 1:15, when describing Jesus, John says His voice was like the sound of many waters. The description given to Jesus is now given to His people. The 144,000 have a voice that sounds similar to their Creator; wonderful, but what does *that* mean? When last on the earth, Jesus said that as the “Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28); it should make sense, then, that His followers would do the same if they share this attribute of the sound of their voice.

The second descriptor that John gives for the 144,000's voice is "as the voice of a great thunder". This description is similar to being "as the voice of many waters", but rather than Jesus, this description alludes to the Father Himself. The Father's voice is referred to as being like the sound of thunder throughout the Bible, but most notably in instances like John 12:28, 29: "**Father, glorify thy name.** Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to Him." Thus, these people will speak as though directly channeling the Father's words as did Jesus before them, and having the authority with the words.

The third descriptor used for the 144,000's voice is like "harpers harping with their harps" (a bit of a tongue twister for a Bible verse). One simple interpretation of this is that the voice of the 144,000 sings praises to God as did the servants of the Sanctuary (Ps. 150.1-3), which retains deep meaning on its own. The 144,000 are repeatedly linked to the Sanctuary and its importance as the abiding place of God. To go further, however, a look at Revelation 5:8 reveals that the heavenly hosts – namely the four beasts surrounding God's throne and the 24 elders doing the same – themselves bear harps. There is a connection between the earthly Sanctuary and what appears to be a heavenly Sanctuary, with the hosts of heaven acting as the worshippers did in the earthly Sanctuary. With the description of the 144,000, then, these sealed people also take on a role of worship in the heavenly Sanctuary directly tied with those closest to God's throne.

The last text with close relation to the description of the 144,000's voice is found in Revelation 11, verse 15. This is the sounding of the 7th trumpet: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." There is a correlation between the voice and the message here in chapter 11 and the voice coming from heaven in Revelation 14. In Revelation 14, the description of the 144,000 is shortly followed by the 3 Angels' Messages, paralleling with the message given in Revelation 11 by the great voices from heaven. Not only so, but the message in chapter 11, when lined up with the 3 Angels' Messages seems to summarize them. The primary message of the 144,000 is that the Kingdom of Promise has finally arrived and are charged both by their character and He who fashioned it to warn and exhort all who live on the earth about the event.

The New Song

In verse 3, John identifies this voice as belonging to the 144,000, saying that they sing a new song only they could learn before God's throne, the 4 heavenly beasts, and the 24 elders. From the verse in isolation, it's unclear whether or not the 144,000 being on Zion and in the midst of the Throne Room is figurative or not, but with context of the rest of the chapter, it's clear that the 144,000 have not yet been gathered to heaven. While they are called "purchased" and "redeemed" from the earth, their appearance here shows a readiness to go out into the world and give the 3 Angels' Messages of Revelation 14:6-12, which are to be given before the Great Harvest of Revelation 14:14-20.

Relative to this verse, it is seen in Revelation 7 that the 144,000 again cry out in worship, "saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Rev. 7.10). Granted that, as confirmed by the Zondervan Commentary, "only those can sing it [the new song] who have themselves been redeemed from the earth" (Bruce et al. pp. 1670), it is safe to assume that this new song would itself be about the 144,000's redemption as it manifests in Revelation 7. Even more, Revelation 15:3 says that those who conquer the beast, its image, and its mark "sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15.2, 3). The song of Moses refers to the song of Exodus 15, celebrating God's deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea, thus symbolizing the 144,000's victory over Satan. The song of the Lamb, on the other hand, symbolizes the 144,000's victory over sin and death, the primary purpose of God coming to die on the Cross as the true Passover Lamb.

Now what about the exclusiveness of the song? Why can *only* the 144,000 learn it? Why not the four beasts or the 24 elders? Why not the angels? According to Daniel Smith, "the text points to secret, member-only worship that is learned upon a transfer of status from death to afterlife. This... matches the practice of initiation in the... Orphic mysteries in particular. Indeed, the Orphic Hymns, ... contain hymns which the initiates sing in their exclusive assembly" (pp. 13). The audience of Revelation was Gentile Christians who may have been familiar with the cultic traditions of the region and, thus, recognized the distinction made of the 144,000 here. The cultic practices were extremely secretive, as what we know about them are pure speculation

based on the names given to certain rites or caricature depictions of outsiders observing them (pp. 10).

Ascribing these ideas to the group of the sealed, redeemed people in Revelation 14, the reader and the listener gain an understanding that becoming part of this group of saints is a high honor and comes with privileges that nobody else receives.

Beyond interpretations based on historical context, others have taken to trying to find meaning in the text's already-exclusive language. In the Seventh-Day Adventist commentary, discussing the phrase "no man could learn", the author remarks that the experiences of the 144,000 are of "such a personal nature that only those who pass through" them can appreciate their significance. "To them the song is a treasured and comprehensive summation of the experiences through which they have passed in the closing stages of the conflict between good and evil" (Andreasen et al. pp. 826). Only the 144,000, among the heavenly host, have experienced the trials and horrors of sin, and they alone have experienced the joy of being liberated from its claws by their Creator. Only the 144,000 can express the gratitude for such a wonderful, loving Savior as Jesus Christ.

The Virgin Firstfruits

The condition in which the 144,000 is deemed ready to give the 3 Angels' Messages John then describes in verses 4 and 5. In verse 4 the translations vary between using metaphor and simile, comparing the 144,000 to virgins or describing them as being pure like virgins, refraining from sexual intercourse. This, obviously, is figurative, as the use of metaphor/simile implies. Not only so, but in Zdzisław Żywica's article discussing this condition of being part of the 144,000, the Greek term for defilement used here stems from another word only used 3 times in the New Testament, indicating religious and moral defilement (Żywica, p. 3). Żywica goes on to connect the description with the message to the church of Sardis in chapter 3, where Jesus says that there are "a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments" (Rev. 3.4), further implying that this description of the 144,000 is symbolic.

Beyond the figurative nature of the term, Żywica notes on page 5 of the article that "The analyzed text speaks of virginity and, in particular of virginity as an attribute of the group of 144,000, whereas the people of God in the Old Testament are shown, both in positive and negative light, always as spouse." Then the

symbolism of virginity here cannot be the Old Testament imagery of a faithful or adulterous spouse, which was used to symbolize “the model of idolatry as a betrayal of union which is known in the Old Testament” (Żywica, pp. 5). It really is referring to sexual abstinence and purity, but then what does it mean? Żywica continues drawing a connection to the Old Testament concept in which “any sexual relationship, allowed or forbidden, was a contraindication to direct participation in religious practices. ... This is how we could understand the expression... The people to whom it refers... have not done anything which prevents or hinders their contact with God” (Żywica, pp. 5). In this sense the 144,000 are virgins, doing the uttermost to stay as close to God as possible.

Stefanovic adds that this practice was performed by the armies of the Old Testament and, since the 144,000 are representative of God’s military force in the Great Controversy, this practice applies to them as well. In fact, he notes that the “Dead Sea Scrolls show that some Jewish groups believed that this regulation also applied to the great eschatological war against the forces of darkness” (Stefanovic, pp. 172). Coming to the depiction of the 144,000 following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14.4), Stefanovic comments that “They put Christ first and choose to keep their relationship with Him, no matter the cost. They remain unwavering in their faithfulness to Him, in contrast to the majority of the world who follow the beast” (pp. 172). This would fit with Jesus’ own description of His relationship to His people, being their Good Shepherd (John 10.14) and leading His people to green pastures and still waters (Ps. 23.2).

On the same phrase, Żywica refers to the Greek word used for “follow” – “The participle ἀκολουθοῦντες derives from the verb ἀκολουθέω – imitate, walk behind someone; be a disciple. In the Old Testament, it does not introduce a religious coloration but indicates the act of service performed by a servant to his master” (Żywica, pp. 6). Not only are God’s people faithful, but they are deliberate in placing their feet in the spots where Jesus left impressions with His own feet, doing their best to copy His behavior and deeds. Like the previous description in which they imitate Christ in word, being “as the voice of many waters” (Rev. 14.2), the 144,000 are now shown to be imitating Christ in deed as well, following Him “whithersoever He goeth” (Rev. 14.4).

The last description in this verse calls the 144,000 “firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb” (Rev. 14.4), referring again to their condition of being redeemed/purchased from among men. The term “firstfruits” refers back to the ancient ordinance of the firstfruits offering, found in Exodus 23:19 and Deuteronomy 26:10. The firstfruits were exactly as their namesake suggests: the choice firstfruits of the harvest offered to God. The natural significance points again to the 144,000 being the choice people of God, of highest quality and character returning to their Creator who rightly rules over them. The deeper significance comes in relating this to the Great Harvest in 14:14-20. There are two harvests in this passage: one for the wheat being gathered by the Son of Man and the other being grapes going directly to the winepress of God’s wrath. The firstfruits of the Great Harvest are taken by the Son of Man while the rest is sent into the winepress of God’s wrath. Thus, the 144,000 will be preserved from God’s wrath and the consequences thereof.

Without Guile and Without Blame

In verse 5, John writes a defining principle that characterizes the 144,000, stating that they do not say anything deceitful and are blameless. On the point of being without blame, the King James version is pretty much alone in saying that “they are without fault before the throne of God” (Rev. 14.5). Still, all versions agree that one of the key characteristics of the 144,000 is their blamelessness, or innocence; on that point, the Bible is very clear. In addressing the lack of guile in the mouth, specifically the phrase “was found”, the Seventh-Day Adventist commentary remarks that “The form of the Greek verb suggests that a certain point of time is under consideration. At that point of time investigation proves the 144,000 to be faultless. This does not mean that they had never erred, but that by the grace of God they had overcome all defects of character” (Andreasen et al. pp. 827). This is proven again in Psalms 32:2 – “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” – and in Zephaniah 3:13 – “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.” In these verses, guile, or lying is equated with sin. A lack of guile indicates a purity of the spirit of the 144,000.

In the Zondervan commentary, the quality of blamelessness in the 144,000 is connected with the white robes that they wear in Revelation 7:9 (Bruce et al. pp. 1670). The significance of the white robes is that

multiple times throughout the Bible, white robes are mentioned in connection with God's eschatological people, most notably in Revelation 3:18 where Jesus counsels the church of Laodicea to “**buy from me... white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen;**” (*YouVersion NRSV*). Two verses reveal the significance of the white robes. The first is Isaiah 1:18: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” God makes a promise to His people who return to the way of God that He shall wash their sins and turn their bloody spiritual robes as white as snow and wool. And not only does He wash us, but He gives us new clothes to hide the shame of our nakedness.

The second is Genesis 3, verses 6 through 8:

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.”

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, it caused them shame, and that shame caused them to separate themselves from God. In the same way does the white robes cover the shame of sin and remove the barrier between Man and God. God provides His own righteousness so that we might be with Him, and our sins are blotted out in His sight. Only by purchasing the white robe He offers can we be “blameless” as Revelation 14 suggests.

Last Generation Theology

This paper has taken a very strong stance in support of many of the ideas proposed and heralded by Last Generation Theology, particularly the idea of a last generation of believers that have attained to perfection exactly as prescribed in Scripture. These teachings have been widely controversial, especially in Adventist circles, due to the seeming unattainability of this state of being. For this reason, even mention of perfection

often shuts down conversation. The topic has become an extremely divisive taboo and the attitude towards it, I will claim, is harming the church in multiple ways.

For one, the immediate shutting down of conversation about the issue that is done by a majority of people is unproductive for promoting unity within the church. Shoving a problem under the rug does not solve the problem, it merely delays it. Addressing the issue and attempting to approach it from a Biblical foundation and with a willingness to learn the Truth, regardless of what answer you might find, is what would please God. We show that we do not love God by showing such enmity for one another over these doctrinal issues.

Secondly, the message of sanctification is one that Jesus Himself gave. When praying to His Father, Jesus asked that God would “**Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is Truth**” and exhorted that we “**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (*YouVersion Bible App, NRSV*, John 17.17) (Matt. 5.48). Later, John, the writer of Revelation had this to say about perfection: “Love has been perfected among us in this: ... We love because He first loved us.” (1 Jn 4.17, 19). Of ourselves, yes, perfection is unattainable. But Jesus assured us that though “**For mortals it is impossible**”, He followed up by saying “**for God all things are possible**” (Matt. 19.26). It is not impossible for God to make us perfect unless we get in His way. And thankfully, we have a God that draws us to Him and works on the heart.

Closing Remarks

During my studies, I have found a wealth of Scripture that suggests Christians and anybody else who would follow God ought to strive for perfection. However, this is not something that we can achieve of ourselves. The Seal of God is in the forehead, and thus, only by Faith can we obtain that which God desires for us. Faith that lives with works, and both of which are revelations of the character of Christ. The only way to be sealed is by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who works in us *for* the perfection of character. In seeking to know Christ more, to throw down the barriers between us and Him, it is important that we understand the role into which we are coming. We will have status like the angels in the heavenly sanctuary and our efforts on earth ought to match the preparation needed to take on such a role. We must look to Jesus as our standard and seek to imitate Him in our daily lives, calling on His help to do so.

I have struggled the last two years with striving for excellence and perfection, as I have all my life, but now with God's standard as my own. I have seen discouraging times, and the Devil is persistent in trying to sway me from pursuing truth. Studying this text has solidified my conviction that at the End, when the image of the beast is formed, God will have a people who have overcome sin. Today is the Day of Atonement, and it is soon to close. We must live day to day with contrition of heart, pleading with God for His strength and His Spirit so that we will be sealed and His work of sanctification in us will be finished. I have already gotten tastes of His wonderful power and I have a renewed interest in pursuing more and encouraging others in doing the same. The image of the beast is so close. The time to preach this message is very soon.

To whomever reads this paper, wrestle with God as did Jacob. Do not let Him go until He blesses you, and do not let Him go even then. Many are the people who say that they cannot achieve perfection and thus it is a worthless pursuit. "God will cover us when He comes." That message is guile in the mouth. We cannot of ourselves obtain salvation, let alone sanctification, but God is more than sufficiently powerful enough to accomplish everything that He says He will do. He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, the Lamb slain for our sins, and as He washed our feet, so will He wash our sins. He expects, if we love Him for all He's done, that we would cooperate with Him in changing our clothes so we may stay clean and present ourselves as His firstfruits of the Great Harvest. He came at the fulness of time so He may come again at its End and bring home they whom He loves to the death.

To the scholar, be not afraid. The Scriptures and our discoveries in them speak plainly of a last generation who stands perfect before God. They are like Christ. What they do not possess is His Godhood, His nature. The 144,000 are the realization of God's promise to restore the image of God in Man, people who are in spirit like Adam before the Fall, only awaiting the body that God will provide in the Last Day. The time is short and the enmity for the message of Biblical perfection is far too much. We must study how God would have us reach His standard, learning more and more that only by Jesus reaching down and pulling us up can we reach so high, and teaching the same. We must reach out to grasp His hand rather than refusing, saying we are not strong enough when He makes up the infinite difference.

To the people, come and let us reason together. Let us bow in humility and penance, asking God to cleanse us by asking for greater and greater portions of His Spirit. Let us study Christ that we may walk more straightly in His footsteps. The path is narrowing and we cannot afford to step outside the trail He leaves behind. Others are following us and we need to show them that we can and should follow Jesus. The mark of the beast is just over the horizon; let us hasten to plead for the Seal of God.

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