



# OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

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**MARCH 2020**  
**ARE THE 144,000**  
**AMONG US TODAY?**

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*Outreach Israel Ministries  
and Messianic Apologetics*

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

**Outreach Israel News** is the monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries, a non-profit organization with an emphasis on reaching, teaching, and encouraging the Messianic community. Subscription to **Outreach Israel News** is without cost and supported only by donation.

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OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

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# OIM UPDATE

March 2020

As the month of March arrived, a diverse array of circumstances converged that propelled some introspective thoughts about how **life, death, disease, and fear** are best combatted by absolute faith in the Holy One and His immutable Word. For if one **truly believes** in what has been recorded and preserved down through the ages in the Holy Writ, the vagaries and challenges of human existence can be interpreted and analyzed **if** one has godly wisdom, knows the Lord, and understands His ways, as noted in this conclusive proverb: **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding"** (Proverbs 9:10, NASB). However, most critically, every insight or blessing a person receives from the Creator God is a direct byproduct of knowing and revering Him through a personal relationship. This eternal bond is why children of the Most High make the lifelong effort to read, study, and memorize the living Word of God. After all, when unexpected or even anticipated circumstances inevitably arise, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit can prompt the memory to focus the mind on His ineffable Word and its power to instill comprehension, joy, and peace. Such was what has happened to me over the past few weeks as issues of life, death, disease, and fear have erupted.

When it came to **life**, the reality of aging arrived with the annual reminder of my birth date, and the sobering reality that the big "70" is next on the horizon! For some reason that year appeared to be older than I recalled from the past. But when my 69th birthday came, I was reminded of when I turned 50 almost twenty years ago, with the thought that I probably had more good years behind me rather than in the future. Then the fleeting thought of how fast the past twenty years flew by, also caught my attention! Nevertheless, I was comforted by this sagely passage from Moses, where he reminds us to number our days, in order to present to God a heart of wisdom:

"For all our days have declined in Thy fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. **As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.** Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee? **So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of**

**wisdom.** Do return, O LORD; how long *will it be?* And be sorry for Thy servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Thy lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days Thou hast afflicted us, *and* the years we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear to Thy servants, and Thy majesty to their children. **And let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and do confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands”** (Psalm 90:9-17, NASB).

In addition to a birthday celebration, I also had to deal with renewing a term life insurance policy that would be affordable for the next fifteen years. Thankfully, based on the lab results, I was able to qualify for the highest “preferred plus” rate (since the insurance company projected my lifespan to the mid-90s). But looking ahead to my 85th year actuarially speaking, only comforted me when thinking about Caleb, one of my heroes of the faith. After all, when faithful Caleb was 85, he was given what I refer to as the “heart of the watermelon” of the Promised Land, because it was where the caves of Machpelah, the sacred burial site for Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah in Hebron:

“So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land on which your foot has trodden shall be an inheritance to you and to your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God fully. And now behold, the LORD has let me live, just as He spoke, these forty-five years, from the time that the LORD spoke this word to Moses, when Israel walked in the wilderness; **and now behold, I am eighty-five years old today. I am still as strong today as I was in the day Moses sent me; as my strength was then, so my strength is now, for war and for going out and coming in. Now then, give me this hill country about which the LORD spoke on that day, for you heard on that day that Anakim were there, with great fortified cities; perhaps the LORD will be with me, and I shall drive them out as the LORD has spoken”** (Joshua 14:9-12, NASB).

Age did not seem to bother Caleb’s strength, and no doubt, he presented to the Lord a heart of wisdom, after his numbered days ended. Now my goal is to emulate Caleb and maintain health, strength, and the mental acuity to serve the Lord until the race is won (1 Corinthians 9:24)!

On the flip side of **life**, we had to deal with the **death** of a dear brother who had suffered for months through strokes and the onset of pneumonia in his waning days. This dear, African American friend, had served in the U.S. Army and retired from the Ford Motor Company, and during my hospital visits, I was more concerned about praying for his caretaker wife, who was bearing the brunt of her husband’s slow march to death. I was

honored to be asked to be a pallbearer, and at the family visitation the night before the funeral, I was asked to share about our brother's life to his family and friends gathered. Almost immediately upon being asked, a passage of scripture from the Book of Ecclesiastes came to mind, that I think best reflected this man's life, and one that I pray will be understood at my departure. But as I read to those in attendance, I remarked that **only** people who understand more than just the knowledge of eternity in their hearts, but the very Creator God who placed it there, would comprehend what this passage states:

"A good name is better than a good ointment, **and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.** Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy. **The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,** while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure" (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4, NASB).

Most assuredly, the natural mind cannot comprehend what only the spiritual mind can understand (1 Corinthians 2:14-16), and for those without hope, the very concept of the day of one's death being better than the day of one's birth, makes very little sense. However, for those with spiritual blessings, the reality that at the end of one's life, if the journey has been to honor the Holy One and serve Him wholeheartedly and without reservation, then the welcome greeting, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" is all one desires to hear. Of course, the stark reality that death is eventually going to claim us all if the Lord tarries, then it should be a day of celebration that the good fight has been won (1 Timothy 6:12), the race is completed and by God's grace, as we cross the line from life to death, our chests are extended, breaking the finish line tape with all of our earthly might. That is what I want to do! May God give each of us the grace and faith to receive His reward.

Next came the extended outbreak of a **disease** that has the world health authorities baffled to the point of almost inciting unparalleled panic primarily because of the proliferation of social media and the connectivity now available to the citizens of the planet, because of the ubiquitous devices that people "never leave home" without them in their possession. Without minimizing the problems associated with disease, imagine a map of the world or graphic statistics that indicate the number of people with influenza (the flu), and the corresponding deaths associated with that viral infection. Quite frankly, after being informed about the average number of

deaths in just the U.S.A. in recent years, those numbers would make the highly publicized coronavirus numbers pale in comparison. And yet with the increase in media paranoia, the global community is experiencing a test of its resolve to deal with a disease that has made SARS, MERS, and even Ebola in the recent past seem almost like nothing, relatively speaking. Of course, it is highly recommended that everyone follows the basic instructions for maintaining individual safeguards and hygiene. But rather than panic or let anxiety overtake your thoughts, trust in the Lord and adhere to this ancient advice, from far more critical issues:

**"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things"** (Philippians 4:6-8, NASB).

In addition, at a home fellowship meeting early this month, the discussion migrated toward the events of the day, which also included the coronavirus and how different people were dealing with it. I was surprised that some were confessing **fears**, which I personally thought were way overblown. Here I was among Believers and **the spirit of fear** seemed to start to creep into the home. It was almost like a contagion of sorts, as it seemed to spread from one to another. Almost immediately as the concerns were becoming elevated, my mind went to a number of verses, which literally act to contain fear when it starts to emote. Of course, the primary weapon against fear is faith and this scripture came to mind:

**"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him"** (Hebrews 11:6, NASB).

Obviously, among those who follow the Messiah Yeshua, the desire is to please the Holy One and so recalling that **no weapon formed against us will prosper** also came up among the crowd gathered. But note in this passage from Isaiah that it is prefaced with the reminder that the children of God will be established in righteousness and **will not fear**:

**"In righteousness you will be established; you will be far from oppression, for you will not fear; and from terror, for it will not come near you.** If anyone fiercely assails you it will not be from Me. Whoever assails you will fall because of you. Behold, I Myself have created the smith

who blows the fire of coals, and brings out a weapon for its work; and I have created the destroyer to ruin. **No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper;** and every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me,' declares the LORD" (Isaiah 54:14-17, NASB).

In conclusion, as **life, death, disease, and fear** are humanity's issues that will be dealt with in varying degrees from time to time, the Believing community of faith needs to rely upon the Word of God and our knowledge that the Almighty One is with us and guiding us through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit! The *Ruach* is always there to not only teach us, but **comfort** us during these seasons of trials, tribulations, and tests that inevitably arise:

**"But the Helper [Comforter], the Holy Spirit,** whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. **Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"** (John 14:26-27, NASB).

And finally, as we celebrate the Feast of Purim this month, let us all be reminded that in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we are ambassadors for the Holy One of Israel and commanded to represent Him in whatever troubled or even calm waters where we may be traveling. Let us remember that God is sovereignly in control of all things, and He alone has placed us exactly where He wants us to be a useful vessel to advance His Kingdom on Earth. In Esther's case, Mordecai reminded her that she was positioned for "a such a time as this":

**"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise** for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty **for such a time as this?"** (Esther 4:14, NASB).

May we all remain healthy as Spring approaches, and the reminder of the Resurrection that follows the commemoration of the Last Seder, and sacrifice of Yeshua next month! We have much to be thankful for, because our Advocate sits at the right hand of our Heavenly Father, and faithfully intercedes for His followers.

And of course, we are extremely grateful for your prayers and financial support as we seek to advance God's Kingdom, until the restoration of all things. . .

Mark Huey

# ARE THE 144,000 AMONG US TODAY?

by J.K. McKee

When many of us have been conditioned to monitor world events, to see if various global and political phenomenon are steering us closer to the return of the Messiah—we have been necessarily conditioned to look for the “wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6) warned about in His Olivet Discourse. Many of us have been inclined to look at various world leaders of influence, and be prompted to consider, “let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six” (Revelation 13:8, NRSV). Even though we each profess to be born again Believers, who claim faith in the Messiah of Israel—and as such constitute the forces of the Kingdom of Light—many people who study and follow the end-times **are far too concerned about the affairs of the Kingdom of Darkness.**

Some of the most important players detailed in the Book of Revelation, *who actually constitute the forces of the Kingdom of Light*, and are to perform some kind of critical tasks or assignments in the anticipated Tribulation period, **are the 144,000 sealed servants of the children of Israel:**

“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth so that no wind could blow on earth or sea or against any tree. I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to damage earth and sea, saying, ‘Do not damage the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads.’ And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the people of Israel: From the tribe of Judah twelve thousand sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand sealed” (Revelation 7:1-8, NRSV).

“Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits

for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless" (Revelation 14:1-5, NRSV).

Several years ago, I was privy to a conversation with a major Messianic Jewish leader (2017), who asserted without hesitation that "The antimessiah is alive on Planet Earth today!" I half-jokingly responded with, "I hope he is in diapers!" If he has still yet to grow up, then it gives our faith community a fighting chance to make a difference in the meantime!

Very recently this past December, I was attending a Messianic Jewish conference, where another leader, who has been a born again Believer since 1965, declared rather stridently that, "The Messianic Jewish movement will give rise to the 144,000 of the Book of Revelation!" I actually tend to be in agreement with this. And, at least wondering whether or not the 144,000 sealed servants of Revelation are alive today on Planet Earth, is no different than wondering whether or not the antimessiah/antichrist is alive as well. But while we can all, quite easily, agree that with the spiritual state of our planet *literally going to Hell*—and as such is quite ripe for the rise of the false messiah—what about the spiritual state of today's Messianic movement? Are we actually a faith community which is capable of one day giving rise to the 144,000?

Today's Messianic movement, because of its emphasis on Jewish evangelism and the Romans 11:26 trajectory of salvation history, tends to pride itself on being "the end-time move of God." If this is indeed the case, then it becomes increasingly imperative for us to ask ourselves the question, "Are the 144,000 among us today?" Rather than this being some ambivalent mystery or enigma, we should seriously consider whether or not the spiritual and religious culture in the broad Messianic community today is presently seeing these individuals being raised up, and coming to the surface among us. Would the present Messianic movement, and the state of much of its theology, be able to recognize the 144,000 *without* some dramatic supernatural sign or event associated with them? When I review some of the descriptions given to us of the 144,000 in Revelation, and consider their implication, I would seriously question whether or not today's Messianic movement—in its present form—is actually capable of seeing the 144,000 come forth from its midst. Some severe reforms, both theological and spiritual, will have to be enacted, in order to see this actually achieved.

## Proposals Made About the 144,000

What has been proposed about the 144,000 of Revelation 7:1-4 and 14:1-5 in contemporary theology? Most frequently among Protestant examiners, the 144,000 have been allegorized as representative of "the Church." This is a line of interpretation most widely based within replacement theology. Israel has been replaced by "the Church," and thus any Biblical promises or prophecies involving a literal Israel, have to instead be viewed as a spiritual metaphor for the bounty of "the Church." The 144,000 only being a metaphor of the redeemed of "the Church"—and not a literal 144,000 sealed servants from Israel—is sometimes based on how not all of the formal Twelve Tribes of Israel are included in Revelation 7 or 14; Dan is missing, Joseph

is included, and Levi is included.

While among resources and commentaries on the Book of Revelation, one is most likely to find an allegorized approach to the 144,000, there are certainly perspectives one will encounter, which support more of a literal approach. More frequently than not, these are found among *dispensational* examiners. The famed *Ryrie Study Bible* is one resource where a literal 144,000 are supported. Commenting on Revelation 7:4, it asserts that "These are Jews from the 12 tribes (12,000 each) who are protected in order to perform some service for God during these days. Perhaps they are evangelists. The omission of the tribe of Dan may be because Dan was guilty of idolatry on many occasions (Lev. 24:11; Judg. 18; 1 Kings 12:28, 29)."<sup>1</sup> It includes further remarks on Revelation 14:4, noting the personal disposition of the 144,000:

"This may simply mean that the 144,000 were unmarried, or it may indicate their purposeful celibate state of separation unto God (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). . . The salvation of the 144,000 will forerun the salvation of a larger group of Israelites, who will turn to the Lord at the end of the tribulation (cf. Isa. 2:3; Rom. 11:15)."<sup>2</sup>

More detailed thoughts on the 144,000 are offered by John F. Walvoord, in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. While he differs from Ryrie in the conclusion that the 144,000 may be end-time evangelists of some sort, Walvoord does take a strong stance against an allegorized approach to these individuals. In his statements on Revelation 7:4, Walvoord summarizes,

"Attempts have been made to identify the 12 tribes here with the church, mostly to avoid the implication that this is literally **Israel**. The fact that specific tribes were mentioned and specific numbers from each tribe were indicated would seem to remove this from the symbolic and to justify literal interpretation. If God intended these verses to represent Israel literally, He would have used this means. Nowhere else in the Bible do a dozen references to the 12 tribes mean the church. Obviously Israel will be in the Tribulation, and though men do not know the identification of each tribe today, certainly God knows.

"Much speculation has arisen about why the tribe of Dan is omitted. Joseph and one of his two sons, Manasseh, are listed, but Ephraim, Joseph's other son, is omitted. Thus if Dan were included, there would have been 13 tribes. According to J.B. Smith, Scripture contains 29 lists of the tribes of Israel in the Old and New Testaments and in no case are more than 12 tribes mentioned (*A Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 130). The tribe omitted was usually Levi, from which the priesthood came. Inasmuch as it is normal to have only 12 and not 13 tribes, the omission of Dan is not significant. Perhaps Dan was omitted here because it was one of the first tribes to go into idolatry (Jud. 18:30; cf. 1 Kings 12:28-29). However, Dan is mentioned in Ezekiel 48:2 in the millennial land distribution."<sup>3</sup>

Walvoord makes the following, further remarks on Revelation 14:3-5:

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<sup>1</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, ed. *The Ryrie Study Bible*, New American Standard (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 1904.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 949.

“Reference to the purity of **the 144,000** could be recognition that during the difficult times of the Tribulation they could not have led normal married lives. Or it may refer to spiritual purity, often symbolized by virginity (cf. 2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21; Lam. 2:13; Amos 5:2). In 2 Corinthians 11:2 the concept of virginity is extended to the entire church, including both sexes.

“Some people believe that the 144,000 will be evangelists in the Great Tribulation. But there is no indication that the 144,000 were preachers or prophets; their testimony was largely from their moral purity and the fact that they were not martyred like many others. **They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.**”<sup>4</sup>

More within the realm of our own Messianic faith community, remarks similar to those of Ryrie and Walvoord are seen in the *Moody Bible Commentary*, edited by Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham. In its remarks on Revelation 7:1-8, it first states,

“Four angels were commissioned to delay the winds of judgment until God’s bond-servants could be sealed for protection. The **seal** indicates God’s ownership and thus protection by God. No more judgment would be exacted against the earth until their safety was assured. . . [T]hey are rightly related to the Father and bear His seal upon their foreheads. They appear in stark contrast to those who are later seen as identifying with the beast by accepting his mark (13:16).”<sup>5</sup>

The *Moody Commentary* goes further here, asking, “Were the 144,000 evangelists who had witnessed to the great throng?”<sup>6</sup>

Addressing the personal disposition of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5, it notes something different than the frequent conclusion that these figures are celibate singles:

“The most likely meaning of not being **defiled with** women and keeping chaste is that they have not engaged in false worship. In the OT, frequently Israel’s idolatry was described as spiritual adultery (Ex 34:11-17; Nm 25:1-9; Hs 1:2; 2:2). The unflagging attention of these faithful servants as on the Lamb, whom they constantly followed around heaven.”<sup>7</sup>

To many evangelical examiners of the past three to four decades—certainly in dispensational quarters—the 144,000 have been approached as 144,000 single male Jews. They are frequently concluded as figures to be sealed, with the expressed intention of evangelizing the unsaved during the Tribulation period, perhaps to be regarded as “144,000 Jewish Billy Grahams.” To dispensationalists, after the pre-tribulation rapture takes place, God will resume His program with Israel, and the 144,000 will be sealed. They will likely be credited with seeing the prophecy of Matthew 24:14 come to pass: “And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come” (NRSV). The 144,000 are commonly thought to be figures embodying the major qualities of the evangelist. And, given the obvious symbolism of the number

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 964.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Rydelnik and Michael Vanlaningham, eds., *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2017.

twelve in the specific quantity 144,000, these figures will to some degree, mirror the position of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the Twelve Disciples of Yeshua.

Messianic approaches to the 144,000 tend to sit somewhere along dispensational lines, although likely with more appeals made to these figures embodying the qualities of significant persons in the Tanach Scriptures as well, such as Ancient Israel's Prophets. Not all Messianic interpretations, in fact likely a majority today, hold to the sealing of a literal 144,000 only subsequent to a pre-tribulation rapture. Many of today's Messianics, while holding to a literal 144,000 from the Book of Revelation, also hold to a post-tribulational gathering of the holy ones or saints into the clouds, prior to Yeshua's arrival to Planet Earth.

## What have Messianic people said about the 144,000?

When investigating the available Messianic materials on the Book of Revelation, not a huge amount has been said about the 144,000—but what has been said, may certainly be regarded as intriguing.

In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (1995), remarking on Revelation 7:4, David H. Stern takes a hardline stance against the view that the 144,000 should be allegorized as representing "the Church." He stresses that the 144,000 are going to be Jews, and makes the effort to also emphasize the supernatural preservation of the Jewish people throughout history:

**"From every tribe of the people of Israel.** The plain sense. . . of this phrase is 'from among the entire Jewish people.' But many commentators say it refers to the Church. . . However, the case that the **144,000 from every tribe of the people of Israel** means 'the Church' is [hard] to make here; because v. 9 below speaks of 'a huge crowd, too large for anyone to count, from every nation, tribe, people and language.' Apparently this innumerable crowd of saved Gentiles is to be contrasted with the delimited number of saved Jews in the present verse. Furthermore, to emphasize the fact that these 144,000 are Jews, vv. 5-8 lists the twelve tribes; this would have no immediate relevance to the Church. . . .

"One objection sometimes made to interpreting these 144,000 as Jews is that there is supposedly no reason why Jews would be singled out for special protection. Such thinking contradicts the whole of salvation history as set forth in the *Tanakh* and reflects an unawareness on the part of Gentile Christian commentators that they have been joined to Israel, that is, to the Jewish people. God, by his grace, has singled out the Jewish people for special protection for thousands of years. After centuries of dispersion and persecution, culminating in the Holocaust, we would not exist at all without such protection. This protection is promised over and over by the Prophets, even when Israel becomes sinful and breaks covenant; though it is not always promised to the entire people, but rather only to a remnant (see Ro 9:27-29, 11:1-32)—such as the 144,000. Moreover the sealing of the Jewish people from judgment corresponds specifically to God's promise at Zechariah 9:14-16. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

Noting some of the issues in Revelation 7:5-8 about the different tribal lists, Stern appeals to the Nineteenth Century opinions of Yechiel Lichtenstein, who believes that there was a scribal error which did not get corrected in the transcription

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<sup>8</sup> David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), pp 810, 812.

of Revelation.<sup>9</sup> But, this is a matter of conjecture. What is not a matter of conjecture, is that “If it is meant literally that 12,000 from each tribe are to be selected, it can be objected that no one will know who belongs to which tribe, since genealogies no longer exist. One answer: God, who will be doing the choosing, will know.”<sup>10</sup> It is to be correctly thought that many of the 144,000 will not know what their tribal heritage is, until they are sealed by the Lord. Regarding such sealing (Revelation 7:1), Stern concludes,

“The 144,000 are. . .Messianic Jews. . .Their **foreheads** are ‘sealed’ (7:2-3&N, 9:4) with both the Lamb’s **name** and **his Father’s name** (contrast 13:16-17). Of the two *t’fillin* is worn on the forehead and contains the Father’s name, *YHVH* (see 13:16-17aN); it symbolizes complete devotion and open profession. These 144,000 will be equally open and devoted about proclaiming the name of the Lamb, Yeshua.”<sup>11</sup>

Stern makes some further claims regarding Revelation 14:4 which need to be recognized as well. His CJB/CJSB says, “These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; they follow the Lamb wherever he goes; they have been ransomed from among humanity as firstfruits for God and the Lamb.” In his estimation, “These are not male celibates, despite the explicit mention of women. Rather, they are people of both sexes who are faithful to God and his Son, as the rest of vv. 4-5 makes clear. Fornication is a common biblical metaphor for idolatry—for several examples from the *Tanakh* see Ezekiel 16, 23 and Hosea 1-5. Here in the book of Revelation, misdirected worship is explicitly called whoring at v. 8 below, as well as at 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2.”<sup>12</sup> Stern does not conclude that being defiled with women is a reference to sexual chastity, but instead denotes abstinence from idolatry. He also thinks that the 144,000 will be sealed from among ethnic Jews of both genders, male and female.

More recently, the reflective commentary *Yochanan (John) Presents the Revelation of Yeshua the Messiah* (2018) by Gavriel Lumbroso, offers some general thoughts on the 144,000, concluding that they are 144,000 Messianic Jews:

“Ya’akov [James], the brother of the Master, was known for his intercessory prayers for Israel, but Yochanan [John] had also certainly cried and wept over the fate of the Jewish believers of his day. They were caught between the Roman government’s persecution of Jews, the harassment of the Sadducee-influenced Israelites, and the Gentile believers who rejected and harassed them. At the time of the vision, Yochanan sees some good news. He reassures them that no matter what happens to them in the earthly reality, their heavenly fate was sealed. Twelve thousand from each tribe, or 144,000 Jewish believers, would be given HaShem’s seal of protection. . . Not only do these receive a seal of protection, but they serve as first fruits. . . In the vision of the 144,000 sealed Messianic Jews, the Israelites are represented by their own first fruit, and after that, Israel stands as the first fruit for the rest of humanity. . .”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp 811-812.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 812.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 830.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 830.

<sup>13</sup> Gavriel Lumbroso, *Yochanan (John) Presents the Revelation of Yeshua the Messiah* (Clarksville, MD:

Lederer Books, 2018), 140.

Lumbroso further observes, regarding the character of these individuals, “Yochanan sees these 144,000 faithful who have stayed close and did not compromise with the beast and its demands.”<sup>14</sup>

It is easy to see that Messianic Jewish interpretations and approaches to the 144,000 are consistent with dispensational views. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as Messianic Jewish teachers are most interested in dispelling the idea that the 144,000 are to be allegorized as a symbol for “the Church,” something resultant of supersessionist interpretations. Still, there are finer details regarding the 144,000 to be considered.

## **What are the 144,000 sealed to do?**

There is nothing explicitly stated in the text of Revelation regarding what the 144,000 are specifically sealed *to do*, and so from that examiners and readers have made various proposals. The 144,000 are often concluded to represent the last declarers of the good news, perhaps commissioned by the Lord to speak forth the Matthew 24:14 “gospel of the Kingdom,” a message involving both personal salvation *and* the final restoration of Israel’s Kingdom via the impending return of the Messiah. At times, the 144,000 are likened unto the fishers and hunters involved in the final restoration of Israel: “I am now sending for many fishermen, says the LORD, and they shall catch them; and afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks” (Jeremiah 16:16, NRSV).

It is not at all an inappropriate stretch to think that the sealing of the 144,000 is akin to the encounter of Moses at the Burning Bush, the commission of Joshua who lead Israel into the Promised Land, the selection of various Prophets in Ancient Israel, as well as the supernatural encounters of figures like the Apostle Paul on the Damascus Road. All of these figures of faith were sealed to perform some incredible work in their generations, so the sealing of the 144,000 by necessity should go beyond the Lord’s faithfulness to preserve Israel and the Jewish people until the end-times.

## **The 144,000 Are from the Twelve Tribes**

Almost all of those you would encounter today, in the broad Messianic movement, should hold to a literal view of the 144,000 being ethnic Israelites. An allegorized view of the 144,000, simply representative of “a harvest of Believers,” comes from a supersessionist hermeneutic. Even a Messianic allegorized view, seeing it as representative of a great salvation of Jewish people in the end-times, should rightly not sit too well with us. A literal view of the 144,000 would see these figures as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—yet it cannot go overlooked that there have been some claims made against this, from the text, for a variety of reasons.

Revelation 7:4-5a first speaks of the sealing of those from the tribe of Judah, “I heard how many were sealed—144,000 from every tribe of the people of Isra’el: From the tribe of Y’hudah 12,000 were sealed” (CJB/CJSB). To many, this bespeaks of an allegorical perspective, because Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob/Israel

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

(Genesis 29:32), and Judah was the fourth born (Genesis 29:35). Yet the placement of the tribe of Judah first, here, is hardly a surprise, given how Judah is given the scepter of authority in Jacob/Israel's decree, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes" (Genesis 49:10, NASU).

More pressing for some readers, is how the tribe of Dan is totally missing from the list of those sealed in Revelation 7:5-8, and instead Levi and Joseph are included (Revelation 7:7-8). Why is the tribe of Dan absent from among the 144,000? The most frequent explanation offered by various commentaries, concerns a penchant that the tribe of Dan had for pagan idolatry. As is specifically detailed in *Testament of Dan* 5:4-7 from the Pseudepigrapha,

"For I know that in the last days you will defect from the Lord, you will be offended at Levi, and revolt against Judah; but you will not prevail over them. An angel of the Lord guides them both, because by them Israel shall stand. To the extent that you abandon the Lord, you will live by every evil deed, committing the revolting acts of the gentiles, chasing after wives of lawless men, and you are motivated to all wickedness by the spirits of deceit among you. For I read in the Book of Enoch the Righteous that your prince is Satan and that all the spirits of sexual promiscuity and of arrogance devote attention to the sons of Levi in the attempt to observe them closely and cause them to commit sin before the Lord. My sons will draw close to Levi, will participate with them in all manner of sins; and with the sons of Judah they will share in greed, like lions snatching what belongs to others. Accordingly you will be led off with them into captivity; there you will receive all the plagues of Egypt, and all the evils of the gentiles."<sup>15</sup>

While today's Messianic people will be seen to widely conclude that the 144,000 are ethnic Israelites, there are still questions regarding who these will be. That the 144,000 are sealed in twelve sets of 12,000, should be taken as a definite indication that many do not know what their tribal lineage actually is, mainly due to genealogies being lost throughout history. Certainly, the further question can also be raised, whether or not there are going to be people who are sealed among the 144,000, who had little or no knowledge of them being physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While we need to remain mature about this, it can be recognized how throughout history there have been people whose Jewish ancestry has remained (purposefully) hidden from them. And, there are people who sit outside of the mainstream Jewish community, who may be regarded as legitimate descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes, deported to areas within the sphere of influence of the old Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian Empires—namely various small groups and sects in Africa and India, recognized as legitimate groups by Rabbinical authorities in Israel.<sup>16</sup> So,

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<sup>15</sup> H.C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," trans., in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 809.

<sup>16</sup> For a fair resolution of the controversies caused by the Two-House teaching, consult the author's book *Israel in Future Prophecy*.

while it may be that the 144,000 are likely to mainly made of up Messianic Jewish Believers, that God may have a few surprises in store regarding some additional others, cannot at all be discounted.

The 144,000 are sealed to be significant leaders in the end-times, sitting in the tradition of Moses, Joshua, the Prophets, and the Apostles. But simply because they are sealed to be significant leaders of God's people, during the Time of Jacob's Trouble or the Tribulation period—hardly means that they are going to be the *only* leaders. Many non-Jewish Believers with a Ruth calling, who will stick by their Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters in the end-times—until death (cf. Ruth 1:16-17)—will doubtlessly be used by the Lord as well, serving alongside many of the 144,000 shoulder to shoulder. Examples of First Century non-Jewish leaders like Titus, who oversaw the congregations on Crete, should no doubt come to mind. But the 144,000 sealed ethnic Israelites, will definitely serve as a beacon to the world, that the Apostles' question of "Lord, are You restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" (Acts 1:6, TLV) is finally going to be answered.

## What does it mean for the 144,000 to be chaste?

Based on the statements of Revelation 14:4-5, detailing the character of the 144,000, many holding to a literal view of these individuals, conclude that they will be celibate male virgins. As it appears in a Messianic version like the TLV, "These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been redeemed from among mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no lie—they are blameless." There is little doubting the fact that whoever the 144,000 are going to be, that they are going to have to be sexually pure and above accusation. However, it has to be noted that some versions stop short of rendering the Greek *parthenoi gar eisin* (παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν) with "virgins," but instead may have "for they have kept themselves chaste" (NASU).

Some examiners, as noted previously, do not think that the 144,000 will be celibate, but instead that the reference to not being defiled with women speaks to an abstinence from idolatry. Other people, certainly believing that the 144,000 will be sexually chaste and pure, are confounded regarding who on Earth, among today's Messianic Jewish community, are going to be found **who are virgins**. Because of the sexual perversions that have plagued humanity from the beginning—but *most especially today*—we would, sadly, be hard-pressed at times to find that many young virgins in today's Messianic movement. Precisely because of the impracticability that many see in finding celibate virgins in today's world, and especially in a small Messianic movement, it is not a surprise why some consider alternative views of *parthenoi gar eisin* that include married males and females. This even includes my own deliberations on the 144,000.

Are all of the 144,000 going to be male celibates, who are virgins who have never had sexual intercourse? It is absolutely true that the marriage bed is undefiled (Hebrews 13:4), and that there is a proper, Biblical orientation toward righteous sexuality. I think it is possible that there may be some married males among the 144,000, but on the condition that they remained sexually pure and *only* had sexual

intercourse in the context of marriage. If one is going to be flexible with the requirement for the 144,000 to be chaste, then it means that in addition to there being male celibates, then any male who had sexual intercourse was never defiled by pre-marital or homosexual sins. And indeed, it is to be unfortunately observed that most couples being married today in evangelical Protestantism, enter into a union where at least one of the spouses was involved in some kind of pre-marital sex.

Another point that cannot be dismissed is the strong likelihood of there being females among the 144,000—especially as it is more likely today for females to remain more sexually chaste than males. There is nothing in the text of either Revelation 7:1-8 or 14:1-5 which would disqualify females from being among those who are to be sealed. In fact, if there are going to be any married males, who were sexually pure, sealed among the 144,000—we should absolutely think that their wives are going to be sealed right alongside them, making them a proverbial “power couple” not unlike Priscilla and Aquila (cf. Acts 18:26).

## **Why do the 144,000 have to be dramatically sealed?**

Given the significant apocalyptic drama in the Book of Revelation, why do the 144,000 have to be publicly sealed? Revelation 7:3 attests, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads” (ESV). The sealing of the 144,000 seemingly takes place in conjunction with some huge ecological catastrophes that will befall Planet Earth during the Tribulation. But if the 144,000 are going to be significant leaders of God’s people during the Tribulation period, why would they need to be dramatically sealed in an event like Moses’ encounter at the Burning Bush or the Prophet Isaiah’s encounter of God’s throne in Isaiah 6? Why would these people not already be recognized as leaders by the faith community at large?

Traditionally, the 144,000 have been viewed as being ethnic Israelites who are single male celibates. In today’s broad Messianic movement, even in the year 2020, there are not that many Messianic synagogues or congregations where one will witness single males serving in the leadership. This is partially based, incorrectly, on a universal reading of instructions such as 1 Timothy 3:2, 4, 12 and Titus 2:5, rather than them being situational instructions given to Timothy and Titus, appointing new leaders in response to the circumstances that have arisen in Ephesus and on Crete.<sup>17</sup> Much more concerning, is the widespread complementarianism of too much of today’s Messianic movement, where only married males, and not single males, and certainly not women, are only thought to be qualified leaders and teachers in the Body of Messiah. This complementarianism also, although without any Biblical support, conflates marital status and spiritual maturity—in spite of significant Biblical examples of leaders such as the Apostle Paul, and surprisingly even for some Yeshua the Messiah Himself, never having married.<sup>18</sup>

If the majority of the 144,000 are going to be single male celibates—and today’s Messianic community frequently does not include single males, much less females,

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<sup>17</sup> Consult the author’s commentary *The Pastoral Epistles for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>18</sup> For a further discussion, consult the author’s book *Men and Women in the Body of Messianic: Answering Crucial Questions*.

into the leadership structure of its congregations—it is **hardly a surprise to me why the 144,000 will have to be dramatically and publicly sealed.** There may not be any other way for many Messianic people to recognize the 144,000 as the leaders that God has chosen for the end-times!

### **Are the 144,000 Among Us Today?**

Much of today's Messianic movement claims that it is "the end-time move of God," precisely and correctly because it focuses on the Romans chs. 9-11 trajectory of salvation history. **But how prepared is our faith community, really, to see the 144,000 be raised up among us?**

Many of today's Messianic Jewish unmarried young people are, lamentably, just as sexually active as those in today's evangelical church are. Today's Messianic movement, while widely concluding that the 144,000 will be celibate male virgins, does not often incorporate single males, much less females, into the leadership structure of its congregations. Today's Messianic movement, while widely concluding that (the majority of) the 144,000 will be unmarried, does not consider the married and single estates to be co-equal. Today's Messianic movement has a tendency to ignore the examples of significant single male leaders in the Scriptures, such as the Prophet Jeremiah, James the Just, the Apostle Paul, and even Yeshua the Messiah Himself. (Significant examples of female leaders, such as the Judge Deborah, Priscilla, or Apostle Junia often do not even get recognized.) What does this say about the environment from which we are expecting the 144,000 to come forth?

With the 2020s now upon us, a significant review of a wide number of issues are in order. **We are closer to the return of the Messiah now, more than we ever have been before!** And yet, in thinking that the 144,000 are going to come forth from us—we might be hard pressed to find 144 virgins, male or female, Jewish or non-Jewish, in our Messianic faith community today. I, and various others, while being flexible on the details regarding the 144,000, would still expect them to have passed *bar/bat mitzvah* age, and be closer to the age of 20—than the 144,000 being found sexually chaste solely because they had never gone through puberty!

Many aspects of our current spiritual culture will have to change, if today's Messianic movement is the faith community from which the 144,000 are going to be raised up. It is not going to be easy, and the conversations which are ahead of us are going to be uncomfortable for many. Yet, the 144,000 will be "beyond reproach" (Revelation 14:5, Phillips). We may not humanly understand how such sexually chaste young men and young women will be raised up from among us. And indeed, many will be surprised one day, when a young man or young woman is dramatically sealed by the Lord—because such persons may have otherwise been overlooked or ignored for a leadership position in the Body of Messiah. **It is certainly my prayer that I have already encountered various Messianic Jewish young people who will be among the 144,000 sealed servants of the children of Israel.**