

Text: Revelation 14:1-5

Title: "144,000 stand with the Lamb"

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Place: NBBC

Intro: Charles T. Russell established the Watch Tower Tract Society in 1881, the group we know today as the Jehovah Witnesses. Four years earlier he had published a book that claimed that the second coming of Christ had occurred in the fall of 1874 in a spiritual and invisible way, commencing a 40-year harvest period. After those 40 years, in 1914, Jesus would establish His kingdom on earth and return to heaven with His 144,000 saints [<http://jwfacts.com/watchtower/failed-1914-predictions.php>; accessed 7/28/2017, citing *Studies In the Scriptures - Thy Kingdom Come* (1908 ed.) p.228].

That did not happen. So the interpretation was adjusted to say on the basis of Matt. 24:34 that there would be 144,000 Jehovah Witnesses from the generation who were alive in 1914 who would live in heaven with Christ. Only they would be allowed to partake of the bread and wine at the annual Memorial of Christ's Death.

For a number of years, many have partaken of that memorial who were not alive in 1914, so in 1994 and again in 2008 the organization changed its interpretation again, so that having been alive in 1914 was no longer necessary to being a part of the 144,000 heavenly anointed ones [See M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, Third Edition; pp. 177-180].

There are many more serious errors in the Jehovah Witness organization, including the denial that Jesus is Jehovah, but I mention their changing interpretation of the 144,000 this

morning because they illustrate well the difficulty that can come to a Bible student when passages like the one before us this morning are called symbolical and thereby made pliable enough to fit into a preferred system of doctrine in support of some organizational teaching.

Five things should be immediately obvious to us when it comes to the identification of the 144,000 we read about in Revelation 7 and 14.

First, they are on the earth rather than in heaven in John's vision (7:3, "hurt not the earth until we have sealed"; contrast the innumerable multitude in 7:9, "before the throne and before the Lamb").

Second, they are on the earth during the Great Tribulation. This vision occurs after the six seal judgments of chapter 6 and before the seventh seal judgment of chapter 8. Four angels stand at the four points of the compass ready to further judge the earth when these are sealed for protection (7:1-2).

Third, they are Jewish (7:3-8). Twelve tribes are mentioned. The list is unique in Scripture because the tribe of Ephraim is called the tribe of Joseph, and the tribe of Dan is not mentioned. We know from Ezekiel 48:1-2, 32 that Dan will have a part in the future Jewish millennial kingdom. Some have suggested that these adjustments to the normal list of tribes have to do with the meaning of their names (Ephraim = multiplication/fruitfulness; Dan = judge) [see Joseph Seis], but we do not now why the Lord chooses to use the name Joseph and exclude the tribe of Dan for this ministry.

Fourth, they are bondservants of God (7:3), the first fruits of the Great Tribulation period (14:4c). Many more Jews will

be saved during the Great Tribulation, but these are given a special ministry as the first ones who are saved.

Finally, they are victorious. They are seen standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion (14:1). Jesus stands on Mount Zion as King when the Great Tribulation is over, and Israel rejoices with Him there. It is really how the prophecy of Revelation ends. This is the anticipated end. We read of this blessed survival of the 144,000 here in chapter 14 in anticipation of the destruction of the antichrist's Babylon through the second coming of Christ, which is the content of the rest of the Book of Revelation.

This end is the hope of many of the songs of Israel:

Ps. 14:7, "Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad."

Ps. 53:6, "Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores His captive people, Let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."

Ps. 69:35, "For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, That they may dwell there and possess it."

Ps. 110:2, "The Lord will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies."

Ps. 125:1, "Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved but abides forever."

Ps. 132:13, "For the Lord has chosen Zion; He has desired it for His habitation."

Ps. 146:10, "The Lord will reign forever, Your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!"

This morning, I want us to review again the importance of three other characteristics of the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb in Zion.

I. They are sealed standing with the Lamb (14:1).

Ill: It is significant that this description of the foreheads of these believers comes on the heels of chapter 13's description of the mark of the beast (13:16-18).

Appl: The Bible Word for this is *sealing* (Rev. 7:3). In ancient times a seal was an identification of ownership. You would put your seal on things that belonged to you. The Bible tells us that the Lord puts His seal on His child when that one is born into the family of God. 2 Tim. 2:19, "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.'"

For these Jews, that seal will be the name of God on their foreheads (7:3, 14:1). That seal will identify them openly as bondservants of the Lamb in the world of the beast's mark, and it will protect them from the judgments of God on that world, the four winds that harm the earth, sea, and trees.

In our day, the Lord uses the indwelling Holy Spirit to seal us, to identify us as belonging to Him.

2 Cor. 1:20-22, "For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us. Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts."

Eph. 1:13, "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise." Believer's baptism is the mark of this sealing.

So God has identified us as His own by giving us the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. That seal should be every bit as conspicuous a witness for Him as the names on the foreheads of these 144,000 Jews will be in the Great Tribulation period.

Can others see God's seal on your life, that you belong to Him, that His Spirit indwells you and bears His fruit in you? Said differently, do you have love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance as part of your testimony before others?

Paul warns, "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

II. They sing a new song standing with the Lamb (14:2-3).

Appl: We have seen this kind of singing already in Revelation (5:9). We said then that the word for *new* here means *new in quality* rather than *new in time*.

This song of the end times, which sounds like many waters and great thunder, which is sung in the unity of perfect harmony as a single voice, which is accompanied by many lyres or harps, is similar in quality to the song that Psalm 40 says is put into the mouth of every true believer:

"He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even

praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord" (Ps. 40:2-3).

Do you enjoy singing that new song? The problem with a new song is that it can take some time to learn it. Our old songs can have a powerful grip on our lives (ex: Billy Joel coming soon to Fenway Park).

The fact of the matter is that when we are saved, God replaces our old song with a new song. We should be thrilled to learn it and to sing it for His glory.

III. They are unblemished standing with the Lamb (14:4-5).

III: Old Testament sacrifices were to be unblemished sacrifices. No diseased or injured animals were to be used.

Appl: This is because they pointed to the coming sacrifice of the perfect Son of God, the Lamb without blemish and without spot. Our lives are supposed to be an unblemished sacrifice that reflects Him too (Rom. 12:1-2). The 144,000 are an example of an unblemished life that points to the sacrifice of the Lamb in four areas mentioned in our passage:

1. Sexual purity (14:4a). The Bible tells us that there are two ways to be morally pure – be a virgin or be married (Heb. 13:4, "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge"). These men were the former, probably because of the dangerous nature of their calling. Our lives cannot be an unblemished sacrifice that points to the sacrifice of our Savior if our lives are sexually impure.

It is clear that God saves His people out of sexually impure lifestyles (1 Cor. 6:9-11). Even as believers who battle temp-

tations to sin, "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just not to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). When we sin, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). But when we sin this way, Jesus Christ has no righteous advocate in this sinful world. We sin bearing His name, dragging it into the muck and mire with us, and hindering the advance of the glory of His kingdom in this world.

2. Obedient discipleship (14:4b). They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They seek His will and desire to do it. They obey. This is what it means to live the Christian life. Peter put it this way: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). The first step of obedient discipleship is baptism.

3. True speech (14:5a). The word *guile* refers to a falsehood or a lie. Certainly, as the unblemished sacrifice, Jesus did not lie nor try to deny or hide the truth. Prophesying of Christ's unblemished sacrifice, Isaiah wrote: "neither was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:9). Does our life reflect Christ this way - unblemished in truthful speech?

4. Redemption (14:3b, 4c). What ultimately made these men unblemished like Christ in their sexual purity, obedient discipleship, and truthful speech was God's work of redemption. They were purchased by Jesus's blood, forgiven by His death, and freed from the bondage of sin by the power of His resurrection life. Have you been redeemed? If so, you have the freedom and power to live an unblemished life that bears well the honorable name of your Redeemer.

Conclusion: They shall be sealed, they will sing, and they will live unblemished lives that pointed people to the un-

blemished sacrifice of our Savior that can save from sin. They are the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb. They shall do so in a very difficult day.

We have a similar calling in our day, for which we are sealed, about which we can sing, and for which we must live unblemished lives. What will be known of the record of our lives when we stand with the Lamb some day?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*