

The Answering Service

FROM AMERICA'S PROMISE

Answers to questions from Radio and Tape Listeners

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Question No. 1:

What or who are the 144,000 in Revelation 7?

Answer:

Revelation 7 tells us that the 144,000 are Israelites, or 12,000 from each tribe. The breakdown of the 144,000 into tribal units makes it abundantly clear that God is not speaking of "spiritual Israelites," but of the race of Israel that had been scattered 800 years earlier. 144,000 is not necessarily a literal number. We believe it is the symbolic number for completion and perfection. Therefore, it would stand for all the Israelites of those tribes.

Some, however, argue that 12 is the number of governmental completion and perfection, and that therefore, this refers to the "overcomers" among the Israelites who will reign with Christ in the Kingdom. (The rest would be citizens, but not a part of the governmental body.) This view is generally accompanied by the additional explanation that not all of these 144,000 would be alive at the same time, but they would be resurrected at the same time. Thus, the selection and sealing of the 144,000 would be spread out over the whole history of Adam to the completed Kingdom. On the other hand, Adam, Methuselah, and Abraham were not a part of the 12 tribes sealed, so this could present a problem to this particular viewpoint.

God, of course, can do as He wishes, but we would be careful about limiting

God's bureaucracy to 144,000. Such limitations tend to make people compete with each other to be of that number. If they feel as though they had "attained," they could easily become quite self-righteous.

Question No. 2:

What is the seal in the foreheads of the 144,000?

Answer:

In **Ezekiel 9:4**, we find that when God destroyed the old city of Jerusalem, He first "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." These were the righteous Judeans who were to be spared in the coming destruction. Here, the mark clearly-signified divine protection.

Servants in ancient times were marked with the seal of their owners in their foreheads. **Ephesians 1:13 and 14** say in part, "In whom also after that ye have believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest (down payment) of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." Thus, the seal can refer to the fact that God owns Israel, with the idea, that with God's seal, they will be protected until they acquire their full inheritance in God's Kingdom.

Such protection does not necessarily mean keeping alive physically, but points to the resurrection.

2 Cor. 1:21-22 and Eph. 4:30 make it plain the sealing is not done by any man, but by God Almighty, through the Holy spirit "unto the day of redemption."

Question No. 3:

In the sealing of the 144,000 why did the Bible leave out the names of Ephraim and Dan? Were they cut off from Israel, as some say?

Answer:

Joseph, you recall, had two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The listing in **Revelation 7**, however, lists Joseph in place of Ephraim. This is proper, since Ephraim was the prime inheritor of the birthright, along with Manasseh, his brother. Thus, we should understand "Joseph" to be referring-specifically to Ephraim. So Ephraim is not really left out at all.

There have been many attempts to explain the omission of these tribes, especially that of Dan. A popular view (mostly among futurists) is that the tribe of Dan was blotted out from Israel for their idolatry, and they often include Ephraim, as well, in this exclusion from Israel. This interpretation is based upon **Deut. 29:18-20**, where God warns Israel that if any man, woman, family, or tribe turns away from God, He would blot out their names from under heaven. Dan and Ephraim were said to be the MOST idolatrous tribes, and therefore, they were blotted out of the registry of Israel forever.

We disagree on the following grounds:

(1) ALL of the tribes were guilty of idolatry; and even though the golden calves were set up in Dan and Bethel (capital cities of Dan and Ephraim), yet all of the tribes were more than willing to worship them, and all should share the blame equally. This is supported by the simple

fact that all of the tribes were deported to Assyria and divorced from God.

(2) The rest of **Deut. 29** makes it clear that God was looking ahead to the dispersion of ALL the tribes. **Verse 28** defines the judgment as being cast into another land. Thus, the phrase, "blot out his name from under heaven," does not refer to an absolute and total destruction of those two tribes, but rather to dispersion. Since God had married Israel and Mt. Sinai, this blotting out was the divorce.

(3) Ephraim was the prime holder of the Israel birthright. We find it inconceivable that God would give the birthright to a tribe that would ultimately be completely lost and "blotted out."

(4) Hosea castigates the tribe of Ephraim moreso than any other tribe. And yet his last words to Ephraim were of comfort in the midst of judgment. **Hosea 13:12-14** says: "The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid. The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him; he is an unwise son; for he should not stay long in the places of the breaking forth of children. I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death; O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." Those words would be inappropriate for a tribe that had been "blotted out."

(5) **Ezekiel 37:16.20** tells us that the stick of Ephraim-Joseph shall be united with the stick of Judah in the latter days. This would be impossible if Ephraim were blotted out.

(6) In **Ezra 6:17**, which occurred 200 years after Ephraim and Dan had been deported into Assyria with the rest of Israel, we find that Ezra offered up sacrifices "for all Israel, twelve he goats,

according to the number of the tribes of Israel." These 12 tribes were not all present in the land, of course. (The genealogical records in Ezra and Nehemiah list only Judah, Benjamin, and Levi.) However, they offered up sacrifices for all the tribes, because this signified that they understood the prophetic writings to mean that all of the tribes would one day be united in God's Kingdom. This, alone, proves that Ephraim and Dan could not possibly have been blotted out forever in the absolute sense.

(7) The tribe of Dan appeared first in Ireland as the "Tuatha de Danaans" (which means "tribeship of Dan"). The subsequent history of Northern Ireland, where this tribe settled, would not seem to indicate that they had been utterly-cast away as a tribe in Israel.

Another viewpoint, which we consider as having the most merit, is based upon the historical interpretation of Revelation. The sealing of the 12 tribes was a historical necessity, in order to preserve the Israelites from destruction, as they migrated into Europe from Assyria. The Roman Empire was a threat, so God placed His seal of protection upon them.

Now you recall that the land allotted to the tribe of Dan in Palestine, during the days of Joshua, was not taken from the Philistines until the time of David. The Danites were not about to wait for 400 years to inherit land of their own, so within 5 years of their entering Canaan, they began to strike out on their own (see **Judges 18**). Deborah even criticized the tribe of Dan for remaining in their ships, while their brethren were at war, (**Judges 5:17**)

The fact is, the tribe of Dan colonized many places. The "Danai" were some of

the most notable Greek warriors mentioned in Homer's *The Iliad*. The "Tuatha de Danaans" were another branch of Danites that settled first in Spain, then in Ireland.

Thus, according to this view, the tribe of Dan was not in special need of divine protection from the Roman legions, because Dan was out of her reach. For this reason, Dan was omitted from the list of sealed tribes.

Question No. 4:

Who were the Nicolaitanes of Rev. 2?

Answer:

This may, possibly, refer to a small sect within the church of Ephesus, to whom this verse is directed. If so, there is no historical record of it other than here. Some say that it refers to followers of some man named Nicolas, and they attach no further meaning to the word.

Others, however, break the word down into two Greek words, *nikao* ("to overcome") and *laos* ("the people, or laity"). Thus, the essential meaning of the word would be "to overcome the laity." One of the most ancient of problems has been the evil practice of a priestly caste lording it over the flock, as though they had special privileges and a God-given right to expect obedience from the people.

Matthew 23:8 says, "But be not ye called Rabbi: for One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." (Rabbi means "my master.")

Peter, also, roundly-denounces those elders of the churches who abuse their brethren: "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for

filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:2, 3)