

144,000

GOD IS INCLUSIVE

by James Rafferty

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Urban Myths

Have you ever heard that the Great Wall of China can be seen from the moon by the naked eye, or that Albert Einstein did poorly in school? I once read with interest a list of commonly known “facts” like these. I was quite surprised when I learned that not one of these alleged “facts” are actually true. Since then I often question what I choose to believe unless I have checked it out for myself. Below are a mixture of facts and fiction. See if you can discern which is which:

- A bank issued a credit card to a tree.
- NASA scientists discover a lost day in time.
- U.S. law specifies that merchants do not have to accept more than 100 pennies in payment.
- By proclamation, George Bush made June 10 Jesus Day in Texas.
- Three people died of suffocation after sealing their home with plastic sheeting and duct tape.
- Flowers and plants are harmful in a hospital room because they use oxygen the patient needs.
- The winning numbers in a New York state lottery drawing on September 11, 2002 were 9-1-1.
- Workers who died while building Hoover Dam were entombed in the dam itself.
- Some German states have banned Red Bull’s “Simply Cola” drink for containing trace amounts of cocaine.
- German chocolate cake originated in Germany.

To discover which statements are true and which are false refer to Appendix I. How did you do? What is the purpose of this exercise? The point is that we sometimes accept fiction as fact without personal investigation. Now don’t worry, this is not a study about a lost day in time or German chocolate cake. It’s about the 144,000 — fact and fiction. So let’s consider some urban legends concerning the 144,000 and see if we can discern fact from fiction:

- Only those who are translated without seeing death can be part of the 144,000.
- Ellen G. White will not be one of the 144,000 because she died.
- Only Seventh-day Adventists can be part of the 144,000.
- The 144,000 is a symbolic number.
- All those who are saved will be included in the 144,000.
- The 144,000 are the only ones who serve God in His temple day and night.
- The great multitude is excluded from entering the temple.
- All of those redeemed from the earth can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

How do you think you did in answering these questions? If you want to find out, the answers are in the study that follows.

The Word is Inclusive

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through Him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1: 1-9).

This introduction to the gospel of John delineates the inspired record of the person of Jesus Christ. A key element in John’s introduction is the inclusive nature of God. Consider these four aspects of God’s inclusiveness:

1. The Word, Jesus Christ, is God and is in no way excluded from being God.
2. The Word, Jesus Christ, was with God, and was not excluded from God’s presence.
3. The Word, Jesus Christ, is the Light and He gives light to *all* men born into the world — no one is excluded from the Light of God.

4. The Light, Jesus Christ, is witnessed in the world so that *all* men might believe — no one is excluded from experiencing belief.

The words of John direct the hearts of men and women to an all-inclusive God who is love (1 John 4:8). As God is inclusive so His word is inclusive. Yet aspects of truth are often lost when we hammer out conclusions by interpreting one quotation to the exclusion or even contradiction of another. This is a major problem if you think about it. Excluding, or overlooking inspired statements is, in principle, exclusive at its core level. Exclusiveness limits comprehension and leads to teachings that contradict the Word. This can be a common problem in any area of study. It calls for careful, open investigation.

The subject of the 144,000 is not a major doctrine essential for salvation. And it is definitely not one of the pillars of faith or even one of our fundamental beliefs. Yet this will be an excellent opportunity to see how ideas of truth that seem to be in contradiction can find perfect harmony when we allow Inspiration to be inclusive. Allow every statement on this subject to have a place and bear its proper weight, and in principle you are rightly dividing the word of truth.

Let's start by considering a few examples of views on the 144,000 that compromise Inspiration and lead to an exclusive attitude toward statements that don't fit our conclusions. For instance, one reference on this subject that had puzzled me for years describes the 144,000 as the only ones who are allowed to go into the New Jerusalem temple. Here is the statement:

"And as we were about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised His lovely voice and said, '*Only the 144,000 enter this place,*' and we shouted, 'Alleluia.'"¹

Now if, as some believe, the 144,000 is an end-time group of Seventh-day Adventists and not the great multitude of all the saved, then we have an apparent contradiction with the Bible. This is because John is asked by the angel who is this "great multitude which no one could number...clothed with white robes." (Revelation 7:9, 13, NKJV)

He answers:

"And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest." Then the angel answers John: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and *serve Him day and night in His temple*: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them" (Revelation 7: 14-15).

Do you see the problem? When we conclude that the great multitude is a different group than the 144,000, we cause the Spirit of Prophecy to contradict the Bible.

How can the great multitude, who "serve Him day and night in His temple," be a different group than the 144,000 if only the 144,000 go into the temple?

Another apparent contradiction arises if we misunderstand the following statement:

"Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming. *The living saints, 144,000 in number*, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake."²

Many believe that the 144,000 are composed only of those translated without seeing death, because they are called "the living saints." It seems to make sense until you consider this statement speaking of a dear saint who did see death:

"I saw that she was sealed and would come up at the voice of God and stand upon the earth, and would be with the 144,000."³

The "she" spoken of here is a sister who *died* in the faith of the third angels message when Ellen White was alive. In fact, the Spirit of Prophecy states that all those who died in the faith of the third angel's message will be resurrected to life before Jesus comes and be among the "living saints," the 144,000.⁴

Are you thoroughly confused yet? Unfortunately it gets worse. Based on these references, a group of off-shoot Adventists [the Reform Church] are teaching that the 144,000 is a literal number that includes only faithful Adventists who have died since 1844. A rather bleak picture if you consider the implications. Only 144,000 literal people since 1844 will make up the 144,000. (Jehovah Witnesses teach a similar concept.)

Various and often dogmatic views concerning the 144,000 have been urged upon me over the years. You may have experienced the same thing. I remember talking with a man at a camp meeting who had been urged to accept a literal view of the 144,000. The twist on this particular view also included the need to leave the church in order to be part of the 144,000. This brother was in mental turmoil over this view. I gave him the study you are about to read. The next day he told me he had his first good night of sleep in a week.

Can you relate to his experience? I certainly could. Over the years I leaned toward one view and then toward another on the 144,000, but kept running into statements that didn't seem to fit. Over time and after prayerful consideration of all that Inspiration has to say on the subject of the 144,000, seemingly contradictory statements have been reconciled in my own mind. Pursuing this subject to a conclusion that leaves no contradictions has removed them, while allowing every statement on the subject of the 144,000 to have a place and its weight. This has revealed a powerful gem of truth that ultimately exalts the character of God — the goal of all truth.

For instance, based on the statement that "*Only the 144,000 enter this place [the temple]*," some folks teach that God separates the 144,000 from the great multitude. They believe God designates the 144,000 as a separate group of select saints

who are alone privileged by their superior Christian experience to enter into the temple. The great multitude does not have temple entrance privilege, because they are not part of the exclusive 144,000. Yet speaking of the great multitude in the book of Revelation, the Spirit of Prophecy states, “John while in vision, saw a company clothed in white robes... They were seen *in the temple of God*. This will be the result *for all who lay hold of the merits of Christ* and wash their robes in His blood.”⁵

So for anyone who has concluded that the 144,000 are an exclusive group, Inspiration brings us a fuller picture, if we are willing to let go of exclusive thinking and think inclusively. When we allow Inspiration to be inclusive, we will find that God is inclusive — conclusively inclusive — for God is love (1 John 4:8).

1 *Early Writings*, p. 19

2 *Early Writings*, p. 15

3 *The Faith I Live By*, p. 173

4 see *The Great Controversy*, p. 637, and *Early Writings*, pp. 16, 285-286

5 *Maranatha*, p. 331

Chapter 2

Who Shall Be Able to Stand

Revelation chapters 7, 14, and 15 contain the only three main sections of Scripture that specifically mention or allude to the 144,000. That's it. However, understanding these sections will take us all over the Bible. If we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to understand these three sections of Scripture, then we will understand the subject of the 144,000. I encourage you to pause for as much time as you need and ask for the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit and claim the promises of God's Word:

“Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, *that* shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall shew *it* unto you” (John 16: 13-15).

With this assurance of God's leading, look at Revelation 7, an interlude — or interruption of sorts — to the seven seals. The whole chapter is dedicated to answering the question that hangs suspended in the last verse of chapter 6: “Who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6: 17). The interpretation of Revelation 7 is entwined in the sixth seal.

The sixth seal details supernatural events linked to the second coming of Christ. At the approach of the Son of Man, the earth, sky, land and sea are in tremendous commotion. Stars fall. Entire mountains and islands are moved out of place (see Matthew 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-26; Revelation 6: 14). So awesome and terrifying is the sight that the “great men” and “mighty men” call for the “mountains and rocks” to fall on them and hide them from the face of God who sits on the “throne” and from the

“Lamb” who is on His “right side” (Revelation 6: 15-16; Matthew 24:30, 26:64; Mark 14:62; Hebrews 10: 12-13).

Every eye sees Christ coming as He crosses the heavens, beginning in the East and moving around the earth even unto the West (see Revelation 1:7, 6: 14; Matthew 24:27). The sight is overwhelmingly frightening. The survivors of the seven last plagues who are blaspheming the name of God now long to hide from the wrath of the Lamb (see Revelation 1:7; 6: 16-17; 15: 1; 16:9).

In this context, a question explodes forth from the lips of all who gaze upon the scene — “Who shall be able to stand?” (Revelation 6: 17). The answer follows in chapter 7 — first by the words of the angel in Revelation 7:3: “the servants of our God;” and then in John’s statements in Revelation 7:9, “I beheld, and lo, a great multitude” who “stood before the *throne*” and “before the *Lamb*.”

Notice that the question, “Who shall be able to *stand*” has a context— before “the face of Him that sitteth on the *throne*, and . . . “the *Lamb*?” (Revelation 6: 16-17). And the twofold answer responds to the question by including the context of the “throne and the Lamb.”

“The servants of our God,” described as “an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:3-4) and the “great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, *stood* before the *throne* and before the *Lamb*” (Revelation 7:9).

The Bible itself unlocks the mystery of John’s vision. It speaks of two groups of people who shall be able to stand before “Him that sitteth on the throne” and the “Lamb” at Christ’s second coming.

The first group is made up of those who hope in Christ and are “alive” when He returns. The second group consists of those who “sleep in Jesus” and are resurrected at His second coming (see 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18; see also 1 Corinthians 15: 12-23, 51-52). Notice these powerful Bible verses:

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17).

These are the two groups who will be able to stand before God and the Lamb. The dead in Christ and the living who remain faithful until His return make up the redeemed of all ages who have received the gift of eternal life.

Literal or Symbolic?

A large segment of evangelical Christians today interpret the 144,000 as a literal number. According to popular evangelical teaching, the 144,000 are a literal number of physical descendants from Abraham who proclaim the gospel during the tribulation after the church is raptured! This view does offer at least one positive feature — it is consistent (i.e. the proponents of this view do not jump back and forth between a literal and the symbolic interpretation of the 144,000). The more literal interpretation is not new to our denominational history. It was held by a man who sought to engage in the work of preaching in our denomination. Here is an excerpt from that history:

“I have received yours dated June 3. In this letter you speak in these words: ‘Elder Robinson does not wish me to leave, but urges that I enter the canvassing field until such time as the conference can afford to employ me in some other capacity, but states positively that I cannot be sent out to present the truth to others until some points held by me are changed or modified in order that the views regarded by us as a people should be properly set forth. He quotes as a sample, ...my belief that the 144,000 will be Jews who will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.’”²

This historical account indicates that as a church we have opted for a spiritual or symbolic approach to the topic. However there are many who apply the number 144,000 literally, as do our evangelical friends. Pray, as we continue to study this subject that God’s Spirit will guide our minds to fully understand His Word.

1 *Revelation 1-7*, pp. 461-481, Robert L. Thomas, Moody Press, 1992 (see also www.ankerberg.com/Articles/biblical-prophecy/BP1100W3.htm).

2 *Manuscript Releases, vol. 14*, p. 175; written to Brother Chapman from Petoskey, Michigan, June 11, 1891

The Significance of the Symbolism

The symbolism of the 144,000 is significant, representing unity, perfection and the completion of God's church! Revelation 6: 11 indicates that before God's martyrs can be avenged and enter into the heavenly city, the "brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" or "complete." (This can infer that their number or character will be "fulfilled" or made up.)

The book of Hebrews indicates that the faithful of past ages are waiting for the "promise" of entering the "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11: 10). "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us that they *without us* should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40). They are waiting for the completion or perfection of the number of God's people. Despite all the faithful victories and the good reports of the faithful of old, they are not complete or made perfect without the final group who will make up the number of the redeemed. This is a type of corporate oneness revealed by God's people in rare times of spirituality and exemplified by Christ's prayer for us (Daniel 9:5-11; Ezra 9:3-15; John 17:20-23).

This same oneness is described in Revelation 7:4-8 in the final sealing of God's people. When this sealing is finished, the number of the redeemed will be complete, and "the mystery of God is finished" (Revelation 10:7, NAS). All who will make up the New Jerusalem city, that is, all who have ever and will ever accept the gift of salvation will have done so and the four winds can be let loose.

Thus, 144,000 becomes the number that represents those who are "sealed." It is a number that symbolizes the completion or perfection of the redeemed of all

generations. When the 144,000 are sealed "of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Revelation 7:4), the four winds of strife can be loosed. All who have placed their faith in Christ as Savior will have God's mark in their foreheads.

It is important to recognize that 144,000 is a specific and limited number. Therefore taking it to be literal would pose some problems:

1. Contrary to His character, God would have to cut off any person that exceeds the number 144,000 from being sealed, or from being written in the Book of Life, or from being eternally saved. Yet the Bible clearly states that God is long-suffering, not wanting any to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Not only that, but God would also be limited to sealing only 12,000 people from each tribe.
2. Biblically, the numbering of people only includes males (Luke 9: 14; Matthew 14:21). Revelation 7:4-8 cannot be taken literally; its interpretation would still have to be symbolic because women and children are not included in the count. Surely we do not believe the 144,000 will be made up solely of males?
3. If literal, the twelve tribes listed in Revelation 7 would have to be the same as the original twelve tribes, but they are not (Genesis 49). Manasseh, a son of Joseph, was added to the list (Genesis 48: 13). And the tribe of Dan is missing from the list (Revelation 7:4-8).
4. The twelve tribes listed in Revelation 7 are different from the list in Ezekiel 48. Since both lists are understood to be eschatological or end-time prophetic pictures, these lists should be the same if the twelve tribes are literal.

In addition, consider the account of John when he was shown the "bride," the "Lamb's wife," and the "great city, the holy Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:9-10). This city, the "Lamb's wife," symbolizes God's faithful of both the Old and New Testaments. And as such, we see the 144,000 as this same symbolic representation of the "bride" of Christ, the "Israel" of God, the redeemed of all ages. While we know this city is a literal city, it also symbolizes God's people. It is called "the bride" of Christ, just as God's people are so named in both the Old Testament and the New (Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 5:23-32; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Jeremiah 3: 14).

In a symbolic sense, the New Jerusalem city is described in the same way as God's literal Old Testament and spiritual New Testament "Israel." That is:

1. It is "foursquare" (Exodus 28: 16, 21).
2. It is "set" with precious stones (Exodus 28: 17-21).
3. It has 12 gates and 12 foundations. The "length and the breadth and the height of it are equal." And they measure "12,000 furlongs" (Revelation 21: 16). The "wall" is "a hundred and forty and four" cubits thick (Revelation 21: 17; 7:4).

4. The “twelve gates” have the “names...of the children of Israel” (Revelation 21: 12; 7:4; Genesis 49).
5. The “twelve foundations” bear the “names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb,” the New Testament “twelve tribes” (Revelation 21: 14; James 1:1).

Entrance to the city requires each of the redeemed to walk through one of the gates named after the twelve tribes. In this way every one of the redeemed from Adam to the final generation is connected to one of the twelve tribes.

There are numerous instances in the New Testament that describe the “seed of Abraham” as including the “Gentiles” (Romans 9:7, 24). And in Romans 9:26-27 Paul quotes an Old Testament prophecy that corresponds to the terminology of the “twelve tribes of Israel” and the “innumerable company”:

“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, ye are the sons of the living God” (Hosea 1: 10). Notice:

1. This prophecy includes Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9: 1-27).
2. It speaks of the “number of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:4).
3. At the same time, it describes a people that “cannot be measured” or “numbered” (Revelation 7:9).

The weight of biblical proof indicates that the 144,000 are not literal Jews who are literal “virgins” (Revelation 14:4). And if not literal, then the number is symbolic. But symbolic of whom? The Bible gives plenty of evidence to conclude that this number represents all the redeemed, the Lamb’s “wife,” New Jerusalem Jews and Gentiles, the “Israel of God” (Revelation 19:7; Galatians 6: 16).

¹ “The number 144,000 (12 x 12 x 1,000) is based upon the kingdom number 12. The number suggests perfect symmetry and completeness as well as the vastness of the multitude of the sealed. Twelve is the number of ancient Israel, based upon the twelve tribes. It is also the number of the church, built upon the 12 apostles. The New Jerusalem, structured to represent both Old and New Testament Israel, has 12 gates with the names of the 12 patriarchs, and 12 foundations containing the names of the 12 apostles (Rev 21: 12-14; Eph 2:20-21). The dimensions of the city are in multiples of 12 (Rev 21: 16-17).

“The great square city is designed to accommodate the ‘hollow square’ of saints who will enter its gates by the names of their respective tribes, 12,000 through each gate. This suggests that all who enter the gates of pearl will be assigned to a tribe, perhaps on the basis of character (see Genesis 49 for a preliminary description of their traits). The blending of the tribes and the apostles in the structure of the city suggest the unity of God’s church, Jews and Gentiles united into the one (Eph 2: 14, 18-22). The number 144,000 should thus be understood as a symbol of the unity, perfection, and completion of God’s church — complete because the number has been made up (Rev 6: 11)” (Beatrice Neall, *Symposium on Revelation*, Book 1, p. 262, 1992).

Chapter 4

The Characteristics of the 144,000

Having looked briefly at Revelation chapter 7, let’s now take a look at Revelation 14. This is the second place where we find the 144,000 addressed and the only other place in the Bible where they are identified by number.

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads. 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: 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. 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. And in their mouth was found no guile; for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14: 1-5).

Revelation 14: 1-5 is an interlude between chapter 13 and the final proclamation of the everlasting gospel in chapter 14:6-12. Chapter 13 focuses on the beast power that reigns for 1260 years, its wound, and then its rise to prominence with another end-time power that brings a death penalty to all those who refuse to worship the beast.

It is here, between these two visions that John sees Christ on Mount Zion with the 144,000. This scene offers much-needed encouragement to God’s people. Since it reveals a group of believers called “the 144,000” on Mount Zion with Christ, we can

safely conclude that they have gained the victory over the beast that “all” the “world” is led to “worship.” This victorious gathering offers a ray of future hope to the faithful — even though all-the-world worships the beast, there will be those who remain true to God.

This shaft of hope tunneling to the future; the end-time, mark-of-the-beast setting; the application of Revelation 13 and 14 to the last days; all of these seem to identify the 144,000 as an end-time group only. Yet before we jump to this conclusion, let's do some thorough Bible study concerning the characteristics of this group called the 144,000.

In Revelation 14 there are eight basic characteristics of the 144,000 covered in this section. It will be helpful to look at each one and identify them biblically. As we do so we will notice how each characteristic applies to every generation of God's faithful people.

Here are the eight:

1. They stand on Mount Zion. This is the place to be occupied by all the redeemed (Hebrews 12:22-23).
2. They have the Father's *name* written in their foreheads. This would include everyone who is redeemed (Revelation 22:4).
3. They were *redeemed* from among men. This would include every saved person (Isaiah 43:1; 1 Peter 1:18).
4. They are *virgins*. The apostle Paul identifies all who believe the gospel and who follow Jesus to be “chaste virgins” (2 Corinthians 11:2-4). Christ used the same symbolic terminology to describe those who professed faith in Him (Matthew 25:1).
5. They *follow* the Lamb. This also applies to all faithful believers and not just literal Jews (1 Thessalonians 1:6; John 12:26).
6. They are the *firstfruits*. According to the Bible this means they are “begotten” or “born again” (James 1:17-18; John 3:3). According to Jesus, this experience is a qualifier for all who are to enter heaven — Old Testament and New Testament faithful (John 3:3; Jeremiah 2:3).
7. They have *no guile* in their mouths. This also is the experience of all who genuinely accept Christ as their righteousness, whether Jew or Gentile (1 Peter 3:10; Psalm 32:2).
8. They stand *without fault* before God. The promise of the Word of God is that Jesus is able to present us faultless before His throne. This, too, is the privilege of everyone, including the thief on the cross, who trusts in Christ as Savior (Jude 24).

Look at some of these characteristics in more detail:

Standing on Mount Zion —

The first characteristic shows the 144,000 to be on “the Mount Sion” with the “Lamb.” Evangelicals would say that this is literally the Holy Land in Israel, but the Bible does not warrant such a conclusion. Consider the twelfth chapter of Hebrews:

“But ye are come unto *Mount Sion*, and unto the city of the living God, the *heavenly Jerusalem*, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the *general assembly* and church of the firstborn, which are written *in heaven*, and *to God* the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22-23).

According to the New Testament, “Mount Sion” is “the heavenly Jerusalem,” not the earthly one. It is the “church,” the “general assembly,” that stands before “God” in “heaven.” Therefore, this vision of the 144,000 on Mount Zion takes us to the heavenly Jerusalem and not to the earthly one. It includes the general assembly of the church and just men made perfect.

The Father's Name —

The 144,000 have the “Father's name written in their foreheads.” In Revelation 22, John was shown that everyone who is saved, Jew and Gentile, will have the Father's name in their forehead: “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22:3-4). Every person who is eternally redeemed from sin will have the Father's name or character foremost in his or her conscious thoughts — in their foreheads.

Virgins —

They are called “virgins” because they are not defiled with women. This spiritual application to the Scripture's use of women to represent churches is found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Ephesians 5:31-32; Jeremiah 6:2). A pure woman denotes God's church; an impure woman represents a corrupt church (Revelation 12:1; 17:3-6). Paul called the believers in the newly formed Christian church to be virgins in spiritual purity to the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2-4). God has always had a remnant of faithful followers down through time who have kept the faith and refused to commit spiritual adultery with the world (Revelation 12:6, 14-17). Jesus also employed the symbol of virgins to describe God's people — some who would be faithful (wise virgins) and others who would be unfaithful (foolish virgins) (Matthew 25:1).

Firstfruits —

They are “firstfruits.” This is a term used to designate that part of the harvest to be dedicated to God (Exodus 23:19; Proverbs 3:9). Firstfruits have a direct relation to the spiritual harvest of this earth. The harvest includes the lost and the saved—both are harvested, one group for heaven and one group for destruction (Matthew 13:30; Revelation 14:15). The term “firstfruits” refers to those who are harvested from heaven—dedicated to God—as compared to those who are lost (Revelation 14:15, 18-20). To be a firstfruit, according to James, is to be born of God: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created” (James 1:18, NIV). “Except a man be born again,” said Jesus, they “cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The redeemed who enter heaven are the firstfruits of the harvest of the earth, whether Old Testament Jews or New Testament faithful (Jeremiah 2:3; James 1:18). They are that portion of the harvest that belongs to God as compared to the lost who perish.

No Guile —

The word guile means deceit, dishonesty, something done to mislead. To live without guile is God’s calling for His people in every generation (Psalm 34:13; 1 Peter 2:1) from Moses and David in the Old Testament to Paul and Peter in the New Testament. All believers are called and enabled by grace to meet this heavenly standard (Exodus 21:14; 32:2; 1 Peter 3:10).

Faultless —

The 144,000 are also described as being without guile and faultless before the throne of God. This is the privilege of everyone who trusts completely in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and *to present you faultless before the presence of His glory* with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25). This promise was experienced by Old Testament faithful as well as the early church (Daniel 6:4; Acts 6:15). It belongs to all who put their faith in Christ.

The Tribes of Israel —

Now that we have covered this basic overview, let’s go back to Revelation 7 so we can take a more detailed look at the 144,000. The first and clearest characteristic

of the 144,000 in this chapter is that they are the sealed of “*all* the tribes of the children of Israel” (Revelation 7:4). Therefore, to be a part of the 144,000 you have to be sealed. So how would this include believers in both the Old and New Testament?

The sealing of “the servants of God” in Revelation 7:3 includes all who have died with “faith” in Christ as well as those who are alive at His coming (Romans 4:11; Hebrews 11:13; Ephesians 1:10-14; 4:30). This is an important point. Every person who stands before the throne in heaven will have the seal of God’s “name” in their foreheads (Revelation 22:4). This seal of God is equivalent to having our names written *and retained* in the “Lamb’s book of life” (Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Luke 10:20; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15). Therefore, the *sealing* includes all of the redeemed, not just an end-time group.

In addition, the Old Testament church was designated as the “twelve tribes of Israel” (Genesis 49:28; Acts 26:7). Likewise, the New Testament church is described as the “twelve tribes scattered abroad,” “the Israel of God” (James 1:1; Galatians 3:29; 6:15-16; Matthew 21:43; Romans 2:28-29; 1 Peter 2:9-10). This evidence would also allow the 144,000, which are from the twelve tribes of Israel, to symbolize all the redeemed, both in the Old and New Testament.

Summary—Many view the 144,000 as solely the end-time people of God, primarily because they are described in the eschatological prophecy of the book of Revelation. Yet the characteristics of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:1-8 and Revelation 14:1-5 reveal character qualities that are found in God’s faithful people in all ages and not just in the final generation. This alone does not prove that the 144,000 are inclusive of all of the redeemed, but the biblical evidence considered so far allows for that more inclusive understanding.

The Sealing and the 144,000

Let's focus for a moment on this last idea, the sealing of the 144,000. I have often heard folks talk about the sealing in reference to those who are living today, as if the seal of God refers only to the living. This focus tends to neglect the fact that all of God's faithful in past generations are to be sealed. This is why the Bible teaches a sealing that is historically past tense:

"Who *hath* also sealed us, and *given* the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 1:22).

"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" (Ephesians 1:13).

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

Yet the sealing is also described in the Bible in a future tense:

"Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads" (Revelation 7:3).

"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. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house" (Ezekiel 9:4-6).

The context of these last two Scripture references in Ezekiel and Revelation prophetically teach that the sealing is directly followed by the close of earth's probation, the loosing of the winds of strife, the slaying angels. Therefore, it is an end-time sealing. Yet we must not forget that the sealing includes all those who pass through the judgment, beginning with the dead in Christ.

The sealing of all the faithful is completed for all generations during the sealing time that began in 1844. Let's say that again. The sealing is an event that applies to all believers and began in 1844. It parallels the judgment. We are living in the time of the sealing of God's people, a time when the four winds, symbolizing world-wide strife, are being held back while all of God's people are being sealed. All the saved will be vindicated by Christ in the judgment as they are sealed (Romans 14:10-12). Notice the parallel in the following statement between the judgment and the sealing:

"The same angel who visited Sodom is sounding the note of warning, 'Escape for thy life.' The bottles of God's wrath cannot be poured out to destroy the wicked and their works until all the people of God have been judged, and the cases of the living as well as the dead are decided. And *even after the saints are sealed with the seal of the living God*, His elect will have trials individually. Personal afflictions will come, but the furnace is closely watched by an eye that will not suffer the gold to be consumed. The indelible mark of God is upon them. God can plead that His own name is written there. The Lord has shut them in. Their destination is inscribed — 'God, New Jerusalem.' They are God's property, His possession."¹

The judgment begins with the dead and then moves to the cases of the living. So too, God seals the dead and then the living. This is also depicted in Revelation 6 by the martyrs under the altar who all receive white robes.

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled" (Revelation 6:9-11).

At the point in history marked by the opening of the fifth seal, the faithful dead receive, in fact, what they had believed by faith when they were alive. These verses and the opening of the fifth seal point to 1844. The next seal ushers in the second coming of Christ. In Bible history we are now standing between seals 5 and 6.

A white robe is synonymous with the character of Christ, the seal of God's character. God's people of past generations looked forward by faith to this judgment/sealing experience.

The sealing and other end-time events were realized in every past generation by faith. The final generation will live through the time of judgment. Theirs will be a living experience. But the faithful of past generations will also be sealed, and will have received the white robe of Christ's righteousness by faith. From 1844 and onward, the sealing becomes fact for all believers beginning with the dead. The previous generations are judged and sealed while resting in the grave. The living are judged and sealed while still alive. The sealing of the final and previous generations differ only in that the final generation lives in the time of the judgment. Consider the following statements:

"In 1844 our great High Priest entered the most holy place of the heavenly Sanctuary, to begin the work of the investigative Judgment. The cases of the righteous dead have been passing in review before God. When that work shall be completed, judgment is to be pronounced upon the living."²

"At the time appointed for the judgment—the close of the 2300 days, in 1844—began the work of investigation and blotting out of sins. All who have ever taken upon themselves the name of Christ must pass its searching scrutiny. Both the living and the dead are to be judged 'out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.'"³

The sealing of Revelation 7 that began in 1844 involves the sealing of all generations beginning with the dead and culminating with the living. Each one is judged, sealed with God's character and covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness—beginning with Adam and moving down to our very time today. We are now living in the sealing time and have been since 1844.

"Satan is now using every device in this sealing time, to keep the minds of God's people from the present, sealing truth; and to cause them to waver. I saw a covering that God was drawing over his people, to protect them in the time of trouble; and every soul that was decided on the truth, and was pure in heart, was to be covered with the covering of Almighty God.

"Satan knew this, and was at work in mighty power, to keep the minds of as many as he possibly could unsettled, and wavering on the truth... I saw that Satan was at work in these ways to distract, deceive, and draw away God's people, *just now in this sealing time*. I saw some who were not standing stiffly for present truth."⁴

"My dear brethren and sisters, let the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ be in your minds continually and let them crowd out worldly thoughts and cares. When you lie down and when you rise up, let them be your meditation. Live and act wholly in reference to the coming of the Son of man. *The sealing time is very short, and will soon be over. Now is the time, while the four angels are holding the four winds, to make our calling and election sure.*"⁵

Here is a brief summary of what we have learned in this last section on the sealing:

1. The sealing parallels the judgment.
2. The time of the judgment/sealing began in 1844.
3. The sealing begins with the dead and then moves to the living.
4. The sealing includes all of God's people from Adam (the dead) to the final generation (living).

(See Appendix II for additional references.)

The Seal of God

The central focus of chapter 7 is the seal of God that is placed in the "foreheads of the servants of God" (Revelation 7:2-3). But what is this seal of God? The Bible reveals five characteristics of a seal that lend clarity to this facet of our study:⁶

1. In the book of Revelation, the seal of God in the forehead is the same as the name of God in the forehead (compare Revelation 7:2-8; 14:1; 22:4). This word *name* in both the Old and New Testaments means "character." It describes those who have developed, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the attributes of His character—they have the mind of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:30; Philippians 2:5).
2. A seal is a "mark" or "sign" that infers ownership and dedication. Abraham was to circumcise his household as a "sign" or "seal" that he belonged to God (Romans 4:11; Genesis 17:9-11). The high priest was to bear the engraving "Holiness to the Lord," on his "forehead" as a sign of his dedication to God (Exodus 28:36-38).
3. The Bible also speaks of a seal or mark offering protection (Revelation 9:4; Genesis 4:15; Ezekiel 9:1-11). Revelation records that God's people are "sealed" to protect them against the seven last plagues or four winds that "hurt" the earth (Revelation 7:1-3, 16:2). At the same time, they are not protected from the persecution of the beast (Revelation 13:15-17; 20:4). Likewise, the "mark" of the beast protects its worshipers from the beast's persecution, but they are not protected from the plagues of God (Revelation 15:1; 16:1-11).
4. Another insight into the sealing is that of genuineness. Documents are "sealed" up to protect them from change or alteration (Jeremiah 32:9-11). Thus God's servants are sealed as a guarantee that they will remain righteous and loyal to God (Revelation 3:12; 22:11).
5. The sealing of God's people denotes their obedience to Him as faithful "servants" (Revelation 7:3; Romans 6:16). They are to be sealed by the Holy Spirit that is "given to them that obey Him" (Acts 5:32; see also Ephesians 4:30; Revelation 14:12).

All these biblical definitions of the seal of God find their foundation in the cross of Calvary. At the cross we see the character of God's love, His justice and mercy revealed (point 1). Calvary is the perfect blend of mercy and justice, a testimony to the unchanging nature of God's government (point 4). In Christ's death is found ultimate protection from the consequences of our sins (point 3). In Christ we see God's undying love leading Christ to surrender His life to God's will even to His death. This gives us the motivation to surrender our lives to God and obey Him as faithful servant-friends (2 Corinthians 5: 14; John 15: 14-15; points 2 and 5). The seal of God in our foreheads is all about having the love of God in our hearts as expressed in the cross of Calvary:

“What is the seal of the living God, which is placed in the foreheads of His people? It is a mark which angels, not human eyes, can read for the destroying angel must see this mark of redemption. *The intelligent mind has seen the sign of the cross of Calvary in the Lord's adopted sons and daughters.* The sin of the transgression of the law of God is taken away. They have on the *wedding garment*, and are obedient and faithful to all God's commands.”⁷

“*Of the number of them that shall be sealed* will be those who have come from every nation and kindred and tongue and people. From every country will be gathered men and women who *will stand before the throne of God and before the Lamb, crying, 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.'* Revelation 7: 10.”⁸

Please reread this last statement prayerfully. It says that “the number of them that shall be sealed” (referring to the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4) “stand before the throne of God...crying, ‘Salvation to our God,’ which is a clear reference to the great multitude (Revelation 7: 10). So we see a clear connection made between the sealed and the great multitude. Those who are sealed (144,000) sing “salvation to our God” (the song of the great multitude). This leads us into our next question: who are the great multitude?

1 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 446

2 *Review and Herald*, March 22, 1887

3 *The Great Controversy*, p. 486; see also p. 435

4 *Review and Herald*, August 1, 1849

5 *Early Writings*, p. 58, [1849]

6 Much of the insight in this section is owed to the writer in *Symposium on Revelation, Book 1*, pp. 254-256.

7 *SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 7*, p. 968

8 *Counsel to Teachers*, p. 532

Chapter 6

The Great Multitude

So far in our study we have looked at a good bit of evidence that indicates the 144,000 is an inclusive group and one that is not restricted to the final generation of believers. It will be helpful at this point to see if the same can be said for the great multitude. Are they also an inclusive group or do they represent an exclusive group? Are they limited to those who come into the church at the end of time or to the faithful martyrs of past generations? If so, then here again we have an exclusive interpretation. Let's first take a look at the characteristics of the great multitude found in Revelation 7:9-17:

1. They come from every nation, kindred and tongue (verse 9).
2. They are clothed in white robes or Christ's righteousness (verse 9, 13-14).
3. They give glory to God alone for their salvation (verse 10).
4. They have come out of great tribulation (verse 14).
5. They serve God in His temple day and night (verse 15).

These biblical characteristics lay the foundation for identifying the great multitude. Now let's see what the Spirit of Prophecy (SOP) has to offer beginning with the following three statements:

“The grain of wheat that preserves its own life can produce no fruit. It abides alone. Christ could, if He chose, save Himself from death. But should He do this, He must abide alone. He could bring no sons and daughters to God. Only by yielding up His life could He impart life to humanity. Only by falling into the ground to die could He become the seed of that vast harvest—the great multitude that, out of

every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, are redeemed to God.”¹

Referring to Revelation 7:9-17, we read: “What an example have the martyrs for Jesus left us in their lives of self-denial and sacrifice. They were faithful and true to principle.”²

“Nearest the throne are those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan, but who, plucked as brands from the burning, have followed their Savior with deep, intense devotion. Next are those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void, and the millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith. And beyond is the ‘great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues . . . before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands’ (Revelation 7:9). Their warfare is ended, their victory won. They have run the race and reached the prize. The palm branch in their hands is a symbol of their triumph, the white robe an emblem of the spotless righteousness of Christ which now is theirs.”³

After reading this last statement from *The Great Controversy* page 665, we could be inclined to exclude the first three groups mentioned from the great multitude (those nearest the throne, those who perfected Christian character and the martyrs of all ages). This is due to the phrase, “and beyond [these first three groups] is the great multitude...” Yet doing so would contradict the statement before this one⁴ that identifies the martyrs as part of the great multitude. The best way to understand this last statement is in the context of all the others. The great multitude is inclusive of all the saved including those nearest the throne, those who perfected Christian character and the martyrs of all ages. A further evidence of this can be seen in the explanation in Revelation 7:14 that describes the great multitude as coming out of “great tribulation.” This designation applies to God’s people in every age, as the following statements confirm:

“Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

“But remember that *every one who shall be found with the wedding garment on will have come out of great tribulation*. The mighty surges of temptation will beat upon all.”⁵

“John saw in holy vision the redeemed host saved, eternally saved, arrayed in white robes around about the throne. John was told by the heavenly messenger, ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”⁶

“The committing of the soul to God is essential for our salvation. You cannot follow a course of your own choosing, and be at war with the law of God, living

in disobedience to His requirements, and yet be in harmony with God. Entire obedience to the will of God will bring courage, hope, peace, and happiness, to the soul. There will be seen watchfulness, diligence and prayer, self-denial, self-crucifixion and active benevolence. John thus describes the faithful whom he saw in vision upon the isle of Patmos:

‘After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.’

‘And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.’

“What an example have the martyrs for Jesus left us in their lives of self-denial and sacrifice. They were faithful and true to principle. Although prisons, tortures, inquisitions, gibbets, and the stake threatened them, they counted not their lives dear unto themselves. Their love for the truth was here manifested. They chose to obey the truth at the expense of great suffering. The world was not worthy of these heroes of faith. They died for their faith. The pure gold was refined from all dross through trial and suffering. As these shall enter the portals of glory they will shout in triumph: We overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of our testimony. We were faithful unto death, and now receive a crown of life. Shouts of triumph will come from lips that never triumphed before. Those who were too timid to praise God vocally were not too timid to die for their Lord. They struggled and fought the good fight of faith. They were steadfast to the end. They will unite their glad voices in the universal songs of triumph and victory, praising God that they were accounted worthy to receive the heavenly benediction ‘well done’ from the Master they loved, and for whom they suffered. His own right hand will place upon their brows crowns of immortal glory that fade not away.”⁷

“In tracing down the history of the church from the fall of Adam to our own time, we see that the righteous have been the objects of the assaults of evil angels and evil men. It is a settled plan of the enemy to seek for the corruption of the souls of those who would vindicate the honor of God; and when he could not accomplish

this, he has caused them to be put to death. Satan has manifested the greatest activity in order that the true worshipers of God might be swept from the earth; but he has not fully carried out his designs, for God has put a limit to his power. There have been tares sown with the wheat, but the wheat has been preserved. *Faithful men have passed through fire and sword, heresy and delusion, and have come forth from great tribulation with their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb.* Thousands have fallen at the stake, but others have arisen to take their places. Staunch advocates of truth have stood the conflict of battle, and the controversy has been brought down to our own day. The light of truth has shone upon us, that we may reflect it upon others.”⁸

“[Revelation 7: 13-17 quoted] To be among that number is the happy privilege of all who will render willing obedience to the words of Christ.”⁹

And Christ, speaking of the dark ages in which millions of God’s people were martyred for their faith, says, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. . . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matthew 24:21, 29; Acts 14:22; Deuteronomy 4:30-31; John 16:33; Revelation 2: 10; Daniel 12: 1).

Summary—Based on these statements we may safely conclude that while the great tribulation speaks of an end-time event, a climax of evil that will bring tremendous testing to God’s people, it also speaks of the ongoing battle God’s people have faced in every age. The point being that all of God’s faithful followers enter heaven through tribulation and are included in the great multitude of Revelation 7:9-17.

1 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 623

2 *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1875

3 *The Great Controversy*, p. 665

4 *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1875

5 *Review and Herald*, April 17, 1894

6 *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 19, p. 189; see also Vol. 10, p. 177; Vol. 21, p. 43

7 *Review and Herald*, December 2, 1875

8 *Signs of the Times*, September 21, 1888

9 *Signs of the Times*, September 24, 1896

Chapter 7

Two Groups or One

The evidence suggests the two visions of Revelation 7, one of the 144,000 being sealed and the other of the great multitude around God’s throne in heaven, present distinct pictures of the same group. One vision pictures the sealing of God’s people on earth that began in 1844 — beginning with Adam and the dead and ending with the living and the final generation. The other scene pictures the redeemed with white robes (synonymous with being sealed) surrounding God’s throne in heaven as a great multitude that cannot be numbered. Again, being clothed in Christ’s righteousness is the same as being sealed with His character. Both groups picture the redeemed of all ages who have placed their dependence on the merits of the Lamb. Those who are sealed compose a great multitude. Those who make up the great multitude are sealed with the righteousness of God.

The first group comes from “*all* the tribes of the children of Israel,” not just some of the tribes of Israel (Revelation 7:4). So the sealing involves not just the literal tribes, as many evangelicals teach today. Neither does it refer only to the end-time spiritual tribes as some Adventists teach. “All the tribes of the children of Israel” are represented in the sealing. All who have placed their trust in God, whether dead or alive, will be sealed with God’s name in their foreheads or have the white robes of Christ’s character. This is the scene John was shown. Notice that it speaks of those who stand before God and the Lamb:

“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of *the throne of God and of the Lamb.* In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and

His servants shall serve Him: And they shall see His face; and *His name shall be in their foreheads*" (Revelation 22:1-4).

The wording in this last sentence, "*His name shall be in their foreheads*," is identical to the descriptions of the 144,000 as described in Revelation 14, "an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads" (Revelation 14:1). Revelation 22 points us to the time when all things are finished and all the redeemed are in heaven with the Lamb.

Based on all the evidence we have considered so far, the vision of the sealing from the twelve tribes and the vision of the great multitude describe the same group of saints at two different junctures in time. The first vision pictures the sealing angel and describes who will be sealed in the sealing time just before probation's close. The sealing includes those in every generation who, by faith, trusted God to finish the work He began in them (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 12:1) The sealing also includes those in the final generation who live in the sealing time when the sealing is to be literally finished up — with the dead and then the living.

The second scene of the great multitude takes place in heaven after Christ's second coming. All those who stand before God's throne must have been previously sealed, beginning with Adam, Abraham, Daniel, Peter, Paul, Luther, Calvin, Miller, White, you and me. The first vision is a symbolic representation of the sealing that began in 1844 and applies to the faithful in every generation. The second vision shows the literal gathering of all the redeemed from all generations. Both of these pictures answer the question posed in Revelation 6:17: "Who shall be able to stand" before "the throne and "the Lamb?" The answer is clearly revealed in John's two accounts:

1. Those who are sealed of all the tribes of the children of Israel.
2. A great multitude that no man can number.

It includes those who have died in Christ and those who are alive at His coming. The following statement describes the inclusive nature of the great multitude, representing them as the redeemed of all generations including the martyrs of Christ. Notice that this statement clearly applies one of the characteristics of the 144,000 to the great multitude when it describes them as "faultless":

"In the results of His work Christ will behold its recompense. In that great multitude which no man could number, presented 'faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' He whose blood has redeemed and whose life has taught us 'shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.'"¹

Summary —The 144,000 and the great multitude are two separate pictures of the same group — the redeemed of all ages.

Hear and See

Another interesting piece of the picture is a pattern found in Revelation that lends credibility to the two visions describing the same group. It is a sequence in which John *first hears* what he *then sees*. First John hears the number of the servants of God being sealed as 144,000, then he sees the great multitude that no man could number. He hears the number of those who are sealed and he then sees them before the throne clothed in white robes. There are two other instances in the book of Revelation that follow this "hear then see" principle:

1. In Revelation chapter 1 John "heard" a "great voice" like a "trumpet" and then he "saw" the "Son of man" (Revelation 1:10, 13).
2. In Revelation chapter 9 John "heard the number" of "horsemen" and then "saw the horses in the vision" (Revelation 9:16-17).

Following this pattern, it is significant to note that John first "heard" what he then saw. John "heard" the number of those who were sealed, and then he "beheld" a "great multitude which no man could number" (Revelation 7:4, 9). In each of these examples in the book of Revelation, what John first hears is the same as what he then sees.

This truth that the great multitude is inclusive of all the saved is affirmed throughout the SOP as the following statement indicates:

"All classes, all nations and kindreds and people and tongues *will stand before the throne of God and the Lamb* with their spotless robes and jeweled crowns. Said the angel, These are they that have come up through *great tribulation* and have washed their robes and made them white, while the lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, the self-indulgent and disobedient, have lost both worlds. They have neither the things of this life nor the immortal life. That triumphant throng, with songs of victory and with crowns and harps, *have trodden in the fiery furnace of earthly affliction when it was heated and intensely hot. From destitution, from hunger and torture, they come, from deep self-denial and bitter disappointments.* Look upon them now as conquerors, *no longer poor, no longer in sorrow, in affliction and hated of all men for Christ's sake.* Behold their heavenly garments, white and shining, richer than any kingly robe. Look by faith upon their jeweled crowns; never did such a diadem deck the brow of any earthly monarch."²

The inspired evidence is abundant that the two groups, one heard the other seen, represent God's sealed and redeemed people coming from all generations. Yet there is more evidence to be considered. It is the purpose of this study to cover

every piece of evidence we have on this subject, allowing no statement to be excluded. Therefore, we still have much to cover and some exciting truth to explore.

Chapter 8

The Spirit of Prophecy- Literal or Symbolic?

At this point you may be wondering how to reconcile “all those statements” in the Spirit of Prophecy that indicate the 144,000 is a literal number. First we should clarify that we are dealing with only “one” actual statement here. That is correct, there is only one, though it is repeated at least 13 times throughout the writings of Ellen White in various compilations. This leads to another principle to consider when studying Inspiration: repetition should not be confused with weight of evidence. One statement repeated many times does not increase the weight of evidence. There are approximately 21 unique statements in the SOP on the 144,000 and only one seems to indicate that the number is literal (see Appendix III). This is why it is important to look at the facts and allow them to remove the aura of fiction surrounding the 144,000.

While proponents of a literal view (I am referring here to the evangelical position that the 144,000 are literal Jews, etc.) would interpret texts like Revelation 4:4 wholly literally, we (Seventh-day Adventists) tend to intermingle the literal with the symbolic. For example, we believe that those who are in Christ are Abraham’s seed, spiritual (i.e. symbolic) Israel. The apostle Paul identifies believers in Christ as Abraham’s seed:

“And if you belong to Christ, *then you are Abraham’s descendants*, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29, NAS).

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: *But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly*; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29).

¹ *Education*, p. 309

² *Maranatha* p. 329

This has been our position from the earliest years of our church as seen in the following statement from Uriah Smith:

“Paul explains in Romans 11:17-24. In the striking figure of grafting which he there introduces, the tame olive tree represents Israel. Some of the branches, the natural descendants of Abraham, were broken off because of unbelief (in Christ). Through faith in Christ the wild olive scions, the Gentiles, are grafted into the tame olive stock, and thus the twelve tribes are perpetuated. And here we find an explanation of the language of the same apostle: ‘They are not all Israel which are of Israel,’ and ‘He is not a Jew which is one outwardly . . . but he is a Jew which is one inwardly.’ Romans 9:6-8; 2:28, 29.”¹

This teaching concerning spiritual Israel was a common and accepted understanding in the early Christian church. Even James, who presided over the general assembly of the early church in Jerusalem, identifies the Christian believers as “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” (James 1: 1).

In addition, we interpret the “virgins” aspect of the 144,000 symbolically as meaning faithfulness to the truth of the gospel or marriage to Christ.

“For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, *that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*” (2 Corinthians 11:2; see also Matthew 25: 1).

Further, we understand that not being defiled with other women is also symbolic of not receiving false doctrine and committing spiritual fornication (Revelation 14:8-9; 17:2). But even though our understanding of these symbolic applications is biblical, some of us still get caught up in the idea that the number “144,000” must be literal.

From my own past experience, I believe the strongest reason for this is our desire to be faithful to the Spirit of Prophecy. We read the statement: “the living saints, 144,000 in number,” and it is easy to automatically assume that this statement is speaking in literal terms.

Our belief in the biblical gift of the Spirit of Prophecy should not lead us to contradict the Bible. It is very possible that we do not correctly understand what she said and saw. It is often the case concerning inspired writings that somewhere between what is written and how we interpret, there is a gap. The gap may be in time, in experience, feelings, education, preconceived opinions, or a number of other factors. Due to these various factors we do not always understand Inspiration as it is written. An example of this can be seen in Peter’s warning concerning Paul’s writings:

“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, *which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures*” (2 Peter 3: 16, NKJV).

This is one reason Paul had to explain in his letter to the Romans that some folks

were attempting to slander him by misrepresenting what he had taught:

“And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just” (Romans 3:8).

People were taking Paul’s powerful emphasis on salvation by grace and misunderstanding or even misrepresenting him. Ellen White was also misunderstood and misinterpreted. This is why, at times, she was compelled to write out clarifications of her visions and statements as noted in the following:

“Dear Christian Friends: As I have given a brief sketch of my experience and views, published in 1851, it seems to be my duty to notice some points in that little work, also to give more recent views.

“1. On page 33 is given the following: ‘I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers; and that the Sabbath is the great question to unite the hearts of God’s dear, waiting saints. I saw that God had children who do not see and keep the Sabbath. They have not rejected the light upon it. And at the commencement of the time of trouble, we were filled with the Holy Ghost as we went forth and proclaimed the Sabbath more fully.’

“This view was given in 1847 when there were but very few of the Advent brethren observing the Sabbath, and of these but few supposed that its observance was of sufficient importance to draw a line between the people of God and unbelievers. Now the fulfillment of that view is beginning to be seen. ‘The commencement of that time of trouble,’ here mentioned does not refer to the time when the plagues shall begin to be poured out, but to a short period just before they are poured out, while Christ is in the sanctuary. At that time, while the work of salvation is closing, trouble will be coming on the earth, and the nations will be angry, yet held in check so as not to prevent the work of the third angel. At that time the ‘latter rain,’ or refreshing from the presence of the Lord, will come, to give power to the loud voice of the third angel, and prepare the saints to stand in the period when the seven last plagues shall be poured out.

“2. The view of ‘The Open and Shut Door,’ on pages 42-45, was given in 1849. The application of Revelation 3:7, 8, to the heavenly sanctuary and Christ’s ministry was entirely new to me. I had never heard the idea advanced by anyone. Now as the subject of the sanctuary is being clearly understood, the application is seen in its force and beauty.

“3. The view that the Lord ‘had stretched out His hand the second time to recover the remnant of His people,’ on page 74, refers only to the union and strength once existing among those looking for Christ, and to the fact that He had begun to unite and to raise up His people again.”²

It is often our own misunderstanding and misinterpretations of the Bible and the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy that leads us to see contradictions in various inspired statements.

Let's get right to the point. Consider the oft-quoted statement in *Early Writings* in which Ellen White is shown the Advent people traveling on a straight and narrow path to the City. When they heard the voice of God giving the day and hour of Jesus' return, she writes, "The living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake" (page 15).

"You see," I can hear someone say; "this statement says that '144,000' is a literal number." But is that what she is saying? Considering the inspired evidence we have already studied, we should be hesitant to jump to a conclusion based on the reading of only one line from Ellen White's writings. This has been a problem throughout our church history. We read a statement and form a conclusion based on that statement. Then we search high and low for anything we can find that will prove what has really become our own invented theory rather than a clear teaching from the inspired writings. Consider this counsel:

"If you come to the Bible [or Spirit of Prophecy] to find texts simply to prove your theory or vindicate your opinion, you will not be enlightened by the Spirit of God; but if you come with fasting and humiliation of soul, with love for men and God in your heart, your prayers will be answered, and light will break upon you."³

There is an added benefit in following this counsel. We will not need to disregard or withhold statements simply because they get in our way or contradict our own conclusions. We may look at everything written on this or any other subject, bringing all of it to bear on our conclusions, and allowing every ray of light from our understanding.

You will no longer "handle the word of God [or Spirit of Prophecy] deceitfully, presenting detached passages of Scripture which you think favor your ideas, and withholding other passages which seem to weaken your position."³

Getting back to our statement — "the living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood the voice" — please consider four reasons that make me believe Ellen White herself understood this number in this very context to be symbolic:

1. The context of the vision where this statement is found is highly symbolic, i.e. God's followers are on a narrow path. They have "God, New Jerusalem, and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name" written on their foreheads.
2. The phrase "144,000" is taken from Bible verses that are also symbolic, as we discussed earlier, and Inspiration is always in harmony.
3. In more than one instance her statements on the 144,000 are applied to all of the redeemed (a point we will consider in more detail).
4. When asked point-blank who would make up the number of the 144,000, Ellen White responded by saying, "I have no light on the subject."⁴ This alone should give us pause. We ought to be hesitant to infer into the SOP something its author did not claim to know.

Why, then, did Ellen White say, "144,000 in number"? There is a simple explanation. It was to clarify what that number represents.

Consider Ellen White's use of the word *Israel* (meaning "God prevails"):

"Never has the Lord been without true representatives on this earth who have made His interests their own. These witnesses for God are numbered among the spiritual Israel, and to them will be fulfilled all the covenant promises made by Jehovah to His ancient people."⁵

Seventh-day Adventists do not question who "Israel" represents in this last statement because the context makes it clear. "Israel" represents God's spiritual people. It is a symbolic name used for believers. And when we read "Israel" in this last statement we are not talking about literal Jews, but rather God's believing people. Here is another example:

"But, thank God, His church is no longer in bondage. To *spiritual Israel* have been restored the privileges accorded the people of God at the time of their deliverance from Babylon. In every part of the earth, men and women are responding to the Heaven-sent message which John the revelator prophesied would be proclaimed prior to the second coming of Christ: 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come. Revelation 14:7.'⁶

In these previous statements we have examples of how the word "Israel" is designated to a symbolic meaning. In other words "Israel," in this case, represents believers in Christ and not literal Jews. As noted earlier, this symbolic use of the phrase "Israel" is also in the Bible. This does not, however, negate the literal use of the word. The point being that the word "Israel" has two meanings, one literal and another symbolic. Therefore we must understand the context of a given statement to know which meaning is being applied at any given time. Here are some examples from the Bible and SOP:

Literal — "Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" (John 3: 10).

"The law given in Eden and repeated on Sinai was essential for the Israel of God; for during the bondage in Egypt the claims of God and His commandments had been lost sight of."⁷

Symbolic — "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the *Israel* of God" (Galatians 6: 16).

"When I study the Scriptures, I am alarmed for the *Israel* of God in these last days."⁸

Here is a statement that contains both the literal and symbolic use of the term Israel:

"The history of the wilderness life of Israel [literal] was chronicled for the benefit of

the Israel [symbolic] of God to the close of time.”⁹

In these examples we see the literal and the symbolic use of the word Israel. In addition to these two meanings there are many occasions when Inspiration uses the term “Israel” in a timeless sense. (Timeless meaning that the name Israel applies to all of God’s people from Adam to the return of Jesus.) Then there are other occasions when Israel is used in a limited exclusive sense to designate a segment of Israel at a certain time in history, for example, those living in Christ’s time. Here are two Bible texts that make use of the word Israel both in a timeless all-inclusive sense and then in a limited exclusive sense.

Timeless/all-inclusive — “Blessed be the Lord God of *Israel*; for He hath visited and redeemed His people” (Luke 1:68).

Limited/exclusive — “When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in *Israel*” (Matthew 8:10).

Notice that the first statement from Luke 1:68 is a general, all-inclusive use of the word “Israel.” The Israel of God includes all believers in time past, present and future. The second use of Israel is limited to God’s people in the time of Christ. Now let’s consider some examples in the SOP:

Timeless/all-inclusive — “The *Israel* of God, journeying to the heavenly Canaan, have a Captain who needed no human teaching to prepare Him for His mission as a divine leader; yet He was made perfect through sufferings; and ‘in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted’ (Hebrews 2:10, 18). Our Redeemer manifested no human weakness or imperfection; yet He died to obtain for us an entrance into the Promised Land.”¹⁰

“As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the *Israel of God*.”¹¹

Limited/exclusive — “When I study the Scriptures, I am alarmed for the *Israel of God* in these last days. They are exhorted to flee from idolatry. I fear that they are asleep, and so conformed to the world that it would be difficult to discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. The distance is widening between Christ and His people, and lessening between them and the world. The marks of distinction between Christ’s professed people and the world have almost disappeared. Like ancient *Israel*, they follow after the abominations of the nations around them.”¹²

The first two statements¹³ are examples of a timeless/all-inclusive use of the word “Israel.”

The last statement has two uses of the word “Israel.” In the first sentence “Israel” refers to God’s people in the last days. In the last sentence “Israel” refers to the literal Israel of the Old Testament. Both statements are examples of a limited/exclusive use

of the word “Israel.” Now see if you can identify the use of “Israel” in this next statement:

“The Jews are coming into the ranks of God’s chosen followers, and are being numbered with the *Israel of God* in these closing days. Thus some of the Jews will once more be reinstated with the people of God, and the blessing of the Lord will rest upon them richly, if they will come into the position of rejoicing that is represented in the Scripture, ‘And again He saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with His people.’”¹⁴

The first sentence is speaking of literal Jews coming into the ranks of the “Israel of God” in these last days. So literal Jews coming into the ranks of God’s chosen followers who are called the “Israel of God” implies that the “Israel of God” is symbolic of God’s end-time church. This statement then is exclusive in that it applies to God’s end-time church.

Based on these examples, we can see how the word “Israel” is used in four different ways with no major explanation of the application except for the context of each statement. The use of “Israel” in one of these four different ways does not contradict or undermine the other uses. Each one has a place in Inspiration and can be understood by the context in which it is used.

With this in mind, let’s assume that I am speaking of “Israel” in a symbolic/exclusive sense — describing, for example, the final generation. To make sure my readers understand the symbolic exclusive (end-time sense), I might want to add the phrase, “in name.” This phrase is defined in Webster’s Dictionary as “mere designation rather than fact — as ‘a king in name only.’” So by doing this, I would be giving the reader more reason to recognize that the name “Israel” is being used symbolically and not literally. I would be clarifying that God’s people are called “Israel” in name or symbolically (spiritual Israel) and not in a literal sense. This would give greater understanding to the idea that I am not talking about literal Jews, but spiritual Israel. My sentence would then read, “The living saints, the Israel of God, in name, knew and understood the voice.”

This is what I believe Ellen White is doing with the use of the phrase 144,000. As *Israel* is the symbolic *name* for God’s people, so *the 144,000* is the symbolic *number* for God’s people. It symbolizes their perfection and completeness.

This becomes even clearer when we look at the same statement with the term “144,000” replacing the name “Israel.” This is a term that most of the world applies to literal Jews. So let’s make a temporary substitute for the sake of illustration and place “Israel” into Sister White’s statement in the place of the “144,000 in number.”

“The living saints, Israel, knew and understood the voice.”

How would that be read and understood by most of the Christian world? Even Adventists might apply the word “Israel” only to literal Jews. A simple way to clarify the statement in order to avoid any misunderstanding would be to write it this way:

“The living saints, Israel *in name*, knew and understood the voice.”

According to the dictionary definition, adding “in name” makes it clearer to the reader that God’s living saints are called “Israel” *in name or in a symbolic/spiritual sense*. That is, they are spiritual Israel, not literal Israel. This then would be the same with the term, 144,000. “The living saints, 144,000, in number,” clarifies that the number is not to be taken literally.

Now, for the sake of clarification, let’s remove the phrase “in number” from this statement in question:

“The living saints, 144,000, knew and understood the voice.”

How would you interpret this? Our first inclination would be to read this statement literally, not symbolically, would it not? “The living saints, 144,000.” There is nothing at all in that phrase to indicate any symbolism. I believe, this is why Sister White added the phrase “in number.” It was for clarification. Had she meant this statement to be literal, she might have written it, “The living saints, 144,000, knew and understood the voice.” Yet she added the phrase “in number” to help clarify that this is not a literal number. The “living saints” are God’s people. They are called “Israel” *in name*; they are called “the 144,000” *in number*.

This becomes very clear when we look at the entirety of God’s inspired Word on this subject. It allows all of inspiration to be in harmony.

(For more information see Appendix IV.)

- 1 Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, p. 470
- 2 *Early Writings*, pp. 85, 86
- 3 *Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1890
- 4 *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 51
- 5 *Prophets and Kings*, p. 714
- 6 *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 714; see also *The Great Controversy*, p. 640; *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 409-410
- 7 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1107
- 8 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 277
- 9 *Conflict and Courage*, p. 94
- 10 *Conflict and Courage*, p. 111
- 11 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 288
- 12 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 277
- 13 *Conflict and Courage*, p. 111, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 288
- 14 *Evangelism*, p. 577

Chapter 9

Historic Setting

One added piece of evidence that could be very helpful here is to know the historical setting of this statement. The previous understanding suggests that there was a need to clarify the difference between literal and spiritual Israel. So we may ask, was there some misunderstanding about the 144,000 being literal Jews back in Ellen White’s early years of ministry that would lead her to add the phrase “in number” to try to clarify the difference between literal Jews and symbolic Jews? Actually, there was. Brethren in New York in the year 1848 were teaching that the 144,000 were those raised with Christ at His resurrection, making them literal Jews. Here is a record of that history:

“Our first general meeting in western New York, beginning August 18, [1848] was held at Volney, in Brother David Arnold’s barn. About thirty-five were present, — all the friends that could be collected in that part of the State. But of this number there were hardly two agreed. Some were holding serious errors, and each strenuously urged his own views, declaring that they were according to the Scriptures. One brother held that the one thousand years of the twentieth chapter of Revelation were in the past, and that the one hundred and forty-four thousand mentioned in the seventh and fourteenth chapters of Revelation, were those raised at Christ’s resurrection.”¹

This gives us some added understanding of why she would have needed to clarify the symbolism of the 144,000. If you can catch the symbolism of the name *Israel*, you will not miss the symbolism of the number *144,000*. It is important to note also that Ellen White uses these two phrases, “the Israel of God” and “the 144,000,” interchangeably. The two statements that follow are an example. (See if you can identify in what sense, literal or symbolic, exclusive or all-inclusive, these statements are being used.)

“The voice of God is heard from heaven, declaring the day and hour of Jesus’ coming, and delivering the everlasting covenant to His people. Like peals of loudest thunder His words roll through the earth. *The Israel of God* stand listening, with their eyes fixed upward. Their countenances are lighted up with His glory, and shine as did the face of Moses when he came down from Sinai. The wicked cannot look upon them. And when the blessing is pronounced on those who have honored God by keeping His Sabbath holy, there is a mighty shout of victory.”²

“Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus’ coming. The living saints, *144,000 in number*, knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake. When God spoke the time, He poured upon us the Holy Ghost, and our faces began to light up and shine with the glory of God, as Moses’ did when he came down from Mount Sinai.”³

Did you notice how these two statements are speaking of the same group in the same time in history — God’s people at the return of Jesus. So are these two statements literal or symbolic? Are they speaking of God’s people in an all-inclusive sense or are they talking more exclusively of a particular group of God’s people? It is clear that they are speaking both symbolically and exclusively. The group mentioned here is end-time believers who see Jesus come just before the final resurrection. They are not literal Jews. It is an end-time group, not all of God’s redeemed. Not until after the final resurrection is the “Israel of God” or “144,000” a complete or all-inclusive group. This point is powerfully confirmed by Ellen White’s use of the number “144,000” when describing the all-inclusive group of God’s people after the resurrection as noted in this next section.

Harmony in the “Perfect Square”

Another important area of reference concerning the 144,000 is found in what we could call the “perfect square” quotations. Now don’t get nervous. These quotes are not talking about perfectionism. They are five specific statements that will lend a great deal of insight to our study, adding to the full picture. The statements are found in *Early Writings*, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, *The Story of Redemption*, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, and *The Great Controversy*. They pick up on the plan of salvation just after the second coming of Christ when all the redeemed are taken to heaven. The statements follow in historical order:

1. “We all entered the cloud together, and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory. *Here on*

the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square. Some of them had very bright crowns, others not so bright. Some crowns appeared heavy with stars, while others had but few. All were perfectly satisfied with their crowns. And they were all clothed with a glorious white mantle from their shoulders to their feet. Angels were all about us as we marched over the sea of glass to the gate of the city. Jesus raised His mighty, glorious arm, laid hold of the pearly gate, swung it back on its glittering hinges, and said to us, ‘You have washed your robes in My blood, stood stiffly for My truth, enter in.’ We all marched in and felt that we had a perfect right in the city.”⁴

2. “On each side of the cloudy chariot were wings, and beneath it were living wheels; and as the chariot rolled upward, the wheels cried, ‘Holy,’ and the wings, as they moved, cried, ‘Holy,’ and the retinue of holy angels around the cloud cried, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!’ And the *saints* in the cloud cried, ‘Glory! Alleluia’ and the chariot rolled upward to the Holy City. Before entering the city, *the saints were arranged in a perfect square*, with Jesus in the midst. He stood head and shoulders above the *saints* and above the angels. His majestic form and lovely countenance could be seen by all in the square.”⁵
3. “Before entering the city, *the saints are arranged in a hollow square*, with Jesus in the midst. In height He surpasses both the saints and the angels. His majestic form and lovely countenance can be seen by all in the square. Upon the heads of the *overcomers* the Savior, with His own right hand, places the crowns of glory. For every *saint* there is a crown, bearing his new name, and the inscription, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ In every hand is placed the victor’s palm and the shining harp.”⁶
4. “Before entering the City of God, the Savior bestows upon *His followers* the emblems of victory and invests them with the insignia of their royal state. *The glittering ranks are drawn up in the form of a hollow square about their King*, whose form rises in majesty high above saint and angel, whose countenance beams upon them full of benignant love. *Throughout the unnumbered host of the redeemed* every glance is fixed upon Him, every eye beholds His glory whose ‘visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.’ Upon the heads of the *overcomers*, Jesus with His own right hand places the crown of glory. For each there is a crown, bearing his own ‘new name’ (Revelation 2: 17), and the inscription, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ In every hand are placed the victor’s palm and the shining harp.”⁷

Did you note the first two statements from *Early Writings*? They speak of the same event, and are significant because the author uses the term “saints” in the second statement to describe the same group called the “144,000” in the first

statement. Then, the last statement contains the words “redeemed,” “followers,” and “overcomers.” Again, notice that each of these statements is speaking of the same event. This is a vital point. It clearly confirms that the saints and the 144,000 are one and the same group. They are the redeemed of all nations, the overcomers, the followers of Christ, the unnumbered host of the redeemed, as confirmed by the rest of the statements.

Who Enters the Temple?

For the serious student, there is one statement on this subject that has never seemed to fully harmonize with the Bible. It is in *Early Writings*, page 19:

“And as we were about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised His lovely voice and said, ‘Only the 144,000 enter this place,’ and we shouted, ‘Alleluia.’” For those who believe the 144,000 to be a literal number, this idea has been a challenging one to fit into the description of the great multitude in Revelation 7 [see Appendix V for an example]. Revelation 7:9-17 clearly pictures the “great multitude” as those who “serve” God “day and night in His temple” (verses 14 and 15). And the great multitude, as we considered earlier, are all of the redeemed. This means that all the redeemed go into the temple. But if you designate the 144,000 to be a literal number composed of an end-time group only, or even a symbolic end-time group (i.e. different from the great multitude), then the great multitude is excluded from entering the temple, which Revelation 7:9-17 clearly does not teach. Ellen White herself was included as a member of that group that entered the temple at the sound of Jesus’ voice, as noted by the context of the statement above. (Her references to “we” when speaking of the 144,000 are numerous, though she is not an end-time, *living* saint.)

If you compare all the statements in the Spirit of Prophecy on this subject there are no contradictions to cause conflict among inspired statements. Consider then another statement in an article written in 1899 that lends clarity and balance:

“The serpent’s head will soon be bruised and crushed. The glorious memorial of God’s wonderful power is soon to be restored to its rightful place. Then paradise lost will be paradise restored. God’s plan for the redemption of man will be complete. The Son of Man will bestow upon *the righteous* the crown of everlasting life, and *they shall ‘serve Him day and night in His temple:* and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them’” (Revelation 7:15).⁸

The context of this last statement is the consummation of the plan of redemption and the fulfillment of Revelation 7:15. The Spirit of Prophecy describes the “righteous,” those who receive “the crown of everlasting life,” as serving God in His temple day and night. In the context of the statement these “righteous” ones are *all*

of the redeemed, not a limited number composing the final generation. This later statement then clarifies Sister White’s earlier one making it clear that all the redeemed go to the temple to serve God day and night. There is no contradiction between Ellen White’s *Early Writings* vision and the teaching of the Bible. The difficulty lies in the interpretation we sometimes place on Sister White’s writings. When Jesus says only the 144,000 enter this place He is talking about all of the redeemed or the great multitude that no man can number, as clearly taught in Revelation 7:9-17. And to this truth all the redeemed, the saints of all ages, Ellen White and you yourself, can shout “Alleluia!” Amen!

1 *Life Sketches*, pp. 110-111

2 *The Great Controversy*, p. 640

3 *Early Writings*, p. 15

4 *Early Writings*, pp. 16-17

5 *Early Writings*, pp. 287-288; *Spiritual Gifts*, vol 1, pp. 208-209; *The Story of Redemption*, p. 412

6 *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 464

7 *The Great Controversy*, pp. 645-646

8 *Review and Herald*, September 5, 1899; *Lift Him Up*, p. 373

Strive to Be Among the 144,000

“But,” you say, “doesn’t Ellen White say somewhere that we should strive to be among the 144,000?” Yes, she does. And this, too, is a significant and important statement that will help us arrive at a clear understanding concerning our subject matter. Actually, this is one of the most frequently mentioned statements about the 144,000. It appears in about three of her books. The original statement comes from a *Review and Herald* dated 1905, just ten years from the death of Ellen White:

“Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand.”¹Amen!

Of course we want to strive to be among this group. Yet this statement does not say or even imply that the 144,000 are exclusively the final generation only. In fact the context of the sentence paints an entirely different picture. Have you ever read this statement in context? I had not for a number of years (one of the problems with using the Spirit of Prophecy in proof text manner is that we often fail to read it in its proper context). Again, you will find the statement in several places but the context is found in a *Review and Herald* article. It was quite a surprise to discover that the subject matter of this article is actually not the 144,000, but rather the *great multitude*. This makes sense only if Ellen White saw the 144,000 and the great multitude as the same group. The article opens by quoting Revelation 7:9-17 verse by verse. Then it skips right over the verses that refer to the 144,000 being sealed. It focuses solely on those verses that describe the great multitude. So here we have an entire article encouraging us to “strive to be among the “hundred and forty-four thousand” while quoting only from the Scriptures in Revelation 7 that describe the great multitude. Think about that.

In this context, she describes the Lamb leading the redeemed by the fountains of living water:

“Those whom the Lamb shall lead by the fountains of living waters, and from whose eyes He shall wipe away all tears, will be those now receiving the knowledge and understanding revealed in the Bible, the Word of God.”

One paragraph later we find her familiar admonishment, “Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand.” Then, without skipping a beat, Ellen White continues, “And let us do all that we can to help others to *gain heaven*.”²Amen!

In context, this statement, calling all to strive to be among the 144,000 has a parallel admonition — “and let us do all we can to help others to gain heaven.” This seems clearly to be a central focus of the entire article. We could very well read the statement, “Let us strive with all the power God has given us to gain heaven” and be entirely in harmony with the context. According to this context going to heaven is synonymous with being a part of the 144,000. This conclusion is again in perfect harmony with the full picture we have seen developing in the inspired writings concerning the 144,000.

I'm With the 144,000

Another seeming dilemma is cleared up by allowing what we have learned so far to have its proper bearing on a vision Ellen White had of heaven:

“I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world again. Then the angel said, ‘You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, *with the 144,000*, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.’”³ Due to our understanding of who the 144,000 are, we feel the need to explain the words of the angel to Ellen White. We want to reason that, “with the 144,000” does not actually mean “with the 144,000.”

Consider again the use of this same phrase concerning a sister who had died trusting in Christ. Ellen White states:

“I saw that she was sealed and would come up at the voice of God and stand upon the earth, and would be with the 144,000.”⁴ We see in this second statement confirmation of what the Bible and SOP teach, that all of the redeemed, including the dead, are to be sealed and be with the 144,000, just as this dear sister who had died in the Lord was sealed and would be with the 144,000.

The other option, given the identical use of language here, would be to add the same explanation to this sister as we did to Ellen White. This would give us the 144,000 plus two — Ellen White and this sister. Yet this begs another question. Are

there not more faithful followers that died in the Lord and were sealed, as this sister was? Wouldn't they also be with the 144,000? How many people do we add to this group without allowing them to be a part of the group? Perhaps it is time to rethink what it means to be "with the 144,000."

So what does "with the 144,000" mean? My understanding of these statements is very simple. If someone knocks on your door and says, "Good morning, I'm with Allstate Insurance," they mean that they are with the Allstate Insurance Company. Or if church members going out door-to-door are asked what church they represent and respond, "I'm with the Seventh-day Adventist Church," they mean they are part of that church group. Or if someone declares, "I'm with the 101st Airborne Division," this means they are directly connected to that military group; they are part of it.

Likewise, when Ellen White was told by the angel, "if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000. . . ." it means exactly what it says. She is part of, one of, connected to, that group. She is not an additional entity attached by some rope to the tail end of this group as they wing their way to other worlds ahead of her. (By the way, Ellen White was faithful. Therefore, according to the testimony of the angel, she will be "with the 144,000" and so will everyone of the saved who remain faithful to God!)

We are not looking at two separate groups here — one that is entitled to travel with Christ because each member lived through the time of trouble, and the other group who does not because they did not.

David had to tackle the principles that lay at the foundation of this thinking after he and some of his men recovered their families from the Amelakites. Let's pick up the story in verse 22 of 1 Samuel 30:

"But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, 'Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go.'

David replied, 'No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. *All shall share alike.*' David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this" (1 Samuel 30:22-25, NIV).

This story brings up four points to ponder. First, those of questionable character sought to divide David's men into two groups when it came to the reward. The two divisions were:

- Those who went all the way with David.
- Those who were too tired and rested with the supplies.

In response to the suggestion of some of his men, David reminded them that it is the Lord who deserved all the credit for their victory, not the men who fought so tirelessly. This is the same truth concerning the great multitude as recorded in Revelation 7:9. There, proclaimed with a "loud voice," the great multitude sing "salvation to our God... and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10). We are saved by the grace of God, not by our tireless efforts or good works.

Second, David divided the spoil with all his men, whether they went all the way to the Amelakite camp or not. Everyone shared equally in the reward, even those who did not go all the way with David and his men. This same principle applies to the redeemed of all ages and the final generation. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

And third, in addition to dividing the spoil equally with those who stayed with the supplies, David also sent spoil "to all the places where David and his men were accustomed to rove," or roam (1 Samuel 30:31). In doing this, David acknowledged that everyone has an equal part in the reward that God has given us. Those who supported David's cause in supplying food, shelter and safety were also rewarded even though they were not there with the men who were on the front lines of the battle. Every person who supports the cause of God shares equally in the victory and the reward. This makes sense in the plan of salvation when we consider that our faith is built upon and strengthened by the faith of previous generations (Hebrews 12:1).

This principle of sharing equally in the reward that God's power had given them was so important to this man after God's own heart that David made it a statute for Israel. Applying the principles of these verses to the redeemed, the forth and final point is this: Those who are resting in the grave will receive the same reward as those who endure through the last hours of earth's history (Revelation 14:13). All who are faithful, as the angel promised Ellen White, will be "with the 144,000." We are, after all, standing and building on the foundation of those who have gone before us, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone:

"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The experience of the final generation finds its foundation in Jesus Christ and is built upon the faithfulness of previous generations. None who are finally saved by grace will consider themselves worthy of some exclusive privileges above the rest of the redeemed in God's kingdom.

Another biblical truth to consider is that of the eleventh-hour workers in Matthew 20:9-10. Jesus explains that those who came into the kingdom of God in the last days receive the same reward or wages as those who worked through the entire day. In this world money gives us status. The more money we have the more status people give us, but this is not how salvation works. No matter what our talents or how long we work; our salvation status does not change. We are all sinners saved by grace. There is no exclusive group among the redeemed that has earned privileges (going into the temple or traveling to other worlds) that the rest of the ransomed cannot also enjoy. All the workers receive the same salvation (status), the last workers receive the same penny as the first workers (they all compose the 144,000). Now notice this same inclusiveness in the Spirit of Prophecy as the redeemed are described after the second coming of Christ:

“We all entered the cloud together, and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory. Here on the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square. Some of them had very bright crowns, others not so bright. Some crowns appeared heavy with stars, while others had but few. All were perfectly satisfied with their crowns.”⁵

Yes, there is a difference in the crown each one wears. Yet even here the difference is not between the last generation and previous ones. The statement does not say that only the final generation stood on the sea of glass while previous generations did not. It does not say that the final generation had brighter crowns than previous generations. The 144,000 are an all-inclusive group saved by the grace of God. The crowns are different based on the use made of their talents for God, but none are excluded from the sea of glass or being part of the 144,000 due to crown-splendor.

Back to our original statement:

“As we were about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised his lovely voice and said, ‘Only the 144,000 enter this place,’ and we shouted, ‘Alleluia.’”⁶

Comparing this statement with others concerning the temple, we can find additional clarification:

“This temple was supported by seven pillars, all of transparent gold, set with pearls most glorious. The wonderful things I there saw I cannot describe. Oh, that I could talk in the language of Canaan, then could I tell a little of the glory of the better world. I saw there tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 were engraved in letters of gold. After we beheld the glory of the temple, we went out, and Jesus left us and went to the city. Soon we heard His lovely voice again, saying, “Come, My people, you have come out of great tribulation, and done My will; suffered for Me; come in to supper, for I will gird Myself, and serve you.

” We shouted, “Alleluia! Glory!” and entered into the city.”⁷

The tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 are engraved in gold are part of the promise to the church at Pergamos in Revelation 2: 17 — “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” This verse clearly shows the 144,000 to be inclusive of all God’s people who belonged to the age represented by the church of Pergamos or the Middle Ages.

In addition, the church of Philadelphia is promised a place in the temple of God:

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from My God: and *I will write upon him* My new name” (Revelation 3: 12). This statement allows those who lived in the church age of Philadelphia to go into the temple where only the 144,000 go.

So, the statement on page 15 of *Early Writings* could be taken literally. Indeed, many of us have read it that way. But that literal interpretation of the 144,000 is not in harmony with all the statements written on this subject in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. Such a lack of harmony can lead to one of two conclusions:

1. Inspiration contradicts
2. Misunderstanding

Inspiration does not contradict, and misunderstanding inspired writings leads to false teachings. God is calling us to humble our hearts as we continue to study this topic and look for a conclusion that brings harmony to all that Inspiration has said about the 144,000. Often it is not evidence of the true meaning of Scripture that is needed, but a reformation of our own sinful hearts. It can be difficult to set aside human speculations, traditions and our exclusive ideas about the 144,000. These were major barriers to accepting truth in the time Christ lived and taught:

“In the theological schools of Judea the word of God had been set aside for *human speculations*; it was robbed of its power by the *interpretations and traditions* of the rabbis. *Self-aggrandizement*, love of domination, *jealous exclusiveness*, bigotry and *contemptuous pride*, were the ruling principles and motives of these teachers.”⁸

Let’s give some thought to the history of ancient Israel and the “jealous exclusiveness” that became a ruling principle of their theological teachers. The pastors and leaders in Christ’s day were so blinded by exclusiveness that they did not welcome the Messiah. The Bible was clear about His birth, life, death and resurrection, but most of the leaders read the Scriptures to prove their own preconceived ideas.

This led them to exclude, explain away, or simply ignore inspired evidence like Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9. This evidence would have given them a fuller picture of the two aspects of the Messiah's work, but they closed their eyes and ears. Even the disciples were blinded by exclusive pride. Could we be following a similar path — repeating the history of Israel by holding interpretations that have a partial basis in tradition and exclusiveness?

- 1 *Review and Herald*, March 9, 1905
- 2 *Review and Herald*, March 9, 1905
- 3 *Adventist Home*, p. 543
- 4 *The Faith I Live By*, p. 173
- 5 *Early Writings*, p. 16
- 6 *Early Writings*, p. 19
- 7 *Early Writings*, p. 19
- 8 *Education*, pp. 64-65

Chapter 11

The Special Resurrection

One of my first encounters with the confusion on the 144,000 was with some members of the Adventist Reform church. They teach that everyone who has died in the Adventist faith since 1844 will be a part of the 144,000, which is actually true. But they further assert that this is a *literal* number of the *only* ones who will be saved post 1844. You are reading that right—only 144,000 literal people are saved from 1844 until Jesus returns. According to all we have studied so far, that idea is not biblical.

However, the idea of a special resurrection inclusive of all who have died in the faith of the third angel's message is truth. Further, that these will be part of the 144,000 is also true (Revelation 1:7; Daniel 12:2). Here are the statements:

“Graves are opened, and ‘many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth. . . awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.’ Daniel 12:2. *All who have died in the faith of the third angel's message come forth from the tomb glorified, to hear God's covenant of peace with those who have kept His law.* ‘They also which pierced Him’ (Revelation 1:7), those that mocked and derided Christ's dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people, are raised to behold Him in His glory and to see the honor placed upon the loyal and obedient.”¹

“It was at midnight that God chose to deliver His people. As the wicked were mocking around them, suddenly the sun appeared, shining in his strength, and the moon stood still. The wicked looked upon the scene with amazement, while the saints beheld with solemn joy the tokens of their deliverance. Signs and wonders followed in quick succession. Everything seemed turned out of its natural course. The streams ceased to flow. Dark, heavy clouds came up and clashed against each other. But there was one clear place of settled glory, whence came the voice of God

like many waters, shaking the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. *The graves were opened, and those who had died in faith under the third angel's message, keeping the Sabbath, came forth from their dusty beds, glorified, to hear the covenant of peace that God was to make with those who had kept His law.*"²

Yes, all who have died in the faith of the third angel's message since 1844 are included in the special resurrection and are identified as part of the 144,000. Yet this truth alone will end up proving that the number 144,000 cannot be literal for there have been millions of faithful members who have died in the faith since 1844. In addition, there are presently millions of people on planet earth who are counted by God to be believers in the three angels' message.

The special resurrection lends significantly to our understanding of this subject—especially when understood in relationship to the great exchange—an event predicted to take place during the Sunday law crisis. This is a time when company after company leaves God's church and tribe after tribe enters the church:

"In vision I saw two armies in terrible conflict. One army was led by banners bearing the world's insignia; the other was led by the bloodstained banner of Prince Immanuel. Standard after standard was left to trail in the dust as company after company from the Lord's army joined the foe and tribe after tribe from the ranks of the enemy united with the commandment-keeping people of God."³

This will be a trying process for the church. So great will be the apostasy that we will be tempted to think that the church is about to fall. It does not fall, but the majority of those who profess to be Seventh-day Adventists end up leaving:

"Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. *The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall.* It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths."⁴

"When the religion of Christ is most held in contempt, when His law is most despised, then should our zeal be the warmest and our courage and firmness the most unflinching. To stand in defense of truth and righteousness *when the majority forsake us*, to fight the battles of the Lord when champions are few—this will be our test. At this time we must gather warmth from the coldness of others, courage from their cowardice, and loyalty from their treason."⁵

Literalists (those who believe the number 144,000 to be a literal number) conclude that this apostasy will bring our numbers down to 144,000 literal, faithful Seventh-day Adventists. Yet God's messenger also says, "The ranks will not be

diminished." This means that those who leave due to apostasy will be replaced by others who take hold of the truth:

"The Lord will give His message to those who have walked in accordance with the light they have had, and will recognize them as true and faithful, according to the measurement of God. These men will take the place of those who, having light and knowledge, have walked not in the way of the Lord, but in the imagination of their own unsanctified hearts.

But there are men who will receive the truth, and these will take the places made vacant by those who become offended and leave the truth. . . . The Lord will work so that the disaffected ones will be separated from the true and loyal ones. . . . *The ranks will not be diminished.* Those who are firm and true will close up the vacancies that are made by those who become offended and apostatize."⁶

Every place made vacant by apostasy will be filled by those who take hold of the message in the final hours—the "ranks will not be diminished." Praise God! What a powerful promise for God's church to claim during this end-time apostasy. Those coming into the church in the eleventh hour will learn in "a few months" what it has taken others a lifetime to learn:

"Said the angel, 'Deny self; ye must step fast.' Some of us have had time to get the truth and to advance step by step, and every step we have taken has given us strength to take the next. But now time is almost finished, and what we have been years learning, they will have to learn in a few months. They will also have much to unlearn and much to learn again. Those who would not receive the mark of the beast and his image when the decree goes forth, must have decision now to say, Nay, we will not regard the institution of the beast."⁷

"At the eleventh hour the Lord will call into his service many faithful workers. Self-sacrificing men and women *will step into the places made vacant by apostasy and death.* To young men and young women, as well as to those who are older, God will give power from above. With converted minds, converted hands, converted feet, and converted tongues, their lips touched with a living coal from the divine altar, they will go forth into the Master's service, moving steadily onward and upward, carrying the work forward to completion."⁸

Amen!

"Many who have had great light have not appreciated and improved it as it was their privilege to do. They have not practiced the truth. And because of this the Lord will bring in those who have lived up to all the light they have had. Those who have been privileged with opportunities to understand the truth, and who have not obeyed its principles, will be swayed by Satan's temptations for self-advancement.

They will deny the principles of truth in practice and bring reproach upon the cause of God. Christ declares that he will spue these out of his mouth, and leave them to follow their own course of action to distinguish themselves. This course of action does indeed make them prominent as men that are unfaithful householders. The Lord will give his message to those who have walked in accordance with the light they have had, and will recognize them as true and faithful, according to the measurement of God. *These men will take the place of those who, having light and knowledge, have walked not in the way of the Lord, but in the imagination of their own unsanctified hearts.*"⁹

In the light of these statements does it make sense that only 144,000 literal persons since 1844, including all those who die in the message, will be saved? Think about it. If every place made vacant by those who leave the truth will be filled by others who will embrace the truth, then there will be millions taking hold of the three angels' message in the last days. Add to these millions all those who have died in the faith since 1844. Yes, there will be martyrs, but is God going to allow exactly enough folks to be martyred in order to get us down to 144,000? In addition, even if most of God's people were martyred in the little time of trouble, they will still be part of the 144,000. We just read that they will be resurrected before Christ returns according to *The Great Controversy*, p. 637 and *Early Writings*, pp. 16, 285-286.

These next statements follow the special resurrection in sequence. The first one identifies all those who have been resurrected in the special resurrection as part of the 144,000 who hear the voice of God give the day and hour of Christ's coming:

"Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming. The living saints, 144,000 in number, knew and understood that voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake. When God spoke the time, He poured upon us the Holy Ghost, and our faces began to light up and shine with the glory of God, as Moses' did when he came down from Mount Sinai."¹⁰

"And as God spoke the day and the hour of Jesus' coming and delivered the everlasting covenant to His people, He spoke one sentence, and then paused, while the words were rolling through the earth. The *Israel of God* stood with their eyes fixed upward, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of Jehovah, and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder."¹¹

These last statements include millions of people since the timing of its prophetic fulfillment is after the special resurrection. It therefore includes all those who have died in the faith of the third angels' message and were resurrected.

Notice also that the first statement refers to God's people as the "144,000" and the next calls them "the Israel of God." Here we find confirmation for understanding the phrase "144,000 in number" as a symbolic equivalent to the "Israel of God." The

number 144,000 signifies "perfect and complete in *quantity*." Likewise the name "Israel of God" signifies "perfect and complete in *quality*." Israel is a symbolic name for the perfect quality of God's people — those who "prevail." The 144,000 is a symbolic number for the perfect quantity of God's people, 12 tribes, 12 apostles times 1,000 (the largest number in the Bible).

We should not assume that the term "144,000" is literal any more than we would assume that the "Israel of God" is literal. Our goal is to find harmony in the Spirit of Prophecy statements. The following quotation clarifies the false idea that only a limited number will be saved:

"Another question upon which we had some conversation was in regard to the elect of God—that the Lord would have a certain number, and when that number was made up then probation would cease. These are questions you or I have no right to talk about. The Lord Jesus will receive all who come unto Him. He died for the ungodly and every man who will come, may come. Certain conditions are to be complied with on the part of man, and if he refuses to comply with the conditions, he cannot become the elect of God. If he will comply, he is a child of God, and Christ says if he will continue in faithfulness, steadfast and immovable in his obedience, He will not blot out his name out of the book of life but will confess his name before His Father and before His angels. God would have us think and talk and present to others those truths which are plainly revealed, and all have naught to do with these subjects of speculation, for they have no special reference to the salvation of our souls."¹²

Based on all the inspired statements we have read so far, the 144,000 includes all who have died in the faith of the Advent message, and all of the redeemed. You may ask, "Why, then, are the 144,000 described as those who witness the seven last plagues and are translated from the earth without seeing death?" That is a question I have pondered many times in trying to harmonize all the statements on this subject. One answer has finally satisfied me. I hope it answers this question for you.

1 *The Great Controversy*, p. 637

2 *Early Writings*, p. 285

3 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 41

4 *Upward Look*, p. 356; see also *Last Day Events*, p. 180; 2 *Selected Messages*, p. 380; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 91

5 *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, p. 136 (1882); see also *Last Day Events*, p. 180

6 *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 422

7 *Early Writings*, p. 67

8 *The Youth Instructor*, February 13, 1902

9 *Spalding-Magan Collection*, p. 208

10 *Early Writings*, p. 15

11 *Early Writings*, p. 34

12 *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 2, p. 149, 1885

The Song of Moses and the Lamb

Let's begin this section by asking an unusual question. Have you ever wondered if Moses will sing the song of "Moses and the Lamb"? If not, then why did God name a song after Moses that he will not sing?

And just one more question — what is this song of Moses and the Lamb?

Looking at its historical setting, we find that it is a song of deliverance. Moses and the children of Israel had just been delivered from Egyptian bondage. Pharaoh's mighty army had been completely washed away by the awesome power of God, and Moses had then led the people in a victory song of praise to God:

"I will sing unto the Lord,
For He hath triumphed gloriously:
The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.
The Lord is my strength and song,
And He is become my *salvation*" (Exodus 15:1-2).

The song of Moses is a song of salvation, a song of deliverance from the slavery of sin. Yes, Moses will sing that song, but this song does not belong to Moses and the "Jewish people alone." It is a song of victory from sin that he and all the redeemed have experienced.

"That song does not belong to the Jewish people alone. It points forward to the destruction of all the foes of righteousness and the final victory of the Israel of God. The prophet of Patmos beholds the white-robed multitude that have 'gotten the

victory,' standing on the 'sea of glass mingled with fire,' having 'the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb' (Revelation 15:2, 3).¹

Here's the point:

- The final generation is called the "Israel of God" but other generations were also referred to as the "Israel of God."
- The final generation goes through Jacob's time of trouble, but Jacob also went through Jacob's time of trouble (hence the name).
- The final generation is called the "twelve tribes of Israel" the same as other generations have been called the "twelve tribes of Israel" (James 1:1; Exodus 28:21).
- Yes, the final generation will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, but Moses himself will also sing that song (it is his song after all).
- The final generation will be sealed with the name of God in their foreheads, just as the redeemed of every generation of Adam's seed receives the seal of God in their foreheads (Revelation 3:12; 22:4; 7:3-8).

In every generation God has had His faithful followers. These share the victory of the final generation because — but for time, opportunity, and circumstance — they, too, would have stood faithful in Christ during the final crisis.

Enoch, for example, has already been translated without seeing death, though he was not part of the faithful living through the time of trouble. Likewise, the twenty-four elders who were raised with Christ at His ascension are already serving God in His temple where only the 144,000 can enter (Revelation 4:4).

Those redeemed by the grace of God are an inclusive group having experienced something that no other company in the universe has — they have overcome sin by the blood of the Lamb.

Now we come to a highly significant statement referring to the 144,000. This one can be easily misunderstood, yet it presents a complete harmony when read in its entirety. So, although it is lengthy, I urge you to read it through in context and note specifically the italicized sections. These offer the corporate inclusiveness that is brought to view again and again in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy:

"Upon the crystal sea before the throne, that sea of glass as it were mingled with fire — so resplendent is it with the glory of God — are gathered the company that have 'gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.' With the Lamb upon Mount Zion, 'having the harps of God,' they stand, the hundred and forty and four thousand that were redeemed from among men; and there is heard, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of a great thunder, 'the voice of harpers harping with their harps.' And

they sing 'a new song' before the throne, a song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand. It is the song of Moses and the Lamb — *a song of deliverance*. None but the hundred and forty-four thousand can learn that song; for *it is the song of their experience*— an experience such as no other company have ever had. 'These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as 'the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb' (Revelation 15:2-3; 14:1-5). 'These are they which came out of great tribulation;' they have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob's trouble; they have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God's judgments. But they have been delivered, for they have 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' 'In their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault' before God. 'Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.' They have seen the earth wasted with famine and pestilence, the sun having power to scorch men with great heat, and they themselves have endured suffering, hunger, and thirst. But 'they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes' (Revelation 7:14-17). "*In all ages* the Savior's chosen have been educated and disciplined in the school of trial. They walked in narrow paths on earth; they were purified in the furnace of affliction. For Jesus' sake they endured opposition, hatred, calumny. They followed Him through conflicts sore; they endured self-denial and experienced bitter disappointments. *By their own painful experience* they learned the evil of sin, its power, its guilt, its woe, and they look upon it with abhorrence. A sense of the infinite sacrifice made for its cure humbles them in their own sight and fills their hearts with gratitude and praise *which those who have never fallen cannot appreciate*. They love much because they have been forgiven much. Having been partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are fitted to be partakers with Him of His glory. "*The heirs of God have come from garrets, from hovels, from dungeons, from scaffolds, from mountains, from deserts, from the caves of the earth, from the caverns of the sea. On earth they were 'destitute, afflicted, tormented': Millions went down to the grave loaded with infamy because they steadfastly refused to yield to the deceptive claims of Satan.* By human tribunals they were adjudged the vilest of criminals. But now 'God is judge Himself' (Psalm 50:6). Now the decisions of earth are reversed. 'The rebuke of His people shall He take away' (Isaiah 25:8). 'They shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the Lord.' He hath appointed 'to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise

for the spirit of heaviness' (Isaiah 62:12; 61:3). They are no longer feeble, afflicted, scattered, and oppressed. Henceforth they are to be ever with the Lord. They stand before the throne clad in richer robes than the most honored of the earth have ever worn. They are crowned with diadems more glorious than were ever placed upon the brow of earthly monarchs. The days of pain and weeping are forever ended. The King of glory has wiped the tears from all faces; every cause of grief has been removed. Amid the waving of palm branches they pour forth a song of praise, clear, sweet, and harmonious; every voice takes up the strain, until the anthem swells through the vaults of heaven: 'Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.' And *all the inhabitants of heaven respond* in the ascription: 'Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God forever and ever' (Revelation 7:10, 12)."²

Again, the context of this statement is significant. The scene takes place in heaven, among the unnumbered host of the unfallen worlds. Within this context, the 144,000 includes those "in every age" who have given all and suffered for Christ. These are they who have "a sense of the infinite sacrifice made for its [sin's] cure [that] humbles them in their own sight and fills their hearts with gratitude and praise which those who *have never fallen cannot appreciate*."

Every one, *all* of God's redeemed people are qualified "by their own painful experience" to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They have an experience that no other company in heaven has had. That is to say, none of the unfallen angels or the innumerable hosts of unfallen worlds has ever experienced what the redeemed have experienced. Of "all the inhabitants of heaven," this company of redeemed alone can sing this song. Only they enter the temple. Only they travel and tell of their victory over sin, for they are unique in their experience. Each one has overcome the power of sin by the grace of Christ. Each one has responded to the voice of God and followed the dictates of conscience, however crucifying to the fallen, sinful nature. This is the corporate identity of that group. All of the redeemed are identified as one because they are all in Christ. Blessed truth! Wonderful Savior! (For more evidence concerning this see Appendix VI.)

Yes, there is a final generation who keeps the law of God while the whole world disregards it. This end-time group illustrates what God's faithful people in every generation would have accomplished, given the right time and circumstances. They are essential to the completion of the plan of salvation because they demonstrate what Christ alone accomplished in His life and death. They show that Christ alone has vindicated God's government and disproved the accusations of Satan in the Great Controversy:

"Through Christ's redeeming work the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan's charges are refuted,

and his character unveiled. Rebellion can never again arise. Sin can never again enter the universe. Through eternal ages all are secure from apostasy. *By love's self-sacrifice, the inhabitants of earth and heaven are bound to their Creator in bonds of indissoluble union.*"³

"It was in order that the heavenly universe might see the conditions of the covenant of redemption that Christ bore the penalty in behalf of the human race. The throne of Justice must be eternally and forever made secure, even tho the race be wiped out, and another creation populate the earth. By the sacrifice Christ was about to make, *all doubts would be forever settled*, and the human race would be saved if they would return to their allegiance. *Christ alone could restore honor to God's government. The cross of Calvary would be looked upon by the unfallen worlds, by the heavenly universe, by Satanic agencies, by the fallen race, and every mouth would be stopped.* In making His infinite sacrifice Christ would exalt and honor the law. He would make known the exalted character of God's government, which could not in any way be changed to meet man in his sinful condition."⁴

Each of us can identify with this concept in our own personal experience. For example, as a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I am corporately identified with its victories and defeats, even though I may not be personally involved in every decision and action of the body. Likewise, as a part of Light Bearers Ministry, I am included in its accomplishments. I can say, "We (Light Bearers Ministry) have printed over 500 million tracts for worldwide evangelism, even though I personally have not printed those tracts. I am included in the accomplishment because I am part of the ministry.

It is the same with the redeemed. All we possess and all we accomplish is a gift to us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The final generation and all the redeemed are saved by the grace of God. In this they represent a corporate body that shares an experience of salvation unique to them among all the inhabitants of God's created universe. As such, they are described as having seen the earth wasted by the seven last plagues, having been translated without seeing death, and having been faithful to Christ in all generations. They travel to other worlds and tell the wondrous story of redemption. Every saved soul will have a testimony to tell (Revelation 12: 11). Not one of the redeemed will be restricted from traveling to other worlds or entering the temple to serve God. His truth is our truth. His law our law. His love fills all of our hearts corporately. We identify fully with heaven and are identified fully with Christ.

This next statement affirms this same point, emphasizing the all-inclusive experience of the redeemed:

"Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God' (Isaiah 43: 12). This also we shall be in eternity.

"For what was the great controversy permitted to continue throughout the

ages? Why was it that Satan's existence was not cut short at the outset of his rebellion? It was that the universe might be convinced of God's justice in His dealing with evil; that sin might receive eternal condemnation. In the plan of redemption there are heights and depths that eternity itself can never exhaust, marvels into which the angels desire to look. *The redeemed only, of all created beings, have in their own experience known the actual conflict with sin;* they have wrought with Christ, and, as *even the angels could not do*, have entered into the fellowship of His sufferings; will they have no testimony as to the science of redemption — nothing that will be of worth to unfallen beings?

"Even now, 'unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places' is 'made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God.' And He 'hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places: . . . that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus' (Ephesians 3: 10, R.V.; 2:6, 7).

"'In His temple doth everyone speak of His glory' (Psalm 29:9), and the song which the *ransomed ones will sing*—the song of their experience — will declare the glory of God: 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for Thou only art holy' (Revelation 15:3, 4, R.V).

"In our life here, earthly, sin-restricted though it is, the greatest joy and the highest education are in service. And in the future state, untrammelled by the limitations of sinful humanity, it is in service that our greatest joy and our highest education will be found — witnessing, and ever as we witness learning anew 'the riches of the glory of this mystery;' 'which is Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27).

"'It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is' (1 John 3:2).

"Then, in the results of His work, Christ will behold its recompense. *In that great multitude which no man could number*, presented 'faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' (Jude 24), He whose blood has redeemed and whose life has taught us, 'shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.' Isaiah 53: 11."⁵

Did you notice how all-inclusive the previous statement is? There are no special exclusions among those who have battled sin. All have a testimony to tell. All speak of God's glory "in His temple." All the ransomed ones" sing the song of Moses as the song of "their experience." All — the entire great multitude that no man can number — are presented "faultless" before the throne of God and before the Lamb.

Every person who exercises faith in God will gain the victory over the beast power — including the faithful of past generations. Their sustaining faith in God purchased their victory over the prevailing beast dominion of their day. Now let's look at some solid biblical evidence for this.

Revelation 13 describes the beast as having reigned for 1260 years. During that time, millions triumphed over this beast by faithfully standing for Christ.

In fact, the battle against the beast is a timeless issue, not just an end-time topic. This becomes clearer when we remember that the beast of Revelation 13 is a composite system. It is a combination of the characteristics of a lion (Babylon), a bear (Media-Persia), and a leopard (Greece) and it receives its seat and authority from the dragon, which is primarily Satan and secondarily Rome as Satan's agency. Therefore the final generation is not the only body of believers who will have gained the victory over this beast. Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar's court, as well as Paul in Nero's, and all who have stood faithfully down through the centuries have overcome the "beast."

The beast that the final generation triumphs over is a continuation of the one Daniel and his friends conquered in Babylon. The power behind this beast is the dragon that fell from heaven, deceiving one third of the angels, and then deceiving Adam and Eve in the garden (Revelation 12:3-4; Genesis 3:1-6). The blood of prophets, saints and "all that were slain upon the earth" is upon this "beast" known as spiritual Babylon (Revelation 16:6).

All of the saved will have overcome the kingdom of Satan. This is why the composite beast that the final generation faces in Revelation 13 was like a "leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Revelation 13:2). Its origins trace back to Babylon, the tower of Babel and Satan himself (Revelation 13:1; Daniel 7:1-5; Revelation 12:3-4; Genesis 11). Daniel and his three friends overcame this beast and so will have everyone who stands on the sea of glass (Revelation 15:3-4). Daniel was told, "As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time" (Daniel 7:12). The lives of these previous kingdoms are prolonged in the composite beast of Revelation 13 because this final "beast" exhibits the same principles that governed the previous kingdoms.

So will Moses sing his song? Will all the redeemed sing it? Here is a final thought:

"There is a day just about to burst upon us when God's mysteries will be seen, and all His ways vindicated; when justice, mercy, and love will be the attributes of His throne. When the earthly warfare is accomplished, and the saints are all gathered home, our first theme will be the song of Moses, the servant of God. The second theme will be the song of the Lamb, the song of grace and redemption. This song will be louder, loftier, and in sublimer strains, echoing and re-echoing through the heavenly courts. Thus the song of God's providence is sung, connecting the varying dispensations; for all is now seen without a veil between the legal, the prophetic, and the gospel. The church history upon the earth and the church redeemed in

heaven all center around the cross of Calvary. This is the theme, this is the song — Christ all and in all — in anthems of praise resounding through heaven from thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand and an innumerable company of the redeemed host. All unite in this song of Moses and of the Lamb. It is a new song, for it was never before sung in heaven."⁶

Does this statement speak to your heart? Do your eyes fill with tears as the truth of God's all-inclusive love bursts upon the selfish exclusive tendency of our nature?

1 *Conflict and Courage*, p. 93
2 *The Great Controversy*, pp. 648-651
3 *The Desire of Ages*, p. 26
4 *Signs of the Times*, July 12, 1899
5 *Education* pp. 308-309
6 *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 433

Nothing Controversial

Please bear in mind that controversy on this subject is completely out of place. I am in no way saying that you must see this as I do in order to be saved. And I would hope the same to be true of those who hold a different view, especially in light of the following statement:

“It is not His [Gods] will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand. This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question.”¹

Based on this previous statement, you might ask, “Well, why even take the time to study this subject?” Good question. The reason is that it can be a great personal blessing to find clarity and harmony in the Bible and in Ellen White’s statements on the subject of the hundred and forty-four thousand. And yet in the light of Sister White’s own understanding, I believe there is no room for us to stir up controversy:

“I have no light on the subject as to who would constitute the 144,000. . . . Please tell my brethren that I have nothing presented before me regarding the circumstances concerning which they write, and *I can set before them only that which has been presented to me.*”²

This study has been an effort to do exactly what this last statement says and set before you what has been presented to us in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, allowing it to harmonize as truth must.

If, as late as 1914, Ellen White herself could say, “I have no light on the subject as to who would constitute the 144,000,” we ought to avoid judgmental opinions of our own on the subject. Rather, we are obligated to follow her counsel and draw our conclusions from *all* the light presented in the Bible and SOP. Perhaps this is the

key—learning, not so much to “identify” the 144,000 (which smacks of theological debate) as to “identify *with*” the 144,000 (which involves the inclusive identity God’s people desperately need). Besides, we are not warned against entering into study, but rather about entering into controversy over the 144,000. Study is a good thing. In addition, we are told that the answer will be plain soon enough. Perhaps this is the time for God to make it plain, now, as we stand on the very borders of eternity.

Therefore, in closing, prayerfully consider one of the most beautiful, balanced and confirming statements written on the subject:

“In comparison with the millions of the world, God’s people will be, as they have ever been, a little flock; but if they stand for the truth as revealed in His word, God will be their refuge. . . .

“Christ’s true disciples follow Him through sore conflicts, enduring self-denial and experiencing bitter disappointment; but this teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they are led to look upon it with abhorrence. Partakers of Christ’s sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory. In holy vision the prophet saw the ultimate triumph of God’s remnant church. He writes:

“I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory. . . stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, Thou King of saints’ (Revelation 15:2-3).

“And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Sion, and with Him a hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads’ (Revelation 14: 1). In this world their minds were consecrated to God; they served Him with the intellect and with the heart; and now He can place His name ‘in their foreheads.’ ‘And they shall reign for ever and ever’ (Revelation 22:5). They do not go in and out as those who beg a place. They are of that number to whom Christ says, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ He welcomes them as His children, saying, ‘Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord’ (Matthew 25:34, 21).”³

(Note: The three dots in the third paragraph signify the omission of one or more words in the original scripture. It was Ellen White who omitted “over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.” Leaving out that phrase allows us to focus on the victory over sin gained by the redeemed, period. Though the beast, his mark and the image are timeless issues that God’s people have faced down through history, we often view them as limited to the end time. The statement also uses the phrase “they are of that number” as referring to a general group and not a specific numeric designation.)

Proof text and Context

Let's spend a short time discussing our approach to the study of the Bible. The proof text method of Bible study is very familiar to us as a people. While it has its strengths, it also presents one major weakness: we lose and often neglect to understand Bible passages in the context in which they were written. Context includes the historical setting as well as the spiritual issues being addressed at the time and the mindset of the people who are listening. Pulling together a list of verses from all over the Bible can lead us to misunderstand certain other verses that may seem to contradict our conclusions.

We see this, for example, regarding the state of the dead and hell in relation to the story of Lazarus. At times we will use the "weight of evidence" principle to overrule the appearance of a "difficult text." This principle allows us to take hold of a biblical teaching based on the fact that the larger portion of Scripture supports it. The study you have just read on the 144,000 appeals both to the "weight of evidence" principle and also to reading the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy in context.

It is clear from the weight of evidence that Sister White did not see the 144,000 as a literal number. There are approximately twenty-one unique statements in the Spirit of Prophecy that mention the 144,000 and only one of them can be interpreted to make that number literal.⁴ Therefore concluding that the 144,000 is a literal number, based on one SOP statement, would be similar to accepting the doctrine of eternally burning hell based on the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:20-31).

At the same time we should also give due consideration to the context of inspired statements. What was the historical situation when the statement was penned? Who was being addressed at the time the statement was made? What is the larger message found in the chapter or even the book? In other words, before we come to our conclusions about the meaning of a particular verse or statement, "time and place" should be considered. As we followed these two principles in this study we found some very significant insights. For example, the clear weight of evidence concerning this subject did not support the 144,000 being a literal number. In addition, the statement in *Early Writings* on page 15, was written at a time when it was being taught that the 144,000 were literal Jews rather than spiritual Israel. Concerning *The Great Controversy* statement on pages 648-651, the very context of the statement is inclusive of the redeemed "in all ages." Could it be that we are inclined to make entrance to heaven as difficult as possible? God is not so inclined. He does not stand before the book of life counting— 143,998..., 143,999..., 144,000! Shut the gates, close the books, no more can be saved! Remember this statement:

"Another question upon which we had some conversation was in regard to the elect of God—that the Lord would have a certain number, and when that number

was made up then probation would cease. These are questions you or I have no right to talk about. The Lord Jesus will receive all who come unto Him. He died for the ungodly and every man who will come, may come."⁵

In the end it is imperative that we understand all Bible truth and doctrine in the light of the cross of Calvary. There, as Jesus is dying, we hear a hopeless thief turning to the Savior of the world with the plea, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42, NKJV). And the response from the parched and dying lips of our crucified Redeemer, who alone has earned the right to save us from our sins is, "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The message of the Cross is the message of the entire Bible—not exclusion, but inclusion—salvation by the blood of the Lamb, by the merits of the crucified One. Jesus Christ alone is the reason why we are in heaven. Some may have done much for Christ, others may have done little, but all are there because of Jesus. None will turn to Moses in that time, forbidding him to sing his song or telling the martyrs for Jesus that they cannot enter the temple. As we approach the temple, Jesus will raise His lovely voice and announce that only the 144,000 enter here. And we will all shout Alleluia! All will feel that they have a perfect right to be there because all have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. All the redeemed will sing that song that gives all the glory to God and to the Lamb.

Fact and Fiction

Again, this study is not for the purpose of causing controversy over the 144,000. The hope is that it will bring clearer understanding about the inclusive nature of the plan of salvation and God's love. Therefore the following thoughts are a summary concerning this subject rather than a dogmatic statement:

- 1. Fact**—The 144,000 is inclusive of all the redeemed from Adam to the final generation.
Fiction—The 144,000 *excludes* the redeemed of every past generation.
- 2. Fact**—The 144,000 represents everyone who gains the victory over the beast, his image, and his mark.
Fiction—The 144,000 represents only those who are living in the "end-times" and gain the victory over the beast, his image, mark, name and number.
- 3. Fact**—The 144,000 is the symbolic number representing the redeemed of the final generation and all other generations who serve God in His temple day and night.
Fiction—The 144,000 is the symbolic number of the redeemed of only the final generation who alone serve God in His temple, while the great multitude

of past generations are excluded from entering the temple.

4. **Fact**—All of the redeemed will travel to other worlds to tell of the wondrous plan of redemption and sing their song of deliverance from sin.
Fiction—Only a select group of 144,000 literal persons will travel from world to world to tell their experience of deliverance from sin.
5. **Fact**—All of those redeemed from the earth can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb because it is a song of deliverance from the slavery of sin through the blood of Christ.
Fiction—Only the very last generation of the redeemed can sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.
6. **Fact**—All of the redeemed enter into the kingdom of God through great tribulation.
Fiction—Only the redeemed of the final generation enter into the kingdom of God through great tribulation.
7. **Fact**—All of the redeemed are sealed and have God's name in their foreheads.
Fiction—Only the living saints of the last generation are sealed and have God's name in their foreheads.
8. **Fact**—The 144,000 is a symbolic number representing the redeemed.
Fiction—The 144,000 is a literal number representing 144,000 literal persons.

1 *SDA Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, p. 978*
2 *Selected Messages, Vol. 3, p. 51, 1914*
3 *Acts of the Apostles, pp. 590-591*
4 *Early Writings, p. 15*
5 *Manuscript Releases, Vol. 2, p. 149, 1885*

Chapter 14

Closing Thoughts

Ponder some closing thoughts of encouragement as John looks upon the great multitude of the redeemed and points out some important characteristics about them:

1. First he states that “no man could number” them (Revelation 7:9). This gives hope to all. Though the road to heaven is “narrow” and “few” find it, there will be countless millions saved at last (Matthew 7: 13-14). (The word “few” compares to the countless masses as “the sand of the sea” describes those who will be lost (Revelation 20:8).)
2. John also declares that the redeemed come from “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (Revelation 7:9). Here is eloquent evidence that “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34-35). People of every race, nation, tribe or language are granted a place in His kingdom.
3. Then John describes the redeemed as “clothed with white robes” (Revelation 7:9). This indicates they have received the free “gift” of the cleansing “blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 7: 14; see also Isaiah 1: 18). They do not depend on their works for salvation, but they cry, “Salvation to our God” and “unto the Lamb” (Revelation 7:10).
4. Though they have “come out of great tribulation,” they will not hunger or thirst any more (Revelation 7: 14, 16). Neither shall they know sorrow anymore, for “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 7: 14, 16-17). Here is tremendous hope for us now. Some day soon life is going to be different. Pain, sorrow, sickness, mourning, heartache and death were never in God's plan for us. And soon, very soon, all things will be new. This is the closing message of Revelation chapter 7.

Consider these words of counsel as we close:

“We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed.”¹

“If ideas are presented that differ in some points from our former doctrines, we must not condemn them without diligent search of the Bible to see if they are true.”²

“The history of the Reformation teaches us that the church of Christ is never to come to a standstill and cease reforming. God stands at the head, saying to them as He did to Moses, ‘Go forward.’ ‘Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward.’ God’s work is onward; step-by step His people advance onward through conflict and trial to final victory. The history of the church teaches us that God’s people are not to be stereotyped in their theories of faith, but to be prepared for new light, for opening truth revealed in His Word.”³

God uses His Word and His messenger to feed our minds, and, He employs His still, small voice to order our steps. And soon *our* hearing will be seeing. The voice of the archangel and the trump of God call the dead to life and we will not just hear the voice of Jesus but we will behold Christ coming in the clouds. As we stand on that sea of glass with disciples and prophets and martyrs long-passed, the question of who will compose the 144,000 will be a distant memory. The One who gave His life to bring us home will gather His beloved from the earth and the grave, “and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10: 16, NKJV). Each saint from the beginning of time will be welcomed into the home of the redeemed. A home not made by hands. A home with the One who said, “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (verse 28, NKJV). Dear friend, I look forward to seeing you there, and rejoicing in God’s undying love forever! Amen.

1 *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 37

2 *Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1890

3 *Christ Triumphant*, p. 317

Appendix

Appendix I

- A bank issued a credit card to a tree. True
- NASA scientists discover a lost day in time. Fiction
- U.S. law specifies that merchants do not have to accept more than 100 pennies in payment. Fiction
- By proclamation, George Bush made June 10 Jesus Day in Texas. True
- Three people died of suffocation after sealing their home with plastic sheeting and duct tape. True
- Flowers and plants are harmful in a hospital room because they use oxygen the patient needs. Fiction
- The winning numbers in a New York state lottery drawing on September 11, 2002 were 9-1-1. True
- Workers who died while building Hoover Dam were entombed in the dam itself. Fiction
- Some German states have banned Red Bull's 'Simply Cola' drink for containing trace amounts of cocaine. True
- German chocolate cake originally came from Germany. Fiction

Appendix II

The Sealing Time

“I saw that Satan was at work in these ways to distract, deceive, and draw away God’s people, just now in this sealing time. . . . Satan was trying his every art to hold them where they were, until the sealing was past, until the covering was drawn over God’s people, and they left without a shelter from the burning wrath of God, in the seven last plagues. God has begun to draw this covering over His people, and it will soon be drawn over all who are to have a shelter in the day of slaughter” (*Early Writings*, p. 44).

“The sealing time is very short, and soon will be over. Now is the time, while the four angels are holding the four winds, to make our calling and election sure” (*Early Writings*, p. 58).

Appendix III

If you do a search in the SOP you will find approximately 132 references for the 144,000. Of these there are 21 unique references, meaning references that are different from others. The remaining references are repeats. For example, the statement, "the living saints, 144,000 in number..." is listed some 14 times. Yet it is the same statement repeated in 13 other places. None of the remaining 20 unique statements regarding the 144,000 describe them "in number."

144,000 references/repeats

1. "The living saints, 144,000 in number..." 14 times
2. "Here on the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square..." 14 times
3. "Only the 144,000 enter this place..." 14 times
4. "I saw there tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 were engraved..." 14 times
5. "They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth..." 11 times
6. "The 144,000 were all sealed and perfectly united..." 11 times
7. "The 144,000 shouted 'Alleluia!' as they recognized their friends..." 11 times
8. "If you are faithful, you, with the 144,000..." 9 times
9. "The 144,000 triumphed. Their faces were lighted up with the glory of God..." 7 times
10. "I saw that she was sealed and would come up at the voice of God and stand upon the earth, and would be with the 144,000..." 5 times
11. "It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand? This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question..." 4 times
12. "Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand..." 4 times
13. "Especially in the closing work for the church, in the sealing time of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who are to stand without fault..." 3 times
14. "Bro. Arnold held that the 1000 years of Revelation 20 were in the past; and that the 144,000..." 3 times
15. "One of the marked features in the representation of the 144,000 is that in their mouth was found no guile..." 2 times
16. "Then we heard the voice of God which shook the heavens and earth, and

- gave the 144,000 the day and hour of Jesus' coming..." 2 times
17. "John saw a Lamb on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 having His Father's name written in their foreheads. They bore the signet of heaven..." 2 times
18. "The people that are described as making up the one hundred and forty-four thousand, have the Father's name written in their foreheads..." 2 times
19. "Why were they [the 144,000] so specially singled out?..." 2 times
20. "I have no light on the subject [as to just who would constitute the 144,000]..." 1 time
21. "My [bro Chapman] idea in reference to ... my belief that the 144,000 will be Jews who will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah..." 1 time

Appendix IV

144,000 inclusive/exclusive, limited/exhaustive

Following is a breakdown of all the unique statements on the 144,000 with an explanation of their inclusive or exclusive, limited or exhaustive application. This list includes two statements from the Bible bringing the total number of unique statements from 21 to 23.

1. “And I heard the number of them which were sealed: *and there were* sealed an hundred *and* forty *and* four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel...” (Revelation 7:4)
This first Bible reference is inclusive/exhaustive. It describes the sealing of the 144,000. This sealing began in 1844 with the dead in Christ (Adam) and then moves to the living (final generation). All of God’s faithful people will be sealed and be part of the 12 tribes.
2. “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...” (Revelation 14:1)
This reference is also inclusive/exhaustive. It describes the 144,000 on Mount Zion, in heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23), and sealed. This is a picture of the redeemed of all ages who have the Father’s name in their foreheads (Revelation 22:4).
3. “The living saints, 144,000 in number...” Quoted 14 times
Exclusive/limited — this is a picture of all those who have died in the third angel’s message from 1844 to the end of time. The context of this statement is always pre-second resurrection (the first resurrection has not taken place yet, just the special resurrection). Therefore it is exclusive/limited in that it does not include all of the redeemed from Adam to 1844, but speaks exclusively of those who have died in the third angel’s message.
4. “Here on the sea of glass the 144,000 stood in a perfect square...”
Quoted 14 times
Inclusive/exhaustive — this describes all of the redeemed after the resurrection and ascension to heaven. Therefore it is inclusive of all the redeemed and not limited to a certain group but exhaustive in that it applies to all the saved.
5. “Only the 144,000 enter this place...” Quoted 14 times.
Inclusive/exhaustive — this describes all of the redeemed after the resurrection and ascension to heaven — the great multitude that serve God in the temple (Revelation 7:15).

6. “I saw there tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 were engraved...” Quoted 14 times
Inclusive/exhaustive — this describes all of the redeemed after the resurrection and ascension to heaven — the promise concerning the tables of stones in which new names were engraved, was made to the church of Pergamos and applies to all of God’s people who overcome (Revelation 2:17; *Manuscript Releases, vol. 1, p. 372; 1888 Materials, p. 779*).
7. “The 144,000 were all sealed and perfectly united...” Quoted 11 times.
Exclusive/limited — this scene describes all those who have died in the third angel’s message just after the special resurrection. The rest of the redeemed are not included.
8. “The 144,000 shouted ‘Alleluia!’ [Hallelujah] as they recognized their friends...”
Quoted 11 times.
Exclusive/limited — this scene describes all those who have died in the third angel’s message just after the special resurrection. The rest of the redeemed are not included.
9. “They sing the new song before the throne, that song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth...” Quoted 11 times.
Exclusive/limited and Inclusive/exhaustive — the context of this statement is speaking primarily of God’s people who were sealed when the judgment moves from the dead to the living. However, the main reference in *The Great Controversy* expands to include all of the redeemed.
10. “If you are faithful, you, with the 144,000...” Quoted 9 times.
Inclusive/exhaustive — Ellen White is told that if she is faithful she will be with the 144,000, i.e., if she is faithful, she will be with the saved. If she is not faithful, she will be lost. So the 144,000 in this statement represent all the faithful whom Ellen White will be with since she was faithful.
11. “The 144,000 triumphed. Their faces were lighted up with the glory of God ...”
Quoted 7 times.
Exclusive/limited — the time frame here is during the death decree before the special resurrection and includes only the final generation who are alive at that time.
12. “I saw that she was sealed and would come up at the voice of God and stand upon the earth, and would be with the 144,000...” Quoted 5 times.
Exclusive/limited — this statement focuses on the special resurrection and a sister who had died in the faith of the three angel’s message and would be numbered with the 144,000.
13. “It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will

not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand? This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question..." Quoted 4 times.

Inclusive/exhaustive — this statement helps us to understand that Ellen White did not want us to understand her statements on the 144,000 to be interpreted as identifying who the 144,000 were — i.e. the final generation only.

14. "Let us strive with all the power that God has given us to be among the hundred and forty-four thousand." Quoted 4 times.
Inclusive/exhaustive — Commentary on the great multitude of Revelation 7:9-17, this statement includes an admonition to do all we can to help others to gain heaven.
15. "Especially in the closing work for the church, in the sealing time of the one hundred and forty-four thousand who are to stand without fault..."
Quoted 3 times.
Inclusive/exhaustive — this statement speaks to the sealing time that includes the dead and then the living who have received the robes of Christ's righteousness.
16. "One of the marked features in the representation of the 144,000 is that in their mouth was found no guile..." Quoted twice .
Inclusive/exhaustive — quoting from the Psalms, the context of this statement reminds us of the spiritual character all will possess who accept the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
17. "Bro. Arnold held that the 1000 years of Revelation 20 were in the past; and that the 144,000..." Quoted 3 times.
Exclusive/limited — this statement is pointing out the error of identifying the 144,000 as literal Jews resurrected with Christ.
18. "Then we heard the voice of God which shook the heavens and earth, and gave the 144,000 the day and hour of Jesus' coming..." Quoted twice.
Exclusive/limited — this statement describes the time just before the resurrection when the final generation are delivered by the voice of God.
19. "John saw a Lamb on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 having His Father's name written in their foreheads. They bore the signet of heaven..."
Quoted twice.
Inclusive/exhaustive — this statement pictures all of the redeemed in heaven, encouraging us to put our trust full in God and follow the Lamb.
20. "The people that are described as making up the one hundred and forty-four thousand, have the Father's name written in their foreheads..." Quoted twice.
Inclusive/exhaustive — pointing to a vision of the redeemed who follow the Lamb and encouraging all to put away guile and foolish conversation.

21. "Why were they [the 144,000] so specially singled out?..." Quoted twice.
Exclusive/limited — this statement seems to be referring specifically to the final generation, but in principle it represents all the redeemed.
22. "I have no light on the subject [as to just who would constitute the 144,000]..."
Quoted 1 time.
Inclusive/exhaustive — this statement encourages us not to use the SOP to limit the 144,000 to a certain select group of people.
23. "My [bro Chapman] idea in reference to ... my belief that the 144,000 will be Jews who will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah..." Quoted 1 time.
Exclusive/limited — this statement is pointing out the error of identifying the 144,000 as literal Jews who acknowledge Christ in the last days.

Appendix V

John Loughborough/Uriah Smith Speak

The following appendix will be of great interest for those who would like to study further into the idea that only those living through the seven last plagues would make up the 144,000. This next section is an excerpt from a book on the sealing by John Loughborough, one of the few pioneers of the Adventist message still living when Ellen White passed away in 1915. The following is just an excerpt and the entire reading can be found in the Pioneer Library CD, *The Great Second Advent Movement*, J.N. Loughborough.

“The presentation of the following pages to our people, I deem to be in harmony with what is stated in ‘Testimonies for the Church,’ volume 7, page 288: ‘As those who have spent their lives in the service of God draw near the close of their earthly history, they will be impressed by the Holy Spirit to recount the experience they have had in connection with His work. The record of His wonderful dealings with His people,’ etc.

“Of the benefit to be derived from the bringing of such things to the attention of our people, we read from the pen of Sister E. G. White, in the South African Missionary of February 20, 1911, ‘We have nothing to fear from the future, except we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teachings in our past history.’

“In reference to the subject matter of this book—the sealed 144,000—I have been greatly moved by the Spirit of God to write and publish the facts as to how the sealing message was obtained — not only from the Bible, but by direct instruction in visions of Sister E. G. White; also as to how the message was received and taught by our ministers and people down to the year 1894, when the ‘new light’ theory found its advocate in one who afterwards apostatized from the faith, and died without seeing the fulfillment of his expectation that he would live to the end of time, and hence be one of the 144,000. His claim was that later testimonies of Sister White taught that all the 144,000 would be made up of those who had never died.

“When I found that some were teaching that ‘all of the 144,000 who will be sealed are now living,’ I thought it time that someone should speak, and show that it is not the manner of God’s prophets to make positive statements at one time, and afterwards teach entirely contrary to them. Such surely was not the course of Bible prophets. The whole of this ‘new light’ is produced by taking words out of their connection, and away from the things of which they are spoken, and giving them a general application, as you will see when we come to the analysis of the matter.

“I presented the substance of this tract in two discourses on the Stockton camp ground. Those who heard the discourses requested that it might be published, so

that they could have the reading of it. As the subject is one on which there is some controversy, I thought our publishers would not wish to print the matter in their papers, or take the responsibility of publishing it in any form. So I have decided to bring it out as a small book, to be obtained through the mail, from the author. I first thought I might get it into a five-cent pamphlet; but since revising for print, and enlarging, I find that five cents would not pay the expense of printing and postage. So I have placed the price at ten cents, with the promise to the Lord that all that may accrue from sales, after tithing, shall be divided between Eastern city work and foreign missions. May the Lord make the reading of the book a blessing, even as the searching out the copy for the same, in the past few months, has been to the author,

J. N. Loughborough.

Lodi, California, July 1, 1916.

Will any who have died in the faith since 1848, when that message was received, be reckoned with the 144,000?

“SOME persons, more especially since 1894, have claimed that none will be reckoned among the 144,000 but those who lived until the second coming of Christ; and that this must be so, for according to Rev.14:3-4, they are ‘redeemed from among men,’ and ‘from the earth.’ According to Daniel 12, there is a partial resurrection in the ‘time of trouble,’ just before Christ’s second coming. We read: ‘At that time shall Michael stand up, . . . And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.’ Surely those who awake to everlasting life will be alive and ‘among men,’ when Christ comes.

“If, in 1848-1850, persons were being sealed, we would naturally expect they would be of those wakened to everlasting life, and so be with the 144,000. Of this resurrection we read in *Early Writings, Spiritual Gifts*, old edition, page 145: ‘There was one clear place of settled glory, whence came the voice of God like many waters, shaking the heavens and the earth. There was a mighty earthquake. The graves were opened, and those who had died in faith under the third angel’s message, keeping the Sabbath, came forth from their dusty beds, glorified, to hear the covenant of peace that God was to make with those who had kept His law.’

“In *Spiritual Gifts*, pages 145, 146, we read: ‘As God spoke the day and the hour of Jesus’ coming, and delivered the everlasting covenant to His people, He spoke one sentence, and then paused, while the words were rolling through the earth. The Israel of God stood with their eyes fixed upwards, listening to the words as they came from the mouth of Jehovah and rolled through the earth like peals of loudest thunder. It was awfully solemn. At the end of every sentence the saints shouted, Glo-

ry! Hallelujah! Their countenances were lighted up with the glory of God, and they shone with glory as did the face of Moses when he came down from Sinai (glorified). The wicked could not look upon them for the glory. And when the never-ending blessing was pronounced on those who had honored God, in keeping His Sabbath holy, there was a mighty shout of victory over the beast and over his image.'

"Of the same we read in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 1, page 59: 'Soon we heard the voice of God like many waters, which gave us the day and hour of Jesus' coming. The living saints, 144,000 in number (remember that the resurrected Sabbath keepers are then among the living saints), knew and understood the voice, while the wicked thought it was thunder and an earthquake. When God spake the time, He poured upon us the Holy Spirit, and our faces began to light up and shine with the glory of God, as Moses' did when he came down from Mount Sinai.

"The 144,000 were all sealed and perfectly united. On their foreheads were the words 'God,' 'New Jerusalem,' and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name. At our happy, holy state the wicked were enraged, and would rush violently up to lay hands on us to thrust us into prison, when we would stretch forth the hand in the name of the Lord, and they would fall helpless to the ground.'

"If it be claimed that none will be numbered among the 144,000 but those who live until Christ's second coming, without tasting death, what about those Sabbath keepers who in 1848 to 1850 were being sealed? There are not a half dozen of those now alive who were then keeping the Sabbath. If they were then sealed, they will be among those resurrected to eternal life at the voice of God.

There are some things connected with the case of Sister White that have a bearing on the matter of the 144,000. She is now at rest. But as reported in her first vision, *Experience and Views*, is an account of what is to take place in the kingdom: 'Zion was just before us, and on the mount was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies. . . . As we were about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised His lovely voice and said, 'Only the 144,000 enter this place,' and we shouted, 'Alleluia.' It seems, however, that in this view of things to occur in the new earth, she entered that temple; for she said: 'This temple was supported by seven pillars, all of transparent gold, set with pearls most glorious. The wonderful things I there saw, I cannot describe. . . . I saw there tables of stone in which the names of the 144,000 were engraved in letters of gold. After we beheld the glory of the temple we went out, and Jesus left us, and went to the city.' From this we would surely conclude that in the new earth, Sister White would be one of the 144,000.*

"On page 33 of *Experience and Views*, old edition, she speaks of what the angel told her while she was viewing Saturn: 'I begged of my attending angel to let me remain in that place. I could not bear the thought of coming back to this dark world

again. Then the angel said, 'You must go back, and if you are faithful, you, with the 144,000, shall have the privilege of visiting all the worlds and viewing the handiwork of God.' That surely looks like some of the 144,000 being of those who will have been raised from the dead.

"Notwithstanding these facts in the testimonies presented, it is still urged by some, that what is said in *Great Controversy*, page 649, shows that the 144,000 will be composed wholly of those who have never died. Let us see what is said, and the condition under which the said statement occurs. Here it is: 'These having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as 'the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.' (The Sabbath keepers resurrected to eternal life will surely be among the living at Christ's second coming.) 'These are they which came out of great tribulation;' they have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.' That trouble of the nations will be under the sixth plague; and it is at that time, according to Dan.12: 1, that the partial resurrection will take place, bringing up the sealed Sabbath keepers. This will be when the seventh plague is yet to come. Of the situation at that time, we read in *Experience and Views*, page 29: 'These plagues enrage the wicked against the righteous; they thought that we had brought the judgments of God upon them, and that if they could rid the earth of us, the plagues would then be stayed. A decree went forth to slay the saints, which caused them to cry day and night for deliverance. This was the time of Jacob's trouble. Then all the saints cried out with anguish of spirit, and were delivered by the voice of God. The 144,000 triumphed. Their faces were lighted up with the glory of God.' We have already seen that this glorification takes place with the resurrected Sabbath keepers, as well as those who had not died, when God delivers the everlasting covenant on those who had honored Him by keeping His Sabbath.

"Of this scene we read in *Spiritual Gifts*, page 143: 'I saw a writing, copies of which were scattered in different parts of the land, giving orders that unless the saints should yield their peculiar faith, give up the Sabbath and observe the first day of the week, the people were at liberty, after a certain time, to put them to death. . . . Satan wished to have the privilege of destroying the saints of the Most High; but Jesus bade His angels watch over them. God would be honored by making a covenant with those who had kept His law, in the sight of the heathen round about them; and Jesus would be honored by translating, without their seeing death, the faithful, waiting ones who had so long expected Him.' Keeping the law 'in the sight of the heathen' was in the sight of these inquisitors who had the decree to put them to death, and not to death in an ordinary sense, under calm conditions.

"It is from this testimony, 'translating, without seeing death,' that the claim has been made that none will be among the sealed 144,000 but those who live until Christ's actual second coming. We see that the death they are saved from is the

death permitted by the 'papers circulated.' Bear in mind that the resurrected Sabbath keepers are included among the covenantees. So they are to be translated at Christ's coming, without suffering the threatened death. By this decree, they are brought into 'the time of Jacob's trouble.' His trouble was the news that Esau was coming with four hundred armed men. Unless the Lord should aid him, it looked like death to him and his whole family.

"There is another testimony from *Great Controversy*, page 649, used by those who claim that none who have died in the message will be among the 144,000: 'They have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God's judgments. But they have been delivered, for they have 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' . . . They have seen the earth wasted with famine and pestilence, the sun having power to scorch men with great heat, and they themselves have endured suffering, hunger, and thirst.' This is what is said of the whole of 144,000, and in part will be true of the resurrected Sabbath keepers; for they endure the time of Jacob's trouble. They are raised under the sixth plague, and see the final outpouring of God's judgments under the seventh plague, and are among those delivered from this decree of death.

"In *Spiritual Gifts*, pages 146, 147, we read still further of what will take place with the living resurrected and living Sabbath keepers, after the voice of God declaring the everlasting covenant, when the wicked were enraged against them: 'Soon appeared the great white cloud, upon which sat the Son of man. When it first appeared in the distance, this cloud looked very small. The angel said that it was the sign of the Son of man. As it drew nearer the earth, we could behold the excellent glory and majesty of Jesus as He rode forth to conquer. . . . His countenance was as bright as the noonday sun, His eyes were as a flame of fire, and His feet had the appearance of fine brass. His voice sounded like many musical instruments. The earth trembled before Him, the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places... Those who a short time before would have destroyed God's faithful children from the earth, now witness the glory of God which rested upon them. And amid all their terror they heard the voices of the saints in joyful strains, saying, 'Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us.' The earth mightily shook as the voice of the Son of God called forth the sleeping saints. They responded to the call, and came forth clothed with glorious immortality, crying, Victory, victory, over death and the grave! O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Then the living saints and the resurrected ones raised their voices in a long, transporting shout of victory. Those bodies that had gone down into the grave bearing the marks of disease and death, came up in immortal health and vigor. The living saints are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up with the resurrected ones, and

together they meet their Lord in the air. Oh, what a glorious meeting! Friends whom death had separated, were united, never more to part.'

"If there is still a doubt of the resurrected Sabbath keepers' being numbered with the 144,000, consider the following from Sister White's words in 1909. At the general Conference in 1909, Elder Irwin had a stenographer accompany him in a call upon Sister White. He wished to ask her some questions, and have an exact copy of the words of the questions, and the exact words of the replies. Among other questions was this one: 'Will those who have died in the message be among the 144,000?' In reply, Sister White said: 'Oh, yes, those who have died in the faith will be among the 144,000. I am clear on that matter.' These were the exact words of question and answer, as Brother Irwin permitted me to copy from his stenographer's report."

*** The use of 'we,' 'us,' and 'our' includes Sister White.**

Uriah Smith

"A Blessing Promised. John is commanded by a voice from heaven to write, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth;' and the response of the Spirit is, 'Yea, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.' 'From henceforth' must signify from some particular point of time. What point? - Evidently from the commencement of the message in connection with which this is spoken. But why are those who die after this point of time blessed? There must be some special reason for pronouncing this benediction upon them. Is it not because they escape the time of fearful peril which the saints are to encounter as they close their pilgrimage? And while they are thus blessed in common with all the righteous dead, they have an advantage over them in being, doubtless, that company spoken of in Dan. 12:2, who are raised to everlasting life at the standing up of Michael. Thus, escaping the perils through which the rest of 144,000 pass, they rise, and share with them in their final triumph here, and occupy with them their pre-eminent place in the kingdom. 1 In this way, we understand, their works follow them: these works are held in remembrance to be rewarded at the judgment; and the persons receive the same recompense that they would have had, had they lived and faithfully endured all the perils of the time of trouble"

"Footnote — Those who die after having become identified with the third angel's message, are evidently numbered as a part of the 144,000; for this message is the same as the sealing message of Revelation 7, and by that message only 144,000 were sealed. But there are many who have had their entire religious experience under this message, but have fallen in death. They die in the Lord, and hence are counted as sealed; for they will be saved. But the message results in the sealing of

only 144,000; therefore these must be included in that number. Being raised in the special resurrection (Dan. 12:2; Rev. 1:7) which occurs when the voice of God is uttered from the temple, at the beginning of the seventh and last plague (Rev. 16:17; Joel 3:16; Heb. 12:26), they pass through the period of that plague, and hence may be said to come "out of great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14), and being raised from the grave only to mortal life, they take their stand with believers who have not died, and with them receive immortality at the last trump (1 Cor. 15:52), being then, with the others, changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Thus, though they have passed through the grave, it can be said of them at last, that they are "redeemed from among men" (Rev. 14:4), that is, from among the living; for the coming of Christ finds them among the living, waiting for the change to immortality, like those who have not died, and as if they themselves had never died."

(Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation*, pp. 677, 688, 1897 edition).