

The 144,000 and God's Special Mark



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 2

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Revelation 7:1–3, 4–8, 9–14; Revelation 14:1–5; 2 Peter 3:14.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘These are the ones [God’s people] who came out of the time of much trouble. They have washed their clothes [a word picture for someone’s thoughts, feelings, and actions] and have made them white [free from sin] in the blood of the Lamb [Jesus] (Revelation 7:14, NlrV).

LAST WEEK, we saw what happened when Jesus started to open the seven locks on the closed book. The open locks warn us that God will bless or punish Christians for their choices. If we are loyal to God and obey Him, God will bless us. But if we do not obey God, He will punish us. The locks, #1–4, that Jesus opened show us that God punishes His people to wake them up and to help them win the war against evil. But God’s followers suffer because they live on earth with people who hate God. When Jesus opens the 6th lock, we see that God is ready to punish everyone who hurt His people.

John puts Revelation chapter 7 between Jesus’ opening the 6th and 7th locks. The 6th lock shows us the time before Jesus’ Second Coming. At that time, God will judge the evil people living on the earth. Revelation 7 shows us a special group of God’s people, the 144,000, who are alive on the earth when Jesus comes back. These people are “sealed.” Sealed means that God put a special mark, or proof, of His power on the 144,000 believers to show everyone they are His people. Revelation 14:1–5 tell us about this special group of 144,000 people to help us know who they are.



If we are loyal to God and obey Him, God will bless us.

THE ANGELS WHO HOLD BACK THE WINDS (Revelation 7:1–3)

What does John see in Revelation 7:1–3? How long will the angels stop the winds from blowing? What will happen when Jesus finishes His work as our Judge?

In the Old Testament, wind is a word picture for God's power to judge evil people and punish them (Jeremiah 23:19, 20; Daniel 7:2). In Revelation, John sees "four angels . . . holding the four winds of the earth. They were stopping the wind from blowing" (Revelation 7:1, ERV). Ellen G. White tells us what happens to the winds when Jesus finishes His work as our Judge: "God's angels stop holding the awful winds. These four winds are word pictures for the bad feelings in human hearts that make people want to fight and kill each other. When the angels stop holding the winds, it means the angels no longer try to stop people from doing evil. Then everyone on earth will experience worse trouble than the war that destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70."—*The Great [worldwide] Controversy [war between God and Satan]*, page 614, adapted. Right before Jesus comes back, God's angels will pour His anger on the earth. But God will wait until His people are sealed first. "Sealed" means that God puts a special mark, or proof, of His power, on His people that only He can see.

What else does "sealed" mean? In Bible times, people put a seal on something to show they owned it. So, when the New Testament talks about God's seal, it is a word picture that helps us understand an important truth: " 'The Lord knows who his own people are' " (2 Timothy 2:19, NIV). God "writes" His name on His people's hearts when He pours His Spirit on them (Ephesians 1:13, 14; Ephesians 4:30). That is what God's seal means. In the end time, God will put a seal on His people above their eyes to show that they obey His law (Revelation 14:1, 12). God's seal is not a real mark. It is a word picture that shows how God's people "grow more loyal to the truth in their minds and hearts so that nothing will change them."—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events [happenings]*, page 220, adapted.

At different times in history, God tested His people's loyalty. In the Old Testament, God's people showed their loyalty to God by keeping the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12–17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20). The Sabbath also will be the test at the end of time that shows who is loyal to God (Revelation 12:17; Revelation 14:12). God's seal also shows us that God will protect His people from the Seven Last Troubles.



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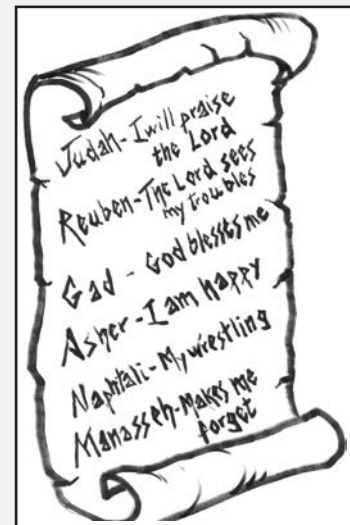
**THE NUMBER OF GOD’S END-TIME PEOPLE
(Revelation 7:4–8)**

In Revelation 7:4–8, John tells us the number of God’s people who are sealed. You will remember that “sealed” means that God pours His Holy Spirit on His people to show that His people belong to Him. How many sealed people does John see? What does that number mean?

The angel announces the number of God’s people who are sealed. When that happens, we know that God has finished His work of putting His seal on His people above their eyes. John learns that there are 144,000 people with God’s seal. They come from the 12 family groups of Israel. Does that mean 144,000 is an actual number? No. The number 144,000 is made up of 12 x 12 x 1,000. 12 is a symbol for God’s people. There were 12 family groups in Israel. Also, Jesus’ 12 followers built up His church. So, we see the number 144,000 is a word picture, not a real number. The number 144,000 means **all** of God’s people alive on the earth when Jesus comes back at His Second Coming (Romans 11:26; 1 Corinthians 15:51–53).

The 12 family groups in Revelation 7 are not the same family groups of Israel in the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, the Assyrians took 10 family groups from Israel into slavery (2 Kings 17:6–23). Then these 10 groups married people from other groups and became part of them. So, these 10 family groups are not part of the Jews today.

Also, look at the list of the 12 family groups in Revelation 7. It is different from any other list of the 12 family groups in the Bible (see Numbers 1:5–15; Ezekiel 48:1–29). Do you see that Judah is the first name on the list, not Reuben? Do you also see that the family groups of Dan and Ephraim are not on the list? But the list includes the family groups of Joseph and Levi instead of Dan and Ephraim. John did not put Ephraim on his list because Ephraim’s family group worshiped false gods (Hosea 4:17). Dan’s family group also worshiped false gods. So, that may be also the reason Dan is not on John’s list (see 1 Kings 12:29, 30). What do all of these things tell us? They tell us that family-group names in Revelation 7 have a special meaning that shows us the story of the Good News about Jesus (see today’s pictures). That is why the list does not match exactly what happened in history. The names show us all of God’s end-time people alive on the earth before Jesus comes back. These people will not die before they go to heaven.



The names of the 12 family groups in Revelation 7 have a special meaning. Their names tell us the story of the Good News about Jesus: “I will praise the Lord. He sees my troubles and blesses me. I am happy because my wrestling with God makes me forget [my sadness]. God hears me and joins Himself to me. He bought me a home. God will give to me the Son [Jesus] of His right hand.”—Doug Batchelor’s sermon: “The Battle of Armageddon, (Part 2),” adapted.

THE BIG CROWD THAT NO ONE CAN COUNT (Revelation 7:9, 10)

In Revelation 7:9, 10, John sees a large group of God’s people. How does John describe them?

John sees “a large crowd of people. There were so many people that no one could count them all” (Revelation 7:9, ERV). John says that this crowd came “ ‘out of the time of terrible [awful] suffering’ ” (Revelation 7:14, NIV). The Bible also names this time the “ ‘time of much trouble’ ” (NLV). This group of people “ ‘washed their clothes and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb’ ” (Revelation 7:14, NLV). They are a special group. Yes, they suffered in life and had some awful experiences. But they stayed loyal to Jesus and obeyed Him. The white clothes they wear are a word picture for their loyalty to God. The white clothes also show us that this group of people “wear,” or put on, Jesus’ holy life the same as clothes.

The Bible often uses the words “terrible [awful] suffering” to talk about the things that believers suffer for their faith (Exodus 4:31; Psalm 9:9; Matthew 24:9; John 16:33; Romans 5:3). These verses help us understand that the large crowd that John sees shows us all the saved people who ever lived on the earth, from the time of Adam until the end of time. The Bible shows that this group of saved believers suffered in life for their faith. Evil people hurt this special group because they obeyed God’s truth.

“The people who stand closest to God’s throne worked hard in the past for Satan. But God saved them. These people were the same as branches that God pulled out of a fire. After God saved them, they followed their Savior very closely. They took special interest in God’s cause on earth, and they loved Him very deeply. Next to this group is a second group. They learned how to be perfect Christians while they lived with people who lied and did not obey God. This group honored the law of God when other fake ‘Christians’ said God’s law had no power in their lives. This second group also includes the millions of God’s followers who died for their faith. After this group, we see the large crowd of God’s people that John tells us about in Revelation 7:9. Their fight is over. The palm branches in their hands are a word picture for their victory. Their white robes are a sign of Jesus’ perfect obedience, which now belongs to them.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great [worldwide] Controversy [war between God and Satan]*, page 665, adapted.



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THE PEOPLE WHO FOLLOW THE LAMB (Revelation 14:1–5)

Revelation 14:1–5 tell us three important things about the special group of 144,000 people who belong to God. What are these three things? How do these three things match the picture of God’s end-time people that we read about in Revelation 14:12?

Revelation 14:4, 5 say that the 144,000 believers obey God and have the faith of Jesus (read also Revelation 14:12). Yes, Satan pours his anger on this group during the last days of earth’s history. But they stay loyal to God.

What does Revelation 14:4 mean when it says that the 144,000 did not sin with women? Read Revelation 17:5 for a hint. What does the Bible mean when it says that “these 144,000 were saved from among [out of] the people of the earth? They are the first people to be offered to God and the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4, ICB)?

Sex sins are a word picture in Revelation for people who are not loyal to God. Revelation 17:5 talks about Babylon and her “daughters.” Babylon and her daughters are word pictures for the churches that turn away from Bible truth. In the end time, almost everyone on earth will sin against God with Babylon and her daughters (Revelation 18:3). Only the 144,000 believers will stay loyal to Jesus. They will not join with Babylon or follow false religions. “They follow the Lamb every place he goes” (Revelation 14:4, ICB).

Why are the 144,000 special? They are the same as the best oil, wine, and grain that Israel gave to God from their crops (Numbers 18:12). But the 144,000 are not special because God saves them in a different way from the way He saves His other people. No. The 144,000 are special because they are alive on the earth when Jesus comes back. The 144,000 see Jesus come in the clouds. So, that is why John says, “These 144,000 were saved from . . . the people of the earth. They are the first people to be offered to God and the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4, ICB).

The Bible uses sex sins as a word picture to show us what it means to turn away from God. What are ways we can turn away from God without knowing it? Why do we lie to ourselves if we think that this danger is not real?



The 144,000 saints are special because they are alive on the earth when Jesus comes back.

THE GOD WHO SAVES US AND HIS LAMB (Revelation 14:5)

Read Revelation 14:5 with 2 Peter 3:14 and Jude 24, 25. Revelation says God’s end-time people will be “without [with no] blame” (Revelation 14:5, NlrV). That means God’s people will be free from sin. How is that possible?

John tells us that the 144,000 “told no lies. They are without [with no] blame” (Revelation 14:5, NlrV). The lies that John talks about here are the lies that Satan uses to trick people in the end time (Revelation 13:14). Satan will trick most of the people on the earth into believing his lies. But God’s end-time people will love and accept the truth, and God will save them (2 Thessalonians 2:10, 11).

The words “without blame” come from the Greek word “amōmos [ä’-mō-mos]” which means “not guilty.” Amōmos shows us that the 144,000 are loyal to Jesus and obey Him. In the Old Testament, Abraham (Genesis 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1) were innocent. God made them right with Him. He made them holy. Two thousand years ago, Paul told all Christians also to be holy (Ephesians 5:27; Philippians 2:15).



The 144,000 believers wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14).

Paul talks about an important truth in Romans 3:19–24. Why must we always remember this important truth?

In the closing days of earth’s history, the 144,000 will show Jesus’ holy life and His love in a powerful way. The lives of God’s people will not show their own holy works or good behavior. Their lives will show what Jesus has done for them (read Ephesians 2:8–10). The 144,000 believers wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). Because they do these things, God says that they are “clean and free from sin” (2 Peter 3:14, NLV).

“We need to let God remove from our hearts any love for the things on this earth. We must let God remove the dirt from our lives until we look the same as our Savior. Then we will have God’s own heart and mind. . . .

“We must fight a war in this life against sin. When God ends that war . . . then it will be safe for us to say that we are saved and free from all sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, pages 355, 356, adapted. As we wait for Jesus, we must live holy lives. How do we do that and not start to think that we are perfect on our own?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Ellen G. White, “Sinlessness [clean and free from sin] and Salvation [God’s plan to save sinners],” pages 353–357, in *Selected Messages*, book 3.

Who are the 144,000? Many people today argue about the answer to this question. What seems clear in Revelation is that the 144,000 are the last group of God’s people who live in the last days of this earth’s history. We know that the 144,000 will experience the time of trouble (read Psalm 91:7–16; Revelation 7:15–17). God will test the loyalty of the 144,000 in a way that is different from the way He tested other people before.

But God does not tell us who will be in that group. That is one of the secrets that God has not told us (Deuteronomy 29:29). Only the future will show us who will be a part of this group of saved people. Ellen G. White gives us a strong warning about not trying to find out things that God does not want us to know:

“Jesus says that there will be people in the church who will teach false ideas and made-up stories as truth. God gave His people important truths to make their minds strong and holy. We should keep these truths in the treasure houses of our minds. When men are too curious and want to know things that they do not need to know, God does not lead them. It is not God’s plan for His people to teach things that are not in the Bible. It is not God’s plan for His people to get into arguments with each other over questions that will not help their spiritual growth. One example is the question: Who will be part of the 144,000? God’s chosen people will clearly know the answer to this question very soon.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 174, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Think about these words: “With all the power that God gave us, let us work hard to be part of the 144,000.”—Ellen G. White *Comments, The SDA Bible Commentary [ideas]*, volume 7, page 970, adapted. How can you live in a way so that you can be part of the 144,000 today? How does working hard to be part of the 144,000 change the way you live and all the decisions you make?
- 2 What is the difference between just knowing about Jesus and really knowing who He is? If someone asks you, “Who is Jesus?” what will your answer be? Why?



The 144,000 will experience the time of trouble (Revelation 7:15–17).