

THEME
THE 144,000

COURSE
REVELATION

NORTHEAST SCHOOL OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

MAY 1978

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I. INTRODUCTION

Who are the 144,000 mentioned in chapters 7 and 14 of Revelation? This question plagues many people today and perhaps the most alarming is the misconceptions of the millinelist and pre-millinelist minded.

Without elaborating the point to refute the varied positions, I will present in this paper a consolidation of a few works done by brethren I believe present the proper scriptural interpretation.

II. THE SYMBOLISM OF NUMBERS IN REVELATION

"The inner significance of numbers was a kind of device which always had fascination for the Oriental mind. In that early day, when language was primitive and vocabulary meager, one Hebrew word sometimes compelled to do duty for a score of diverse meanings. Under such conditions men came naturally to use numbers as we use words. They were symbols of moral or spiritual truth. A certain number would suggest a definite concept.

Man saw a single object and came to associate with the number '1' the idea of unity or independent existence. It stood for that which was unique and alone. This number does not appear symbolically in the book of Revelation.

When man went out to hunt the wild animal or fight against a foe he found strength and courage in companionship. Two were far stronger and much more effective than one. Thus the number '2' came to stand for strength, for confirmation, for redoubled courage and energy. In the book of Revelation the truth is confirmed by two witnesses who are slain and rise again. Two beasts present a formidable foe.

Because man found love in the home - father, mother and filial - the number '3' came to be the number for perfection. The number three came to carry the thought of the divine.

To man the world was a flat surface with four boundaries. There were four winds. In the town in which he lived he was surrounded by a wall with four sides. Thus, when he thought of the world he thought of four. Four becomes the cosmic number. In Revelation four living creatures, four horsemen. The world in which men lived and worked and died was conveniently symbolized by '4'.

Next man turned to study himself. Perhaps our decimal system arose from the intensive study by a man of his own fingers and toes. A perfect man was one who had all his members intact. So the number '5' doubled to '10' came to stand for human completeness. In Revelation, 10 horns also 70 and 1000 - ultimate completeness - completeness raised to the nth degree.

Man took the perfect world number 4 and added to it the perfect divine number 3 and obtained 7, the most sacred number to the Hebrews. Most prevalent number in the Apocalypse.

Then $4 \times 3 = 12$. In Hebrew religious thought it was the symbol of organized religion in the world.

Then 7 cut in half becomes $3\frac{1}{2}$ which came to express the incompleteness, that which was imperfect. It symbolized restless longings not yet fulfilled, aspirations unrealized. Always $3\frac{1}{2}$ or its equivalents stood for the indefinite, the incomplete, the dissatisfied; but in it all was the hope and patient waiting for a better day when truth would be delivered from the scaffold and placed on the throne usurped by wrong.

One last number must be treated in our study of symbolism. To the Hebrew '6' had sinister symbolism. Six was the charge that met defeat with success just in its grasp. It had the ability to be great but failed to measure up. It is important to keep this in mind when we come to the number '666' in Revelation.

From this observation of the symbolic use of numbers, it follows that the real numbers which occur in the book of Revelation, cannot be understood with real numerical value, not even as round numbers. They are purely symbolic and we must discard our mathematical ideas and seek to discover their symbolic significance. A large part of the unscriptural dispensationalism of the past and present is based upon a false view of the value of the numbers employed by the writer."¹

¹Hallelujah Anyway, Richard Rogers. (World Mission Publishing Co., Lubbock, Texas, 1966), pp. 9-10.

III. THE 144,000 OF REVELATION 7:1-17

A. THE SIGN OF JUDGMENT - 7:1

1. Man's world, the earth - the four angels at the four corners of the earth
2. Judgment - the four winds
 - a. Jer. 49:34-36 - destruction of Elam
 - b. Jer. 51:1-2 - a destroying wind on Babylon
 - c. Dan. 7:2, 10 - announcement of judgment
3. The four angels are holding back the wind of judgment for a purpose

B. THE SEALED SERVANTS OF GOD - 7:2-8

1. Fifth angel - 2a
 - a. From the rising of the sun - the source of light
 - b. Having the seal of the living God
 - 1) Not dead but alive
 - 2) Ezek. 9:1-6 - seal meant safety in time of trouble
 - 3) Three-fold sense of sealing
 - a) To protect against tampering (Matt. 27:66; Rev. 5:1)
 - b) Shows ownership and destination (2 Tim. 2:19)
 - c) Certifies genuineness (Esther 3:12)
2. The four angels - 2b
 - a. Granted to execute judgment
 - b. Instructed by fifth angel
3. The bond-servants - 3
 - a. The holding off of judgment until sealed
 - b. The ownership of God
 - c. Certifies - on their foreheads

4. The sealed - 4
 - a. Heard the number sealed
 - b. Sealed - protection, ownership
 - c. The source - from every tribe of the sons of Israel
 - d. The number - 144,000

5. The breakdown of the 144,000 sealed - 5-8
 - a. From tribe of Judah - 12,000
 - b. From tribe of Reuben - 12,000
 - c. From tribe of Gad - 12, 000
 - d. From tribe of Asher - 12,000
 - e. From tribe of Naphtali - 12,000
 - f. From tribe of Manasseh - 12,000
 - g. From tribe of Simeon - 12,000
 - h. From tribe of Levi - 12,000
 - i. From tribe of Issachar -12,000
 - j. From tribe of Zebulun - 12,000
 - k. From tribe of Joseph - 12,000
 - l. From tribe of Benjamin - 12,000

Note: It is important to remember that numerical designations are not literal but represent something to the Hebrew mind. John signified by numbers that which he wanted to represent.

12 is the number that is symbolic of God operating in the world, organized religion.

1,000 is symbolic of the most complete number, the total amount, completeness. Therefore the 12 tribes of Israel represent God's chosen, and has within each representation

the number of God operating in the world to the completeness.
12 tribes X 12 God operating X 1000 completeness = 144,000
144,000 represents the redeemed, God's servants. John used
the 12 for the symbol to show all the redeemed of every group.

C. THE SEALED SERVANTS SIGN OF SURVIVAL - 7:9-17

1. Following what was heard - cf v4 - 9a
2. I looked - "saw" - 9b
 - a. A great multitude
 - b. No one could count
 - c. From every nation - political persuasion
 - d. From all tribes - national origin
Peoples - social groups
Tongues - ethnic groups
3. Their position - 9c
 - a. Standing
 - 1) Before the throne - cf v15
 - 2) Before the Lamb
 - b. Appearance
 - 1) Clothed in white robes - victory and purity
 - 2) Palm branches in their hands - salvation - cf Jn. 12:13
4. Their praise = 10
 - a. They cry out
 - 1) Salvation to our God - provides
 - 2) Sits on the throne - Rules
 - 3) To the Lamb - means
 - b. Salvation's cry because of deliverance

5. The Company - 11-12

- a. Joined into praise - 11
- b. Resolved to God's judgment that God knows best - 12

6. Questions asked concerning - 13

- a. Those clothed in white robes
- b. From where have they come

7. God gives the answer - 14-17

Note: John does not guess to the answer, but relies upon God's revelation: "My Lord you know"

a. The overcomers - the faithful - 14

1) Out of the great tribulation

- a) Great tribulation - cf 1:9
- b) Come out

(1) Present active indicative

(2) Coming out right now - a thing of the moment

(3) Literally dying every day - cf Phil. 1:21-23;

2 Cor. 5:5-8

2) Have been washed in the blood of the Lamb

- a) Past tense
- b) They can stand in the presence of Christ because they have no sin

b. Before the throne in the temple (descriptive of the church) -15

1) Before the throne - perfect communion

2) Serving - perfect service

3) In His temple - perfect protection

c. No more economic discrimination - 16

1) Hunger and thirst no more - perfect provision

2) If suffer, do it as a christian - cf I Pet. 4:16

d. The church on earth - 17

- 1) Wailing and weeping because of stress every day
- 2) God will wipe every tear away - won't even be possible to cry
 - a) Waters of life - perfect life
 - b) No tears - perfect joy

D. THE 144,000 ARE

1. The sealed ones of God
2. The servants of the living God
3. The persecuted ones, the church (called-out ones) of God
4. The multitude coming out of the tribulation which is on the earth where the 144,000 are is marked sealed for salvation

IV. THE 144,000 OF REVELATION 14:1-5

A. This chapter presents the forces of righteousness ready to vindicate the christian cause. It is a vision of encouragement.

B. The Vision of the 144,000

1. Their place - 1a

a. Mt. Zion - stands for the Church of God

1) In history - its origin

- a) 2 Sam. 5:6-10
- b) 2 Sam. 6:12-13
- c) I Kings 8:1

2) Symbolic of Jerusalem

- a) Ps. 2:5-6
- b) Ps. 15:1
- c) Ps. 48:1-2
- d) Ps. 132:13-14

- 3) Used in prophecy - Jerusalem envisioning the church
 - a) Zech. 8:1-3
 - b) Dan. 2:34-35
 - c) Isa. 2:2-4
 - d) Heb. 12:22-23
 - 4) God in Zion
 - a) Ps. 110:1-2
 - b) Heb. 12:22-23
 - c) I Cor. 3:16
 - d) Eph. 2:21-22
- b. Mt. Zion is the location of God
2. THEIR NAME - 1b
 - a. Not a mark but a name, the name of God
 - b. cf Rev. 3:12; Acts 4:12 - the 144,000 have the very name promised to the faithful at the church at Philadelphia
 3. Their song and position - 2-3
 - a. They sing a new song - cf Rev. 5:9-10
 - b. They are purchased out of the earth - cf Rev. 2:17 - the redeemed ones
 4. Their description - 4-5
 - a. Free from spiritual impurities
 - 1) They are men virgins - 4
 - a) 2 Cor. 11:2 - the church presented as a pure virgin - cf Rev. 3:14
 - b) Eph. 5:27 - Christ is the Saviour of the Body, a holy perfect body
 - c) Rev. 2:18 - the problems of the defiled churches

- 2) They are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever it goes
 - a) John 10:22f - Jesus as the great shepherd. His Sheep follow Him. They have double security in the Shepherd and Father
 - b) John 21:19ff - Peter told he would die a violent death that would glorify God
 - c) I Pet. 5:1 - Peter the elder, witness of Christ's death and sufferings and partaker in the glory revealed
 - d) I Pet. 2:19ff - bearing up
- 3) They are the first-fruits of God and the Lamb
 - a) Heb. 12:22-23 - the church is the first-born, the first in rank and superiority
 - b) James 1:18 - the first fruits are brethren
- 4) They are without blemish - undefiled
 - a) Eph. 5:27 - the church, holy and blameless
 - b) Col. 1:21-23 - the saints
 - (1) Set apart
 - (2) Consecrated
 - (3) Dedicated
 - (4) Cleansed
- b. They are the sealed of God - the seal shows ownership.
 - 1) Eph. 1:11-14;-4:30 - the Holy Spirit is our seal
 - 2) 2 Cor. 1:21-22 - God does the sealing
 - 3) 2 Tim. 2:19 - this is not a literal mark, but is an actual one

5. The "first fruits"

- a. James 1:18 - Those that belong to God
- b. Purchased from among men - idea of separation
 - 1) Separation for God - cf 14:14-16
 - 2) Separated for punishment - cf 14:17-20
 - 3) Old Testament references (all the first fruits given to God)
 - a) Ex. 23:19
 - b) Num. 15:20
 - c) Num. 18:20
 - d) Deut. 26:2
 - e) Neh. 10:35, 37
 - 4) All the redeemed, the full number of the elect, are included in these first-fruits
 - 5) Whatever does not belong to these first-fruits is not for the Lord and is not of the elect
 - 6) The 144,000 are the first-fruits purchased away from men, the redeemed of God

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