

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

On December 17, 2012, we received the following comment and inquiry:

“Jehovah’s Witnesses firmly believe that the number of those who will go to heaven is limited to 144,000. Yet the promise made to Abraham was that his seed would become "like the grains of sand that are on the seashore." This is interpreted as being an unknown number (at that time), yet, wherever the expression is used in the Hebrew Scriptures it refers to a very large number. Please see Joshua 11:4; Judges 7:12; 1 Samuel 13:5; 1 Kings 4:20; Job 29:18; Psalm 139:18; Isaiah 10:22. Could it be that the number 144,000 is symbolic of a much greater number as are most of the numbers in the book of Revelation?”

To the author, thank you for your email. We find your reasoning, asserting that the 144,000 referred to at *Revelation 7:4* and *Revelation 14:1-5* is **not** literal, is very interesting and even sound, to a certain extent. As we mention on several occasions, and in the introduction to this section, we refrain from responding to emails that seek determinative interpretations of the Book of Revelation. Our view is that the matters that the Apostle John was privileged to see involve matters of an earthly nature **as well as** extra-terrestrial matters – matters beyond the confines of our planet, matters that are foreign to the human experience, and events that will occur beyond the human lifespan. As such, we are not at this time authorized to make definitive statements about Revelation’s fulfillment.

However, we believe that your email provides us with an opportunity to make a few comments that will not overstep our commission and may even broaden our visitors’ view of the 144,000 and the ‘great crowd.’ So let’s take a look at your reasoning in detail, and then we will add our comments as food for thought, and allow all who read it to formulate their own conclusions.

We remind you that our conclusions are not definitive nor are they dogma. The reader is free to accept or reject them at will. We make no inferences that failure to agree with our statements have any bearing on the reader’s sonship or their relationship with the Father and His Christ.

The subject scriptures in Revelation state:

“And I saw, and, look! the Lamb **standing upon the Mount Zion**, and with him **a hundred and forty-four thousand** having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound out of heaven as the sound of many waters and as the sound of loud thunder; and the sound that I heard was as of singers who accompany themselves on the harp playing on their harps. And they are singing as if a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and **no one was able to master that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, who have been bought from the earth**. These are the ones that did not defile themselves with women; in fact, they are virgins. These are the ones that keep following the Lamb no matter where he goes. These were bought from among mankind **as firstfruits** to God and to the Lamb, and no falsehood was found in their mouths; they are without blemish.” – *Revelation 14:1-5*

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, **a hundred and forty-four thousand, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.**” – *Revelation 7:4*

The author’s argument develops like this:

- The seed of Abraham will become “like the stars of the heavens” and “like the grains of sand on the seashore:”

“I shall surely bless you and I shall surely multiply your seed **like the stars of the heavens and like the grains of sand that are on the seashore**; and your seed will take possession of the gate of his enemies. And by means of your seed all nations of the earth will certainly bless themselves due to the fact that you have listened to my voice.” – *Genesis 22:17-18*

- Next, the author points out that when the Hebrew Scriptures use the phrase “like the grains of sand,” they are referring to a large unknown and uncountable number:

“So they went out, they and all their camps with them, a people **as numerous as the grains of sand that are on the seashore** for multitude, and very many horses and war chariots.” – *Joshua 11:4*

“Now Midian and Amalek and all the Easterners were plumped in the low plain as numerous as locusts; and their camels were without number, **as numerous as the grains of sand that are on the seashore.**” – *Judges 7:12*

“And the Philistines, for their part, collected themselves together to fight against Israel, thirty thousand war chariots and six thousand horsemen and people **like the grains of sand that are upon the seashore** for multitude; and they went their way up and began camping in Michmash to the east of Beth-aven.” – *1 Samuel 13:5*

“Judah and Israel were many, **like the grains of sand that are by the sea** for multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing.” – *1 Kings 4:20*

“And I used to say, ‘Within my nest I shall expire, And **like the grains of sand** I shall multiply [my] days.’” – *Job 29:18*

“Were I to try to count them, they are **more than even the grains of sand.** I have awaked, and yet I am still with you.” – *Psalms 139:18*

“For although your people, O Israel, would prove to be **like the grains of sand of the sea**, a mere remnant among them will return. An extermination decided upon will be flooding through in righteousness.” – *Isaiah 10:22*

- Then, the author point out that anointed sons of the Kingdom are the seed of Abraham:

“You are all, in fact, sons of God through your faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one [person] in union with Christ Jesus. Moreover, **if you belong to Christ, you are really Abraham’s seed, heirs with reference to a promise.**” – *Galatians 3:26-29*

- One would naturally deduce from these factors that the sons of the Kingdom would therefore be “like the grains of the sand of the seashore.”

Based on this reasoning, we would have to agree with the author that the number of the sons of God – the anointed sons of the Kingdom – would be a very large number, so large that one could not count them. Yet, all would agree that it is fairly easy to count 144,000. The Society regularly counts active Jehovah’s Witnesses into the millions, the observers at the Memorial celebrations in excess of 19,000,000, and hours spent in the ministry in excess of 1,000,000,000!

But here is where we depart from the author’s conclusion: We suggest that the number 144,000 may be literal to some group, but it is not the literal number of **all** of the anointed sons of God. Let’s take another look at the scriptures in Revelation:

Revelation 7:4 refers only to those who were “sealed **out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.**” That limits the number to a particular race of mankind (literally or figuratively). Then *Revelation 14:1-5* refers only to those standing on symbolic Mount Zion. Now, of course, these two groups could be the same group – 144,000 of the sons of Israel standing on a symbolic mount. But this does not mean that these 144,000 are the **only ones** bought from the earth.

Revelation 14:4 says they are “bought from among mankind as firstfruits.” One could easily assume that if there are first fruits, there must be ‘second fruits’ that are also bought from among mankind. These second fruits might not be from the tribes of Israel, and they might be situated in places other than on top of the symbolic mount.

And notice this:

“After these things I saw, and, look! **a great crowd**, which no man was able to number, **out of all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, dressed in white robes; and there were palm branches in their hands. And they keep on crying with a loud voice, saying: “Salvation [we owe] to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb.” – *Revelation 7:9-10*

And notice what the ‘four living creatures’ and the ‘24 elders’ say about them:

“And they sing a new song, saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slaughtered and with your blood you bought persons for God **out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation**, and you made **them** to be a kingdom and priests to our God, **and they are to rule as kings over the earth.**” – *Revelation 5:9-10*

These are not the 144,000 of the ‘tribes of the sons of Israel.’ This is the “great crowd” of all nations. Does this not seem to say that the ‘great crowd’ will be the ones ruling as kings and priests **over the earth**, not the 144,000?

Interesting thought. This is why we refrain from supporting the current interpretations of Revelation’s symbolisms. It is also why we strongly resist developing dogma based on interpretations that are so obviously limited in spiritual vision. The Revelation is a far larger and more complex revealing than man has heretofore realized.

For these reasons, we believe it is wiser to rest our hopes for salvation on Jesus’ actual, original, plain and open teachings. We will all eventually understand these matters, but until then, let us rest our hopes on what is **not hidden**. That is the most important undertaking for Christians of our day. If we cannot understand the things that are plain, how will we ever understand those that are hidden?

We sincerely appreciate the author’s email and inquiry, as it has certainly provided evidence that the seed of Abraham – the anointed sons of God – is not circumscribed to 144,000. So many of our brothers and sisters need to know that the Father has not limited the number of those He draws to Himself through the ministry of Christ Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit of Truth.

This, we believe, is as much as we can say on this matter at this time. But if it is the Father’s will for us, and circumstances allow us more freedom, perhaps we will be able to go further in this discussion.

Until then, your comments, which we suspect may be many, are welcomed.

“Elaia Luchnia”
