

Who Are the 144,000?

“Increasingly, scholars are looking at Revelation as a Jewish text that reveals a heavenly Christ rather than a Christian text with Jewish attributes.” –*The Jewish*

Annotated New Testament, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 465.

Revelation 7:1-8 is about Israel – not the Gentiles.

Revelation 7:1-8 (NKJV)

¹ After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree. ² Then I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, ³ saying, “Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” ⁴ And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed:

- ⁵ of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- ⁶ of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of **Manasseh** twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- ⁷ of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of **Levi** twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- ⁸ of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of **Joseph** twelve thousand *were* sealed;
- of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand *were* sealed.

Jacob’s Birth Order & Mother

- 4th; Leah
- 1st; Leah
- 7th; Zilpah
- 8th; Zilpah
- 6th; Bilhah
- 11th; Rachel
- 2nd; Leah
- 3rd; Leah
- 9th; Leah
- 10th; Leah
- 12th; Rachel
- 13th; Rachel

- ❖ Not mentioned?: Dan, 5th born, a son of **Bilhah**.
- ❖ Oddly mentioned: Manasseh since Joseph is mentioned.
- ❖ Should not be mentioned: Levi

Let’s try to make sense of this.

- Are they ordered by birth order?
- Are they ordered by maternal line?

This passage flies in the face of Replacement Theology. Replacement Theology says that the church has replaced Israel – the church is the “new Israel.”

Jack Van Impe:

“These are Jewish tribes with Jewish names. . . . Under the circumstances, . . . you had better allow Jews with Jewish names to head up a Jewish nation—Israel.”¹

¹ Van Impe, Jack. *Revelation Revealed*. (Troy, MI: Jack Van Impe Ministries, 1982) p. 100.

John Walvoord:

"It would be rather ridiculous to carry the typology of Israel representing the church to the extent of dividing them up into twelve tribes as was done here, if it was the intent of the writer to describe the church."²

"The prevalent idea that the church is the true Israel is not sustained by any explicit reference in the Bible, and the word Israel is never used of Gentiles and refers only to those who are racially descendants of Israel or Jacob."³

"Though the Bible distinguishes true Israelites from those who have forsaken their heritage, the term 'Israel' is never used outside the descendants of Jacob himself."⁴

Are there Twelve Tribes in Revelation 7?

Genesis 48:5-6 (NKJV) – ⁵ And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. ⁶ Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

Genesis 48:14 (NIV) – But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

Genesis 48:17-19 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this *one is* the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

1. Some early church fathers believed that the anti-Christ would come out of the tribe of Dan.

Irenaeus⁵ (130 – 200 AD) – the first to suggest this based it on Jeremiah 8:16.
(Irenaeus was an anti-Semitic leader in the early church.)

- In some regards, Dan did have a negative reputation.

- ❖ Jeremiah 8:14-17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "Why do we sit still?
Assemble yourselves,
And let us enter the fortified cities,
And let us be silent there.
For the LORD our God has put us to silence

² Walvoord, John F. The Revelation of Jesus Christ. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966) p. 143.

³ Walvoord, John F. The Revelation of Jesus Christ. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966) p. 142.

⁴ Walvoord, John F. The Revelation of Jesus Christ. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966) p. 143.

⁵ Adv.Haer.v.30.2.

And given us water of gall to drink,
Because we have sinned against the LORD.

¹⁵ “We looked for peace, but no good *came*;
And for a time of health, and there was trouble!

¹⁶ **The snorting of His horses was heard from Dan.**

The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of His strong ones;
For they have come and devoured the land and all that is in it,
The city and those who dwell in it.”

¹⁷ “For behold, I will send serpents among you,
Vipers which cannot be charmed,
And they shall bite you,” says the LORD.

❖ Genesis 49:16-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ “Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.
¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent by the way,
A viper by the path,
That bites the horse’s heels
So that its rider shall fall backward.

Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)

And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”

❖ Judges 18:30 (NKJV)

Then the children of **Dan** set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of **Manasseh**, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land.
(*Yet, why would Revelation 7 mention the Tribe of Manasseh and not Dan?*)

• **In other places though, Dan is regarded highly in Judaism.**

❖ “Dan was made the **head of its division** [over Naphtali and Asher guarding the northern flank of the Ark of the Covenant, Num. 2:38-43] because he was the **first-born of all of Jacob’s children from his concubines** (Gen. 30:1-13). Moreover, Dan stood out among the tribes because it **provided the hero judge Samson** (Judg. 13-16), its **sanctuary was staffed by a priestly line descended from Moses** (Judges 18:30), and it was noted for two of its **artisans who designed the wilderness Tabernacle** (Exod. 31:6) and **Solomon’s Temple** (2 Chron. 2:12-13).⁶

- Is it possible that a scribal error in Rev. 7:6 replaced Dan with Manasseh?
 - Revelation 7:6 C – ἐκ φυλῆς **Μανασσῆ** δώδεκα χιλιάδες
 - Manasseh = **Μανασσῆ**
 - Dan = **Δαν**

⁶ Jacob Milgrom, The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), p. 14.

- Ancient Jewish tradition that the mother of Messiah will be from Dan.
 - “This is the Messiah ben David who will arise from two tribes: his father from Judah and his mother from Dan.” (Gen. Rab. 97:9)

Hippolytus (170 – 236 AD) said,

"As the Christ was born of the tribe of Judah so the Antichrist will be born of the tribe of Dan."⁷

Unfortunately, this is a typical anti-Semitic statement from Hippolytus (and the early church).

“And surely you [the Jews] have been darkened in the eyes of your soul with a darkness utter and everlasting. . . . Furthermore, hear this yet more serious word: “And their back do you bend always.” This means, in order that they may be slaves to the nations, not four hundred and thirty years as in Egypt, nor seventy as in Babylon, but bend them to servitude, he says, “always.” – Hippolytus, Treatise Against the Jews 6, ANF 5.220.

“Bend their back” is from Romans 11:10.

John Chrysostom (347 – 407 AD) based his belief on 3 passages.

Chrysostom means “golden mouth”

- Jeremiah 8:16
- The absence of Dan from the list in Revelation 7.
- Genesis 49:16-18

2. **The most common answer offered is that Dan was one of the first tribes to go into idolatry.**

Ancient Rabbinical writings support this - “R. Johanan said that Abraham prophetically ‘saw his descendants who would practice idolatry in Dan.’ (Sanh.96a)”⁸

Judges 18:28b-31 (NKJV) – ²⁸ So they rebuilt the city and dwelt there. ²⁹ And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel. However, the name of the city formerly was Laish.

³⁰ Then the children of Dan set up for themselves the carved image; and Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. ³¹ So they set up for themselves Micah’s carved image which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

Judges 18:1 (NKJV) – In those days *there* was no king in Israel. And in those days the tribe of the Danites was **seeking an inheritance for itself to dwell in**; for until that day ***their* inheritance among the tribes of Israel had not fallen to them.**

⁷ Leon Morris, ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1992), vol. 20, Revelation, by Leon Morris, 112.

⁸ Leon Morris, ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 1992), vol. 20, Revelation, by Leon Morris, 113.

3. Walvoord mentions a third possibility. This is a fairly popular explanation.

Dan, a smaller tribe, was classified with Naphtali? Similarly: Judah and Benjamin comprised The Kingdom of Judah.

Why is Dan left out of Revelation 7? It's a fuzzy picture.

Revelation 7:9-17 is about the Gentiles – including Israel.

Revelation 7:9-17 (NKJV)

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" ¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying:

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."

¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. ¹⁶ They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; ¹⁷ for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The nations of Rev. 7:9-17 do not seem to know the song that the 144,000 "of all the tribes" know (Rev. 7:4). The rest of Israel do not know this song either.

Revelation 14:1-5 (NKJV) – ¹ Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. ⁴ These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

All of Israel does not know the song either. Only 144,000 redeemed out of all of Israel (Rev. 7:4) know that song Many in Israel will suffer; yet, Israel will be returned to the

place of spiritual leadership.

Zechariah 13:8-9 (NKJV)

- ⁸ And it shall come to pass in all the land,”
Says the LORD,
“That two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die,
But one-third shall be left in it:
⁹ I will bring the one-third through the fire,
Will refine them as silver is refined,
And test them as gold is tested.
They will call on My name,
And I will answer them.
I will say, ‘This *is* My people’;
And each one will say, ‘The LORD *is* my God.’ ”

Zechariah 8:23 (NKJV) – “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days **ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard *that* God *is* with you.” ’ ”**

This is part of the handout from 2 weeks ago.
Revelation chapters 4 – 5 are similar to Numbers 1-4.

- ❖ **Numbers, chapter 1** – The census of 11 tribes (not Levites who are counted in Numbers 3)
- ❖ **Numbers, chapter 2** – **The 11 tribes are camped in order around the throne with a leading tribe on each side.**
(The 3 clans of the Levites are told where to camp as they are counted in Numbers 3:23, 29 & 35)

North

Dan (62,700), Lead Tribe 1st born of Jacob's concubines
Asher (41,500)
Naphtali (53,400)
Total: 157,600

Levite Clan: Merari

West

Ephraim (40,500), Lead Tribe honored by Jacob, Gen 48:14
Manasseh (32,200) **Levite clan: Gershon** **ARK OF COVENANT**
Benjamin (35,400)
Total: 108,100

East

Levites: **Judah** (74,600), replaced Reuben (Gen. 49:3-4)
Moses **Issachar** (54,400)
& Priests – **Zebulun** (57,400)
Aaron & sons Total: 186,400

Levite clan: Kohath

South

Reuben (46,500), Lead Tribe is First born
Simeon (59,300)
Gad (45,650)
Total: 151,450

The tribes are largely camped according to the mothers:

- Leah: **Reuben** (1), **Simeon** (2), **Levi** (3), **Judah** (4), **Issachar** (9), **Zebulun** (10) --- Levi is often not counted as 1 of the 12 due to their calling. They are replaced by the 2 tribes that came out of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh.
- Bilhah: **Dan** (5), **Naphtali** (6)
- Zilpah: **Gad** (7), **Asher** (8),
- Rachel: **Joseph** (11), **Benjamin** (12) (Jacob adopts Joseph's sons (**Ephraim** & **Manasseh**) as his thus making 2 tribes out of Joseph, Gen 48)

Order of marching is similar to the order of camping: Judah (Num. 2:9); Reuben (Num. 2:16); Ephraim (Num. 3:24), Dan. (Num. 2:31).

Similar to Revelation 4 & 5, there are circles around the ark of the covenant. God sits on a throne between the cherubim on the mercy seat over the ark.