

# The Good Word

PUBLISHED WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



## WHO ARE THE 144,000 OF THE APOCALYPSE?

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FRESCO (DETAIL), 14TH CENTURY AD: COMMUNION BEING GIVEN TO THE 144,000 OF THE TRIBES OF ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BY AN ANGEL, REVELATION CHAPTER 7, HOLY MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU, MT. ATHOS.

Just exactly who are the 144,000 mentioned in the *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian* chapter 7? For the Jehovah's Witnesses, who zealously seek new proselytes, it is not a symbolic number but is the literal number of people who will be saved and go to Heaven. That is why, because of their heretical beliefs, they all labor so hard to be one of those 144,000. But, unfortunately for them, they can be likened to the scribes and Pharisees of Israel of whom our Lord Jesus Christ said, *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves* (Matt. 23:15 KJV). So, in truth, who are these 144,000? -- and who are they not? These 144,000 have been the topic of much discussion over the centuries among Orthodox Christians, the heterodox, heretics, and unbelievers. Consequently, it is the purpose of this article to review how our Orthodox Church has viewed these 144,000:

*Revelation 7:1-9, KJV* And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. 2 And 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 given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. 4 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.

5 Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand.

6 Of the tribe of Asher were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Manasseh were sealed twelve thousand.

7 Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand.

8 Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand.

Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand.


Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

9 And 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.

## SEALING OF THE 144,000 OF ALL THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

So, all these 144,000 of all tribes of the children of Israel were servants of our God, and they were to be sealed in their foreheads by the seal of the living God at the hands of angels prior to the four angels, who were standing on the four corners of the earth and holding back the four winds of the earth, were to let the winds loose to harm the earth, sea, or the trees. First of all, what does it mean to be sealed -- and sealed in the forehead? Secondly, what did that seal look like?

For this, there is an older, biblical precedent -- a true "sealing" that took place during the time of the Old Testament Prophet Ezekiel (son of the Zadokite priest Buzi) who had been a functioning priest attached to the Jerusalem Temple until taken captive along with King Jehoiachin of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in the first wave of his deportations in 597 BC. Ezekiel settled in the the village of Tel-abib by the Chebar river near Nippur, spending the rest of his life in captivity. It is evident that he was, among his fellow exiles, a person of uncommon stature. Ezekiel's religious call came in 592 BC when he had a vision of



the “throne-chariot” of God. He subsequently prophesied until 585 BC and then was not heard from until 572 BC. His last datable utterance is thought to have been around 570 BC, 22 years after his first.

In *Ezekiel* chapters 8 and 9 we see the *sealing* of a righteous remnant of Israel, i.e., those who mourned the apostasy, idolatry, abominations that their leadership (the king and 70 elders) and most of the people had immersed themselves in after turning away from the Lord. No doubt this vision was given shortly before his own exile. It was a time much like our day when witchcraft, idolatry, paganism, and Satanism, among many other heresies were increasing.

*Ezekiel* (Lxx Brenton) 8:1 And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the fifth month, on the fifth (day) of the month, I was sitting in the house, and the elders of Judah were sitting before me: and the hand of the Lord came upon me. 2 And I looked, and, behold, the likeness of a man: from his loins and downwards [there was] fire, and from his loins upwards [there was] as the appearance of amber. 3 And he stretched forth the likeness of a hand, and took me by the crown of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and sky, and brought me to Jerusalem in a vision of God, to the porch of the gate that looks to the north, where was the pillar of the Purchaser<sup>1</sup>. 4 And, behold, the glory of the Lord God of Israel was there, according to the vision which I saw in the plain. 5 And he said to me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes toward the north. So I lifted up mine eyes toward the north, and, behold, (I looked) from the north toward the eastern gate. 6 And he said to me, Son of man, hast thou seen what these do? They commit great abominations here so that I should keep away from my sanctuary: and thou shalt see yet greater iniquities. 7 And he brought me to the porch of the court. 8 And he said to me, Son of man, dig: so I dug, and behold a door. 9 And he said to me, Go in, and behold the iniquities which they practice here. 10 So I went in and looked; and beheld vain abominations, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon them round about. 11 And seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and Jechonias the son of Saphan stood in their presence in the midst of them, and each one held his censer in his hand; and the smoke of the incense went up. 12 And he said to me, Thou hast seen, son of man, what the elders of the house of Israel do, each one of them in their secret chamber: because they have said, The Lord seeth not; the Lord has forsaken the earth. 13 And he said to me, Thou shalt see yet greater iniquities which these do. 14 And he brought me in to the porch of the house of the Lord that looks to the north; and, behold (there were) women sitting there lamenting for Thammuz<sup>2</sup>. 15 And he said to me, Son of man, thou hast seen; but thou shalt yet see (evil) practices greater than these. 16 And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the Lord, and at the entrance of the temple of the

1. Masoretic Text (KJV) reads where there was the seat of the image of jealousy which provoketh to jealousy, i.e., an idol that “provoked” the LORD to jealousy.


2. Thammuz was a Sumerian fertility god, embodying the powers for new life in nature in the spring. He had two yearly celebrations -- one celebrating his marriage to the goddess Ishtar, the other lamenting his death at the hands of demons from the netherworld.

Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty men, with their back parts toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces [turned] the opposite way; and these were worshipping the sun. 17 And he said to me, Son of man, thou hast seen this. (Is it) a little thing to the house of Judah to practice the iniquities which they have practiced here? for they have filled the land with iniquity: and, behold, these are as scorers. 18 Therefore will I deal with them in wrath: mine eye shall not spare, nor will I have any mercy.

9:1 And he cried in mine ears with a loud voice, saying, The judgement of the city has drawn nigh; and each had the weapons of destruction in his hand. 2 And, behold, six men came from the way of the high gate that looks toward the north, and each one's axe was in his hand; and there was one man in the midst of them clothed with a long robe down to the feet, and a sapphire girdle was on his loins: and they came in and stood near the brazen altar. 3 And the glory of the God of Israel, that was upon them, went up from the cherubs to the porch of the house. And he called the man that was clothed with the long robe, who had the girdle on his loins [MT: which had the writer's inkhorn by his side]; 4 And said to him, Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a **mark** [σημειον] on the foreheads of the men that groan and that grieve for all the iniquities that are done in the midst of them. 5 And he said to the first in my hearing, Go after him into the city, and smite: and let not your eyes spare, and have no mercy. 6 Slay utterly old man and youth, and virgin, and infants, and women: but go ye not nigh any on whom is the mark: begin at my sanctuary. So they began with the elder men who were within in the house. 7 And he said to them, Defile the house, and go out and fill the ways with dead bodies, and smite. 8 And it came to pass as they were smiting, that I fell upon my face, and cried out, and said, Alas, O Lord! wilt thou destroy the remnant of Israel, in pouring out thy wrath upon Jerusalem? 9 Then said he to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is become very exceedingly great: for the land is filled with many nations, and the city is filled with iniquity and uncleanness: because they have said, The Lord has forsaken the earth, The Lord looks not upon (it). 10 Therefore mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have any mercy: I have recompensed their ways upon their heads. 11 And, behold, the man clothed with the long robe, and girt with the girdle about his loins, answered and said, I have done as thou didst command me.

Those that mourned over the sins of Israel were given an ink mark on their foreheads to identify and protect them, and only them, from the avenging angel sent by the LORD upon the people of Jerusalem. Just what was that ink mark? In the *Septuagint* (Lxx) the Greek word is σημειον which means a mark by which a thing is known. That fits the context well, since it is a mark by which the true Israelites who continued to put their trust in the Lord would be known, the means from which they could be distinguished from the apostate Israelites. However, the passage in the Lxx tells us nothing about the sign itself.

Unfortunately, *Ezekiel* chapter 9 is not found among



the Dead Sea Scrolls<sup>3</sup>. But if we look at the Hebrew Masoretic text (*MT*) we find the word translated as “mark” to be the Hebrew word  $\text{ט}$ , *tav*, which is the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet  $\text{ט}$ . In the square Aramaic script used today, the *tav* has the sound of a “t” but looks more like the shape of an “n”. This square Aramaic script only came into use around the 5th century BC (475 BC or slightly earlier). But the Prophet Ezekiel, who prophesied 3-4 generations earlier, would have written in the older Middle Semitic script, i.e., the Hebrew/Phoenician script. So the ink mark would actually have been a “cross,” as shown here:  $\times$ . So the true Israelites in Ezekiel chapter 9 were presumably marked with the “sign of the cross.”

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (c. AD 200-258), affirms that this seal in both *Ezekiel* and *Revelation* is indeed the sign of the Cross for salvation in his *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*:

22. That in this sign of the Cross is salvation for all people who are marked on their foreheads.

In Ezekiel the Lord says: “Pass through the midst of Jerusalem, and thou shalt mark the sign upon the men’s foreheads, who groan and grieve for the iniquities which are done in the midst of them.” Also in the same place: “Go and smite, and do not spare your eyes. Have no pity on the old man, and the youth, and the virgin, and slay little children and women, that they may be utterly destroyed. But ye shall not touch any one upon whom the sign is written, and begin with my holy places themselves.” Also in Exodus God says to Moses: “And there shall be blood for a sign to you upon the houses wherein ye shall be; and I will look on the blood, and will protect you. And there shall not be in you the plague of wasting when I shall smite the land of Egypt.” Also in the Apocalypse: “And I saw a Lamb standing on Mount Sion, and with Him a hundred and forty and four thousand; and they had His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” Also in the same place: “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have power over the tree of life.”<sup>4</sup>

St. Andrew of Caesarea in Cappadocia, (AD 563-637), foremost of the Greek commentators on *Revelation*, also sees this seal as that of the life-giving cross:

[7:2-3] *And I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying:*

This was revealed long ago to Ezekiel concerning him who was clothed in a fine linen robe and who sealed the foreheads of those who mourned so that the righteous would

not be destroyed along with the wicked, since the virtue of the saints is hidden and is unknown even to the angels. This is shown also here to the blessed John, that a preeminent holy power encourages the avenging holy angels to do nothing until they might recognize the servants of the truth by virtue of their having been sealed. Although this has happened partially long ago when those who believed in Christ fled from the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans into very many destinations, the great James having showed to blessed Paul their great number (*cf. Acts 21:20*), then, as has been said, this will especially occur at the coming of the Antichrist when the seal of the life-giving cross will separate from the faithless the faithful who bear without shame and with boldness the sign of Christ before the impious. Therefore the angel says,

[7:3] *Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.*

Just as the creation, created for our sakes shares in the torments which us who are being chastised, so too it will be made clean with the saints who are being glorified. Though these words we learn that the virtuous will require the power of angelic assistance before the arrival of the trials by way of the seal of the Spirit that is given to us. This seal will reveal its power to that extent that we add our own work to it, for everything remains without aid that by its own will not to be aided.<sup>5</sup>

The Venerable Bede (AD 673-735), an English Benedictine monk in the Monasteries of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Kingdom of Northumbria of the Angles, a scholar, author, and teacher, concurs with both St. Cyprian and St. Andrew in this seal being the sign of the cross. He wrote the following in support of this interpretation in his very succinct commentary on St. John’s *Apocalypse*:

7:2. *east*. The Lord incarnate, Who is the Angel of the great counsel, that is, the Messenger of His Father’s will, has visited us, *the day-spring from on high*, bearing the ensign of the cross, with which to seal His own in their foreheads.

*voice*. The *loud voice of the Lord* is the cry which is lifted up on high, *Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*.

7:3. Hurt not. From the time that the Lord suffered, not only was the dominion of the enemy who opposed Him destroyed, but that of worldly power too, as we both see with our eyes, and read of in the image which the stone from the mountain *broke in pieces*.

*foreheads*. For to this end was the empire of the nations broken up, that the face of the saints might be freely marked with the seal of faith, which these had resisted. For, again, the figure of the cross itself represents the kingdom of the Lord extending everywhere, as the old saying proves:—

“Behold the world four-square, in parts distinct,  
To shew the realm of faith possessing all.”

And not in vain was the sacred Name of the Lord, of four letters, written on the forehead of the High Priest, inasmuch as this is the sign on the forehead of the faithful, of which it is also sung in *Psalms 8:1* (*For the end a psalm of David*

3. *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible Translations* @ [http://dssenglishbible.com/chapterview.htm#\\_ftnref1](http://dssenglishbible.com/chapterview.htm#_ftnref1), [listed by book, chapter, and scroll].

4. St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise XII: Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, 2.22, *ANF, Vol. 5*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1994, p. 525. <https://ccel.org/ccel/cyprian/treatises/anf05.iv.v.xii.iii.xxiii.html>

5. St. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Book 7, Chapter 19, in Weinrich WC (trs), Weinrich WC (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XII: Revelation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, pp. 137-138.

concerning the Wine presses) O Lord, our Lord, how wonderful is Thy Name in all the earth? and the rest, until he says, *That thou mayest destroy the enemy and the avenger.*<sup>6</sup>

St. John of Damascus (c. AD 675-749), in His *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, discusses the sign of the Cross on the forehead as separating and distinguishing believers from nonbelievers. He also alludes to it as a seal that the destroyer, the devil, may not touch the believers, as the Scripture proclaims:

Every action, therefore, and performance of miracles by Christ are most great and divine and marvelous: but the most marvelous of all is His precious Cross. For no other thing has subdued death, expiated the sin of the first parent, despoiled Hades, bestowed the resurrection, granted the power to us of contemning the present and even death itself, prepared the return to our former blessedness, opened the gates of Paradise, given our nature a seat at the right hand of God, and made us the children and heirs of God, save the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. For by the Cross— all things have been made right. *So many of us, the apostle says, as were baptized into Christ, were baptized into His death, and as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.* Further *Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Lo! the death of Christ, that is, the Cross, clothed us with the enhypostatic wisdom and power of God. And the power of God is the Word of the Cross, either because God’s might, that is, the victory over death, has been revealed to us by it, or because, just as the four extremities of the Cross are held fast and bound together by the bolt in the middle, so also by God’s power the height and the depth, the length and the breadth, that is, every creature visible and invisible, is maintained.

This was given to us as a sign on our forehead, just as the circumcision was given to Israel: for by it we believers are separated and distinguished from unbelievers. This is the shield and weapon against, and trophy over, the devil. This is the seal that the destroyer may not touch you, as saith the Scripture. This is the resurrection of those lying in death, the support of the standing, the staff of the weak, the rod of the flock, the safe conduct of the earnest, the perfection of those that press forwards, the salvation of soul and body, the aversion of all things evil, the patron of all things good, the taking away of sin, the plant of resurrection, the tree of eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

The very popular conservative New Calendar homilist Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilianos (1927-2006) of Larissa, Greece, in agreement with Holy Tradition, summarized this as follows:

1. “The faithful will be sealed and thus find themselves under God’s protection .”
2. “God seals the members of His Church to safeguard them from the false Christs, the false prophets, and mainly the

6. Venerable Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, James Parker and Company, Oxford and London, England, 1878, [https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-12.shtml#\\_Toc385608320](https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-12.shtml#_Toc385608320)

7. St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* Bk. IV, Chapter XI, in *NPNF*, 2nd Series, Vol. IX, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody MA, 1994, p. 80, <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209/npnf209.iii.iv.iv.xi.html>

Antichrist whose deception will take on universal dimensions. This is the purpose of the living seal of God.”

3. “Only those who have the Spirit of God can detect deception ... the Spirit of God acts as an aid to detect delusion and protect them from falling into it.”

4. “The purpose of this protection is to keep us from worshiping the Antichrist.”<sup>8</sup>

#### OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND ON THE TRIBES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL [JACOB]:

From *Genesis* we note that 13 children were born to the Patriarch Jacob/Israel (see the first column in the table below). Twelve were sons and one daughter, Dinah. Only the 12 sons of Israel were reckoned as heads of tribes (a patriarchal society). So there would have been 12 tribes for all of the children of Israel.

TABLE 1: VARIOUS OLD TESTAMENT LISTINGS

	*Birth Order (Genesis 29-35)	Blessing Order (Gen. 49)	Numbering Order (Numbers 1)	Camp of Israel (Numbers 2)	Allocation (Joshua 13-19)
1	Reuben <sup>†</sup>	Reuben	Reuben	E. Judah	Reuben
2	Simeon <sup>†</sup>	Simeon	Simeon	E. Issachar	Gad
3	Levi <sup>†</sup>	Levi	Gad	E. Zebulon	Manasseh 1
4	Judah <sup>†</sup>	Judah	Judah	S. Reuben	Judah
5	Dan <sup>‡</sup>	Zebulon	Issachar	S. Simeon	Manasseh 2
6	Naphtali <sup>‡</sup>	Issachar	Zebulon	S. Gad	Ephraim
7	Gad <sup>‡</sup>	Dan	Ephraim	W. Ephraim	Benjamin
8	Asher <sup>‡</sup>	Gad	Manasseh	W. Manasseh	Simeon
9	Issachar <sup>†</sup>	Asher	Benjamin	W. Benjamin	Zebulon
10	Zebulon <sup>†</sup>	Naphtali	Dan	N. Dan	Issachar
11	Dinah (f.) <sup>†</sup>	Joseph	Asher	N. Asher	Asher
12	Joseph <sup>‡</sup>	Benjamin	Naphtali	N. Naphtali	Naphtali
13	Benjamin <sup>‡</sup>				Dan


\*Key: Born (to Leah)<sup>†</sup>, (to Bilhah maidservant of Rachel)<sup>‡</sup>, (to Zilpah maidservant of Leah)<sup>‡</sup>, (to Rachel)<sup>‡</sup>

However, in Revelation 7:5-8 when we study the listing of the 144,000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel in order from Judah, Ruben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zabulon, Joseph, to Benjamin, we notice a few discrepancies:

(1). First, we notice that the tribe of *Manasseh* in *Revelation 7* is listed as the sixth tribe. He was not one of the 12 sons of Jacob/Israel, but the son of the Patriarch Joseph. Nevertheless, *Manasseh*, whose mother was Asenath the daughter of Potipherah, the priest of On of Egypt, is listed here as one of the twelve tribes. So why would he be included here as a tribe? The answer can be found in Genesis 48:

*Gen 48:1 And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father [Jacob/Israel] is sick: and he*

8. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Lesson 34, Revelation 7:2-4, Revelation, Volume II, The Seven Seals, Orthodox Christian Lessons*, Zoe Press, Dunlap, CA 2014, pp. 182-186.



took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed. 3 And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, 4 And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession. 5 **And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.** 6 And thy issue, which thou begettest after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.

We see here that Jacob/Israel proclaimed that Joseph's two sons would be reckoned as his own sons. Hence, each became a "son" of Jacob/Israel as well, i.e., brothers to Joseph for the purpose of their inheritance from Jacob. So, in essence, Jacob "adopted" Joseph's first two sons as his own. Consequently, each was allotted his own inheritance in the Land of Israel along with the other sons following the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Any subsequent son born to Joseph and Rachael would then be considered to be Joseph's sons whose inheritance would be in the allotments given to Ephraim and Manasseh, their brethren. That would seemingly make 13 "sons" of Israel instead of 12 for the land to be divided among. Thus, the listing of *twelve thousand of the tribe of Joseph* in Rev. 7 doesn't apply to Ephraim, Manasseh, or their descendants, but only to the later progeny of Joseph. That explains why Manasseh is listed as one of all the tribes of the children of Israel here in *Revelation 7* in addition to Joseph.

(2). However, we then quickly realize that Manasseh's younger brother, Ephraim, is missing from the list. That is a little more problematic especially since it was Ephraim, who was placed ahead of Manasseh by Jacob (Israel) at the time of the blessing of all his children near the end of his life (*Genesis 49*). Ephraim was prophesied to be greater than his brother Manasseh, and his seed prophesied to become a multitude of nations:


*Gen 48:17. And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. 19 And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: **but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations.** 20 And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.*

So why should the tribe of Ephraim, whose name in Hebrew means *doubly fruitful*, be missing from the list but his brother Manasseh's tribe is present? This is an excellent question to investigate! We begin to see the reason taking shape during the time of King Solomon.

In 922 BC, because King Solomon (the son of David of the tribe of Judah) had led Israel astray to worship Astoreth the god of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcam the god of the Ammonites, Jeroboam (an Israelite from the tribe of Ephraim and son of one of Solomon's servants) was chosen and made king of the northern 10 tribes of Israel in accordance with the word of the Lord given through the prophet Ahijah:

*3 Kingdoms 11:26 And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. 27 And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. 28 And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. 29 And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in the field: 30 And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces: 31 And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: 32 (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel:) 33 Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways, to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. 34 Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose, because he kept my commandments and my statutes: 35 **But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes.** 36 And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. 37 **And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel.** 38 **And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee.***

However, Jeroboam, of the tribe of Ephraim, failed to walk in the ways of the Lord and incurred divine wrath by building two rival Temples, one in Dan and



the other in Bethel, which he staffed by ordaining non-levitical priests to prevent his people from returning to King Rehoboam of Judah and worshipping in the Temple in Jerusalem. He usurped the office of priest by preparing an offering to the idols he had previously cast and by burning incense for the last Levitical feast of the year, the great Feast of Tabernacles/Ingathering:

*3 Kingdoms 12:25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 27 If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. 28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 29 And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. 31 And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. 32 And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. 33 So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense.*

Thus, Jeroboam was also a syncretist, mixing the godly faith of the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob with the fertility cult of Baal, thus incurring the wrath of the Lord:

*3 Kingdoms 13:33 After this thing Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places: whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. 34 And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.*

Jeroboam's line of descent was cut off and destroyed by Baasha of Issachar, who killed Jeroboam's son King Nadab and all his descendants, and seized the throne of Israel, thus ending Ephraim's rule in Israel.

Later in rebuking apostate Judah before their exile to Babylonian under King Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the Prophet thusly:

*Jer. 7:15 And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren even the whole seed of Ephraim.*

The implication is that none of the seed of Ephraim remained, not the slightest remnant. The other 9 northern tribes of Israel also persisted in their evil. They were idolatrous (spiritually adulterous) and

unrepentant for generations and enthroned wicked kings one after another. Consequently, they were eventually swept away by the Assyrians in two successive waves -- in 732 BC by Tiglath-Pileser III and in 722 BC by Sargon II. As was their custom with captive peoples, the Assyrians totally depopulated the Kingdom of Israel. They exiled and then dispersed the captive remnants of the 10 tribes of Israel in multiple places throughout the Assyrian Empire. The land of Israel was then repopulated with pagan peoples brought from various parts of their empire.

(3). Next, we notice that the tribe of Dan is also missing. Why is that the case? Obviously, all the tribes of the children of Israel should now number 14. But only 12 are listed in *Revelation*. First, we lost the tribe of Ephraim, and now we see that the tribe of Dan is lost as well! We will get to the reason in a little while.

(4). It is also important to note that tribes listed in *Rev. 7* are not in their birth order;

(5). nor are they listed in the order in which Jacob (Israel) blessed them in *Genesis 49*;


(6). nor are they listed in the order in which they were numbered in *Numbers 1* [note: Levi is missing from that list because the Lord forbid that they be numbered in the census of Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh have been substituted for Joseph];

(7). nor are they listed in the order of arrangement of the 12 tribes in the "camp of Israel" during their 40 years in the wilderness (*Numbers 2*) where three tribes were camped at each point of the compass for the protection of the Tabernacle; [Note: the Levites camped in the middle with the Tabernacle, so they are not listed, Ephraim and Manasseh have been substituted for Joseph];

(8). nor are they listed as in the *Book of Joshua* 13-19 where the tribes were allocated their inheritance in the land of Israel. In this listing Levi is missing and Manasseh listed twice. But why is that? We read in the book of *Joshua* that Manasseh was allocated two half-portions, one on each side of the Jordan, and that Levi was allocated no portion because their inheritance was the priesthood, not the land, but were granted cities to live in within the allocations to the other tribes:

*Joshua 8:7 "But the Levites have no part among you; for the priesthood of the LORD is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave them."*

*Joshua 14:14b therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance.*



*Joshua 21:41 All the cities of the Levites within the possession of the children of Israel were forty and eight cities with their suburbs.*

(9) Nor are they listed as in *Ezekiel 48* in the idealized allotment of the land for the tribes of the children of Israel that Ezekiel sees in his vision (*Eze. 40-48*), which is similar to the lists in *Numbers* and *Joshua* albeit in a different order.

Consequently, as we consider the listing of all the twelve tribes of the children of Israel in *Revelation*, we see that there have been multiple different lists of the tribes and all in different orders. The list in *Joshua* is most complete and would seem most relevant, with only Levi missing in the allocation of territory in the Promised Land. But as we have noted, Levi's inheritance in the Land of Israel was the priesthood. The Levites were granted cities to live in within the lands allocated to the other tribes! That being the case, it makes perfect sense that the tribe of Levi would be sealed and given a place in the Kingdom of Heaven in *Revelation 7*. In contrast, both Ephraim and Dan were given an inheritance in the Promised Land in the time of *Joshua*, but were not sealed for the Kingdom of Heaven. We have seen why Ephraim has been omitted from *Revelation 7*. Let us now examine why Dan is missing!

#### WHY IS THE TRIBE OF DAN MISSING FROM THE LIST?

St. Andrew of Caesarea in his commentary on *Revelation* chapter 7 states: "And this is to be noted, **that the tribe of Dan, out of which the antichrist is to be born**, is not arranged with the other tribes."<sup>9</sup> What are the reasons for St. Andrew saying that the Antichrist will arise from the tribe of Dan? He most certainly based his opinion on the Old Testament Scriptures and the earlier Orthodox Tradition expressed by St. Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Hippolytus of Rome.

Let's look at the Biblical history of the tribe of Dan first. In the Book of *Judges*, we often read the phrase, *Everyone did what was right in their own eyes because there was no King*. And that got the Israelites into much trouble, especially the tribe of Dan. The Danites had trouble taking possession from the Canaanites of that portion of the Land of Israel allotted to them by the Lord (*Joshua 19:40-47*), so most of them left their allotted portion in the *Shephalah* (the non-coastal lowlands directly to the west of Jerusalem) and traveled

far north to where an isolated and very peaceful people lived (which today would be the northernmost tip of the Golan Heights), an area not allocated by the Lord to the 12 tribes of Israel as recorded in *Joshua*. There the Danites slaughtered the inhabitants and seized the land for themselves (see *Judges 17-18* for the entire history):

*Judges 18:27 And they [the Danites] took that [a graven image, an ephod (an article of clothing worn only by the High Priest), and teraphim (personal household gods)] which Micah [of Mount Ephraim] had made, and the priest [a Levite] whom he had; and they came to Laish, to a people tranquil and secure, and they struck them with the edge of the sword. And the city they burnt with fire ... 29 And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born to Israel, but actually Laish was the name of the city at first. 30. And the children of Dan set up for themselves the graven image. And Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Menasseh, (both) he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites until the day of the exile of the land. [at the hand of the Assyrians].*

Thus, these Danites were disobedient, self-willed, covetous, merciless, murderous, idolatrous, and now living outside of the Promised Land. Consequently, they forfeited the protection and blessings of the Old Covenant between Israel and the LORD in stealing land not given to them, by setting up their own sanctuary, ordaining their own priests, and worshipping idols of their own making until, in punishment, they were swept away in the first wave of the Assyrian conquest under Tiglath-Pileser III in 732 BC, which took all but Samaria. If any had escaped to Samaria they would have been caught up in the second Assyrian wave of conquest begun by Shalmanasser V (which specifically targeted Samaria), but was completed by Sargon II in 722 BC.

#### ST. IRENAEUS (AD 130-202), BISHOP OF LYON ON JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY ABOUT THE TRIBE OF DAN:

2. These men, therefore, ought to learn, and go back to the true number of the name, that they be not reckoned among false prophets. But, knowing the sure number declared by Scripture, that is, six hundred sixty and six, let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten; then, in the next place, when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order, and advance their kingdom, (let them learn) to acknowledge that he who shall come claiming the kingdom for himself, and shall terrify those men of whom we have been speaking, having a name containing the aforesaid number, is truly the abomination of desolation. This, too, the apostle affirms: *When they say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction shall come upon them (1 Thess. 5:3)*. And Jeremiah does not merely point out his [the Antichrist's] sudden coming, but he even indicates the tribe from which he shall come, where he says, *We shall hear the voice of his swift horses from Dan; the whole earth shall be*

9. St. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, Book 7, Chapter 19*, in Weinrich WC (trs), Weinrich WC (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XII: Revelation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, p 139.

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*moved by the voice of the neighing of his galloping horses: he shall also come and devour the earth, and the fulness thereof, the city also, and they that dwell therein* (Jer. 8:16). This, too, is the reason that this tribe is not reckoned in the Apocalypse along with those which are saved Rev. 7:5-7).<sup>10</sup>

**St. Hippolytus (AD 170-235), ABOUT THE TRIBE OF DAN**

14. Thus did the Scriptures preach before-time of this lion and lion's whelp [of Judah]. And in like manner also we find it written regarding Antichrist. For Moses speaks thus: "*Dan is a lion's whelp, and he shall leap from Bashan [Golan Heights/Syria]*" (Deut 23:22). But that no one may err by supposing that this is said of the Saviour, let him attend carefully to the matter. "*Dan,*" he says, "*is a lion's whelp;*" and in naming the tribe of Dan, he declared clearly the tribe from which Antichrist is destined to spring. For as Christ springs from the tribe of Judah, so Antichrist is to spring from the tribe of Dan. And that the case stands thus, we see also from the words of Jacob: [Genesis 49:17: *Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.*] What, then, is meant by the *serpent* but Antichrist, that deceiver who is mentioned in Genesis<sup>11</sup>, who deceived Eve and supplanted Adam (περνήσιας, bruised Adam's heel)? But since it is necessary to prove this assertion by sufficient testimony, we shall not shrink from the task.

15. That it is in reality out of the tribe of Dan, then, that that tyrant and king, that dread judge, that son of the devil, is destined to spring and arise, the prophet testifies when he says, *Dan shall judge his people,*<sup>12</sup> as (he is) also one tribe in

*Israel.* [In other words, Dan will rule over all the other tribes as if there were one tribe -- from Genesis 49:16] ... For Jeremiah also speaks to this effect: *From Dan we are to hear the sound of the swiftness of his horses: the whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing, of the driving of his horses* [Jer 8:16]. And another prophet [apocryphal?] says: *He shall gather together all his strength, from the east even to the west. They whom he calls, and they whom he calls not, shall go with him. He shall make the sea white with the sails of his ships, and the plain black with the shields of his armaments. And whosoever shall oppose him in war shall fall by the sword.* That these things, then, are said of no one else but that tyrant, and shameless one, and adversary of God, we shall show in what follows.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, our Holy Tradition recognizes that the Antichrist will be a Jew from the apostate tribe of Dan, and that is a second reason Dan is not listed in Revelation Chapter 7 among the 144,000 from the tribes of Israel.

Thus, we have good reasons from scripture as to why the two tribes of Dan and Ephraim would not be listed among the 12 other tribes of the children of Israel in the Heavenly Kingdom in Revelation 7. ❖ ❖ ❖

Next Issue: Part II: Patristic Commentary on the Identity of the 144,000 of the Apocalypse



10. St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies, Book V, XXX, ANF I*, p. 559.

11. Gen 3:13 *And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. 14 And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy [Satan's] seed and her seed [Christ Jesus]; it [Christ] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

12. The name *Dan* in Hebrew means "judge."

13. Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, ¶14-15, in ANF 5*, p. 207. The treatise continues on through p. 219.