

The Good Word

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THE IDENTITY OF THE 144,000 OF THE APOCALYPSE

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FRESCO, 14TH CENTURY AD: THE GREAT MULTITUDE OF REVELATION 7 ARE GROUPED IN WHITE ROBES IN THE BACKGROUND, THE 4 ANGELS ARE BEING HELD BACK, AND COMMUNION BEING GIVEN TO THE 144,000 IN THE FOREGROUND. HOLY MONASTERY OF DIONYSIOU, MT. ATHOS.

THE ORTHODOX TRADITION: OPINIONS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS ON THE IDENTITY OF THE 144,000

As we look to the Orthodox Tradition for the opinions of the Fathers on the Apocalypse, we will see that there are a few differing opinions of who these 144,000 are, let alone, when they were sealed. Each Patristic writer will be taken up in chronological order.

1. HIEROMARYTR VICTORINUS, BISHOP OF PETTAU:

MARTYRED C. AD 304 IN THE PERSECUTIONS OF DIOCLETIAN, COMPOSED THE FIRST KNOWN COMMENTARY ON THE APOCALYPSE

“2. *And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God.* He speaks of Elias the prophet, who is the precursor of the times of Antichrist, for the restoration and establishment of the churches from the great and intolerable persecution. We read that these things are predicted in the opening of the Old and New Testament; for He says by Malachi 4:5-6: *Lo, I will send to you Elias the Tishbite, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, according to the time of calling, to recall the Jews to the faith of the people that succeed them.* And to that end He shows, as we have said, that the number of those that shall believe, of the Jews and of the nations, is a great multitude which no man was able to number ...

“9 *After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man was able to number, of every nation, tribe, and people, and tongue, clothed with white robes.* What the great multitude out of every tribe implies, is to show the number of the elect out of all believers, who, being cleansed by baptism in the blood of the Lamb have made their robes white, keeping the grace which they have received.”¹

Of note, the last phrase of *Malachi 4:6* above that Victorinus quotes, *to recall the Jews to the faith of the people that succeed them*, is quite a strikingly prophetic utterance and otherwise unknown in the manuscript tradition. It reads quite differently from the Septuagint (*Lxx*) text, from *Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS)*², and from the Masoretic text (*MT*) as we see below³:

Lxx (Brenton) *Malachias 4:3* *who shall turn again the heart of the father to the son, and the heart of a man to his neighbor, lest I come and smite the earth.*

DSS 4Q76 Minor Prophets, Malachi 4:6 *He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.*


MT (KJV) 4:6 *And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*

Regardless, here, in the earliest commentary on the *Book of Revelation*, Victorinus conveniently skips over discussing *Revelation 7:3-8* in detail and thus avoids

1. Victorinus, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of the Blessed John*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) 7*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1994, pp. 351-352. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf07.vi.ii.html>.

2. <http://dssengishbible.com/malachi%204.htm>

3. Note: There are no other Hebrew textual variants according to the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Germany, 1983, [verse 3:24 in the Hebrew], p. 1086.



the question of who these *144,000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel* are. Instead he proceeds right to the climax revealing the great multitude of the Jews and of the nations that have believed, have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and have kept their baptismal grace. Consequently, Victorinus is of little help to us in pinning down the specific identity of the 144,000.

2. BLESSED JEROME, (C. AD 340-420)

Blessed Jerome appears to believe that these 144,000 are the Jews that are going to believe at the very end of the world after the multitude of the Gentiles have been saved. It is uncertain if he is limiting their total number to 144,000 -- a specific number instead of a symbolic number. Otherwise he has nothing to say about the specific tribes listed in *Revelation 7*.

“Someone may ask, Where does one read that all Israel will be saved? First, of course, there is the apostle: *Until the full number of the Gentiles should enter, and thus all Israel should be saved [Rom:11:25-26]*. In the second place, John says in his *Apocalypse*: of the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand shall believe, of the tribe of Ruben twelve thousand shall believe, and of the remaining tribes, he says the same, and the number of all who believe became 144,000. Then too, *Psalms 145, [LXX Ps. 144]* which is alphabetical [only in the Hebrew], treats of this number saved. If Israel had believed, our Lord would not have been crucified. If our Lord had not been crucified, the multitude of Gentiles would not have been saved. The Jews are going to believe, but not until the end of the world. It was not the time for them to believe in the cross; for if they had believed, the Lord would not have been crucified. It was not the time to believe. Their infidelity is our faith. By their downfall, we are raised up. It was not their time in order that it might be our time.”⁴

3. ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, (AD 354-430)

Although St. Augustine’s work, the *City of God*, discusses the ends times and comments on various passages in *Revelation* in his Book XX chapters 19-30, he does not mention anything about the 144,000 in *Rev. 7:4-8*. However, he does reveal his interpretation in another work of his, *On Christian Doctrine*, which follows Victorinus’ interpretation. He writes:

“... or when multiplied into themselves, as ten into ten gives one hundred and twelve into twelve gives one hundred and forty-four, which last number is used in the *Apocalypse* to signify the whole body of the saints.”⁵

4. CAESARIUS BISHOP OF ARLES: (c. AD 468-542), A WESTERN LATIN-SPEAKING HIERARCH ASSIGNED IN GAUL (SOUTHERN FRANCE), WELL-KNOWN FOR HIS PRACTICAL HOMILIES, AND HIGHLY INFLUENCED BY ST. AUGUSTINE AND ST. JOHN CASSIAN

4. St. Jerome, *Homilies on Mark*, 82 (8) [source: FC 57:177], as quoted in Weinrich WC (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XII: Revelation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, pp. 105-106.

5. St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, XXX.19-30, *NPNF, 1st Series, Vol. 2*, Hendrickson Press, Peabody, NA, 1994, pp. 571-2.

Bishop Caesarius of Arles, like St. Augustine and Victorinus before him, interprets the 144,000 to be the same as the great multitude, i.e., to be the entire Church. Like Victorinus, he also avoids discussing *Rev 7:5-8* and the significance of the listing of the 12 separate tribes of the Children of Israel in *Rev. 7:5-8*.

“(Rev. 7:4) As for these *one hundred and forty-four thousand who are marked*, they represent the whole Church. (Rev. 7:9) *Then I saw a great multitude that no one could count of any nation, any tribe, any people, nor any language*. He does not say: I next saw another people, but, I saw the people, that is to say the same as he had seen in the mysterious number of one hundred and forty-four thousand; he sees it composed of an innumerable multitude of every tribe, of all people, and of all tongues, because all the nations are grafted on the root by embracing the faith. Our Lord in the Gospel, under the figure of the twelve tribes of Israel, represents to us the whole Church composed of both Jews and Gentiles; Saying to his Apostles, *You will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt. 19:28).”⁶

5. PRIMASIVS, BISHOP OF HADRUMENTUM IN NORTH AFRICA, (FLOURISHED AD 550-560), INFLUENCED BY ST. AUGUSTINE AND TYCHONIUS (HERETIC), WROTE AN ALLEGORICAL COMMENTARY ON REVELATION VIEWING IT AS A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

Primasius also follows suit with his predecessors in interpreting the 144,000 as the multitude of the elect, of the Church.


“(Rev. 7:9). By the sign of the sacred number [i.e., the 144,000] he signifies the multitude of the elect, *whom God foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son* (Rom. 8:29). For those who come from the nations are made to be Israel and so by right are called sons of Abraham, not by flesh but by faith in that seed which is Christ, the cornerstone, of whom the apostle said, *He is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of two, and so make peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body through the Cross* (Eph. 2:14-16).”⁷

6. OECUMENIUS ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΟΣ, (C. 6TH CENTURY AD), AN ECCLESIASTICAL WRITER, CURRENTLY THOUGHT TO BE A HIGHLY EDUCATED LAYMAN

Oecumenius’ commentary on *Revelation*, was written in the 6th century and was first discovered by Franz Diekamp in 1901 in a single 12th century manuscript (*Messina S. Salvatore 99*) in Messina, Sicily. He is the first interpreter of the specific identity of the 144,000 of the children of Israel. Some

6. Litteral J (trs), *Caesarius of Arles Commentary on Revelation: A Sixth Century Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, Litteral Truth Publishing, Ashland, KY, (no date), pp. 79. Translated from *Patrologia Latina* 35:2417-2452.

7. Primasius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 7.9, [source CCL 92:126] as quoted in Weinrich WC (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary, New Testament XII: Revelation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, pp. 110-111, 423.



historians have considered him to be a monophysite, others disagree and consider him to be Chalcedonian, but in the spirit of St. Cyril of Alexandria. Yet others have claimed that he was not opposed to the Council of Chalcedon, but that he tended to interpret it in a manner congenial to the Monophysite interests of Severus of Antioch. He clearly believed that the *Apocalypse* was both inspired and canonical. His commentary shows remarkable vigor and creativity and espouses some rather unique interpretations, e.g., that the 1000 years of *Revelation 20* represent the time of the life of Christ.⁸

“An I saw an angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called out with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given the power to harm the earth and the sea, saying, *You are to harm nothing, he says, until the servants of our God have been sealed.* That the divine angel appears from the rising of the sun and not from its setting that brings on the evening is symbolic of the gospel and the promise of its blessings. For the prophet foresaw in the spirit that seal that now prevails when he said, *The light of your face, O lord, was sealed on us.* Meanwhile **he rightly commands that nothing be harmed until those from the Jews who are worthy of being saved should be sealed**, so that none of the righteous should suffer any of these calamities along with the sinners. And the sealed, it says was 144,000. **For those from the Jews who believed in Christ were numerous and greater than this number, and they were accounted worthy to be saved from the common destruction**, as those testified who spoke to Paul when he was in Jerusalem: *Do you see, brother, how many thousands there are of the Jews who have believed?* (Acts 21:20) ... It is likely that all of these were later sealed in the faith of Christ, otherwise the angel would not have called them the servants of God. And when these had been rescued, either by flight or desertion to the Romans, those wicked ones who remained were destroyed in a terrible manner [the 1st Jewish War with Rome AD 67-73 and especially the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70], *having become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men*, in a way quite different from what Paul had said of the blessed apostles. And of these things, Josephus is again witness, counting those killed by famine as more than ten thousand ...

“That an equal number from each tribe is said to have been sealed and to have believed indicated the equality of their zeal and the unanimity of their faith, although there would have been more from one tribe and less from other tribes of those who were saved and believed on Christ, Who although dishonored by the Jews, is worshiped by us and by every supernatural creature now and always and forever more. Amen.

“Rev. 7:9 *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands ...*

“As I said above, he sees the countless thousands from the

8. Weinrich WC, *Translator's Introduction*, in Weinrich WC (ed.), *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2011, pp.xix-xxxi.

Gentiles who, having received the faith of Christ and having attained the blessed portion, have been allotted a place in the glorious choir and stand before the Lord and the throne of the Father. They are clothed in white robes as a sign of the purity of their life, and the palm branches are symbolic of victory and reveal that they rejoice in the victory of Christ against every spiritual and physical foe.”⁹

We see that Oecumenius believed that the 144,000 were symbolic of the many more Jews who received Christ and were baptized into the faith and “sealed” prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and Judea by the Romans. The subsequent multitudes he considered to be the Gentile Christians. Unfortunately, he doesn't discuss the missing tribes of Dan and of Ephraim.

7. ST. ANDREW OF CAESAREA IN CAPPADOCIA, (AD 563-637)

The commentary of St. Andrew of Caesarea is considered to be the most important of the Orthodox Church's Greek writings on the *Apocalypse*. Little is known of his life other than he also wrote a commentary on the book of Daniel and a question and answer book (especially on eschatology) called *Therapeutike*. Since St. Andrew quotes Oecumenius, he must have written his commentary subsequent to Oecumenius', but before AD 637 when Jerusalem fell to the armies of Islam, and possibly in (or shortly after) the Persian plundering of Jerusalem in AD 610.¹⁰


“BOOK SEVEN, Chapter 19: Concerning the 144,000 saved from the plagues of the four angels:

“7:1 *After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.* These things are thought by some to have occurred long ago to the Jews at the hands of the Romans. They think that the four divine angels reveal the impossibility for those who were experiencing the wrath to escape either on the land or on the sea. However, how much more will these things occur at the coming of the antichrist, and not only partially in the land of the Jews, but over the whole world at whose four corners the angels stand fulfilling a service assigned to them by God, but unknown to us. The holding back of the winds reveals clearly the dissolution of the good order of creation and the inevitability of evil. For by means of wind the plants of the earth are nourished and ships sail the sea.

“7:2 *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 the 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 with the wicked [Ezekiel 9:2-11], since the virtues of the saints is hidden and is unknown even to the angels. This is shown here in the

9. Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in Weinrich WC (ed.), *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, pp.33-35.

10. Weinrich WC, *Translator's Introduction*, in *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.



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 [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 with us who are being chastised, so too it will be made clean with the saints who are being glorified [cf. Rom. 8: 1-22]. Through 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 will not be aided.

“7:4-8 And I heard the number of the sealed, a hundred and forty-four thousand sealed, out of every tribe of the sons of Israel;

“12,000 out of the tribe of **Judah**: Judah is interpreted *confession*. Through him those are manifested who are being saved through the confession to Christ Who came forth as a branch from Judah.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Reuben**: Reuben is interpreted *son of vision*. Through him those are shown who possess spiritual sight through purity of heart.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Gad**: Gad is interpreted *temptation*. Through him those are shown who through the endurance of temptations are being crowned, after the example of Job.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Asher**: Asher is interpreted *blessing*. Through him are revealed those who are worthy of dominical blessings because of their life and are made worthy of standing at the right hand of Christ and are shown to be children of the light and of the day.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Naphtali**: Naphtali is interpreted *prayer*. Through him those are characterized who are bound to God through unceasing prayer.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Manasseh**: Manasseh is interpreted *forgetfulness*. He represents those who, on account of love for God, have forgotten the things from the past and their paternal homes.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Simeon**: Simeon is interpreted *obedience*. He clearly refers to those who are becoming righteous through obedience to the divine commandments.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Levi**: Levi is interpreted as *having been taken up*. Through him those are indicated who have been taken up by Christ through a life proper to the priesthood. Levi is listed eighth, since by the eighth day of the resurrection the true priesthood is made known.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Issachar**: Issachar is interpreted *reward*. He represents those who for the sake of the rewards from God have lived virtuously.

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Zabulon**: Zabulon is interpreted *abode of power* or *fragrance*. Through him those are indicated who by the indwelling of Christ have been made firm against sufferings and have become his sweet smell, as St. Paul says [2 Cor 2:15].

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Joseph**: Joseph is interpreted *addition*. That is, he represents those who in addition to the kingdom of heaven receive those things necessary for eternal life, as the Lord says [Matt 6:33].

“12,000 sealed out of the tribe of **Benjamin**: Benjamin means *son of sorrow* or *son of day* or *son of my right hand*. He indicates those with sorrow in their heart. **This refers either to those believers from the Jews who fled the siege of the Romans and equaled this number, or, what is rather more likely, to those from the Jews who are saved at the consummation when, as the apostle puts it, after the full number of the Gentiles come in, all Israel will be saved.** [Rom 11: 25-6]. **Either interpretation is acceptable.** The exact equality of each tribe seems to me to **show the utter fruitfulness of the apostolic seed**, since twelve multiplied by twelve and multiplied by the perfect number of a thousand yields the thousands here indicated. For **these were the disciples of that Seed that out of love for humankind fell on the earth and brought forth the various fruits of universal salvation.**

“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.¹¹ Instead of it the tribe of Levi is mentioned, which, as the priestly tribe of old, had not entered into the division [i.e., the apportioning of the Promised Land by Joshua] among the tribes.

“From the interpretation of the names there is a certain understanding that is suitable to each of the tribes, as is provided in the next examples. He has listed **Joseph** instead of **Ephraim** [which means *doubly fruitful*], his son. As we have said, the number given is suitable to these; as it is said, both because of the twelve patriarchs of the ancient Hebrews and because of the holy apostles who, instead of them, *were established as rulers on all the earth*, as it is written [Psalm 44:16 LXX], and through whom the Jews in the diaspora of the earth are saved in the last days.”

ALTERNATIVE TEXT OF ST. ANDREW ON THE NAMES OF THE TRIBES¹²


{“This is an opportunity to complete the task, for we often find in holy Scriptures that parents give names to their offspring because of things that have either occurred or have been said.

“About Leah it is written that when she was giving birth she said, *The Lord has seen my humiliation*, and named the child **Ruben**, which means, *son of vision* [Gen. 29:32].

“And when she gave birth a second time, she said, *The Lord has heard that I am hated*, and she named the child **Simeon**, which means *having heard* [Gen. 29:34]. He read also that when Rachel was in hard labor, she named the child *son of sorrow* from what had happened [Gen. 35:16-18]. And there are other such names that are familiar to those well-

11. See Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, 5.30.2, ANF I, p. 559 and Hippolytus *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, §14, ANF 5, p. 207.

12. Editor’s note: Some manuscripts of St. Andrew’s commentary give this alternative interpretation of the twelve names of the patriarchs. Some manuscripts give both interpretations as reproduced here.



versed in the divine texts.

“For this reason, we have considered the explanation of the patriarchal names and think that the tribe of **Judah**, which means *confession*, symbolizes those who are being saved through repentance and love of the Lord Who sprouted from Judah and Who justified a tax-collector and a prostitute and a thief.

“The tribe of **Ruben**, which means *son of one who sees* or *son of vision*, represents those who are pure in heart and see by the Spirit.

“The tribe of **Gad**, which means *temptation* or *ordeal*, symbolizes those who through trials and tribulations are being *refined as gold* and crowned by the *genuineness of faith*.

“The tribe of **Asher**, which signifies *blessing*, indicates those who by holding fast to the blessings that are taught of God will attain the everlasting bliss of the eternal praises.

“The tribe of **Naphtali**, which is interpreted *understanding* or *stump*, represents those who cling with understanding to the stump of the Lord’s cross and by it crush the demons.

“The tribe of **Manasseh** which is interpreted *from forgetfulness*, symbolizes those who for the sake of Christ *forget their father’s house* so that *the king might desire the beauty* of their souls and find them worthy to be invited to the mystical wedding.

“The tribe of **Simeon**, which indicates *attentiveness*, represents those who through good works are attentive to the commandments of God.

“The tribe of **Levi**, which indicated *one who is accepted*, symbolizes those who *are chosen and accepted by God*, as the psalm says, and *will dwell in the courts of God*. Since they will serve as priests on the eighth day that is after the present age of seven days, the tribe of Levi is numbered in eighth place. The same is also first, since everyone does not attain one continuous path.

“The tribe of **Issachar**, which means *reward*, represents those who dedicate themselves to works of virtue for the reward of future prizes and sincerely pursue them for the sake of good itself.

“The tribe of **Zebulun**, which is interpreted *change is accepted*, symbolizes those who give up their transient wealth to the poor *and are received by Christ and who heal the mutability of material gain, which is born of vanity, by remembering the fire of Gehenna*.

“The tribe of **Joseph**, which means *the Lord is gain*, symbolizes those who along with the kingdom of heaven receive as though by addition all the necessities of life from the true Lord. Such are indicated by the divine name Jaoth.¹³

“The tribe of **Benjamin**, which is interpreted *son of sorrow* or *son of day*, represents those who because of the *multitude of sorrows in the heart* as the psalm says [*Psalm 93:19 LXX*], and moreover because of the abundance of bodily sufferings they have displayed for the sake of Christ, have become *sons of light and sons of day* [*1 Thessalonians 5:5*].

“Such interpretations on the basis of the names are for an

exercise for those more skilled in the discernment of the Scriptures.

“In our opinion the tribe of **Dan** [which means *judge, judgment*] is omitted not only because the antichrist was to arise from it, as we noted, but also because it is a burdensome thing *to judge the servant of another* [*Rom. 14:4*]. For this reason the Lord says, *Judge not, that you be not judged* [*Matt. 7:1*]. For *there is one lawgiver and judge* [*James 4:12*], as the great James says. **Dan** is interpreted *judgment*.”¹⁴

“Chapter 20: Concerning the numberless throng from the nations who wear bright robes

“**7:9-10** *After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’*

“These are the ones of whom David spoke: *I shall number them, and they will be more than the sand* [*Psalms 138:18 LXX*]. **Namely, these are those who long ago struggled as martyrs for the sake of Christ and those from every tribe and tongue who will fight brilliantly at the end of time.** By the outpouring of their own blood for the sake of Christ, some have made white, and others will make white, the robes of their deeds. And they have in their hands palm branches, which are symbolic of victory and which are good, straight and white as are their hearts. And they form a chorus around the divine throne of the godly rest, as grateful family members ascribing the victory over the demons to Him Who provides it.”¹⁵


St. Andrew recognizes the 144,000 to be true descendants of 12 tribes of Israel -- both physically and spiritually: true Israelites in whom there was no guile, i.e., the fruit of that apostolic seed. In other words they are the spiritual children of Christ and His 12 Apostles. As Jesus has said, *Salvation is of the Jews* (John 4:22). Those children multiplied rapidly after the Resurrection and Ascension forming the Nazarene Sect, as it was called by the Jews. They numbered in the tens of thousands before the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans in AD 70. Ever since there have been Jews coming to faith in Christ and salvation, albeit in very small numbers, throughout the centuries of the Church Age. That will culminate dramatically during the time of the Antichrist when the remnant of the Jews who will yet believe will respond to the preachings of the two witnesses Enoch and Elijah. All those former “144,000” children of the tribes of Israel will be joined by the *fullness of the Gentiles* ... from every tribe and tongue, as well as by the final remnant of Israel that comes to faith at the end of time, *and ... so all Israel shall be saved* [*Rom. 11:25-26*].

St. Andrew is not the first to discuss why the tribe of Dan is missing from the list. He voices the same

13. St. Andrew of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Book 7, Chapter 19, in Weinrich WC (trs), p. 140, footnote 39: “The divine name is $\iota\alpha\omega\theta$. Most likely for [St.] Andrew the name indicates *the Lord of Hosts* or *the Lord Almighty*. The form $\iota\alpha\omega\theta$ probably reflects *God Sabaoth* ($\iota\alpha\omega\ \sigma\alpha\beta\alpha\omega\theta$). According to St. Irenaeus, $\iota\alpha\omega\theta$ was a name for God among the Gnostics (*Haer.2.35.3*).

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 141.



reasons as St. Irenaeus and St. Hippolytus: because the Antichrist will arise from the tribe of Dan. He also notes, in the main source text only, that the tribe of Joseph is listed instead of the tribe of Ephraim, the brother of Manasseh, but without explanation!

8. THE VENERABLE BEDE, (AD 672-735).

The Venerable Bede was a Benedictine monk in the Kingdom of Northumbria (northeast England) and was a well know author and teacher best remembered for his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. He also wrote a number of biblical commentaries.

“*Rev. 7:4. number. By this definite number is signified the innumerable multitude of the whole Church, which is descended from the patriarchs either by the lineage of nature, or the imitation of faith.* For, he says, *if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed.* And it tends to additional completeness, that the twelve also should be multiplied by twelve, and brought to a sum of thousands, which is the cube of the number ten, by which is represented the enduring life of the Church. And for this reason, too, it is often denoted by the number twelve, because throughout the foursquare world it subsists by faith in the Holy Trinity, for three times four are ten and two. Finally, also, when the Apostles were to preach the same faith to the whole world, twelve were chosen, as signifying by their number the mystery of their work.

“*Rev. 5-8 Judah.* With good reason, he begins with Judah, from which tribe our Lord sprang; and has omitted Dan, from whom, as it is said, Antichrist is to be born; for it is written, *Let Dan become an adder in the way, a horned serpent in the path, biting the horse-hoofs, that his rider may fall.* For he has not proposed to set forth the order of earthly generation, but according to the interpretation of the names the powers of the Church, which from present confession and praise is hastening to the right hand of eternal life. For this is the meaning of the name of Judah, who is placed first, and of Benjamin, who comes last. So, then, Judah is placed first, who is interpreted *confession*, or *praise*; for before the first step of confession no one reaches the height of good works, and unless we renounce evil deeds by confession, we are not fashioned in such as are good.

“The second is Reuben, who is interpreted, *seeing the son*. That works are denoted in *sons*, the Psalmist testifies, when among the benedictions of the man who is blessed, he says with the rest, *Thy sons like olive-plants*; and below, *That thou mayest see thy sons’ sons*. For it is not, that he who fears the Lord cannot be blessed, unless he has begotten sons, and raised up grandsons, since a better reward awaits the faithful virgins; but in *sons*, he designates works, and in *sons’ sons* the fruits of works, namely, an eternal reward. Accordingly, after Judah there follows Reuben, that is, after the commencement of divine confession and praise, the perfection of action.

“But because *we must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God*, after Reuben follows Gad, who is interpreted *temptation*, or, *girt*. For after the beginning of a good work, it is needful that a man should be proved by greater temptations, and be girt about for greater conflicts, that the strength of his faith may be approved. And so Solomon says, *My son, when thou comest to the service of*


God, stand in righteousness and fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation; and the Psalmist also, Thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle.

“And because *we esteem them blessed who have maintained sufferance*, for this reason, after Gad is placed Asher, that is, *the blessed*, an order which is not unsuitable. For *Blessed is he who endures temptation, for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life.* But, inasmuch as they who rely upon the sure promise of this blessedness, are not straitened, but *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation*, sing with the author of the Psalm, *In tribulation Thou hast enlarged me*, and also, *I ran in the way of Thy commandments, while Thou didst enlarge my heart*; and say, exultingly, with the mother of the blessed Samuel, *My heart is enlarged above mine enemies, because I rejoiced in Thy salvation*; therefore, Nephthali succeeds, that is, *enlargement*. Moreover, he is followed by Manasseh, who is interpreted *forgetting*, or, *necessity*. And by the mystery of this name we are admonished, that being taught by the anguish of the present temptations, and *forgetting the things which are behind*, we should so *reach forward*, as the Apostle says, *to the things which are before, as not to make provision for the flesh in lust*, but as compelled by the necessity of human nature alone. And concerning this the Psalmist prayed, when sighing for better things, *Deliver me out of my necessities*.

“Next to him is placed Simeon, that is, *he heard of sorrow*, or, *the name of his habitation*; in order that, by the character of this name also, he might more plainly inculcate both what it to be possessed here, and what is to be profitably expected. For the joy of the heavenly habitation will be given to those whose mind is here made sorrowful by a fruitful repentance; to whom it is also said, *Your sorrow shall be turned into joy*.

“In the next place follows Levi, that is, *added*, in whom we either understand those who by temporal obtain eternal things; as Solomon says, *The ransom of a man’s life are his riches*;” or those who, by following the counsel of God, *receive in this world a hundredfold with tribulations, but in the world to come, eternal life*. And to these, also, belongs this that is written, *He who adds knowledge, adds grief*. For to this end also the bitterness of tribulation was added to the blessed Job, that having been proved, he might receive a greater recompense of reward. And so, not without reason, there succeeds him in direct order, Issachar, who is interpreted *reward*, because, as the Apostle teaches, *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the future glory which shall be revealed in us*, inasmuch as we fight with better success when there is hope of a sure reward. But God operates and perfects this in the habitation of strength, which Zabulon means, when *strength is made perfect in weakness*. So that the body, which is considered weak by its enemies, and through the material substance of which they also strive to bring destruction to the soul, is found to be invincible through God Who strengthens it; and there succeeds a happy increase in this. This is also denoted by the word Joseph, for it signifies, gifts and graces to be added, whether thou understand the increase of spiritual gain from the double return of the talents, or whether thou take it in respect of the offerings which are made to God the Redeemer by the devotion of the faithful.

“Now, in order that thou mayest perceive that all these,



who both by the succession and interpretation of the names are shewn not to be placed without significance, will be at the right hand of Christ, the eternal King, in the judgment to come; Benjamin, that is, *the son of the right hand*, is set last, as I said before, as the end of the line. For, after the last enemy, death, has been destroyed, the bliss of the eternal inheritance will be given to the elect. And this, whether each one of the faithful is rightly called the son of the right hand, or the whole assembly of the Church, of which it is sung: *Upon Thy right hand stood the queen, in a vesture of gold, clothed in variety.*

“So, then, from each tribe are sealed ten [twelve?] thousand. For in whatsoever virtues each one of the faithful has made progress, he must needs be ever strengthened by the faith, and instructed by the examples of the fathers of old. And it is most certain that frequently the body of doctors, frequently that of the whole Church, is designated by the number twelve, because of the sum of the Apostles, or patriarchs. For whether each one is counted worthy of praise from confession, as in Judah; or is illustrious from the progeny of works, in Reuben; or is strong from the discipline of temptations, in Gad; or is happy from victory in conflicts, in Asher; or is enlarged by abundant works of mercy, in Naphtali; or is forgetful of the things which are behind, in Manasseh; or is still sorrowful, as in the valley of tears, but always rejoicing in the name of his habitation, while sighing for the heavenly Jerusalem, in Simeon; or is rejoicing together in the promises of the life that now is, and of that which is to come, resting upon temporal good things, added to the eternal good, in Levi; or is strengthened by the contemplation of the future reward, in Issachar; or is laying down his life for Christ, in Zabulon; or is labouring earnestly for an increase of spiritual substance, and offering something more beyond the commands of God, either in virginity, or from the abundance of his means, in Joseph; or is expecting the right hand of eternal bliss, with unwearied prayer, in Benjamin; it is fitting that each should be sealed in his own profession by the rule of the preceding fathers, as by the number twelve, and that from the merits of individuals, should the most perfect beauty of the Church, as the sum of a hundred and forty-four thousand, be made up.

“*Rev 7:9. multitude.* On the conclusion of the recapitulation, which had been interposed for the sake of example, he returns to the previous order, and announces the glory of those who are to overcome the wickedness of the last persecution. And that which follows, *From all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues,* may also be thus understood, that, **after enumerating the tribes of Israel, to whom the Gospel was first preached, he desires to make mention of the salvation of the Gentiles as well.**”¹⁶

From the Venerable Bede’s comments on verse 9 “after enumerating the tribes of Israel, to whom the Gospel was first preached,” we see that he believed the 144,000 were the true Israelites, the true sons of Abraham by faith among the Jews who were incorporated into the early New Testament Church, i.e., those to whom the Gospel was first preached. The

multitudes in verse 9 included the Gentiles. Thus, he concurs with Oecumenius and St. Andrew of Caesarea.

9. SAINT ARETHAS OF CAESAREA, (AD 860-939)

He was a most scholarly Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and compiled a Greek commentary on the *Apocalypse* making frequent use of the commentary of St. Andrew of Caesarea. To date St. Arethas’ commentary has not been translated into English. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios quotes occasionally from him in his 5-volume set of homilies on the Apocalypse, but does not refer to him in regard to the 144,000. However, Arethas’ view on the 144,000 is mentioned by Francis X. Gumerlock in his article *Exegesis of the Apocalypse in the Tenth Century*:

“Arethra’s *Commentary on the Apocalypse* is mainly a selective reworking of exegesis found in the sixth- and seventh-century Apocalypse commentaries of Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea ...

“In their utilization of earlier traditions, tenth-century commentators on the Apocalypse often viewed the visions as symbols of Christian truths relevant for life in the present age. They also saw in the visions depictions of past history. **According to Arethas, the 144,000 in Revelation 7 were Jewish people who escaped the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans,** and the visions of Revelation 12 recounted the early life of Jesus, including the attempt on his life by Herod and his flight to Egypt.”¹⁷

10. ARCHBISHOP AVERKY: (AD 1906- 1976)

In his commentary on the Apocalypse this renowned 20th century bishop of the Russian Church Outside of Russia followed the teachings of St. Andrew of Caesarea on the 144,000 for Revelation 7:1-9.¹⁸

11. VLADIMIR MOSS: (AD 1949-PRESENT), CONTEMPORARY ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN WRITER.

This contemporary Russian Orthodox writer offers the opinion of St. Andrew of Caesarea without any additional comments in his online book.¹⁹

12. ARCHIMANDRITE ATHANASIOS MITILINAIOS: (AD 1927-2006), ABBOT OF THE MONASTERY OF KOMNIENEIOU AND ST. JOHN THE THEOLOGIAN IN STOMION, LARISA, GREECE,

This extremely popular conservative Greek New Calendar homilist, took a different path than our traditional Orthodox commentators in his 5-volume set of transcribed homilies on the Apocalypse. His oral homily 35 on *Revelation* was transcribed and translated

17. Gumerlock FX, *Exegesis of the Apocalypse in the Tenth Century*, in McAllister C, *The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2020, pp. 138-139.

18. Archbishop Averky (Taushev) (translated from the Russian by Fr. Seraphim Rose), *The Apocalypse in the Teaching of Ancient Christianity*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, Platina, CA 1995, p. 136-9.

19. Vladimir Moss, *Apocalypse, Book of the End.*, 2011, pp. 380, online only, <http://www.orthodoxchristianbooks.com/books/>

16. Venerable Bede, *The Explanation of the Apocalypse*, <https://www.ecatholic2000.com/bede/untitled-31.shtml>



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into English as follows:

“However, **the one hundred and forty-four thousand does not refer to the Jews who lived during the time of the Apostles. It refers to the New Israel that consists of Jews and Gentiles and all those who believed and would believe in Christ throughout the ages** ... One element of the reference to the twelve tribes is that the natural order of the tribes is not adhered to. This non-adherence becomes significant; in fact any argument that Saint John’s reference is based solely on the twelve tribes of Israel is thereby eliminated. Additionally, Saint John places the tribe of Judah first because it is from this tribe that Christ descended. **Therefore, the number of the saved refers to a new people, the people of grace, the Christians.**”²⁰

However, in the rest of the extended passage from which the this quote was excerpted, the Archimandrite makes two major errors in his analysis. First, he states that Saint Andrew of Caesarea says, “And who are these twelve tribes? They are the twelve Apostles.”²¹ Nowhere in either text of St. Andrew, which has been quoted in full above, does this statement occur. Thus, he has misinterpreted or misrepresented St. Andrew on this point. Secondly, he writes, “The tribe of Levi also does not receive a share, so it is not counted here either. Levi is mentioned as a tribe that received a promise, but not a share or a lot.”²² However, St. John the Theologian does include the tribe of Levi in his listing of the 12 tribes in his *Revelation 7:7* preceded by the tribe of Simeon and followed by that of Issachar. So

the archimandrite is wrong here again. Consequently, I find some of his comments misleading and erroneous.

The *new people* he refers to, *the people of grace, the Christians* are not the 144,000, but the result of the 144,000. They are that *great multitude*. For subsequent to the description of the 12 tribes of 12,000, in verse 9 of *Revelation* we read:

7:9 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.

A countless multitude of Jews and Gentiles of *all nations* are seen gathered here *after* the 144,000 Israelites were seen. Based on Oecumenius, St. Andrew of Caesarea, and the Venerable Bede, the *144,000 of all the tribes of the children of Israel* would represent the Israelites composing the early New Testament Church: the Apostles, lesser Apostles, myrrh-bearing women, the early followers of Christ Jesus, as well as the Jews evangelized by them, and sealed before the fall of Jerusalem. They are the fruit of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and typified by the early summer harvest of wheat celebrated in the Feast of Pentecost. The countless multitude of Jews and Gentiles seen *after this* would be typified in the great fall harvest festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, the great Feast of Ingathering. The former Jews would be joined by the Jews evangelized by Enoch and Elijah in the time of the Antichrist and included among the multitudes from every nation, kindred, people, and tongue seen together in that latter great harvest.



20. Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios, *Lesson 35, Revelation 7:4-8* [Homily 35], *Revelation, The Seven Seals, Volume II*, St. Nikodemos Publications, Bethlehem, PA, 2014, pp. 200-203.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 203.