

Questions For Discussion And Further Study

1. Who are the 144,000?
2. Why do we say the 144,000 are not a figurative picture of the Church?
3. 14:1 says that the 144,000 had the name of the Lamb and of God written on their foreheads. Is this literal? Could it (and the mark of the Beast: 666) be figures of speech that refer to ideology? Why? Why Not?
4. These redeemed ones set up a stark contrast. To what? How are they unique?
5. These redeemed ones are identified as male. Why does this observation drive a nail in the interpretation of Jehovah's Witness doctrine that the 144,000 are those who inherit heaven by their good works and obedience?
6. The 144,000 are identified as virgins. Is this a preferred state of existence for Christians? Why? Why not?
7. What does the creation account in Genesis suggest about human sexuality and its expression? Did God call it good?
8. Does the decision to remain sexually celibate provide for a greater level of spirituality? Why? Why not.
9. What does 1 Corinthians 6:14-20 teach us about sexuality?
10. What does Paul teach about marriage, celibacy and singleness in 1 Corinthians 7?
11. How is 1 Corinthians 7:26 of particular relevance to the sexual choice of the 144,000 in Revelation 14?
12. How did the early Church begin to misunderstand sexuality? How is this still reflected today?



Sealing of the 144,000

Redemption In The Midst of Wrath: The 144,000

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Introduction

Chapter fourteen begins with a discussion of the 144,000 who were sealed for redemption from the tribes of Israel. There was a modification of precisely who the tribes are in chapter seven. But it is clear it is a reference to a literal Israel that was future from John's own time. The earlier Church interpreters up to and beyond the Protestant Reformation were incorrect to identify this large group of people as representative of the Church, either the Apostolic Church or subsequent. For them the church was spiritual Israel improved and continued under the New Covenant of Christ. The Church is not Israel. It benefits from many of the promises to Israel, but is not ethnic, national Israel. In the Revelation of John we see the fulfillment of the eschatological promises to Israel and glimpse the establishment of the promised Kingdom on earth with the greater son of David – Jesus the Christ – sitting upon the throne ruling Israel and the world.

The 144,000 are referenced in unique ways – and ways that raise questions about what constitutes holy service to God, gender and personal purity in relationship to that issue. First, it must be noted that the 144,000 who are sealed for God are male. This poses a problem for cultic groups who teach that the 144,000 are the number that earn heaven while the remainder are on the earth. If true, this means no woman will be in heaven. Clearly it is not that. And clearly females will also be redeemed during this time of great judgment on earth. They are “firstfruit”. The firstfruit of God's redemptive plan for this era in renewing His dealing with His ancient people Israel.

Second, they are sexual virgins who have not “defiled themselves with women.” This phrase has fed a notion in church history that sexual expression even within marriage is a lesser evil. We must clarify that misunderstanding of these verses by noting that Scripture as a whole teaches that human sexuality is God's good gift to be freely enjoyed within the boundaries of the marriage of a man to a woman. Sexuality is a gift, not defilement. In the broader context this statement refers to fornication and adultery.

The Unique Nature of the 144,000

The Concept of Sexuality and the Historical Misunderstanding of the 144,000