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PROPER CONTEXT OF THE 144,000

by Floyd R. Cox



Googling for "144,000 in Revelation" produces 56,200 hits. Why so much variety? One version would be just fine! Perhaps 99% of these are reading the subject out of context. What is the proper context?

Of course, it was written in the first century, but Irenaeus is given credit for setting the date. However, upon close examination, he was ambiguous in dating the apostle John's visions. He said, "For (John or John's book or John's vision) was seen not very long ago, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign" (Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 5, 30, 3). Domitian's reign ended September 18, 96.

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This could mean that John's visions were much earlier, even before the temple burned in 70 AD, and that it was John, himself, that was seen up to the time of Domitian, in about 98 AD. One cannot be too careful about what others say Irenaeus actually said. There may be an ulterior, hidden motive. Those saying Revelation was written for today will, of course, say it was written in about 98 AD.

Context of the New Covenant

The new covenant reverts back to the time before the Israelites asked for a king.

Before this, the Israelites made a covenant on Pentecost, at Mt. Sinai, to keep the law and to follow the One in the cloud and in the pillar of fire. Moses wrote a book showing that the Passover, the days of unleavened bread and Pentecost would represent the early harvest of the firstfruits, which would be followed by a fall harvest after the feast of Trumpets.

Therefore, he sent out 12 scouts into the Promised Land, and they brought back giant grapes and a bad report. Grape harvests occur in the fall, near the feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month. Perhaps they would have entered and began counting the years, sabbaticals and jubilees on the 10th day of the seventh month instead of on the 10th day of the first month. That is when the trumpet of the jubilee is sounded. They would have entered with the expectation of eventually reaching their golden era, when they would dedicate a permanent temple and celebrate the feast of Tabernacles. These feast days were to be observed as memorials of what would happen and what did happen, but they did not enter the land in that fall because the scouts returned with a bad report.

Upon coming into the Promised Land, eventually they asked for a king. Solomon built a permanent temple in Jerusalem and celebrated the feast of Tabernacles 14 days. Not long thereafter, he overtaxed the people and married 700 wives. Many of them were daughters of foreign kings, and they demanded that Solomon build them temples for their foreign gods.

Out of anger, God took away their kings, replaced them with foreign kings that took them captive into exile into the empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

Context of the 144,000

Revelation often refers to the first covenant at Mt. Sinai, which had a bad ending. The 12 tribes were disbursed among the nations not belonging to them, and a Redeemer was willing to die in order to "buy" them back, to forget their past and to follow Him again as their King. Revelation pictures the Higher Realm with this Redeemer (the Lion and the Lamb) dwelling with those returning from the nations.

Many exiles returned with Zerubbabel in 539 BC, others in the time of Ezra after 520 BC and others on the day of Pentecost, in 31 AD (Acts 2:5). The 144,000 are redeemed from the earth, from among men, and we can safely assume they are from all nations (Rev 7:4-8).

The elect are from one end of heaven to the other (Mat 24:31).

The prophets spoke of the tribes of Israel and Judah returning from all nations and becoming one kingdom again. The 144,000 are the firstfruits of God and the Lamb (Rev 14:1,4). Christ told his disciples that, after the regeneration, when he begins to sit on the "throne of glory", they would

sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel” (Mat 19:28).

When would this be? 3½ years after 31 AD, after the church was founded, Stephen said the heavens were opened and he could see Jesus standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

The Mystery of the Gospel to the Gentiles

Among the firstfruits, there is another group. The gospel first went to the Jews who became believers and then to the gentiles who became believers. These lived in all nations but were not exiled as the Israelites were. Evidently, they lived in their own land among the nations.

Revelation 7:9 says this second group which is too large to number is also taken out from all nations, they are also saved just like the 144,000 (Rev 22:24-26). Like the firstfruits, they are also the elect gathered from one end of heaven to the other (Mat 24:31).

If the innumerable multitude is not the firstfruits (the spring harvest) then they likely represent the fall harvest, after the gospel is sent to all nations.

Paul spoke of this mystery hidden from the foundations of the earth (Rom 16:25; Col 1:26) about the gospel going to the gentiles. The kings and innumerable multitude that are saved from all nations bring glory to the Kingdom (Rev 22:24-26).

Some gentiles of Paul’s time became to become converted. This became obvious because of the healings, opening of prison doors, and was acknowledged by the apostles’ conference in 49 AD and endorsed by two prophets sent back to Antioch with Paul and Silas.

Before this, Paul noticed that Peter ate in the synagogue at Antioch with the circumcised but not with the others and did not respond to Paul’s correction. Therefore, Paul knowing very well the law on how “strangers” were to be treated by the Israelites, brought his case before the apostles in Jerusalem. Hospitality towards “strangers” is covered in the Law, in Leviticus 17 to 22, and was very likely referred to during the ministerial conference in Jerusalem, in 49 AD.

There are several kinds of “strangers”. Because of this “hospitality” or being “neighborly” toward the gentiles, we know that 318 servants were born in Abraham’s house, and they were an army (Gen 14:14). Abraham and others like him claimed to be aliens looking for a perfect world. The Israelites were strangers in Egypt learning how to treat others who would be strangers in the Promised Land (Lev 19:34).

Using this hospitality, we know that the gentiles in Joshua’s time could have remained in the Promised Land, along with the Israelites, if they, like Rahab and Ruth, had feared the One who was in the cloud and in the fire, the One who parted the Red Sea. But Leviticus 17 to 19 says don’t settle with those worshipping idols, drinking blood, eating things strangled, and making pornography and condoning sexual perversion.

The Israelites also, like the converted gentiles of the new covenant, could have stayed in the Promised Land if they had not, after asking for a king, turned to worshipping idols, making false images of God and performing other intolerable acts. Solomon ignored this and married many wives that worshipped idols. Thus ended the golden era of Israel after his death, when Israel split from Judah.

After the first temple was destroyed in 587 BC, a new temple was on the drawing board (seen in a vision), which would provide for strangers that sojourn with the 12 tribes to have inheritance among the Israelites “as born in the country among the children of Israel” (Ezek 47:22-23). In the restored temple, there would still be sacrificial offerings, which is contrary to the new covenant (Ezek 43:23-26; Zech 14:20-21; Heb 9:11-14). Therefore, Ezekiel 43 and Zechariah 14 are not speaking of a third temple after the first century, which prohibits sacrificing.

Likewise, the gentiles were accepted into the new covenant if they had converted from worshipping idols, from making images of God and other required changes as itemized in Acts 15. Gentile converts became separate from gentile unbelievers hoping to form a community with Jewish converts.

Kingdom Based Upon the 12 Apostles and 12 Tribes

If the innumerable multitude represents the converted gentiles of all the nations, then the 144,000 likely represent the 12 tribes and those who would become converted and enter into the New Covenant.

Evidently, Abraham was part of the New Covenant because he is the father of the faithful, and Lazarus died and went to Abraham’s bosom. Moses and Elijah were of the New Covenant because they were seen in a vision transfigured with Christ. David, Elisha, Daniel, John the Baptist and many others were likely of the New Covenant along with those converted in and after 31 AD, when the invisible New Covenant Church became “visible”. They represent the firstfruits of Israel. These lived as strangers and wanderers looking for a City (perhaps with a temple) built without hands. Would they find it on the earth? When and where?

The gentiles, on the other hand, were not exiles. They owned their land. They had not been in

Egypt at the exodus Passover. They were not at Mt. Sinai on Pentecost. They were not in Jerusalem on Hanukkah. These days have little meaning to them. They were also like foreign “strangers” who were reached by the 12 apostles. This is clearly expressed by the apostle Paul. The wall of the City has 12 foundations having the names of the 12 apostles on them.

The 12 gates have the names of the 12 tribes of Israel on them, each being one pearl, each having its own angel. The founders are not Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, or Moses.

The wall is 144 cubits high, which would efficiently keep out those who are dogs, whoremongers, murderers, idolaters, sorcerers, liars and creators of international pornography and sexual perversion. This was clearly decided by the apostles at the ministerial conference in 49 AD. In the new covenant, there is neither gentile nor Jew. The true gentiles are the gentile and Jewish unbelievers, which are warned against. The converted would be scourged and beaten in the unconverted synagogues (Mat 10:17; 23:34; Mk 13:9; Lk 21:12; Jn 16:2; Acts 26:11;). Thanks to the ministerial conference in 49 AD, converted gentiles were not required to meet in synagogues if they continued coping with being “hushed”, isolated, or forced to comply with the unconverted.

In other words, the new covenant is a pristine world dressed in white, without abomination, pollution or corruption and is based upon the apostles. Converted gentiles enter into the new covenant as strangers and are allowed to reside with those descending from the twelve patriarchs of Israel.

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