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Marks of the 144,000

Two major groups will be

in the earth in the last days.

Each will have marks by which

its members may be recognized.

By GERHARD F. HASEL



WHO ARE THE 144,000 OF THE BOOK of Revelation? This question has aroused the curiosity of both laypersons and theologians. John the Revelator presents this group in Revelation 7 and 14. In chapter 7, he sees the 144,000 being sealed, and in chapter 14 he sees them "on Mount Zion." As loyal followers of Christ, they have certain characteristics. They stand in contradistinction to the group of people who have the mark of the beast on their foreheads (see Rev. 13:16, 17).

In the time just preceding the great consummation all human beings on this globe will be divided into two major groups, each of which will have marks by which its members may be easily recognized. The decision as to which group to join is a matter of life or death. This question is one that must be decided here and now. Each human being decides his destiny. To whom will he pay allegiance? Whose name will he carry? Whose mark, or seal, will he have? Whose pattern will he follow?

Several important characteristics identify the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14. First, they have the name of the Lamb and His Father written on their foreheads (14:1, N.A.S.B.). What is the importance of such a name? In Biblical thinking there is a close association between a person and his name, an association that is foreign to Western ways of thought.

Anciently the name stood for the nature and personality of the being that carried the name. Inasmuch as the 144,000 carry the name of the Lamb and His Father, they have a share in the nature and personality of the two. They are the image of God (*cf.* Gen. 1:26f.) in the truest sense.

With bestowal of a new name, ownership is asserted. More yet. Adoption into God's family is signified. Every person who receives these names has entered a new existence, has experienced a new ownership, and has come to live under the authority and protection of the loving Father and His gracious Son (*cf.* Deut. 28:10; Isa. 43:7; 63:19; 65:1; Dan. 9:18, 19). These are the rights of adoption.

Significance of Name in Forehead

Incidentally, the new name is written in the "forehead" (Rev. 14:1). Neurologists inform us that the forward section of the brain, that which is nearest to the forehead, is the part that is involved with the processes of abstract thinking, including the reasoning power and logical deduction. It has been suggested that the "forehead" is singled out because it is that part of the body behind which the section of the brain in which the key processes of thought take place is situated. If this suggestion is correct, then it seems reasonable to conclude that those who bear this name were in their thought processes so settled in the truth, in the essence of the nature of the Lamb and His Father, that no theory or supposition, no hardship or persecution, nothing under the whole heaven, could separate them in their faith and allegiance to Him who has purchased them with His own blood. They have stood during the time of Jacob's trouble (Dan. 12:1-3). They have gone unharmed through the great

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day of God's wrath (Rev. 6:17). They were under the protection of the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 22:13).

Another characteristic of the 144,000 is the fact that they "were redeemed" (Rev. 14:3). The word translated "redeemed" (K.J.V., R.S.V., N.I.V.) or "ransomed" (N.E.B., N.A.B.) in verse 3 is *agorazō*. It may be literally translated "purchased" (N.A.S.B.). The descriptive term is well chosen, for it is the Lamb who paid the price of release from sin and bondage with His own blood (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 3:18; 13:17; 18:11).

But along with the idea of being purchased is the idea of separation from the world. On the one hand the purchase of the redeemed is an act of God through Jesus Christ in which man has no merit of his own; on the other hand it is an act of separation "from [apo] the earth" (verse 3) and "from [apo] mankind" (verse 4). In contrast to the human multitude who are marked with the name or number of the beast (Rev. 13:17), the 144,000 receive the seal of God in their foreheads. The ultimate question is whether each person who learns of these issues can affirm that he or she is God's purchase, acquired through the blood of the Lamb. Only God's own provisions lead to salvation and to membership in the family of God, the remnant. This remnant will enter into everlasting glory at the consummation.

The enigmatic words that these purchased ones "were not defiled with women; for they are virgins" (Rev. 14:4) have been explained in different ways. It seems safe to conclude on the basis of the symbolic nature of the Apocalypse that the refraining from "immorality with women" (N.A.B.) refers to their refusal to indulge in idolatrous practices, which are equated with adultery and fornication (Rev. 2:14, 15, 20-25; 17:1-7; cf. Eze. 16:1-58; 23:1-49). The 144,000 have not had illicit relationships with "the great prostitute" (Rev. 17:1, N.I.V.), "Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes" (verse 5), nor with her harlot daughters. There is no mixing between the last remnant community of believers and the counterfeit religious mother and daughter communions.

Significance of the Term *Virgins*

The 144,000 are "virgins" (K.J.V.). The Greek word thus translated does not imply that they are all women. The term applies to members of both sexes, as, in fact, the English word *virgin* does also. The word *celebrates* (N.A.S.B.) is inadequate. Their state as "virgins" indicates that they carry the mark of purity. They are chaste and have kept themselves in a continual state of cleanness. They have kept an uncorrupted faith. Their refusal to bind themselves in illicit relationships with other religious bodies is a sign that they succeeded in keeping their covenant with God. They know of only one relationship: the true love relationship of faith with the Father and with the Lamb who purchased them from worldly slavery to sin and made them adopted sons and daughters of God.

The observation that "in their mouth no lie was found" (Rev. 14:5, R.S.V.) suggests that an investigation has been conducted relative to their character. The transforming power of the Lamb changed sinful, erring, and dishonest beings into persons who have neither pretense nor make-believe, neither deceit nor dishonesty.

The reason for the truthfulness of the last generation

of the faithful rests in their blamelessness. "They are blameless" (Rev. 14:5, N.I.V., N.A.S.B.). The Greek word *amōmos* is rendered "without fault" (K.J.V.), "faultless" (N.E.B.), "spotless" (R.S.V.), and "without flaw" (N.A.B.). It carries the connotation of blamelessness in a moral and religious sense. It is God's designed aim for the early Christian community. "We should be holy and blameless before Him" (Eph. 1:4, N.A.S.B.), writes Paul to the Ephesians (cf. 5:22, N.A.S.B.). The Philippians should prove themselves "to be blameless and innocent" (Phil. 2:15, N.A.S.B.). Christ is said to present the Colossians before the Father "holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Col. 1:22, N.A.S.B.). Those who look for a new heaven and a new earth must "be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14, N.A.S.B.).

A Song Out of a Unique Experience

Noah, who lived "according to all that God had commanded him" (Gen. 6:22; cf. 7:5, N.A.S.B.), was declared blameless and emerged with his faithful family as the only survivors from the worldwide destruction of the Flood. Noah and his family were the remnant of the first destruction of the world, and thus may be considered to be a type of the remnant, numbered 144,000, who will survive the second destruction of the world at Christ's second coming. If the 144,000 will also follow Christ on Mount Zion wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4, N.A.S.B.), then they must walk with Him before He returns to earth in glory. Their spiritual forefather, Enoch, "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24, N.A.S.B.) right into heaven; they too will walk with, and under the leadership of, the Lamb into their heavenly abode.

In that new heavenly Jerusalem they will sing "a new song before the throne" (Rev. 14:3, N.A.S.B.). That "new song" that they alone can learn comes out of their unique experience of being the last community of faithful ones who passed through almost overpowering tribulations, the time of Jacob's trouble, to witness the coming of their expected Lord.

Who are the 144,000 of the book of Revelation? This question is answered in Revelation 7 and 14. The 144,000 are human beings who make up the last remnant community of faith. They are identified by (1) having the name of the Lamb and His Father written on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1, N.A.S.B.); (2) the fact of their purchase from the earth and from mankind (verses 3,4); (3) their having kept themselves undefiled from illicit relationships with false religious communions (verse 4); (4) the mark of purity (verse 4); (5) the mark of truthfulness (verse 5); (6) the mark of moral and religious blamelessness (verse 5); and (7) their following of the Lamb wherever He leads (verse 4).

The question of "who" relates to us. To know the marks of identification is not enough. What matters most is whether each of us will carry these marks of identification. Do we live in such total union and intimate relationship with our Lord, day by day, that our moral and religious selves are merged with His being? If not, then the message of the 144,000 calls us to make such a commitment and thereby experience the beginnings of eternal life, so that we may pass from death to life (1 John 3:14, N.A.S.B.; John 5:24; Eph. 2:1ff., N.A.S.B.) and may be numbered among the 144,000. □