

## Questions on the Sealing Message

Over the past few months I've had several people ask me about who I believe compose the 144,000, and to be honest, I really don't think it's a salvational issue, but what is important is that we strive to develop the kind of character that the 144,000 are said to possess.

I'd like to read you two short statements from the Spirit of Prophecy to begin with this morning, and I think they should help answer many questions you may have about the 144,000.

The first statement is from ***Selected Messages, book 1, page 174***, "Christ says that there will be those in the church who will present fables and suppositions, when God has given grand, elevating, ennobling truths which should ever be kept in the treasure house of the mind. **[In other words, some things are more important than others; some are salvational and some are not]** When men pick up this theory and that theory, when they are curious to know something it is not necessary for them to know, God is not leading them. It is not His plan that His people shall present something which they have to suppose, which is not taught in the Word. **[Now just to be clear; to "suppose" something is true doesn't make it so. An idea or theory that you believe is true without proof is a supposition, and we don't want to base what we believe on suppositions]** It is not His will that they shall get into controversy over questions which will not help them spiritually, such as, Who is to compose the hundred and forty-four thousand? This those who are the elect of God will in a short time know without question.

"My brethren and sisters, appreciate and study the truths God has given for you and your children. Spend not your time in seeking to know that which will be no spiritual help."

That was written in 1901 and the next one was written 13 years later in 1914, just a year before the Lord's messenger died.

***Selected Messages, Book 3, page 51***, and evidently this was a persistent question over the years and finally she simply said, "I have no light on the subject [as to just who would constitute the 144,000]."

Boy, after reading these two statements I guess we could stop right there and go on with another more important topic, but because questions seem to persist, I do want to cover a few points.

We just read that who compose the 144,000 is not necessary for us to know, and even if we knew, it would not help us spiritually, that much is clear. However, because this question has been a long standing controversy within Adventism and because it continues on today, I think we need to talk about it. When people are curious to know something that is not necessary for

them to know, God is not leading them, that's what we just read! And do you know what it means to be curious in this context? It means to be "Strongly desirous to see what is novel, or to discover what has not been revealed."

Now notice what it says about this in the ***Review and Herald, January 22, 1901*** "If we only knew what is before us, we should not be so dilatory in doing the work of the Lord. There are ministers and workers who will present a tissue of nonsensical falsehoods as testing truths, even as the Jewish rabbis presented the maxims of men as the bread of heaven. These are given to the flock of God, as their portion of meat in due season, while the poor sheep are starving for the bread of life. Even now there seems to be a burning desire to get up something startling, and bring it in as new light. Thus men are weaving into the web as important truths a tissue of lies. This imaginary food that is being prepared for the flock will cause spiritual consumption, decline, and death."

The prophet said God did not reveal to her who compose the 144,000, and that should be good enough for us. And yet the questions keep coming about who compose the 144,000. Let me just say this in case you are one of the curious ones, and hopefully you will not remain curious by the time we're through. There are two major views today within Adventism about who compose the 144,000. One is that they will be made up of those that will be translated when Jesus comes, like Enoch and Elijah were, without ever having experienced death, which is by far the majority view, and the other is that those who have died since 1848 when light on the sealing message first began, and who died in faith, keeping the Sabbath, coming up in that special resurrection mentioned in ***Early Writings, page 285***, will be included in that number along with those that have never died when Jesus comes.

Over the years I have met people who were very adamant that the first view is correct, and I have also met those who were just as adamant that the second view is correct, and they both have some pretty good arguments that their view is the correct view.

Now there's only one reason I know of as to why people believe the second view, and that's because of a small booklet written in 1916 by J. N. Loughborough titled *Questions on the Sealing Message*. If you want to read it you can find it in the pioneer writings. Just type in *Questions on the Sealing Message* and it will come up.

So, this morning I'm not going to tell you what I believe about who compose the 144,000, and I hope you're not disappointed by that, but I am going to share a few things with you in hopes of putting this subject to rest, but you'll have to come to your own conclusion if you still feel it's important. I'll give you a little information about both sides of the question, but you'll have to make up your own mind, and then I want to spend some time talking about the importance of

having the kind of character the 144,000 are said to possess, which is without question, the more important question.

J. N. Loughborough wrote his booklet in 1916, a year after Ellen White died. It's only 48 pages long and was written by request of several people that heard him speak about these things at a campmeeting in Stockton, California.

Loughborough was of the opinion that people like himself, who were alive when light on the sealing message first began in 1848, will make up part of the 144,000 as long as they were faithful, keeping the Sabbath when they died, and the idea that the 144,000 will be made up only of those of the final generation who have never died, he said was a new teaching, or "new light" as he called it, that was put forth around 1894 by one who eventually apostatized from the truth.

But here's something I found as I was researching this subject and trying to get a sampling of what the early pioneers actually believed, and I found something very interesting about what Loughborough himself believed in the early days.

Now remember, Loughborough's booklet was written in 1916, but notice what he wrote 60 years earlier in 1855. Speaking of the 144,000 he says, "They are changed from mortal to immortality, and never taste of death. How often we see it stated concerning different individuals that have died, that they got the victory over death, when the facts in the case are, they sunk beneath his icy hand. Paul does not locate this song of victory at death; but 'when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'

"This testimony concerning the 144,000 we shall consider as a description of the deliverance of those holy ones who shall be alive when Christ comes. They are to be made partakers of a blessing that but two in the world's history ever experienced; namely, translation to heaven without tasting death."

And he mentions the two he refers to here are Enoch and Elijah. These are the only two people that have been translated to heaven without ever experiencing death, and he said it will be people like them that will make up the 144,000. You can find this information under **MPC** in the pioneer writings, **page 76**, and I believe MPC stands for "Man's Present Condition."

So I'm not sure what Loughborough was talking about in 1916 when he wrote about the early pioneers believing that the 144,000 would be composed of some who have died keeping the Sabbath since 1848 when he himself didn't believe that in the early days.

If you search the pioneer writings about the 144,000 you'll find that there were different ideas over the years about who compose that number and that the pioneers were not in unity about it. And so, for Loughborough to suggest that they were united on that point early on, is not correct, and I'm not sure why he would say that they were.

To be fair to Loughborough, he couldn't get on the computer and search what the various pioneers believed like we can, and maybe those he knew of were in unity, so we'll give him the benefit of the doubt, but it's clear that there were differences on this point all through the years.

The other thing I have to wonder about is why he waited until 1916, a year after Ellen White died, to preach his sermons about the 144,000 and publish his booklet. Did he think there would be opposition from the prophet if he voiced his beliefs while she was still living? I don't know, and I don't think anyone can know, but it does make me wonder since Ellen White basically said to leave the subject alone.

Now I don't tell you these things to try to damage Loughborough's reputation or to impugn his character, because I believe and hope he'll be in heaven, but at the same time we have the right, and even the duty to examine what he and others taught, don't we? After all, didn't the apostle Paul commend the Bereans because they wanted to study for themselves and not just take his word for what he was teaching?

I have to tell you friends, as I have researched over the past 43 years what the pioneers taught about various subjects, I have found that there were many differences in what they believed. That's one of the reasons I hesitate to call myself an "Historic Seventh-day Adventist", because that implies in the minds of many that I believe everything the pioneers believed, when in fact I don't. Uriah Smith, for example, went to the grave believing errors about the deity of Christ. He may have contributed a lot of good things for the advancement of the truth, but he was flat wrong on a few things, and the same could be said of others.

Much of what the pioneers wrote is very beneficial, don't get me wrong, and I have benefited greatly from what they have written, but their knowledge through the years was progressive, and most changed as light came through the Spirit of Prophecy. What the Spirit of Prophecy taught over the 70 years of Sister White's ministry is what we should believe, and if what the pioneers wrote is contrary to the Spirit of Prophecy, I'm going to take the Spirit of Prophecy over the pioneer writings every time!

And I can almost hear someone saying, "Yes that's true, but Ellen White herself said we should believe what the pioneers taught," and I would agree, but it has to be in harmony with what the prophet wrote, and if she corrected things along the way, what the pioneers taught is not to supersede that.

On things salvational I think the pioneers were pretty much in agreement, but on non-salvational topics, such as who compose the 144,000, there were differences. And so we've got to study things out for ourselves rather than just accept it as gospel truth just because one or more of the Advent pioneers said so, and if they were alive today I think they would agree with that.

Loughborough also intimates quite clearly that he believed the 144,000 to be a literal number. But if this be true as he says, and I'm not saying it is or isn't literal, then how many, since 1848, which is now 168 years ago, how many of the literal 144,000 have already been added to that number, and how many would be left? Not many.

I would think over the past 168 years that more than 144,000 faithful Sabbath keepers will be saved, at least I hope so, and I can understand why he may have believed what he did, because I'm sure he thought the Lord would come long before 2016, and I can't help but think that his views may very well be different today, were he alive, than they were in 1916. So these are some of my concerns about what Loughborough believed. There's more, but I think that's enough for now.

If I were to give you information about the 144,000 consisting only of those of the final generation who will be translated as were Enoch and Elijah and that the 144,000 is a symbolic number, I could probably do a pretty good job of convincing you that that view is the correct view, and if I gave you information about the 144,000 being made up of those who died in faith keeping the Sabbath since 1848 along with those of the final generation who will never experience death and that the 144,000 is a literal number, I could probably do an equally good job of convincing you that that view is correct, but I'm not going to try to do either this morning, because all that would do is confuse you. As I've studied this subject, I believe there are some good points on each side of both theories and I also believe there are a few holes in each theory, and as I said, I'm not going to adamantly put forth one theory above the other for that very reason.

Now having said all that, we're not totally left in the dark about the kind of people who will compose the 144,000, because the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy do have quite a bit to say about the subject, and at this point maybe we should read what we know for sure is inspired.

I'd like to read what the apostle John wrote about the 144,000 in **Revelation chapter 7**, but before we do that I think it's important to understand what John wrote in the last few verses of **Revelation chapter 6**, because we are living between **verses 13 and 14**.

Notice what it says: **Revelation 6:13**, "And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."

Now if you've studied this in the past, you know that the falling of the stars is history, in other words, it's already happened. Now notice what it says in **verses 14-17**: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Good question.

And then as we begin to read **chapter 7**, it tells us who will be able to stand, and it's the 144,000.

**Revelation 7:1-4** "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. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God [**by the way, that would be the third angel. Study that out when you get the time**]: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. 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."

I mentioned earlier that many of the pioneers believed differently about who they believed the 144,000 to be, and as I was reading about what one of them wrote, he believed the 144,000 to be Messianic Jews, and that's not unlike what many evangelical Christians believe today, but are we to believe the 144,000 are literal Jews that have come to Christ because there's 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel as the next few verses mention? No!

Revelation by in large is symbolic and spiritual in meaning. We're talking spiritual Israel here, are we not? Paul said, If we belong to Christ, then we're Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. He also said a Jew is not a Jew because he is one outwardly, but because he is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit. And so it's important that we understand these things correctly. If we try to interpret Revelation literally as many are doing today, we'll run into all kinds of problems. By the way, if the 144,000 are symbolic of spiritual Israel, wouldn't it make sense that the number is symbolic and not literal? Just something for you to think about.

The apostle John tells us in the very first verse of the first chapter of Revelation that Jesus sent His angel to show him things that were soon to take place, and it says, "He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." The important word here is "signified." The word signified means, "to indicate or make known by a sign", and the word "sign" means "to communicate an

idea by using symbols”, and the word “symbol” means “something that represents something else.” And of course the Spirit of Prophecy agrees with this in *Selected Messages, Book 2, pages 319* where it says, “Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols.”

There are two mistakes people make when trying to understand Revelation today and that’s why there’s so much confusion about what Revelation teaches. Number one, they try to interpret it literally; and number two, they think it’s in chronological order when it isn’t, and these things have to be kept in mind if we want to come to a knowledge of the truth in these last days. Now let’s skip down to **verse 9** and read through to **verse 17. Revelation 7:9-17**, “After this [**that is after his description of the 144,000 coming from the 12 tribes**] 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; and cried with a loud voice, saying, salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? [**You see, he’s not referring to the great multitude now, because the angel already said where they came from. They came from “all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues and were unnumbered.” Now he’s looking at another group other than the great multitude, which would be the 144,000, and listen to how they’re described**] And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [**Again, this can’t be referring to the great multitude because the great tribulation spoken of here is the time of Jacob’s trouble, and we’ll see that when we read what it says in Revelation 14 about the 144,000**] Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. [**Why? Because they were alive when the seven last plagues were falling**] For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Now let’s turn to **Revelation 14** and read what it says there.

**Revelation 14:1-5** “And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before

the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

Now let’s compare what we just read with what it says in *The Great Controversy, pages 648, 649*, “Upon the crystal sea before the throne, that sea of glass as it were mingled with fire—so resplendent is it with the glory of God—are gathered the company that have ‘gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.’ With the Lamb upon Mount Zion, ‘having the harps of God,’ they stand, the hundred and forty and four thousand that were redeemed from among men; and there is heard, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of a great thunder, ‘the voice of harpers harping with their harps.’ And they sing ‘a new song’ before the throne, a song which no man can learn save the hundred and forty and four thousand. It is the song of Moses and the Lamb—a song of deliverance.

“None but the hundred and forty-four thousand can learn that song; for it is the song of their experience—an experience such as no other company have ever had. ‘These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.’ These, having been translated from the earth, from among the living, are counted as ‘the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.’ Revelation 15:2, 3; 14:1-5. **[Now, to be objective, no matter which side of the question you take, you have to ask yourself the question, did those who died in faith, keeping the Sabbath back in the 1800s experience these things?]** ‘These are they which came out of great tribulation;’ they have passed through the time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation; they have endured the anguish of the time of Jacob’s trouble; they have stood without an intercessor through the final outpouring of God’s judgments. But they have been delivered, for they have ‘washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb’. . . They have seen the earth wasted with famine and pestilence, the sun having power to scorch men with great heat **[this takes place under the 4<sup>th</sup> plague and you’ll see in a minute that those who died in faith, keeping the Sabbath are raised during the 7<sup>th</sup> plague]**, and they themselves have endured suffering, hunger, and thirst.”

Just one more point about Loughborough’s book. He says those who died in faith, keeping the Sabbath since 1848 will be resurrected during the 6<sup>th</sup> plague, but *The Great Controversy, pages 636, 637* makes it very clear that they are raised after the mighty earthquake such as never was, and after the hail falls from the sky, which is mentioned in the 7<sup>th</sup> plague, and that would also be at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> plague and just before Jesus appears on that great white cloud, and that



sounds reasonable to me.

I will say that God can do whatever He wants, and if He includes all those who died in faith, keeping the Sabbath along with those who have never died to be among the 144,000, that's fine with me, and if He doesn't, that's fine with me too. It is clear however, that all who are alive and found faithful when Jesus comes will be among the 144,000, no question. In other words, if you live to see Jesus come you will be one of the 144,000 or you will be eternally lost, that much is clear; as for the rest, I think we'll have to wait until it happens before we'll know for sure.

Well, I've spent more time than I intended discussing Loughborough's account of who he believed compose the 144,000, so let's spend a few moments now discussing something we should all be able to agree upon; what will the 144,000 be like in character.

I think we have time to quickly look at at least four of the things mentioned in **Revelation 14**.

#1 "They are not defiled with women; for they are virgins." In other words, they did not embrace the false teachings of the harlot of **Revelation 17**, which is the papacy, or the teaching of her daughters, which are the Protestant Sunday churches that forgot what they were protesting about. They did not drink their wine and become drunk with their false doctrine. And by the way, someone that's not a virgin can become a virgin in God's eyes when they are born again, that's pretty much what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11:2; when we are presented as chaste virgins to Christ.

#2 "They follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." They're like Enoch who walked with God. Enoch walked so close to God that God said, "You don't belong on this sinful planet any longer, come to heaven and walk the streets of gold." That's what the 144,000 are like. They're lives are totally focused on Jesus, just like Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

#3 "In their mouth is found no guile." The word guile means "To decoy or to trick and is likened to "bait." There aren't going to be any liars or hypocrites in heaven. A decoy is something fake; it's something that's intended to lead someone into a snare. If you bait a trap, it's for the purpose of fooling someone to take advantage of them; it's a trick, and isn't that what the devil is like? The 144,000 are the complete opposite of the devil, just Like Jesus is.

#4 "They are without fault before the throne of God." The 144,000 are doing nothing wrong. They have, through the power of the Holy Spirit, stopped sinning. During their life of probation they learned that they could truly live a life of victory over sin, even in the face of the greatest time of trouble this world has ever seen.

In **Revelation 6:17**, while the wicked are calling for the rocks and mountain to fall on them and

hide them from the face of God and from the wrath of the Lamb, it says, “For the great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand.” Then in **chapter 7** it tells us who will be able to stand. It’s the 144,000 that will be able to stand because they have prepared themselves to stand. They accepted the seal of God as it’s presented in the third angel’s message, and as a result God made that seal a part of their characters by inscribing it permanently in their foreheads, just as permanent as the law was inscribed on the tables of stone.

Let’s look quickly at a few verses of Scripture.

**Malachi 3:2** “Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap.” That means Jesus is the One who will cleanse and purify the 144,000 and make them fireproof so that in the end they will come forth as gold, purified 7 times.

**Isaiah 33:14-16** “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.”

That’s a description of the 144,000.

**1 John 3:2, 3** “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be **[what?]** like him; for we shall see him as he is **[that is, in all His glory and still be able to live]**. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

And how is this going to happen? It’s a law of the mind that by beholding we become changed. Do you want to have the character of the 144,000? Then you must behold the right things. The 12 disciples became like Jesus because they spent time with Him. It really is that simple. As you follow the Lamb wherever He goes, you will not find yourself in the wrong places and thus you will be purifying yourself and perfecting a character that will be prepared to dwell in the very presence of God Almighty. Unless we are pure, we can’t see God and survive.

And you know, the characters of the 144,000 aren’t really going to be any different than anyone else that’s saved in God’s kingdom. Every one of us will get there the same way, through the shed blood of Christ and by allowing the Holy Spirit making us new creatures and giving us power to stop sinning.

The difference between the 144,000 and the great multitude is that the 144,000 will be tested and tried as no other generation has ever been since the time of creation, because they will have

gone through a time of trouble such as there has never been, the time of Jacob's trouble, and because of that, they're going to be rewarded for it like no others have ever been.

Notice what it says in ***The Great Controversy, page 622*** "The 'time of trouble, such as never was,' is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us. The most vivid presentation cannot reach the magnitude of the ordeal."

Are you willing to do whatever it takes to gain an experience that you do not now possess? Or are you too indolent to obtain it? By the way, the word "indolent" means "habitually lazy." Has it become a habit with you to be spiritually lazy? Would you rather sit in church every Sabbath and allow someone else to spoon feed you than dig out the truth for yourself? If you allow yourself to be spoon fed, whether in church or from listening to a multitude of sermon CD's from various ministries without digging in to the word of God to make sure what you're hearing is the truth, then you will be fed poison sooner or later, and the only way for that not to happen is for you to know the difference between truth and error, and no one can do that for you, you must do it yourself.

In ***The Great Controversy, page 598*** it says, "It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light and encourage others to follow his example. We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought and comparing scripture with scripture. With divine help we are to form our opinions for ourselves as we are to answer for ourselves before God."

Am I telling you anything you don't already know? No. But even though we know these things, many times they don't get it done. Friends, we've got to get it done. We've got to prepare ourselves for that which is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise.

I'd like to close by reading one more quote from ***The Great Controversy, page 555***, "Satan is marshaling his host, and are we individually prepared for the fearful conflict that is just before us? Are we preparing ourselves and our households to understand the position of our adversaries and their modes of warfare? Are our children forming habits of decision, that they may be firm and unyielding in every matter of principle and duty? I pray that we all may understand the signs of the times, and that we may so prepare ourselves and our children that in the time of conflict God may be our refuge and defense."

Oh friends, our time is precious. We have but a very few days of probation in which to make ready for the future immortal life; to strive to be among the 144,000; and I hope that something you have heard this morning will nudge you in the right direction.