

truth" (v. 10), and is seen as collective rather than individual (v. 11). Its purpose or predicted result is "that they all might be damned who believed not the truth" (v. 12). It is characterised by belief in a lie (v. 11).

There is a clear link with Romans 1:25, which speaks of those "who changed the truth of God into a lie", where this lie is stated to be idolatry (v. 23), substituting worship of the created for worship of the Creator, so ascribing to creatures the glory that is due to God. This is precisely what the theory of evolution does. Astonishingly, it is uncritically accepted by the majority that man is derived from one particular creature, the ape; and scientific wisdom backs it. No verse could be more apt in this regard than Romans 1:22.

Thus evolution has dismissed God, and humanism has resulted, putting man in the position from which God has been displaced. No longer is there any authority higher than man, hence the current preoccupation with human rights and the importance attached to the satisfaction of his needs and desires. As Romans 1:25 expresses it, they "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator". Thus we go right back to Genesis 3:5, "ye shall be as gods". The same old lie has resurfaced in a different form.

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## Two classes of people in Revelation 7 and 14\*

I am writing this letter to express the view that there are two classes of people referred to in Revelation 7 and 14. One class of people is natural Israel and the other class spiritual Israel.

Revelation 7:1 depicts four angels holding the four winds of heaven, which means a time of peace. A fifth angel then announces the sealing of the 144,000 in their foreheads. This sealing is as described in Ephesians 1:13: "In whom [Christ] ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise". When Israel see Jesus, as recorded in Zechariah 12:10-14, they will know that he is their Messiah and will mourn for him. Zechariah 13:1 says, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness". Several other passages speak of this time:

"The LORD hath taken away thy [Zion's] judgments, He hath cast out thine enemy [Gog]: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more" (Zeph. 3:15);

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa. 1:18);

"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD" (59:20).

So we see in Revelation 7 Israel in the latter day, not, as the saints in verse 9, in white robes, but forgiven their sins and joined together as one nation.

The names of the tribes of Israel are not the same in Revelation 7 as they are in Ezekiel 48. Dan, whose name means 'judged', is missing in Revelation 7, for God has taken away Israel's judgements. Levi is in his place and his name means 'joined', referring to the way the ten tribes are joined to Judah again as one nation, as prophesied in Ezekiel 37:15-22. Ephraim is missing in Revelation 7, and Joseph, meaning 'increaser', is in his place, referring to the multiplying of men upon the land of Israel (Ezek. 36:10-12).

Revelation 7 then refers to the saints: "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". John was told, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (vv. 9,14).

Turning to Revelation 14, we read, "lo, a Lamb stood on the *mount Zion*, and *with him* an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads"; and then, "I heard a voice from *heaven*, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder [a multitude]: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps" (vv. 1,2). Note that there is one group on the earth (Mount Zion) and another in heaven. Then the ones in heaven "sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn

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\* This letter was received following the publication of the two-part article, "The Lamb on Mount Zion" ([May 2007, p. 151](#); [Jun, p. 198](#)).—T.B.

that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed *from the earth*" (v. 3). Still speaking of the ones in heaven, verse 4 continues, "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".

The 144,000 on Mount Zion are natural Israel, judged (Dan), forgiven, and sins forgotten (Manasseh), and joined into one nation (Levi). They are from *the earth*, God's people, the Jews. The ones in heaven sing a new song before the throne, but the 144,000 have to learn the song. The 144,000 are "redeemed from the earth", that is, Israel, but the ones in heaven are "redeemed from among men", that is, all the inhabitants of the world, as in 7:9.

The differences between the two are summarised in the table below:

Israel	Saints
Sealed (7:4)	White robes (7:9)
Tribes of Israel (v. 4)	All nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues (v. 9)
Set number, 144,000 (v. 4)	Cannot be numbered (v. 9)
On Mount Zion (14:1)	In heaven, symbolically (14:2)
Learn the song (v. 3)	Sing the song (v. 3)
Redeemed from the earth (v. 3)	Redeemed from among men (v. 4).

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## Reply

I thank Sister Smith for her letter, in which she expresses the view that in Revelation 7 we see "Israel in the latter day, not, as the saints in verse 9, in white robes, but forgiven their sins and joined together as one nation". It is easy to read Revelation 7:4-8 and understand it in a literal sense and then apply it to natural Israel, but is that what Jesus intended?

We have to remember the first verse of the book, which reads, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and *signified* it by his angel unto his servant John". The word "signified" indicates

that it was given in a symbolic form that his servants would understand.

Thus we would expect the tribes of natural Israel mentioned in chapter 7 to signify something else, that is, the members of spiritual Israel. In conformity with this interpretation, it is important to note that Levi is included in the names of the tribes. This is as it should be to be a proper symbol. Under the Mosaic covenant, Levi was separated and elevated to priesthood, and consequently had no territorial inheritance. Moses declared, "Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren" (Deut. 10:9). Before that, all the tribes were of equal status. This list in Revelation 7, then, can suitably symbolise spiritual Israel, in which equality of status prevails with all members.

The historical background of Revelation 7 follows closely that of chapter 6. If we follow the continuous historical interpretation, the "great earthquake" of the sixth seal (6:12) was brought about by the Emperor Constantine, who, because he favoured the nominally Christian community then living in a pagan world, made Christianity the state religion. In the interval between this momentous change and the sounding of the war trumpets of chapter 8 there was an opportunity, described in 7:1 as angels "holding the four winds", for the true gospel to be preached. The sincere men and women living in those contentious times who learned the Truth were called "the servants of our God", and by their learning of the Truth they were "sealed . . . in their foreheads" (v. 3). They are said to be 144,000 in number, "of all the tribes of the children of Israel".

It is reasonable to conclude that these sincere people, mostly Gentiles, are regarded as members of a Divine family, a spiritual house, totalling a symbolic 144,000. Then, after many centuries have passed, when persecution and sorrows are also passed, these same servants of God will be raised again to life and join in that great exultation described in verses 9-17.

With reference to 14:1,2, we again have to bear in mind the symbolic nature of the language used throughout Revelation. These 144,000 standing on Mount Zion are said to be "redeemed from the earth" (v. 3). They are therefore immortal saints and remain in view throughout the three opening verses. Hence all the 144,000 sing the new song.

The voice from heaven is from a symbolic heaven, the sphere of rulers where these 144,000 are engaged in "a great thunder", that is to say, in warfare (v. 2). They "follow the Lamb" (v. 4) as he is engaged in subduing the world, when he

will become King of kings and Lord of lords in preparation for the Millennium.

Sister Smith refers to the ones in heaven singing a new song but the 144,000 having to learn it, thus making a distinction. The text says that no man could learn it but the 144,000. If this is the case, the ones in heaven, if they sing it, must be the same body of people as the 144,000, for no one else can learn it but them.

She also says, "They are from the *earth*, God's people, the Jews". However, all who are redeemed were once mortals, human beings. "Flesh and blood", says Paul, "cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50); all have to be changed. So there can be no distinction here. In the details given in Revelation 14:1-5 we can find a satisfactory understanding of the 144,000 if we see them as symbolic of spiritual Israel.

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