

Pastor Mark Mikels - April 26, 2020
DISCOVERING HOPE IN THE REVELATIONS OF SCRIPTURE
"THE REVELATION OF THE 144,000"

(Revelation 7:1-8; Romans 9: 2-4a; Romans 11:8,15; Revelation 14:1-5)

Intro ... Every now and then a '*Hope Generating Revelation*' comes when we are least expecting it - from a source we would never have thought of. It's a revelation that stops us in our tracks - that absolutely overwhelms us with its impact - that reminds us that the Almighty has things in mind that our minds just cannot predict, let alone fathom.

That's the kind of '**Revelation**' the Apostle John received in our passage of the morning.

Consider with me ...

HOPE GENERATING REVELATION SEVEN ...
"THE REVELATION OF THE 144,000"

(Revelation 7:1-8)

"After this (the 6th seal) I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree."

(The calm before the storm)

"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the Servants of our God."

*Then I heard the number of those who were sealed:
144,000 from all the **Tribes of Israel**.*

Now, for us to even to begin to connect with the impact this revelation made upon John, we need to take a quick trip through the Old Testament record ...

Let's head back to the Book of Genesis and check out ...

THE PROMISE THAT STARTED IT ALL ... Genesis 12:1-3

*God said to Abram: "I will make of you a great nation.
All the nations on the earth will be blessed through you."*

God chose Abram to become the father of a new nation - a nation that would bring blessing to all other nations - a strategic force in the earth.

This was a **Promise** that the Almighty was making to Abram. Abram and Sarah moved to what would be known as '**The Promised Land.**'

Why Abram was chosen for this incredible honor and blessing we don't know but the Biblical account immediately points out ...

THE SEEMING IMPOSSIBILITY OF THE PROMISE ...

Sarah was barren and Abram was nearly 100 years old.
- A near miracle would be needed for the '*promised one*' to be born -

But as Abram and Sarah were soon to find out ... '*There is nothing that is impossible with God*' and Sarah conceived and delivered what they considered to be their '*Miracle Baby*' ... Isaac was his name. Isaac would father Jacob and then ...

TWELVE SONS WERE BORN TO JACOB ...

They would become the Heads of the 12 Tribes, but the older ones plotted to kill Joseph but later altered their plans and sold him into slavery which was about the same.

But God strategically maneuvered Joseph through the Egyptian Hierarchy until he was second in command only to Pharaoh - a kind of Prime Minister of the most powerful nation on earth! Thanks to Joseph's wise management, Egypt survived a seven-year drought. Joseph was revered only slightly less than the Pharaoh himself.

To escape the famine the drought had created, Joseph brought his entire family into Egypt. They were given some of the finest land for their herds. Joseph had been used to keep the **Promise** alive.

Consider now ...

THE SOJOURN IN EGYPT ...

The Hebrews entered Egypt as heroes - the family of Joseph; 80 in all. They exited Egypt as slaves - despised by all - perhaps 2 million strong. Pursued by Pharaoh himself who was destroyed in the Red Sea.

The Hebrews stayed in Egypt for some 400 years and they grew tremendously, and they established their tribal identities. They began

to call themselves "*Israelites*" after the Patriarch Jacob, whose name God had changed to '*Israel*.' They left Egypt in a flurry of God's miraculous dealings, culminating in their crossing of the Red Sea on '*Dry Ground*.'

However, their journey to the '*Promised Land*' got derailed by their self-centered, undisciplined, idolatrous human nature which led to ...

THE REBELLION IN THE WILDERNESS ...

- An entire generation died while wandering aimlessly.

Everyone who was 21 years of age or older when they left Egypt died in the wilderness during those 40 years! An entire new generation would enter into the Promise Land under Joshua.

Then came what I am calling this morning ...

THE HALF-BAKED CONQUEST OF THE LAND ...

- Those years were characterized by erratic allegiance to the God of the Burning Bush and the Fiery Mountain - They prostituted themselves to the pagan gods of the land.

Some tribes took full possession of the land they were given and prospered in the land. Other tribes didn't. The Canaanite peoples whom God commanded them to destroy in judgment were not destroyed and they harassed the Israelites continually. Every new generation of Israelites had to learn obedience all over again.

Some generations fell into great error.

God sent leaders called '*Judges*' to summon the nation back to Him.

Some 900 years before Jesus came, the Nation of Israel reached its best day and enjoyed ...

THE MOMENTARY GLORY OF THE KINGDOM UNDER DAVID AND SOLOMON

- The kings of the earth came and were impressed and blessed - Solomon was regarded as the wisest and the richest man on earth!

This was the nearest they ever came to fulfilling the ***Promise*** given to Abram ... They were distinct among the nations of the earth. They were faithful to their God and they were a blessing

to the nations around them.

But the Glory faded quickly with the death of Solomon.
Next we see the ...

DISASTEROUS END TO THE KINGDOM ...

- The glorious Kingdom was divided into North and South -
Both parts were destroyed by pagan nations.
Neither Kingdom ever regained its former stature.

400 years before the coming of Jesus, the Old Testament record was completed. There was a momentary '**HOPE**' in the Rebellion of the Maccabees approximately 165 BC which led to 100 years of an independent Jewish State, but Rome eventually crushed it. The Celebration of Hanukkah dates from that period.

But by 65 BC Rome was the undisputed leader of the civilized world and the Jews in the Promised Land had only fading memories of "**The Promise**" or any '**Fulfillment**' of it.

AND THEN CAME JESUS ...

- His birth, which was attended by miracles, and his ministry, which was characterized by them, culminated in The Palm Sunday Presentation proclaiming Him to be '*King of the Jews.*'

John was part of that entire process. He, who had seen over three years of evidence, shouted '*Hosanna*' right along with the rest of the **Hope-Filled** throng.

Jesus had indeed been a '*Living Blessing*' to all men:
To the Jews, to the Samaritans, even to some officers
of the hated Roman Army.

He was the '*Living Embodiment*' of Abraham's **Promise**.
It would seem that '*The Time had Come.*'

BUT ...

***THE LEADERS OF THE JEWS DENOUNCED JESUS AS AN HERETIC
AND BLASPHEMER - THEY CONDEMNED HIM TO DEATH ...***

- They denied he had any part to play in the **Promise** given to Abraham -

AND ...

THOSE JEWISH LEADERS BECAME THE SWORN ENEMIES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ...

*They became the very first 'persecutors' of the Church;
They denied everything the Church affirmed.
They had Peter and John arrested and flogged.
They threatened them with worse.*

But all their efforts failed - the Church grew tremendously.

In utter contrast, the Jews temple was destroyed as was the Jewish nation in the terrible tribulation that came upon them just as Jesus had prophesied.

They were scattered to the ends of the earth, seemingly erased from the further story of mankind.

No nation called Israel even existed when John received the '**Hope-Generating Revelation**' that we focus on today.

AND SO A ...

CENTURIES-LONG DISTRESS ENSUED ...

How could such a people - God's one-time Chosen People - just pass away like so many other peoples of the past?

It would seem that God's **Promise** of Nation and Purpose had failed.

* **The Apostle Paul** articulated that distress eloquently in his Letter to the Romans written before the destruction had begun.

*"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ
for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the People of Israel."
(Romans 9:2-4a)*

* **Paul** expanded his statement and began to comfort himself a bit just two chapters later - (Romans 11:8, 15)

He points out that even in his day - in a day of God's Judgment upon the nation - **there is** ...

"A Remnant according to Grace." (vs. 8)

There were many Jews according to the flesh who had '*thrown in their lot*' with *Christ* - who had received new life through Christ. They were what Paul would call: "**True Jews.**" Paul was one of them!

And through those relatively few believing Jews, the Good News of Eternal Life through Jesus Christ came to the Gentiles.

Even as the Jewish Leaders had officially slammed the door in Jesus' face, so the Holy Spirit had opened that Door of Grace to the non-Jew. It was the beginning of the fulfillment of the **Promise** God had made!

Jesus was the seed of Abraham and through Jesus all nations were being blessed even though the Jewish nation had rejected him.

So, Jesus was the fulfillment of the **promise** and fortunately not all Jews had missed out on it because Paul himself and many others around him were Jews and they had received it and traced its lineage all the way back to Abraham. They were indeed the "**Truest of Jews.**"

So maybe the **promise** had been fulfilled after all and '*Jewishness*' was no longer a relevant consideration. Perhaps literal, physical Israel had been replaced by what Paul dubbed (in Romans) "**Spiritual Israel.**"

But then in a marvelous burst of Holy Spirit Inspired Reverie, Paul's thought took a different turn and an exciting new "*What if*" possibility presented itself.

Here's how he expressed it ...

"For if their (the Jews) rejection (of Christ) is the reconciliation of the world, what will their (the Jews) acceptance be but life from the dead?"
(Romans 11:15)

Being the Old Testament Bible Scholar that Paul was, I have no doubt that when he wrote those hope-filled words he was envisioning the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel himself who was shown a '*Valley of Dry Bones*' and questioned: "**Can these bones live again?**" (Ezekiel 37)

What a triumph of God's Grace it would be if such a thing happened!

The Apostle John surely shared that same anguish of soul as did the Apostle Paul and surely John held on to every tiny '*little-evidenced*' piece of hope even as had the Apostle Paul.

Now John had held on to these things some 30 years longer than had Paul. John had lived to see the temple destroyed and the great city of Jerusalem sacked and burned. John had seen the Jewish people scattered and the chasm between Christian and Jew grow wider.

John's '**hope**' had far less evidence to support it than had Paul's. John was probably one of the few remaining Church Leaders who was so thoroughly versed in Old Testament History - One of the few who was so passionately connected to it.

So, imagine with me, if you can, John's overwhelming delight - his absolute astonishment - when he received:

"THE REVELATION OF THE 144,000"

There they were: not one or two, not found here and there ... but 144,000 strong from all the tribes of Israel, from all over the earth!

Is it any wonder that he took the time to carefully and surely joyfully enumerate every tribe by name - names that had already begun to vanish from the historical record ... Names that thrilled him and linked him with his own glorious heritage.

FROM THE TRIBE OF **JUDAH** (Jesus own tribe): 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **REUBAN** (the brother who protected Joseph): 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **GAD**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **ASHER**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **NAPHTALI**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **MANASSEH**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **SIMEON**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **LEVI**: (the priests and servants): 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **ISSACHUR**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **ZEBULUN**: 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **JOSEPH** (No Joseph - No nation): 12,000

FROM THE TRIBE OF **BENJAMIN** (this was the Apostle Paul's tribe): 12,000

TODAY'S KEY QUESTION ...

**WHAT DOES THIS 'REVELATION OF THE 144,000'
MEAN?**

What did it '**MEAN**' to the Apostle John?
What should it '**MEAN**' to us today?

IT MEANS ...

1. GOD IS NOT DONE WITH HIS ANCIENT PEOPLE

- There is a vital role for Israelites still to play -
What a thrill it must have been for John to learn that.
What a thrill for any born-again Jewish person today.

IT MEANS ...

2. GOD IS A MIRACLE WORKING GOD

-The assembling of this grand company will be indeed miraculous -
It will surely require some kind of Divine intervention.
Is there any evidence of these Twelve Tribes today?
How many Jews know what their tribal identify is?

Today's Worship Focus says: "My Abba is Unceasingly Creative"

He will find a way - This Jewish Band will be formed, will be sealed
from judgment and will serve the Living God in the darkest of days.

God has always had a voice - a witness - in this world.

In the end days, there will be 144,000 of them!

IT MEANS ...

**3. GOD DOES NOT RENEGE ON HIS PROMISES
OR FORGET HIS PEOPLE**

You and I fall into the '*Johnny come lately*' category.
We should never act as though we are the '*whole story*.'

Though we might make up what Paul called " ***Spiritual Israel***,"
there still remains in the heart of our Heavenly Father
a place for the '***Real Israel***.'

IT MEANS ...

**4. GOD'S FINAL WITNESSES IN THE WORLD WILL BE THIS
NOBLE
BAND OF ABRAHAM'S OFFSPRING.**

The Circle will be complete.
The ones entrusted with the initial message
will deliver the final message!

This past week as I was contemplating the beauty and the significance of that last statement, I was struck by a thought that nearly bowled me over - like a bolt out of the blue.

What if these **144,000** were, in fact, resurrected saints from Old Testament Days? **What if** they were the very ones that the writer of Hebrews said:

"Died in faith not having received the Promise" - Hebrews 11:13

What if that were the very moment when the Exalted Lord Jesus Christ presented himself to all those who had been securely kept in '*Abraham's Bosom*' and called them to the final great task for which their '**faith**' qualified them?

David and Jonathan, Isaiah and Jeremiah, Samuel and Gideon, Joshua and Caleb, the 7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal in the days of Elijah ... and on and on until the full number was reached.

What if they were the ones chosen to deliver God's final message of salvation to the earth? What an awesome thought!

Here now is **John's second look**:

*"And I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion,
and with him **144,000** who had His Name and His Father's Name
written on their foreheads."
(Revelation 14:1)*

We could add:

"THEIR TASK COMPLETED!"

John then goes on to report:

*"They sang a new song before the throne and the four living creatures.
No one else could learn the song except for the **144,000** who had
been redeemed from the earth."
(Revelation 14:3)*

So, just as the 'Band of Martyrs' wear the 'White Jackets' that no one else can ever wear, so these 144,000 Servants of God sing a song that no one else can ever sing. It's their song and it thrills the Heart of God!

Here now is today's '**Hope Generating**' ...

Final Thot ... (What does John's revelation of the 144,000 mean to us?)

IT MEANS:

Nothing can **THWART** the **PLANS** and **PURPOSES** of God.
If He has to **RESURRECT** something long dead
to accomplish them, He **WILL!**