

The 144 Thousand

According to Jehovah's Witness eschatology (theology of the end times), a special class of believers has been designated the anointed. Those 144,000 will go directly to heaven at their death, to rule and reign with Christ.¹ Russell believed that the Scriptures indicated that the 'little flock' of Luke 12:32 and the sheep of John 10:1-15 were synonymous with the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14. This is the most exalted class called the 'little flock' or God's congregation.² Those were faithful and true believers. They gave all to please God. They lived self sacrificially and sought the truth.

As a result, Jehovah selected them to rule with him.³ The promises of the New Testament are for them, but not for others. At death, they immediately change, receiving a spiritual body and go directly to heaven to be with Jehovah.⁴ There they rule and reign with Christ. Some early Christians were in the 144,000, but the apostasy of early Christendom meant that few in that time found their way into the 144,000. Only after Charles Taze Russell restored the church did God begin to select large numbers of faithful believers to be part of the 'little flock.' As a result, the majority of the 144,000 are followers of the Watchtower Society.⁵ Russell taught that in 1878 all the anointed saints, who had previously died, were raised as a part of the 'little flock'. From that time forward, all those chosen to be part of the 'little flock' would receive a spiritual body and go to be with Christ immediately at death. This special calling will continue until the anticipated

¹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Serve with Eternity in View," *Watchtower*, June 15, 1974, 376, accessed May 20, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1974%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. "Also, it is to the spirit-anointed Christians who will rule in that kingdom that of the Christian Greek Scriptures is directed, including the promises of everlasting life." Spirit anointed Christians are members of the little 'flock,' the 144,000 thousand.

² Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "Who Go to Heaven and Why," *You Can Live Forever On Paradise Earth* (New York: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1982), 125-126, accessed May 13, 2018, [http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Books/Teachings/1982%20You%20can%20live%20forever%20in%20paradise%20on%20earth%20\(pe-E\)+Stern%20Magazine.pdf](http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Books/Teachings/1982%20You%20can%20live%20forever%20in%20paradise%20on%20earth%20(pe-E)+Stern%20Magazine.pdf). "When the Bible speaks of 'the congregation of the living God', it is referring to a particular group of Christ's followers. (1 Timothy 3:15) They are also called 'the congregation of the firstborn who have been enrolled in the heavens'. (Hebrews 12:23) So this 'congregation of God' is made up of all Christians on earth who have the hope of heavenly life. In all, only 144,000 persons finally make up the 'congregation of God.'"

³ *Ibid.*, 125-126. "So it was from the earth that Jehovah arranged to take a 'little flock' of persons to be associated with his Son in the heavenly kingdom. They are the ones who, by their faithfulness to God, proved false the Devil's charge that men serve God only for selfish reasons."

⁴ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, "The First Resurrection Now Under Way," *Watchtower*, July 1, 2007, 25-30, accessed May 13, 2018, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2007006>. "As Christ's presence progresses, anointed Christians who faithfully finish their earthly course are changed 'in the twinkling of an eye' into powerful spirit creatures." (1 Corinthians 15:52)

⁵ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Jehovah's Witnesses, Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993, 706, 709. "Clearly, when the time of the end began in 1914, none of the churches of Christendom were measuring up to these Bible standards for the one true Christian congregation. What, though, about the Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then known?"

harvest of the whole group takes place.⁶ The great multitude, another class of believers, will be subject to the anointed class of believers. Russell also taught that the time for the selection of those special individuals was to end in October of 1881.⁷ He said that “the favour has now ended” and “the door was

shut.”⁸ Those who were dedicated followers of Charles Taze Russell could become members of the 144,000 until then. They could share in the promises of Scripture, escape Armageddon, have spiritual bodies, and live in heaven.⁹ Over time, the Watchtower has changed the 1881 date a number of times. In 1919 there was said to be a final harvest of the anointed. Then the date of 1931 was set as the last opportunity to be among the anointed. Finally, it was decided that it was not possible to know for sure when the last anointed might be selected.¹⁰

⁶ Russell, *Millennial Dawn*, vol. 3, *Thy Kingdom Come* (1891), 234. “And since the resurrection of the Church must occur sometime during this ‘end’ or ‘harvest’ period we hold that it is a most reasonable inference, and one in perfect harmony with all the Lord’s plan, that in the spring of 1878 all the holy apostles and other ‘overcomers’ of the Gospel age who slept in Jesus were raised spirit beings, like unto their Lord and Master. And while we, therefore, conclude that their resurrection is now an accomplished fact, and hence that they as well as the Lord are present in the earth, the fact that we do not see them is no obstacle to faith when we remember that, like their Lord, they are now spirit kings, and, like him, invisible to men.”

⁷ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Zion’s Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, January 1881, R176, 2, accessed May 4, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1881%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “This last class is to be the bride. . . Careless of the opinions, smiles or frowns of the world, she cares only to be in favor with her beloved—the heavenly bridegroom. And these are to recognize him now, the others are to stumble and not recognize Him until these have all gone in to the marriage and the door to that high position is closed. Our understanding is that the Bridegroom came in 1874; and this little company is being brought to a knowledge of his presence, and in that sense, being separated from other true Christians who either are overcharged with the affairs of this world or bound by chains of denominationalism, are making void the word of God through their traditions, etc., and still others, who, not being in condition of heart to receive Him on the evidence of His word, but who turn to seek light on His presence in other directions and find it not until the door to that high calling is shut. Matt. 25:10.”

⁸ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Zion’s Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, October/November 1881, R289, 3, accessed May 4, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1881%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “The seven years which ended October 3d, 1881, were years of favor during the presence, that of the living generation all of readiness of heart might become members of the little flock and enter into the joys of our Lord’s presence. If our application of Scripture be correct, the favor has now ended, and in the language of the parable, “the door was shut”; and to those who have never fully consecrated and sacrificed self to God, we cannot any longer hold out the great prize of our high calling, viz.: to be members of the Bride of Christ, joint heirs of Glory, Honor and Immortality.”

⁹ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Zion’s Watchtower and Herald of Christ’s Presence*, October 1879, 37, accessed May 4, 2018, <http://www.watchtowerwayback.org/jw-wb/English/Magazines/The%20Watchtower/1879%20The%20Watchtower.pdf>. “I know of no scriptures which teach that any but the ‘little flock’ or ‘bride company’ and the company that comes out of the tribulation (Rev. vii 14.) will ever be given spiritual bodies.”

¹⁰ Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, “Questions from Readers,” *Watchtower*, May 1, 2007, 30-31, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://wol.jw.org/en/wol/d/r1/lp-e/2007327#h=4>.