

Lesson # 44 The Lamb & the 144,000

Revelation 14: 1-5

Date: February 12, 2012

Revelation 14:1-5 (ESV)

¹Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. ²And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, ³and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. ⁴It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Introduction to Chapter 14

Chapters 12-14 form a parenthesis in the actions of the judgments. Chapters 6-11 unfold the first stages of judgment and 11:15 announces the sounding of the 7th Trumpet, but the judgments associated with the 7th Trumpet don't begin to occur until chapter 15 – the 7 Bowl Judgments.

①

Chapters 12 & 13 are partly a recap of the events of the Tribulation, giving us Satan's perspective or the world's perspective, showing us how Satan is involved. These 2 chapters expose his efforts to destroy Israel as well as providing details about Antichrist & the False Prophet. Satan's hatred and concentrated wrath is a result of his expulsion from heaven for good and this his realization that his time is short.

In chapter 14, our view is again directed to God's role and His victorious work in the Tribulation in achieving His goals. This chapter contains 3 visions, each of which starts with "I saw" or "Then I looked", which preview what will yet come to culminate ultimately in the return of Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur comments here, *"Chapter 14 is a bright contrast to the darkness of chapter 13, which describes Satan (the dragon), Antichrist, the final False Prophet, deception, the unredeemed, idolatry, and the Mark of the Beast. Chapter 14 describes the Lamb, angels, redeemed saints, genuine worship, and those sealed by God. In chapter 13 there is falsehood, wickedness, corruption and blasphemy; in chapter 14 there is truth, righteousness, purity and praise."*

I. Mt. Zion V. 1

Verse 1 is a hotbed of questions and variations in interpretation, even among dispensationalists. Is this Mt. Zion in heaven as in Hebrews 12, or is it Jerusalem? Is this scene taking place in mid-Tribulation or is it a look ahead to the return of Christ? Are these 144,000 alive if it's the end of the Tribulation or were they martyred? If they were martyred, what good was the seal on their foreheads in Rev. 7?

In this first of the 3 visions, John looked and saw on Mt. Zion...what he saw is a contrast between chapters 13 and 14. There are opposites being depicted here. The Lamb is in place of the Beast; those sealed by God are contrasted with those sealed by the mark; a divinely controlled Mt. Zion versus the wickedly controlled earth. This chapter gives us a short encouraging glimpse of ultimate triumph for God and His people alongside a prediction of doom for God's enemies.

The Lamb – meek, sacrificed and risen victorious versus the ferocity of the Beast is a great contrast. While the Dragon had his feet on the sand in Rev. 12:18, the Lamb stands firm on the rock of Mt. Zion. He is not here called a slain Lamb, although we know He was, but if this is depicting His return to earth, He is a victor with His feet firmly planted on the Mt. of Olives – cf. Zech. 14:3-4.

Which Mt. Zion?

②

Some try to equate this Mt. Zion with the one in Heb. 12:22, but without some qualification in the text, the Bible never uses “Mt. Zion” to denote God's celestial abode.ⁱⁱ The argument that the voice from heaven and the heavenly singing place this Mt. Zion in heaven falls flat and instead, more strongly support Mt. Zion on earth, and the voices and singing are descending from heaven to earth.

There are other views too, but the best evidence supports the idea that this is Mt. Zion on earth at or before Christ's return – being viewed proleptically, and therefore, the Millennial Kingdom is in view. John MacArthur agrees with this view and argues that, if this scene is in heaven at the end of the Tribulation, then the 144,000 are in heaven, which means they have died and cannot populate the Kingdom in physical, unglorified bodies. Although Robert Thomas believes they will all be martyred before Christ's return (he thinks the sealing of Rev. 7 covered protection only from God's wrath, but not Satan's), John MacArthur counters that the seals protect them against any death and they enter the Millennium alive, unscathed and that is what this scene is prophesying. Verse 4 tends to support MacArthur's view, ascribing righteous acts to these witnesses as if they still alive, not as if they had died and that was merely their legacy. They are not the only redeemed, but are a representative company of the redeemed.

Here we are also given a detailed description of the seal they received – “the Lamb's name & His Father's name written on their foreheads”. These 144,000

are not the only ones saved during the Tribulation. Other Jews (Zech. 12:10-14; 13:1,9; Rom. 11:26-27), and Gentiles (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9,13,14; Matt. 25:31-46) will be saved.ⁱⁱⁱ Many or even most of these will die as martyrs, but those who survive will enter the Millennium in physical bodies, not yet glorified. The 144,000 are unique and all of them will survive the Tribulation.

II. The New Song vv. 2-3

John now hears a voice from heaven – likening it to the roar of many waters and loud thunder. Although God’s voice is described that way in Ezek. 43:2 (many waters), and Jesus’ voice in Rev. 1:15 is described the same way, Rev. 19:6 uses this same phrasing to refer to the voice of the multitudes in heaven, and it is most likely in the context here in chapter 14, that this is the voice John is hearing – notice v. 2 “the voice” (singular), and v. 3c, “they were singing”.

The voice John heard is also said to be like the sound of many harpists make, so it was a joyous voice rather than one of judgment. John MacArthur adds here, “Heaven will resound with loud praise when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in triumph to establish His earthly Kingdom.”^{iv} This heavenly praise reaches to earth, and they were singing a new song before the throne, before the 24 elders and before the 4 Living Creatures.

John goes on to say that no one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. Of course, the unsaved wicked cannot learn such a song because it flows from a changed heart and a realization of what one has been saved from, and only the redeemed can sing a song, the topic of which is salvation. The 144,000, saved after the Rapture, witnessing of Christ in the most dangerous climate for believers in all history, have a unique story and thus a song to sing which no one else can really relate to. Those saved in the Tribulation who are martyred have a different joyful song, with no doubt some minor key portions to express the horror of their demise at the hands of the wicked, but the unique sealing and survival of the 144K separates them and puts them on a level of grateful, victorious praise unimaginable to virtually any other group in the world today, with the possible exception of those who are Raptured, once that occurs. ③

Joyous praise arises in the outflow of a renewed heart and changed life that trusts completely in the sovereign control of a God who controls everything. Cf. **Phil. 4:1-4; I Thess. 5:16; I Pet. 4:13.**

III. The Character of the 144,000 vv. 4-5

The 144K are described using 5 terms or phrases of righteous humility and obedience. First, v. 4a says they have not defiled themselves with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. As we live out our lives, those of us who can recall the 1950’s and the early 1960’s remember a time in Canada & the US when chastity, purity, virginity before marriage and modesty were virtues to be

cherished and practiced. However, since the sexual revolution in the 1960's began, it has gathered speed, intensity and scope like a snowball rushing downhill, carrying along with it abortion on demand, the homosexual agenda, transgenderism, AIDS, divorces galore, and unmarried singles living together. In 2011, we are at a point where just about anything goes, and the very virtues once cherished by society are now ridiculed and seen to be old fashioned and even dangerous.

Heroes today seem to be those who are cool, edgy and worldly, who take advantage of every sexual opportunity regardless of gender and those who point out this as sinful behaviour have been marginalized as prudes, Victorian, do-gooders, intolerant or hate mongers. With regard to our views on homosexuality in particular, new hate crimes make criminals out of those who have an opposing opinion and refuse to 'tolerate' this behaviour – a complete reversal from 40 years ago when homosexuality itself was a crime. Along with that, the meaning of the word, "tolerate" has been altered to mean, full acceptance or be called a hate-monger.

It is easy to imagine a complete slide into open and flagrant debauchery during the rule of a Satanic ruler in a time when the church is gone and the Holy Spirit has withdrawn the ministry of restraining sin. This is the direction things are heading – cf. **II Tim. 3:1-5**.

These men – this group of 144K manages, in that future economy of outright sin, to maintain chaste morals (not necessarily meaning celibacy if they are married), when the temptation to achieve sexual conquest is around every corner. Note I Cor. 6:13,18; II Tim. 2:22; and again, John MacArthur comments, as he quotes Robert Murray McCheyne, according to Andrew Bonar, *“Do not forget the culture of the inner man – I mean of the heart. How diligently the cavalry officer keeps his saber clean and sharp; every stain he rubs off with the greatest care. Remember you are God's sword, His instrument – I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity & perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God.”*^v ④

Secondly, they follow the Lamb wherever He goes – v. 4b – what did Jesus say about those who follow Him? Note **MT. 16:24; JN 10:27; I JN 2:6**. These men will follow unflinchingly wherever they are led by Christ, taking the sword of God to wherever it is needed most, and as a result, multitudes will spend eternity in heaven because these will have been faithful in carrying out their mandate – like a 144,000 Pauls.

Thirdly, they have been purchased – v. 4c – or redeemed from mankind, as firstfruits for God and the Lamb. Everyone who is ever saved is redeemed or purchased by Christ^{vi}; but these 144K are described as firstfruits to God and the Lamb, because they are saved for a special purpose during a specific time period.

They are Elect from before the foundation of the world but chosen at this time. They missed the Rapture but will not miss the Kingdom.

They are the firstfruits of a finally redeemed Israel, precursors of the national salvation that God has planned for Israel – Rom. 11:25-27; Zech. 12:10; Ezek. 37 – Paul called the household of Stephanos (I Cor. 16:15) ‘the firstfruits’ of Achaia’, and many more would follow in Achaia. Likewise in the Tribulation.

Fourth, - v. 5a – “no lie was found in their mouth”. This group will speak and live God’s truth. Them or those like them are predicted in **Zeph. 3:13**, and in the Tribulation, while the world swallows the lies of Antichrist and the False Prophet, the 144K will follow God and His word, and will proclaim this truth to the world. This is what we are to be doing as well – according to verses like Eph. 4:15,25; II Tim. 2:15; II Cor. 4:2; etc.

Fifthly, “they are blameless”. Blamelessness does not mean sinlessness. These men will have intensely fierce purpose, focus on the goal, loyalty to Christ alone, great faith, purity and holiness – IOW, they will be sanctified because they’ve been justified and as a result, they will be glorified. Their godly lives will separate them from the world because they’ve been called to holiness and empowered to be holy, and it is God who will keep them.

The indwelling Spirit is the secret to their ability to be blameless. On our own, without prayer, without faith, we would fall flat on our faces time after time, because apart from Christ, we can do nothing – cf. **John 15:5** – and we’ve been chosen by God to be holy – cf. **Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 1:15-6**; and notice **Jude 24**.

The efforts of these Spirit sealed, Spirit empowered, and Spirit led men will be the impetus for the greatest spiritual awakening in all of history during the most dangerous time in history to be a Christian or to even give a hint that one is following Christ. Yet, here they stand, triumphant and joyous as Christ returns to claim His own, to judge the wicked and move history into that final step of a 1,000 year Millennial Kingdom.

Next lesson – Lesson # 45 - - - Rev. 14:6-13 --- The Proclamation of 3 Angels

ⁱ John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22; Moody; 2000; p. 70

ⁱⁱ Robert Thomas, Revelation 8-22; p. 190

ⁱⁱⁱ MacArthur, p. 70

^{iv} IBID, p. 75

^v IBID, p. 77

^{vi} Acts 20:28; I Cor. 6:20; 7:23; I Pet. 1:18-19; etc.