

*Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #10*

## PREFACE

Before we launch into the second portion of this first parenthesis, I would like to revisit a question raised by one in our local class about Revelation 14:4. As I wrote to her earlier this week, there are two reasons why I stumbled a bit when answering her question in class. First, I intentionally used only v1 of Chapter Fourteen as a cross-reference to our passage in Revelation 7, setting aside the following verses (vv2-5) in my study for when we would actually be in the Chapter 14 time frame. Thus I had not yet studied that passage in-depth.

Second, as is so often the case in our study of the Last Things, there is no direct, easy answer to the question. Opinions vary, and here in *this* instance there is pretty solid evidence that this is one passage that can indeed be interpreted “spiritually,” or metaphorically, rather than literally—specifically for our understanding of “defiled with women,” and “kept themselves chaste [or are virgins].”

So, to answer her question more thoroughly—and accurately—I did the requisite study, and here are my conclusions:

- We cannot say dogmatically whether the 144,000 are all men or not, nor can we say conclusively that the 144,000 are married or not.
- Because of this group's integral evangelistic and leadership role during not just the Tribulation, but (probably) the Millennium, I would nonetheless conclude that the 144,000 are indeed all men. As to their marital status, the passage does not confirm this one way or the other. The term translated "defiled with women" refers to *extramarital* activity—i.e., visiting prostitutes, adultery, etc.—and *never* in God's word refers to the marriage bed; to the contrary, marital relations are *honored* in God's word. So this cannot be used to show that the men remained unmarried. Correspondingly, it is not conclusive that "they are virgins" (ESV) or "kept themselves chaste" (NASB) means they abstained from any and all sexual relations. Note (as do most commentators) how the apostle Paul used the same term in his second letter to the Corinthians:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; **for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.** But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. (2 Corinthians 11:2-4; emphasis added)

- Here the idea of virginity or purity is applied to those who have remained faithful to Christ, and the same is said of the 144,000 in Revelation 14: "These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (v4).
- My personal conclusion: the 144,000 are *probably* all men (because of their evangelistic and leadership roles), and they very well could be married, but whether they are or not, they are sanctified as those who were utterly faithful to Christ, and thus, deemed pure.

## A SCENE IN HEAVEN

Last week we looked at the 144,000 “sealed” (i.e., protected, sanctified, and literally marked) out of the twelve tribes of Israel, while the four angels held back their respective “winds,” which I suggested seemed to represent not moving air, but is a euphemism for the powers granted to the angels to inflict damage on the earth; that’s what was being held back. We next turn to Act Two in this cinematic epic: The multitude gathered around the throne to worship God and the Lamb.

### Read Revelation 7:9-12.

Act One of this parenthesis was set on earth; Act Two, vv9-17, is set in heaven—specifically around the throne of God. This scene would be a foretaste of a scene in heaven at the end of the Tribulation—but, I believe it will be shown, *prior to* the return of Christ and His earthly reign during the Millennium. So what we have here, it would seem, is a preview of the triumphant celebration in heaven marking the end of the anguish, persecution, and martyrdom of the Great Tribulation.

As one might expect, the focus of this scene, the center around which everything else takes place, is the throne of God. But note that here John seems to go out of his way to make the point that only Father God is seated upon a throne. Different from other passages of the Eschaton (e.g., Revelation 3:21) or John 14:9, here Father and Son are *not* interchangeable. See how John draws the distinction:

- v9: the people are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb”—i.e., the Lamb is not on the throne (“before” = *enopion* = before the face of, in the presence of, in the sight of);
- v10: the people cry out, “Salvation to our God [*theos*] who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”—i.e., the Lamb is worthy of praise, but is not sitting on the throne;
- vv11-12: God alone is specified here as the recipient of the worship, and the Lamb is not mentioned;

- vv14-17: The two roles are further delineated: the worshipers serve God, and the Lamb serves them; they worship and serve the one on “the throne of God,” but the Lamb’s placement is more ambiguous with, “in the center of” or “in the midst of” the throne.

**Sidebar:** From this and other passages we might conclude that in heaven’s temple (the throne room of God) the principle throne “chair” is placed on a raised dais, and that there are instances where the word “throne” refers exclusively to the chair, but others (as here [\[see also 4:6\]](#)) where the word throne refers to both the chair and the dais. For, though not seated in the chair, the Lamb is said to be “in the center [or midst] of the throne.”

v9

In many respects this scene mirrors those set in Chapters Four and Five, especially in the cast members closest to the throne: angels, elders, four living creatures. It is easy to imagine these central characters as being on the raised dais as well. But in those earlier chapters there is no mention of people like you and me—except for our inclusion in 5:13, “every created thing”. Here in our passage John gives more specifics regarding this “great multitude.”

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,

How did John know this? How did he know that the crowd before him was “from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues”? That late great nineteenth-century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, has the answer:

I suppose as he looked at them he could tell where they come from. There is individuality in heaven, depend upon it. Every seed will have its own body. There will sit down in heaven not three unknown patriarchs, but Abraham, you will know him; Isaac, you will know him; and Jacob, you will know him. There will be in heaven not a company of persons, all struck off alike so that you cannot tell who is who; but they will be out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

...clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

The fact that they are in “white robes” ties this scene back to the vision of the fifth seal, in which the martyrs are underneath the altar. As we read the passage again, note especially v11.

**Read Revelation 6:9-11.**

Now we know who these are in white robes, and why they are wearing them. These are the ones for whom the earlier martyrs were waiting: “until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” Verses 14-17 will add more specifics to confirm this, but v9 is sufficient to identify them. And they were holding palm branches.

*Spurgeon:* Palm branches were emblems of victory. It shows this great multitude celebrates a great victory. The palm, the ensign of triumph, indicates most certainly a conflict and conquest. As on earth palm would not be given if not won, we may conclude that the Lord would not have distributed the prize unless there had been a preceding warfare and victory.

v10

Don't miss the content of their praise: “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” In their praise they identify the Ones responsible for their being saved: God and the Lamb. They did not die in vain because they and their garments had been “made...white in the blood of the Lamb” (v14).

v11

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

As in Chapters Four and Five, we have a picture of the hierarchy in heaven's temple. The four living creatures are apparently nearest the chair, with the elders upon their own chairs in a circle or semicircle around them. Surrounding this dais comes next all of heaven's angels. “And they”—*all* of them—fall down in worship of the Lord God. (The text does not indicate if the “multitude” joins in this worship, or if it is just the “regulars”; Walvoord assumes it includes the multitude.)

v12

All of this so far has just been by way of an introduction; the real meat and purpose of this vision is in the passage that follows. But let us pause for just a moment to appreciate what is laid before us here, and in Chapters Four and Five, and later, in Chapters Fifteen and Nineteen. It is not just a picture of our future occupation as believers and servants of Christ, but is a textbook definition of true worship.

*Proskyneo*, always translated “worship,” means to kiss (i.e., adore), do reverence to, bow down before, prostrate oneself. We have, in our day, cheapened that word, “worship.” Gather up all these scenes of heavenly worship and you will note that true worship includes nothing of the horizontal; it is all vertical, focused upon either Father God or Christ Jesus—here, “the Lamb.” Note the content of their worship:

“Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

In true worship we declare, we proclaim, we ascribe—and thus renew in ourselves—the unique and eternal qualities of our God. We offer up to Him only what He deserves as our sovereign Lord: He is glory, He is wisdom, He is deserving of our thanksgiving and honor, He is power and might, and beyond this, He is holy, and just, and righteous and eternal.

Another form of worship—a slightly lower, but still authentic form—is our obedience and service to Him. [Look at v15](#). What are these doing who surround the throne? “... they serve Him day and night in His temple.” That word translated “serve” is *latreuo*, and is always associated with service rendered to God; it is *divine* service, and is some times even translated “worship.”

Every follower of Christ is going to be doing this for eternity. Are you doing it now?

## Read Revelation 7:13-17.

### vv13-14

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

**Sidebar:** Who are the heavenly elders? I will offer here a condensed version; if you desire more specifics, let me know. The short answer is, of course, we don’t know for sure. (What else is new.) Most agree they are a representative body—but of which group? Revelation 5:9 is a key passage that illustrates the divide. The KJVs quote the elders in their praise of the Lamb, “...For You were slain, And have redeemed **us** to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...” The rest of our versions say something along the lines of the NASB: “for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood **men** from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

That is, one set of manuscripts has the elders being redeemed—which would make them men who are representatives of (probably) the church—while other manuscripts (the difference is one letter in one Greek word) leave open the possibility that these are *not* men, but (some claim) angelic beings. Having looked at the evidence, I favor the position that these are redeemed elders of the church—not just because of that one letter in the Greek, but because I do not think a group of angels would be called “elders”; they would be called something else. “Elders” is a very human, earthly descriptor.

In a fine example of Socratic teaching, one of the elders approaches John and puts to him a question, which, of course he hasn’t the answer, so the elder himself supplies it. “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

This multitude is not comprised of every human being in heaven, but specifically those followers of *Christ*, instead of the beast, who have been killed because of their faith. It is possible it includes all who died for *any* reason, but the emphasis in this passage is on those who have been victorious in death (white robes, palm branches) by standing for their Christ *during the Tribulation*, not giving into Antichrist. The text states literally, “... they which came out of the tribulation, the great one.” That is, if we are to subdivide the Tribulation, this speaks of the worst of it during the second half.

v15

“For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.”

“For this reason...” What reason? They have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. He has saved them—by merciful death—out of the intense persecution of the Tribulation. For this reason they gladly serve in worship the Lord God.

*Walvoord*: The expression [“day and night”] can be understood as meaning simply that they will continually serve the Lord, that is, they will not need sleep or restoration as is necessary in earthly toil. They are delivered from the limitations of this life.

v16

“They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;”

Here is the beauty of redeemed death during this horrific time. No longer must they suffer living with hunger and thirst, the misery of a desert-like heat and unremitting sun. They are now home, in the tent of their compassionate God and Savior.

v17

for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

David Guzik asks, then answers, the question, “Doesn’t Jesus shepherd us *now*? Isn’t He close to us and caring for us *now*? Yes, but in heaven it will be so much more.”

Then he quotes Spurgeon, with that man’s remarkable gift for imagery:

The true Christian life, when we live near to God, is the rough draft of the life of full communion above. We have seen the artist make with his pencil, or with his charcoal, a bare outline of his picture. It is nothing more, but still one could guess what the finished picture will be from the sketch before you.

## CONCLUSION

This passage proves that there will be Christians on earth during the Tribulation. Whether they were converted by the dramatic Rapture, by the testimony of the 144,000 Messianic Jews, or by the ministry of the two witnesses (which we will encounter later in Chapter Eleven), there will be new believers after the Rapture. And because of their persecution and death for the name of Christ, God holds them in high esteem. There is no better measure of His grace, His mercy, His compassion than the phrase, “He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.” Even in the midst of His terrible wrath, poured out on earth during these seven years, our God will remain, as always, a compassionate, merciful God who demonstrates a tender heart for those who live in Him.