

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, with #10, and #9

PREFACE

God, in the prophecies of the Last Things in His word, demonstrates His grace by periodically offering pictures—visions—of encouragement interspersed here and there with the visions of doom and wrath. For the most part, Chapter Fourteen of the Revelation offers a breath of fresh air to believers, after the accounts of anguish, deprivation, and despair that comprised Chapter Thirteen. So if any of you have developed nightmares or chronic depression thus far from this study, be assured that at least for a while, the outlook will be a bit brighter. Here, now, we have something we can look forward to. If you like outlines, here is a quick one for Chapter Fourteen:

1. A vision of Christ's triumphant return accompanied by the 144,000 ([vv1-5](#))
2. A vision of three angels ([vv6-13](#))
 - a) the angel with the gospel ([vv6-7](#))
 - b) the angel declaring Babylon has fallen ([v8](#))
 - c) the angel declaring doom for the worshipers of the beast,
but blessings upon the saints who die in the Lord ([vv9-13](#))
3. A vision of the reaping of the earth ([vv14-20](#))

[Look at Chart 15](#)

Walvoord: All of this material is not chronological but prepares the way for the climax which begins in chapter 15. Chapter 14 consists of a series of pronouncements and visions assuring the reader of the ultimate triumph of Christ and the judgment of the wicked. Much of the chapter is prophetic of events that have not yet taken place, but which are now impending. The chapter begins with the assurance that the Lamb will ultimately stand in triumph on Mount Zion with his followers, and it concludes with a series of pronouncements of judgments upon the wicked.

MacArthur: Chapter Fourteen is a bright contrast to the darkness of Chapter Thirteen, which describes Satan (the dragon), Antichrist, the final false prophet, deception, the unredeemed, idolatry, and the mark of the beast. Chapter Fourteen describes the Lamb, angels, redeemed saints, genuine worship, and those sealed by God. In Chapter Thirteen there is falsehood, wickedness, corruption, and blasphemy; in Chapter Fourteen there is truth, righteousness, purity, and praise.

Read Revelation 14:1-5.

v1

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

As we have learned since beginning this study, there are some who are *determined* to complicate the interpretation of end times prophecy. And this verse includes two elements some have exerted great effort to confuse needlessly.

Mt. Zion

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion,

There are commentators that have needlessly tried to locate this Mt. Zion in heaven by associating it with a passage in Hebrews.

Read Hebrews 12:22-24.

If this is the Mt. Zion being referenced in v1, then it destroys the whole purpose of the protected—the “sealed”—144,000 who accompany the Lamb. For in the first parenthetical vision the sixth seal, in Chapter Seven, God seals a remnant from Israel—12,000 from each tribe—against death during the Tribulation. If this Mt. Zion is in heaven, then this would mean that the 144,000 have *died* during the Tribulation. But before we get lost in such mechanics, let us exult in this vision of our triumphant Lord standing upon Mt. Zion.

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.
This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:13-14)

Jesus was circumcised in Jerusalem. He wept over Jerusalem. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain in Jerusalem. To Jerusalem He will return, and in a *new* Jerusalem He will make His eternal abode. In cosmic, spiritual, and eternal terms, Jerusalem truly is the navel of the world. To see Him standing there in all His glory, ready for the final battle against evil will be *breathtaking*. Will He then engage in a bloody battle against Satan? No. Jesus, the Lamb slain, will utter a word—“the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse”—and it will be over (Revelation 19:21). Once again we turn to the prophet Zechariah for different perspective on the same moment in time.

Read Zechariah 14:3-4.

The 144,000

and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

Again, there are those who want to make this a different 144,000 for the sole reason that this verse does not include the definite article, “*the* one hundred and forty-four thousand,” as in *the same*, which is just silly. Others point out that the group mentioned in Chapter Seven are said to have on their foreheads the “seal of the living God,” while in Chapter Fourteen it is said they have “His [the Lamb’s] name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” This reveals nothing more than that the first reference was speaking generally, and the second specifically.

Walvoord: As Seiss points out, their identification with the Father is their mark of being saved Jews; their identification with the Lamb reveals their salvation through faith in Christ; their position on Mount Zion a place of security, blessing, and glory in the earthly Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom.

These are the 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—Messianic Jews all—who have been sealed against death—but not necessarily hardship—through the complete Tribulation. So in this vision, looking roughly three and one half years down the road, the Lord God is revealing to John that they all will indeed make it through the seven years, to stand alongside their Lord upon His return. They do not come from heaven with Him, but join Him as He arrives.

v2

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

We need to define our pronouns here. To John, on the island of Patmos, is not just revealed a vision of images, but a heavenly soundtrack like nothing ever heard on earth. As best he can describe it, the voice (*phone*, singular feminine) has a sound like

- the sound of many waters,
- the sound of loud thunder,
- like the sound of harpists playing harps

Some of our translations interpret this third component as a separate sound instead of a voice, or even the same voice. For example, the original NIV uses “sound” throughout, with no mention of “voice,” while the NKJV uses “voice” three times, but then switches to “sound” for the harps, the KJV uses “voice” for all, and the NASB intermingles both freely. The Greek *phone* is used for all three, and can mean a voice or a sound.

This is simply the aural version of John's many visual descriptions: He is obviously privileged to hear the dramatic, yet ethereal music of heaven, and struggles to find suitable words with which to describe it.

v3

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

Here's where many commentators get sidetracked and end up thinking the 144,000 are in heaven; they also credit the wrong ability to them, wherever they are.

First, once again, pronouns. Who are "they"? Some have decided that it is the 144,000 who are singing—but that's not what it says. Verse 3 supplies more details to v2; hence, the "they" are the voice or voices in heaven sounding like many waters, like loud thunder, and like the sound of harps. This song is being performed "before" (*enopion*, in the presence of, in the eyes of) the exalted throne of heaven, peopled by, of course, Father and Son, but also the supporting cast of the four living creatures (seraphim), and the twenty-four elders.

The verse does not say that the 144,000 are doing the singing, nor does it even say that they can even *hear* the song; only that they are the only ones who "could learn the song" being sung. Well then, it's fair to ask, "Who is this doing the singing before the throne in heaven?" The passage does not tell us, but from the description of the scene we might make an educated guess. [Turn please to Chapter Seven.](#)

When Linda and I moved back to the Midwest from California during the winter of '91/92, for a time we stayed in an apartment in Marshalltown, our home town. The apartment was the second and third floors of an old house on State Street, and it had a large room facing the street that had windows on at least two, perhaps three sides. I drew on that room in my writing at the time to express a way to understand the holy Trinity. Imagine God, three in one, seated on a chair in the middle of that room facing forward. Now go outside and first look in at him through one window; He would look a certain way. Now switch to a window from another direction; same person, but now He looks different. Finally, switch to a window from the third direction; still the same person, but He now looks different again. The person seated in the chair never changes, but we have just looked at Him from three different aspects. God never changes, but He consists of three different aspects: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each aspect has a different role, a different job description, as it were. But they all, either individually or as One, are God.

This illustrates not just the Godhead, but how we are to make sense out of the prophecies, the sequential narratives, and various parenthetical visions scattered about in the Revelation. It is *one* narrative, but God in His wisdom offers us various different *aspects* by which to view and understand the same narrative. In our text in Chapter Fourteen, though we have not yet arrived there in the overall narrative, we are offered an aspect onto Christ's triumphant return to earth. That same moment in time is pictured by a *different* aspect in Zechariah, as well as many other places in Scripture—including elsewhere in Revelation. [Look at Chart 10.](#)

The 144,000 are introduced in Chapter Seven, and the parenthetical vision there points us back to the *start* of the Tribulation, when God sealed these Messianic Jews against death. This remnant would survive the trials of the next seven years. In our current text in Chapter Fourteen we see them again, the parenthetical vision now pointing forward to the *end* of the Tribulation—proof before the fact that they will indeed survive and have reason to give praise to their Savior.

But there may be another connection between Chapters Seven and Fourteen—and, again, two different aspects. In the second parenthetical vision in Chapter Seven we are granted an aspect of a scene that will take place at the end of the Tribulation.

vv9-10: 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, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Later in the passage John—and we—are told who these people are.

vv14-15: ... "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. 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."

We first met these martyrs in Chapter Six. [Look at Chart 9.](#) Here we encounter them "underneath the altar," "the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God" and their testimony. A connecting element between those in Chapter Seven and those in Chapter six is that they are described dressed in white robes ([6:11 and 7:9](#)). The time frame for the martyrs under the altar is somewhere *during* the Tribulation, because they are told to wait a while until *all* the martyrs have been killed. The time frame for the martyrs in Chapter Seven is the return of Christ at the *end* of the Tribulation, for it says that "These are the ones who *come out of the great tribulation*" (emphasis added). They are no longer crying out for vengeance, but now are gathered around the throne "cry[ing] out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." [Back to Chapter Fourteen.](#)

Look at Chart 15

Again, the time frame for this five-verse passage is the return of Christ marking the end of the Tribulation. So we have shown that there is pretty good evidence that these in heaven singing “a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders” are the same martyrs we saw in Chapter Six under the altar, and in Chapter Seven praising God and the Lamb before the throne.

and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand

I stated earlier that nowhere does it state that the 144,000 are actually singing; just that they alone are able to learn the song. But over against this is the common position by all my primary commentators that the 144,000 *do* take up the song learned from the voices of heaven.

Let’s back up just for a minute. We are going to see again this moment when Christ returns—predominantly, and more dramatically presented, in Chapter Nineteen—but let us not pass too quickly over what is presented in vv1-2. This will surely be the most powerful scene witnessed by anyone on earth in the history of this earth. Yet it will be, as well, in the economy of God for the redemption of man. It would be picking nits to gauge its importance in comparison to Christ’s death on the cross, His subsequent resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. If not the most dramatic moment, however, this one holds its own against the others, and this is seen in the presumed antiphonal chorus filling the air in both heaven and earth. It begins around the throne of God in heaven, descends to earth where the 144,000 learn the song and then join in the singing. This will be a “new” song, because the occasion it serenades is brand new. It is a song of praise from those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb: The choir in heaven through martyrdom, the choir on earth through His protection through many trials. It is a song only the redeemed, the saved, can sing. And don’t miss the import of v3’s delicious closing phrase.

who had been purchased from the earth.

J. A. Seiss: [While] most people in their day “dwell upon the earth,” sit down upon it as their rest and choice, derive their chief comfort from it, these are “redeemed from the earth,”—withdrawn from it, bought away by the heavenly promises and the divine grace to live above it, independent of it, as no longer a part of it. Also is it said that they are “redeemed from men” [v4]—segregated entirely from the common course of the world, and removed from the ordinary fellowship of men. Less than this the language concerning them can scarcely mean. They are quite severed from the world in heart and life.

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

We *are* going to examine these last two verses as we have the previous, but if you are looking for application for us today in this passage, this is where you will find it. The last phrase of v3 tees this up, and vv4-5 expand on what it means to be purchased, or redeemed, from the earth—not just during the Tribulation, but right now. What it means to “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” It will not be necessary to drive home this application with a sledge hammer; it is lying there on the surface for all to see.

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.

At a cursory reading this might seem to denigrate the influence of women on men, but prepositions are important. First, this is *not* saying that all the 144,000 are virginal men. Second, it does not say that they were not defiled *by* women, but “with” women, (*meta*) which can include the idea of being in company with, among. That is, it could mean what we *think* it means at a glance—*they kept away from women*—or it could mean that *both* the men and women remained chaste. John MacArthur states it well.

MacArthur: That the 144,000 will be separate from Antichrist’s empire has already been made clear; they bear God’s mark, not the beast’s (7:3-4). Nor does this passage teach that they will all be unmarried, since sex within marriage does not defile anyone (Hebrews 13:4). What it means is that they will stand apart from the sin of their culture; 144,000 morally pure preachers amid the defilement that surrounds them.

Those who were part of the *First Corinthians* class may recall that there were some in the Corinth church who took this to extreme. They considered themselves to be so spiritual that they were abstaining even from conjugal relations—yet some even of them were visiting temple prostitutes because they believed the flesh meant nothing; only the spirit-life was important, so what one did with the body meant nothing. Neither of those are part of God’s plan for marriage. As MacArthur points out, there is nothing “defiling” about sexual relations between husband and wife.

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

From the insight of John Phillips we might add to this, *or go wherever He sends them.*

Phillips: They allow no rivals, no refusals, and no restraint to mar their dedication to Him. Does He need someone to stand upon the steps of the Vatican and cry out against the marriage of Christendom to the Beast? There are 144,000 ready to go! Does the Lord need someone to beard the Beast at some high function of state and roundly denounce him, his policy, his statecraft, his religion, his economic boycott, his mark, his ministers, his alliance with Satan? There are 144,000 eager to go! Does the Lamb need evangelists to proclaim to the untold millions the gospel of the coming kingdom of God? to climb the highest Himalayas, to cross the desert sands, to blaze evangelistic trails through steaming jungles, or to mush huskies across wide arctic wastes? There are 144,000 ready to go! And though the Beasts' Gestapo dog their footsteps and wreak upon their converts his direst vengeance, yet on they go undaunted and undeterred. That was the very spirit of their consecration as they followed the Lamb whithersoever He led them on earth, and their reward is in kind.

(*Exploring Revelation*, 180-81; to "beard" the Beast means to face or oppose courageously or brazenly, as if grasping by the beard.)

These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

We can look at this a couple of ways, neither of which eliminates the other.

First, these 144,000, set apart and sealed by God at the beginning of the Tribulation, constitute the first and best part of the crop and always (in OT terms) offered to God for His service. These are not all that are saved during the Tribulation, but they are a special, sanctified group of Jewish evangelists, set apart to proclaim the gospel during treacherous times.

Second, we can also see them as representing the first of many others who will be saved. "The 144,000 may legitimately be viewed as the first fruits of redeemed Israel, foreshadowing the nation's salvation when Christ returns" (MacArthur).

(v5) And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

The prophet Zephaniah spoke of this:

"But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people,
And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.
The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue
Be found in their mouths;
For they will feed and lie down
With no one to make them tremble." (Zephaniah 3:12-13)

Note: "...before the throne of God" (KJVs) is not found in the best manuscripts.

The word translated "lie" or "guile" is the Greek *pseudos*, meaning there was not found in them anything false, or especially false religion. They are consecrated to God, and will have nothing to do with Antichrist's false religion. Note how *pseudos* was used by Paul in Romans 1:25.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a **lie**, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

Now, we can say that they are also "blameless" before God because of the blood of Christ. True, but I believe this verse implies *before men*, as well. These people will be the real thing; even the morally and spiritually depraved around them will attest to their honesty, forthrightness, morality, and purity.

MacArthur: The 144,000 deserve a place in the "Hall of Fame" of the Christian faith (Hebrews 11). They will lead holy lives and minister effectively for God during history's darkest hour. Their exemplary efforts will spearhead the greatest spiritual awakening the world will ever see. The inspired account of their lives and ministry provides a pattern of triumphant Christian living for all believers to follow.