

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

EXPLANATORY PROPHECIES, REVELATION 12 - 14

- This is another parenthesis in which those who play important parts in the tribulation are introduced. The people include a woman representing Israel (12:1-2); the red dragon representing Satan (12:3-4); the male child representing Christ (12:5-6); the archangel Michael representing angels (12:7-12); the offspring of the woman, representing Israel (12:13-17); the beast out of the sea, the world dictator (13:1-10); the beast out of the earth, the false prophet (13:11-18); and the judgment by the Lamb (14:1-20).
- Grant Osborne, *Chapters 12–14 are the third and final interlude tracing the church’s involvement in the action of the three judgment sets, this time showing the war between the woman/church and the false trinity (the dragon and the two beasts).*

INTRODUCTION

- Chapter 14 contrasts the activity of Christ to the activity of Satan. Despite the power of the satanic world system, the Lord preserves a remnant (14:1-5). Angels announce that judgment has come with the defeat of Babylon and the condemnation of the worshipers of the beast. The Lord is now pictured as a reaper who harvests the world in judgment.
- John Walvoord, *In chapters 14 and 15 various other details of the world scene in heaven and earth are introduced in preparation for the final series of seven bowl judgments in chapter 16 and the judgments in chapters 17–18.*
- Charles Swindoll, *In this thematic preview of coming attractions, we step closer to the end of the great tribulation, but the judgments aren’t over. We’ll see God’s full wrath revealed in chapters 15 and 16; but before that, the Lord interjects several snapshots of hope. In this way Revelation 14 ties the whole book together, reminding us of its major message and pointing us forward to the ultimate vengeance of the glorious Redeemer.*
- Thomas Constable, *John recorded these scenes of his vision in order to assure his readers of the triumph of believers and the judgment of unbelievers at the end of the Tribulation (cf. Matt. 25:31–46).*

COMING VICTORY, REVELATION 14

The 144,000, REVELATION 14:1-5

- A. A vision of the 144,000 with the Lamb (1), *Then 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.*
1. Thomas Constable, “*Then I looked*” (Gr. *kai eidon*) introduces three scenes in chapter 14 (vv. 1, 6, 14) as this phrase did twice in chapter 13 (vv. 1, 11). “*Behold*” (Gr. *idou*, cf. v. 14) calls special attention to the greatness of the sight that John saw here . . . John saw in this scene the time yet future at the end of the Great Tribulation when Jesus Christ will return to the earth. The Second Coming does not actually take place here chronologically but in 19:11–21. John only saw a preview of it, as if it happened here, in his vision . . . Zion, as that name occurs elsewhere in Scripture, usually refers to earthly Jerusalem (cf. 2 Sam. 5:7; Ps. 48:1–2; Isa. 2:3; 24:23; Joel 2:32; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:1–2, 7; Zech. 14:10).
 2. John Walvoord, . . . this is a prophetic vision of the ultimate triumph of the Lamb following His second coming, when He joins the 144,000 on Mount Zion at the beginning of His millennial reign . . . the 144,000 in this chapter are the same as in chapter 7. In their first mention they are seen at the beginning of the great tribulation. In their second mention in chapter 14, they are seen still intact, preserved by God through the fearful days of persecution and standing triumphantly with the Lamb on Mount Zion at the beginning of the millennial reign.
 3. Mark Hitchcock, *The earthly location is in view here in Revelation 14 because the voice John hears comes from heaven (verse 2) . . . All 144,000 made it through the Tribulation, just as God promised in 7:1-8. God keeps His Word.*
 4. Grant Osborne, *Since the sound comes “from” heaven, it is best to see this as earthly, but Christ does not descend until the Parousia (19:11–16), so this seems to be a flash-forward either to the millennial period of 20:1–6 or the new Jerusalem of 21:1–6. It is an earthly scene anticipating a future reality.*
 5. Henry Swete, *The Divine name on the forehead suggests at once the imparting of a character which corresponds with the Mind of God, and the consecration of life to His service.*

6. Warren Wiersbe, *The scene in Revelation 14 is the assurance to God's people that He cares for His own and finally will take them to glory.*
7. Charles Swindoll, *This group of 144,000 from the tribes of Israel will be converted to their Messiah after the rapture of the church at the beginning of the seven-year tribulation. During that time they will confront unbelievers, call them to Christ through repentance and faith, and proclaim the catastrophes of the coming judgments. Though they will endure hardship and flee persecution, they will be divinely protected through those terrible times and eventually enter into the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ.*

B. Worship before the Throne (2-3)

1. There was a mighty voice like thunder (2), ***And 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,***
 - a. Mark Hitchcock, *If this scene with the 144,000 on Mount Zion were in heaven, it would be strange for John to say that the voice came from there.*
 - b. Thomas Constable, *John did not identify the person who spoke from heaven. This could be the voice of Christ (cf. 1:15; Ezek. 1:24; 43:2), the Tribulation martyrs (7:10), an angel (cf. 6:1; Dan. 10:6), or many angels (5:8, 11; 7:11; 19:6). Perhaps the last option is best in view of how John described it here and in the next verse (pl. "they sang"). These angels, however, do not include the four living creatures and the 24 elders (v. 3).*
 - c. Warren Wiersbe, *Not only are the 144,000 standing, but they are also singing (Rev. 14:2-3).*
 - d. Grant Osborne, *The combination of the loud singing and the harps emphasizes the tremendous joy and worship in this scene.*
2. Harpists played a new song (3a), ***and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.***
 - a. Grant Osborne, *Their hymn was a "new song" (14:3) like the one in 5:9. This could even be the same song, as both are celebratory hymns rejoicing in the purchase of the redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.*
 - b. Charles Swindoll, *While John observed this glorious gathering of saints on Mount Zion, music began to pour forth from heaven around the throne of God (14:2-3).*
 - c. Warren Wiersbe, *They are accompanied by heavenly harps and other heavenly voices. It is encouraging to know that one day our sorrows will be transformed into songs!*
 - d. Thomas Constable, *These angels sang a new song. A new song in the Old Testament was a song of praise to God for new mercies, particularly victory over an enemy and sometimes for God's work in creation (cf. Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10).*
 - e. John Walvoord, *The preponderance of evidence seems to indicate that this is indeed a heavenly scene which John is seeing "in the Spirit" while his body is on earth. If the 144,000 are on earth in Zion, who then are the company in heaven? Though the natural questions concerning their identity are not clearly answered in the text, the heavenly group are probably the martyred saints of the tribulation, in contrast to the 144,000 who are on earth and do not suffer martyrdom.*
3. The new song could only be learned by the 144,000 (3b), ***No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.***
 - a. Warren Wiersbe, *Because of the special experiences they had during the Tribulation, they have a new song to sing that others cannot share (see Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1).*
 - b. Charles Swindoll, *Only the 144,000 will understand the celestial chorus, for they will be the firstfruits of the messianic kingdom (14:4).*
 - c. Thomas Constable, *The song that this group sang in heaven is one that only the 144,000 of all God's creatures could learn. Probably they were the only ones who could learn it in the sense that they were the only ones who could appreciate what it expressed (cf. 15:2).*
 - d. John Walvoord, *Both groups, however, experience the trials of the great tribulation and therefore are alone worthy to enter into the song of redemption recounting their victory over their enemies and praising God for His grace which has numbered them among the redeemed . . . the thought seems to be that both those in heaven and on earth have been redeemed, that is, purchased by the blood of Christ and delivered from their enemies, one group through martyrdom, the other group by divine preservation through the tribulation.*
 - e. Grant Osborne, *It can only be sung by the faithful who have overcome temptation and opposition.*

C. A description of the 144,000 (4-5)

1. They are set apart (4)

a. They are virgins (4a), ***It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins.***

- 1) Charles Ryrie, *Two things are said about their separation unto God. First, they are virgins. Although this could be understood to mean that these people were never married and therefore undistracted in their work for God (as in 1 Cor. 7:32), it also can mean that they were completely separated unto the God they served. The word "virgin" is used this way of married Corinthian believers in 2 Corinthians 11:2.*
- 2) John Walvoord, *This description is not explained in the context but has been taken variously as referring to necessary abstinence from marriage in the critical days of the tribulation when a normal marital life for a person true to God is impossible, or as referring to spiritual purity, that is, they are not defiled by love of the world or compromise with evil, but keep themselves pure in a world situation which is morally filthy. In like manner Israel is referred to frequently in the Bible as "the virgin the daughter of Zion" (2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 37:22), as the "virgin daughter of Zion" (Lam. 2:13), and as the "virgin of Israel" (Jer. 18:13; 31:4, 21; Amos 5:2).*
- 3) Grant Osborne, . . . *it sounds on the surface like John is describing a group of celibate Christians, perhaps a monastic sect living an ascetic lifestyle. But the language is too strong for that, for if the clause "not defile themselves with women" refers to celibacy, it would entail a serious denigration of marriage, an attitude missing from other passages on celibacy in the New Testament (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:1, 32). It is better to see this as a "bride of Christ" metaphor (see Rev 19:7–8; 21:2), building on Israel as the virgin bride of Yahweh (2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Amos 5:2) and the church as a "pure virgin" in 2 Corinthians 11:2 . . . So this is figurative, referring to a refusal to participate in immorality, and, in fact, in worldly pursuits of any kind. The idea of "remaining virgins" is meant spiritually for men as well as women, referring to those who keep themselves pure from sinful pleasures.*

b. They always follow the Lamb (4b), ***It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.***

- 1) Charles Ryrie, . . . *they follow Christ "wherever He goes," including unto death.*
- 2) John Walvoord, *The possibility that their virgin character signifies their spiritual purity primarily is indicated in the next statement describing them as those "which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Here again it is obviously in the earthly scene, as the 144,000 of Israel do not ever go to heaven during their natural lifetime.*
- 3) Grant Osborne, *It is the heart of discipleship in the Gospels (Mark 1:18; 8:34–70 times in Jesus' teaching). "Wherever he goes" implies imitatio Christi, involving the surrender of everything and a willingness to die as in Revelation 12:11 ("did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death").*
- 4) Thomas Constable, . . . *the 144,000 will receive special commendation because they will follow the Lamb faithfully wherever He goes during their lives. This will be especially difficult due to the time in which they will live, the Great Tribulation.*

2. They are firstfruits to God and to the Lamb (4c), ***These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb,***

- a. Charles Ryrie, *They are redeemed people ("purchased") and "first fruits." From the Old Testament use of "first fruits," this means that they are a token offering to God, which indicates that a larger harvest will follow . . . Apparently they indicate the harvest of many other Israelites (remember that they are Jews, not Gentiles) who will turn to the Lord at the end of the Tribulation and during the Millennium (Isa. 2:3, Zech. 8:22, 12:10, Rom. 11:25).*
- b. John Walvoord, *The term "firstfruits" seems to refer to the beginning of a great harvest, here to the beginning of the millennial kingdom. The 144,000 are the godly nucleus of Israel which is the token of the redemption of the nation and the glory of Israel which is to unfold in the kingdom.*
- c. Thomas Constable, *They will be unique. Probably the first fruits figure represents them as a special gift to God. This is the idea behind about two-thirds of the references to first fruits in the Old Testament.*
- d. Warren Wiersbe, *The term firstfruits means "the very finest." But it also carries the idea of an expected harvest. On the Feast of Firstfruits, the priest waved the sheaf before the Lord as a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him (Lev. 23:9–14). The 144,000 may be the firstfruits of the harvest yet to come; they may be the nucleus of the coming kingdom.*

3. They are without fault (5), *and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.*
- a. Charles Ryrie, *Their mouths spoke not lies (that is, no false messages) but only the truth about Christ as the only way to heaven. They were blameless or unblemished (that is, true teachers in contrast to false teachers, who are labeled “blemishes” in 2 Peter 2:13.*
 - b. Thomas Constable, *In addition to the three commendations of verse 4, the witnesses will speak the truth even though deception will abound (13:14; cf. Isa. 53:9; Zeph. 3:13; John 8:44; 1 Pet. 2:22). In short, they will be blameless, that is, perfectly acceptable to God as first fruit sacrifices (cf. Phil. 2:15; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19; Jude 24).*
 - c. John Walvoord, *This large number have been kept utterly clean from the false religion of the great tribulation. They are also described as without fault, that is, blameless and without stain, in contrast to those who are apostates, described as “faults” or “blemishes” using the same root (Gr., amosos) as in 2 Peter 2:13.*
 - d. Grant Osborne, *It is interesting that out of all the ethical aspects, John centers on “no lie.” He is not referring to all lies but has in mind primarily the lies of the false teachers, specifically the Nicolaitan cult. In Revelation 2:2 their so-called “apostles” are proven to be “false,” and in 3:9 the Jewish persecutors are labeled “liars.” In 21:8, 27; 22:15 liars are excluded and thrown into the lake of fire. When they have conquered such falsehood, among other things, the Christians are considered “blameless,” another sacrificial term depicting the sacrifice as perfect and acceptable to the Lord (Exod 29:1; Lev 4:3). Here it refers to an absolute commitment to God, a total walk with Christ, and a commitment to sound doctrine.*

SUMMARY

- John Walvoord, *The passage as a whole is a prophetic foreview of the triumph of the 144,000 when Christ return.*
- Charles Swindoll, *These are saved, sealed, sanctified, and spotless saints. As such, these tried and true survivors become the means by which God will fulfill His promise that Israel will bless all nations during Christ’s reign over the earth (Gen. 26:4).*