

Living Word Fellowship Church

An Expository Explanation of Revelation Chapter 14

Pastor Paul Cannings, D.Phil.

Part II

A. Background Information:

1. The fuller name “Mount Zion” in distinction to “Zion” by itself occurs only nineteen times in the OT, at least nine of which allude to a remnant being saved in connection with either God’s name (the remnant being saved for the sake of God’s name or by calling on his name) or God’s sovereign rule, sometimes both (2 Kgs. 19:31; Isa. 4:2–3; 10:12, 20; 37:30–32; Joel 2:32 [= 3:5]; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:5–8; Pss. 48:2, 10–11; 74:2, 7; see below for further references and discussion).^[1]

a) Since Zion was also where God sat enthroned in Israel’s temple, the Lamb’s position on Zion shows that He is the only true claimant to the throne of the cosmos. The mention of “his father” together with the Lamb further confirms Christ as the only legitimate heir to the throne at Zion in future fulfillment of Ps. 2:6–9. In fact, Acts 13:32–35; Heb. 1:2–5; and Rev. 2:26–28 and 12:5 apply the Psalm 2 text to the resurrection and subsequent reign of Christ (so likewise *b. Sukkoth* 52a with respect to a future resurrection of the Messiah).^[2]

2. **And with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads (14:1).** The names written on the foreheads of the 144,000 fulfill the promise given to the victors (3:12). These names are evidently the content of the seal mentioned in 7:3, whose nature has long been debated. Its Old Testament background is found in Ezekiel 9:3–11, where an angel is told to put a mark on the foreheads of Jerusalem’s residents who grieve over evil. The angel is to slaughter those who do not receive the mark (Heb. *taw*; Ezek. 9:5). *Taw* is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and in the Old Hebrew script, used during Ezekiel’s day until

the New Testament period was written in the form of a cross (X). The Greek letter chi (C) was recognized as an equivalent to tau. Chi, the first letter of $\Xi\pi\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, was a common abbreviation for this Greek word, meaning Christ or Anointed One. The *Damascus Document*, quoting Ezekiel, states that at the time of the Messiah's coming, the only ones to be spared the sword are those marked by the tau (CD 19.12). A Jewish Christian told the third-century church father Origen that "the form of the Tau in the old [Hebrew] script resembles the cross, and it predicts the mark which is to be placed on the foreheads of the Christians."⁹⁹ The mark, therefore, signifies possession and protection because God's presence is with his people.^[3]

a) The names of Christ and the Father, written on the foreheads of the 144,000, are in contrast with "the name of the beast," written "on the foreheads" of unbelievers (13:16–17). The number 144,000 connotes the completeness of God's true people, in antithesis to the 666 on the foreheads of the beast's followers, which connotes their incompleteness in achieving the divine design for humanity. As in 7:4–9, the 144,000 are not a remnant of ethnic Jews at the end of the age or a remnant of the church. They are instead the totality of God's people throughout the ages, viewed as true Israelites (for an extended discussion of this figurative meaning, see 7:4–9). Charles views the group as the entire community of resurrected martyrs,³⁵⁵ and Bauckham identifies them with a "first fruits" remnant whose witness will lead to the conversion of more people later. But to limit the number to a select group of believers dilutes the figurative force of completeness connoted by the number.^[4]

b) In both texts, the power of this name on the forehead is said to protect believers from the deceptive influences of the powers of evil. The names on the forehead in Rev. 14:1 probably have the same function, as implied by 14:8–11, which says that those with the beast's mark on their foreheads worship the beast and will be punished by eternal fire.^[5]

c) The names of Christ and God inscribed on Christians' foreheads are equivalent to the seal placed on the foreheads of the 144,000 in 7:1–8. $\sigma\phi\sigma\gamma\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ ("seal") carries the sense of "protect," which includes the idea of "authenticate" and "designate ownership of." Therefore, the "seal" or "name" empowers saints to persevere through adversity, which authenticates their profession of faith as genuine and shows that they truly belong to God. The seal is a symbol of allegiance, but it is also emblematic of God's power, which has enabled believers to maintain their allegiance to the Lamb in the first place. The equation of the seal with the divine name is confirmed by the fact that the "mark" (= the seal) of the beast on the foreheads of unbelievers in 13:17 is identified as "the name of the beast," and in 14:9–11 "a mark on his [the beast worshipers] ... forehead" is also called "the mark of his [the beast's] name." And, as we have seen in 2:17, identification with the divine name actually begins when Christ reveals Himself to people, and they confess His name. When this occurs, they have a

new spiritual status and have been given “power ... not to deny His name” (3:8–10) and to persevere through the final tribulation (cf. 3:8–10; 2:13a). Hence, the seal empowers the 144,000 to perform the role of witness intended for true Israel (e.g., Isa. 42:6–7; 49:6; 51:4–8). Therefore, the divine “name” and the “seal” are marks of genuine membership in the community of the redeemed, without which entry into the eternal Zion is impossible. Therefore, the entire community of the redeemed, not just a part of the community, is pictured here. ^[6]

3. In the OT, the “new song” was always an expression of praise for God’s victory over the enemy, which sometimes included thanksgiving for His work of creation (cf. Pss. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa. 42:10). Jewish writings applied the “new song” of Pss. 33:3; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1 and Isa. 42:10 to the time of the coming of the Messiah in the world to come (Midr. Rab. Exod. 23.11; Midr. Rab. Num. 15.11; Tanhuma Gen. 1.32; b. Arakhin 13b), after the redemption (Midr. Pss. 1.20), the resurrection of Israel (Midr. Pss. 104.23), and the defeat of the fourth kingdom (Midr. Pss. 18.5). Now the “new song” is sung again, but on an escalated scale and for the last time. Vv 1–5 focus, then, not only on an ideal description of the church throughout the ages but also on the end of the age, when, at last, the church will have been redeemed fully. ^[7]

a) Whereas in 5:8–10, the four cherubim and the elders sing the “new song,” here the throng of the saved sings the song. This is further evidence that the cherubim and elders represent the saints in heaven (see 4:4, 6—though some see angels as the source of the song in 14:2–3). ^[8]

4. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, the concept of virginity is extended to the entire church, including both sexes. ^[9]

a) The phrase “defiled with women” does not imply that sex within marriage is evil because it is not (Heb. 13:4). It merely indicates that these 144,000 Jewish men were unmarried. In the Bible, fornication and adultery are pictures of idolatry (Ex. 34:15; James 4:4). While most of the world bowed down to the image of “the beast,” the 144,000 were faithful to the true God. While others lied to get what they needed, the 144,000 were without guile and blemish. ^[10]

b) The Lamb's followers, literally called virgins (*parthenoi*), have kept themselves pure for the spiritual holy war. To interpret their continence literally is problematic because the New Testament affirms the role of sex in Christian marriage (cf. 1 Cor. 7:2–5). A figurative interpretation is preferred: The virgins are believers of either sex who have not defiled themselves through spiritual fornication. Some at Sardis had not defiled their white garments (Rev. 3:4). Two women—Jezebel and the great prostitute—are the primary adversaries of the church. In Thyatira, the woman Jezebel threatened the churches with her false prophecy (2:20). Later, Babylon/ Rome is described as a woman who is the mother of all prostitutes (17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18). Believers who have contact with either woman, Babylon or Jezebel, will soil their garments or, to change metaphors, lose their virginity. ^[11]

5. The presentation of saints as “first fruits” develops further the idea of Christians as sacrifices to the Lord. In the OT, the “first fruits” of the harvest were offered to God at the sanctuary to show that they especially belonged to Him and to signify that he was the sovereign owner of the whole. The offering of the “first fruits” also foreshadowed that the rest would soon be gathered in accordance with the Owner's sovereign provision. In this manner, the rest of the harvest was consecrated to God so His people could use it for their everyday needs. In the same manner, ἀπαρχή in the LXX refers to a sacrificial offering to God of “first fruits” at the sanctuary. Indeed, Charles underscores the fact that in the LXX ἀπαρχή often translates various Hebrew words for “offering,” though many of these cases have the concept of “first fruits” in mind in the context. ^[12]

a) In Revelation 14, believers are the “first fruits” of God's harvest at the very end of the age in distinction to the unbelieving nations about to be judged (vv 14–20). The harvest background of “first fruits” is carried over from the redemption of all Christians and applied metaphorically to the judgment of the unrighteous (Rev. 11:11–13 follows the same pattern in which the saints are first resurrected at the end of the age and afterward God judges the unrepentant). ^[13]

b) “First fruits” were the beginning of harvest, offered up to God; the term declares their holiness (Jer 2:3) and perhaps that others like them would come after them. ^[14]

c) They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb (14:4). Israel was the first fruit of God's spiritual harvest (Jer. 2:3). Although first fruits are used to describe a variety of spiritual blessings in the New Testament, Paul used the term to speak specifically of Israel as the spiritual root of the church (Rom. 11:16). Jewish believers in the Messiah comprised the first fruits of God's new kingdom

community (cf. James 1:18). The use of the term here helps to confirm the identification of the 144,000 as Jewish believers. This group that does not lie about the Lamb contrasts with those in the synagogue of Satan who are liars (Rev. 3:9).^[15]

6. Babylon was the ungodly world power under which Israel had to live in captivity. While Israelite saints did not go along with Babylon's religious practices, they were nonetheless tempted to compromise. When they remained loyal to their God, they underwent trial by their oppressors (see Daniel 1–6). The ungodly social, political, and economic system dominated by the Roman Empire placed believers in the same position as Israel was under Babylon. Just as Babylon destroyed the first temple and sent Israel into exile, so Rome came to be called "Babylon" in some sectors of Judaism because it also destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and exiled Israel (so *Midr. Rab. Num. 7.10; Midr. Pss. 137.1, 8; cf. Targ. Lam. 1:19*).^[16]

a) Therefore, in the Apocalypse, Rome and all wicked world systems take on the symbolic name "Babylon the Great." Indeed, this symbolic interpretation of Babylon is assured beyond reasonable doubt by the prophecies of God's judgment on historical Babylon, which foretold that Babylon "will be desolate forever" and "not rise again" (Jer. 28:39 LXX; Jer. 50:39–40; 51:24–26, 62–64; so also Isa. 13:19–22).^[17]

b) Clearly, ungodly humanity's love for Babylon lay in her ability to provide economic prosperity (18:11–19). The nations "weep and lament" over Babylon's fall because they "fear" that it means their imminent demise (18:9–10, 15, 19). They are fearful at first about their economic collapse resulting from Babylon's fall (18:11, 19). But a much more ultimate collapse than economic depression is at hand. Those experiencing economic tragedy in the contemporary world should be warned that it is a forerunner of a final world collapse and universal judgment by God; accordingly, they should pay heed and take stock of their standing before God.^[18]

7. "Drinking the cup" is sometimes used as an image of judgment (Jer. 25:15ff; 51:7ff; note also Rev. 14:8). God's final judgments on mankind will be "vials of wrath" poured out from heaven (Rev. 16). God will not mix mercy with this judgment (Ps. 75:8; Hab. 3:2), but will pour out His undiluted indignation on a rebellious world.^[19]

a) The following phrase, “in the cup of his wrath,” reiterates the preceding “he will drink from the wine of the wrath of God” to emphasize the definitiveness and severity of the last judgment (the synonym in 16:19—“the cup of the wine of his *fierce anger*” [τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς]—has the same force; so also 19:15).^[20]

8. The “torment” is primarily spiritual and psychological suffering, as elsewhere in the Apocalypse with reference to trials that either precede the final judgment or are part of it (9:5–6; 11:10; 18:7, 10, 15; 18:7, 10, 15; 20:10). The psychological notion of suffering is enforced by the uses of these words in ch. 18, where they are joined with “weeping” and “mourning.”^[21]

9. Take your sickle and reap because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe (14:15). Sickle can refer to two types of curved knives used for agricultural purposes. Grain was harvested with a short-handled hand scythe, while the sickle used by vintagers was a small knife that could cut grape clusters from the vine. The time of ripeness depended on the crop. The wheat harvest occurred in June, while the harvest of grapes for wine production occurred in September. This agricultural analogy suggests that two groups are to be harvested—the righteous and the wicked. Two things in chapter 14 suggest that the grain harvest is of the righteous. The 144,000 are identified as first fruits, an agricultural metaphor (14:4; cf. Lev. 2:14), and the audience addressed with the eternal gospel both fear and worship God (Rev. 14:7). Jesus likewise described the ingathering of the righteous as reaping the harvest (John 4:35–38).^[22]

10. The harvest is also an image of judgment against Babylon in the Old Testament (Jer 51:33); it is specifically appropriate for the final battle when blood would flow, as Joel 3:13 noted: “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the wine press is full” (NASB).^[23]

11. Because crushed grapes could look like human blood (Gen 49:11), this image, playing on Joel 3:13 (cf. also Jer 25:30), was powerful for ancients, who were more familiar with viticulture than most modern peoples are (contrast Christ and His people as a vine in Jn 15:1). This harvest image is particularly from Isaiah 63:1–6: God goes on to tread the wine press of His fury and tramples the nations, splattering His garments with their lifeblood. For angels over various elements of nature (including fire), see comment on Revelation 7:1.^[24]

12. John, in his vision, next saw seated on a white cloud, one like a Son of Man wearing a crown of gold and holding a sharp sickle. Though some have identified “a Son of Man” as an angel, it is more probable that it is Christ Himself who is frequently called “the Son of Man” (cf. 1:13). In the Book of Matthew alone, this title is ascribed to Christ more than

25 times (Matt. 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 32; 13:41; etc.). The sickle in His hand suggests judgment. And this is supported by the messages of the three angels (Rev. 14:15–20).^[25]

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[2] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 733). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[3] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 331). Zondervan.

[4] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 733). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[5] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 734). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[6] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (pp. 734–735). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[7] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 736). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[8] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 737). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[9] Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [*Revelation*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 964). Victor Books.

[10] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 607). Victor Books.

[11] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 332). Zondervan.

[12] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 742). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[13] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (pp. 743–744). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[14] Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (Re 14:4). InterVarsity Press.

[15] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 332). Zondervan.

[16] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 755). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[17] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 755). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[18] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 756). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[19] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, p. 608). Victor Books.

[20] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 759). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[21] Beale, G. K. (1999). [*The book of Revelation: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 760). W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

[22] Arnold, C. E. (2002). [*Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation*](#). (Vol. 4, p. 335). Zondervan.

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