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# **REVELATION**

**SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD**

**PART 18**

**REVELATION 14:1-13**

# **The Lamb on Mount Sion**

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# **REVELATION SPIRITUALLY UNDERSTOOD**

## **PART EIGHTEEN**

### **THE LAMB ON MOUNT SION**

Revelation 14:1-13

#### **“AND I LOOKED” v.1**

The phrase is equivalent to “And I saw” (see v.6) and the same as in v.14. The Greek is the same. Our translators properly gave the two senses because in verses 1 and 14 the phrase is complete in itself whereas in v.6 it is transitive, being joined to what follows – “another angel flying in the midst of heaven ...” In the opening verses of the Apocalypse (see chap. 1, v.2) John speaks of recording “all things that he saw”. That language is peculiar to the prophets, who in the Old Testament “saw” the things of which they wrote, in divine visions imparted to them by the Spirit of God. See Isaiah 1, v.1: “The vision of Isaiah which he saw ...” See also Isaiah 6, v.1; Jeremiah 1, v.11-13, etc. John is a true prophet, in the line of succession of those in the OT who saw divine truth in the form of heavenly dramas (note the prophecies of Zechariah) which were never intended to be taken literally (how could they indeed?). Not attending to this visionary nature of prophecy has resulted in the absurd interpretations of the literalists, not only in the case of the Apocalypse, but in the case of such descriptive pictures as that of the new Jerusalem of Isaiah 60 where incautious prophetism has settled for an earthly city without reckoning on the departure of sun and moon to make way for the full light of truth figured in the words “The sun shall be no more thy light by day...the Lord shall be thine everlasting light” etc. (vv.19-20).

#### **WHAT JOHN ‘SAW’ -**

John the Seer beholds “a Lamb standing on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand having his Father’s name written in their foreheads”.

Hengstenberg writes, “Prophecy everywhere notices distresses, dangers, temptations, for the purpose of fortifying the heart in respect to them, and

imparting counsel and consolation, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures may have hope” (Romans 15, v.4). Hengstenberg adds that the Holy Spirit, who in this book acts peculiarly in that office of Paraclete described exclusively by John in his gospel (John 14), accomplishes this office of Comforter by “suddenly transporting us out of the tribulations of time with its conflicts and trials and placing us on the heavenly mount Sion where we find the company of saints gathered around their Saviour, their warfare finished, rejoicing in their victory, pure and holy, in spite of all the temptations which the earth presented to them”.

We are reminded that the 144,000 are the completed number of the redeemed Church, as in chap. 7. The number is a sacred perfection, a multiplication of the number 12, which is the number of the church of OT and NT - one unified company of the redeemed from all ages, from the beginning to the end of time, a number not to be broken, but which is complete in the holy purpose of God. It is a number which can be neither increased nor diminished and thus shows the perfection of the divine wisdom which always achieves its goal and can never be thwarted. We dismiss without hesitation the curious theories of modern prophetism that the 144,000 represents an actual precise number of some elite division either of the church or the Jewish nation in some fanciful future. Verse 3 as we shall see, effectually destroys any such imagination.

The commentators are almost unanimous in accepting the reading, “THE” Lamb in place of “A” Lamb as in the AV. They do this on the mistaken authority of those mss which have been preferred in all the modern versions, to the Received Text. The latter is now treated almost with contempt by those who, like sheep, follow the verdict of those nineteenth century scholars who, though perhaps good grammarians, were ignorant of the laws of evidence. They substituted the ‘authority’ of a few ancient copies recently disinterred from the dust of ancient libraries, to that text which had weathered the storms of two thousand years of church history and had been proved and tested in the experience of the saints of God in all ages. Not here do we intend to discourse on the authenticity of the “Received Text” - we refer the reader to the noble work done in this field by the Trinitarian Bible Society of London in defence of that authentic Bible which has been preserved in its succession of manuscripts, by the providence of a God who foresaw that it was not enough to give to His church an inspired Bible; it was equally necessary to preserve inviolate that sacred text. We cannot accept for one moment that for two thousand years the Eternal God suffered His church to stumble along with a defective Bible and left it to such a decadent and apostate age as ours to discover the real one. We deplore the confusion which has been created

in this last three generations by the introduction of fully one hundred different versions of the English Bible, few of which can even be commended for their English, let alone their accuracy. Unitarian ‘scholars’ and modernistic unbelievers have had too much to do with this fell task to afford us any comfort as we contemplate the tasteless English in which most of the new versions are written. We note that their principal variations from the Received Text are always those fundamental statements which enshrine and prove the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. We refer to Matthew 1:23; 1 John 5:7; 1 Tim. 3:16; and Romans 9:5 as samples of this nefarious and false scholasticism in the new versions.

Our business just now is to vindicate the text before us. The reading “a Lamb” in the AV we adjudge to be correct, because of the phrase which follows: “With him ‘an’ hundred and forty and four thousand ...” No-one has alleged that the indefinite article in this phrase is unsuitable or unauthenticated, despite the fact that the same 144,000 have been mentioned before (chapter 7). It cannot be seriously suggested (though some have tried) that there is more than one company of 144,000 in the Apocalypse! There is in the reference to “a Lamb” in our verse, a peculiar appropriateness and emphasis in the indefinite character of the noun. This is an independent vision of John the Seer in the course of the unfolding drama of the Apocalypse, and there is a very special emphasis in the indefinite grammatical form in which Christ is here presented. Sometimes we say – “and He is ‘A’ Saviour indeed!” In the peculiar language of awe and of love, John could write of Him he knew so well, “Lo, a Lamb stood on Mount Sion ...” We do not intend to be robbed of the tenderness of that phrase merely because some modern scholars prefer to follow an erroneous one on the score that the original phrase lacks precision. It does not. It is THEIR phrase which lacks poetry and feeling.

The word used for LAMB here is ‘peculiar to the Apocalypse’ (Alford). It is the diminutive form of the Greek word for lamb, and is not found elsewhere in the NT. It means a young lamb, weak and small, which it has been suggested may have been used to put forward more prominently the idea of meekness and innocence (see Alford). The inspired writer, John, who in his gospel uses the mature form of the Greek word for lamb (see John 1:29, 36) chooses the diminutive form here to mark the contrast with the wild beasts of the preceding chapter. Christ was crucified through weakness, and liveth now by the power of God. The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Paul says, “When I am weak then am I strong”. Again, “My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness”. (See 2 Cor. 12:9-10)

It is no glory to God to overcome by sheer power else how shall we explain the Cross? The mystery of God lies in this, that by weakness and by yielding, by God becoming Man, by the helplessness of infancy and by consecration to death, the awful power of evil, personified in the beastly powers of chapter 13 is overcome for ever. Nowhere is Satan made to appear so powerful as in the Book of Revelation, but always he is overcome by the gentle Lamb who gives Himself to death and the grave.

If we were writing a treatise on Christian evidences we should feel happy to rest our case just there. Who could have invented such a means of overcoming death and its dreadful prince, by submitting to the fear and power of it, and by voluntarily becoming the victim of it? If this be not true, there is no truth.

### WHERE THE LAMB STOOD

He stands upon the mount Sion. In such a book as this we do not require to prove that Sion here means the heavenly and not the earthly. "Ye are come" writes Paul in Hebrews 12:22-24, "to mount Sion, unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven ...." This is the only other place in the NT where mount Sion is mentioned, and it signifies the heavenly city.

Because of what follows we prefer the interpretation that what John sees here is the final state of the church, the whole body of the redeemed, in heaven. In Rev. 21 he describes the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, prepared and adorned as a bride for her husband. So here, we have the consummation of all Christ set out to do. Despite all oppositions, and persecutions, fears and conflicts, trials and temptations, the bride is brought home at last to the heavenly marriage. "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace" (Psalm 45:15). That we are here looking to the eternal consummation seems to be confirmed in this chapter by the description which follows, of the Last Judgment (v.13-20).

### WHO STOOD WITH HIM?

They are the 144,000 whom we have already seen in Chap. 7, who were sealed out of all the tribes of Israel. We do not repeat the proofs already recounted in that place, of the true identity of this company of redeemed. They are the true church of Christ - all of it - Jew and gentile - who by grace and gospel have been delivered from sin and condemnation. The term "Israel" never did stand exclusively in

prophecy for the twelve literal tribes descended from Jacob. Paul in Romans describes TWO ISRAELS, the earthly and the heavenly. He declares “They are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh” (that is, of natural descent) “these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise” (that is, Jew or gentile who have the same faith of our father Abraham) – “are counted for the seed” (Romans 9:6-8; see also the epistle to the gentile church of the Galatians, chap. 4:22-31).

The imprint of the Father’s name on the forehead of the 144,000 proves the spiritual nature of the interpretation. The Father’s Name is His character. The forehead is the temple or residence of the soul, which is the temple of God. Anatomically we call the brows the “temples” because the forehead is where the mind resides - that part of the brain which is exclusive to Man. He is the only creature with a forehead, and it is well-known that the intellectual part of the human brain is in that region. The brute has no forehead, and the false doctrine of evolution cannot account for this human phenomenon. The mind - the soul -the spirit - is self-consciousness. Only Man can reflect upon himself and discover himself. The first three chapters of Genesis are the only authentic and satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon of Man. Evolution denies the soul and is baffled to discover what it is which sets Man at so unbridgeable a distance above the highest of the brutes. “God created Man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them ....”

In man’s temporal state the seat of the personality lies in the region of the mind known as the forehead, and as long as we are in the body, it is there that character is determined. The writing of the Father’s name thereon is the figure of ownership and dedication. Through the grace of regeneration - born again of the Spirit of God - the soul is claimed by its Creator and becomes His residence, dedicated to Himself, where He reigns by His Spirit and holds converse and communion with the soul of Man.

We are referred to the message to the Church in Philadelphia where (Rev. 3: 12) we are told, “I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name”. Let the writings of John be their own interpreter, and let us hear no more of the sensational theories which purport to warn us of coming frightfulness when Satan will insist upon his own mark or name being inscribed on the foreheads of the deluded.

“I will write upon him.” It is Christ who thus speaks in the text above. “The name of my God” refers to the words of the risen Saviour to Mary Magdalene - “Go and tell my brethren, I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). “The name of the city of my God” - see Ezekiel 48:35, “The name of the city from that day shall be, The Lord Is There”. See also the remarkable verse in Jeremiah 33:16 – “... Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness”. In the Hebrew these names in Ezekiel and Jeremiah respectively are “Jehovah Shammah” and “Jehovah Tzidkenu” - see Jeremiah 23:6 (Margin). The name borne by Christ becomes the name of His Church in spiritual union with Himself.

The same text in Rev. 3:12 tells us also, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go no more out”. The scene is a (heavenly one, and therefore we are seeing in our chapter 14 the final destiny of the redeemed realised. They shall go no more out.

### SAD WORK OF LITERALISM

The modern attempts to limit the number of the chosen ones of chapter 14 to a literal 144,000 are sad in the extreme. Even so scholarly a man as Dean Alford is betrayed into the idea that the 144,000 are literally ‘virgins’ though not literally confined to that exact number. Among these ‘virgins’ (masculine) he is inclined by a most generous act of condescension to number womenfolk along with the male celibates!

Another good man, who we notice has an excellent degree in mechanical engineering, tells us that these 144,000 are “overcomers” from the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13), and they will constitute a sort of ‘royal bodyguard of the King of kings as he goes from place to place over his vast (millennial) dominions’. In God’s estimation, writes this gentleman, “they are the pick of the earth”. Mr. Hal Lindsey of USA in one of the biggest dollar spinners of recent times, writes that the 144,000 are all physical Jews who are going to believe “with a vengeance” (whatever that means) that Jesus is the Messiah and are going to be as 144,000 ‘Billy Grahams’ turned loose on the earth. Quoting from Rev. 7 this excellent man tells us that these ‘Billy Grahams’ will achieve the greatest number of converts in history – ‘a great multitude which no man can number’.

With such friends as these, we surely do not need to apologise for our modest interpretation of the Apocalypse.

It is noteworthy that none of these speculations attempts any serious exercise of exposition. The idea that our blessed Saviour will traverse the millennial earth on a sort of roving commission, protected by a bodyguard of picked men, is surely something which no-one but a mechanical engineer would have imagined. Mr. Lindsey's peripatetic evangelists apparently will be that much more effectual than the Twelve Apostles- and all in the lightning period of seven years.

### MARKED WITH THE FATHER'S NAME

We ask the reader seriously to examine the alternative. The 144,000 are described in our verse as having the Father's name written in their foreheads. This is in contrast with the Mark of the Beast of chapter 13, verse 16, which we have sought to prove in our last chapter to be no visible mark at all, inasmuch as the Father's name written on the foreheads of the redeemed of chapter 14 cannot be literally understood. If the forehead seal denotes only possession, ownership, character (and it can mean nothing else) then we are in the spiritual realm all the way through. Nowhere in the Book of Revelation are we told that the 144,000 are "preachers". Though Mr. Lindsey asserts (with many other writers) that the great multitude which no man can number of all nations, kindreds and people and tongues, of chapter 7, verses 9-17 are "converts" of the 144,000 of the earlier verses, this is sheer assumption. There is not a word to suggest that this is the case. In fact it is much more capable of proof that the 144,000 ARE the great multitude which cannot be numbered. John writes that he 'heard' the number of the sealed, 144,000, but he 'saw' or 'beheld' the innumerable multitude. From the variant verbs we perceive that the number 144,000 which John 'heard' is a prophetic number, known only to God as to its quantity, whereas the uncountable multitude is a visionary spectacle, and can only be the complete army of the redeemed from all ages seen in their eternal state in white robes, bearing palms of peace in their hands, washed in the blood of the Lamb, eternally led from fountain to fountain of love, joy and peace in the eternal pastures of heaven.

How bewilderingly confident are they who turn the 144,000 into preachers and the great multitude into their "converts" without even the merest affectation of proof or of exposition!

### THE NEW SONG

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:



And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

The voice from heaven appears unquestionably to be the voice of the entire company of the redeemed as they surround the eternal throne and celebrate the glorious consummation of God's purposes in redemption. Hengstenberg correctly regards the parallel passage in Rev. 19, v.6 as conclusive: "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth".

"The new song" can only mean the last, the final, the eternal song of redemption. It is called the new song because the old song is the song of creation: "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38, v.7). At creation, when life sprang forth into the conscious enjoyment of celestial being, the angelic chorus filled all the vast realm of visible and invisible life with rapturous and melodious praise and thanksgiving for the privilege of life in all the intensity and beauty and wonder and mystery of it. The creation of man was designed to be the topstone of this mystery as there was entrusted to him the dominion of the lower creation in anticipation of his ultimate rule over the entire creation. The disruption of this joy by the fall of angels, and afterward by the fall of man, opened the way for a yet higher creation - that of eternal redemption - by which God would participate in the infinite sorrows of that which had fallen, and bear through death its curse, its pain and its tears, to establish that new creation of unsullied joy and peace, love and truth which, because united indissolubly with deity incarnate, could never fall again.

Hence the "new song", which can only be sung when redemption is finally accomplished and realised in the triumph of the Redeemer over all forces and powers of evil, including the Last Enemy, Death (1 Cor. 15 v.26).

Singing is the antithesis of sorrow. There will be no cessation to the new song, because Christ has put an end to the reign of sin and death from which all sorrows spring.

The statement, “no man can learn that song but the 144,000 which were redeemed from the earth” is proof that in that mystic number is not some fragment of earthly Israel, much less some tiny and privileged fragment of the Church itself, but the whole elect company of the redeemed of all ages, from the Garden of Eden to the end of time. The attempt to limit the singing of the new song to a tiny fragment of premillennial preachers, whose ministry lasts but seven years, is surely one of the most preposterous ever to be foisted upon the intelligence of Christian believers. The parallel passage of Rev. 19, v.6 clearly envisages the entire church of Old and New Testaments, and the voice which John records there, is ‘the voice of a great multitude’ - that great multitude which no man can number, which is also the mystic Israel of God, the Church, comprehended under the mystic number of divine completeness –

ONE HUNDRED AND FORTY AND FOUR THOUSAND.

The reader is reminded of our exposition of chapter 7 where it is pointed out that the tribe of Dan is missing from the twelve tribes there enumerated. The order of the tribes is also deliberately disturbed, and the name of Ephraim is carefully avoided - proving that the enumeration is to be understood spiritually and not literally - a mystic numbering in accordance with the genius of the entire Book.

#### VIRGIN CHARACTER OF BELIEVERS

If further proof is needed for this spiritual interpretation, we have it in verse 4, where the 144,000 are identified as those who were “not defiled with women - being virgins” - and who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”.

Here, if anywhere, we are in spiritual territory. Unless we join forces with Dr. Alford and others, and settle for a company of celibates whose heaven shall be greater than the heaven of all the rest of the redeemed, we must look for a spiritual meaning which embraces all the redeemed from the foundation of the earth.

The exposition simplifies itself the moment it is recognised that as usual; John dwells deep in the imagery of Old Testament prophecy. The term VIRGIN or VIRGINS is employed in the Old Testament to denote cities or nations. Mystically it is applied to the Church as in Psalm 45, v.14. The inspired David there describes the Bride of Christ, the Church, with her retinue of virgins. “She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow thee shall be brought unto thee.” Raiment of needlework denotes a virgin state -as in the case of the unhappy Tamar, shamefully betrayed by her half-brother Amnon: ”She had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king’s

daughters that were virgins, appareled". (2 Sam. 13, v.18) Compare Judges 5:30.

How often is the nation of Israel, or Judah, described thus. "The virgin the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee" (2 Kings 19:21). By contrast heathen Tyre is described as a rejected harlot (Isaiah 23:15-17).

The Song of Solomon which is the bridal song of Christ and the Church describes the pure love of the Church toward Christ because of the wonder of His name and the savour of His presence. "Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee" (Song 1:3). The too much neglected Alexander Cruden writes in his Concordance under the heading "VIRGIN" -

Virgin is often used in Scripture for a people, a city, a nation, as the virgin the daughter of Babylon, the virgin the daughter of Zion - of Israel - etc. The professors of religion in general are called virgins, such as are not defiled with scandalous sin nor erroneous opinion. Matthew 25, v.1: The kingdom of heaven shall be likened unto ten virgins - yet only five deserved the name, they having not only a profession but a true faith and love. The character of virgins is principally given to those who adhere steadfastly to Christ and abhor anything that has any show of violating their fidelity to Him. Rev. 14, v.4: These are they which are not defiled with women - that is, that are not corrupted with the erroneous doctrine and idolatrous worship of the antichristian church, for they are virgins: they keep close to Christ in all His ordinances and are led by His Word and Spirit. The apostle says, "I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" - (2 Cor. 11, v.2).

It should be clear therefore that John is speaking in the spiritual, prophetic sense when he describes as 'virgins' the 144,000 of verse 3. These so described are the citizens of the heavenly Zion, the New Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ, those who comprise the marriage train of the Lamb. If some should complain that it is not possible to be of the Bride, and at the same time one of the bridesmaids at the heavenly marriage, they do not understand how rich is the Bible in its variety of figures. Hence the Church is a city and also the citizens of the city; a tree and a forest of trees; a garden, an army, a country, a temple, a collection of many individual temples, branches in a vine, a vine in itself, living stones, a wife, a daughter, a son, a child, a dew, God's heritage, God's husbandry, God's flock, the light of the world, stars, singular, sevenfold, watchmen, wayfarers, a woman, a

man, etc., etc.

Every believer therefore is a virgin, dedicated to Christ, separated unto Him from a wicked world, having renounced this world and its ways, yielded to God, a pilgrim on the way to Zion.

In the bad sense, a woman in the Bible represents false religion, spiritual adultery. The believer in this sense is 'not defiled with women' for he is espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ. There are exactly 144,000 of us - but that is a mystic number to show divine completeness, and the assurance that not one sheep will ever be left behind when the flock is finally made up.

### DEDICATION TO CHRIST

Another mark of the believer is (verse 4) that he "follows the Lamb whithersoever He goeth". A stranger will he not follow for he knows not the voice of a stranger (John 10 v.5). This following of Christ is undoubtedly taken from the parable of the Shepherd and the sheep, which only John records.

"Whithersoever he goeth" marks the complete dedication of the soul to the will and to the leading of the Redeemer. There is perhaps a call here to those who have participated in the notable revival of "Reformed" theology at this end of the twentieth century, not to overlook in their enthusiasm the sweet doctrine of utter consecration to Christ in loving obedience and self-dedication. The weakness of the consecration teaching lay in the optional status given to it by many otherwise earnest preachers. The idea that one could become a Christian without such a consecration was an error of the first order, but the extent of the damage was perhaps mitigated always by the fact that a true conversion involved that dedication anyway and the voice of the Spirit within was stronger than the voice of the platform. Is there not room in the "Reformed" equipment for such a melody as that expressed in the searching lines of Mr. F. Brook,

My goal is God Himself - not joy nor peace;  
Not even blessing, but HIMSELF, my God;  
'Tis His to lead me there, not mine but His –  
At any cost, dear Lord - by any road.  
No matter if the way be sometimes dark,  
No matter though the cost be oftentimes great;  
He knoweth how I best shall reach the mark.  
The way that leads to Him must needs be strait.

## THEOLOGY AND PERSONAL DEVOTION

Theology which is unmixed with the devotion of a dedicated life is surely a betrayal of Christ. “I live - yet not I but Christ liveth in me” declared the great apostle who counted not his life dear unto himself (Galatians 2:20; Acts 20:24). It is thus, in lowly obedience and in utter devotion, the satisfied soul pours out its love and worship to the Redeemer, as did she who being forgiven much, broke her box of ointment most precious over His feet so soon to tread the journey to Calvary for her.

Solomon saw it all in advance when he wrote, “While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof” (Song of Songs, chap. 1, v.12). He had a prevision of the scene in the house at Bethany.

### WITH CHARLES WESLEY

And why should not the Reformed learn to sing with Charles Wesley of “Love divine” in these terms -

Then let us sit beneath His cross,  
And gladly catch the healing stream,  
All things for him account but loss,  
And give up all our hearts to Him;  
Of nothing think or speak beside,  
My Lord, my Love is crucified.

Nothing less than this, surely, is found in the words of the Beloved Apostle: “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth”.

### FIRSTFRUITS

“These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”

That this description applies to all the redeemed and not to a special class is clear from the absolute nature of the first phrase. These are in fact the redeemed - not a portion of them but the whole. The use of the term ‘firstfruits’ does not imply a second harvest after the first, but rather the quality of their redemption. “Separated from the entire mass as the best absolutely” (Speaker’s Bible, which rejects the

opinion that these are the firstfruits from among the redeemed themselves, or with respect to those who come after them). Futurism is by no means free from the error of making these 'firstfruits' a kind of elite class among the redeemed; indeed they who make the 144,000 an actual limited number from among the mass of the redeemed are bound to maintain this theory of limitation.

### WHO ARE THE "LIARS"?

"And in their mouth was found no guile (lit. no lie)".

John is his own interpreter. "Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ. He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." The meaning is far-reaching. What John is saying is that the Godhead is One. The supreme lie which has troubled creation from the beginning is this denial of God. To deny the Son is to deny the Father, and by consequence to deny the Incarnation of God, to deny the Holy Trinity and dismantle the Godhead. In these last of days we are seeing this spirit of antichrist coming to its full and final blasphemy - helped on its way by the multiplicity of Bible 'versions' by which the Church is troubled today, for most if not all the new 'versions' omit or otherwise meddle with the key texts on which the doctrine of God in Three Persons is founded - 1 John 5:7; 1 Tim. 3:16; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6, etc.

The beloved apostle probably wrote his Gospel, the three epistles, and the Apocalypse, long after all the other apostles had been removed from the earth. It is significant that all his writings appear to have as the motive for their production the challenge which was even then growing in the Church, concerning the true deity of Christ, the mystery of the Incarnation of God, the Word made flesh. It is these writings more than any others which are Satan's target today, and it is in these writings that the features of the antichristian apostasy are fully exposed. Antichrist has been with us for the last two millenniums, and in our day is coming to his last and boldest maturity. It will increasingly appear in our generation, as a distinguishing feature of the true Church, that in our mouths is not to be found the last and greatest lie.

Hengstenberg is very clear and helpful on this verse. He writes, "Freedom from lying appears not rarely as the mark of the elect in the writings of the Old Testament. 'The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth' (Zephaniah 3:15). But there is a peculiar depth in John's idea of the truth, and so its sweep is with him very wide, and to be destitute of it is something very terrible. A liar, in his account, according

to 1 John 2:4, is one who does not confess Christ nor exhibit his faith by his works. He notes it as the crowning point of lying, in 1 John 2:22, to deny Christ, with which idolatry and the deification of man, described as a work of lies in Romans 1:25, goes hand in hand ... All men are by nature liars, and freedom from lying, especially from that worst form of it, which withholds divine honour from Him to whom alone it is due, and ascribes it to one to whom it does not belong, can be derived only from above; the rather so as man's natural inclination to lying has so powerful a coadjutor in Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44)." Allusion is made to 1 Peter 2:22: "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth," Isaiah 53:9 – "Neither was any deceit in his mouth".

### "WITHOUT FAULT BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD"

The grammarians, who lean heavily on a few manuscripts which they always prefer to the Received Text, dismiss the words, "Before the throne of God". For our part we consider that the balance of the text requires these words to be retained. To omit them leaves the last phrase, "For they are without fault" in a state of tautology with the preceding sentence – "In their mouth was found no guile". The following phrase requires the addition "Before the throne of God" to give it the force of an independent statement which in fact adds considerably to the weight of the verse. To be found "without fault" at the Last Assize is an assured destiny of very great consolation to the troubled soul. The throne of God is mentioned here in the sense of the Last Judgment about which the whole of the remainder of this chapter is concerned. The Book of Revelation is the Book of the Throne. The Throne is mentioned 32 times in this Book, roughly one third of the number of occurrences of the word in the entire Bible. The Apocalypse is the Book of the Throne, and it is a high proof of the true deity of Christ that in so many instances we find the blessed Redeemer sitting thereupon or otherwise sharing the Throne with the Father, as in the last sentence in this Book (and in the entire Bible of course) where we read, "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it". (Chapter 22:3)

It is the prerogative of Christ to share that throne with His people and so to realise the secret object of all creation - that man should reign over all as the vicegerent of God. This promise is wonderfully described in the Eighth Psalm -

What is man that thou art mindful of him? ... thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour ... thou has put all things under his feet.

This is why God made man, but we now know that that destiny is only realised in God becoming Man, that fallen man might be raised to the highest dignity in creation through the atonement wrought in the Eternal Son. Redeemed man reigns in Christ over all, and through the mediation of the God-man, Christ Jesus, is elevated to the highest dignity in creation.

It is of this high destiny that Christ speaks in the message to the last of the Mystic Seven Churches, that of Laodicea, wherein He declares, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne”. (Rev. 3:21)

They who will attend to these remarkable verses will see that there is in them a complete proof of the true deity of the Son Incarnate. Who is this who claims the right to order the eternal destiny of His people, saying, “I will grant to sit with me in my throne ...”? If He be not God in the most absolute sense such words would express the highest blasphemy. To be “without fault before the throne” is an evangelical state, for no man in his own right can attain to it. Unless we can claim the divine occupant of the throne as our own and only righteousness, we cannot hope for acceptance there. Yet it is His throne before which we are attested to be accepted as being without fault. This can only be as He is revealed to us and received by us as our JEHOVAH TZIDKENU – “The Lord our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6). If He who is on the throne is our only righteousness, then there can be none to blame, none to condemn. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Again, “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God”. (John 3:18) It is significant that the same John who tells us in Revelation that the redeemed are without fault before the throne, is also he who records in his Gospel the wonderful secret of our acceptance in Him, through whom, by faith, we possess that everlasting righteousness which causes us to be accepted, without blame, at the Last Judgment.

To summarise these five verses of Revelation 14 in their description of the Church, we see the final scene when the Lamb stands upon Mount Sion with His 144,000 whose number can neither be increased nor diminished for it is perfect; they have a song which only they can sing; they have a separation from the defilement of this world; they follow the Lamb wherever He leads; they have a guiltlessness which none else can claim; stamped upon them is the name of the Father who in Christ claims them for His own.



## LOOKING TO THE END - THE VISION OF THE SIX ANGELS Rev. 14: 6-13

The remainder of chapter 14 is taken up with events relating to, and leading up to, the final act of the world drama of judgment and redemption. The chapter, as we have already seen, commences with a view of the final triumph and reward of the saints of God standing with their Redeemer on Mount Sion in their mystical number, 144,000, marked with the insignia of the divine name in their foreheads, singing the new song of redemption accomplished, and being approved by the holy judgment of God as the undefiled, the guileless, the justified, the followers of the Lamb. Now the vision moves to the preparation for the final judgment. Three angels of judgment appear and pronounce their mission. They are followed by three more angels who are the reapers in the Last Judgment according to the words of the Lord in the parable of the tares and the wheat (Matthew 13:39) – “The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels”. See also the parable of the drag net, Matt. 13:49 – “The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just ....”

The first of the six angels is described as ‘another angel’. With one exception, each of the succeeding angels is similarly described. This has led Hengstenberg to the conclusion that in reality there are seven angels, seeing the first is designated ‘another’ as though he was preceded already by one going before him. “Another angel” therefore must point back to a predecessor whom Hengstenberg finds in none other than the Mighty Angel of chapter 10, already identified as none other than the Son of God Himself, the Lord of all the angels and of men, the Arbiter of the events now about to be described.

The message is that same consolation which runs through the entire Apocalypse, taking its rise in the soul of the aged prisoner of Caesar in the Isle of Patmos. Christ rules, sovereign and absolute, over all the powers of evil which He has already conquered by His victory over death, and whom He now permits only in so far as the overcoming of those powers in the individual soul and in history, and in the Church as a whole, brings to pass the fulness of the triumph of His kingdom.

The vision of the twofold judgment - that of the just and of the unjust - now before us, is filled with comfort for the tried and persecuted saint, and with foreboding for the unbeliever.

The lesson behind the vision is that we should look steadfastly to the end of that which is revealed, and not be cast down by the frightful view of the world’s heathen and blasphemous power opposed so bitterly (and often, so seemingly

successfully) to the flock of God. All trials are tolerable if we look to the end of them. Who will fear the power of the enemy if we see clearly that he has but a little season left to him, and that his eternal overthrow is decreed? Hence verse 12 exhorts us to constancy in the faith and in the patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and verse 13 shows the eternal reward of those who believe.

### THE GOSPEL WHICH NOTHING CAN HINDER FROM BEING PROCLAIMED

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.- v. 6 & 7

The gospel is a message of life to all who believe, but of judgment to the unbelieving and impenitent (John 3:36). Clothing is here given to the truth that as the dominion of Antichrist extends over ‘all kindreds and tongues and nations’ (see chap. 13:7), so the Word of God, the gospel, by which men must be justified or condemned, extends to “every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (14:6). Moreover this is-an everlasting Word, in contrast with the empty boast of Satan, who has but a short time and will remain active only for a season. Verse 7 summarises the message of the gospel in its practical result among men. “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” is ever the first word of the message of God and extension is given to the meaning of those words in their impact on mankind, so shortly to be judged. Hence we have here, “Fear God and give glory to him” - for the object of the gospel is to bring us back to a right relationship to God as Creator and righteous judge, the source of all life and light, and peace and joy.

Angels do not actually preach the gospel, but they carry the divine decrees, and have power to forbid and thwart every act of Satan who fears the preaching of the Word of God more than anything else. In this flight of the first angel in the midst of heaven with the divine decree concerning the preaching of the gospel, we see the onset of that last proclamation of the divine grace in Christ for sinful man, prior to the final act by which God brings the history of creation to its fulfillment in eternity. No act of man or demon can ever prevent the preaching of the Word. Fire and sword cannot overcome it. Persecution only spreads it. Error may seem at times to becloud its purity, but only for a season in the divine permission. The

gradual sinking of the original Church into the subtleties of a new heathenism, could not prevent the emergence of the truth again through the preaching of dedicated men and the prayers of faithful and devoted women, until that great divine earthquake, the Reformation of the sixteenth century, overthrew the walls and towers of Satanic deceit and suppression. It may be in our day, when we see the truth being obscured by errors not seen or heard of before, such as the evolutionary hypothesis which has befouled and diverted the processes of true science and erected the altars of a reckless atheism in regions once sacred to the true gospel - it may be we will yet witness a fresh proclaiming of the divine decree, and for the last time rejoice at the full and clear preaching of the Word of Truth in our time. We cannot say, for it is not for us to know the times or the seasons, but this we know, that God will not leave Himself without witness, and when His decree goes forth, the world shall hear, if for the last time, the clear testimony of the mercy of God to fallen man.

Such a worldwide preaching of the Word in the old-fashioned terms would exalt the Lord God to the highest and require that all men everywhere should repent and give glory to Him, but that is hardly the note of modern evangelism which is man-centred rather than God-centred. The accent today is not so much upon preaching as upon method and organisation and money. 'Campaigns' are now 'budgeted' for, and the gathering of money, with the full programme of publicity and advertisement, appears to be at least as important as 'preaching'. Somehow we are skeptical. The awakenings in the Middle Ages, long before the Reformation, and indeed the Reformation itself, and the triumphs of the Gospel in the Puritan and Methodist centuries which followed, not to speak of the age of mighty pulpit preaching in the nineteenth century, owed nothing to publicity, planning, or money. Now towards the end of the twentieth century - the age of man and of man's pride and sufficiency - we are getting threadbare theology and the worst preaching of almost any age of which we have knowledge - and few there be who appear to be aware of it. God grant He may yet send His angel before the end to proclaim an era of the preaching of the Word of God which will begin and end with that great purpose of all true preaching - "Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him who made heaven and earth and the sea and the fountains of waters".

That formula is prophetic. The heaven and the earth and the sea in the language of the Apocalypse are terms which bespeak the powers of creation and the inhabitants thereof, and the fountains of waters are the means of grace which the Father has placed in His own power.

The Lord describes Himself in Jeremiah 2:13 as “the fountain of living waters” which Israel had forsaken. He promises that in the gospel day a fountain will be opened to His people for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). Christ shows Himself to the woman of Samaria to be a well of living water (John 4:14), and to the Jews at the feast He proclaims, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7:37). In paradise He will lead His people “unto living fountains of waters”, which can only mean that the soul’s thirst will for ever be supplied by full participation in what Christ is to the soul (Rev. 7:17).

### THE FALL OF BABYLON

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. - v. 8.

Babylon is not a phenomenon of the latter days, nor yet of the times of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon is a continuing feature of the history of man since the days when Cain fled into the east country and built for himself the first city, naming it after his own son (Genesis 4:17). On the very much altered geography of the earth after the Flood, Nimrod, the first world emperor, built his city on the site of Cain’s ruined metropolis, and to raise a towering ziggurat or pyramid which stands even to this day in Mesopotamia, in a ruin of vitrified brick some three hundred feet high. Alexander the Great in 324 BC visited it and thought to restore and rebuild, but his sudden death in that vicinity brought the plan to nothing. The ruins still remain as a monument to the pride and rebellion of man against God and a memorial to that idolatry which ever exists in the heart of fallen man. Babylon still survives as a spiritual principle of apostasy, endemic in the heart of man, ever creating for itself the old idolatry, ever-changing in form, but always the same in principle. That principle is man's worship of himself - making himself the centre of creation - drawing all to himself, independent of God, and establishing his own name in place of the divine.

It is convenient to the pride of man to deny divine history, and scoff at the ‘fable’ of man’s origin as made by God and for God in the holy image of God. The fable of man’s evolutionary origin is the latest device to render unnecessary, man’s dependence upon God - answerable to no-one for his own life. A contemporary religious philosopher, who draws the wages of the Christian church without a blush, assures us that he hopes the resurrection of Christ was not true, for he would rather believe that man needs nothing outside of himself to determine and control his own destiny. Alas, death takes them all and overcomes them and they can make

no headway against the grave. The humble and meek look for eternal life beyond the grave, and find their hope in that One who alone in all man's long and tragic history, has overcome death by enduring it and rising from the tomb. He is an enemy of the human race who scoffs at or denies man's only hope - that hope of immortality which the best of our poets have spoken of and which is assured to us in a Bible which is above and beyond the scope of man's science.

Natural science does not contain the whole of truth, for the nature of man is - above all natural science. Man is a soul, and "the soul of the soul" says Tertullian "is perception". That is, man is not what the brute beast is, and no process of growth can ever bring the beast to the level of man. The soul, which lives in its self-consciousness and perceptiveness of itself, is not of nature but is of God, and will survive death, for it partakes of the gift of immortality. It can never die. As Job said nigh upon 4,000 years ago before all the Greek philosophers and poets had begun to write: "Though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God". Mr. Handel has ensured that those imperishable words by which man proves himself to be superior to death, should be carried on the wings of inspired music to the uttermost parts of the world, and throughout what remains of time.

Babylon is the typical centre of the world's false religion and pride - in continuity from the days of the building of Babel's tower, indeed, from its predecessor, the city which Cain built when he was cast out from the presence of God and His people. In John's day it was imperial Rome which claimed the title, and there is every reason to suppose that the Babylon mentioned by Peter in his first epistle chap. 5, verse 13, is none other than Rome itself, disguised in this reference for purposes of prudence, as was Paul's great reference to the hindering power of Caesar in 2 Thess. 2, where, for the same reasons, the reference to Rome is disguised.

Papal Rome became the legal and historical successor of the city of the Caesars, when the purple of the pagan antichrist fell upon the shoulders of the Bishop of Rome. The Papacy however does not exhaust the full meaning of Babylon which is always located, with its citizens, where confusion, apostasy and pride do reign.

The message of Revelation is that all the oppressors of God's people, in whatever age or form they appear, will inevitably fall. The characteristics of Babylon - the unholy alliance of religion with worldly power and pride, to the suppression of the truth - are symbolised in the adulterous wine-cup of false religion and lying deceit, found in the hand of the Great Whore of Revelation 17.

The lesson of our verse 8 in Rev. 14 is that come what may, the doom of Babylon is already decreed, and the persecuting power of the enemy of the truth can only go so far as the wisdom of God decrees - far enough to bring about its own destruction.

### THE THIRD ANGEL

And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. - v. 9 - 12

“The aim of all three messages” observes Hengstenberg, “is intended to strengthen men’s minds against the temptation which the seeming omnipotence of the Beast should present to the followers of the Lamb, and arm them against his seductive arts by the solemn call: “Worship not the Beast, for the power of judgment has come - Babylon is fallen”. Hengstenberg adds, “Fear can only be driven out by stronger fear - the fear of God. Let us shut it up fast in our hearts. The times are drawing nigh when we shall again need such heroic means against fear”.

The fire and brimstone in this passage point back to the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah which are symbols always of the final judgment of the world. “Hell would be a fable if it had not such earthly types (as Sodom and Gomorrah),” says Hengstenberg; “What is to be done hereafter can only be regarded as a reality when the same law which necessitates it is found to be in operation here and now.”

Verse 12 emphasises that the patient endurance of God’s people is founded on their unshakeable confidence in their sovereign Lord and Redeemer. Their eyes are always toward Him who has conquered death and therefore all power is His in

heaven and in earth. There is no power which can challenge His throne. The destruction of all evil power is sure, and one of the supreme elements of faith is patience - the tried and the troubled can afford to wait, because their final triumph is guaranteed by the Saviour's resurrection from the dead.

“Keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” has a peculiar emphasis. It is John who writes here at the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and he feels what he writes, for in his epistles he has already defined the meaning – “This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as he gave us commandment”. (1 John 3:23)

### THE BLESSED DEAD

This brings our section to its natural conclusion:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them (verse 13).

“Write.” Twelve times in the Apocalypse this imperative of the verb, to write, occurs. God will have His counsel preserved for the faith and comfort of His people. The Word of God is both written and absolute - settled in heaven before it is inscribed on earth. Those who have doubts as to the correct transmission of the Word of God to the latest day are defective in their theory of the written Word. It was as necessary for the comforting Word of God to be preserved, as it was originally to promulgate it. The one is useless without the other. The Word must be preserved inviolate or the people of God will be deprived of their consolation.

This verse teaches us that our full blessedness belongs to the world that is to come, and we are not to look for our reward in this present scene of trial and conflict.

“From henceforth” – “This word is a precious jewel” says Hengstenberg, “an antidote against the cheerless doctrine (of ‘soul sleep’) that would make a long night go before the bright day, such for example as theirs is, who dream of a sleep of the soul”. The doctrine of ‘soul sleep’ long ago refuted by Tertullian, throws the comfort of the saint so far into the future that the prospect itself becomes uncertain, and faith is injured. The ‘blessedness’ of those who die in the Lord, lies in their “resting” in the Lord till the consummation. To describe ‘soul sleep’ as a state of blessedness is to make a mischievous use of words.

“The soul’s life in Christ can suffer no interruption, and whenever any interruption is believed to exist, eternal life itself is indirectly denied”. (Hengstenberg)