

Revelation Chapter 14

In Revelation 7 we saw the 144,000 of the 12 tribes of Israel bring forth the early harvest of the church. Now we will see a second harvest, the latter harvest from a different 144,000.

Revelation 14:1 And I looked, and, lo, [the]¹ Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand[s], having his [name and his] Father's name written in their foreheads. 2 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: 3 And they [sing] 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. 4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. 5 [There was found no falsehood in their mouth]: for they are [blameless]. 6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto [those sitting] on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, 7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear [the Lord], 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.²

Back in Revelation chapter 7 we encountered 144,000 servants of the Lord who were sealed in their foreheads and portrayed in the Heavens. There they were derived from **all the tribes of the children of Israel** except for the tribe of Dan (from which the Antichrist will arise) and the tribe of Ephraim (whose leaders rose up against the Lord and led the northern Kingdom of Israel astray into idolatry, for which they were brutally invaded and conquered by Assyria, the remaining remnant subsequently deported from the Israel into Assyria never to return. It is important to recognize that those 144,000 in chapter 7 were true descendants of the “12 tribes of Israel” physically and spiritually, true Israelites in whom there was no guile. As St. Andrew of Caesarea states: “The exact equality of each tribe seems to me to show the utter fruitfulness of the apostolic seed ... For these were the disciples of that seed that out of love for humankind fell on the earth and brought forth the various fruits of universal salvation.” [I.e., they were the good earth that the Word of God fell on in the Apostolic Age, i.e., the beginning of the New Testament Church.]

But here in Revelation chapter 14 we have a different 144,000, not a specific number, but a representative number. Here the 144,000 are not listed by tribe nor sealed with a mark, but have the Lamb’s name and the Father’s name written on their foreheads. Here they are described as “virgins, not defiled with women,” with “no falsehood in their mouth,” and are “blameless.”

1. Square brackets indicate a corrected translation from the 1904 Constantinople Text of the Greek New Testament, i.e., the Orthodox text.

2. This reminds us of the scene in Chapter 5: *Rev 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as having been slain ... And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden bowls full of incenses, which are the prayers of saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the ~~book~~ [scroll], and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*

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So who exactly are these 144,000? There are those who believe they are Jews in the last days, others who believe it is the Church (both Jews and Gentiles); some believe them to be true virgins (living the angelic life as Adam and Eve before the fall), others -- virgins by not having fallen into idolatry, i.e., spiritual adultery, and chaste in marriage, the spiritual leaders of the New Testament Church.

Victorinus of Poetovio (AD 250-303), who wrote the first commentary on Revelation in the Latin language favored the Jews): 20.1 “*Of this resurrection, he says: And I saw the Lamb standing, and with him 144 thousands, that is, standing with Christ, namely those of **the Jews in the last time who become believers through the preaching of Elijah, those who, the Spirit bears witness, are virgins not only in body, but also in language.***”³ [A minority opinion]

Ecumenius (6th-7th century AD, favors both Jews and Gentiles): **We must regard those mentioned to be a mixture of persons from Israel and from the Gentiles, and the greater part from the Gentiles. And that they had the name of the Father and of his Son written on them shows that they were wreathed in a certain divine glory.”**

St. Andrew of Caesarea (5th-6th century AD favors both Jews and Gentiles and literal virginity) interpreting the passage as follows: “Without any doubt whatsoever, the Lamb is Christ. He is standing on Mount Zion, not on the ancient city, but the new city of the living God ... [the 144,000] **signify those from the New Testament who are chaste in both the inner and outer person**. For among the ancients the virtue of virginity was rare, found only in a very few, and from this fact one must suppose that **these are different from those mentioned earlier who were introduced with the names of the tribes of Israel, to whom he did not attribute virginity**. The foreheads of all of these are sealed with the light of the divine countenance, by which they are revealed as holy to the avenging angels.”

Archbishop Averky (20th century AD): In this vision is **depicted the Church, the pure bride of Christ, at the time of the flourishing of the empire of the beast**. The number 144,000 here has a similar significance as in chapter 7:2-8. In this instance, **the chosen of God are from all the peoples of the earth, presented figuratively in the form of the twelve tribes of Israel**. That the name of the Father of the Lamb is written upon their brows signifies the distinguishing qualities of their inward attitude: their moral character and form of life, their entire dedication to the service of God.”

Revelation 14:2 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: 3 And they [sing] 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

³ https://www.preteristarchive.com/0260_victorinus_apocalypse/ This verse is not found in *ANF, Vol VII*. The text here is from an alternative source and found in William C. Weinrich (ed), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XII: Revelation*, Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2005, p. 214, and sourced from Johannes Haussleiter (ed), *Victorinus of Petovium, Commentarii in Apocalypsim Joannis*, CSEL 49, F. Tempisky Vienna; G. Freytag, Leipzig, 1916, pp. 14-154.

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*the earth. 4 **These are** they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. **These are** they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being **the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.** 5 [There was found no falsehood in their mouth]: for they are [blameless].*

St. Andrew of Caesarea: “We think that after the 24 elders, **these are leaders of the rest** who because of their chastity and purity in word and deed have, after the sojourn of Christ, come to possess the brightness of the virtues. Taught by the virtues, they sing the new song, which remains unknown to most, not only in this life but also in that to come.

Archbishop Averky: “To [the 144,000] is joined the choir of those playing upon harps as it were a new song. This is the song of the new creation of God, the song of the redemption and renewal of mankind by the blood of the Lamb of God. Only that part of mankind which has been redeemed sings this song. Therefore *no man could learn that song but the 144,000, which were redeemed from the earth.* By *virgins* certain commentators understand here not virgins in the literal meaning of the word but those who were saved from the grasp of paganism and idol worship, in as much as in the Holy Scripture of the Old Testament, idol worship is often called adultery.”

[This phrase “*sing a new song*” reminds us of Psalm 95 Lxx, which also relates to the judgment and redemption of mankind:]

Psalm XCV. 95.

A canticle praise. Davids's. When the house was built after the captivity. Without superscription among the Hebrews.

- 1 O sing unto the Lord a new song, sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
- 2 Sing unto the Lord, bless, His Name; proclaim from day to day the good tidings of His salvation.
3. Declare among the nations His glory, and among all peoples His wonders.
- 4 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.
- 5 For all the gods of the nations are demons, but the Lord made the heavens.
- 6 Praise and beauty are before Him, holiness and majesty are in His sanctuary.
- 7 Bring to the Lord, ye kindreds of the nations, bring to the Lord glory and honopur; bring to the Lord the glory due unto His Name
- 8 Bring sacrifices, and go into His courts; worship the Lord in His holy court.
- 9 Let the earth be shaken at His presence; say among the nations that the Lord is king.
- 10 for He hath established the world which shall not be shake; He shall judge the people in uprightness.
- 11 Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice; let the sea be shaken, and the fulness thereof. The plans shall be joyful, and all the things therein.
- 12 Then shall all the trees of the forest rejoice at the present of the Lord, for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth.

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13 He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with His truth.

Archimandrite Athanasios: “Saint Arethas [of Caesarea (AD 850-944, Byzantine Scholar)] writes on this point, ‘marriage is not dishonored by what is presented here [by the Evangelist John], marriage is honorable, and it does not mean that by praising virginity we downgrade marriage’ ... Virginity transcends marriage. It is not a commandment, and of course one can be saved if he does not choose virginity and chooses to marry ... For this reason, the Lord did not institute virginity for all, but He left it to the disposition and free choice of each individual [*cf.* Matthew 19:11-12].

“According to Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who writes to St. Polycarp, ‘if anyone is able to remain in purity, in honor of the Lord’s flesh, he must do so without boasting.’ Virginity is not an unnatural state but rather a supranatural state. It is above nature in terms of this age, but indeed natural under the prism of the pre-fallen state. There is spiritual virginity and physical virginity. They physical state, which is not so difficult, is to simply avoid bodily union, to never have sexual relations. Spiritual virginity, however is extremely difficult. This is accomplished when one develops virginity in his soul and in his thoughts.

“But getting back to the Scripture, we can ask again, who are these who are especially referred to as 144,000 virgins? They will be all those who sparkled through the centuries as shining examples of asceticism, obedience, and virginity. They are the ascetics of all centuries, of all seasons, until the end of the ages, until the end of history ... Even today, my friends, Christ sends invitations to people, especially young men and women, to come to love virginity, spiritually and physically, and to dedicated themselves to Christ.”

[I would add to emphasize that they are the *First-fruits*, the leaders as St. Andrew of Caesarea has mentioned, who with honest and good hearts, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth [much much] fruit with patience. As in our Apostolos reading for today, these are truly those who have been crucified with Christ and no longer live (for themselves), but Christ livest in them! They are the *First-fruits*, not the total harvest which we will see in chapter 19.]

Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto [those sitting] on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, 7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear [the Lord], 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.

Archbishop Averky: “Immediately after this, there appears to St. John a second vision of three angels soaring in the heavens. One declares to men the *everlasting gospel* and as it were says: “Fear God and do not be afraid of Antichrist who cannot destroy your souls together with your bodies, and oppose him with boldness for judgment and reward is close and he has power only for a short time” (St. Andrew, chapter 40). Certain exegetes by this angel understand the

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preachers of the gospel in general.”

Archimandrite Athanasios: Today the gospel has been taught everywhere [but not the True Orthodox Gospel. There are many that bring and teach a different Gospel, i.e., Catholics, Protestants, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, etc.]. We could say that a proof to this is the abundance of languages into which Scripture has been translated, thousands of languages? Scripture has been translated into 1400 languages and dialects worldwide. This essentially means that the gospel has been preached and made available to all ... so the Gospel will be preached, but not necessarily accepted.” [That’s man’s efforts, and much more-so by the heterodox than the Orthodox.]

But here we have an Angelic Evangelist in the mid-heavens, i.e., in the sky above us. What is the message?

1. Fear God
2. Give Glory to Him
3. Worship Him Who made heaven, and earth, and the sea and the fountains of waters.
4. And then the end will come (Matthew 24:14), so that no one will have an excuse.

The hour of His Judgment will come. At the hour of Judgment there will be no repentance possible, nor evangelism, but only Judgment that will lead to either eternal life or eternal death.

For the atheists the hour of Judgment will come.

For the idolators the hour of Judgment will come.

For the heterodox the hour of Judgment will come.

For we Orthodox the hour of Judgment will come! Thus, we need to be ready at all times to meet our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Revelation 14:8 And there followed another [, a second] angel, saying, Babylon [the Great] is fallen, is fallen, ~~that great city~~, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. 9 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, 10 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: 11 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. 12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. 13 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.

Revelation 14:8 And there followed another [, a second] angel, saying, Babylon [the Great] is fallen, is fallen, ~~that great city~~, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

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Averký: Another angel declares the fall of Babylon by which is usually understood the kingdom of evil and sin in the world. Some commentators understand by this Babylon ancient pagan Rome, which gave all the people to drink the “wine of fornication” or idol worship. Others understand by this symbol the false Christian empire; and by the wine of fornication the false teaching of religion (compare Jer. 51:7).

St. Andrew of Caesarea: He speaks of Babylon, which refers to the confusion of the world and the troubled disorder of this live, which in no way have abated. By the “wine of the wrath of her fornication” he means not only the frenzy that attends to idol-worship and the ecstasy of their minds but also to the drunkenness and derangement that attends all sin, by which everyone who whores against God is wholly destroyed, as the saying of the psalm goes (Ps. 72:27) ... those who have been workers of iniquity are sent to the everlasting fire.

Revelation 14:9 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, 10 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: 11 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. 12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

Averký: The third angel threatens with eternal torments all those who serve the beast and bow down to him and his image and receive his mark upon their brow or hand ... the wrath of God in its powerful activity is likened here to unmixed wine. In Palestine, wine was never used whole, unmixed with water.

St Andrew of Caesarea: It says that should anyone bow down to the beastlike antichrist and pursue an ungodly life like his, should anyone proclaim him to be God in word or deed -- for the mark given on the forehead and on the hand would show this -- that person will share with the antichrist in the drinking of the revenge-filled cup, which is unmixed and devoid of any divine mercy because of the justice of the judgment ... we learn that even as the bliss of the righteous is everlasting, so also is the torment of sinners.

Æcumenius: *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints*, it says. This will be manifested at this time of the antichrist and in this ordeal. For however great is the danger and the tribulation at that time, so great is the need for endurance.

Revelation 14:13 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.

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St. Andrew of Caesarea: The voice from heaven does not bless all the dead, but only those who die in the Lord, who have died to the world, and *carry about the dying of Jesus in the body* (2 Cor. 4:10) and suffer with Christ. For these persons the departure from the body is truly a rest from their labor. Moreover, the obedience of their works is the reason for their unfading crowns and rewards of glory that are the prizes given in great measure to those who prevail in the contests that the contestants of Christ, our God, endure to the end against invisible powers.

Revelation 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.
15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come ~~for thee~~ to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. 17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for the [grape of the earth did ripen] ~~her grapes are fully ripe.~~ 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

Archimandrite Athanasios: In the remaining verses of Revelation chapter fourteen we have the description of two images. The first is the universal harvest where the earth is considered a field. The second one likens the world to a grape vineyard. It uses the image of gathering the ripe grapes for the wine press. Both images are the prefigurement of the judgment of the world. The first image of the harvest is a marvelous image, especially liturgically, from the Old and New Testament. The *one like a Son of Man who sits on the cloud* is Jesus Christ, Who is coming as Judge of the entire world. Here it is worth mentioning that perhaps in the perception of many of our Christians the image of Christ the Judge does not exist but only the image of Christ the Redeemer. Please pay attention to this point. Since they have erased the image of Christ the Judge, they think of Christ as gently, compromising, always forgiving, sweet, and accepting regardless of our state, whether it is corrected or uncorrected. It is inconceivable to them that their Christ could reprove or judge.

Revelation 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: We think that his cloud is either the visible cloud that took our Lord Jesus Christ from the eyes of the apostles or that it is a certain angelic power [here called a cloud] because of its purity and sublimity ... For this reason, we believe that the one seen on the cloud similar to a son of man is Christ, and that the crown on his head signifies his governance over both the visible and invisible powers. The crown is gold because of the value of this

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substance among us. The sickle indicates the consummation, for indeed the Lord called the end of the world a *harvest*.

Revelation 14:15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come ~~for thee~~ to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: The cry of the angel symbolically represents the supplications of all the heavenly powers who desire to see both the honoring of the saints and the separation of the transgression of the sinners ... that the harvest is ripe indicates that the time of the consummation has come when the seed of piety, having matured as ripe wheat, will be regarded as ready for the heavenly granaries and will yield for the husbandman thirty fold, sixty fold, and a hundredfold.

Revelation 14:17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for the [grape of the earth did ripen] ~~her grapes are fully ripe~~. 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

St. Andrew of Caesarea: The present angel is shown to be one of the ministering angels, for he comes out of the heavenly temple with a sharp sickle in order to accomplish the cutting off of those who are most impious ... The winepress of God is the place of torment prepared for the devil and his angels. Because of the multitude of those who are to be punished, it is great.

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Revelation 14:20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs [stadia].

Averký: Here there is a reference to the city of Jerusalem outside of which, on the Mount of Olives, there were many wine presses in which were pressed olives and grapes. The abundance of the harvest of grapes is described in the fact that the wine poured out on the earth in such abundance that it reached the horses' bridles. The hyperbolic expression used here by the holy seer of mysteries indicates that the defeat of the enemies of God will be so terrible that the blood will flow as in rivers. Sixteen hundred furlongs is a definite number taken in place of an indefinite one and signifies in general the abundant field of battle.

Æcumenius: He speaks rightly of *blood*, to show that he was speaking figuratively when he spoke of *clusters of grapes*. For, to be sure, it is real persons who are being trampled on and cut up, so that their blood flowed *as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand and six hundred stadia*. In the holy Scriptures there is a common usage whereby God has certain horses with himself as the rider, these horses symbolizing an angelic power. For in the Song of Songs the heavenly bridegroom says to the bride, *I have compared you, my love, my love, to my horse in the chariot of Pharaoh* (Song 1:9), and Habakkuk the prophet sings to God, *You will mount on your horses; and your chariots are salvation* (Hab. 3:8). The Apocalypse says that the bridles of these horses are soaked with the blood of sinners, not only of those close by but also of those standing far away. The passage is wholly figurative, intending to show the great amount of blood. For those who walk in the wide road are much more numerous than those who walk in the straight and narrow path (Mt. 7:13-14), so that they soak the bridles of the horses responsible for punishment, even though these are angels.