

Bible Study Revelation Chapters 14-15

“14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb...”

We have seen this depiction of Christ before in Revelation. In fact, the Lamb has been already been mentioned 14 times, and will be mentioned a total of 28 times.

“...standing on Mount Zion...”

Mount Zion is in Jerusalem, along with nearby Mount of Olives, Mount Scopus, Mount Moriah, and others. Over the millennia, the term “Mt Zion” has been used for at least two Jerusalem mountains, and has often been used as a metaphor for the entire city of Jerusalem.

When John wrote Revelation, Jerusalem was a desolate city destroyed by the Romans. In the last chapter, Jerusalem was called “Egypt and Sodom.” But now, seeing the Lamb of God (Christ) standing on Mt. Zion was a vision of supremacy over that city, now destroyed and rejected. It is also a suggestion of the Lamb building something new above the ashes – the Church.

“He is standing not on Mt. Zion, not the ancient city, but the new city of the living God” (Andrew of Caesarea).

“...and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

We have already seen the 144,000 people before. They were mentioned in chapter 7 verse 4:

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed...”

Several early Church commentators believe this means the Jews will convert to Christianity in the end times.

“But now the Lord is shown having come to Mt. Zion represents the conversion of Israel by faith in the last days, when indeed the Lord will make them His own possession and bring them unto Himself. For this was proclaimed by Isaiah: ‘The Redeemer will come to Zion and will remove ungodliness from Jacob says the Lord’” (Oecumenius)

“He is speaking of those Jews who, at the end of time, will come to faith through the preaching of Elijah ...” (Victorinus)

There is biblical evidence to support this interpretation as well.

““O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Luke 13:34-35).

Christ says Jerusalem is now desolate, just as Revelation says it is now “Egypt and Sodom.” But Christ says there will come a time when the people of Jerusalem says “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” just as the crowds cheered on Palm Sunday, the last time Christ entered Jerusalem: *“Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!”* (Matthew 21:9).

Now, we learn more details about the 144,000. They are holy virgins:

“⁴ These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

Orthodoxy has always deeply honored virginity. It is a spiritual discipline signifying total obedience to God. It is difficult to maintain, but it can be done. Christ was a lifelong virgin. The Theotokos was a lifelong virgin. According to Holy Tradition, John the Evangelist was a lifelong virgin: *“Such was John’s love of virginity and asceticism that, above all the disciples, he was worthy of the name of “virgin,” and such was his ardent love for Christ and irreproachable life that, among them all, he became the “beloved disciple”* (Synaxarion).

The Church has also deeply honored celibacy – the practice of abstaining from sex without reference to one’s sexual past. Of virginity and celibacy, Christ said: *“For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake.”* Not all are called to it, as Christ adds, *“He who is able to accept it, let him accept it”* (Matthew 19:12).

In the Liturgy of St. Basil, we pray *“Remember, Lord, those living in chastity and godliness, in asceticism and holiness of life.”* The spiritual disciplines of virginity and chastity are practiced in Orthodoxy monasteries. Some are virgins and some are not. But all abstain from sex, as well as having families and children.

“Those who have consecrated their lives to Christ, and renouncing the lustful behaviors of the flesh, have dedicated themselves to God in body as well as in spirit, may perfect their work, destined as it is for a great reward, and may not be solicitous to adorn themselves, or to please anyone except the Lord...” (Cyprian).

“To eunuchs in my house and within my walls, says the Lord, I shall give a place better than sons and daughters” (Bede, quoting Isaiah 56:5).

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The 144,000 are also singers and musicians.

² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. ³ They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders...

Heaven is full of singers and music. The Old Testament Temple was too. Then comes this detail:

“...and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.”

This song which was only understood by the 144,000 virgins is part of their reward for their virginity, but without penalty to the non-virgin faithful:

“You who are virgins will both sing and hear it, for you will also hear it from your own lips as you sing it. Your joy will be more blessed and your dominion sweeter. Those who do not attain your greater glory will experience no grief, for the Lamb whom you follow wherever He goes will not abandon those either, who cannot follow Him where you can. The Lamb of whom we speak is almighty. He will both go before you and not desert them, for He will be the God who is ‘all in all’” (Augustine).

“If virgins are firstfruits, then it follows that the widows and the continent in marriage come after the firstfruits” (Jerome).

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—⁷ saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

“The eternal Gospel, which from eternity was foreordained by God, says, ‘Fear God, but have no fear of the antichrist, who cannot kill the soul with the body. Rather, fervently stand opposed to him who has power but for a short time, for the time of his judgement, and the reward for what he has done, is near” (Andrew of Caesarea).

“The saving teaching that one should fear the Lord is from eternity, since ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and its end is love.’ On the other hand it says the harsh beast, who works spiritual death, the antichrist, is not to be feared, even though he may threaten and do the most amazing feats. For the hour of his judgement is come” (Oecumenius).

⁸ And another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.’”

Ancient Babylon was one of the oldest cities in the world. It is believed that the Tower of Babel was in early Babylon. The term “Babel” means “confusion,” from where human language became confused. In the English language, “to babble” means to speak nonsense.

At the time of the writing of Revelation, Babylon had already been a renowned city and mighty empire twice: it has been estimated that Babylon was the largest city in the world c. 1770 – c. 1670 BC, and again c. 612 – c. 320 BC. The Bible records when their king Nebuchadnezzar conquered the southern kingdom of Judah, and carried the people into slavery in Babylon (2 Kings 24-25, 2 Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 39:1-10).

Despite the might of the Babylonian Empire, it was also conquered several times by even stronger neighbors. While the Jews were captives in Babylon, the book of Daniel chapter 5 recounts the conquest of Babylon by the Persians. It was the Persian King Cyrus that released the Jews from captivity and released them back to their homeland. When John wrote Revelation, Babylon was a shadow of its former power. It had already been conquered by Alexander, the Parthians, and was merely a province under the Roman Empire.

Many evangelicals believe it will be rebuilt to participate in the end times. However, today, the ruins of Babylon are a tourist attraction in modern Iraq about 50 miles south of Baghdad. It shows no signs of being rebuilt anytime soon.

“Babylon is fallen” in this verse may be referring to their fall to the Persians while the Jews were enslaved. To Jewish ears, that original cry would have meant their conquerors were now themselves conquered. The new conquerors would be soon become their liberators. Applied to the context of the end times, this would mean the Babylon here is the antichrist – who had been tormenting the Church – is about to be conquered by near coming of Christ. The city of Babylon will be a major focus in later chapters in Revelation.

“⁹ Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.’”

The message here is clear for end times Christians: at all costs do not receive the mark of the antichrist. The temptation will be great, for to submit to him will bring relief from persecution and starvation. *“¹² Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”* The reward will be greater than the suffering: *“¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ This has always been the case. ‘Precious in the sight of the Lord Is the death of His saints’ (Psalm 116:15). ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.’”*

“¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like 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 who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your

*sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”
¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

The **“*One like the Son of Man*”** is clearly Christ, who called himself by this title often. He reaps one of two harvests of people on earth in this passage. Christ prophesied this:

“Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares [weeds] among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ” (Matthew 13:24-30).

Christ’s harvest was harvesting the valuable wheat (his followers) and bringing them into His heavenly barn.

¹⁷ Then 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, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” ¹⁹ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰ And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

This is the second harvest, that of the “tares,” which are to be collected and burned up.

As we have seen several times before, the vision shifts from the staggering woes and miseries on earth in the end times to the sublime vision of heaven. Once again, we are reminded that God is still on His throne, and events are unfolding according to His will.

² And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. ³ They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

*“Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways,
O King of the saints!*

⁴ Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?

*For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested.”*

The heavenly scene is not only full of divine worship, but it includes the final judgements about to be unleashed.

“15:1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.. ⁵ After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. ⁷ Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. ⁸ The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.