

INTRODUCTION

Remember the 144,000 described in chapter seven from the 'twelve tribes of Israel'? All kinds of speculative conclusions have been drawn over their identity. Guess what? John in chapter fourteen tells us exactly who they are: the faithful believers in Christ on the earth! They now are gathered on Mount Zion with the Lamb of God, Christ, in their midst celebrating the upcoming victory of Christ over Satan and his cohorts. Their celebration on earth is heard and acknowledged even from heaven.¹

In the unfolding drama of John's apocalyptic vision, both tension and excitement begins to build. The end of things is rapidly coming. The final temporal judgments of God are about to be unleashed upon the evil people in the world, which then will trigger the final judgment of God determining eternal destinies. Satan, his cohorts, and all those worshiping him are coming ever closer to final judgment and eternal damnation in the lake of fire. The pure triumph of God over evil is near and the eternal blessings of God for His people are nearly ready to be disclosed.

Once more in v. 12 (in the next study), John will step out of his apocalyptic vision in order to make an application of the vision to his initial readers in Asia at the end of the first century. It has application to us as well.

Ἦδε ἡ ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to faith in Jesus.

Remember the first application statement in 13:10, Ὡδὲ ἐστὶν ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ πίστις τῶν ἁγίων, Here is a call for endurance and faith by the saints. Here in 14:12, John defines 'saints' (τῶν ἁγίων) as οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, those remaining steadfast in obeying God's commandments and steadfast to their faith commitment to Jesus. Consistent commitment is the defining criteria of authentic Christianity, not empty profession of faith.² Even though this admonition will

¹La visión del Cordero con los elegidos en el Monte Sión recuerda la descripción de la comunidad cristiana en la carta a los Hebreos (Heb 12,22–24). Los 144.000 son los miembros del nuevo Israel de Dios (12×12×1000), una multitud inmensa. La idolatría es vista en la Biblia como una infidelidad a la relación matrimonial que el pueblo tiene con su Dios. Estos 144.000 son los fieles cristianos que han permanecido fieles a Cristo sin adorar a los ídolos. En el Apocalipsis, todo el mundo recibe un sello; los que adoran la bestia reciben su imagen en sus manos; los elegidos reciben la señal del Cordero, la cruz, en sus frentes." [Luis Alonso Schökel, *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo* (Comentarios) (Bilbao, España: Ediciones Mensajero, 2006), Re 14:1–5.]

²“Auf die Frage, was in der furchtbaren Bedrängnis aus dem Volk Gottes wird, antwortet Kap. 14: Die 144000 (vgl. 7:1–8) gehören zum siegreichen Lamm. Der Hinweis auf ihre Jungfräulich-

be covered in the next study, contextually it covers the content of vv. 1-12 in the chapter.

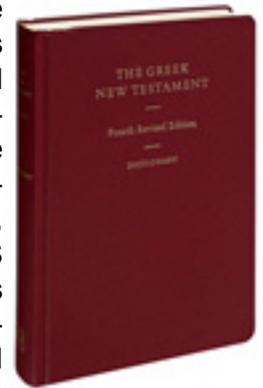
1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Relevant background issues need to be addressed before the detailed analysis of the text. These are best approached within the framework sketched out below.

Historical Aspects:

The historical aspects cover both the history of the composition and transmission of the handwritten text (External History) and any historical references as time and place markers inside the passage itself (Internal History).

External History. In the centuries of hand copying this passage variations in wording will inevitably surface. The contemporary printed Greek text of the New Testament used most widely in the English speaking world, *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed), lists only two places in the Text Apparatus where variations surface that are considered important enough to impact the translation of the passage.



14.1, the article τὸ before ἀρνίον.³ The issue here is whether or not to include the article τὸ, the, before ἀρνίον, Lamb. The presence of the article signals more strongly that this Lamb is the one previously referenced in 5:6, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, who is Christ. This is over against the reference in 13:11 to the horns on the second beast. The evidence strongly favors its inclusion.⁴

keit zeigt an, dass sie sich nicht zum Götzendienst haben verführen lassen, der im Alten Testament bildhaft als →Hurerei bezeichnet wird (V. 4; Erstlinge s. Sacherklärung)." [Einführungen Und Erklärungen Aus Der Stuttgarter Erklärungsbibel. Neuausgabe Mit Apokryphen. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2005), Re 14:1–5.]

³{A} τὸ κ A C 1006 1611 1841 2053 2329 2344 2377 Byz [046] cop^{bo} (eth) Origen Methodius // omit P⁴⁷ P 051 205 209 1854 cop^{sa} Andrew

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁴The presence of the definite article τὸ before ἀρνίον has strong manuscript support. The article is lacking in a number of manuscripts, including a number of minuscules, followed by the Textus Receptus, which reads 'a Lamb.'

⁵The variant reading is not significant for translation since the context clearly indicates that the Lamb is the Lamb first mentioned in 5:6 and numerous times thereafter. The definite article here 'has an anaphoric function; i. e., it refers back to a concept or thing men-

14.3, the conjunction ὡς.⁵ The issue here is over the inclusion or omission of ὡς. Again not much impact on the translation in most modern languages would be seen with either including or omitting it.⁶ The difference is largely between ‘they were singing a new song’ or ‘they were singing, as it seemed, a new song.’ The evidence is pretty well evenly split between these two options, and thus the UBS editors include it in brackets as [ὡς].

Of course, when combing through several thousand manuscripts containing this passage more than just two places will surface with variations in wording. This is where the Text Apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed) is helpful, since it will list the majority of these variations. In this instance 19 places of variations are listed.⁷ But careful inspection

tioned earlier that has occurred initially without the article’ (Aune, Revelation 6–16, p. 783, n. 1.b). Receptor language requirements will determine whether the definite article is used in translation.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 539–540.

⁵{C} ὡς A C 051 1006 1841 it^{ar} vg syr^{ph} Andrew; Beatus // omit P⁴⁷ κ 205 209 1611 1854 2053 2329 2344 2377 Byz [P 046] it^{sig}. t syr^h cop^{sa, bo} arm eth Origen Methodius; Jerome Primasius Cassiodorus

[Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament*, Fourth Revised Edition (with Apparatus); *The Greek New Testament*, 4th Revised Edition (with Apparatus) (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; Stuttgart, 2000).]

⁶“The manuscript support for and against including ὡς is about evenly divided. It is difficult to decide whether the word was unthinkingly introduced by copyists as an echo of v. 2, where it appears three times, or whether it was dropped either accidentally or in imitation of 5:9, where the expression ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν (they sing a new song) occurs without ὡς. In order to represent the even balance of external and internal evidence, the word ὡς has been put in brackets to indicate uncertainty regarding the original text. The variant reading gives essentially the same meaning as the reading in the text, which may be translated ‘they were singing, as it were, a new song’.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 540.]

⁷Offenbarung 14,1

* P⁴⁷ 051. 1854 M^A sa (τὸ is omitted in these mss.)

* εστως P⁴⁷ 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 1854. 2053. 2329 M^A; Or (ἐστὸς is replaced)

| εστηκος 2377 M^K

| txt κ A C P 2344 pc

*¹ bis C (τὸ before ὄρος is omitted)

* αριθμος 2377 M^K sy^h (ἀριθμὸς is inserted before ἑκατὸν)

Offenbarung 14,2

* ως P⁴⁷ (ὡς is inserted after φωνὴν)

* φωνην P⁴⁷ 2053 M^A (ἢ φωνῆ ἦν is replaced)

* M^A (ὡς after ἦκουσα is omitted)

* φωνην P⁴⁷ 2053 ar t

Offenbarung 14,3

* † P⁴⁷ κ P 1611. 1854. 2053. 2329. 2344. 2377 M^K gig sy^h; Or Meth Prim ([ὡς] is omitted)

of each of these places reveals mostly efforts at stylistic improvement and a small number of careless omissions or additions.

Consequently we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in full confidence of it being the original words of the composition.

Internal History.

Although the reference to τὸ ὄρος Σιών, Mount Zion, is unquestionably a reference to Jerusalem, the apocalyptic visionary nature of the text limits most historical aspects about the ancient city in favor of a spiritualized Jerusalem. Nothing beyond the noting of τὸ ὄρος Σιών is made in the text. Thus these aspects are best treated in the exegesis of the text rather than as background issues.

Literary Aspects:

Genre: The broad genre of apocalyptic vision still controls the narrative and thus casts the image as what John saw in his dream. This is perhaps the reason for no details about the earthly Jerusalem in the narration. They were unimportant, in the face of the spiritual reality of the Lamb and the redeemed on earth in a gigantic worship experience in the place on earth considered to be as close to heaven as possible.

Literary Setting: The literary context is relatively easy to determine. First, vv. 1-5 is part of a three part celebration of victory over Satan and his cohorts in chapter fourteen: vv. 1-5; 6-13; 14-20. This sets up the seven angels with the bowls of wrath to be poured out over the earth in chapters fifteen and sixteen. This

| txt A C 051. 1006. 1841 M^A lat sy^{ph}

* C (καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων is omitted)

* ουδε εις 051. 2377 M^K (οὐδεὶς is replaced)

Offenbarung 14,4

* A pc (οὗτοί εἰσιν is omitted)

* εἰσιν 051. 2351 M^K sy^h** (εἰσὶν is inserted after οὗτοι)

* -γει A C 2329 al (alternative spelling for ὑπάγη)

* υπο Ἰησου 051. 1611. 2351 mK sy^h** (ὑπὸ Ἰησοῦ is inserted after 2nd οὗτοι)

*¹ C; Bea (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων is omitted)

* απ αρχιης P⁴⁷ κ pc t; Prim Bea (ἀπαρχὴ is replaced)

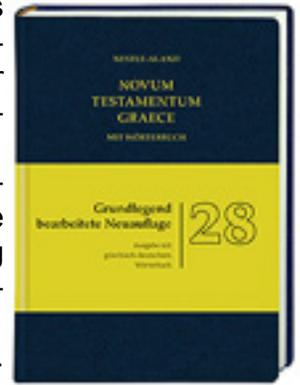
Offenbarung 14,5

* 5 6 1-4 M^K (different sequence for ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη)

* γαρ P⁴⁷ κ (051). 1. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2329. 2351 M^K ar t vg^{cl} sy^{ph}. h** co; Or (γὰρ is inserted before εἰσιν)

| txt A C P 1854. 2053 al lat

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 659.]



is the climax of the seven trumpets section in 8:2-15:1. Throughout we have noticed a gradual intensification of divine judgments upon the evil earth for its rebellion and abuse of God's people. The large interlude in chapters twelve through fourteen have reflected a sweeping survey of human history leading up to the final implementation of divine punishments upon the earth prior

to the very end of human history. The climax of this interlude is seen in chapter fourteen beginning with the celebration of victory over Satan and his cohorts for their corruption of the earth and abuse of God's people.

Literary Structure: The diagram below visually presents the internal relationship of primary and secondary ideas inside verses one through five.

14.1 And

422 **I saw,**
 and
 behold

423 **the Lamb stood**
 upon Mount Zion
 and

424 **one hundred forty-four thousand have His name**
 with Him
 and
 the name of His Father
 written
 upon their foreheads.

14.2 And

425 **I heard a voice**
 out of heaven
 like a sound of many waters
 and
 like a sound of great thunder
 and

426 **the voice (was)**
 which I heard
 like that of harpists
 playing
 with their harps.

14.3 And

427 **they sing**
 as though a new song
 before the throne
 and
 before the four living creatures
 and
 the elders,

428 and
no one was able to learn the song
 except the one hundred forty-four thousand
 who had been redeemed
 from the earth.

14.4 **These are those who have not been defiled with women,**
 for

429 **they are virgins,**

430 **they are virgins,**

431 **these (are) those following the Lamb**
 wherever He goes.

432 **These have been redeemed**
 | from humanity
 as first fruits to God
 and
 to the Lamb,
 14.5 and
 in their mouth
 433 **there is not found a lie,**
 434 **they are blameless.**

Summary of Rhetorical Structure

In this pericope, two natural units of text material emerge clearly from the diagram: #s 422-424; 425-435. These focus on **what John saw**: (#s 422-424), the Lamb and the 144,000. And then on **what John heard**: (#s 425-427), the heavenly Voice, and (#s 428-435) the 144,000. In both sections there is first the divine and then the human with the human evidently being the same group in both sections.

Exegesis of the Text:

The rhetorical balance of the text is clear between ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing.’ Then with two subunits inside each of the two divisions on first the divine and then the human, John completes out the balance in the text.

Interestingly, the narrative setting shifts from earth (v. 1) to heaven (vv. 2-3), and then back to earth (vv. 4-5). Although challenging for us as readers, we have observed John freely moving between earth and heaven etc. in previous segments of his vision. In an apocalyptic visionary dream such is easy to do, although not possible for a human in real time.

A. What John saw, v. 1

14.1 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ ἄρνιον ἑστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.

14.1 Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.

John begins with his standard apocalyptic introduction Καὶ εἶδον, *And I saw*. But here he uses the modified version of Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ, *And I saw, and behold...* Whereas εἶδον is used some 56 times in Revelation to introduce a segment of his vision, the modified form is used some 8 times.⁸ The point of this more detailed expression is to increase the emphasis on what is seen by John. The object of εἶδον can be simple like a ἵππος, *horse*. But more often what is seen is more complex and requires a phrase or clause to describe such as here in 14:1. And in these instances, the entire phrase or clause receives the heightened emphasis. The parti-

cle of emphasis ἰδοὺ is added for emphasis sake.⁹

1) The Lamb, v. 1a. 14.1 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ ἄρνιον ἑστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών, 4.1 Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion!

What John saw was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. A very close parallel to this is found in 4 Ezra 13:29-50¹⁰ (= 2 Esdras 13:29-50).¹¹ [Fourth Ezra](#) is a

⁹“ἰδοὺ demonstrative or presentative particle that draws attention to what follows (Soph.+). It is actually the aor. mid. impv. of εἶδον, ἰδοῦ, except that it is accented w. the acute when used as a particle (Schwyzer I 799) ‘(you) see, look, behold’ (for var. renderings see e.g. ESiegman, CBQ 9, ’47, 77f, fr. RKnox’s transl.)” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 468.]

¹⁰“The angel’s explanation of the dream is composed of an introduction and an answer to the seer’s question (13:20b-24), the interpretation of the dream (13:25-53a), and a conclusion (13:53b-55). In this passage there is considerable repetition and lack of clarity. The man is interpreted three times (13:25-26, 32, 51-52); the sequence of events is interrupted (cf. vv. 25-26 and 32-39).

“In his response (13:20b-24) to Ezra’s words the angel reasserts the seer’s position, using language very close to that of 9:7-8. He then proceeds to interpret the dream. The angel says that the man is the precreated Messiah who will deliver creation and rule the remnant (see 3:6; 6:6; 9:8; and 12:32 on precreation). The interpretation of the mountain is influenced by Dan. 2:34 and contradicts the vision (cf. 13:6 and 36). The fiery elements that destroy the enemies in the dream are here interpreted in legal terms.

[James Luther Mays, ed., *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 787-788.]

¹¹**4 Ezra 13:29-50.** 29 The days are coming when the Most High will deliver those who are on the earth. 30 And bewilderment of mind shall come over those who inhabit the earth. 31 They shall plan to make war against one another, city against city, place against place, people against people, and kingdom against kingdom. 32 When these things take place and the signs occur that I showed you before, then my Son will be revealed, whom you saw as a man coming up from the sea.

33 “Then, when all the nations hear his voice, all the nations shall leave their own lands and the warfare that they have against one another; 34 and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, wishing to come and conquer him. **35 But he shall stand on the top of Mount Zion.** 36 And Zion shall come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. 37 Then he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolized by the storm), 38 and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and the torments with which they are to be tortured (which were symbolized by the flames), and will destroy them without effort by means of the law (which was symbolized by the fire).

39 “And as for your seeing him gather to himself another multitude that was peaceable, 40 these are the nine tribes that were taken away from their own land into exile in the days of King Hoshea, whom Shalmaneser, king of the Assyrians, made captives; he took them across the river, and they were taken into another land. 41 But they formed this plan for themselves, that they would leave the multitude of the nations and go to a more distant region, where no

⁸Rev. 4:1; 6:2, 5, 8; 7:9; 14:1, 14; 19:11.

Jewish apocalypse¹² written at the end of the first century about the time of Revelation.¹³ The only available copies are translations produced after the original composition, with the Latin Vulgate being the primary manuscript.¹⁴ Verses 14-53 of chapter thirteen represent an

human beings had ever lived, 42 so that there at least they might keep their statutes that they had not kept in their own land. 43 And they went in by the narrow passages of the Euphrates river. 44 For at that time the Most High performed signs for them, and stopped the channels of the river until they had crossed over. 45 Through that region there was a long way to go, a journey of a year and a half; and that country is called Arzareth.

46 "Then they lived there until the last times; and now, when they are about to come again, 47 the Most High will stop the channels of the river again, so that they may be able to cross over. Therefore you saw the multitude gathered together in peace. 48 But those who are left of your people, who are found within my holy borders, shall be saved. 49 Therefore when he destroys the multitude of the nations that are gathered together, he will defend the people who remain. 50 And then he will show them very many wonders."

[*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 2 Esd 13:29–50.]

¹²In sorting out the confusing labels, perhaps this will help:

2 Esdras 1-2 = 5 Esdras (Christian; about 300 AD)

2 Esdras 3-14 = 4 Esdras (Jewish; about 100 AD)

2 Esdras 15-16 = 6 Esdras (Christian; about 300 AD)

Fourth Esdras contains only visions 3-14 of Second Esdras, and is the only purely Jewish perspective; the two others represent much later Christian additions to the original document. Due to the influence of the Vulgate, an English translation of 4 Esdras was included beginning with the King James Version in 1611 and continues in many Catholic editions of modern English translations. It is included in the Deutero-Canonical section. The Christian insertions clearly reflect a dependence upon Revelation 14 for much of their content.

¹³**Esdras, the Second Book of**, (ez'druhs), a Jewish apocalypse dating from the very end of the first century A.D. The material was written under the pseudonym of Ezra in order to use the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonians a century prior to Ezra as a means of reflecting upon the intense suffering occasioned by the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70. The work is at times designated 4 Esdras or 4 Ezra (chaps. 3-14). It is included among the Apocrypha by Protestants and is sometimes printed by Catholics along with 1 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh in an appendix following the NT. The original language was probably Hebrew, which was then translated into Greek. Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek is extant, but the book survives in a number of versions made from the Greek, including Latin, Syriac, Ethiopic, and Armenian. Chaps. 1-2 and 15-16 represent Christian additions to the original Jewish apocalypse and are occasionally designated 5 and 6 Ezra, respectively." [Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 278–279.]

¹⁴"The book today termed 2 Esdras is not in the Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox canon. It was written too late to be included in the Septuagint, but it was in an appendix to the Vulgate, and it is also found among the Apocrypha in the King James Version and Revised Standard Version. See the entry for 1 Esdras for a chart clarifying the nomenclature.

"Daniel J. Harrington writes: 'The work known as 2 Esdras is in fact three separate compositions. In them Ezra functions not

as the architect of Israel's return from exile but rather as a prophet and a visionary. In 2 Esdras 1-2 (also known as 5 Ezra) Ezra prophesies about God's rejection of Israel as God's people and its replacement by the Church. This is a Christian work composed in Greek in the mid-second century C.E. In 2 Esdras 3-14 (also known as 4 Ezra) Ezra engages in dialogue about the meaning of Israel's sufferings and is granted visions that reveal what God is going to do in the near future on Israel's behalf. This is a Jewish work written in Hebrew around 100 C.E. The material contained in 2 Esdras 15-16 (also known as 6 Ezra) consists of oracles of doom against the enemies of God's people (the Church) and advice on how those enduring persecution should behave. This is a Christian work composed in Greek in the third century C.E.' (Invitation to the Apocrypha, p. 185)

"Michael E. Stone writes: 'We can be more confident about the circumstances of the composition of 4 Ezra. The book stems from the last decade of the first century A.D. and was composed in reaction to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Its primary concern, therefore, is to understand that traumatic event. To do this the book charts Ezra's development from distress to consolation. This development is paralleled by his growth as a visionary until, by the end of the sixth vision, he is designated a prophet. Full consolation has also brought full prophetic status. Thus another major concern of the book, the restoration of the tradition of secrets concerning the eschaton, or end-time, is made possible by Ezra's consolation.' (Harper's Bible Commentary, pp. 776-777)

"Marjorie L. Kimbrough writes: 'While Ezra is talking to the woman and imploring her to shake off her great sadness, her face begins to shine and flash like lightning. When she cries out, the earth shakes, and Ezra is frightened. Then the woman disappears and in her place Ezra sees a city being built, and he cries out in fear for the angel Uriel (10:25-28). The angel comes to him and tells him to 'stand up like a man' and abandon his fear. Uriel explains that the woman represents Jerusalem; her barrenness represents the many years during which there was no temple of offering to God; the years of care given to the son represent the years of Jewish residence in Jerusalem; her son's death represents the destruction that befell Jerusalem; and Ezra's compassion for her allowed him to see the brilliance of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, representing the hope that awaits those who accept the commands of God (10:29-54).' (Stories Between the Testaments, pp. 122-123)

"Daniel J. Harrington writes: "The narrative setting of 4 Ezra is the Babylonian exile in 557 B.C.E. Despite the fact that the historical Ezra led a group of returnees to Jerusalem some 100 or 150 years later, here he serves as the spokesman for the Jewish exiles in the sixth century B.C.E. However, the historical setting of 4 Ezra's composition seems to be the late first century C.E. This becomes most obvious in the vision of the eagle and the lion (11:1-12:51) where the eagle is clearly Rome and there are abundant references to the Roman emperors of the first century C.E. And so the Babylonian exile of the sixth century B.C.E. becomes the literary occasion for exploring the theological issues raised by the recent destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 C.E. under the Romans. The eagle vision reaches its climax with reference to the three 'heads'—the late first-century C.E. Roman emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian—who were responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and for the harassment of Jews afterward. Thus it appears that 4 Ezra was composed around 100 C.E. in the expectation of the imminent end of 'this age' (and the Roman empire) and the beginning of 'the age to come' (and the vindication of the righteous within Israel).' (Invitation to the Apocrypha, pp. 189-190)"

interpretation of the sixth vision presented in vv. 1-12.

Mount Zion¹⁵ is clearly distinguished here from heaven and is an allusion to Jerusalem.¹⁶ Thus the scene of celebration depicted here is set on the earth rather than in heaven, contrary to many commentators.¹⁷ The 144,000 have not yet suffered martyrdom

[“Information on 2 Esdras,” [Early Jewish Writings.com](http://EarlyJewishWritings.com)]

¹⁵“The fuller name ‘Mount Zion’ in distinction to ‘Zion’ by itself occurs only nineteen times in the OT, at least nine of which allude to a remnant being saved, in connection with either God’s name (the remnant being saved for the sake of God’s name or by calling on his name) or God’s sovereign rule, sometimes both (2 Kgs. 19:31; Isa. 4:2–3; 10:12, 20; 37:30–32; Joel 2:32 [= 3:5]; Obad. 17, 21; Mic. 4:5–8; Pss. 48:2, 10–11; 74:2, 7; see below for further references and discussion).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 731–732.]

¹⁶“The scene in v 1 is set on the earth (Swete, 177; Bousset [1906] 380; Beckwith, 657; Charles, 2:4–5; Allo, 195; Ladd, 189) since v 2 introduces an audition of a voice from heaven, clearly distinguishing between Mount Zion and heaven. In Jewish eschatological expectation, Mount Zion = Jerusalem served as the center of the eschatological kingdom (Joel 2:32; Isa 24:23; 31:4; Mic 4:7; Zech 14:4–5; Jub. 1:28; 4 Ezra 13:29–50; 2 Apoc. Bar. 41:1–4; cf. Sib. Or. 5.414–33; Rev 17:14; see Volz, *Eschatologie*, 372). The Lamb, a thinly veiled metaphor for the Davidic Messiah, is depicted as standing in order to suggest that he functions as a warrior prepared to destroy his enemies (the Lamb is also depicted as ‘standing’ when first seen by John in 5:6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 803.]

¹⁷“Some commentators have understood Mount Zion in this pericope as a reference to heaven and suppose that the 144,000 have been exalted to heaven (Kiddle-Ross, 262–71; Lohmeyer; Mounce, 267; Giesen, 320), a view apparently reflected in 5 Ezra 2:42–48. There ‘Ezra’ narrates a vision of the great and innumerable multitude on Mount Zion who were praising the Lord with songs. A young man of great stature placed victory crowns on their heads, and they were also given victory palms. The interpreting angel explained that these people are those that now put on immortality, and the young man is the Son of God whom they confessed in the world. The obvious similarities to Rev 7:9, 14:1, and Heb 12:22 are certainly the result of literary dependence of the Christian author of 5 Ezra 1–2 and 6 Ezra 15–16 upon the NT. Mount Zion in this case is the heavenly Jerusalem (Myers, Esdras, 153). However, the older, Jewish portion of 4 Ezra (chaps. 3–14) understands Mount Zion as an earthly mountain (13:33–36):

And when all the nations hear his [God’s Son’s] voice, every man shall leave his own land and the warfare that they have against one another; and an innumerable multitude shall be gathered together, as you saw, desiring to come and conquer him. But he will stand on the top of Mount Zion. And Zion will come and be manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands. And he, my Son, will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness.

“Here it appears that ‘the top of Mount Zion’ refers to the temple mount in Jerusalem, while the phrase ‘Zion will come’ refers to the descent or appearance of the heavenly Jerusalem. While the MT of Isa 24:23 expresses the eschatological hope that ‘the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion,’ Tg. Isa. 24:23 (tr. Chilton, Isaiah Targum) substitutes the manifestation of God’s kingdom for

but can celebrate the destruction of Satan in advance.

Here Christ is portrayed as the standing Lamb, yet in v. 14 He will be seen as the Son of Man sitting on a white cloud (νεφέλη λευκή, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν νεφέλην καθήμενον ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου).

What is the significance of the standing Lamb image in v. 1? The image of standing presents Him as a warrior prepared for battle with His enemies. The OT and Jewish apocalyptic traditions see the Messiah judging the nations and defending covenant Israel against its enemies, but that is not likely in the background that John presents here.¹⁸

the visitation of God himself: ‘for the kingdom of the Lord of hosts will be revealed on the Mount of Zion.’ Similarly in Tg. Isa. 31:4 (tr. Chilton), ‘so the kingdom of the Lord of hosts will be revealed to settle upon the Mount of Zion and upon its hill.’

“The term ‘Zion’ occurs only here in Revelation, elsewhere in the NT just six times (Matt 21:5; John 12:15; Rom 9:33; 11:26; Heb 12:22; 1 Pet 2:6), and once in the Apostolic Fathers (Barn. 6:2). Since ‘Zion’ (= Jerusalem) occurs only here in Revelation, it is likely that this pericope is based on a particular source used by the author. The entire scene in 14:1–5 may have been modeled, at least in part, on Isa 40:9–11, where the people are told ‘Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings’ (v 9), where they anticipate the coming of God who will ‘feed his flock like a shepherd’ (v 11). In Jewish apocalyptic texts, Mount Zion is the place where the Messiah will defeat his foes and will judge them (2 Apoc. Bar. 40:1–3).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 803–804.]

¹⁸“In the last days God will ‘install’ his ‘Messiah’ and ‘King on Zion, my [God’s] holy mountain.’ Then the Messiah will judge the ungodly and will be a place of refuge for those who fear him (Ps. 2:6–12). On this OT basis 4 Ezra 13:25–52 (cf. v 36) and 2 Bar. 40 speak of the ‘Son’ and ‘Messiah’ standing on ‘Mount Zion’ at the end time judging the unrighteous and ‘defending’ or ‘protecting’ the remnant (those who ‘remain’ or the ‘rest’). In 4 Ezra 13 the remnant are from the ten tribes, like the 144,000 gathered from the ‘earth’ and from ‘humanity’ in Rev. 14:3–4 and from the twelve tribes in Rev. 7:4–8.

“Against this OT and Jewish background, ‘Mount Zion’ in Rev. 14:1 is to be seen as the end-time city where God dwells with and provides security for the remnant, the ‘144,000 who have been bought out from the earth.’ Possibly this is a symbol of Christ’s presence with his people on earth throughout history (cf. 3:12).³⁴⁹ Interestingly, OT prophecies of Yahweh’s salvation of Israel at Mount Zion are viewed as having begun fulfillment during the church age elsewhere in the NT (Acts 2:16–21; 13:33; Heb. 1:1–5; Rev. 2:26–27; 12:5). That the same notion of latter-day inaugurated fulfillment is conveyed here is supported by the observation that vv 1–5 are in contrast to what is said of the beast and his worshipers in ch. 13, those who dwell on earth during the same period of the church age. Accordingly, Zion could be the ideal, heavenly city to which saints aspire during the course of the church age (Gal. 4:25–27; Heb. 12:22–23). Therefore, deceased, glorified saints who have attained standing in that city may be in view here. This is supported by the fact that all the other references to the Lamb place him in heaven (in 7:9–14, with the redeemed multitudes). Furthermore, when Christ is associated with his people on earth elsewhere in the Apocalypse, it is only through his prophetic word.^{350”}

Christ is here presented as the Lamb in linking Him to the portrait in 5:6.¹⁹ It is the sacrificed Lamb who now gathers His people together to celebrate His victory. In gathering them to Mount Zion, He reflects His genuineness as the prophetic Messiah by bringing the true people of God to the place of God's dwelling on the earth, Mount Zion.

2) The 144,000, v. 1b. καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν. *And with him were one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

Unquestionably the 144,000 here is the same group as mentioned in chapter seven. In the first narrative, they were to be sealed with the name of Christ on their foreheads (7:3). The framework of the twelve tribes (7:4-8) provided not a Jewish Christian identification, but a Jewish symbol of completeness of number for these who are the authentic people of God across the ages.²⁰ Now they are identified as those with both Christ's and God's name on their forehead. Their general Christian identity is made specific in vv. 3-5 below.

The rest of humanity has the number 666 tattooed on their foreheads signifying their failure to measure up and their loyalty to the first beast (13:15-18). But the

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 732.]

¹⁹6 Καὶ εἶδον ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἄρνιον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον ἔχον κέρατα ἑπτὰ καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ οἱ εἰσιν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.

6 Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

²⁰Note this interpretation of Rev. 14:1 in **2 Esdras 2:42-48**.

42 I, Ezra, saw on Mount Zion a great multitude that I could not number, and they all were praising the Lord with songs. 43 In their midst was a young man of great stature, taller than any of the others, and on the head of each of them he placed a crown, but he was more exalted than they. And I was held spellbound. 44 Then I asked an angel, "Who are these, my lord?" 45 He answered and said to me, "These are they who have put off mortal clothing and have put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God. Now they are being crowned, and receive palms." 46 Then I said to the angel, "Who is that young man who is placing crowns on them and putting palms in their hands?" 47 He answered and said to me, "He is the Son of God, whom they confessed in the world." So I began to praise those who had stood valiantly for the name of the Lord. 48 Then the angel said to me, "Go, tell my people how great and how many are the wonders of the Lord God that you have seen."

[*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 2 Esd 2:42-48.]

people of God are 'branded' with the names of Christ and God on their foreheads indicating that they belong to God through Christ and are loyal only to Him.²¹

In contrast to the slant given in 2 Esdras 2:45 which sees the 144,000 as martyrs, John makes it clear that these are μετ' αὐτοῦ, *with Him*, who ἐστὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών, *stands on Mount Zion*. They are not yet martyrs, and are continuing to experience the persecution of the two beasts (13:15b-17). To be sure, individuals from their number are suffering martyrdom, but not the group as a whole.

They are now gathered upon Mount Zion for protection by the Lamb and under His leadership will celebrate victory over Satan and the two beasts that will be coming shortly.

B. What John heard, vv. 2-5

2 καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἤκουσα ὡς κιθαρῳδῶν κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν εἰ μὴ αἱ ἑκατὸν τεσσεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς.

4 οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν, οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἄρνιῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ. οὗτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἄρνιῳ, 5 καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος, ἄμωμοί εἰσιν.

2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been re-

21 "The names of Christ and of the Father, written on the foreheads of the 144,000, are in contrast with 'the name of the beast,' written 'on the foreheads' of unbelievers (13:16-17). The number 144,000 connotes the completeness of God's true people, in antithesis to the 666 on the foreheads of the beast's followers, which connotes their incompleteness in achieving the divine design for humanity. As in 7:4-9, the 144,000 are not a remnant of ethnic Jews at the end of the age or a remnant of the church. They are rather the totality of God's people throughout the ages, viewed as true Israelites (for extended discussion of this figurative meaning see on 7:4-9).³⁵⁴ Charles views the group as the entire community of resurrected martyrs,³⁵⁵ and Bauckham identifies them with a "first-fruits" remnant whose witness will lead to the conversion of more people later.³⁵⁶ But to limit the number to a select group of believers dilutes the figurative force of completeness connoted by the number." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 733.]

deemed from the earth.

4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

In this second part of the pericope we are introduced to the vision with John's standard καὶ ἤκουσα, I heard...²² In chapter fourteen the phrase ἤκουσα φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, I heard a voice out of heaven..., marks two boundary points in verses two and thirteen.

Another important introductory point comes with how divine revelation is introduced. Throughout Revelation such is presented formally by the introductory statements seen in the first two verses of chapter fourteen: εἶδον, I saw, (43x in Rev. w. εἶδον) and ἤκουσα, I heard. (33x in Rev. w. ἤκουσα).

What seems to surface is that eschatological (in the broad definition of the word) revelation is primarily something that one sees but as a completed action as signaled by the aorist form of the verb. Inside the 'seeing' occasionally individuals or groups are 'heard' either speaking or chanting. In the book of Revelation these actions are directed exclusively toward John as the receiver of this revelation during an apocalyptic vision. As 14:13 illustrates, it is John's assignment to write down what he has seen and heard as a witness to be passed on to the believing communities of the seven churches of Asia (cf. 1:2).

And the φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ here signals a voice speaking to John, particularly in the second instance. The first instance in v. 2 seems to point toward some kind of heavenly chorus chanting a praise expression. The text is not clear in its depiction of who, what, and where this voice represents.

Also important is the re-surfacing of a parallel statement in 16:6.²³

Rev 14:2

καὶ ἤκουσα
Then I heard

φωνήν
a sound

ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
from heaven

Rev 19:6a

καὶ ἤκουσα
Then I heard

ὡς φωνήν
like the sound

²²33 of the 46 uses of ἀκούω in Revelation are this aorist indicative first singular form ἤκουσα, I heard. This mostly introduces someone usually in heaven speaking to John. Often it is the voice of God speaking to John: 6:6; 10:4, 8; 11:12; 12:10; 14:2, 13; 16:1, 17; 19:5; 21:3

²³David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 806–807.

ὄχλου πολλοῦ
of a large multitude

ὡς φωνήν
like the sound

ὑδάτων πολλῶν
of the roaring sea

καὶ ὡς φωνήν
like the sound

βροντῆς μεγάλης
of loud thunder

καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἣν ἤκουσα
and the sound which I heard

ὡς φωνήν κιθαρωδῶν
like that of kitharists

κιθαριζόντων
playing

ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν
on their kitharas²⁴

καὶ ὡς φωνήν
and like the sound

ὑδάτων πολλῶν
of the roaring sea

καὶ ὡς φωνήν
and like the sound

βροντῶν ἰσχυρῶν
of loud thunder

In chapter nineteen, the speech of ὄχλου πολλοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, a great crowd in heaven, (19:2) first celebrates the condemnation of Babylon, 'the great whore,' in vv. 1b-3. Then in v. 6, ὄχλου πολλοῦ, a great crowd, declares rejoicing in anticipation of the wedding feast of the Lamb with His bride (vv. 6b-8). But as v. 1 with ὄχλου πολλοῦ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, a large crowd in heaven, makes clear, this group is in heaven and not on the earth.

In 14:2, a large crowd is presented as ᾄδουσιν, singing, something like as new song ([ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν). But the crowd is not identified. Clearly this group is not the 144,000 in v. 1 who are still on earth at Mount Zion, and the φωνήν comes ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, out of heaven, rather than from the earth. The heavenly group sings what is described as something like a new song ([ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν) and do so in heaven in front of the throne and in front of the four creatures and elders (ἐνώπιον

²⁴“The major difference between these two passages is that the two similes drawn from nature are placed first in 14:2 but last in 19:6. Correspondingly, the similes drawn from human life, a large crowd of people in 19:6 and a group of kithara players in 14:2, are both somewhat awkward since in both instances the groups named are not just similes but the groups who sing. Rev 14:2 is presented as an audition, and it is as if the author only gradually becomes aware of the sound he hears, for he first compares it to loud sounds found in nature, roaring water and loud thunder. In v 2b, on the other hand, his impression of the sound becomes much more specific.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 807.]

τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων). Yet, the only ones able to learn this song, which the heavenly group already knows, are the 144,000 on earth (v. 3b). And it appears that martyrdom is the path to learning this new song: οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, *who are those having been redeemed from the earth*.

Who is making the loud sound in v. 2? Is it the chorus of myriads of angels from 5:11-12?²⁵ Or, is it the great multitude of saints already in heaven standing before the throne in white robes from 7:9-10?²⁶ Commentary opinion is divided on this issue, but the relative clause οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, *who are those having been redeemed from the earth*, seems to me to point toward the latter group. The heavenly group already knows the song because they are martyred saints in heaven while the 144,000 can learn the new song through martyrdom.²⁷

²⁵Rev.5:11-12. 11 Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἀγγέλων πολλῶν κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, καὶ ἦν ὁ ἀριθμὸς αὐτῶν μυριάδες μυριάδων καὶ χιλιάδες χιλιάδων 12 λέγοντες φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν τὴν δύναμιν καὶ πλοῦτον καὶ σοφίαν καὶ ἰσχὴν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ δόξαν καὶ εὐλογίαν.

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of **many angels** surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 singing with full voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

²⁶Rev. 7:9-10. 9 Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἁρνίου περιβεβλημένους στολὰς λευκάς καὶ φοίνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν, 10 καὶ κρᾶζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες· ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἁρνίῳ.

9 After this I looked, and there was a **great multitude** that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

²⁷Beale is contradictory in his comments about the identity of the group in heaven singing the new song:

The 144,000 praise God by “playing harps” and singing a new song. Later Jewish sources foresaw that God would be praised by harps and “a new song” in the messianic days and in the “world to come” (Midr. Rab. Num. 15.11 and b. Arakhin 13b). The images of harpists and a heavenly host “singing a new song” occur elsewhere in the Apocalypse only in 5:8–9 and 15:2–3 (in the latter “the song of Moses and the Lamb”). In both places the images connote the redeemed saints’ praise in response to “victory” (νικᾶω in 5:5 and 15:2), victory over sin in ch. 5, victory over the “beast and ... his image and ... the number of his name” in ch. 15. This end-time praise on Zion was prophesied in the OT (Isa. 35:10).

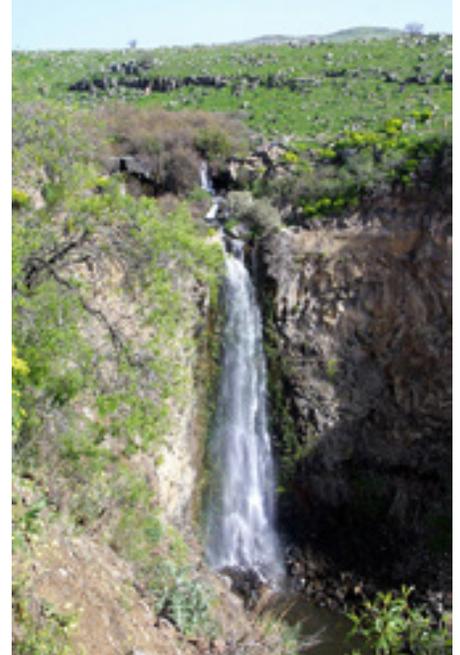
Therefore, the imagery in Rev. 14:2–3 portrays redeemed saints praising God for the victory he has won for them over sin and the beast, though the victory over the beast is not explicitly mentioned until 15:1–3. The victory over judgment due to sin and over the beast is spoken of twice through the metaphor of “purchasing” (ἀγοράζω,

1) The Voice, v. 2-3a 2 καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης, καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἤκουσα ὡς κιθαρῳδῶν κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν. **2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps,**

The description of the φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, *voice out of heaven*, gathers up a variety of comparisons to loud sounds found on the earth in order to collectively present the overwhelming power of this exceedingly loud sound. Note the uniform use of simile type comparisons with ὡς. The sound was not many waters, thunder, or harps playing, but had a similar effect of all three of these sounds combined into a single sound.

a) ὡς φωνὴν ὑδάτων πολλῶν, as a sound of many waters.

The phrase ‘many waters’ shows up in Rev. 1:15 (=Christ’s voice); 14:2 (??); 17:1 (the location of the great whore Babylon); 19:6 (=a large crowd in heaven). The comparison stresses the overpowering sound of a large waterfall to the sound made by the group in heaven.²⁸



50 meter high [waterfall](#) at Gamla in one of the Golan national parks.

Such a sound signals enormous power and authority coming out of the world which God created. Although the sound in heaven wasn’t that of a large waterfall, it had a similar impact upon John as he heard it.

b) καὶ ὡς φωνὴν βροντῆς μεγάλης, and as a sound of great thunder. Thunder, βροντή, the sound of a lightning strike, shows up some ten times in Revelation.²⁹ The plural βρονταὶ reflects the meaning clearer

vv 3–4), which is also used of victory over the penalty of sin in 5:9: “you [the Lamb] were slain and you purchased for God by your blood some from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.”

[G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 735–736.]

²⁸A modern comparison would be to [Niagara Falls](#) where the sound of the water coming over the falls exceeds that of [20 supersonic airplanes](#) combined.

²⁹Rev. 4:5; 6:1; 8:5; 10:3, 4; 11:19; 14:2; 16:18; 19:6.

with the translation ‘peals of thunder.’ Everywhere but 14:2 and 19:6 the thunder is asserted to be happening along with lightening in heaven, usually around the throne of God. But in 14:2 and 19:6, the sound of thunder on earth is compared to the sound that John heard coming out of heaven. Again, this signals an overpowering sound of power and authority.

c) **καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἥκουσα ὡς κιθαρῶδων κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις³⁰ αὐτῶν**, and the sound which I heard as of harpists playing on their harps. John’s additional qualification here **καὶ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἥκουσα**, and the sound which I heard, has led a few commentators to suggest this is a second voice distinct from the one described in v. 2a. This becomes remotely possible only by adopting the alternative reading **φωνὴν** in place of **ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἥκουσα**. But the support for this is very small and surfaces only in a few late and relatively unimportant manuscripts: P⁴⁷ 2053 M^A. It also requires the dropping of **ὡς** before **κιθαρῶδων**. The resultant reading is then: **and a sound of harpists playing their harps**. This is then interpreted to refer to the 144,000 on earth playing harps to create this second **φωνὴν**. But such an interpretation has exceedingly weak foundations and is not plausible. And the vast majority of scholars reject it as legitimate.

The nominative case **ἡ φωνὴ** with the article reflects a grammar construction in Greek that is not possible literally in any modern western language. Davids uses the grammar function of the Greek nominative case labeled the Pendent Nominative, but it also is labeled a variety of ways across modern Greek grammars of ancient Koine Greek. An easier to understand label is the Appositional Nominative in independent use. The articular **ἡ φωνὴ** with **καὶ** in front of it and no verb that competes a sentence statement signals that the **φωνὴν** in v. 2a is now being further labeled differently as like the sound of harps playing. Notice the simile comparison **ὡς κιθαρῶδων** continued here as with the waters and thunder comparisons. This reaching back to v. 2a is further asserted with the relative clause **ἦν ἥκουσα**, which I heard.

Once again the **ὡς** asserts that the sound is not that of harps³¹ playing but has a sound similar to such

³⁰κιθάρα, -ας, ἡ, in LXX chiefly for כִּנּוּר, but in Daniel for סַרְתָּק, which is transliterated by the LXX into the Homeric spelling κίθαρις.

³¹“A variety of references to the harp (**kinnor**, **nevel**; **kithara**, **kinyra**, **nabla**, **organon**, **psaltērion**) are found in the Bible (1 Kgs 10:12; 1 Chr 13:8; 2 Chr 5:12; Neh 12:27; Pss 49:4 [Heb. 49:5]; 71:22; 92:3 [Heb. 92:4]; 108:2 [Heb. 108:3]; 137:2; 150:3; Isa 5:12; 14:11; 16:11; 23:16; Dan 3:5, 7, 10, 15; Sir 39:15; 1 Macc 3:45). The term harp is used in the NRSV to translate two Hebrew names of musical instruments, the **nevel** and **kinnor** (‘ten-stringed harp’ relates to **nevel** ‘**asor** [נֶבֶל עָשׂוֹר]; e.g., Pss 33:2; 144:9). The etymology of **nevel** is ambiguous. The word **kinnor**, a central cultural term attested throughout the ANE that transcends geograph-

a sound. Sidenote: notice the redundant and alliterative Greek expression **κιθαρῶδων κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν** creating the effect of ‘**harpers harping on their harps.**’

These **κιθαρῶδων**, **harpists**, are the ones who **ἄδουσιν**, **sing**, in v. 3, or so it seems. But the source of the comparison follows that of the waters and thunder; it is taken from an earthly comparison. Revelation 18:22 is instructive here: **καὶ φωνὴ κιθαρῶδων καὶ μουσικῶν καὶ αὐλητῶν καὶ σαλπιστῶν οὐ μὴ ἀκουσθῆ ἔν σοι ἔτι**, and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and trumpeters will be heard in you no more. The angelic pronouncement of doom on Babylon signals the silencing of all musical instruments in the city in anticipation of divine destruction of the city.³² This reaches back to Isa. 24:8, where the harp / lyre is silenced in the presence of divine judgment.³³

ic and linguistic boundaries, is of unknown etymology. The term **kinnaratim** (‘lyre player’) is first attested in 18th-cent. BCE documents of the Mari archives, and the root is also incorporated into many ANE names of deities, plants, or toponymy. The biblical **kinnor** and **nevel** usually appear together; when mentioned separately, their translation is inconsistent, the term harp being used alternately for both. Modern research, however, does not accept the identification of **kinnor/nevel** as a harp, but considers both instruments to be lyres (see §C), the **kinnor** being a solo melody lyre and the **nevel** an accompaniment tenor-bass instrument. This conclusion is based primarily on archaeological evidence: more than thirty depictions of the lyre have been discovered, but no archaeological artifact depicting the harp can be dated between the 3rd millennium BCE and the Hellenistic-Roman period (see also §D9). The **kinnor** and **nevel** were usually played together in larger groups of musical instruments (1 Sam 10:5), and both were quite versatile. They accompanied the transport of the ark (2 Sam 6:5), and prophetic ecstasy (1 Sam 10:5). The **kinnor** appears in the first mention of music (Gen 4:21), in connection with therapeutic healing (1 Sam 16:16), related to prostitution (Isa 23:16), and connected to God’s anger (Isa 24:8). The **nevel**, independent of the **kinnor**, is associated with happiness (Isa 24:8, 16; Amos 5:23; 6:5).” [Joachim Braun, “Musical Instruments,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 178.]

³²“The motif of the cessation of the sounds of musical instruments as a poetic way of describing desolation also occurs in Isa 24:8 and 1 Macc 3:45. A more remote parallel is found in Sib. Or 8.113–19 (tr. J. J. Collins, OTP 1:420), which may be dated ca. A.D. 175 and in which a strong antipathy to musical accompaniment at ritual occasions is expressed:

They do not pour blood on altars in libations or sacrifices.
No drum sounds, no cymbal,
no flute of many holes, which has a sound that damages the heart,
no pipe, which bears an imitation of the crooked serpent,
no savage-sounding trumpet, herald of wars,
none who are drunk in lawless revels or dances,
no sound of the lyre, no evil-working device.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 1008.]

³³Isa. 24:8 (LXX). 8 πέπαιται εὐφροσύνη τυμπάνων, πέπαιται

But here in 14:2 the harpists are playing and most likely the collective sound of many harpists is intended to communicate the idea of celebration, and probably with a religious tone attached. The secular background reference in 18:22 would clearly imply such an effect. The apparent reason John restructures the reference to harpists while maintaining the simile comparative structure is to stress a shift of symbolism from loud overpower sounds to a celebration sound as a part of the combined sound coming out of heaven (v. 2a).

He does not imply that the elders are playing harps as was true in 5:8, nor that angels etc. in heaven were playing harps. The point of the figurative reference is a celebration sound. The only possible exception to this is the reference in 15:2 of the masses of the redeemed standing before the throne of God ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ, *holding the harps of God*. But no mention is made of them playing the harps nor is any description given of what the 'harps of God' are. Thus the more natural interpretative pattern that is consistent with both the text structure and context is that the symbolism of the harpists is to stress a celebration tone to the heavenly voice from an earthy reference. And yet the following statement seems to cross over the simile to asserting a heavenly chorus actually playing and singing.

It's no wonder that text variant readings are all over the map especially here in the text.³⁴ Later copyists had great difficulty trying to understand the grammar of this part of the text.³⁵ When we find ourselves in the same dilemma we can find consolation from their struggles.

d) καὶ ᾄδουσιν [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, *and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders.* Here John moves toward the identity of the φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, sound out of heaven. He follows previous patterns of first giving a description of 'appearance' and then of 'actions.' Here the 'action' is stated simply as καὶ ᾄδουσιν [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν, *and they are singing as though a new song*. With no anticipation nor

αὐθάδεια καὶ πλοῦτος ἀσεβῶν, πέπαυται φωνὴ κιθάρας.†

8 The mirth of the timbrels is stilled, the noise of the jubilant has ceased, **the mirth of the lyre is stilled.**

³⁴The *Text Apparatus of the Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) lists 19 places where text variations surface in these five verses. See the [External History](#) section above for more details. And this listing is not a complete listing itself. David Aune, WBC v. 52B, discusses 30 such instances in the **Notes** section of his commentary on vv. 1-5 (pp. 783-785).

³⁵And given their great reverence for the perceived ideas being expressed here as divine revelation, they did not hesitate to modify the wording of the text in order to present a clearer expression of the ideas. Clarity of understanding of the ideas in the text was their bottom line criteria in copying the text. This was where the 'voice of God' existed in the text, not in the individual words or phrases of the text.

specification of subject John moves to a third person present tense verb, ᾄδουσιν, from the uniform past time aorist tense verbs both before and after this verb ᾄδουσιν. Contextually the most logical subject specification implied in the third plural verb ending would be the κιθαρωδῶν, *harpists*. Thus ἡ φωνὴ ἣν ἤκουσα, *the sound which I heard*, is the harpists both playing and singing. The heavenly location of the singing rules out the 144,000 as the singers since they are still on the earth.

Who then are these playing and singing in heaven? Most likely they are to identified in 15:2 with τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ, *those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands*. They ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου, *sing the song of Moses, God's servant, and the song of the Lamb* (15:3a). The song they sing is then sketched out in vv. 3b-4, and specifies what John calls [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν, *as though a new song* in 14:3.

It is interesting to compare the 'songs' of this group of saints in heaven as presented in 7:10b and 15:3b-4.

7:10b

ἡ σωτηρία τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν
τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ
τῷ ἀρνίῳ.

15:3b-4

μεγάλα καὶ θαυμασὰ
τὰ ἔργα σου, κύριε ὁ θεὸς
ὁ παντοκράτωρ· δίκαιαι
καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου, ὁ
βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν· 4 τίς οὐ
μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει
τὸ ὄνομά σου; ὅτι μόνος ὅσιος,
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν
σου, ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου
ἐφανερώθησαν.

"Salvation belongs to our God
who is seated on the throne,
and to the Lamb!"

"Great and amazing are
your deeds, Lord God the Al-
mighty! Just and true are your
ways, King of the nations! 4
Lord, who will not fear and glo-
rify your name? For you alone
are holy. All nations will come
and worship before you, for
your judgments have been re-
vealed."

The 'song' in 7:10b is presented not as a song but as a loud shout in a confession of faith: καὶ κρᾶζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγοντες,... *and crying out in a loud voice they were saying*. But in 15:3 this song is presented as καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου λέγοντες, *and they are singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying...* Additionally in 15:2, the crowd has the

κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ, *harps of God*, although the text does not explicitly indicate that they played these harps as they sang. Interestingly κιθάρας, harps, are mentioned only three times in all of Revelation: 5:8 (24 elders each holding one); 14:2; and 15:2. The expression κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ, *harps of God*, only in 15:2 seems to be saying, ‘the harps that God supplied them.’ In 14:3 the song is described as [ὡς] ᾠδὴν καινὴν, *as though a new song*. The continuation of ὡς here signals a simile comparison, but in this usage to suggest ‘something of a new song’ since the chant version was given in 7:10, and a double version will be sketched out in 15:3-4.

Only in 14:2 does the text explicitly say that the ones holding a harp played it, although one would assume this to be the case.³⁶ Interestingly once the tem-

³⁶Note the word group linked to an ancient harp: κιθάρα, *harp*; κιθαρίζω, *play a harp*; κιθαρῳδός, *harpist*.

Musical instruments mentioned in the NT include:

6.83 κιθάρα, ας f: a small stringed harp-like instrument held in the hands and plucked—‘lyre, harp.’ ἔχοντες ἕκαστος κιθάραν ‘each having a lyre’ Re 5:8. The closest equivalent to a κιθάρα is in most instances a small harp.

6.84 κιθαρίζω (derivative of κιθάρα ‘lyre, harp,’ 6.83)—‘to play a lyre, to play a harp.’ πῶς γνωσθήσεται τὸ αὐλούμενον ἢ τὸ κιθαριζόμενον; ‘how will one know what is being played on the flute or on the lyre?’ 1 Cor 14:7.

6.85 κιθαρῳδός, οὐ m: (derivative of κιθαρίζω ‘to play a lyre,’ 6.84) one who plays the lyre or harp—‘harpist.’ ἡ φωνὴ ἦν ἠκουσα ὡς κιθαρῳδῶν κιθαριζόντων ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις αὐτῶν ‘the sound which I heard was like that of harpists playing music on their harps’ Re 14:2.

6.86 αὐλός, οὐ m: a musical wind instrument consisting of a tube with a series of finger holes used to alter the tone—‘flute.’ εἴτε αὐλός εἴτε κιθάρα ‘whether a flute or a lyre’ 1 Cor 14:7.

6.87 αὐλέω (derivative of αὐλός ‘flute,’ 6.86)—‘to play a flute.’ ἠυλήσαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ οὐκ ὠρχήσασθε ‘we played the flute for you and you did not dance’ Mt 11:17.

6.88 αὐλητής, οὐ m: (derivative of αὐλέω ‘to play a flute,’ 6.87) one who plays the flute—‘flutist.’ ἐλθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ ἄρχοντος καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς αὐλητάς ‘Jesus went into the house of the ruler and saw the flutists’ Mt 9:23.

6.89 σάλπιγξ^a, ἰγγοσ f: a wind instrument, frequently used in signaling, especially in connection with war—‘trumpet.’ ἐὰν ἄδηλον σάλπιγξ φωνὴν δῶ ‘if the trumpet gives an unclear sound’ 1 Cor 14:8. The present-day equivalent of the σάλπιγξ is the bugle.

6.90 σαλπίζω^a (derivative of σάλπιγξ ‘trumpet,’ 6.89)—‘to play the trumpet.’ ὅταν οὖν ποιῆς ἐλεημοσύνην, μὴ σαλπίζης ἔμπροσθέν σου ‘and so whenever you give alms, do not sound the trumpet in front of you’ Mt 6:2. It is possible, of course, in Mt 6:2 to interpret σαλπίζω as a type of causative and thus to say ‘to cause someone to blow the trumpet’ or ‘to have the trumpet blown.’

6.91 σαλπιστής, οὐ m: (derivative of σαλπίζω ‘to play the trumpet,’ 6.90) one who plays the trumpet—‘trumpeter.’ φωνὴ κιθαρῳδῶν ... καὶ σαλπιστῶν οὐ μὴ ἀκουσθῆ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι ‘the sound of harpists ... and trumpeters will never be heard in you again’ Re 18:22.

6.92 σαλπίζω^b: to produce the sound of a trumpet (with-

ple was built in Jerusalem by Solomon the Israelite musician guilds took over total control of music presented at the temple.³⁷ The congregation were passive listen-

out specification of an agent)—‘to sound a trumpet, a trumpet sounds.’ ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι· σαλπίζει γάρ ‘at the last trump; for trumpet will sound’ 1 Cor 15:52. In a number of languages it may be best to render σαλπίζει in 1 Cor 15:52 as ‘people will hear the sound of the trumpet’ or ‘the sound of the trumpet will be heard.’

6.93 σάλπιγξ^b, ἰγγοσ f: (derivative of σαλπίζω ‘to play the trumpet,’ 6.90) the sound made by a trumpet—‘trumpet blast, trumpet sound.’⁹ ἐν ῥυτί ὀφθαλμοῦ, ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι ‘in a blinking of the eye, at the last trump’ 1 Cor 15:52; καὶ ἀποστελεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης ‘and he will send out his angels after the great trumpet blast’ or ‘... with the great trumpet blast’ Mt 24:31. With both σαλπίζω^b (6.92) and σάλπιγξ^b, it may be necessary to introduce an agent, even though indefinite. For example, ἐν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ σάλπιγγι may be translated as ‘when someone blows the trumpet for the last time,’ and σαλπίζει may be rendered as ‘when someone sounds the trumpet’ or ‘when someone produces a noise on the trumpet.’ However, any term for ‘noise’ should imply a meaningful sound.

6.94 κύμβαλον, ου n: a percussion instrument consisting of two metal discs which were struck together in order to make a shrill, clashing sound—‘cymbals.’ γέγονα χαλκός ἡχῶν ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον ‘I have become a noisy brass gong or clanging cymbals’ 1 Cor 13:1. The equivalent of κύμβαλον is in many instances a phrase such as ‘loud metal.’

6.95 χαλκός ἡχῶν: (an idiom, literally ‘echoing brass’ or ‘resounding brass’) a gong made of brass—‘brass gong.’ γέγονα χαλκός ἡχῶν ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον ‘I have become a noisy brass gong or clanging cymbals’ 1 Cor 13:1. In a number of languages the equivalent of gong is ‘noisy metal’ or ‘reverberating metal’ or ‘echoing metal,’ but frequently translators have simply used an expression meaning ‘loud bell.’

[Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 63–64.]

^{37c}As music became more formal, professional guilds of musicians were employed to form choirs and orchestras which served at the various temples and shrines and in the palace. One sign of this is found in the book of Amos. During his stay at Bethel, Amos harangued against the emptiness of the worship in the temple there, declaring that Yahweh would no longer listen to the worshipers’ songs and harps (5:23). Yet another indication of these musician guilds is found in the Assyrian Annals. Following the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib, King Hezekiah was forced to pay a huge ransom for the city which included male and female musicians (ANET, p. 288).

“The Israelite musician guilds have many parallels throughout the ANE. They in essence represent the movement of music into a formal liturgical setting with a set religious calendar of performances. Sarna (EncJud 13: 1317) suggests that the levitical singers, said to have been appointed by David to the task of performing the music in the Jerusalem temple (1 Chronicles 6; 15; 16; 25; 29; 2 Chr 35:15), were actually in place within the cultic community not long after this traditional date. Whenever they were appointed, it would have been their responsibility to make constant praise to Yahweh, and “prophesy with lyres, with harps, and with cymbals” (1 Chr 25:1). Among the themes of their music was the call for

ers who responded only with the shout of affirmation, Selah, at the end of the chanting of one of the psalms.

In the Jerusalem temple the use of musical instruments and singing required highly trained individuals who devoted their entire lives to developing the necessary skills. In the OT, the ‘sons of Asaph’ were the central Levitical group who handled this. Their descendants continued this role through to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. This primarily because ‘music’ in the temple was dramatically different from ‘everyday life’ music. It was much more complex and in its highly liturgical forms produced a very distinct sound from everyday music among the Jews. But in heaven the multitude of saints are equipped with the necessary skills to be able to present such music at the throne of God in a unified manner.

These saints, already in heaven, are singing this new song of victory and celebration already (= the present tense ᾄδουσιν both in 14:3 and 15:3). But only the saints on earth, the 144,000, have been able to learn

Yahweh to have mercy and to care for the people (Psalms 23; 46) and curse the wicked (Psalm 58). They also recited the epic history of Yahweh’s past victories at the major festivals and the coronation of kings (Psalms 78; 81; 105).

“These levitical singers, whose original leaders are said to be Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman (1 Chr 25:1) were probably even more prominent in temple worship during the Second Temple period following the Exile. They were joined in the organization and performance of all liturgical music by several other groups, including those associated with Chenaniah, ‘leader of the music of the singers’ (1 Chr 5:27), and Mattithiah and five other men, who were “to lead with lyres” (1 Chr 15:21). Still another group, the Korahites (1 Chr 6:7), were also apparently members of the musical community, since their name appears in the superscription of a number of psalms (42; 44–49; 84–85; 87–88).

“Each guild would have ultimately created and become associated with a particular repertoire of songs — thereby aiding in the transmission and survival of this sacred music (Sarna EncJud 13: 1317). Their survival during the Babylonian Exile and their importance to the establishment of the Second Temple community can be seen in the list of the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem. Here it states that 200 male and female singers (Ezra 2:65) as well as 128 ‘sons of Asaph’ (2:41) were a part of the company of returnees.

“In light of the later prominence of the guilds, it is interesting to note that the ‘sons of Asaph’ are showcased in the ceremony dedicating the laying of the foundation of the restored temple in Ezra 3:10–11, playing trumpets and cymbals and singing responsively a hymn of praise to Yahweh. However, no musicians or choirs at all are mentioned in Solomon’s formal dedication of the temple in 1 Kings 8. It seems likely, however, that such events demanded music and ritual dancing and in fact several times reference is made to ‘prayer and supplication’ (8:28, 30, 33). The absence of performers in the text probably reflects a more focused intent on the part of the writer, who did not choose to crowd his scene with obvious details.”

[Victor H. Matthews, “Music and Musical Instruments: Music in the Bible,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 933.]

(ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν, 14:3) this song due to God’s similar redemptive work in their lives as well as in the lives of those already in heaven.

This depiction corresponds to the picture of the same group in 7:9-10a, Μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ὄχλος πολὺς, ὃν ἀριθμησαὶ αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο, ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου περιβεβλημένους στολὰς λευκάς καὶ φοίνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν, 10 καὶ κράζουσιν φωνῇ μεγάλη λέγοντες, 9 After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,... This depiction underscores the universal appeal of the Gospel far beyond just covenant Israel. Out of a myriad of different languages everyone can join in a unison chant of praise to God -- probably in Hebrew.

Their song is being presented both to God and the heavenly creatures present in heaven: ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων καὶ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. God is distinguished from the others in the structuring of the two expressions of the preposition ἐνώπιον, before. In 15:2 this group is pictured as ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην, standing beside the sea of glass. This complements the locational reference here in 14:3a. It also complements the locational picture of this crowd of saints in heaven given in 7:9, ἐστῶτες ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ ἀρνίου, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

2) The 144,000, vv. 3b-5 3b καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν εἰ μὴ αἱ ἑκατὸν τεσσεράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, οἱ ἡγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς.

4 οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γὰρ εἰσιν, οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ. οὗτοι ἡγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, 5 καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος, ἄμωμοί εἰσιν.

3b No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.

4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

John now returns to the earthly setting in order to give further description of the 144,000. A further depiction of the heavenly celebration will come in 15:1-4 in anticipation of the pouring out of the seven bowls of

wrath.

He introduces the earthly picture with *καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο μαθεῖν τὴν ᾠδὴν εἰ μὴ αἱ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες*, and no one was able to learn this song except the one hundred forty-four thousand. The NRSV rendering 'no one could learn' is weak and possibly misleading since it ignores the aorist form of ἐδύνατο which in the indicative mood here asserts inability (with οὐδεὶς) in past time: *was unable*. The English potential form 'could' does not clearly denote past time occurrence, only possibility.

John explicitly references the 144,000 from 7:4-8 and then in 14:1. His quick glimpse into heaven (vv. 2-3a) with the celebration of the multitude of saints there points to the hope that the 144,000 have in being gathered on Mount Zion (14:1). He now comes back to reaffirm this expectation by stating emphatically that they are the only ones on earth able to learn this new song. The unredeemed on earth cannot learn this song because of the lack of salvation in their lives.

This redeemed status of the 144,000 is asserted in several ways in vv. 3b-5. First through the appositional phrase 'renaming' the 144,000. Then through three independent clauses using the demonstrative pronoun οὗτοί, *these*, to introduce each clause. The antecedent of each of these clauses also goes back to the 144,000 reference.

a) οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, *the ones having been redeemed from the earth* (v. 3b). The perfect passive participle ἠγορασμένοι from the verb ἀγοράζω specifies that the 144,000 have been purchased by God at a prior point in time and now belong to him, rather than to the beast. Although the prepositional phrase ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, *from the earth*, seems at first somewhat confusing, two background points clarify what John is intending here. First, in point d) below the same verb ἀγοράζω is used with the qualification ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, *from men*. Thus the preposition ἀπὸ is signaling where these 144,000 came from. Second, in the 82 uses of γῆ, *earth*, inside Revelation as a people designation it uniformly in 77 of these uses specifies the people / individuals belonging to this world rather than to God and His people. Thus the intended meaning of John here becomes clear. The 144,000 have been redeemed by God out of all the tribes and nations of this world.

Thus these alone are the people assembled with the Lamb on Mount Zion in anticipation of a celebration of the coming victory of the Son of Man over Satan and all those linked to him. Their gathering together on Mount Zion with the Lamb of God who redeemed them by His blood symbolizes their victory along with the coming defeat of Satan.

b) οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν, *These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins* (v. 4a). The threefold use of οὗτοί in vv. 4-5 at the very beginning of each sentence pulls these statements together literally as a unified amplification of the identification of the 144,000 in v.1.³⁸ Plus it serves to define in greater detail the appositional participle phrase οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς at the end of v. 3.

The defining trait of the 144,000 given here at first seems rather strange in asserting no sexual contact with women by the group.

Standing in the background is a long standing Jewish view both in the OT and outside literature of the potential contaminating result of sexual activity.³⁹

³⁸“The anaphoric character of such demonstrative pronouns means that when they are used at the beginning of sentences in Revelation, they are never preceded by *καί*, either as an interpretive explanation supplied by the author in his own person (11:4, 6, 10; 20:5, 14) or as the first word in a sentence introducing the direct discourse of a supernatural revealer (7:13, 14; 17:13, 14; 19:9; 21:5; 22:6).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 810.]

³⁹“The aorist passive form of the verb *μολύνειν* can be used literally with the meaning ‘to soil, to make dirty,’ as in Rev 3:4 (see Louw-Nida, § 79.56), or (as here in Rev 14:4) figuratively with the meaning ‘to defile, stain,’ i.e., ‘to cause something to be ceremonially impure,’ implying serious defilement (Louw-Nida, § 53.34). This is a constative aorist summing up the consistent behavior of these chaste males over an indefinite period of time (as in Rev 3:4). *μολύνειν* is used in a similar context in Acts of Paul 12: ‘Otherwise there will be no resurrection for you unless you remain pure and do not defile [*μολύνητε*] the flesh but keep it pure.’ This negative statement has its positive antithesis in the declaration that ‘they are virgins.’ *μολύνειν* can be understood to refer to ritual impurity that is the consequence of sexual intercourse, a view widely assumed in the OT world (Lev 15:18, 24; G. F. Moore, *Judaism* 2:76; C. M. Doughty, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1888] 1:572). Acts of Andrew 14 (ed. D. R. MacDonald, *Acts of Andrew*, 98–99) refers to the requirement that priests, after having sexual intercourse with women, purify themselves for seven days before entering into the temple. The phrase ‘to defile themselves with women’ is used of the behavior of the Watchers (in 1 Enoch 7:1; 9:8; 10:11; 15:3; 69:5), who, as angels, are forbidden to marry (1 Enoch 15:2–7; cf. Luke 20:35; see Aune, “Luke 20:34–36,” 187–202). The presence of an allusion here to 1 Enoch 1–36 is recognized by Yarbro Collins (“Women’s History,” 89) and used by Olson to argue that the author of Revelation depicts the angelic status of the 144,000 of Rev 14:4, who stand in radical opposition to the fallen angels of 1 Enoch 1–36 (CBQ 59 [1997] 496–500). The context of this emphasis on sexual purity or virginity is one of discipleship (cf. the ‘following’ motif in v 4b), and there are discipleship sayings in the Gospels that emphasize asceticism, such as forsaking one’s wife and children (Luke 14:26–27; 18:29; see Aune, “Following the Lamb,” 272–74; Roloff [ET] 171–72; Yarbro Collins, “Women’s History,” 96).

An emphasis on sexual asceticism is particularly characteristic of Luke (Cadbury, *Luke-Acts*, 264–65, 272). In Mark 10:29, seven types of renunciation (home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, chil-

John's use of *μολύνω* both here and in 3:4 points to a playing off the OT view of soiling oneself as a priest in God's service but still attempting to 'serve God' -- something absolutely impossible. But the point is here made even more pointedly against the backdrop of the pagan worship of the beast assumed to follow the typical patterns of immoral sexual activity as a part of the pagan devotion to their gods, and in this case, to the beast.

This provides a better understanding of John's rather unusual use of *παρθένοι* as a masculine rather than feminine designation in the explanatory second statement *παρθένοι γὰρ εἰσιν*, for they are virgins.⁴⁰

dren, fields), all repeated in Matt 19:29, are reduced to five in Luke 18:29 with the addition of "wives" (house, wife, brothers, parents, children). In the Q passage in Luke 14:26–27 (= Matt 10:37–38), wives are also included in a list of that which followers of Jesus must "hate" (in the parallel in Gos. Thom. 53, only father, mother, brothers, and sisters are mentioned). According to Vermes (Jesus, 246 n. 79), however, the term "house" in Mark 10:29 and Matt 19:29 is synonymous with "wife," since in the vernacular Aramaic "one belonging to his house" is the wife of the owner. In the parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14:15–24; Matt 22:1–14), only Luke includes recent marriage as an excuse not to attend the banquet (v 20; marriage is not mentioned in the parallel in Gos. Thom. 64).

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 810–811.]

⁴⁰The term *παρθένοι* is unusual, for it is a term usually reserved for young women of marriageable age, though virginity is not always a connotation of the word (Horsley, *New Docs* 4:221–27). Here the term is clearly used of males (this conclusion is necessitated by v 4a, though the masculine gender of the substantial participles and pronouns in vv 1–5 could be construed as including both men and women). This masculine application of the term *παρθένος* is very rare and is certainly unknown before the first century A.D. Some have argued that *παρθένος* in 1 Cor 7:25–27 can be understood to refer to male as well as female *παρθένοι* (J. Weiss, *Korintherbrief*, 194–95; Black, *Scrolls*, 84–85), though the use of the term *παρθένος* of women in 1 Cor 7:28, 34, 36–38 makes this an unlikely possibility.

"Joseph is called a *παρθένος* in Jos. As. 4:9 (tr. Burchard in Charlesworth, *OTP* 2:206: 'Joseph is a man who worships God, and self-controlled, and a virgin [*παρθένος*] like you [i.e., 'Aseneth'] today'; he is also called a *παρθένος* in 8:1). Along with Rev 14:4, this is one of the very first instances in which the term *παρθένος* is used of males (see C. Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, WUNT 8 [Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1965] 110 n. 1). In Achilles Tattius 5.20.5, Clitophon tells Leucippe by letter 'you will find that I have imitated your virginity [*παρθενίαν*], if there be any virginity in men [ἐν ἀνδράσι παρθενία].' The term *παρθένος* is also used of males such as John the Apostle, referred to as 'the holy virgin John' (Epiphanius Pan. 28.7.5) or 'John the virgin,' using the Greek loanword *παρθένος* (Pistis Sophia 1.41 [ed. Schmidt-Till, p. 42, line 27; ed. Schmidt-MacDermot, p. 68]; 2.96 [ed. Schmidt-Till, p. 148, line 25; ed. Schmidt-MacDermot, p. 233]). It is also applied to such OT figures as Jeremiah (Olympiodorus Frag. in Jer. 52:1; Migne, PG XCIII.724), Abel (Adler, *Suidae Lexicon* 1:16), and Melchizedek (Adler, *Suidae Lexicon* 2:773); see references in Lindijer, "Die Jungfrauen," 128. The terms *παρθένος* and *παρθενικός* are sometimes used of men in Jewish epitaphs (CIJ,

Clearly inside the NT in the 15 uses of *παρθένος* only Rev. 14:4 specifies males while all the others designate an unmarried female. This unusual usage signals something beyond just the standard meaning of 'unmarried' for *παρθένος* here.

Neither of the two typical interpretive conclusions of either asceticism or celibacy provide an accurate understanding of John's statement.⁴¹ The tones of priestly ritual against the backdrop of the pagan incorporation of immoral sexual activity into worship of the patron de-

81, 242), though here it means simply that the deceased were unmarried when they died. This might suggest that the 144,000 were executed as young men and are designated *παρθένοι* because they had died as yet unmarried. In two Jewish sepulchral inscriptions from Rome, the Greek adjective *παρθενικός*, 'virginal,' and the Latin adjective *virgineum* (= *virginio*) are used of husbands who had not been previously married (A. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* [New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960] 130, 231–32, 274–75 [no. 81], 299 [no. 242]). Against this background the reference to the 144,000 as *παρθένοι* in Rev 14:4 may plausibly be construed to mean that they have been married only once (Ford, NTS 12 [1966] 293–99)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 811–812.]

⁴¹The central interpretive problem here in v 4 is often reduced to a choice between understanding these statements to indicate literal asceticism, i.e., physical purity, and understanding them to imply figurative abstention from various forms of sin, i.e., moral purity. The term *παρθένοι*, 'celibates,' can be understood in several different ways. (1) The term *παρθένοι* is sometimes understood to refer to those who abstain from sexual immorality, whether or not they are married (Beckwith, Zahn, Hadorn). This view is generally unconvincing. (2) The term is also understood more literally to refer to those who remain celibate (Bousset, Lohmeyer, Lindijer, "Die Jungfrauen"), a view held earlier by Augustine (Migne, PL XL.410–11). It is also important to note that the author uses the metaphor of marriage for the relationship between Christ and his community, i.e., the New Jerusalem (Rev 19:7–10; 21:2, 9–14; 22:17). (3) Another traditional understanding of this term regards it as a figurative term for the purity of the faith of those who refuse to worship the beast. In the OT, unchastity is frequently used as a metaphor for turning away from the true worship of God to the idolatrous worship of false gods (Jer 3:2; 13:27; Ezek 16:15–58; 23:1–49; 43:7; Hos 5:4; 6:10; see Comment on 2:14). In 2 Cor 11:2, the metaphor of the 'pure virgin' symbolizes the moral and spiritual purity of the Christian community, while in *Hermas Vis.* 4.2.1–2, *Hermas* sees a *παρθένος* who represents the Church. This view is reflected in the early Church in Ps.-Augustine (Migne, PL XXXV.2437), Ps.-Ambrose (Migne, PL XVII.891), and Ambrosiaster (Migne, PL XVII.319–20). (4) Finally, the chastity of the 144,000 males can be regarded as reflecting the purity regulations required of participants in a holy war (Lev 15:16; Deut 23:9–10; 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:11; 1QM 7:3–7) or the abstinence requirements for priests under particular ritual circumstances (Lev 15:18); both soldiers and priests were exclusively male. Variations of this view are widely held by scholars (Lohmeyer, 120; Caird, 179; Beasley-Murray, 223; Sweet, 222; Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 129–30; id., *JBL* 96 [1977] 248)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 812.]

ity of the individual strongly suggest that John's intended point here is that the 144,000 have not corrupted themselves by engaging in paganism. They have remained completely 'pure' from this contaminating influence, in stark contrast to the evil people around them who are worshiping the beast. The aorist passive verb οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, *they have not been defiled*, combined with the present tense εἰσιν, *they are*, paint a picture no defilement in the midst of a continuing purity.

Although the language of John in these statements is clearly masculine, the reality being described is inclusive of both men and women who remain pure in their devotion of Christ and do not contaminate themselves by pagan worship.⁴²

⁴²John's use of sexual abstinence here needs some amplification, especially in light of how this statement in v. 4 has been twisted and misunderstood. Aune, WBC, has an excellent excursus on this that merits inclusion in this study in spite of its length. In spite of interpretive errors on some NT texts, he presents a very helpful social background perspective.

Whether literally or figuratively understood, the language of Rev 14:4 reflects a positive estimation of sexual abstinence. This extraordinary emphasis on the sexual abstinence of the followers of Jesus in Rev 14:5 requires explanation. It is important, however, to consider this text within the comparative framework of the various positive assessments of celibacy or sexual continence that existed in antiquity. The phenomenon of celibacy or sexual continence (which could be either temporary or permanent) in the ancient world was practiced for a number of very different reasons: (1) as a ritual requirement for male participants in holy wars, (2) as a ritual requirement for communion with the divine world, (3) as a prerequisite for becoming a disciple of Jesus or (in some phases of second- and third-century Christianity) a Christian, (4) as part of an ascetic program that sought a more spiritual form of existence through the denial of the needs and drives of the physical body, (5) as a prophetic characteristic according to some strands of early Jewish tradition, and (6) as a sign of participation in the Israelite cult (Exod 19:10–15; Jos. J. W. 5.227; CDa 12:1–2).

(1) The sexual abstinence of these adult males is sometimes explained against the background of the requirement for temporary celibacy demanded of participants in a holy war as prescribed in the OT (1 Sam 21:4–5[MT 21:5–6]; 2 Sam 11:11–12; cf. Deut 23:9–14; von Rad, *Krieg*, 7; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 258–59; J. Pedersen, *Israel*, 4 vols. in 2 [London: Cumberlege; Copenhagen: Branner og Korsh, 1926] 3–4:10). The primary problem with understanding the sexual abstinence of the 144,000 in this ideological background is they are not described in vv 1–5 with other military metaphors or motifs based on Israelite holy war theology (unless they are linked to the 144,000 in Rev 7:4–8, and the latter passage is considered a military roster), though it is true that v 4a indicates that they are all males. It is also true, however, that in Rev 13:7 the beast makes war on the saints and conquers them. The conception of the holy war was not limited to Israel's distant past; it was also revitalized in connection with imaginative accounts of the impending eschatological conflict (see Giblin, 222–31). In the Qumran community, for example,

there was a close connection between celibacy and holy-war theology (G. Anderson, HTR 82 [1989] 140). According to 1QM 7:3–6 (tr. Vermes, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 132–33):

No boy or woman shall enter their camps, from the time they leave Jerusalem and march out to war until they return. ... And no man shall go down with them on the day of battle who is impure because of his fount [i.e., a nocturnal emission] for the holy angels shall be with their hosts.

According to Philo (Apol. 11.14–17), Pliny (Hist. nat. 5.15), and Josephus (J. W. 2.120–21; Ant. 18.21), the Essenes rejected marriage, though Josephus does mention one branch of the sect that did marry (J. W. 2.160–61). While the practice of celibacy among the Essenes is not confirmed directly in the Dead Sea Scrolls (with the exception of the requirement of "temporary" abstinence from sexual relations in 1QM 7:3–4 in anticipation of the eschatological holy war, which was expected to last forty years), that the Essenes did practice celibacy is confirmed by Philo (Apol. 11.14; Eusebius Praep. evang. 8.11), Josephus (J. W. 2.120–21; Ant. 18.21), and Pliny (Hist. nat. 5.17). Philo and Josephus attribute this practice of celibacy to misogyny (Philo Apol. 11.14–17; Jos. J. W. 2.121), but quite incorrectly (see Baumgartner, "Marriage," 13–14). Josephus, however, mentions another group of Essenes who did practice marriage (J. W. 2.160–61).

Pliny, Philo, and Josephus all agree on the reasons for the negative attitude of the Essenes toward marriage: ascetic renunciation of pleasure and the relatively low morals of women. These attitudes, however, are not confirmed in the Dead Sea Scrolls and appear to be based primarily on Hellenistic values. The evidence for celibacy among the residents of Qumran is ambiguous. Apparently only males were buried in the large central cemetery of Qumran (containing about 1,100 graves), while the remains of women and children have been found in adjacent (perhaps later) burial areas (F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, rev ed. [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961] 96–99; J. C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994] 14–15, 90–91). One female skeleton was found somewhat separated from the other graves in the main cemetery. However, only twenty-six graves have been excavated there. It is possible that members of the community over the age of twenty-five were required to abstain from sexual relations since they were considered soldiers mustered in readiness for the eschatological holy war; young men (נער זעטוט *na-ar za-ăṭûṭ*; 1QM 7:3) between the ages of twenty and twenty-five were required to live celibately (Isaksson, *Marriage*, 55–56). This arrangement would have given some outsiders the impression that all members of the Qumran community were celibates. However, in view of the discussions by Baumgarten and Qimron, it appears that there were two kinds of members of the Qumran community: (a) those who lived at Khirbet Qumran and considered themselves a temporary substitute for Jerusalem and its temple and in consequence maintained a high degree of ritual purity appropriate for Jerusalem, i.e., permanent abstinence from sexual relations (Qimron, "Celibacy," 291–92), and (b) those who lived in the "camps," i.e., the villages of Palestine, and did marry and have children (CD 7:6–7; Qimron, "Celibacy," 289–90). The asceticism of the Qumran community, then, is both eschatologically motivated, i.e., in order to be constantly prepared for the final conflict a strict regimen that included sexual abstinence in accord with OT prescriptions for the pros-

ecution of a holy war was deemed necessary (1QM 7:3–6), and cultically motivated, i.e., the ritual demands of sexual abstinence within the temple were extended to Jerusalem (11QTemple 47:5–12; 46:16–18; CD 12:12), and since members of the community represented the temple, they practiced permanent sexual abstinence.

In his discussion of the Therapeutae (which some consider an Egyptian branch of the Essenes; see G. Vermes, “Essenes and Therapeutae,” RQ 3 [1962] 495–502), Philo mentions that they had abandoned their possessions, brothers, children, wives, parents, and homeland (Vit. Cont. 18), and that the women among them were aged virgins (Vit. Cont. 68). However, the possibility of an eschatological motivation for celibacy is not mentioned. It must also be noted that a Roman in military service was not permitted to contract a legal marriage (*matrimonium iustum*) during service (this included soldiers in the legions, the praetorian guard, the urban guard, and the auxiliary units and sailors in the fleet); see Dio Cassius 60.24.3. This ancient regulation, which, however, did not prevent military personnel from keeping mistresses, was finally rescinded by Septimius Severus (Herodian 3.8.5).

(2) An entirely different role for celibacy is attested in some strands of early Jewish tradition linking celibacy to the reception of revelation, to the possession of the Spirit of God, or to prophecy. The Jewish tradition of the celibacy of the prophet and sage is reflected in rabbinic tradition (Vermes, Jesus, 99–102; A. Büchler, Types of Jewish Palestinian Piety from 70 B.C.E. to 70 C.E. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1926] 42–67; Boring, Voice of Jesus, 134–37). In a saying widely considered a later addition to the Mishnah, the second-century A.D. sage Phineas ben Jair proposes a graduated chain of virtues (tr. Danby, Mishnah, 306–7):

Heedfulness leads to cleanliness, and cleanliness leads to purity, and purity leads to abstinence, and abstinence [פרישות *pērišōt*] leads to holiness, and holiness leads to humility, and humility leads to the shunning of sin, and the shunning of sin leads to saintliness, and saintliness leads to [the gift of] the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit leads to the resurrection of the dead. Here, פרישות *pērišōt*, ‘separation, abstinence,’ refers to sexual abstinence (Büchler, *Palestinian Piety*, 48–59). According to talmudic tradition, Moses had no sexual relations with his wife after his call, since if temporary communion with God required temporary continence, uninterrupted communion with God required permanent continence (b. Šabb. 87a; Vermes, Jesus, 100–101). A similar tradition is preserved earlier in Philo Mos. 2.68–69 (LCL tr.):

But first he [Moses] had to be clean, as in soul so also in body, to have no dealings with any passion, purifying himself from all the calls of mortal nature, food and drink and intercourse with women. This last he had disdained for many a day, almost from the time when, possessed by the spirit, he entered on his work as a prophet, since he held it fitting to hold himself always in readiness to receive the oracular messages.

When Zipporah (the wife of Moses) heard that Eldad and Medad had begun to prophesy, she was overheard by Miriam to say “Woe to the wives of these men!” (Sipre Num. 12:1 [99]). Though these texts are relatively late, the tradition of the prophetic celibacy of Moses goes back to the first century A.D. since Philo also claims that Moses abstained from sexual intercourse after he began to function as a prophet (Mos. 2.68–69). Yet since from the rabbinic perspective prophecy

was largely a phenomenon of the past, prophetic celibacy was not a current practice (Vermes, Jesus, 101–2).

The seven daughters of Philip are specifically designated as παρθένοι, perhaps because a connection was assumed between virginity and the gift of prophecy (Lindijer, “Die Jungfrauen,” 129). A similar conception is expressed in the Acts of Paul 5, “Blessed are the continent [ἐγκρατεῖς] because God will speak to them.”

(3) Sexual abstinence was sometimes cited as a prerequisite for becoming a disciple of Jesus. The author of Luke-Acts does stress various aspects of asceticism, including celibacy (see below), but only in a relatively weak form. 1 Tim 4:3 (written ca. A.D. 100 or later) expresses opposition to Christians who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from various types of food, though the identity of the author’s opponents is unknown. A strong correlation between discipleship and sexual abstinence can be found in the Apocryphal Acts, widely regarded as originating in Asia Minor from ca. A.D. 175 to 225, though the Christian practice of sexual abstinence is certainly much earlier (see Tissot, “Encratisme,” 109–19), and in the celibacy demanded as a prerequisite for baptism in Syrian Christianity (see Brock, Numen 20 [1973] 1–19; Vööbus, Celibacy).

Just as Philo (Vit. Cont. 18) emphasized how the Therapeutae had abandoned possessions, brothers, children, wives, parents, and homeland, so the Gospels emphasize the specific types of renunciation of those whom Jesus called to follow him. The seven types of renunciation enumerated in Mark 10:29 and repeated in Matt 19:29 (home, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, fields) are reduced to five in Luke 18:29 with the addition of “wives” (an indication of Luke’s concern with celibacy). In a passage possibly derived from Q (Luke 14:26; Matt 10:37–38), only Luke includes wives on a list of what followers of Jesus must “hate.” Luke 20:34–36 (in contrast to Mark 12:24–25) indicates that sexual abstinence is a prerequisite for participation in the Resurrection. In the Parable of the Great Supper from Q (Luke 14:15–24; Matt 22:1–14), only Luke mentions recent marriage as an excuse not to attend the banquet. These passages all reflect a special Lukan emphasis on the abandonment of sexual relationships, an abstinence that is part of a larger emphasis on asceticism (Cadbury, Luke-Acts, 264–65, 272; Pervo, Profit, 127, 181–82 n. 79).

(4) Sexual abstinence was often considered part of an ascetic program that sought a more spiritual form of existence through the denial of the needs and drives of the physical body. Philo describes the ascetic practices of the Therapeutae, which included celibacy (Vit. Cont. 18, 32–33, 68–69, 83ff.). According to Matt 19:12, there are three types of eunuchs: (1) eunuchs by birth (i.e., born without normal sexual organs), (2) those made eunuchs by people (i.e., emasculated), and (3) those “who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (i.e., self-emasculation or more probably voluntary celibacy); see J. Blinzler, “Ἐἰς τὸν εὐνοῦχοι’: Zur Auslegung von Mt. 19,12,” ZNW 48 (1957) 254–70. Ben Azzai, an unmarried rabbi, reportedly claimed that he could not marry since his soul was joined to the Torah (Str-B, 1:807); perhaps Paul was also unmarried because he was “married” to his ministry (1 Cor 9:5; cf. 7:33–34). In Jesus’ saying about forsaking homes and families (Mark 10:28–30 = Matt 19:27–29 = Luke 18:28–30; Ap. James 4:1), only Luke mentions leav-

Therefore, those who gather on Mount Zion will be able to sing the new song defined in Rev. 19:7-8.⁴³

7 χαίρωμεν καὶ ἀγαλλιώμεν καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ, ὅτι ἦλθεν ὁ γάμος τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ ἠτοίμασεν ἑαυτὴν 8 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῇ ἵνα περιβάληται βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν· τὸ γὰρ βύσσινον τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν.

7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; 8 to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

c) οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ, These who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (v. 4b). The abbreviated expression here can assume a ‘to be’ verb out of the predicate construction of οὗτοι, but the elliptical grammar construction ties this expression closely on to the preceding one.

What is implied in the preceding statement παρθένοι γὰρ εἰσίν? Or, put another way, How does one continue to be a παρθένοι?

The answer comes clearly in this follow up οὗτοι declaration: by following the Lamb wherever he goes. And yet the image is rather unusual because it is of a Lamb functioning as a shepherd.⁴⁴ But this image re-

peating one’s wife (v 29). In the negative version of that saying in Luke 14:26, hatred of wives is mentioned along with hatred of other family members as criteria for discipleship. Similarly, the Lukan version of the question about the resurrection (Mark 12:18–27 = Matt 22:23–33 = Luke 20:27–40) emphasizes celibacy for those who will be accounted worthy to attain to the age to come and the resurrection (20:34–36; see Aune, “Luke 20:34–36,” 187–202). In 1 Cor 7:1, Paul recommends that a man not touch a woman, a suggestion made because of the nearness of the end (1 Cor 7:29–31); i.e., celibacy is eschatologically motivated. According to 1 Clem. 35:1–2, one of the gifts of God is ἐγκράτεια ἐν ἁγιασμῷ, “continence in holiness” (cf. 1 Clem. 38:2). ἐγκράτεια becomes increasingly emphasized in second-century Christianity (1 Tim 4:3; Ign. Pol. 5:2; 2 Clem. 15:1; Hermas Vis. 1.2.4; 3.8.4; Justin 1 Apol. 15.6; Athenagoras Legatio 33.1; Tatian, Marcion, and Saturninus emphasized celibacy; see Eusebius Hist. eccl. 4.29.3; Tertullian Ad uxorem 1.3–4; De exhort. cast. 9–10; Minucius Felix Oct. 31).

(5) The participation by priests in the Israelite cultus required temporary sexual abstinence (Exod 19:10–15; Jos. J. W. 5.227). In CDa 12:1–2 (cf. 4Q268 = 4QDc 3 i 17) the rules for temporary priestly celibacy are extended from the temple itself to include the entire city of Jerusalem.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 819–822.]

⁴³Here may be another reason for the feminine oriented language in Rev. 14:4, the 144,000 as the bride of Christ.

⁴⁴“The peculiar metaphor of the Lamb as shepherd and guide is found here and in Rev 7:17, while the more conventional metaphor of the Messiah as shepherd (based on the ancient Near Eastern metaphor of the king as shepherd of his people) is found in Frg. Tg. Exod 12:42 (tr. Klein, Fragment-Targums 2:126), ‘and Moses

peats the same idea found in Rev. 7:17

ὅτι τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου ποιμανεῖ αὐτούς καὶ ὀδηγήσει αὐτούς ἐπὶ ζωῆς πηγᾶς ὑδάτων, καὶ ἐξαλείψει ὁ θεὸς πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν.

for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

In this earlier text, those following the Lamb as Shepherd are explained to John by one of the elders in heaven as οὗτοι εἰσίν οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης καὶ ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου, these are those coming out of great suffering and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The image is of martyrdom since these εἰσίν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ, are before the throne of God. These martyrs in heaven follow the Lamb as their Shepherd. But the 144,000 on earth also follow the Lamb unconditionally, and that includes the possibility of being ‘slaughtered’ as well as what happened to the Lamb.⁴⁵ Such obedi-

will go forth from the midst of the wilderness and the King Messiah, from the midst of Rome: this one [Moses] will lead at the head of the flock, and that one [King Messiah] will lead at the head of the flock.’ The notion that the Messiah will shepherd the flock of the Lord (i.e., God’s people) also occurs much earlier in Pss. Sol. 17:40–42 and has biblical antecedents in Isa 40:11 and Ezek 34:23.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 812.]

⁴⁵“The phrase ‘where he would go’ in Rev 14:4 suggests that the 144,000 follow the Lamb regardless of the cost, i.e., even to the point of death (see Matt 10:38 = Luke 14:27; Mark 8:34–35 = Matt 16:24–25 = Luke 9:23–24; Luke 17:33; John 12:25–26; 1 Pet 2:21; Rev 12:11). In the interpretive explanation found in Rev 14:4, the term ἀκολουθεῖν is very probably modeled after Gospel traditions involving discipleship, such as the *chreia* in Q (Matt 8:19–20; Luke 9:57–58), introduced with the statement “As they were going along the road a man said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go [ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου ἂν ἀπέρχῃ].”’ The saying so introduced (‘Foxes have holes ...’), like its close parallel in Gos. Thom. 86 (Kloppenborg, Formation of Q, 191), probably circulated as an independent saying and was turned into a *chreia* by introducing it with the brief narrative element in v 57 (Bultmann, Geschichte, 27). This narrative framework was in all probability formulated on the basis of a generic understanding of Christian discipleship, i.e., ‘following Jesus wherever he went.’ It is true, however, that the term ἀκολουθεῖν, ‘to follow after,’ occurs in connection with Jesus outside the Gospels only here in Rev 14:4 and in a figurative sense (Hengel, Leader, 62). And, of course, it is not the historical Jesus that is in view here but rather the exalted Christ (Hengel, Leader, 86 n. 9). A similar statement is found in Acts of Paul 25, “Thecla said to Paul, ‘I will shave my head and follow you wherever you go [ἀκολουθήσω σοι ὅπου δὲν πορεύῃ].”’ This possibility receives partial confirmation by the existence of several similarly worded statements in the Gospel of John. For example, in John 13:36, ‘Where I go [ὅπου ὑπάγω] you are unable to follow [ἀκολουθεῖσαι] me now, but you will follow later.’ Here discipleship means fol-

ence to the Lamb naturally comes out of experiencing God's redemption, οἱ ἠγορασμένοι.

d) οὔτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος, ἄμωμοὶ εἰσιν, These have been redeemed from men as first fruits to God and the Lamb, and in their mouths is not found a lie, they are blameless (vv. 4c-5). Here John returns to the initial image of redemption with expansions elaborating its deeper meaning. The core expression οὔτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων picks up οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς in v. 3c. The use of the aorist passive verb ἠγοράσθησαν, instead of the perfect passive participle ἠγορασμένοι, focuses emphasis upon the past action of being redeemed which is contained in the participle.

But the use of ἀγοράζω here in the aorist stresses an additional aspect through the Greek double accusative object construction: he redeemed someone into something different.⁴⁶ Thus the 144,000 in being redeemed by God become ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, a first fruit to God and to the Lamb. The term ἀπαρχή

lowing Jesus to death (see John 21:18–19; Mark 8:34–35 and par.). John 13:36 is thematically connected with John 12:26, ‘If any one serves me, he must follow me [ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω]; and where I am [ὅπου εἰμι ἐγώ] there shall my servant be also.’

‘Finally, in John 14:3, Jesus expresses the eventual reward for disciples who follow him to death: ‘where I am [ὅπου εἰμι ἐγώ] you may be also. And you know the way I am going [ὅπου ἐγὼ ὑπάγω οἶδατε τὴν ὁδόν].’ These Johannine passages provide a form of the tradition found in Rev 14:1–5 but shorn of apocalyptic features; i.e., true discipleship means following Jesus to death with the promise of their ‘acceptance into Jesus’ community with the Father’ (Schnackenburg, John 3:55–56). Some of the consequences of discipleship are described in more traditionally eschatological terms in Matt 19:28, ‘Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed [οἱ ἀκολουθήσοντες] me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (see Luke 22:28–30, which adds the motif of the messianic banquet). The term ἀκολουθεῖν is used metaphorically in Ign. Phld. 2:1, ‘Where the shepherd is, there follow as sheep [ὅπου δὲ ὁ ποιμὴν ἐστίν, ἐκεῖ ὡς πρόβατα ἀκολουθεῖτε];’ cf. Smyrn. 8:17. In an early allusion to Rev 14:4 in Ep. Lugd. 10 (preserved in Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.1.10; Musurillo, Acts, 64), it is said of a Christian martyr named Vettius Epagathus that ‘he was and is a true disciple of Christ, following the Lamb wherever he goes [ἀκολουθῶν τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἂν ὑπάγῃ].’ In this allusion to Rev 14:4, following Christ is clearly a metaphor for martyrdom, conceived of as true discipleship.’

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 813–814.]

⁴⁶The interesting angle presented here, which is common for ancient Greek verbs taking a double accusative set of objects, is that when the verb is shifted from the active voice to the passive voice both objects shift from the accusative case to the nominative case. In this instance both οὔτοι and ἀπαρχή are moved into the nominative case from the accusative case with an active voice form of this verb. Thus ἀπαρχή shifts from being an Accusative of Predicate Object to now being an Nominative of Predicate Object.

specified one category of offering to the gods that was universal in the paganism of John's world.⁴⁷ In such a setting ἀπαρχή had the symbolical meaning of ‘devoted to.’ But in the Hebrew sacrificial tradition ἀπαρχή as a LXX translation of בכורִים *bikkûrîm* added additional richness to the idea.⁴⁸ The LXX also uses ἀπαρχή to trans-

⁴⁷“The term ἀπαρχή, ‘first-fruits,’ here translated ‘devoted servants,’ originated as a technical term drawn from the language of cultic offerings and sacrifice found throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. In the ancient Mediterranean world, there were three primary types of ‘sacrifice’ or gifts to the gods (i.e., commodities withdrawn from regular human use): offerings of food, offerings of objects (votive offerings), and animal sacrifices. The offering of first-fruits (ἀπαρχή), which belongs to the first category, was regarded by the Greeks as ‘the simplest and most basic form of uncorrupted piety’ (Burkert, *Mythology and Ritual*, 52). The means of offering first-fruits, however, exhibited a wide spectrum: they may be offered to any god; they may be left at a holy place until they decompose or are eaten by animals or scavengers; they may be thrown into ponds, rivers, or the sea; they may be burned.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 814.]

⁴⁸“The Hebrew word בכור *bēkôr* and its feminine plural form בכורות *bekôrôt* refer to the ‘firstborn’ of animals and humans beings, while the masculine plural form בכורים *bikkûrîm* refers to the ‘first-fruits’ or ‘first portion’ of cereal and fruit crops that are presented to God in a cultic context (Exod 23:19; 34:22; Lev 23:9–14; Num 28:26–27; Deut 16:9–12; Deut 26:1–11; 2 Kgs 4:42; Neh 10:35[MT 36]; Prov 3:9–10; Ep. Arist. 158; T. Levi 9:7, 14; T. Jud. 21:5; T. Iss. 5:6; 1QS 6:5–6; 1QSa 2:18–19; Ant. 4.70; 9.273; Apost. Const. 8.40.2); see TWAT 1:644–45; 7:292–93; EDNT 1:116–17; J. Milgrom, “First Fruits, OT,” IDBSup, 336–37; R. O. Rigsby, “First Fruits,” ADB 2:796–97). Inexplicably בכורים *bikkûrîm* is never translated ἀπαρχή in the LXX. ראשית *rē.šît* is also used to refer to the ‘first-fruits’ (of the field) in a cultic sense, but it is not at all clear what difference, if any, existed between ראשית *rē.šît* and בכורים *bikkûrîm* in Israelite sacrificial protocol (Tsevat, TDOT 2:122). The semantic problem is compounded by the rare phrase ראשית בכורים *rē.šît bikkûrê*, τὰς ἀπαρχὰς τῶν πρωτογεννημάτων, ‘first-fruits of first-fruits’ (Exod 23:19 [cf. Philo De sacr. 72]; 34:26; Ezek 44:30). The term בכור *bēkôr*, ‘firstborn,’ a term often used synonymously with גדול *gādôl*, ‘eldest,’ is based on the same root as בכורים *bikkûrîm*, ‘first-fruits,’ and the assumption is that the firstborn or firstlings of animals and people (i.e., the first and the best), as well as the first-fruits of the field, belong to God (Exod 13:2–16; Lev 27:26–27; Num 3:44–51; 18:13–17; Deut 14:23–26; Neh 10:36[MT 37]; Ant. 4.70; cf. Ezek 20:25–26). The presentation of the first-fruits of the harvest, which themselves cannot be consumed by the offerer (Jer 2:3b), sanctifies the entire harvest, which can then be consumed (Lev 23:14; cf. Prov 3:9–10). In the OT the offering of first-fruits was reserved for priests and Levites (Num 18:12–13; Deut 18:4; Ezek 44:30; Sir 45:20), a practice continued in some segments of early Christianity according to Did. 13:3–7. The term ἀπαρχή can also be used of booty presented to God (Ant. 5.26), and in Pss. Sol. 15:3, ἀπαρχή is used metaphorically of speech in praise of God. There is evidence in the OT that ראשית *rē.šît* takes on the meaning ‘the best’ (Num 24:20; 1 Sam 15:21; Jer 49:35; Amos 6:6; see Weicht, Folge, 96–99; TWNT 1:644; 7:293; Rigsby, “First Fruits,” ADB 2:796). It is important to observe that the term ἀπαρχή is never used of the firstborn of animals or people in the OT or early Jewish literature. Therefore the figurative use of the term ἀπαρχή when applied to people, whether individually or collectively, is a

late several other related Hebrew words as well. One of the extensions of meaning in the Hebrew background is that as a grain offering presented in the temple in Jerusalem the first fruits consecrate all of the harvest to God. This would suggest these individuals are completely devoted to God in contrast to their pagan neighbors.

One very interesting and perhaps important aspect is that here ἀπαρχή designates people rather than grain offerings. Just two instances in the LXX surface where ἀπαρχή is a people reference rather than a grain offering. These are in Psalm 77:51 LXX with the MT text as 78:51 and Psalm 104:36 LXX with the MT as 105:36. Here ἀπαρχή equals πρωτότοκος, *first born*, in reference to Exodus 12:29-36.⁴⁹ In Jer. 2:3, the cognate term ἀρχή figuratively refers to all of Israel with the sense of ‘first fruits.’ Important to note in Rev. 14:4 is that the singular ἀπαρχή refers to the plural οὔτοι, *these*. Thus as a collective noun ἀπαρχή specifies one part of redeemed humanity with the other part as the multitude already in heaven as per 15:3; 7:13-14 et als. The 144,000 as devoted servants on earth to God and to the Lamb are just as secure in their relation to God as are those already in heaven. Therefore the core meaning of ἀπαρχή is John’s primary point with the image. Redemption turned these into devoted servants to metaphor drawn from the first-fruits of the field (barley, wheat, bread, grapes, etc.).

“The term ἀπαρχή occurs seventy-six times in the LXX, with the following meanings (Lust, Lexicon, 45): (1) ‘offering’ (Exod 25:3), (2) ‘the first(offering)’ (Deut 26:10), (3) ‘portion’ (1 Sam 10:4), (4) ‘first-offerings’ (Exod 23:19), and (5) ‘first-fruits’ (Exod 22:28). The verb ἀπαρχομαι, ‘to offer first-fruits,’ occurs five times (2 Chr 30:24[2x]; 35:7, 8, 9). ἀπαρχή is used to translate several different Hebrew terms: תְּרוּמָה *tērūmā*, ‘offering’ (37x), רֵאשִׁית *rē.šīt*, ‘beginning, chief’ (17x), תְּנוּפָה *tēnūpā*, ‘elevation offering’ (1x: Exod 39:1[MT: 38:24]), חֵלֶב *hēleb*, ‘fat’ (2x: Num 18:12), and מַאֲשֵׁר *ma.āšēr*, ‘tithe’ (1x: Deut 12:16), though sometimes ἀπαρχή appears in the LXX without reflecting the Hebrew text (e.g., Exod 22:29; Num 18:1; 1 Kgs 10:4; Ezek 20:31). Though בְּכוֹרֵי *bik-kūrīm* can mean ‘first-fruits,’ it is inexplicably never translated with ἀπαρχή in the LXX, though rather frequently it is rendered by πρωτογενήματα, ‘first-fruits’ (Exod 23:16, 19; 34:26; Lev 2:14; 23:17, 20; Num 18:13; 2 Kgs 4:42), once by ἀρχή, ‘beginning’ (Exod 34:22), once by πρόδρομοι, ‘forerunners’ (Num 13:20), and once by τὰ νέα ‘the new things’ (Num 28:26).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 814–815.

⁴⁹“In both passages (which are literal translations of the underlying Hebrew text), πρωτότοκος is used to translate בְּכוֹר *bēkōr* and ἀπαρχή renders רֵאשִׁית *rē.šīt*. Even though ἀπαρχή is used in both Ps 77:51 and Ps 104:36 of human beings, ἀπαρχή does not have a cultic meaning and is therefore not used figuratively or metaphorically but simply means ‘the first (of a series)’ (Louw-Nida, § 61.8), i.e., in this case the first or eldest son, closely associated in meaning with πρωτότοκος.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 816.]

both God and Christ.

This meaning is confirmed in the parallel statement that follows οὔτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχή τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ. Their moral blamelessness is the outgrowth of this redemptive action of God: καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος, ἄμωμοί εἰσιν, *and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless*.

The first expression ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος is a well established Hebrew axiom for telling the truth.⁵⁰ Telling lies signaled a corrupt character and inner part of a person. To not discover a lie in their mouth -- the main bodily opening into the interior of a person -- suggested purity on the inside of the individual, according to the idiom.

This is confirmed by the final assertion ἄμωμοί εἰσιν, *they are blameless*. Only used here in Revelation, ἄμωμοί plays off a sacrifice that was acceptable for offering to God. It, along with ἀπαρχή, helps to define the intended figurative meaning of παρθένοι as specifying

⁵⁰“Guile is not found in their mouth’ is a Semitic idiom for telling the truth, and there is a tendency within Judaism to favor the negative expression of this moral virtue. While this appears to be an ethical topos, it may be inspired by Zeph 3:13, where it is said of the remnant of Israel καὶ οὐ μὴ εὐρεθῆ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν γλῶσσα δολία, ‘nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth.’ (This does not mean, however, that the author understands the 144,000 as the remnant of Israel.) Because this saying occurs in a variety of contexts in a stereotypical form, its dependence on Zeph 3:13 is somewhat weakened. A similar saying is found in Isa 53:9 (quoted in 1 Pet 2:23 and 1 Clem. 16:10), where it is said of the Servant of the Lord: οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ, ‘and there was no deceit in his mouth.’ Similar forms of this saying occur in LXX Ps 31:2(MT 32:2) in the context of a beatitude: μακάριος ἀνὴρ, οὗ οὐ μὴ λογίσηται κύριος ἁμαρτίαν, οὐδὲ ἔστιν ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ [MT וְרוּחַ *bērūhō*, ‘in his spirit’] δόλος, ‘Blessed is the person to whom the Lord does not impute sin, nor is there guile in his mouth,’ and in Jdt 5:5, καὶ οὐκ ἐξελεύσεται ψεῦδος ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δούλου σου, ‘and no lie will come forth from the mouth of your servant.’ The term ἄμωμος, ‘blameless,’ occurs only here in Revelation and can refer to a sacrificial offering that is without defect (Exod 29:1; Lev 1:3; 4:3; 5:15; Ezek 43:22–23; Philo Leg. All. 1.50; Christ in 1 Pet 1:19), to a priest who is in a state of ritual purity (1 Macc 4:43), and by extension to one who is morally blameless, i.e., faultless (Eph 1:4; 5:27; Col 1:22; Phil 2:15; Ign. Trall. 13:3).

In the OT and early Judaism there was an extremely large vocabulary devoted to the notions of deceit and treachery, suggesting that (along with idolatry, murder, and sexual immorality) lying was regarded as one of the major vices, though paradoxically there is not a single law in the OT that forbids lying generally, though there are injunctions against bearing false witness (Exod 20:16; Prov 21:28) and perjury (Lev 19:12). In the OT, God is associated with truth and idolatry with lying, and by the late second temple period this is transposed into the association of God with truth and Satan with lying (1QS 4:9; 10:22; Titus 1:22; John 8:41–47; Rom 3:4; see NIDNTT 2:470–74.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 823.]

a level of purity before God which He could accept.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How does this passage relate to us today? The answer comes first by exploring its meaning to John's first readers at the end of the first Christian century.

In chapter thirteen the appearance of the first and second beasts upon the earth assisting Satan to carry out his plan of harming the people of God sets the scene for a positive word to the people of God in the seven churches who first heard these words read to them in public worship in the various house church groups over the seven cities. They have been warned of an intensification of persecution (14:15-18) to come upon them. Being a faithful Christian in this would become even harder than ever before.

But the picture of the saints of God gathered on Mount Zion with the Lamb of God in preparation to celebrate his coming victory over Satan provides the needed word of encouragement to remain faithful in hard circumstances. John gives them encouragement by painting the picture of the earthly gathering with the Lamb (v. 1). In spiritual reality they stand now with the victorious Lamb on Mount Zion in their assemblies around the cities. He then shifts to a vision of heaven where a huge celebration of victory is taking place from those already in heaven (vv. 2-3b) which will be amplified even further beginning in 15:2-4. Through their redemption they stand as a part of this people of God even though still on earth. Thirdly, he affirms to these folks in the churches that as a part of the 144,000 on earth they have already learned the new song of victory and will also sing it in heaven because of their redemption by God (vv. 3c-5). This divine redemption has made them into a brand new people who are pure and acceptable to God and to the Lamb. This even though their refusal to worship the beast makes them unfit for his temple and subject to execution (cf. 13:15).

Here lies a powerful message to us as modern believers in Christ. Although for most of us the intense persecution has not fallen on us, we all do live in a time of growing hostility to the Gospel and to Christian values. In our very chaotic world, it is often very challenging to be a committed believer in Christ. The bad news is that this is going to get worse as time progresses. But the good news is that we as authentic believers stand as a part of the 144,000 who serve God on earth. We are eligible to learn the new song of victory over Satan and all those following him. In fact our earthly gatherings can be a sharing in the victory celebration continuously taking place in heaven by the saints of God before the heavenly throne.

Central to our participation is the redemption of God in our lives. The work of the Lamb has set us apart

in dedication to God as ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ, a first fruit to God and to the Lamb, i.e., as devoted servants to our God. The confirmation of this life changing redemption is that we live in complete submission to God as His blameless servants. We bow no knee to evil or to the evil one. Our commitment is solely to the victorious God who will bring us home to celebrate His coming victory over Satan and all that are evil in this world.