

# Christ's Shock Troops For Missions

Revelation 14:1-5

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### Text

14:1 And behold, I saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a sound from the sky, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of loud thunder; and the sound that I heard was like harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they sing a new song before the Throne, and before the four living beings and the elders; and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000, who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 These are the ones not defiled with women, for they are virgins; these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He may go. These were redeemed by Jesus from among men, firstfruits for God and for the Lamb; 5 no lie was found in their mouth, for they are blameless.

### Introduction

Later in the sermon I hope to at least introduce you to the shock troops that God raised up for the first missions blitz after AD 70. And to me, it is astonishing that just one nation would be able to send 144,000 missionaries into the field and to have them so focused on the cause and so dedicated to Christ that Christians began to penetrate every area of life. There have been many other major missions movements in the last 2000 years, but very few match the intensity, number, and dedication of this group until the last two centuries. Today, the total number of missionaries worldwide (and that number includes more than Evangelicals) is estimated to be about 400,000. That gives you a little bit of a comparison of how significant this number is. Interestingly, among Evangelical missionaries, 44,000 come from India. If the Chinese church can get their borders opened, they are poised to send out one hundred thousand missionaries immediately, one million missionaries within two or three decades and with the hopes of giving a tithe of their church, which would amount to over 10 million. And the target of most of these Chinese churches is the Arab world and moving to Jerusalem. Can you imagine the impact on the Arab world and on Israel if they were able to able to raise even 100,000 missionaries? It would be astounding. Perhaps we can pray that God would raise up missionary shock troops in our own generation.

Just to orient you on the place of this chapter in this book, chapters 12-14 form the heart of the book and the central section of the chiasm. And if you

remember how chiasms work, in an ABCDCBA structure, the point of that arrow (the middle section) is the most important part of the book. And all three chapters deal with the invisible battles that occur behind the scenes. Now, for God to showcase these three chapters in this way shows the importance of these chapters. God wants us to know that the invisible world is just as important as the visible world. He does not want us downplaying the importance of spiritual warfare.

So chapter 12 dealt with angel-on-angel warfare. Chapter 13 dealt with angels and demons fighting through human agents in this world's physical battles. And chapter 14 deals with angels helping human missionaries as they carry the Gospel to the far reaches of the globe. We don't often think of the role that angels play in missions, but they do have a role. Verse 6 says, "And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an everlasting gospel to be proclaimed to those who reside on the earth—to every ethnic nation and tribe and language and people." It doesn't say that the angels proclaimed the Gospel, but they had the Gospel that was to be proclaimed. We won't focus on that verse today, but somehow angels are directly involved in the missions efforts of these Jews and of the later Gentile missionaries. In fact, you could label this whole chapter a chapter on missions and/or how God uses His redemptive judgments to advance the cause of Christ in missions.

Was there opposition? Absolutely, yes. This section is surrounded before and behind by chapters dealing with enormous opposition that Satan brought against Christ's missions program. In fact, he had tried to kill the remnant Jewish church, but was not able to; God had preserved them for the past three and a half years. But the beginning of the book promises the total victory of Jesus, and the end of the book showcases what planet earth will look like when the Great Commission is completely fulfilled.

So that's how this section fits into the overall structure of the book. This is a chapter on missions, and by the end of the book, missions will have totally converted the world. The Great Commission will indeed be a success. Every nation will be a disciple of Christ and will be obeying all things that Christ has commanded. It's a glorious future. But these chapters remind us that our conquest of Canaan is not automatic; will require sacrifice, planning, and perseverance.

## **I. This section describes Jewish missionaries**

But we won't get beyond verse 1 today because I want to spend some time dealing with two controversies that have blinded people to both eschatology

and true missions; to both God's promises for the future (that is what eschatology means) as well as the achievability of the Great Commission (which is what true missions is). I find it sad that some commentators are so opposed to God's eschatology for the Jews that they actually teach that the 144,000 are Gentile believers.<sup>1</sup>

So let me begin by asking, "How do I know they were Jewish believers?" And the answer is, "Because chapter 7 has already described these 144,000 for us". That chapter describes the 144,000 as the remnant of the Jewish church. We looked at several undeniable features of their Jewishness in that chapter, and the specific tribes that they came from. There is the tribe of Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, etc. And then it reiterates that he really is talking about Jewish people when he says that the 144,000 are people from "all the tribes of the children of Israel." And it says they are in the land of Israel. I don't know how you could be more clear. The 144,000 are missionaries sent

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1 There are two views that illegitimately insert Gentiles into the 144,000. 1) The first group says that this 144,000 is exclusively Gentile and 2) the second group says that this 144,000 could have Jews and Gentiles but that the figure has nothing to do with literal tribes or a literal Israel but rather represents the whole church of every tribe and nation mentioned in Revelation 7:9-17. Both groups identify the 144,000 of 7:1-8 with the Gentile church of 7:9-17. In my sermon on that chapter I demonstrate how this is not possible. Dusterdiek is representative of the first group when he says, "the one hundred and forty-four thousand in our passage, which, according to ver. 3 sqq., do not appear at all as from Israel... [but rather refers instead to converts] springing from the heathen." Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 391. Here are representatives of the second view: Mounce says that it is "the entire body of the redeemed." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 265. Beale says, "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." 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. For says, "The one hundred and forty-four thousand refer to all Christians as in ch. 7." J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, vol. 38, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 234. Schaff says, "Christians so numbered can hardly be Jewish believers alone, but must be the Church of Christ in its widest extent and final comprehensiveness" Philip Schaff, ed., *The Catholic Epistles and Revelation*, 6th ed., vol. 4, *A Popular Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 76-77. Dusterdiek summarizes Gebhardt's views saying, "Gebhardt emphatically dissents from the limitation of the one hundred and forty-four thousand to converted Israelites: "Neither the Jews in contrast with the Gentiles, nor the Christian Jews in distinction from the Christian Gentiles, but Christians, the true Israelites, whether Jews or Gentiles. The twelve tribes of the children of Israel are therefore identical with the people of God; only the latter are described in O. T. style, or typically, and as a living great organism." "Where the purpose is to confirm Christians in their confidence in God, or to impress on their mind their high dignity, they are represented as the true Israel, as the numbered or chosen one hundred and forty-four thousand." So Philippi (Kirch. Glaubenslehre, iv. iii. 251): "The one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed out of all the tribes of the children of Israel are not only Christians among the Jews, upon which see Calov., Ewald, De Wette, Hengstenb., Klief., etc.; but rather the entire congregation of believers is meant, the true spiritual Israel, who have been preserved from all the plagues to be inflicted on the world." Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 256-257.

out by the remnant church of Israel. I have noticed that there were other men, women, and children who were believers, so I no longer see them as the only survivors.

But I think it is so intriguing that John starts this chapter on missions with a Jewish church and moves towards the re-establishing of a Gentile church. (You see, the Gentile church had almost been wiped out by this time. There needed to be a reboot of the church as a whole.) But just like he did in chapter 7, he starts with the Jews and moves to the Gentiles. And that's the way the book of Acts begins as well. It starts with a Jewish church and moves to the establishing of a Gentile church.

Is there a reason he does this? I believe there is. This is the New Covenant principle that Paul gave in Romans 1:16, where he says that the Gospel is "the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Notice that phrase, "for the Jew first and also for the Greek." This makes some Amillennialists squeamish so they spiritualize these Jews as Gentile Christians. But when you study chapter 7, I do not see how you can possibly interpret the specific tribes of Israel there as Gentiles. They are contrasted with the multitudes that no man can number among the Gentiles. And if the 144,000 are Jews, then Paul's principle of "to the Jew first and also to the Greek" applied not just in the last days of the Old Covenant leading up to AD 70 (when the Old Covenant was definitively ended), but it also continues to apply in the years after AD 70. Remember the context? We have been moving year by year up to AD 70 and beyond in chapter 13, and this just continues that historical progress. So this passage is a great answer to Full Preterism, Amillennialism, and Replacement Theology. It's actually a great answer to Kinism as well.

But it is also a fantastic answer to liberals and Talmudists who claim that the apostle John was an anti-Semite. They claim this because John so clearly shows that Rome's violent war against Israel was God's just judgment against Israel. They say that if that isn't anti-Semitism, what is? But that is ridiculous. Were Ezekiel and Jeremiah anti-Semites because they predicted Babylon's judgment of Israel in their day? No. Obviously not. And it is just as ridiculous to accuse John of anti-Semitism. John himself was a Jew who had been commissioned by the Jewish Jesus to be an apostle to the Jews. His heart's desire was for the Jews salvation. His whole ministry had been wrapped up in that. And we earlier in this book that every book of the Bible was written by a Jew.<sup>2</sup> God had committed His oracles to the Jews. God

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<sup>2</sup> [https://smile.amazon.com/Authorship-Hebrews-American-Commentary-Theology/dp/0805447148/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1507244219&sr=8-](https://smile.amazon.com/Authorship-Hebrews-American-Commentary-Theology/dp/0805447148/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1507244219&sr=8-)

continues to have a plan for every nation of the world, including a Jewish nation. And though he emphasized judgment upon the nation of Israel in this book, He did so because they were his covenant people who had broken covenant with God. With greater privilege comes greater judgment.

Speaking of judgment, Romans 2:9 says, "tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek." So that is why we saw judgment poured out on first century Israel first, and then upon the Roman Empire. But the same is true of evangelism in this book. The Gentile church by this time had been virtually wiped out, and needed to be reestablished. And we saw that two thirds of the Jewish Church was killed according to Zechariah 13. All that were left were the 144,000 Jewish missionaries and an undefined number of women and children. And this sizable Jewish church was preserved during the previous three and a half years. But they were preserved for a purpose - to be missionaries to reestablish the church and take it to the ends of the world. They had the passion for missions that the Chinese church of today has.

But Paul says that there is also blessing that God sends in the same manner. So Romans 2:10 says, "but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

I am emphasizing this because a lot of Preterist and Amillennial literature says that God has no place for the Jews in the New Covenant. These first few verses that take place after AD 70 show that to be absolutely false. This chapter is totally consistent with Romans 9-11 which shows that God will always have a remnant of ethnic Jews being saved in every generation, and that there is coming a day in which the nation of Israel as a whole will be saved. When we get to verse 4, I will talk about that. If this huge crowd was the tiny firstfruits of the Jewish harvest, we can expect a much, much larger harvest of Jews in the future. So even after AD 70 God has a program for Jews within His church, and this group of 144,000 would be the Kamikaze shock troops of missionaries around the world to begin the process of discipling the nations. I believe when Israel gets converted in the future, they will repeat this theme and provide the Kamikaze shock troops once again. Now in terms of the celibacy of these 144,000 I believe they didn't get married because they all knew they were going to be martyrs. Can I prove it? No. But it appears that their sole goal in life was radical missions.

But before I even get to missions I want to give you ammo to oppose the two extreme on this Jewish question. We need to be prepared to oppose a racist

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approach to Jews as well as a Zionist approach to Jews.

## **II. This message about a Jewish remnant is of critical importance to understanding eschatology (v. 1 - ἰδοῦ)**

The first word "behold" clues us into something very, very important that is about to be said. Anywhere in this book that the Greek word ἰδοῦ occurs, we need to pay special attention. Various dictionaries say that the word is a marker for something of critical or central importance or at least something very unusual. Was the raising up of these 144,000 missionaries unusual and important? Yes it was. It illustrates the importance of the Jews in God's program of eschatology and God's program of the Great Commission. Postmillennialism alone preserves this distinctive. It is Postmillennialism alone that sees missions to Jews as a critical part of the eventual conversion of all nations. And it saddens me that so many Postmillennialists are softening on this. But before I get to that extreme, let me deal with the Zionist extreme.

### ***A. It stands as a rebuke to Dispensationalism, which divides between Israel and the church as if they were two separate bodies (vv. 1,4 with Hebrews 12:18-29; Eph. 2:11-3:7; etc)***

Subpoint A says that this passage stands as a rebuke (first of all) to Dispensationalism, which radically divides between Israel and the church as if they were two separate bodies that God saved and two separate bodies that have a totally different destiny in eschatology. Charles Ryrie is perhaps the most famous representative of Dispensationalism today, and if you have his Study Bible, toss it out. I really do recommend that you not introduce his false doctrines into your thinking. Here is his summary statement of the essence of Dispensationalism. He says,

The dispensationalist believes that throughout the ages God is pursuing two distinct purposes: one related to earth with earthly people and earthly objectives involved, which is Judaism; while the other is related to heaven with heavenly people and heavenly objectives involved, which is Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

That is in stark contrast to our own covenant theology, which sees only one saved people from Genesis to Revelation. It is a unity of people. And Covenant theology holds to the whole Bible, so there is a unity of the Bible, a unity of salvation, a unity of God's laws, a unity of purpose, and a unity of destiny. Dispensationalism sees radical disjunctions between Israel and the church on each of those subjects. They do not believe you can apply even

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), p. 45. Ryrie is quoting Chafer approvingly here.

the promises of the Old Testament given to Israel to the church.

Older Dispensationalists were even worse, saying that there were two separate ways to be saved - Jews by law-keeping and the church by grace. Some of those older style Dispensationalists are still spouting this heresy. And it is heresy because it is another Gospel. For example, John Hagee, a very famous and influential pastor in Austin, Texas, says this:

I'm not trying to convert the Jewish people to the Christian faith... In fact, trying to convert Jews is a waste of time. Jews already have a covenant with God and that has never been replaced by Christianity.

In over-reaction to replacement theology, he espouses a totally different works-based-gospel for Jews. He says that they have a different Gospel than we do. That is heresy. He went on to say,

The Jewish people have a relationship to God through the law of God as given through Moses... I believe that every Gentile person can only come to God through the cross of Christ. I believe that every Jewish person who lives in the light of the Torah, which is the word of God, has a relationship with God and will come to redemption.

The law of Moses is sufficient enough to bring a person into the knowledge of God until God gives him a greater revelation. And God has not..

Well, this passage is a rebuke to not only John Hagee's consistent Dispensationalism, but to all forms of Dispensationalism. I want you to notice that these 144,000 Jews have the same sacrificial Lamb that we do in verse 1, Jesus Christ. They have the same Father that we do in verse 1. Where Dispensationalists often believe that Israel was married to the Father and the church is married to Jesus, verse 1 shows the names of both the Father and the Son on their foreheads. In other words, they belong to both. Just like a wife takes on the name of her husband, they have taken the name of Jesus upon them. All believers from Genesis to Revelation belong to both Father and Son. And contrary to Dispensationalists who insist that Jews are restricted to earth and the church is restricted to heaven, these come to the same Mount Zion in heaven that we come to in Hebrews 12. Consistent Dispensationalists deny that; they say that the Jews will be on the earth in the Millennium and beyond and the church will be in heaven. In fact, they claim that Revelation doesn't even talk about the church on earth after Revelation chapter 3.

Notice also that these 144,000 enter into the same worship that the elders of the church enter into in verses 2-3. They have the same redemption that the church does in verse 4. And they follow the Lamb wherever He goes just as the church follows the Lamb wherever He goes. Jesus isn't going in a different direction for Jews than He is for believing Gentiles.

So yes, there is a distinction God makes between Jew and Gentile, but not a



separate destiny, separate body, separate salvation, separate Scriptures, or separate law. Dispensationalism taken to its logical conclusion is heresy. Thankfully most Dispensationists that I know are true believers who love the Lord and are simply deceived. But even the non-heretical Dispensationalism is an escapist theology that has done enormous damage to American culture by withdrawing both Scripture and gospel from politics and most other areas of culture. Their one goal is to save people from the sinking Titanic and not to repair the Titanic. But if God's mandate is to save people and repair the ship, then that is disobedience. Let me give some quotes from famous Dispensationists so that you can see the problem.

Hal Lindsey said, "God sent us to be fishers of men, not to clean up the fishbowl." From his perspective there is no need to oppose abortion because that is cleaning up the fish bowl. He believes our mandate today is to just evangelize. J. Vernon McGee said, "You don't polish brass on a sinking ship." According to him, improving politics is polishing brass on the Titanic. He tell us not to do that. It's a waste of time according to him. Just be involved in saving souls. Wayne House and Tommy Ice said, "God's intent for this age is to 'take out' from among the nations a people for his name, not to convert the nations and make them into Christian republics." And I'm scratching my head and asking, "Isn't that precisely what the Great Commission commands - to disciple all nations?" He goes on: Indeed, any "attempt to establish long-term change in institutions will only result in the leaven of humanism permeating Christianity." He has no confidence that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more, so he withdraws from world. No wonder we are in the mess we are in. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus guaranteed that we would be in this mess that we are currently in if we do what Dispensationists do. He said that when the church ceases to be salt in society, it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trampled under foot of men. What does it mean to be trampled under foot of men? It means that humanism dominates. Humanism dominates because the church has retreated.

In contrast, we will be seeing that this believing remnant of 144,000 Jewish believers would run toward the enemy, and engage culture so much, that early church fathers said that there was not any area of government or any area of culture where you could not find Christians influencing. These were the shock troops who helped to turn planet earth upside down in the years to come.

I was tempted to skip over a couple of pages of material here, but because Dispensationalism is all around us, I think I do need to address this in more

detail. I'll at least look at two more Scriptures with you. The first Scripture is Hebrews 12, and it actually answers an additional question some people have had about verse 1. Verse 1 says, "I saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand." Mount Zion is in heaven, right? So you might be surprised to know that commentaries are hotly divided between the opinion that the 144,000 are on the earth exclusively or that they are in heaven exclusively. Those who say they are on the earth exclusively point to the passages that guarantee that these 144,000 would be preserved from death during this war. And they were. So how could they be in heaven? That would imply they got martyred. Others say that they have to be in heaven because Zion is in heaven, no matter what apparent contradictions that gives to other passages. But the best commentaries say that it is both/and. And they demonstrate this not only by comparing to other parts of Revelation, but they show that this passage is tied point-by-point and verse-by-verse to Hebrews 12:18-29, which explicitly says that the believers on earth that he was writing to had already ... come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We on earth have come to the heavenly Zion. As we move through Revelation 14, we will be returning to that passage more than once, but it not only shows Jew and Gentile to be one body in the church, but it shows that as we come to worship the Lord on the Sabbath, we are caught up to the heavenlies and participate with the heavenlies in their invasion of earth with Christ's mediatorial kingdom. Hebrews says that the Great Commission will shake all things and replace all things with that which is unshakeable.

If you turn with me to Ephesians 2, I will share another passage that overthrows this idea that God has two separate peoples. We Gentiles were grafted into the spiritual Israel. Let's start reading at Ephesians 2:11.

Eph. 2:11 ¶ Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— Eph. 2:12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Eph. 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What have we been brought near to? To the commonwealth of Israel, to the covenants of promise in the Old Testament, and to a common hope. That is what Christ's blood achieved. It grafted us into the Commonwealth of Israel. Continuing to read in verse 14:

Eph. 2:14 ¶ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, Eph. 2:15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, Eph. 2:16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. Eph. 2:17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. Eph. 2:18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Eph. 2:19 ¶ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, Eph. 2:20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, Eph. 2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, Eph. 2:22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

We are fellow citizens of Israel just as much as Rahab and Caleb were. Rahab, Caleb, and thousands of others were formerly Gentiles who became part of Israel. So the bottom line is that God does not have two brides, two vineyards, two temples, etc. No, there is one body, one bride, one vineyard, one Olive Tree, one temple, one people of God. And to misuse a quote from a wedding ceremony, "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." Dispensationalism fights against God when it puts asunder what God has joined. It puts everything asunder and makes different peoples of God, different destinies, different laws, different purposes, etc. Can you see the problem? That's why I encourage you to get rid of the Ryrie Study Bible and the Schofield Study Bible. They have led people astray, and the consequences have been enormous.

I've given you a handout that shows numerous Scriptures that give the same name to the church as it gave to spiritual Israel of the Old Testament. Both are called Israel, Heirs of Salvation, a peculiar or special treasure, a holy nation, a holy people, a special people, a kingdom of priests, saints, household of God, children of promise, seed of Abraham, chosen, Church, assembly, circumcised in heart, general assembly and church of the firstborn, commonwealth of Israel, Sion, God's people, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, the promises, and the fathers. We are both called the bride of God, the temple of God, the vineyard of God, the flock of God, the house of God, Jerusalem, children of Abraham, an olive tree, and a field of God. Hopefully you can see that the evidence is overwhelming that while we can distinguish between Jew and Gentile, we cannot separate Jew and Gentile into separate peoples of God.

And this was a total mystery to first century Jews. It created conflict in every church, and as we saw in Revelation 10, it necessitated prophets in every

church to settle the question of the mystery of Jew and Gentile both being in Israel. Jews were wondering, "How is that possible?" They were used to thinking of Gentiles joining Israel by becoming Jews, but not staying Gentiles. In the Old Covenant they had to leave their Gentileness behind. So they wondered, "How could these New Covenant Gentiles join Israel and still remain uncircumcised Gentiles?" That was the mystery that Ephesians 2 says required prophets to settle. And if you keep reading, you will see it reiterated in chapter 3 of Ephesians. Paul says,

Eph. 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— Eph. 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, Eph. 3:3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, Eph. 3:4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), Eph. 3:5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: Eph. 3:6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, Eph. 3:7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

So back to Revelation, John begins chapter 14 with a "behold" or an ἰδοὺ because he wants us to pay particular attention to this chapter, which once again reiterates the fact that the church has always been Israel and Israel has always been the church, even though the church is composed of both Jew and Gentile.

And by the way, I could have put in the outline that this also stands as a rebuke to Kinism. Kinism makes such a radical separation between cultures that they not only consider intermarriage between men and women of different cultures to be a sin (which is an insult to Moses and his Ethiopian wife), but I have read many who also consider various cultures belonging to the same church to also be a sin. Some have called it Marxism. That is ridiculous. My question to them is, "If there can't be multiple cultures in one church, which church was Timothy supposed to pastor? He was the offspring of a Jew and a Gentile. He didn't have pure genetics of one race." Now, I don't have any problem with people seeking to preserve cultural distinctives. But not radical separation into separate bodies.

***B. It stands as a rebuke to Replacement Theology which says that God no longer has any place for an ethnic distinction of Jew and Gentile within the unity of the church (vv. 1,3,4 with Eph. 2:14-3:7; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 9-11; etc.)***

But this passage also stands as a rebuke to Replacement Theology, which says that God no longer has any place for an ethnic distinction of Jew and

Gentile within the unity of the church. Some do this by saying that Jews no longer exist on planet earth and they hold that current Jews are Khazars and not Jews. Others simply say that once a Jew joins the church, he should shed any identity as a Jew and should no longer identify with any Jewish heritage or culture. Others have gone so far as to say that the Jewish nation committed the unpardonable sin and therefore all Jews are outside the scope of salvation. There are several variations on the theme, but all discount the Jew/Gentile distinction based on the verses I just gave you that show that Jew and Gentile are in one body. You can think of this as an overreaction to Dispensationalism. Their main argument is that since the church is the spiritual Israel (which it is), we cannot recognize any other Israel according to the flesh, and therefore we should not acknowledge any distinction between Jew and Gentile within the church. They say that if every Gentile that gets converted joins the spiritual Israel, then he is just as much a Jew as anyone else in the church, and the distinctions of Jew and Gentile no longer exist. You can sort of see the logic of what they are saying.

But hopefully you can also see the weakness of that argument. To say you can't separate Jew and Gentile in the church does not mean you can't distinguish them. To return to the marriage analogy, husband and wife are one flesh, "What God has joined together, let no one separate." But that doesn't mean you can't distinguish wife from husband. Well, the same is true on this issue. And the fact of the matter is that the New Testament continues to use the distinction of Jews and Gentiles long after people joined the church.

Now it is true that since the church itself is quite separate from the world, the Bible does indeed separate what it calls "unbelieving Jews" (Acts 14:2) from believing Jews (John 8:31; 12:11; Acts 14:1; 16:1; 17:5; 21:20). But there is no separation within the church; only distinctions.

And it is a failure to recognize this distinction between Jew and Gentile that messes up so many people's eschatology. They can't read the word "Israel" in Romans 9-11 without making it unJewish. But the fact of the matter is that Paul explicitly called himself a Jew (Acts 21:39) and "a Jew by nature" (Gal. 2:15). To be a Jew by nature is something ethnic. And he explicitly called Peter a Jew in contrast to Gentile believers (Gal. 2:14). Apollos (Acts 18:24), Aquila (Acts 18:2), Peter (Acts 10:28), and Timothy's mother (Acts 16:1) were all called believing Jews. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, are equal in the church, but it doesn't say that those distinctions no longer exist or he wouldn't call them Jew and Gentile. According to the New Testament there were many cultures in the church -

something Kinists sometimes call Marxist. Again in Romans 10:12 Paul says that there is no spiritual difference between a Jew and a Gentile within the church, but he still calls one a Jew and another a Gentile. Distinction, but not separation.

So the fact that there is only one body, one bride, one people of God does not do away with the racial distinctions that this book talks about. Every tribe, and tongue, and nation will be included in the church eventually. And one of those tribes or nations will call themselves Israel. Isaiah 19 is quite clear about that. It predicts a time when Assyria, Egypt, and Israel will all be 100% converted nations, and will have trade with each other, and will all learn the Hebrew language, and he calls each nation "my people." Not "my peoples" (plural), but my people (singular). Israel will be God's people because it will abandon Talmudism and embrace God's Gospel. And Egypt will be God's people and so will Assyria. Outside of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, the book of Revelation says that Jews are non-Jews spiritually speaking and are no different than Sodom or Egypt spiritually speaking (Rev. 2:9; 3:9; 11:8). But the very fact that he uses the words 'spiritually speaking' shows that he still recognizes a fleshly distinction. And the fact that unbelieving Jews are no better of than Sodom or Egypt shows that they need to be evangelized. And we should support Jewish evangelism. Our family has done so for many decades.

And when it comes to eschatology (in other words God's promises concerning the future), we cannot spiritualize away the term "Israel" in passages like Isaiah 19 and Romans 9-11. It is quite clear that an Israel according to the flesh will get converted and become part of the true church - grafted back into their own olive tree. Jews are declared by Paul to be the natural branches just like Paul called himself "a Jew by nature" (Gal. 2:15). The unbelieving Jews were cut out of the olive tree at the time of Christ and they will be grafted back into the olive tree in the future.

So the bottom line is that we need to avoid Dispensationalism which has a hyper-separation of Israel and the church. And we need to avoid Replacement Theology which obliterates even distinctions. When we get to verse 4 on another Sunday, we will see that John calls the 144,000 a firstfruits. If the conversion of these Jews is a firstfruits, it implies that the full harvest will come later, and all Israel will be saved. But Romans 11 says that Israel's future salvation as a nation will result in a greater fullness of the Gentile nations. There is a pivotal point in the future that will make such stupendous changes in history that it will be likened to life from the dead. I know I have spent a long time on this, but how you understand this chapter

will impact how you understand later chapters in Revelation.

### **III. This message about a Jewish remnant is of critical importance to understanding a theology of missions (v. 1 - ἰδοὺ)**

But the second major thing that this "behold" makes us pay attention to is the critical importance of having a correct theology of missions. Missions is not an optional add-on for the church. Missions is integral to a church's healthy existence. So he says, "Behold!" - pay attention to what I'm going to say in this chapter. Every member of a church and every church should think of itself as a bond-slave of Jesus Christ whose only existence is to serve Jesus. The moment churches begin having purpose statements and goals that are self-serving instead of Christ-serving, they have lost their purpose.

#### ***A. Missions is an activity of Jesus Himself working through His people (v. 1a with Acts 1:1)***

And there are three points that show this. First, the missions of this chapter is the activity of Jesus Himself working through His people. Verse 1 says, "And behold, I saw a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand..." This Lamb will clearly be calling the shots for the church and directing her activities, as is made clear from verse 4, which says in the middle of the verse, "these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He may go."

Note that phrase: they "follow the Lamb wherever He may go." Do you follow the Lamb wherever He may go? If not, why not? It is a failure to follow Christ's call to disciple nations to obey everything in the Bible that has led modern missions to make zero difference in culture. This is the difference between the missions of the 1800s that had a comprehensive Reformed worldview and which turned every culture it touched upside down and the Dispensational missions of the 1900's which won tons of people for heaven, but had almost zero impact upon culture. We need the missions of the 1800's which sought to disciple every square inch of a nation to serve Christ. It elevated the treatment of women, it rid cultures of their idolatries, it abolished Seti and other demonic cultural practices. It was not satisfied with merely winning people to fill the church pews; no it promoted the Lordship of the Lamb over all of life.

And we will be seeing that these verses show Jesus working supernaturally through the church in advancing His kingdom. In verse 6, Jesus sends His

angels to help us in missions. In verses 14-17 Jesus thrusts in His sickle and reaps a huge harvest of souls. He Himself is winning souls. Jesus has promised to be with us to the end of the age, and it is on the basis of that promise that we can take on the huge impossible task of the Great Commission. I'm so glad that this doesn't describe these 144,000 as doing missions by themselves. No, they are with Jesus and follow Jesus. Just as the Glory Cloud led the way in the conquest of Canaan, Jesus leads the way in this new conquest.

Interestingly, Acts 1:1 credits everything that the apostles and other missionaries did in the book of Acts to Jesus when it says that the Gospels are the record of what Jesus "began both to do and teach" whereas Acts records what Jesus continued to do through the church. Missions that is worth the name of missions is the supernatural work of Jesus through His body. If Christ is not living His life through us, our missions will not be successful. And if we are ashamed of any words in His Bible, He will be ashamed of us. We must embrace all that Christ stands for and follow the Lamb wherever He may lead us.

### ***B. Missions is the heavenly kingdom invading earth (v. 1b - Zion)***

Second, missions is the heavenly kingdom invading earth. Commentators point out that when verse 1 speaks of Jesus standing on Mount Zion with His army, it is alluding to Hebrews 12, which has Jesus on His throne in Zion replacing every aspect of culture on earth with His blueprints from heaven. It's an invasion of earth by the kingdom of heaven. Sunday by Sunday God's people on earth come to the heavenly Zion not only to worship, but to receive His strength and His marching orders. Hebrews 12 ends by saying that Jesus,

... speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken [present tense], as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (vv. 25-29)

Missions is not simply winning souls. True missions shakes the entire culture of countries and replaces those cultures with a Christian culture. It drives me crazy that modern missions contextual uses the Gospel so much that it leaves demonic aspects of culture untouched. True missions is a comprehensive conquest of every square inch of planet earth for the crown



rights of King Jesus.

***C. Missions involves both the heavenly Zion and the earthly people who come to Zion (v. 1c with Hebrews 12:18-29)***

And thirdly, missions involves both the heavenly Zion and the earthly people who come to Zion. Chilton and other commentaries point out that when you interpret these verses in light of Hebrews 12, it is clear that both heaven and earth are keenly interested in the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth.<sup>4</sup>

**IV. A brief introduction to the shock troops of missions**

Now I have spent so much time on this introductory material that I will give short shrift to other aspects of them. But let me just very briefly introduce you to a few ideas of why I consider them to be shock troops.

***A. They stand with Christ and thus do not go alone (v. 1)***

Verse 1 shows that they stand with Christ. The word "standing" applies to both Christ and the 144,000. Well, any time that Jesus stands, He is preparing Himself for action. And these men are standing ready for any action that Jesus calls them to. Are we at His disposal? Are we ready to obey His orders no matter what? That attitude is essential for shock troops. They cannot second guess whether the Bible's orders are legit or not. No, they follow.

***B. They are God's precious possession (v. 1)***

Secondly, they wear the name of Jesus and the Father on their foreheads. In the previous chapter the unbelieving Jews were owned by the demonic beast and so they had the name of the beast on their foreheads of right hands. But these believers are owned by Jesus and the Father. God does not want to lose a one of them, so He engraves His name upon them. They are His precious

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<sup>4</sup> Commentators have often been vexed over the question of whether this picture is meant to represent the Church as seen on earth, or the Church as seen at rest, in heaven. It should be obvious that both aspects of the Church are in view here — especially since, as we have seen, the Church on earth is “in heaven” (12:12; 13:6). The famous statement in Hebrews 12:22-23 provides compelling evidence: “You have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels in festal assembly, and to the Church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...” Milton Terry rightly remarks: “The heaven of our apocalyptist is the visional sphere of the glory and triumph of the Church, and no marked distinction is recognized between the saints on earth and those in heaven. They are conceived as one great company, and death is of no account to them. . . . Thus the entire passage serves to illustrate how saints ‘dwelling in heavenly places in Christ Jesus’ are all one in spirit and triumph, no matter what physical locality they may occupy.” For St. John, Zion “is neither in Jerusalem nor above the clouds; it is the whole assembly of the saints, living and departed.” David Chilton, [Days of Vengeance](#), (Forth Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), p. 358.

possession.<sup>5</sup> Do you see yourself as Christ's property to use you as He wishes? Total consecration to Christ is essential to missions. We must see ourselves as bondslaves of Christ.

**C. They have pride in bearing God's name (v. 1)**

And they on their part are not ashamed to identify with Jesus or with God. They boldly and publicly declare themselves to be Christians. They don't erase that name off of their forehead. Obviously it is a symbol that they couldn't erase, but it shows what they gladly embrace. You cannot be successful in missions if you are the least bit ashamed of Christ and His Word. It just will not work. Is there anything connected with Christ and His Word that you are ashamed of? If so, repent and ask the Holy Spirit to give you an unreserved identification with everything that Christ stands for.

**D. Their missions flows out of a heart of worship (vv. 2-3)**

Next, their missions flows from a heart of worship. We see that worship in verses 2-3. We will look at these incredible verses next time, but the worship of heaven has gripped their hearts and they respond by singing their own song.

**E. They have intimacy with Christ and learn from Him (v. 3)**

Fifth, they have intimacy with Christ and learn from Him. Verse 3 says, "and no one was able to learn the song except the 144,000." What a wonderful symbol of intimacy. It is a secret between Christ and them. Psalm 25:14 says, "The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant." So this symbol speaks of a closeness to God. Such closeness gives you an inner strength to be a Kamikaze evangelist.

**F. They know what it means to be redeemed from Satan's kingdom (v. 3,4)**

The next thing they had was a personal appreciation for being redeemed from sin and from hell. Previously these men had been lost sinners headed toward hell and verse 3 says they were "redeemed from the earth" and verse 4 says, "These were redeemed by Jesus from among men." To be redeemed means to be ransomed out of the slave market. They no longer identify with what they were redeemed from. They no longer belong to Satan and their life-goal is to see Satan's kingdom dismantled. To know what you deserved and where you are headed is another characteristic that enabled them to be

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<sup>5</sup> Beale, G. K. *The Book of Revelation, A Commentary on the Greek Text. The New International Greek Testament Commentary.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

such powerful shock troops in missions.

### ***G. They are consecrated to one task and single-eyed for missions (v. 4)***

Verse 4 says, "These are the ones not defiled with women, for they are virgins..." In the Old Covenant, holy soldiers had to abstain from sexual relations when they engaged in holy war (Ex. 19:15; Lev. 15:16; Deut. 20:7; 23:10-11; 1 Sam. 21:4-5; 2 Sam. 11:8-11). It was a consecration to the task. So commentators point out that this at least symbolizes that they were being singled-eyed in following their general. Most commentators don't think they were literally virgins. I do. I don't understand why they struggle with that. It think it is quite clear that they were not married; they were virgins. They sacrificed a legitimate thing for the cause of Christ. This is not a pattern that is mandated in Scripture. It is certainly not a call for a celibate priesthood.

The best I can figure is that they were following Paul's advice during this present trouble and not getting married because they knew that in their line of work it was almost guaranteed that they would soon be martyred. The shock troops of a new offensive very often get mowed down.

### ***H. They have picked up their cross to follow Jesus (v. 4)***

So they had in effect picked up their cross to follow Jesus. Verse 4 says, "these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He may go." Where was Jesus going? He was going back into the land of occupied Israel (verses 6-16). That was one of the worst places to be. And Jesus was going into a harvest of the rest of the planet in chapter 19. Given the descriptions of what was happening in those places, it was almost suicidal to go wherever the Lamb would go. But they were willing.

What makes missionaries be willing to face martyrdom? It is being daily with the Lamb, having intimacy with Him, knowing where we came from and where we are going. It is the certainty that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. When you have their character you will have their boldness.

Jack Vinson was a missionary to China in the years leading up to World War II. He was captured by bandits and eventually shot and beheaded. A witness later described how he had earlier seen Vinson threatened by a bandit with a revolver who said, "I'm going to kill you! Aren't you afraid?" Vinson replied, "No, I am not afraid. If you kill me, I will go right to God." Another missionary by the name of E. H. Hamilton heard of his martyrdom while leaving another bandit infested area, and wrote a poem that has been an

encouragement to many missionaries who have also faced martyrdom. It said,

Afraid? Of what? To feel the spirit's glad release? To pass from pain to perfect peace, The strife and strain of life to cease? Afraid? Of that?

Afraid? Of what? Afraid to see the Saviour's face, To hear His welcome, and to trace, The glory gleam from wounds of grace, Afraid? Of that?

Afraid? Of what? A flash – a crash – a pierced heart; Brief darkness – Light – O Heaven's art! A wound of His a counterpart! Afraid? Of that?

Afraid? Of what? To enter into Heaven's rest, And yet to serve the Master blessed? From service good to service best? Afraid? Of that?

Afraid? Of what? To do by death what life could not – Baptize with blood a stony plot, Till souls shall blossom from the spot? Afraid? Of that?

These are men who have my admiration. I want to be more and more like them. I want to be single-eyed in pleasing the Master. I want my life to count and I want to face death with fearless conviction that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

### ***1. Their testimony matches their life (v. 5)***

And finally, verse 5 says that these shock troops had an inward character that matched their outward life. It says, "no lie was found in their mouth, for they are blameless." Their testimony matched their life. With models of missions like these men, it is no wonder that the church of the first three centuries converted country after country.

Next week we will dig deeper into verses 2-6, but for today let's at least marvel at the beauty and symmetry of God's plans for this world and secondly let's be challenged to be more zealous for the Great Commission. Though we don't have their precise calling, we can learn to pick up our own cross and follow the Lamb wherever He leads us. We will be placing several more discussion questions on the tables for discussion over dinner. But let's close in prayer and thank the Lord of the Harvest that He has been faithful to raise up laborers for the harvest in every age. Amen.