

Revelation 14:1-20. The Song Of The 144,000



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

Supplemental History Of The True, As Distinguished From The Nominal, Reformed Church.

Please read Revelation chapter 14 from your Bible.

THE SERIES of supplemental visions, written as it were on the outside of the Apocalyptic scroll, which we noticed in our Twenty-fifth Lecture as entered upon at the beginning of Rev. 12, is continued to the end of chap. 14. While the Beast, the usurper of Christ's supremacy, had been exalting himself against God and blaspheming, – with clergy and councils aiding and abetting, with Rome for his capital, and the world wondering after him, worshiping him, and receiving his mark – there were all the while in existence, though trampled on and oppressed, another city and another people, the followers of the Lamb, with their Father's name upon their foreheads. They had been, on the commencement of the Apostasy, depicted as the subjects of divine grace, elected out of the symbolic Israel, and sealed as the 144,000. Preserved amongst the judgments of false Christendom, and witnessing against the evils that increased around them, they yet remained indestructible, and were ultimately triumphant. These 144,000 are now again pictured to St. John, presenting a beautiful and animating contrast to the visions of the Anti-christian Beast and his people. While the latter gather around their Romish Babylon and the great Image there set up, and do worship to the work of their own hands, the true Church is represented upon Mount Zion in the presence of the Lamb himself, singing and harping before the throne of God.

We have before observed how that upon the cleansing of the figurative temple at the Reformation and the ascent of the witnesses, a voice of thanksgiving arose from the redeemed and "gave glory to the God of heaven." It was the same occasion and the same song which is here again supplementally described. We have heard how Luther sang it: – "Thou, Jesus, art my righteousness; I am thy sin: thou hast taken on thyself what was mine; thou hast given me what was thine." It was this doctrine of our sinfulness and Christ's righteousness and blood atoning that was introduced, as their very essence, into the ritual and services of the Reformed Churches, and was their distinctive characteristic. Taking then this as the Reformed Church's song, what are we

to understand by there being some who could not "learn it"? Does it not seem to imply that there would still continue that nominal profession, distinct from real religion, which had before the Reformation marked the course of the Church's progress? Let us then test this from the history of the Protestant Churches, from that period to the time of the French Revolution in the end of the eighteenth century.

We pass over Belgium, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, countries where Protestantism was never established, but was expelled as soon as discovered by the Papal weapons of the Inquisition, fire and sword, and we pause for a moment on France. Here the Reformation had been introduced under fair auspices, and Protestants had for more than a century been tolerated and protected. Henry of Navarre, who, after the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, had renounced the Reformed religion, and so procured for himself the crown, had nevertheless, by the well-known Edict of Nantes (A.D. 1598), confirmed to the Protestants, who now formed a third of the kingdom, the utmost security and freedom. But the revocation of this edict in A.D. 1685 by Louis XIV., at the instigation of the Jesuits, withdrew this protection, and exposed them to prison and to death. Forty thousand took refuge in England, while those who remained in France for the most part were obliged to conform to the Romish Church. This persecution did not, however, take place until the religious fervor of the Reformed Church had declined, and it had become in character more of a chivalrous than of a Christian body. But what of the countries where Protestantism had been cradled and established? What of Northern Germany, Denmark, Holland, England, and the Reformed cantons of Switzerland? Alas! in each of these we shall find the predictive clause but too well verified.

Take the case of Germany. Though the protest against Rome was distinct, and though much orthodox religious profession continued, yet real vital piety waxed colder and colder, and there was little of the holding forth in spirit and in act the word of life. So that, when the Thirty Years' War had desolated Germany from 1618 to 1648, and Protestantism itself was periled, it was confessed that the judgment was righteous and well deserved. But no revival took place. Greater energies were developed, but they were the energies of a bold and intellectual spirit, judging of Scripture truth by weak philosophy, and tending to skepticism and apostasy. The neology of the latter half of the eighteenth century was its consequence. Could there be, amongst those who held these views, any understanding of the "new song" of redemption and justification through the Saviour's blood and mediation? Certainly not. The doctrine had been cast off as the creed of a bygone age, and the Gospel itself, its inspiration denied, was considered as a book adapted only for Judaic times, and having but little to do with eternal truth or eternal philosophy.

It has been said that the want of liturgies, and creeds, and church establishments had somewhat to do with this decline of piety on the Continent. But if so, what shall be said of England and England's Church, with her Liturgy and ritual embodying in its services and creeds all the essential doctrines of salvation, and ministered by a regulated and supported clergy? As the eye rests on the two and a half centuries alluded to in a

former sketch – from the time when, under Edward VI., the Reformation was perfected, and the Liturgy, services, and articles were arranged by Cranmer and others – and contemplates the efforts made by Bishop Land to corrupt that ritual by mixing up with its pure worship mysterious Popish rites and ceremonies, then the fanaticism of Cromwell's time, then the skepticism and levity of the laity in the reign of Charles II., and then observes the heartlessness and utter want of spirituality in the century following, specially amongst the clergy; – the inference seems plain that no human means can give real heart-piety. God's Spirit must renew and sanctify the spirit of man, or man's heart and man's systems must fail. Such we infer to be the lesson taught in the vision before us, in that "no man could learn that song but the 144,000 which were redeemed from the earth."

Very many eminent men there were who during this dark period were used by God as instruments to help forward the light of truth and keep alive the fire of true devotion. In Germany, for example, Arndt, Spener, and Franck of the Lutheran Church, besides many in the Moravian body. In England, within the Established Church, Hooker and Kenn, Usher and Hall, Leighton and Beveridge, Hopkins and Walker, Newton and Venn. Amongst the Nonconformists, Baxter and Howe, Watts and Doddridge, Whitfield and Wesley. These with many others, and "of honorable women not a few," stand out in relief as honored by God in the promotion of his glory. America too had its burning and shining lights.

Many more doubtless there were, during these years of comparative darkness, unmarked by any save by the Eye which sees all, of whose character the Scripture gives beautiful testimony; – as to purity of heart and holiness "they are virgins," the Lamb's affianced Bride; as to active, practical, and self-denying conduct, "they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." These, if they did not suffer under the hostility of Popish adversaries, were yet oftentimes compelled to "go without the camp, bearing the reproach" of Christ their Lord. It was probably in contrast to the opprobrium of the world that He that "knoweth them that are his" in this place pointedly marks his approval: – "In their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault, before the throne of God." Their record was on high. But justice has in our days been done to them. We rejoice to think that with numbers their writings are now esteemed and their memory is blessed.

As the eighteenth century advanced the voice of the 144,000 waxed fainter and feebler, and their existence might to the outward eye of man appear a doubtful matter, especially in the Continental countries and churches. In Germany neology ruled supreme; and its Spirit extended to the kindred Churches of Sweden and Denmark. In Holland a torpor that denoted the absence of all spirituality and life was the prevailing character of the Protestant religion. In Switzerland, Socinianism with its paralyzing influence had blighted the true doctrine which Calvin had once so fully confessed and taught.

Thus, though symptoms were not wanting which showed that Popery was becoming aged and reft of much of its former vigor, yet, in case of any new attack upon Gospel truth such as might arise from threatening infidelity, there appeared in the declining state of piety on all sides but little zeal or power to Oppose it either amongst the Protestant or the Romish Churches. In

England almost alone it seemed the salt had not absolutely lost all savor. The light, well-nigh extinct, began to burn brighter; – elsewhere the darkness thickened.

Could it be that the blessed Reformation had ended in failure? If such a doubt had crossed the mind of St. John at this point, the next vision must have dissipated it, when the missionary angel was seen to fly in mid-heaven giving glorious token of revival and triumph to the Church, as also of warning to those who either opposed or still neglected the message.

When our blessed Lord in the synagogue of Nazareth had opened the Bible, he selected the 61st chapter of Isaiah; and when he had read the verse, "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord," he closed the book, and giving it to the minister, he said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled;" announcing himself as the appointed prophet to deliver this message from God. To preach "the day of vengeance" was not his commission: the Gospel he declared "must first be published among all nations." Here then, ere "the end" come, we have the angel commissioned again with the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, and bidding every nation and kindred and tongue and people "fear God and give glory to him." He announces also the startling fact, "the hour of his judgment is come." He claims the reverence due to omnipotence as God's right: – "Worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

This vision, however, as also the two following, are, in this supplementary, or without written series, given only in brief; and each is taken up afterwards in the regular, or within written course, as a separate and distinct occurrence: the former we shall have to notice in a following lecture; the two latter belong to unfulfilled prophecy, and are consequently beyond the scope of our present design. Meanwhile there are words of comfort given to the children of God at the very first announcement of the vial judgments.

The first angel brings with him the Gospel, or glad tidings to all, before pronouncing the woe that must follow its rejection. The second angel announces the speedy fall of Babylon, that enemy and rival of the Christian Church; while a third pronounces woe upon those who still remain in her once the call is gone forth, – even the wine of the wrath of God and fiery destruction; adding, "Here is (or will be shown) the patience of the saints." Here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Before announcing the awful final judgments, another angel or voice from heaven declares, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord;" and the Spirit of God himself gives the encouragement, "They rest from their labors and their works follow them." How terrible, and yet how precious, is the Word of God according as it is addressed to the unbelieving or to the faithful! Like the "pillar of fire," it is a "cloud and darkness to them, but it gives light to these."

Continued in [Revelation 15 And 16:1-12, The Seventh Trumpet, The Vials](#)

All chapters of The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's *Horae Apocalypticae*

- [Revelation 1, 2, 3. St. John in Patmos](#)
 - [Revelation 4, 5. View of Scenery As It Appeared to St. John](#)
 - [Revelation 6:1, 2. The First Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 6:3-8. Second, Third, and Fourth Seals](#)
 - [Revelation 6:9-11. The Fifth Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 6:12-17. The Sixth Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 7:1-8. The Sealing Vision](#)
 - [Revelation 7:9-17. The Palm-Bearing Vision](#)
 - [Revelation 8:1-5. The Seventh Seal](#)
 - [Revelation 8:6-12. The First Four Trumpets](#)
 - [Revelation 8:13. Forewarnings Of Coming Woe](#)
 - [Revelation 9:1-11. The Fifth Trumpet](#)
 - [Revelation 9:12-19. The Sixth Trumpet](#)
 - [Revelation 9:20-21. The Unrepentant State of Western Christendom](#)
 - [Revelation 10:1-3. Intervention Of The Covenant Angel](#)
 - [Revelation 10:1-4. The Epoch Of The Reformation](#)
 - [Revelation 10:5-7. The Angel's Oath](#)
 - [Revelation 10:8-11 And 11:1-2. The Covenant Angel's Commission](#)
 - [Revelation 11:2-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part I](#)
 - [Revelation 11:3-6. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part II](#)
 - [Revelation 11:7-12. Retrospective View Of The Two Witnesses – Part III](#)
 - [Revelation 11:12-14. Ascent Of The Witnesses. Great Earthquake](#)
 - [The British Church Amongst The Witnesses](#)
 - [Revelation 12:1-17. The Great Red Dragon](#)
 - [Revelation 13 And 17. The Beast From The Sea, Etc. The Lamb-like Beast. The Image Of The Beast.](#)
 - [Revelation 14:1-20. The Song Of The 144,000](#)
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- [Revelation 15 And 16:1-12, The Seventh Trumpet, The Vials](#)
 - [Revelation 11:15, 19, And 16:6, 7. The Temple Opened. The Angel With The Everlasting Gospel](#)
 - [Revelation 16:13, 14. The Three Frogs](#)
 - [Revelation 17-22. Concluding Visions](#)
 - [Appendix – The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae](#)