

An Original Song

A Preview of Things to Come – Part I

Revelation 14:1-5

Introduction

A. W. Tozer once wrote,

*I say without qualification, after the sacred scriptures, the next best companion for the soul is sacred music. Sometimes our hearts are strangely stubborn and will not soften or grow tender no matter how much praying we do. It is often found that the reading or singing of a good hymn will melt the ice jam and start the inward affections flowing again.*ⁱ

Frankly, there is no doubt as to the power, motivation, and influence of music – and the world acknowledges it.

An ancient poet once wrote, “I do not care who writes a nation’s laws, if you let me write its songs.”ⁱⁱ

This is the power of music.

I am certain you remember church history well enough to remember the German monk, by the name of Martin Luther, who introduced congregational singing and harmony to replace the morose and monotone chanting of the priests. The German Reformation of the sixteenth century would eventually produce a hymnal, and it was said that one of the most powerful missionaries of the biblical doctrines of this Reformation was this hymnal.

It is no surprise that a Jesuit priest in the sixteenth century complained about the lingering effects of this German monk who effectively began the Reformation. This church leader said, “Luther has damned more people with his hymns than with all his sermons.”ⁱⁱⁱ

We would say, “Liberated,” right?

Five hundred years later, we are still thrilled and motivated as we sing,

A mighty fortress is our God,

A bulwark never failing.

William Carey and his associates labored for years in India in the 1800s without one convert. Over time, they began to realize the power of Hindu music over the hearts of the teeming millions they were trying to reach with the gospel. The missionaries had discovered that the Hindu gurus were constantly

writing short songs for their disciples to sing – songs to the moon and to the river.

As an aside, when I traveled to India on one occasion, I remember hearing hundreds of people singing the same phrase over and over again. I asked an Indian believer what they were singing and he said they were repeating over and over the name of their particular god.

After seven long years of labor, in which Carey wrote that preaching was like trying to plough through solid rock, a young carpenter began to work on their mission home. The missionaries taught him some lyrics they had composed in the Bengali language and set to a simple tune. In English, the lyrics are not necessarily poetic, but they are something like:

Sin confessing, sin forsaking,

Christ’s righteousness embracing,

The soul is free.

The carpenter seemed to catch on.

William Carey and his associates began writing more of their own songs. They would go out in public and literally sing their sermons of original music, often coming home with their faces bloodied because of the rocks thrown at them. The work of missions had become a battle of musicians – and the music of Carey, Marshman, and Ward was making headway.

Their thirty-five year old carpenter – named Krishna, in honor of his Hindu god – made the statement to these missionaries that after years of singing the music of his guru, his spirit still had no peace and his guilt was un-remedied. After seven years with no spiritual fruit, this carpenter for these missionaries gave his heart and life to Jesus Christ. In spite of death threats and people surrounding his house chanting to his former gods, the carpenter made his way to the river and was baptized publicly. He became the first of the now millions of believers in India who trace their heritage back to William Carey – and to lyrics to songs like:

Christ’s righteousness embracing

The soul is free.^{iv}

There is no doubt as to the significance of music in the life of the church and in the life of the individual believer. In the Old Testament, in the New Testament, in the coming Kingdom, and in the new heaven and earth we discover the saints are singing. Mankind knows how to sing and loves music because he was created by a musical Creator God.

God the Father happens to love to sing over His beloved. The prophet Zephaniah wrote,

The Lord your God is in your midst, The Mighty One . . . will rejoice over you with gladness . . . He will rejoice over you with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17 NKJV)

God the Son can sing as well. Matthew 26 records for us the precious moments in the upper room where Christ met with His disciples and ate the Passover meal with them; the same place and time in which Christ provided instruction for our celebration of the Lord's supper, or the communion table, that we follow to this day. Matthew records that at the end of their meal,

. . . they . . . sang a hymn . . . (Matthew 26:30)

Imagine that – God the Father and God the Son sing!

What about God the Spirit? We are told that His very presence produces a desire to sing. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that being filled with the Spirit will lead to the congregation communicating . . .

. . . to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . (Ephesians 5:19)

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit create, compose, and compel singing.

It should come as no surprise to discover singing throughout the book of Revelation.

We have observed in chapter 5, the church raptured, singing praise to God with lyrics we sing even today, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain".

We have also observed in Revelation the hosts of heaven, numbering in the hundreds of millions, singing of God's glory, power, and might.

Having just had revealed to us, in chapters 12 and 13, the forces and faces of evil at work in the Tribulation; the terror of Satan, the dragon, the antichrist, and the false prophet, we might be inclined to wonder if anyone will ever sing again – especially the believer!

At this point in his revelation, the apostle John would know the question which would probably be

asked by his readers would be, "Is anyone going to make it?"

Those who have come to faith in Christ after the rapture of the church are living through awful terror as God's wrath is unleashed on planet Earth. Add to this the vengeful fury of Satan against all who will defy his false messiah. We have already seen the martyred Tribulation believers asking God,

. . . "How long before You avenge the blood of Your children who have been slain?" (Revelation 6:10 paraphrased)

The question could be, "Will there ever be music on Earth again?"

So, God, in His grace, gives John a telescope and allows him to look further down the road at some amazing scenes. In fact, chapters 14 and 15 of Revelation are really nothing more than a preview of things to come over the course of the next few years.

The first thing John sees is something that will happen at the end of the Tribulation. And would you believe – it just so happens to involve music, once again.

144,000

Notice Revelation 14:1.

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

Now, before we listen to them sing, let us get reacquainted with this remarkable group of men – which will have a lot to do with the reason they are singing.

These men were first introduced to us in chapter 7, where we saw God redeem 12,000 Jewish men from each of the tribes of Israel. Every tribe was affected except the tribe of Dan – perhaps, many believe, because the tribe of Dan was uniquely instrumental in leading the Israelites into idolatry – and, as a result, 12,000 were redeemed from the line of Joseph instead. The tribe of Dan will appear later in the book of Revelation with redeemed members praising God.

There is no such thing as the lost tribes of Israel. They are all accounted for and God redeems thousands from these tribes during the opening months of the Tribulation as they respond to the gospel.

- **These 144,000 are redeemed Jews.**

These are not Seventh Day Adventists who believe that worshiping God on Sunday is the mark of the beast and that only those who worship God on Saturday are truly redeemed.

These 144,000 are not Jehovah's Witnesses either.

These are redeemed men who will preach and teach around the world.

They are not chosen ones by aliens in outer space. There are religious groups today that actually believe the 144,000 are chosen by extraterrestrials to continue the human race following the end of the world.

By the way, more and more we will hear about the influence of extraterrestrials having some part in our past or in our future. The idea that the world could explain away the rapture of the church as some kind of alien abduction is not such a strange idea anymore. The theory that millions of people have disappeared because of alien involvement is plausible to most people in our world today.

A Roper Poll taken as far back as 2002, revealed that at that time, 67% of Americans polled believed there were other forms of intelligent life in the universe; 45% believed intelligent life from other worlds had monitored life on earth.^v

I listened recently to one well-known evolutionist and atheist make the suggestion, which he later tried to explain away, that perhaps Earth was seeded with life from aliens.

When people abandon God and deny the Creator, anything is plausible. In fact, any explanation other than God is more desirable.

Paul wrote to the Romans, who, by the way, were surrounded by their own theories of origins apart from a Creator, Sovereign God, and said,

. . . they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of . . . God for an image of . . . man . . .

(Romans 1:21-23)

According to this plain revelation from God, these 144,000 are not chosen by aliens to repopulate the Earth after some cataclysmic event; they are human beings of Jewish kin who will prepare the path for not only a global revival, but the re-gathering of the nation Israel.

When these men were introduced back in chapter 7, and here in chapter 14, you may remember that several things mark these men.

- **Revelation chapter 7 informs that these Jewish evangelists are sealed and marked.**

Notice in chapter 14 verse 1, we are told that this seal is *the name of the Lamb and of the Lamb's Father*.

This is a visible seal, mimicked, of course, by the antichrist who marks all his followers with the number of his name, which we learned totaled the sum of six hundred and sixty six, or 666. His seal will not be able to protect them. His seal is, in reality, marked in washable ink – it will not last.

God's seal, however, on the 144,000 at the beginning of the Tribulation is a mark of divine possession and divine protection. When they are marked back in the beginning of the Tribulation, millions of new Christians will be martyred, as Revelation 7 informs us, from every nation, tribe, people, and language. However, these men will be literally unstoppable. And their ministry will be global.

John Phillips wrote of these men,

No other age has produced a company like this, a veritable army of . . . believers marching unscathed through every form of danger. It has been theirs to defy the dragon, to bait the beast . . . Their calling has been to preach the gospel from the housetops when even to name the name of Christ called for the most dreadful penalties. They have been . . . able to laugh to scorn all the grand inquisitors of hell. They have walked the streets in broad daylight, careless of the teeth-gnashing rage of their would-be . . . assassins, true witnesses . . . in the most terrible era of the history of mankind. The devil knows about this coming band of conquerors, and writhes already in an agony of anticipation.^{vi}

These men are selected by God, sealed by God, and another mark as well.

- **These men are sexually pure for the glory of God.**

They were known for their purity. Notice chapter 14, verse 4.

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. . . .

This verse gave a twisted foundation for the church in the third and fourth centuries to develop the belief that the perpetual state of virginity exalted a Christian to higher levels than those who married. With this, of course, came the belief that Mary remained a virgin, although the gospel account actually gives us the names of the sons born to Mary and Joseph after Jesus was born (Matthew 13). However, the church so glorified celibacy that they believed marriage and the marriage bed was a defiling thing.

The Gnostics, who have always reversed the truth, held that marriage was actually from Satan.

Marcion, a church leader as far back as the second century, who was eventually kicked out for heresy, taught that marriage was corruption. He even set up a church for those who were celibates and from which all others were barred.

This gave rise, of course, to the development of monasteries and convents where people went who were truly devout, believing that marriage was less holy than celibacy. In fact, they believed then, and even to this day, that priests, bishops, and popes must remain undefiled by a woman.^{vii}

When we study church history, we find priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes who sired many children and then, absolved one another from the guilt of their sin.

Celibacy did not create greater purity, it created the potential for greater immorality – of all kinds – as our own generation has discovered all over again.

It is fascinating to discover in church history that one of the things that Martin Luther, the German monk, did when he left the church was find wives for his fellow priests. Martin Luther himself married a nun.

The teaching of the New Testament reveals that marriage is honorable and the writer clearly states,

. . . the marriage bed is . . . undefiled . . .
(Hebrews 13:4)

In fact, the apostle Paul who certainly encouraged singleness due to the persecution and uncertainty facing the church, still likens the union of a husband and wife to an illustration of the . . .

. . . mystery . . . [of] Christ and [His bride] the church. (Ephesians 5:32)

So these 144,000 are kept, not from marriage, but pure from the defiling immorality of their culture and their climate where, under the leadership of the antichrist and with the departure of the church, sexual sin is rampant.

John writes further of them in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 14,

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

We have studied these expressions already when we studied chapter 7.

The question remains, after showing us the depths of Satan's hatred and murder in chapter 12; after showing us the rage and murderous agenda of the antichrist and the false prophet in chapter 13, "Will these specially marked evangelists survive?"

Will God be able to protect these men over the course of seven years of earthquakes, plagues, and pestilence poured out on the Earth by God Himself as He judges the human race (chapter 6).

Will they be protected from the rage of the dragon who is making war against anyone who,

. . . holds to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:17)?

Will these men survive the latter part of the Tribulation when the antichrist forces the world to take his mark on their right hand or forehead, or be killed (Revelation 14:15)?

How could any believer survive? Especially how could the believers survive who are boldly testifying, unapologetically preaching, gospel delivering, Christ exalting? These believers are in double trouble. First, they are Jews and are hated by Satan and the antichrist, and secondly, they are Jews who have converted to Jesus Christ – talk about a target.

Will these believers survive?

Anticipating this question that believers will have as to the sovereign power and control of God, John is about to answer the question, "How many of the 144,000 sealed servants of God make it to the end of the Tribulation alive?"

Notice Revelation chapter 14, verse 1 again.

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand . . .

John writes, "I looked, and behold – would you look at that – the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion and with Him, all 144,000!"

How many survived? The answer is – all of them.

The number is not 143,999 – not even one of them is missing.

While millions of Christians have been martyred; while millions of unbelievers and believers have died in the upheaval of God’s wrath unleashed on the planet, all 144,000 protected preachers of the gospel are alive and well as Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom.

Every parent, every spouse wonders if their loved one will return from Iraq or some war zone alive. They cling to news of their well-being.

In the same way, every wife, every parent, every child related to these evangelists will wonder if daddy is going to survive. They will cling to this verse, saying, “Look, it promises that they will be alive when Christ comes back!”

Notice two more statements about these men.

1. First, the 144,000 men are standing with Christ.

We are told in verse 1 that the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion and these men are standing with Him.

John is given a vision of the end of the Tribulation period, as Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. In fact, chapters 14 and 15 provide something that John has already done in the past – an overview or preview of things to come and then the details. In these chapters, there is another preview of things to come in the latter part of the Tribulation and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on Earth.

Now, just where is Mount Zion?

This can be a reference to heaven, but in this text, John is looking at these men with Christ and they hear a voice from heaven. So they are obviously on Earth.

Mount Zion can also refer to a very special piece of real estate on the planet. In fact, it is the most carefully watched piece of real estate in the world. There are a billion people who would like to own this small piece of property.

Mount Zion was the name of an ancient fortified hill controlled by the Jebusites. In II Samuel chapter 5, David conquered it and took up residence in the fortress at the top. He then built a city around the fortress and it was called either the city of David, or to this day, Jerusalem.^{viii}

The appearance of the Lamb of God descending to Mount Zion is a monumental moment in the redemptive history.^{ix}

John the apostle is given a brief vision of the moment when Christ returns and, in this particular

vision, the Lamb is met by the still living, still serving, still preaching, still following 144,000 Jewish evangelists – they are all still alive.

The very purpose of this chapter’s opening is to inform the believer that the victory of Jesus Christ is not only His but every one of His beloved’s.^x

No one is lost – not even one!

If no one gets lost in the chaos, cruelty, and confusion of the Tribulation, how could anyone ever believe God might lose sight of them?

Here they are, in victory – standing!

This stand of victory has been the subject of singing through the years of the church.

Dudley Tyng was a well-known speaker in the late 1800s. He had just finished speaking to 5,000 young men at the Young Men’s Christian Association that we know today as the YMCA, and 1,000 of them stepped forward to accept the gift of salvation.

That day after preaching, Tyng went back to his farm and decided to go to the barn and watch the men shelling corn. He got a little too close to the machine and his jacket was caught, pulling his arm into the grinding gears and lacerating it beyond repair. With the loss of blood he experienced, in a few hours he would be dead.

His father was there and he reminded Dudley that thousands of people would gather to hear him preach that evening. What did he want said to them? Through strained lips, Dudley’s last words were, “Tell the people to stand up for Jesus Christ.”

That night, the assembly hall was packed with people expecting to hear Dudley preach. However, instead of hearing him preach, they learned of his accident and death. Then, they were given the words of his final message. George Duffield heard these last words and later sat down and composed a poem. It was put to music and we know the hymn as:

Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross;

Lift high His royal banner, it must not suffer loss.

From victory unto victory His army shall He lead,

Till every foe is vanquished and Christ is Lord indeed.

Revelation 14 introduces this amazing message of God’s protection over those He has sealed. Here they all are with the Lamb – standing in victory!

This is a point of encouragement for every Christian in every generation. We have been sealed by the Spirit of God and He will lose not one of us.

Not one will be lost.

John informs us that these men are standing and then, makes a second statement about them.

2. Secondly, the 144,000 men are learning a new song.

Notice Revelation 14:2.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

We are told that this heavenly orchestra and these singers who are about to teach these 144,000 men a new song, are playing harps. I found it interesting that the word for “harp” is the word “kitharodos” (κιθαρῳδοσ).^{xi}

This word happens to be the source of our word “guitar”.^{xii}

It is a Greek word created by the sound of a string being plucked.

“Kithardos . . . kithardos . . . kithardos.”

We have no idea what this will exactly sound like, but it could be several hundred guitarists – and David will be leading them, I am sure. Added to this could be hundreds of harpists and as many string-plucking instruments as we can imagine. This song will be a new song. The four living creatures and the elders are singing in verse 3 – the church is singing – yet we are told that this song is uniquely given to these victorious ones – it is their special song.

It is a new song, more than likely because the experiences of these men in the Tribulation are unique to them. Let us face it, not many of us have walked through the flood and the flame as one of God’s untouchables, right?

How many Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednegos are there? How many Daniels are there who spent the night in the lion’s den?^{xiii}

Just because we are all equally saved and in the body of Christ does not mean that some truth is not especially meaningful to us because of what we have experienced.

When explaining the actions of a forgiven woman who anointed His feet with ointment, the Lord explained her actions by saying that her . . .

. . . love for Him was great because she had been forgiven much (Luke 7:47 paraphrased)

One author wrote of this new song, “These were the only ones who could learn it in the sense that they were the only ones who could appreciate what it expressed. God had purchased them from the earth, not just for salvation, but for their special ministry in the Tribulation.”^{xiv}

The 144,000 are uniquely thrilled and prepared to sing a new song especially composed for them because of God’s faithfulness to their protection and their faithfulness to His calling.

I wonder – what kind of song are you able to sing today – that many around you cannot identify with; the lyrics of which are unique to you?

Perhaps you are like the man who spoke with me a couple of days ago and because of a fresh commitment made to Christ, could identify with the hymn writer who wrote,

All to Jesus I surrender;

All to Him I freely give.

I will ever love and trust Him,

In His presence daily live.

I surrender all.

Or, perhaps you are like the woman who called our church office on Friday and prayed to receive Christ, now identifying with the truth of the old hymn,

Just as I am, without one plea,

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Perhaps you can identify with these lyrics that I was given recently:

The anchor holds, though the ship is battered;

The anchor holds, though the sails are torn;

I have fallen on my knees as I faced the raging seas,

The anchor holds, in spite of the storm.

I have been young, but I am older now

And there has been beauty these eyes have not seen,

But it was in the night, through the storms of my life,

Oh, that's where God proved His love to me.

Or perhaps with fresh trust, you can identify with the writer who wrote a song to his relatives after their youngest son was killed and they had such difficulty getting through it. The song he wrote especially for them was:

*God will make a way,
Where there seems to be no way.
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me.
He will be my guide;
Hold me closely to His side.
With love and strength for each new day,
He will make a way.^{xv}*

What song can you sing today?

Let me encourage you to fold into your life music and singing. You are heading for a future of music, whether you like it or not!

So now – not later – now, add music to your life – sacred music. Add music to your life that will inspire and encourage you to:

- glorify Christ;
- stand for Christ;
- serve Christ;
- wait for Christ;
- love Christ;
- surrender to Christ.

There is coming a day when Christ will come down and stand on Mount Zion. And that moment will be marked by music.

According to everything we are being taught in the book of Revelation:

- There will come a day when we will stand with Christ.
- There will come a day when we will sing with Christ.

Stand for Him now.

Let the singing begin now – in preparation for the coming day when all heaven sings.

Adopt the challenge of the hymn writer who took his lines from the text of Revelation and wrote:

*Come, thou Fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,*

*Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.*

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.*

ⁱ Robert J. Morgan, Nelson's Complete Book of Stories (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 465.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart (Word Publishing, 1998), p. 402.

^{iv} S. Pearce Carey, William Carey (The Wakeman Trust, 1923), p. 195.

^v "Roper Poll on UFOs and Extraterrestrial Life," 2002, <http://scifipedia.scifi.com>.

^{vi} John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 179.

^{vii} William Barclay, The Revelation of John: Volume 2 (Westminster, 1976), p. 106.

^{viii} Daymond R. Duck and Larry Richards, The Book of Revelation (Thomas Nelson, 2006), p. 206.

^{ix} John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 71.

^x Duck and Richards, p. 206.

^{xi} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 843.

^{xii} Life Application Bible Commentary: Revelation (Tyndale, 2000), p. 164.

^{xiii} Sam Gordon, Revelation: Worthy Is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 301.

^{xiv} Tom Constable, "Notes on Revelation," 2008 ed., p. 128, <http://soniclight.com>.

^{xv} Don Moen, "God Will Make a Way," (Integrity's Hosanna Music/ASCAP, © 1990).