

Rev 26-03-25a

Greetings. This is the 25th of March, 2026. We continue our study in the book of Revelation.

We're at the end of chapter 14 and moving into chapter 15 tonight. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for each member of our fellowship, those believers in our periphery, whether here with us in study or in our fellowship that surrounds us on a daily basis.

We're grateful that we can enjoy the opportunities of looking at the world through the eyes of faith and of wisdom and insight that comes from your word. We thank you for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you that we are no longer imprisoned by sin, whether our own or that of others, that which persists in the world or the attacks of the evil one.

We thank you that through our study tonight, we can be better equipped for every good work. We pray that our time of questioning and investigation will be blessed with insight from your Holy Spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We are in Revelation chapter 14. It is so packed with information.

It is hard to leave. There is a lot here to see. We don't want to posthold, but we don't want to miss important things either.

Let's look at the content here. And it is organized chiastically. And this is a great help.

Our experience looking at the way God uses structure is a wonderful key, especially when passages become somewhat difficult. So if you look at this and see the lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 having his father's name written on their foreheads, this group has shown up in the past as we saw. They were sealed before the winds were let loose and judgment came upon the earth.

But there is this sound from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. But they sing this new song before the throne, before the four living creatures and the elders.

No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth. You can't believe the difficulty that these 144,000 individuals have caused for Bible interpreters because of this description that follows. Now, here's your challenge for tonight.

Try this and let's see if we can rise above the ordinary and the usual and gain some insight using the tools that we have acquired in our times of study and fellowship. So watch closely now. This is a tough passage to crack.

I'll read you something about it shortly. But you remember from last time the description of the 144,000 redeemed from the earth in verse 4. Verse 4 is the crux. These are the ones who were

not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Let me read you part of the difficulty from just one commentator. This is the NDSB commentary. William Barclay wrote this particular volume, and this is what it says for Revelation 14.4a. We take this half verse.

These are they who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. Believe it or not, this is a big problem. It is one of the most difficult sayings in the whole of Revelation, and it is of the utmost importance to get its meaning clear.

On this I agree. It is difficult and it's important to get it clear. You say, I'm an American.

I live in challenging times. I've got personal testing. I've got circumstances.

I've got people. I've got relationships. I fight with myself.

I tend to worry. I get distracted. I'm frustrated by what's going on in society and in the nation and in the international situation.

Why should I care about whether or not these 144,000 are virgins or not? Trust me, by the time we finish this, you will see why the Lord Jesus put this before us. Church age believers, this letter is addressed to you and to me for a reason. To miss this is to miss the value, the gift that Jesus is giving us in this book in general and this passage in particular.

So hopefully we have a sense of need. We want to find out what this because it will be helpful to us right here, right now. These 144,000 are living in challenging times, so challenging that they are going to die for their faith.

And as it says in another place, you have not yet resisted sin to the point of blood. So if this truth is something that sustains them, that helps us understand them, it should certainly help us. So, not defiled with women, for they are virgins.

We take this half verse by itself. It is one of the most difficult sayings in the whole of Revelation, and it is of the utmost importance to get its meaning clear. It describes the unsullied purity of those who are in the Lamb, but what is meant by that purity? 1. Does it describe those who in sexual relationships have been pure? That can hardly be the case, for the people in question are described not simply as pure, but as virgins, that is, those who have never known sexual relations at all.

2. Does it describe those who have kept themselves free from spiritual adultery, that is, from all disloyalty to Jesus Christ? Again and again in the Old Testament, we find it said of the people of Israel that they played the whore and went after strange gods. You have this, for example, in

Exodus 34.15, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you, and you eat of his sacrifice. This is the Old Testament archetype for eating meat offered to idols in the New Testament.

So this is tangled up with temple prostitution on the part of these idolaters and false god worshipers and sucking believers into it. So you could imagine that this might be put for some form of compromise in our relationship to God. That is Exodus 34.15. Similarly, Deuteronomy 31.16, the Lord said to Moses, you're going to rest with your fathers, and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake me and break my covenant which I have made with them.

So you can see the metaphorical use of playing the harlot, and especially important here is you would think play the harlot would be talking about women, but of course it is the men who are the decision makers, the patriarchs, the responsible parties in Israel. And so the nation is pictured as playing the harlot and being an unfaithful woman, not a virgin, and not operating within the bounds of marriage, but it is talking about the mixed multitude of people in the nation, men and women. Deuteronomy 31.16. Judges 2.17. Judges 2.17, yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods and bowed down to them.

They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord, they did not do so. Disobedience to the commandments of God is metaphorically pictured as playing the harlot spiritually. Judges 8.27. Gideon made an ephod and set it up in his city, Ophrah, and all Israel played the harlot with it there.

It became a snare to Gideon and to his house. Hosea 9.1. Do not rejoice, O Israel, with joy like other peoples, for you have played the harlot against your God. You have made love for hire on every threshing floor.

Physical infidelity, physical harlotry, certainly non-virginity being put for spiritual fornication, spiritual infidelity. So is that what this describes? These that are virgins that have not defiled themselves with women. Could the women be a reference to back in chapter two and three where we saw the doctrine of Balaam.

Balaam taught Israel to sin by sending the women in there to seduce them. Jezebel, Athaliah, idolatrous women who infiltrated themselves into the company of the faithful and caused them to sin. Maybe that's what is in view.

But the commentator here, and I think there is a lot of traction, which is why I've given you those passages and read them. I think that that is an element in what we're looking at here, but I don't think it fully exhausts it. And I think the passage itself will tell us exactly what it means.

This passage does not read as if it were metaphorical. It doesn't immediately strike you as something similar to playing the harlot spiritually. It says that they've not defiled themselves

with women and they're virgins.

And it just sounds like these are young men who have never done anything with women at all, haven't married them, haven't engaged in fornication or premarital infidelity or whatever. Number three, does it describe those who have remained celibate? This is how the Catholic church takes it. The days soon came when the church glorified virginity and held that the highest Christian life was possible only for those who renounced marriage altogether.

This is where your nuns and your celibate monks come from, is deciding that this sacrifice of normal human relations puts you on a higher spiritual plane, renouncing marriage altogether. The Gnostics said that marriage and generation are from Satan. In the second century, the Christian Gnostic Tatian said marriage is corruption and fornication.

At about the same time, the heretic Marcion set up churches for those who were celibates and from which all others were barred. If you were married or had taken up with anybody, you couldn't even come to that church. Origen voluntarily castrated himself to ensure his own perpetual virginity.

This is taking things to quite the extreme. So there is a record of a Roman trial in AD 304 in which the Christians are described as the people who impose upon silly women and tell them they must not marry and persuade them to adopt a fanciful chastity. This is precisely the attitude that lay behind the creation of monasteries and convents and the implication that everything to do with sex and the body is wrong, which of course is nonsense.

This is far from the teaching of the New Testament. Jesus glorified marriage saying that for this purpose a man leaves his own family and is so closely united to his wife that they are one flesh and warning that what God has joined no one should put asunder. That's Matthew 19 4 through 6. You'll remember in his highest teaching, Paul glorified marriage, likening the relationship of Christ to his church to the relationship between husband and wife.

This is Ephesians 5 22 23. The writer of the Hebrews, Paul says, let marriage be held in honor by all. Hebrews 13 4. That teaching makes it difficult to understand this description of these 144,000 as all being men.

There's not a single woman in all of the 144,000 and none of them have ever been married. None of them have ever touched a woman. They are all virgins.

12,000 from each tribe and this is somehow a qualification to be in that crowd. What sort of application would we make? The more you think about this, the more difficult it becomes and you understand why at the beginning of this section of the commentary they say this is one of the toughest ones in all of Revelation. What then are we to say of our present passage? If we are to treat it honestly, we cannot avoid the conclusion that it praises celibacy and virginity and belittles marriage.

There are two possible explanations. It's possible this is the commentator's conclusion. How is

he going to solve it? I don't agree with either one of his conclusions.

See what you think. Number one, possibly the writer of Revelation did mean to exalt celibacy and virginity. The likelihood is he's writing in about AD 90 when this tendency was already in the church.

If that's the case, we will have to lay this passage on one side because tested by the rest of the New Testament, it is not a correct statement of the Christian ethic. Well, we don't pick and choose which parts of scripture we think we're going to apply or we're going to lay aside. All scripture is God-breathed.

So number one is just write out. Number two, another possible interpretation. When scribes were copying New Testament books, they often added notes and comments in the margin to explain the text.

It may well be that some scribe in later days copying this passage wanted to give his opinion as to who the 144,000 were. Copying into the margin, this means those who never defiled themselves with women and who remained virgins. This is likely since many of the later scribes were monks.

When the manuscript was recopied, the comment in the margin was included in the text. However, we've got many early copies of Revelation. None of them have any trouble in this portion.

All of them say exactly the same thing. It's not troubled. It's not watered down.

It's not changed in any existing text. So this is wishful thinking. So what is your conclusion? You look at this and there are some things that we know.

The Apostle John is the inspired writer. He set this down. He observed these 144,000 via the vision that was given to him by God Himself.

What he saw is true. What are we to make of this? Well, as I hinted earlier, you already have in your toolkit the means of unlocking this passage. When God puts structure into a passage, what's one of His favorite things to use? It is the chiasm, right? So I say, if I'm having trouble with this passage, maybe I should look for a chiasm.

If you remember, this entire chapter 14, starting at verse 6, is a beautiful menorah. The Lord Jesus Christ at the center, three another angels at the beginning, and three another angels afterward, right? So we know there is structure in this passage. We say, well, if God was going to give me a clue via structure, maybe He would use a chiasm.

So let's see if we can look at these 144,000 individuals chiastically. Now, I think the clue is that they are described and they sing a new song in verse 3. They're before the throne, before the living creatures and the elders. No one can learn that song except the 144,000 who were

redeemed from the earth.

That is their introduction. That is their uniqueness. They are special in some way.

They sing a song only they can sing. That is their introduction. That is the title of what is to follow.

So I put this at the top. This song is sung by 144k, 144,000 redeemed from the earth. I write this down at the top of my page in my notes.

It's 144k redeemed from the earth. It's critical to their description and it is going to occur again. So underline redeemed, underline earth.

This is our title. Now we're going to get what I consider to be a beautiful and very helpful for interpretation, chiasm. So on your top line, which is going to be furthest out to the left, you know, you're going to start indenting toward the right so you can see your chiasm.

So on your first line, what is our first description? Verse four, these are the ones who are not defiled with women. So I put that on my first line, not defiled with women. That's the first line.

There are many ways you can be defiled with women, but there is a special description of these individuals that we're going to indent and put on line two. They are virgins. This is where we really start struggling to understand what's going on here.

So virgins, we indent that and put that as number two. You with me so far? These redeemed 144,000, first thing we know about them, they're not defiled with women. So that would include married men, whatever, conceivably married women.

But secondly, virgins, well, that cuts everybody that's married right out. If you take things at first blush. So that's the second line.

Thirdly, what does it tell us in verse four? These are the ones who follow the lamb wherever he goes. Notice the first line. These are the ones who the third line, these are the ones who they follow the lamb wherever he goes.

So we've got three increasingly indented lines. Now we come and I'll just tell you to save you having to count and figure it out because I had to do this twice in the center. What does it say? These are redeemed from among men.

They are redeemed from among men. I am encouraged that this is the center of my chiasm because that was also in the title. The title said redeemed from the earth.

Here they are redeemed from among men. Very helpful. I feel like I'm on the right track.

Now I'm ready to start coming back out on my chiasm. What does it say after redeemed from among men? It says they are first roots to God and the lamb. So this is going to come directly

underneath follow the lamb wherever he goes.

Lamb and lamb. That's also helpful to see the symmetry. See what I mean? So after first fruits to God and to the lamb in verse five in their mouth is found no deceit.

This is going to fall directly under interestingly virgins. It corresponds with virgins. In their mouth there is no deceit.

And then finally for they are without fault before the throne of God and that comes directly under not defiled with women. If you're not defiled you're without fault, right? Now how helpful is this in seeing how these lines inform, interpret, and describe each other? So what does it mean to not be defiled with women in this metaphor? It means that these latter lines are the description. This is the interpretation of these more difficult figures.

God knew it would confuse us so he gives us the key via the chiasm. So what does it mean to not be defiled with women? They are without fault before God's throne. God finds no fault in their behavior.

Whatever that may be. It could be marital behavior. It could be their conduct in any number of areas to include not being swayed or deceived into idolatry or into compromise or into infidelity of any kind.

Generally if you're defiled by women you have broken a covenant of some kind. If you're married and you defile yourself with women you have committed adultery. If you're unmarried but you will one day be married and you defile yourself with the opposite gender you are sinning against your future relationship.

You are not operating in hope and confidence that you should be just as faithful to this future person before you meet them as you intend to be after you meet them. Just as important. Haven't met him yet, still going to be faithful because God tells me they're coming.

They're in my future. God tells me I should be chaste. I should be a person in which there is no deceit, no defilement, no corruption, no base self-gratification.

I want to be faultless before the throne. We have a hymn. One of the lines is, faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ the solid rock I stand. Faultless to stand before the throne. This verse reflects that.

So now we come to the equally difficult. They are virgins. Well, virgins corresponds to in their mouth there is no deceit.

If you look at the outside bracket you would say that this is holiness. It is sanctification. The Lord Jesus gave himself for the church that he might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Holy and without blemish. Without fault. Spotless.

We commit faults. We err and come short again and again. How is it that we can be without spot or wrinkle? Holy and without blemish.

We confess our sins. It doesn't mean these 144,000 are perfect. That they never sin and never will.

They understand how to cleanse themselves. How to wash their robes in the blood of the lamb. And they maintain a general climate in their life of spotlessness.

Of dedication. So not defiled with women. Without fault before the throne.

This is sanctification. Faultless. Not defiled.

The next one virgins. In their mouth is no deceit. Both of these speak of purity.

We saw and have seen many times the passages about the tongue. The tongue is a fire. Oh what a great forest a little flame can kindle.

It's set on fire by the flames of hell. If a man can bridle his tongue he can bring his whole body into submission. So if in their mouth there is no deceit, no guile, this is purity.

It reflects purity. What is the single most suggestive adjective for a virgin? Purity. Not spoiled.

Not sullied. Not compromised. Purity.

So our outside bracket, sanctification. This is forgiveness and cleansing. The next bracket in, it is purity.

They are not defiled with women because they are virgins. They are pure because they are sanctified. You see the progression here.

Sanctification in the outside bracket leads to purity. They are virgins. Then your next and most bracket, they follow the lamb wherever he goes.

Corresponds with they are first fruits to God and the lamb. How would you characterize that? What adjective would you use? Dedication. Dedicated.

Purposeful. They have a strong sense of direction and attachment. Isn't this what we would love to have in all of our relationships, our marriage, our family, our close friendships, our one another contact is sanctification, purity, and dedication.

That's what characterizes these 144,000 in the midst of all of the maelstrom and the chaos and the wrath of man and the wrath of God that pertains on the earth during this period. They have not forgotten the basics. It's the same basics you and I are to live by.

If we mess up, confess your sins. God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse from all unrighteousness so that we can be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Holy and without blemish.

Sanctified. Therefore, pure and able to act in purity and in keeping with purity. And what is the purpose of that sanctification and purity? Dedication.

It's not just for my own self-esteem. It's not to impress others. It isn't to avoid trouble.

I am dedicated. They follow the lamb wherever he goes because they are dedicated to him exclusively. And they are firstfruits.

The firstfruits offering was a dedication of the entire harvest to God, right? So dedication. And at the center, this is what defines or should define the redeemed. And they are not just redeemed in an abstract sense.

It says they are redeemed in the title from the earth. And at the center of the chiasm, they are redeemed from men, separated out, made unique and special from the large milling throng of humanity from among men on the earth. These are exceptional.

They are distinct. They are sanctified. They are purified.

They are dedicated. And they are the redeemed. All of this done by the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power and purpose of God the Father.

Now, what do you think about the 144,000 who have not defiled themselves with women, but are virgins who follow the lamb wherever he goes? They are the redeemed. They are the firstfruits to God and to the lamb. Because in the age of Israel, these are the first Old Testament saints, if you will, who look at the completed work of Christ as history and are Old Testament saints dedicated to the lamb.

This is the first group. They are the firstfruits. The rest of Israel will follow when they are raised on day one of the millennial kingdom and will look upon him whom they pierced and will accept him as their Messiah, which the generation to whom he first appeared did not.

So, I submit this to you as the key that unlocks the beauty and the application value of this portion of Revelation chapter 14. We are going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we are going to move forward through the two reapings, the two harvests, and Lord willing, move into chapter 15.

Let's pause here and take our break.