

The Lamb on Mount Zion (1)*

Ralph Green

REVELATION 14 opens with a joyful symbolic picture of a lamb standing on Mount Zion together with 144,000 having the Father's Name written on their foreheads. A lamb is mentioned twenty-eight times in Revelation, and refers, of course, to the Lord Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith", as Hebrews 12:2 puts it. The theme of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is central to the outworking of God's plan of redemption, and is presented many times in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

This sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus, achieved by his crucifixion on Calvary's cross, is clearly stated and defined in such passages in Revelation as, "To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (1:5,6).

In chapter 5 we have the scene of four living creatures and twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb in worship and rejoicing, and singing the new song, "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (vv. 9,10). What a lovely song!

There can be no doubt that those who are described as rejoicing in their redemption accomplished by the shed blood of the Lamb are the same group referred to as standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion in chapter 14.

Mount Zion

The name Zion, which means 'fortress', occurs over 100 times in the Old Testament with reference to the city of Jerusalem. It is usually used in connection with the religious aspects of the nation's activities. The psalmists and prophets who loved their religion used the term Zion rather than Jerusalem. One example is Psalm 48:1-3: "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. Beautiful in

elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge".

Another example is Isaiah 62:1,2: "For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name". Here both the names Zion and Jerusalem are used. The name Jerusalem means 'possession of peace', but sadly there have been more wars in and around that city than in any other city in the world. It is clear, however, from this passage that God is most anxious to see the fulfilment of His purpose, in which Zion will be the place where wonderful developments will be enacted. Later in this same chapter we read, "Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.'" And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken" (vv. 11,12).

How comforting this remarkable flow of gracious promises must have sounded in the ears of Isaiah's readers! The destiny of God's people is to be all-glorious. God has even sworn with an oath that these things will surely come to pass. The key role to be played by the Lord Jesus can be discerned in many of these phrases. "Surely your salvation is coming" speaks of Jesus as "the Saviour of the world" (Jno. 4:42). "His reward is with him" speaks of the eternal life that Jesus will bestow on his faithful servants when he returns; "his work before him" speaks of the judgement and the establishment of the Kingdom of God; "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD" refers to those who have followed the Divine way

* Quotations from the Revised Authorised Version.

in their lives and are with Jesus in his Kingdom, portrayed in vision as the 144,000 standing with him on Mount Zion.

It might be argued that the future glories of God's people described in these phrases apply initially to the mortal population of Israel. But they should also have an application to the spiritually developed members of the nation who will finally emerge as constituents of the holy nation, made "all glorious within" (Ps. 45:13) with immortality.

The 144,000

We have already assumed that the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion constitute the redeemed, the whole body of acceptable men and women who have been given the wonderful gift of immortality. This understanding is confirmed in Revelation 14:3, which speaks of the singers of "a new song" as "the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth".

The question arises, Is the number 144,000 to be taken literally or is it symbolic? Bearing in mind that the 144,000 constitute the kings and priests of the future age, and that the world population at the present time is over 6,000,000,000, such a number as 144,000 does not seem adequate, because the ratio would be just 1:40,000.

This question can be resolved by referring to chapter 7, where the number 144,000 is used again in connection with the sealing of the servants of God out of "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (v. 4). However, this is followed by another vision of the redeemed, who are said to have "come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v. 14). Of these it is said, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (vv. 9,10).

A symbolic number

Clearly this vision of a great multitude, clothed in white robes, is also of the redeemed, so numerous no one could number them. In this vision no symbolic number is given, nor any literal number either. We may be sure there will be as many redeemed as God will require for His purpose of supervising the affairs of His Kingdom when

the time comes. We conclude, therefore, that the number 144,000 is symbolic. If this is the case, what does it signify?

In Revelation 7:4-8 it is divided between the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, 12,000 to each tribe. The number 144 occurs with reference to the wall of the symbolic city that is described in Revelation 21 (v. 17). (144 is, of course, the square of twelve.) In the description of this holy city, identified as "the bride, the Lamb's wife" (v. 9), we are informed that it had twelve gates, with twelve angels and the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and twelve foundations, on which were the names of the twelve apostles; and also we are told that the city measured 12,000 furlongs (vv. 12-16).

One cannot help noticing the emphasis placed here on the number twelve, the square root of 144. It is possible, then, that the redeemed are given the number 144,000 because they have originated in Old Testament times largely from the faithful among the Jews, the twelve tribes of Israel, and in New Testament times from believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was preached by the twelve apostles. If this explains the symbolic number 144, the increase to 144,000 could have been made to indicate that the redeemed really are a great multitude.

The Father's Name

These redeemed ones are said to have "his Father's name written on their foreheads" (14:1). The Father's Name is representative of who and what He is, which comprehends His power, His righteousness and also His glory, in the sense of His mercy and longsuffering, attributes of His loving character.

This name written on their foreheads indicates that this multitude have learned and understood the grand purpose and majesty of the Father and have been lovingly adopted into his Divine family. His revealed purpose has been eagerly embraced and stored up in their minds and affection. They have followed the same path as their great example, the Lord Jesus, who in this sense had said, "I and my Father are one" (Jno. 10:30).

It means, too, that these redeemed have already been judged at the judgement seat and been made immortal; made like the angels and the Lord Jesus, who now is alive for evermore. All the saints, because of their understanding of the Truth, their faith in it, having acted upon it, have been able to look forward to this rewarding future, "when this corruptible has put on incor-

ruption, and this mortal has put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:54).

This happy destiny is reserved for all those who have been faithful and have overcome the hindrances of the flesh. A promise to this effect was made by the Lord Jesus in his letter to the church in Philadelphia: “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him

the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of the heaven from my God. And I will write on him my new name” (Rev. 3:12). Or, to state the promise in more literal terms, it would be, “He who overcomes in the battle for holiness, I will make a leader in the immortal community which God has foreordained, because he has developed a character like his Father’s and like mine”.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

Out of the earth

News from the world of archaeology

Tony Benson

Has the tomb of Jesus’ family been discovered?

AT THE END of the previous [“Out of the earth”](#) article I mentioned recent claims that the tomb of Jesus and his family has been discovered in Jerusalem (Mar. 2007, p. 87). We now take a closer look at this claim, which has been much hyped in the media.

The claim surfaced in a documentary called *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, presented on television’s Discovery Channel in early March. A book of the same title was published by HarperSanFrancisco. The director is an Israeli-born Canadian-based documentary maker, Simcha Jacobovici, an observant Jew, and the producer is James Cameron, famed for producing the film *Titanic*. The documentary is apparently brilliantly done, with dramatic reconstructions of events and state-of-the-art graphics, and with Jacobovici himself taking a prominent role. There is, however, little or no support amongst archaeologists for the claims made in the film.

The story centres round the discovery of a first-century-A.D. tomb in the south Jerusalem suburb of East Talpiot. It was uncovered in 1980 during building work, remained rather incongruously in the middle of a housing estate and has now been sealed to keep visitors away. Within the cave were discovered ten ossuaries, stone boxes used for storing the bones of bodies once the flesh had rotted away. Ossuaries were inscribed with the name of the person whose bones were stored inside, and it is the particular set of names on these ossuaries that are alleged to prove that the tomb was the tomb of the family of Jesus. (Six of the ten ossuaries have names on them.)

When the tomb was discovered it was hastily cleared to allow building work to continue, the bones were re-buried by the religious authorities, the details were recorded and the ossuaries stored in the warehouse of the Israel Antiquities Authority. The possible significance of the names and the tomb has been noted before, in a BBC documentary and a *Sunday Times* article ten years ago. Jacobovici

became aware of the ossuaries when working on a documentary several years ago about the ossuary with ‘James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus’ on the side, condemned by the Israel Antiquities Authority and many experts as a forgery but still accepted by others as genuine.

The names on the six ossuaries are as follows:

- Jesus son of Joseph
- Mary
- Matia, apparently a diminutive of Matthew
- Jose
- Mariamne e Mara
- Judah son of Jesus.

The Bible believer will immediately realise that these ossuaries cannot have anything to do with Jesus Christ because he left his tomb alive. Also, he was the Son of God not the son of Joseph and did not have a son. However, since unbelievers will use this supposed discovery to cast doubt on Scripture, and since Jacobovici claims that the odds on this being the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth are very high, we must look at the claim more closely.

Firstly, we consider the names. The first two clearly can be linked