

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God  
IN CHRIST JESUS.**  
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

#03-09147

## ***The 144,000 First Fruits to God #4***

August 9, 2009

**(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. ... (4) 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 [Lambkin].** (Revelation 14:1, 4 NASB [CV])

This is the eighth and last point of this series, and it deals with the meaning of first fruits to God and to the Lambkin.

First, I must go back to what I wrote previously, that it is possible the 144,000 first fruits is not a literal number. The fact that the number is a multiple of 12 and the number 12 signifies *governmental perfection* could indicate that the number 144,000 is meant to signify a spiritual truth rather than an exact or literal number. However, upon further reflection, I realize that a spiritual truth and a literal number are not mutually exclusive. For example, if we are to accept that the 1,000-year reign of Christ is signifying both a spiritual truth (six days and on the seventh; one day is like a 1,000 years) and a literal number of years, then it only follows that we could view the 144,000 or the 288,000 as a literal number as well. Besides, in Revelation 7, John saw a “great multitude” standing before the throne **after** he heard that the 144,000 were sealed, which indicates that the 144,000, at the very least, is a multitude but not a “great” multitude.

Regardless of how one views this question, there is one undeniable fact: the 144,000 represents a smaller complement of believers (perhaps, a multitude) that precedes a great multitude in reaching the throne. The 144,000 represents a special class of believers called **first fruits**, which leads to the topic of this issue.

First fruits refer to the first of a crop to be harvested. It is the first to come forth or to be harvested of its kind. In the Old Testament, first fruits are first mentioned in Exodus in association with the feasts that Israel was required to celebrate.

**“Also you shall observe the Feast of the Harvest of the first fruits of your labors from what you sow in the field; also the Feast of the Ingathering at the end of the year when you gather in the fruit of your labors from the field.”** (Exodus 23:16 NASB)

When it comes to the New Testament, we discover that first fruits refer to people. Instead of crops in a field in the world, we see a new kind of crop in the field, which is the world; it is a crop of people. In the parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens (Matthew 13), the Lord Jesus referred to the field as the world and the good seed sown by the Son of Man on the good soil as the sons of the kingdom that are harvested at the end of the age (Matthew 13:23, 37-43). Which age He referred to is an interesting topic unto itself that, perhaps, I will take up in a subsequent issue. Nevertheless, the point is that the Lord is after sons of the kingdom, and they are described as growing in a field.

Turning to Paul’s writings, we discover that Christ is the first fruit of His kind.

**(20) But now hath Christ been raised from among the dead,— a first fruit of them who have fallen asleep; (21) for since indeed through a man came death through a man also cometh the raising of the dead; (22) for just as in Adam all die so also in the Christ shall all be made alive.** (1 Corinthians 15:20-22 REB)

Jesus is the first Man to be raised from among the dead in an immortal body. He alone possesses immortality (1 Timothy 6:16). He is the Resurrection and the Life, and because of His resurrection, all mankind one day, but not all on or in the same day, will be made alive in Him. So, Christ stands apart

from all mankind at this point in time. He is the first fruit of His kind (first fruits) that soon will be harvested to the glory of God the Father. We need to keep in mind that 1 Corinthians 15 is a defense of the resurrection, not only of Christ but of the first fruits to follow, until ultimately all mankind is resurrected.

**(23) But each in his own rank** [*tagma*; troop]: **(the) first-fruits, Christ** [first fruits anointed]; **then those that are the Christ's at his coming. (24) Then the end, when he gives up the kingdom to him who is God and Father; when he shall have annulled all rule and all authority and power.** (1 Corinthians 15:23-24 DNT [added by writer])

In the Greek, the word for *rank* is *tagma*, which refers to “something orderly in arrangement (a troop), that is, (figuratively) a series or succession:- order.” In other words, for the purpose of harvesting, mankind is divided into troops, and every person will be resurrected by troop. Simply, all will not be made alive at the same time but each in his or her own order, class, or troop.

At first glance of verse 23, it might appear as if Paul repeats the fact that Christ is the first in the order, but it seems that *each in his own rank* refers back to *in the Christ shall all be made alive*, which means it refers to all mankind that die, not to Christ Himself. Paul already had established Christ's unique position, and he began to take up all mankind that will follow Christ in resurrection. As such, using the term *first fruits*, Paul could have been referring to a new troop of people and not to Christ alone.

In the New Testament, the word *christos*, which means “anointed,” is translated as *Christ* or *Messiah*, referring to Jesus. However, is it possible that the ones to follow Christ in the order of resurrection could be called the **first fruits anointed troop** (or, anointed first fruits)? After all, there will be a group of believers that will be counted worthy to attain to the oncoming eon to reign with Christ; they are sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:34-36) and the only ones to come alive (first resurrection) while the rest remain dead, awaiting the second resurrection and the Great White Throne (Resurrection 20:4-6; 11-15). Surely, they will be first fruits of the resurrection, and they will be anointed to reign with Christ.

As further support of this thought, in the same Corinthians letter, Paul refers to the body of Christ as **the Christ** or, if you will, **the Anointed** (1 Corinthians 12:12). Thus, Paul's use of the phrase *first fruits anointed* identifies this troop with Christ in a very intimate way, and as such, they will be the first to appear before Him and to be changed into His likeness. I do not believe that this troop includes all the “church” but is limited to the conquerors as represented by the 144,000. They must be resurrected first so that the rest may follow, which is a requirement of the law of first fruits.

First fruits are essential in the work of God. According to the law of first fruits, the first fruits must be offered to God before the harvest can begin (Leviticus 23:14). In fact, because the anointed first fruits are holy, the rest to follow will also be holy. The work of the first fruits is to make the way for the Lord by preparing the rest to enter into His presence. Again, Paul explains the process.

**For, if the first-fruits [are] holy, then the mass [is] also: and if the root is holy, then also the branches.** (Romans 11:16 MNT)

The first fruits must be manifested before the rest of the “church” and, ultimately, mankind are harvested. This is revealed in Revelation 14 with the manifestation of the 144,000, followed by the eonian gospel going forth throughout the earth until “the harvest of the earth is ripe” (Revelation 14:15), and concluding with the actual harvest of the wheat and the grapes. Consequently, troops or classes of people are raised in order, the first being first fruits, which is similar to a barley harvest, the first of the grains to be harvested, followed by a more general harvest of the “church,” which is similar to a wheat harvest, and concluding with the final harvest of all that is left (i.e., the nations), which is the grape harvest.

In conclusion, the ones standing with the Lambkin on Mount Zion are the holy ones, the ones found worthy to reign with Christ and to lead the rest of the “church” and mankind into the kingdom of Christ, until all are holy. Like all that will follow, they are purchased from among men by the blood of Christ. They are the first fruits to God and to the Lambkin. They are not the last but simply the first of a glorious harvest that will come until, ultimately, all mankind bows the knee to Christ.