

Firstfruits in the Bible: Meaning and Key Scriptures

Meaning of Firstfruits

Hebrew: 'Re'shith' (רֵאשִׁית) means the beginning, chief part, or first and best portion. Another related Hebrew term is 'Bikkurim' (בִּכּוּרִים), meaning first ripe fruits or first produce. In the Old Testament, firstfruits referred to the earliest and best portion of a harvest dedicated to God as an acknowledgment that all provision comes from Him.

Greek: 'Aparche' (ἀπαρχή) means firstfruits, first portion, or the first offering dedicated to God. In the New Testament, the term is used both literally and figuratively for believers and especially for Christ as the first to rise from the dead, guaranteeing the future resurrection of His people.

Key Old Testament References

- Exodus 23:19; 34:26: Israel was commanded to bring the firstfruits of the land to the Lord.
- Leviticus 23:9-14: The Feast of Firstfruits required the first sheaf of harvest to be presented before God.
- Numbers 18:12-13: The best firstfruits of grain, wine, and oil were given to the priests.
- Deuteronomy 26:1-11: Worshipers presented firstfruits with a confession of God's faithfulness.
- Proverbs 3:9-10: God's people are instructed to honor the Lord with their firstfruits.
- Nehemiah 10:35-37: The returned exiles renewed their commitment to bring firstfruits to the temple.
- Numbers 15:17-21: The first portion of dough was to be offered as a contribution to the Lord.
- Leviticus 2:14-16: Firstfruits of grain were offered as roasted heads of new grain with oil and frankincense.
- Leviticus 23:15-21: The Feast of Weeks included an offering of new grain, continuing the firstfruits theme.
- Numbers 28:26: The Day of Firstfruits marked the presentation of a new grain offering at the Feast of Weeks.
- 2 Kings 4:42: A man brought bread of the firstfruits to Elisha, showing the practice beyond the law's instructions.
- Ezekiel 44:30: The best of all firstfruits was to belong to the priests, so blessing would rest on the household.

Key New Testament References

- Romans 8:23: Believers possess the firstfruits of the Spirit, a foretaste of future redemption.
- Romans 11:16: The firstfruits are used as a metaphor for a consecrated portion representing the whole.
- Romans 16:5: Epaenetus is called the firstfruits of converts in a region.
- 1 Corinthians 15:20-23: Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, guaranteeing future resurrection.
- 1 Corinthians 16:15: The household of Stephanas is described as firstfruits in Achaia.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13: Some translations describe believers as chosen as firstfruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.
- Hebrews 12:23: The church of the firstborn points to a consecrated people belonging to God, closely related to the firstfruits idea.
- Revelation 1:5: Jesus is called the firstborn from the dead, a related resurrection title that parallels Christ as firstfruits.
- Colossians 1:18: Christ is called the firstborn from the dead, emphasizing His supremacy and priority in resurrection.
- James 1:18: Believers are described as a kind of firstfruits of God's creation.
- Revelation 14:4: The redeemed are called the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

Qualities of the Firstfruits, the 144,000, and the First Resurrection

Scripture presents firstfruits as the first, best, and consecrated portion set apart for God. They are not ordinary leftovers, but offerings marked by priority, purity, dedication, and ownership by the Lord. In the Old Testament, firstfruits expressed faith that the whole harvest belonged to God and that future blessing depended on Him. In the New Testament, this idea deepens into a spiritual picture of people who belong wholly to God, are formed by His truth, and serve as a sign of a greater harvest yet to come. This background helps explain why Revelation 14:4 is so important in identifying the 144,000 as firstfruits.

Revelation 14:1-5 describes the 144,000 as standing with the Lamb, bearing the Father's name, following the Lamb wherever He goes, being redeemed from among humanity, and standing before God in purity and faithfulness. These qualities match the biblical meaning of firstfruits: they are set apart, consecrated, and especially identified as belonging to God and to the Lamb. Most importantly, Revelation 14:4 says they are "being the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." In many Bible editions, the word "being" appears in italics, showing that it was supplied by the translators for readability and is not found in the original Greek text. Therefore, when the supplied word is removed, the statement is even more direct: the 144,000 are "the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." The verse is not merely saying that they are like firstfruits; it identifies them as the firstfruits themselves.

This direct identification matters because firstfruits represent the first portion of a harvest presented to God before the rest of the harvest is gathered. The firstfruits are not the entire

harvest, but they are the beginning, the consecrated portion, and the pledge that a fuller harvest will follow. In the same way, the 144,000 are presented as a specially redeemed company, separated from the world, devoted to the Lamb, and offered to God as the first portion of a greater redemptive harvest.

For this reason, the description of the 144,000 as firstfruits supports the understanding that they are connected with the first resurrection. Just as the firstfruits offering came before the full harvest, the 144,000 may be understood as the first resurrection —the first resurrection harvest presented to God and to the Lamb. Their qualities in Revelation 14 are therefore not separate from their title as firstfruits; those qualities help show why they are set apart as the first portion belonging to God.

This interpretation fits the larger biblical pattern in which firstfruits point to resurrection, consecration, and the beginning of a greater work of redemption. Revelation 14:4 does not simply give the 144,000 an honorary title; it places them within the biblical harvest pattern as the first portion raised, redeemed, and dedicated to God before the fuller harvest that follows. In this way, the qualities of the 144,000, their identification as firstfruits, and the doctrine of the first resurrection work together as one connected theme.

Biblical Significance

Throughout Scripture, firstfruits symbolize giving God the first and best, expressing gratitude, faith, trust, and consecration. The Old Testament practice pointed to God's ownership of the harvest and His promise of blessing, while the New Testament expands the concept to resurrection and redemption. Christ is the ultimate firstfruits, guaranteeing the future resurrection of those who belong to Him. Revelation 14:4 carries this same theme forward by identifying the 144,000 as "the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb." Because the supplied word "being" is not part of the original text, the statement directly identifies the 144,000 as firstfruits. Their purity, faithfulness, redemption, and devotion to the Lamb show why they are set apart as the first portion of God's harvest. In this way, the biblical idea of firstfruits reaches a focused conclusion in Revelation 14: the 144,000 are presented as the first resurrection, dedicated to God and to the Lamb before the fuller harvest that follows.