

Revelation 14



Reprise: the 144,000

(Rev 14 7-5 NIV) Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. (3) And they were singing in new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. (4) These are those who do not defile themselves with women, for they hate themselves such. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. (5) No one was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

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We've had a flashback; we now begin a "flash forward." The tense in the Greek indicates this clearly (aorist). We are seeing the final triumph -- and seeing it as a warning of what is yet to come. Take heed.

It surprises me somewhat that all the commentaries I have seen indicate that there is some question as to whether or not these are the same 144,000 as before -- and all of them agree that they are. I would point out two characteristics:

- He has not lost one -- it's the same number, through all the trials.
- The Lamb is in their midst -- the characteristic of the saints.

The 144,000 have the name of the Father on their foreheads (hence Jehovah's Witnesses as a name). This could mean

- ownership -- for He bought them (I label my tools).
- loyalty -- for they have shown it (I know my students).
- dependence -- for we are completely dependent upon him (my kids, my name).
- safety -- just as American citizens used to be able to depend upon their government to come to their aid; just as Paul was "a Roman born," so the saints may see their safety in the Name.

The song itself is unmistakable, though there is some debate about the harpers. The song shows forth

- power (do we not sing of the power of praise?)
- unmistakableness. The song belongs to the redeemed; you cannot mistake the real thing.
- the harp implies a melodious soothing (little David, play), which may signify grace.

The harpers? Again, different time zones: they are the redeemed, but from when?

The question of "virgins" again sparks much debate. Virtually all commentators (with the exception of Smith, who is the most literal of futurists) take this to be spiritual virginity (see 2 Corinthians 11:2).

Mt. Zion, too, can be literal (usually the futurists, seeing a vision of the return of Christ) or spiritual (see Hebrews 12:22-23). Depending upon your timetable, this is either in heaven or on earth, therefore.

Finally, these are "first fruits." Futurists generally hold this to be a fulfillment of Paul's prophecy in Romans (speaking of the Jews):

(Rom 11:15-16 NIV) For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? {16} If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

The poetic interpretation has much to say here -- for first fruits are well known to the Old Testament.

- First fruits were considered to be the best -- and therefore to be sacrificed to God. ("Give of your best to the Master.")
- There were no lies in them.
- Like the sacrifices of the Old Testament, they were "without blemish"
- And -- most important in this context -- first fruits are the symbols of the harvest to follow.

Fear God

(Rev 14:6-7 NIV) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. [7] He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

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The inescapable reference here is to **Matthew 24:14**:

(Mat 24:14 NIV) And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Before we take the more exact meaning, there is much we must extract from these two verses:

- The Gospel is “everlasting” -- which I believe eliminates the possibility of the end of grace.
- Why, then, this warning? Because the Gospel is a two edged sword: when proclaimed, it obliges a decision. God is now about to oblige all of mankind to the decision for Christ.

Fear God: there is an obvious point here: fear God, for the judgment is finally upon you. There are two possible ways to look at this:

- It may be a call to wise up. Look at Solomon’s last warning in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.
- It may be a call to confession and repentance, as in Joshua 7:19 (Aachen).

Worship: God is to be worshiped, to be sure. The reason given in this context is interesting: He is creator. It is as if to say that the rightful owner of the planet is coming to claim his own (see the parable of the vineyard, Mark 12:1-9).

Historicist: all see this as a great revival before the fall of Babylon (Rome)

Futurist: all see this as a literal angel proclaiming the Gospel McGee (1962) sees this as an angel broadcasting from a satellite television station, for example.

Take your choice: the symbolic or literal interpretation. The time frame determines what you can have.

This is the first of six angels in this section -- and great are the woes thereof.

Fallen is Babylon the Great

(Rev 14:8 NIV) A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

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It is important to note that there is no paragraph marking in the original. The judgment of the first angel is now pronounced on “Babylon” -- indeed, the Greek verb has a tense here, the prophetic(?) aorist, which implies “future fact.” (We see this all the time in English, signs which say “Future home of First Megalithic Church”).

Babylon: All commentators agree on this: Babylon is Rome. This is made clear in chapters 17 and 18. It is more than that, however. We can look at the Old Testament Babylon, now destroyed, and see some parallels:

- Babylon is a huge empire; so is Rome (in any view)
- It is always viewed as Satan’s throne.
- It is related to Babel, or confusion.
- It persecuted the people of God, destroying the Temple.
- It carried Israel, the people of God, into captivity -- it enslaved them.

All these are, in the historicist view, characteristics of the Roman Catholic Church. There is one more point:

Babylon fell in a single night. Hal Lindsey makes this out as one more thermonuclear exchange.

Adultery = Idolatry: Throughout the Old Testament, God refers to the people of Israel as his “wife.” Idolatry, the worship of false gods, is frequently referred to as “adultery.” Please note:

- Adultery applies only to the married. Whatever this passage means, it applies to those who claim to have a relationship to the Living God. We are not talking about Hindus here.
- As such, in this age, we must (as Talbot, a futurist, put it) be speaking of “false and corrupt forms of Christianity.”

To the historicist, of course, this is the Roman Catholic church. The idols are the plaster saints; the idolatry is the worship of saints and particularly the Virgin Mary.

Warning

(Rev 14:9-12 NIV) A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on the forehead or on the hand, (10) he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. (11) And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." (12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

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(The artwork is by Hieronymus Bosch, early 15th century)

How to go to Hell: There are two things given here:

- Worship the beast (remember who this is?)
- Receive the mark

There is one key lesson here: there is no neutral position with regard to God. For us / against us, that's how He has it. For the historicist, this should be troubling, for it means that most Roman Catholics --- if not all -- are going to Hell.

Wine: this wine is a figure of the wrath of God, his righteous anger.

- It is full strength -- not diluted by mercy, hope or even love.
- The cup of wrath is a figure of judgment -- first on Israel (Isa 51:17, after which she repented) and then on the world. The people of God are purified by God's wrath; they repent. The world does not. This just might be the best way to tell the difference.

Torment: There are three things to note about this torment:

- It is done in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. The tormented will know who He is, and what they have done.
- It will last forever. Isaiah foresaw this as applying to Edom (the land of Esau, the type of the worldly) in Isaiah 34:8-10.
- There will be no "break periods." Your mother told you there was no rest for the wicked. Now you know where she got the idea. How these phrases bite into the consciousness of the English language!

The saints reaction to this should be patient endurance, obedience and faithfulness. Our usual reaction is quite different. We ask, "How can a loving God send people to Hell?" Most of the words on Hell itself come from our Lord. Perhaps the answer is this (discussion point): God did show his love to them -- on the Cross. They rejected it.

Blessed are the dead...

Rev 14:13 NIV) Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."



For the first time since the second chapter, John is commanded to “write.” It is a point of emphasis: the verse is short, but we are not supposed to miss it.

Dying in the Lord: what does that mean? It means that we were faithful *to the end*. Even if that end is martyrdom.

The key is the reward. So many of us feel that we should not expect to be rewarded for good works -- but our Lord has a different opinion:

(Heb 11:6 NIV) And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

See the point? He knows we need motivation; he is also just (or fair, as we would put it). He will reward us.

Doctrine: would someone tell me how we can retain the doctrine of purgatory in the face of this verse? I can’t justify it.

Futurists see this as during the Great Tribulation. Some interesting interpretations have been added here: McGee sees this as a time when one would prefer to die (in the Lord) rather than live. Talbot states that martyrs during this time go to heaven (those converted during the Tribulation stay on earth during the Millennium). This latter seems unjustified by the text, to me.

Historicists see this as being after the Reformation, and take it as (following the previous verses) as the reward for those who make the right choice.

Grapes of Wrath

(Rev. 14:20-20:15) I bowed and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of grapes in his hand and a sharp sickle in his hand. (1) Then another angel came out of the temple and carried a bowl of fire to him who was sitting on the cloud. "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." (2) So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. (3) Another angel came out of the temple, holding a sickle like a sharp sickle. (4) Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and poured his fire on him who had the grapes. (5) "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." (6) The angel swung his sickle and gathered the grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. (7) The wine was pressed in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridle for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

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(Mat 13:24-30 NIV) Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. {25} But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. {26} When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. {27} "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' {28} "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' {29} "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. {30} Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

Consider these questions:

Who reaps? On the one hand, there is Jesus Christ; opposite, is an angel.

What are their characteristics? Jesus is identified because he sits on a cloud (re: the Ascension, and how He will return) and has a crown. The angel has no such distinction. He is, however, also called out of the Temple -- implying the harvest is commanded by the Father.

Who calls them? Both are called by an angel -- but the second is called by an angel who has charge of the fire, the common symbol of wrath and judgment.

What do they reap? Jesus reaps a "harvest"; the angel reaps grapes -- in a passage in which the wine of wrath is prominent.

The results: The harvest by Jesus is now uncommented. The angel's harvest, however, produces a river of blood 1600 furlongs long. This can be seen as the length of Palestine, or (symbolically) 4x4x10x10 -- implying in either event a complete judgment. Some futurists see this as a literal amount of blood (see the sixth seal for the number of bodies required). Christ Himself treads the winepress, according to Isaiah 63:1-6. And the city? All agree: Jerusalem.

This is the battle of Armageddon, seen in flash forward.