



Revelation - Chapter Fourteen

V. Revelation 12:1-14:20 - The cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Fourteen

John saw the Lamb with the 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. They were redeemed as the first fruits for God and they were seen as blameless. Then he saw an angel who said to those on earth: 'Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come'. Then a second angel said 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'. A third angel said, 'Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb'.

Then John saw one like a Son of Man seated on a white cloud, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. Another angel came out and called with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud to reap the harvest of the earth and throw it into the wine press of the wrath of God.

V.d Revelation 14:1-5 - The Lamb and the 144,000

The two parts of this chapter, vv.1-5 and vv.6-20, are unified by the fact that first fruits imply a harvest. In the OT every firstborn, human or animal, belonged to the Lord (Exodus 13:2), so the first fruits, or initial yield of every crop, were set aside as a sacrificial offering to God, e.g. Leviticus 2:9-14 and Nehemiah 10:35-37. God's portion of the harvest was given in advance of the main crop being brought in.

In the NT the term 'first fruits' is used as a metaphor for something given in advance, anticipating a greater benefit or harvest to come. This can be the resurrection of Jesus anticipating the resurrection of believers (1 Corinthians 15:23); the Spirit as a gift from God pointing to future resurrection (Romans 8:23); the first converts in a particular region holding out the promise of more converts

to come (Romans 16:5 and 1 Corinthians 16:15); or born again Christians offering hope for the rebirth of God's creation (James 1:18).

John's second vision of the 144,000 as first fruits, first seen in 7:1-8, interprets the seal they had received and the protection it provided.

¹ Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion! And with him were one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Revelation 14:1

Mount Zion. Fulfilling Psalm 2:6 <<*I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill*>>, the Lamb stands in glory on God's holy hill in heaven: <<*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering*>> (Hebrews 12:22), accompanied by the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. The two beasts are nowhere to be seen in this earthly location, where King David had built the city of God: <<*Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, which is now the city of David*>> (2 Samuel 5:7).

The seal on their foreheads, refer to the comments made on 13:16-17, is the name of the Lamb and of his Father, a token of possession and protection by God, promised to every conqueror in the spiritual war (3:12). This is in contrast to those who wore the mark of the beast (13:10). Most dispensationalists see these 144,000 as the same group mentioned in 7:4, that is, Jewish believers who have trusted in Christ as their Messiah during the great tribulation. Others believe it is representative of the uncountable great multitude that belongs to Christ, i.e. the church throughout the ages.

² And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder; the voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, ³ and they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.

Revelation 14:2-3

The singers with their harps will reappear beside the sea of glass (15:2-4); their song indicates that they have been redeemed. The sound of their harps and voices descends from heaven like a waterfall's thundering cascades, i.e. the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, as they sing before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders (4:2-8 and 7:9-12).

Because they are redeemed, there is reason to believe that redemption will be the theme of their song. The only new song mentioned before in Revelation was that of the four living creatures and the elders in heaven, and it was a song of redemption: <<*They sing a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation; you have*>>

made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God, and they will reign on earth>> (Revelation 5:9b-10).

The new song celebrates God's triumph over sin through the Lamb, just as the Lord's prior victories were celebrated in new songs: *<<O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth>>* (Psalm 96:1), *<<O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. His right hand and his holy arm have gained him victory>>* (Psalm 98:1), and: *<<I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you>>* (Psalm 144:9). Their song belongs only to those who have experienced the Lamb's redemption: *<<O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south>>* (Psalm 107:1-3), into whose salvation *<<angels long to look>>* (1 Peter 1:12b). This is another indication that one hundred forty-four thousand should not be taken as a literal number; they represent those who have been redeemed; refer to the comments made on 7:1-17 and 7:4-8.

⁴ It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, ⁵ and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

Revelation 14:4-5

It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. This is a passage that has caused concern for both women and married men. If taken literally then it would seem to suggest that only men who remain celibate are truly of value to God. However, becoming defiled with women should be read in light of Babylon being *<<the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations>>* (17:5b), and any association with her as being spiritual defilement. It does not denigrate women nor is it a call for life-long celibacy, but is in line with Paul's longing for the whole church: *<<I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin to Christ>>* (2 Corinthians 11:2). The spiritual purity of those who bear the Lamb's name is symbolised by the sexual self-denial that consecrated Israel for the wars that God commanded: *<<When you are encamped against your enemies you shall guard against any impropriety. If one of you becomes unclean because of a nocturnal emission, then he shall go outside the camp; he must not come within the camp. When evening comes, he shall wash himself with water, and when the sun has set, he may come back into the camp>>* (Deuteronomy 23:9-11), and: *<<David answered the priest, 'Indeed, women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?>>* (1 Samuel 21:5). Although portrayed as celibate males, the 144,000 signify believers of both sexes who, dying in faith, are gathered as first fruits for God, foreshadowing a greater harvest.

That these follow the Lamb wherever he goes is a phrase combining the ideals of martyrdom and military allegiance. The true church will do whatever is required of

them to ensure that the Gospel is lived out and not just discussed behind the closed doors of a church building on a Sunday morning.

In their mouth no lie was found. God had always looked for his people to be honest: <<*Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit*>> (Psalm 32:2 NIV), and: <<*For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord – the remnant of Israel; they shall do no wrong and utter no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouths. Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid*>> (Zephaniah 3:12-13). As stated elsewhere in the book, the church must not include those who falsely claim to be Jews, prophets or apostles, nor those who falsely teach in order to disrupt the work of the church. True believers are called to resemble Jesus, the blameless servant of the Lord: <<*They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth*>> (Isaiah 53:9).

V.e Revelation 14:6-13 - The Messages of the Three Angels

Three angels announce the hour of God's judgment, the fall of Babylon, and the eternal punishment of the beast's worshippers. This section, along with the next section with its four angels, forms another of the sequences of seven in John's visions. Like the judgments introduced by the trumpets, it is the work of seven angels, but this time only the first three are numbered.

⁶ Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation and tribe and language and people. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgement has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.'

Revelation 14:6-7

The flying angel proclaims an eternal gospel. Its command that every nation and tribe and language and people are to fear, give glory to, and worship God the creator, that is, him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water, means that the long-awaited reign of God and his Christ is about to be consummated (11:15-18).

This eternal gospel is not good news in the way that the Gospel is normally understood, which may seem strange as it is the only time the noun is used in this book. It does not mention Jesus or redemption, and seems to be more aligned to the woes of the eagle that also flew overhead. The eternal gospel is perhaps best understood on the analogy of Jesus' own proclamation of the Kingdom of God in Mark 1:15, which has two parts: an announcement: <<*the kingdom of God has come near*>>, and a command: <<*repent*>>. John's eternal gospel has the same two parts, but in reverse order; first a command: Fear God and give him glory, and then an announcement: for the hour of his judgment has come. The announcement of God's judgment is equivalent to one aspect of the announcement of God's Kingdom, for the coming of the Kingdom involves judgment as well as salvation. The very word eternal is probably linked to the absence of anything

explicitly Christian about the angel's message. There is something almost contradictory about the terms eternal and gospel. The Christian Gospel by definition is new good news, implying that God has done a new thing in the world by sending Jesus as its Saviour. Eternal, on the other hand, refers to that which has always been true.

To fear God and give him glory is a call for those who believe in him to stand in reverential awe: <<*O fear the Lord, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want*>> (Psalm 34:9); while for those who choose not to come before God in repentance need to fear him all the more.

⁸ Then another angel, a second, followed, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.'

Revelation 14:8

Another angel announces that Babylon is fallen echoing: <<*Look, there they come, riders, horsemen in pairs!*>> Then he responded, '*Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the images of her gods lie shattered on the ground*'>> (Isaiah 21:9), before Babylon even appears in the narrative (16:19 and 17:1-18). Just as ancient Babylon had carried Judah into captivity, so in John's day Rome was the pagan power with dominion <<*over the kings of the earth*>> (17:18b) that oppressed Christ's people (17:6). Yet Revelation's Babylon transcends Rome, since its fall awaits the end of history (15:1 and 16:17-19).

She has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. Babylon the great prostitute represents society's allure of material prosperity and pleasure, seducing the unwary into adultery against the Lord.

⁹ Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, 'Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, ¹⁰ they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name.'

Revelation 14:9-11

A third angel announces that the beast's worshippers, like the prostitute Babylon (16:19), will drink the wine of God's wrath and endure constant torment in eternal restlessness. God had also given this command through his prophet: <<*For thus the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: Take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath, and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it*>> (Jeremiah 25:15). The warning is intensified with the qualification that it will be poured unmixed into the cup of his anger.

They will be tormented with fire and sulphur. Although the language of these verses has contributed mightily to traditional Christian images of hell, it is difficult to say whether or not hell, as commonly understood, is in view here. Why, for example, is the torment going on in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb, thus apparently in heaven itself? The announcement seems related to a celebration of Babylon's doom five chapters later: <<*Hallelujah! The smoke goes up from her for ever and ever*>> (19:3). That celebration too goes on in heaven (19:1). Probably both scenes are momentary previews of hell and hell's finality in the lake of fire, not the reality itself.

The smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever shows that hell is eternal, and that the wicked are not annihilated and put out of existence at death.

There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name. Both those who explicitly follow Satan and those who just simply ignore the call to repent and turn to God to give him the glory he deserves will face an unending punishment for their apostasy.

¹² Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus. ¹³ And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them.'

Revelation 14:12-13

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus. This is virtually a repeat of what was said in 12:10 and provides a clear contrast between those who will remain faithful to God and those who will choose the beast.

I heard a voice from heaven saying. The series of angels flying overhead is abruptly interrupted by a voice from the same direction. This voice, like the prophetic appeal preceding it, is directed to Christian readers. It is addressed to John first and commands him to write this.

Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord is Revelation's second of seven benedictions. Refer to the supplementary material on the website. Many commentators believe it is a clear reference to those who are martyred in the Great Tribulation, whereas others take to mean those who remain faithful to Christ until their deaths, whether natural, accidental or violent.

The Spirit promises that the saints, who heed God's call to endurance, keeping God's commandments and who hold fast to the faith of Jesus, will be blessed at death with rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them. The situation recalls the fifth seal (6:11), where the souls of the martyrs were told to wait, literally rest, until their number was complete. In both passages those who die as martyrs are said to be at rest, in contrast to the worshippers of the beast, for whom there is no rest day or night forever.

The time-honoured custom of reading this text at funerals suggests that the prophetic announcement could apply not just to martyrs in the strict sense of the word but to all Christian believers. Nothing much is said in the book of Revelation about natural death from sickness, accident or old age. Because there was so much violence in the society in which the book was written, the emphasis is almost entirely on persecution and martyrdom. Yet if any text in the book is applicable to natural death, this one is.

V.f Revelation 14:14-20 - Reaping the Earth's Harvest

The judgment that was ceremoniously announced by three angels (vv.6-12), and punctuated with a voice from heaven (v.13), is now carried out by four more angels (vv.14-20). The earth itself is harvested first (vv.14-16), and finally the earth's inhabitants (vv.17-20). Only as the judgment is actually carried out is it explicitly defined as a harvest.

Although both harvests could signify either God's judgment on the wicked or Christ's gathering of his saints, probably the grain harvest shows the Son of Man's gathering of believers: **<<Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn>>** (Matthew 13:30), and the grape harvest envisions the bloody destruction of the wicked. This is confirmed by the Lord's gathering of nations in the valley of judgment because the harvest is ready for reaping: **<<Let the nations rouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the neighbouring nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great>>** (Joel 3:12-13).

¹⁴ Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand!

Revelation 14:14

One like the Son of Man, seated on the cloud and wearing a golden crown is thought by some to be Jesus, the Lord of the harvest, as described in Daniel 7:13-14 NIV and Revelation 1:7. He came first as Gospel sower: **<<He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man">>** (Matthew 13:37), but will finally return as the just reaper. However, many translate this passage as 'one like a son of man'. Also, the reader needs to take note that he does not send the angels out but takes orders from them, which does not fit with the authority that has been given to Jesus to judge all things.

A better interpretation is that both these angels, the last four, in fact, are functionally equivalent to Jesus in that what they accomplish is what he accomplishes: the judgment of the world. This is signalled by the description of the first figure seated on a white cloud, as John will later see Christ seated on a white horse (19:11), and God seated on a white throne (20:11), settings in which they will execute judgment.

¹⁵ Another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, 'Use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.'¹⁶ So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Revelation 14:15-16

The cry of the next angel, who came out of the temple, use your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is fully ripe, echoes the announcement that the time for God's judgment had come (v.7). The only difference is that now it is addressed not to humans facing the judgment, for it is too late for them, but to the messenger about to carry it out. The messenger quickly does what he is told. Still sitting on the cloud, he swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped or harvested.

The harvest of the earth refers to wheat or barley, for ripe, Greek *xērainō*, which means 'to dry up' or 'to be ripe', is a different word from that used of ripe grapes in v.18, and generally describes dried heads of grain. Christ's harvest, of which the martyrs were first fruits (v.4), is gathered safely into his barns: <<*His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire*>> (Matthew 3:12).

¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.¹⁸ Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.'¹⁹ So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.²⁰ And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles.

Revelation 14:17-20

Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. As before, one angel commands while the other carries out the instruction. The harvest that now ensues is far more graphic and terrible than the earth harvest so briefly described in vv.15-16. It is a destructive harvest carried out in fire and blood. The angel commanding it is the angel who has authority over fire. Here, as in the earlier vision, destructive judgment comes, ironically, from the altar in heaven, the place of mercy and the focus of Christian worship.

The vintage of the earth is literally the vine of the earth, but not the true vine: <<*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit*>> (John 15:1-2). This is not the pruning of fruitless

branches but the destruction of a wild vine. God had once asked his created beings through his prophets: <<*What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?*>> (Isaiah 5:4), and: <<*Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?*>> (Jeremiah 2:21). Throughout human history there has always been the opportunity for people to turn to their creator, yet so many choose not to and are here paying the price.

The second harvest involves not only cutting grape clusters from the vine but also crushing them in God's wine press. Trodden translates Greek *pateō*, rendered 'trample' in 11:2. The Lord will trample nations that have trampled God's holy city, as Isaiah had foretold: <<*'Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?' 'It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save.'* *'Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?' 'I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come. I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain me; so my own arm brought me victory, and my wrath sustained me. I trampled down peoples in my anger, I crushed them in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth'*>> (Isaiah 63:1-6).

Their blood is shed outside the city, probably Jerusalem: <<*Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood*>> (Hebrews 13:12), where all defiled things belong: <<*But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life*>> (Revelation 21:27). So great are the numbers of those who have opposed God and therefore so great the slaughter that blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles.