The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 14**

* **14:1-5– The Blameless Disciples of The Lamb**
  + The first 5 verses of chapter 14 anticipate the glorious, conquering victory of Christ over the beast(s) and its followers of chapter 13. Those that follow the Lamb understand that while this victory is not yet consummated, its guarantee on behalf of Christ’s death and resurrection assures their place in the kingdom with Him.
  + **Verse 1**– John sees the true Lamb (cf. 5:6) standing on “Mount Zion.” The term Zion or “Mount Zion” occurs numerous times in the OT and it typically refers to the same general idea: **God among His people/God dwelling with man** (Psa. 9:11; 135:21; Isa. 8:18).
  + Zion is often interchangeable with Jerusalem since God dwelt there in the temple (2 Sam. 5:7; 1 Kings 8:1; Jer. 51:24; Lam. 1:4). Zion is also commonly associated with divine deliverance and the sovereign rule of God (2 Kings 19:31; Psa. 2:6-12; 132:13-14; Isa. 37:32; Joel 2:32; Micah 4:5-8).
  + Deliverance and sovereign rule in the NT is fulfilled in the church/kingdom because of Christ’s death and resurrection. NT authors like Paul and Peter apply the term Zion to Jesus’ establishment of the church/kingdom (Rom. 9:22; 1 Pet. 2:6 cf. Isa. 28:16).
  + The writer of Hebrews also describes Zion as the reign and rule of Christ, church/kingdom of God (Heb. 12:18-24; cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Mic. 4:1-8). Together, these points illustrate that Mt. Zion here represent Jesus and His people dwelling together in the kingdom He established. This will ultimately be fulfilled in Heaven but the picture here is not that yet.
  + The Lamb stands with the 144,000 which is the same group of people from 7:1-8. These are the faithful who have God’s seal on their foreheads (2 Tim. 2:19; Rev. 7:2-3). The point is to contrast these with the beast and its followers of chapter 13.
  + **Verse 2**– John hears a voice likened to the sound of many waters (cf. 1:15; 19:6), the sound of thunder (cf. 6:1; 19:6) and the sound of many harpists playing on their harps (cf. 5:8). What John hears is reminiscent of Jesus among the lampstands so loud like crashing thunder yet so melodious and celebratory as that of many harpists strumming their instruments. This is clearly a scene of ecstatic celebration, praise and thanksgiving.
  + **Verse 3**– These who stand on Mt. Zion with the Lamb (144,000) sing a new song before the throne, the elders and the living creatures. The singing of this new song here is almost identical to the scene of 5:8-10 which helps us to understand what the meaning is here.
  + The new song denotes a song of praise and thanksgiving to God because of His mercy, love, forgiveness, grace and deliverance. This is how it was used in the OT (Psa. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). Only those who have been purchased and redeemed by Christ’s blood can learn this song and know it (cf. 5:8-10).
  + **Verse 4**– The 144,000 is described as virgins. This is not to be taken literally. In the OT the people of God, Israel, was often described as a virgin since they were betrothed to God (2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 37:22; Jer. 14:17; 18:13; 31:4, 13, 21: Lam. 1:15; 2:13; Amos 5:2).
  + This is also how the term virgin is being used of the 144,000. They are the bride of Christ or the Lamb (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2) who have not compromised their faith by turning to the world or seeking after false gods (idolatry). They have maintained their loyalty to their betrothed (cf. Hos. 2:19-20).
  + This doesn’t suggest that they are sinless but it does suggest that they do not seek to sin and to commit metaphoric (spiritual) adultery against God by defiling themselves with immorality and impurities (idolatry, pagan worship etc.). They are faithful to the Lord and strive to grow ever closer to Him.
  + The 144,000 are also described as those that follow the Lamb wherever He goes. This speaks to the kind of disciples they are (Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Kings 2:1-6; Lk. 9:23-25, 57-62; 14:25-33; 1 Pet. 2:21-22). They follow Jesus with the caveat in mind that they suffer, serve, love, sacrifice and are self-less.
  + They are also described as first fruits to God and the Lamb. In the OT, the first fruits of the harvest were offered to God to illustrate that they belonged to Him and that God was the sovereign owner of everything they had and were blessed with
  + Likewise, the saints belong to God. They are His people and His possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10; Rev. 7:2-3 cf. Jer. 2:2-3). Paul speaks of Christians as first fruits in Rom. 16:5 and 1 Cor. 16:15. The idea of Christians being first fruits is important as it plays an important role in the latter part of this chapter.
  + **Verse 5**– This verse comes as no surprise because of what has been said about the characteristics of the 144,000. No lie being found in their mouth doesn’t just denote general truthfulness but it speaks also to the refining and testing of their faith.
  + Through persecution, suffering and perhaps death they are found to be tried and true like their Lord. They hold fast to the word of their testimony even in the midst of opposition and temptation to compromise (Rev. 1:5; 2:13; cf. Jn. 8:40, 44-45; 18:37).
  + Lying in Revelation and Johannine literature is directly associated with denying Christ as divine and holding up Satan and evil powers to that position (1 Jn. 2:22-23; Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8, 27; 22:15).
  + Their blamelessness because of their effort and tried and true faith groups them with the descriptions of the suffering servant of Isaiah (Isa. 53:7, 9). Because they follow the Lamb, they become like Him and attain to the same standards as He did.
* **14:6-8– The Impending Judgment**
  + **Verse 6**– The language in these verses primary relate to judgment. This is true because of the audience the angels address. John sees an angel flying in midheaven (cf. 8:13) having an eternal gospel to preach to the earth dwellers.
  + This gospel is the same gospel to be preached to the nations which speaks of Christ and what He has done to the end that all might be saved (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 16:25-27; Jude 1:3). It is called an eternal gospel because it does not change. It is incapable of destruction and permanently valid (cf. Matt. 24:35; Jn. 10:35; 17:17).
  + **Verse 7**– The angel announces that the hour has come for judgment which solidifies the idea that this “gospel” is dealing with judgment of the unbelievers. The word gospel is used because this message is good news to the saints that their enemies will be judged and held accountable for what they have done.
  + The loud voice urges in a command to fear God, give Him glory and worship Him. In the OT similar commands were given to both believers and unbelievers. The believers adhered joyfully (Psa. 22:23; 115:1; Isa. 42:12) but the unbelievers did so forcefully (Ex. 7:5; 14:4, 18; Josh. 7:19; Jer. 13:16; Ezek. 25:11, 17: 26:6; 28:22).
  + Therefore the understanding here is that the time is coming when the enemies of the saints will be coerced so to speak to honor God and recognize that He is in charge (cf. Dan. 4:34, 37; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 5:13; 11:13). Those incredulous of God will one day find out who He is and what He is capable of doing (cf. Jon. 1:9-10).
  + **Verse 8**– Another angel enters the scene and announces that *“Babylon the Great”* is fallen. This phrase and terminology is primarily drawn from Isa. 21:9; Jer. 51:6-8 and Dan. 4:30. To properly understand what Babylon means in Revelation, we must go back to the OT.
  + In the OT, Babylon was the nation who destroyed the temple of God and carried off the people of Judah into Babylonian exile (cf. 2 Kings 25:8-17; Jer. 52). In Babylon, these Israelites lived under an idolatrous and ungodly regime. This, of course, presented scenarios of compromise which some did not adhere to. When they remained loyal to God, they were persecuted (cf. Dan. 1-6).
  + This idea is carried over to the NT in Revelation as a way of describing Rome and its ungodly regime and its influence on all the nations around them. The Babylon connotation is solidified because of Rome’s destroying of the temple in AD 70. In Revelation, saints are pictured as being persecuted and killed because they maintain loyalty to God.
  + For these reasons, OT Babylon was destroyed but also for these reasons NT Babylon will be destroyed or “fallen” (cf. Jer. 51:64). She is described as making all the nations drink of the *“wine of the passion of her immorality.”*
  + The idea is that all the earth dwellers flock to Rome because of its promise of security, economic and social prosperity and political power. All these are proclaimed to be the byproducts of idolatrous and pagan practices (cf. Hos. 2:8-13; Rev. 13:16-18).
  + The immorality spoken of here is the idolatry and evil practices associated with pagan worship although physical sexual immorality was almost always intertwined with these pagan practices (cf. Ezek. 23; Jer. 3:1-10; Hos. 1:2; Rev. 17:1-9, 15-18). The idea of Babylon is not to be limited to OT Babylon or Rome or any other nation.

* **14:9-13– Doom for Beast Worshippers/Blessings for Saints**
  + **Verses 9-10**– A third angel now enters the scene announcing doom and gloom for the beast worshippers from chapter 13. The beast is connected to *“Babylon the Great”* by the context here. They represent the same idea as will also be shown in chapter 17.
  + The angel announces judgment for anyone who worships the beast or receives a mark on their forehead or hand (cf. 13:16-18). This sin of idolatry will be punished even as God punished the idolaters in the OT time and time again.
  + In a statement of Lex Talionis, the angel declares that the idolaters will *“drink of the wine of the wrath of God.”* This is *“mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger.”* Babylon the Great made the nations drink of its *“wine of the passion of her immorality”* and now God will turn the tables on them forcing them to drink of His wine.
  + Notice that God’s wine is pictured as one mixed in full strength. The wine of Babylon the Great is weak/diluted and temporary compared to God’s wine which is His wrath which is utterly overwhelming and long lasting. The imagery of these verses is drawn primarily from Jer. 25:15-16, 27-29; 51:7.
  + The idea of God pouring out His wrath as if from a cup is well established in the scriptures (Job 21:20; Psa. 60:3; 75:8; Isa. 51:17, 21-23; 63:6; Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:6; 2 Thess. 1:6-9). Mounce rightly says, *“God’s wrath is…the response of a righteous God to people’s adamant refusal to accept his love”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + The description of what they will suffer is also stated in an allusion to Gen. 19:24-25. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah became an example of what would happen to nations and people who rejected God (Deut. 29:23-28; Isa. 1:9-10; 13:19; Jer. 49:18; Amos 4:11).
  + Fire is prevalent throughout Revelation as a picture of judgment and God’s wrath (8:5, 7-8; 9:17-18; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8) and is sometimes pictured in conjunction with brimstone to remind us of Gen. 19:24-25. The use of the word torment reminds us of Rev. 9 but also Luke 16:23-24 (psychological, spiritual, eternal torture).
  + There is another irony in these verses. The false prophet (land beast) announced doom and gloom for the those who do not worship the beast in 13:15. But their doom and gloom is short-lived and leads to a reward. The doom and gloom declared by God for those who worship the beast is long lasting and extremely painful/overwhelming.
  + **Verse 11**– The doom of the beast worshippers continues to be described in crude fashion. The image of torment and smoke here is drawn from OT passages like Gen. 19:27-28 and Isaiah 34:9-10.
  + The point is that God’s judgment is such that those who are unrepentant and stand in opposition to Him will be reduced to nothing more than ashes and rubble illustrated by the rising of smoke. There is no end to this torment or smoke (cf. Mk. 9:43-48; Lk. 16:23).
  + They are pictured in a state of constant unrest (“day and night”) because of their loyalty to the beast. The idea of rest in the biblical narrative is exclusively set aside for God’s people and true believers (Sabbath; Heb. 4:1-11 cf. Matt. 11:28). Conversely, unrest is for unbelievers and those who want nothing to do with God (Deut. 28:65).
  + **Verse 12**– Similar to 13:10, the saints are encouraged to persevere despite trials and persecution (cf. Jam. 1:2-4). Their perseverance is best seen in refusing to worship the beast and its image and receiving its mark (13:15).
  + Their refusal will result in suffering that is but only temporal. They will be saved and kept from the eternal suffering that is described for the beast worshippers in vv. 9-11. The saints cling to Jesus and keep His commandments (Jn. 15:10, 14).
  + **Verse 13**– This verse concludes this section of comparison and contrast between the believers and unbelievers by divulging the reward God’s people will receive. Those who die in the Lord will gain rest unlike those who die outside of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
  + This supreme blessing recalls Matt. 5:11-12 where Jesus spoke of the reward those who persevered would receive. Now that He has died, risen and ascended, this promise is guaranteed when they physically pass away (Isa. 57:1-2; Phil. 1:21-23).
  + At that moment they will begin to experience rest (cf. Lk. 16:25) since they have labored hard in the kingdom by maintaining their faith in Christ in the midst of evil and persecution. This rest is ultimately fulfilled by being in the presence of God (Rev. 7:15-17).
* **14:14-20– The Harvest of the Earth**
  + **Verse 14**– John sees one like a “son of man” sitting on a white cloud with a golden crown on His head with the harvest instrument in His hand. This is the same figure of Dan. 7:13-14 and Rev. 1:13-18. This is Jesus.
  + The image of a white cloud emphasizes purity but also the presence of God and it is typically used in reference to judgment (cf. Isa. 19:1; Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mk. 13:26; 14:62; Lk. 21:27; Rev. 1:7).
  + The golden crown indicates the conquering, victorious, authoritative nature of Christ to execute this judgment (cf. Ps. 2; 2:10; 3:11; 19:12). Christ wields the typical instrument of harvest in His hand and He Himself prepares to perform a certain kind of harvest.
  + **Verses 15**-**16**– An angel comes out from the temple (i.e. the presence of God; Rev. 7:15) issuing the command to Jesus to reap since *“the harvest of the earth is ripe.”* The command is not from the angel himself but from God since the angel proceeds from His presence. This command is identical to that of Joel 3:13 and it may play an important role in these verses but it certainly is the basis for vv. 17-20.
  + The hour having drawn near and the harvest being ripe indicates the fullness of God’s sovereign plan being executed in relation the judgment of His enemies and the redemption of His people (Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 4:16). Jesus this follows suit and thus reaps the earth.
  + The question is, however, whether the reaping of vv. 14-16 is the same as vv. 17-20 and therefore just a general description of what is to follow in those verses or a whether it is a different reaping altogether.
  + Some suggestions are that is a harvest of the righteous only. This is based on the reading of v. 4 and also the general understanding of the parable of the wheat and tares in Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43 but also Jesus’ words in Mk. 4:26-29 (cf. Matt. 3:11-12).
  + Verses 17-20 clearly refer to the judgment of the wicked and therefore some suggest vv. 14-16 is the redemption of the righteous being its counterpart. It is possible this is the case but the text in vv. 14-16 seem rather vague if it is indeed referencing the salvation of the saints.
  + The natural reading of the text does point more towards vv. 14-16 being a general description of the judgment that will be described in further details in vv. 17-20. But even if this is the case, these verses do not in any way negate the guarantee that there will be a redemption of the saints in conjunction with the punishment of unbelievers.
  + **Verse 17**– Whether or not vv. 14-16 pertain to judgment or redemption, vv. 17-20 clearly relate to the judgment and execution of the enemies of God and His people. The structure of these verses are partly why it’s considered to be a further development of vv. 14-16.
  + John sees another angel (in addition to all the angels he has been seeing in this chapter) coming out from the temple (i.e. the presence of God; Rev. 7:15) and he has a sharp sickle in his hand just like the scene in v. 14.
  + **Verse 18**– Yet another angel is seen coming forth. This time he comes forth from the altar (cf. 6:9; 8:3-5; 9:13). This is a way of saying that he comes forth from the presence of God as well (cf. Lk. 1:19). The angel having authority over fire is intended to depict judgment as occurs in 8:3-5 and 14:10-11.
  + He commands the other angel with the sickle to *“gather the clusters from the vine of the earth.”* Not only does this seem to be a further development of v. 15 but it clearly alludes to Joel 3:13 and also Rev. 14:10 confirming the idea of God’s enemies drinking of the wine of His wrath. The imagery that plays out here is an answer to the prayers of the saints (6:9-11; 8:3-5).
  + **Verse 19**– The angel with the sickle thus follows the command of God and harvests the ripe clusters which will be thrown into the winepress of God. This winepress is also mentioned in 19:15 with reference to judgment.
  + **Verse 20**– The winepress is pictured as being trodden outside the *“city.”* This city is likely a reference to the *“holy city”* which is the people of God (cf. 11:1-2; 21:2). The point is that those who are being trodden are those who are outside the church and outside the realm of God’s divine protection (the seal; cf. 7:2-3).
  + This image of a winepress being trodden as a way of describing God’s judgment against the unbelievers is also seen in passages like Isa. 63:3 and Lam. 1:15. Jesus is the one pictured in 19:15 doing this treading.
  + This treading yields blood that rises up to the horses’ bridles for a distance of 200 miles (approximation of 1,600 stadia). This is not intended to be literal but it is instead a symbolic display of the gory and horrifying end that all unbelievers will face.
  + These images (in vv. 17-20 and perhaps vv. 14-16) are referring to the judgment of the unbelievers and it is clearly illustrating the destiny of the beast worshippers. They are the ones who are harvested to be thrown into this very winepress to be trodden.
  + In one sense this is speaking of the destruction and termination of the Roman empire and its followers. But in a much greater sense, this is a type of what is to come in the final judgment which has already been indicated in other passages and previously in this very chapter.