

Revelation Chapter 14

A Vision of Hope in the Midst of Judgment

This chapter of Revelation begins with a vision of hope to the believers [14:1-5] and ends with six pronouncements of doom [14:6-20] to those who refuse the Lamb. This chapter is the last of three chapters 12-14 that form an interlude between the seal and trumpet judgments [chapters. 6-11] and the bowl judgments [chps.15-16]. We saw in chapter 12 Satan's destructive plan for Israel while in chapter 13 we saw the two evil cohorts empowered by Satan who will try to accomplish his will. Although Satan and his diabolical duo may appear somewhat successful in the last 3½ years of the tribulation, John's vision in chapter 14 shows us that the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is the real victor in the age-old struggle between God and Satan.

A vision of Christ on Mt. Zion [vss. 1-5]

The way you interpret the first five verses in chapter 14 depends on (1) your view of where Mt. Zion is located – heaven or earth – and (2) who are the 144,000 standing with the Lamb?

A. The Heaven View:

There are three different views on the 144,000 in heaven with their Lord.

View #1:

The 144,000 were martyred on or before the middle of the Tribulation.

The 144,000 are the same group of Jewish believers as in Revelation chapter 7. They were sealed and protected for a certain period of time until their evangelistic work was finished on earth. In Revelation 14, they are in heaven with Christ, rejoicing over the ultimate triumph of the Lamb. This view holds that Chapter 14:1-5 takes place at the middle of the tribulation before the bowl judgments are released.

View #2:

This 144,000 is a different group than in chapter 7.

These are martyred believers that have been killed for the testimony of Christ during the first half of the tribulation period. They have sealed their testimony of faith in the Lamb with their blood and are now appearing in heaven with their Lord.

View #3:

This 144,000 in chapter 14 are the most outstanding Christian saints from the church age.

This 144,000 are the most outstanding Christian saints of the Church age from the

early days of the spread of the gospel to the rapture of the Church. They enjoy a special position before the throne of God from their death until Christ's second coming and will have an important job in the millennial reign. Revelation Unveiled by Tim LaHaye, chapter 14, p. 232.

B. Mt. Zion is on earth [most popular view]. There are two views:

View #1:

This is a prophetic vision of the ultimate victory of Jesus, the Lamb of God, given to the Apostle John to encourage him as well as the persevering saints in the tribulation period. This encouragement comes right before the bowl judgments are released upon the earth. These final judgments are the final and most devastating of God's judgments.

This vision looks forward in the future to the end of the tribulation period after Jesus Christ returns to earth [19:11-16], the armies of the world have been defeated [19:17-19], Antichrist and the False Prophet have been judged [19:20], the unbelievers are killed [19:21] and Satan has been imprisoned for 1000 years in the bottomless pit [20:1-3]. After all of this is accomplished, Christ then joins the 144,000 on Mt. Zion, a place of security, blessing and glory during Christ's thousand-year reign on earth.

View #2: (Our View)

This group of 144,000 is the same group of Jewish believers that were sealed and protected by God in chapter 7 to carry out God's purpose to evangelize the world throughout the entire tribulation period. They are prophetically seen standing triumphantly with their Lamb, still intact and preserved by God through the most horrible time in history. They are identified as belonging to the Father and the Son, by having the mark of the Father in their foreheads. This vision pictures the triumphal end of the tribulation before the bowl judgments are poured out in order to encourage the believers to be faithful to the end. The 144,000 are described as "the firstfruits" of those who will enter the Millennial kingdom.

C. A voice from heaven [v. 2]

John now directs our attention to heaven where he hears a voice of many waters. . .of great thunder. Both the voice of God and the Lord Jesus Christ is described in this way [Ezek. 43:2; Rev. 1:15]; however in Rev. 19:6 the use of these two phrases describe the voice of a heavenly multitude. This is best understood here as a heavenly choir having musical quality. It is a sound of joy when all of heaven will resound with loud praise when Christ returns to earth in triumph to establish His earthly kingdom.

D. A new song [vs. 3]

This song began in Rev. 5:9-10 with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Shortly afterwards, the angels joined in [5:11-12] and all living creatures [5:13].

Next the tribulation martyrs joined this musical crescendo [7:9-10] and now in this vision [Rev. 14:3], the 144,000 join this heavenly praise at the end of the tribulation period. The song will be new in respect to the 144,000 for it will be unique to them because “no man can learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand.” Why the song is restricted to the 144,000 is not stated.ⁱ

E. The Godly Characteristics of the 144,000

1. Purity

In a time of unrestrained sin and sexual perversion, these chosen servants of God will keep themselves pure and undefiled with women [1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Cor. 6:13, 18]. They are spiritually pure because they are not part of Satan’s world system. Their lives shine forth as testimonies of purity against the backdrop of grossly, immoral, and sexual perversion.

2. Devotion [14:4b]

Another characteristic of the 144,000 is that they are loyal to the Lamb, no matter what the cost. Jesus still seeks individuals that are unreservedly, devoted to Him in all areas of their lives [Matt. 16:24; John 10:27].ⁱⁱ

3. Purpose

Although God has purchased all believers, these 144,000 Jewish men have been redeemed and chosen for a specific purpose. Hand chosen by God these Jewish men were to proclaim the gospel to the lost souls of the tribulation period. They are the first fruits of Israel to be saved after the rapture of the Church; thus, foreshadowing Israel’s salvation as a nation when Christ returns at the end of the tribulation [Zech. 12:10].

4. Truthfulness

These 144,000 will not propagate Satan’s lies but will only speak God’s truth [Zeph. 3:13]. They will not support the “false wonders” [13:13] nor the deception of wickedness promoted by Antichrist and his False Prophet. Without hesitation, the 144,000 will accurately proclaim God’s word.

5. Blameless [14:5b]

Being without guile does not mean sinless [Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:10-12; 1 John 1:8-10], but the 144,000 will be set apart in their service to the Lamb. Since they lead lives of purity, devotion, singleness of purpose and truthfulness, they will be blameless in God’s sight. They will live lives above reproach that will bring forth the greatest spiritual revival the world has ever seen.

The Six Pronouncements of Judgment of the Wicked [14:6-20]

John now directs our attention to three angels with a proclamation for all those on earth. He does this through his second vision, in which three angelic messengers proclaim judgment. As we saw so often before in the book of Revelation, angels play an important role in end-time events. The messages of these angels in particular anticipate the judgment of the seventh trumpet sounded in Rev. 11:15 and poured out in chapters 15-16

A. The First Pronouncement – Angel #1: having the Everlasting Gospel [14:6-7]

This angel appears in mid heaven with a loud voice where everyone can see and hear the gospel being preached throughout the world. The angel is high enough in the heavens that Satan and his demons cannot reach him, since their demonic activities have now been restricted to earth [Rev. 12:12].

Although millions have been saved through the preaching of the two witnesses and the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, many others have not made a decision. God shows his incredible grace on mankind [Matt. 24:14] by offering them another opportunity to repent before the unleashing of the final and terrifying bowl judgments. The angel appeals to sinners to turn to the Creator because creation declares God's power and glory, and warns them that this same Creator will also be their Judge. Therefore, fear and worship Him instead of the Antichrist. This gospel is everlasting because it brings eternal life to those who receive it.

B. The Second Pronouncement – Angel #2: declaring Judgment [14:8]

Unlike the first angel who came before him, this second angel pronounces the bad news of judgment instead of the good news of salvation. This judgment is on Babylon, the Antichrist's mighty empire – the most powerful empire in history – will come to a destructive end. Babylon in scripture is the symbol of all that is evil and rebellious against God. This end time Babylon [comprised of political, economical and religious ties] will seduce the world into sexual perversion and spiritual immorality. Her judgment is certain for even though the angel is speaking of Babylon's future judgment [see Rev. 17 & 18], it can be spoken of as if Babylon's destruction has already taken place.

C. The Third Pronouncement – Angel #3: proclaiming Damnation [14:9-11]

This angel will deliver his message *loud* and clear – do not give homage to the beast or his image and do not receive the mark of the beast. Disobedience of the angel's message will result in God's undiluted wrath and judgment. Their fate will be unending damnation in the lake of fire. Not only will they have no rest to their torment but to add to their shame and humiliation, they will be tormented in the presence of the Lamb and His holy angels [Ps. 139:7-8; Matt. 10:28].

D. The Fourth Pronouncement – Blessing to the Persevering Saints

Here again God gives encouragement to his followers, in the midst of judgments pronounced on an unbelieving world. This is the most startling blessing in all of Scripture, and this is the second beatitude of seven in Revelation [cf. 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14]. This introduces one of the most important doctrines in Scripture. How will these saints be able to persevere in such a time as this? Why are the dead in the Lord considered blessed? The Scripture tell us in two ways – in how they lived and in how they died.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. How they lived [v. 12]

The perseverance of the saints will be manifested in their obedience to God's commandments. No group of believers has nor will ever face the strong assaults on their faith like the Tribulation saints. They will endure the most intense time of persecution in human history. God will intervene by shortening the days [Matt. 24:21-22]. Even in the face of deprivation and certain death, their genuine saving faith will not waiver in their obedience to God and His word.

2. How they died [v. 13]

Here God pronounces a blessing on the dead. How can this be? This is the tenth time that John is told to write something down; it is that important [cf. 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 19:9; 21:5]. The voice tells John that those who have died and those who will henceforth die will be blessed. How are they blessed?

a. They may rest from their labors

These tribulations saints will experience excruciating hardships and sorrow – seeing the torment and death of their loved ones, struggling daily to eat and survive, living as fugitives because they have not taken the mark, etc. Death will come as a welcome relief from the struggles and fears of the tribulation period. They gladly die for Christ and experience His promised rest [Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 21:4] than to live for the Antichrist and experience a life of torment [no rest] in the lake of fire [Rev. 14: 11; 20:15].

b. Their works do follow them

These believers are given a promise by the Spirit. When these loyal followers of Christ die and go to heaven, their diligent labor will follow them. God will reward believers in heaven for their earthly service [Heb. 6:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8]. Their obedience and service to the Lord will result in eternal rest and great reward. No wonder this Scripture in Revelation calls those who die in the Lord blessed.

E. The Fifth Pronouncement – The Reaping of the Grain Harvest [14:14-16]

After the brief pause to encourage the faithful in the Lord [vs. 12-13], the theme of divine wrath resumes in verses 14-20. These last two pronouncements describe God's righteous judgments in the imagery of a reaper harvesting a grain harvest and a wine harvest [cf. Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:12-13]. The fifth pronouncement represents the unleashing of the final bowl judgments by the Son of Man in chapter 16.

1. The Reaper [v. 14] - "...upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man ..."

This passage is in fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel [Dan. 7:13-14] of Christ coming to establish His kingdom. The term "the son of man" was Christ's favorite title of Himself during His incarnation. The brilliant, white cloud represents His glory and majesty [Rev. 1:7] and the crown on His head represents Him coming as a victorious conqueror over His enemies [Matt. 24:30]. Christ, the reaper, will have a sharp sickle in His hand. Jesus will use this sickle to mow down His enemies.

2. The Ripeness [v. 15] - Angel #4

"And another angel came out of the temple . . . for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

The first three angels proclaimed that judgment was coming. This fourth angel now brings the command to execute these judgments. This angel comes from God's throne and delivers the message from God the Father to God the Son that it is now time for judgment. God's wrath is full. There is no more grace; there is no more delay for the earth is ripe [the idea of overripe or rotten] for judgment [Matt. 13:40-43].

3. The Reaping [v. 16] - "And he . . . thrust in his sickle . . . the earth was reaped."

What a tragic and sobering act as the Son of man executes divine judgment on the earth. This reaping is carried out in detail in the bowl judgments of chapter 16. These terrifying bowl judgments mark the first phase in the final reaping of the earth.

F. The Six Pronouncement – The Reaping of the Grape Harvest [14:17-20]

1. The Reaper [v. 17] – Angel #5

"And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven . . . having a sharp sickle . . ."

The reaper in this vision is not the Son of Man as in the vision of the grain harvest. It is referring to the [fifth] angel that came out of the temple of heaven that had a sharp sickle. Angels have been used in Revelation to summon the four horsemen, sound the seven trumpets, defeat Satan and his demons, etc. Therefore, it is of no

surprise that angels will assist the Son of Man in pouring out the bowl judgments on earth.

2. The Ripeness [v. 18] – Angel #6 - “Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.”

As John watches, another angel [the sixth angel] appears on the scene. He is designated as the angel “which had power over fire.”

This designation is, no doubt, connected to the fact that he “came out from the altar” [Rev. 8:3-5]. Unlike the angel in v. 17 that comes from the throne of God, but from the altar associated in heaven with the prayers of the saints. In answer to the saints’ prayers, the time of the reaping of God’s judgment has come.

The fifth angel is told to thrust in his sickle. The word “ripe” here refers to something fully ripe and in its prime; therefore, the unregenerated people of the earth are described as clusters of grapes, ready to be cut down by the angel’s sickle [John 15:6].

3. The Reaping [vs. 19-20]

“And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth . . . and blood came out of the winepress.”

When the angel put forth his sickle, the enemies of God who survived the seven bowl judgments will not escape the wrath of God in this judgment. They will meet their end outside Jerusalem for God will protect His holy city from the carnage of the battle of Armageddon [about 60 miles north of Jerusalem]. There will be millions of people from all nations that gather in the valley of Armageddon to fight each other but then will turn and unite to fight against the army of God. This will not be a battle but rather a bloody slaughter [14:20] for Jesus Christ will defeat the armies of the world by the power of His word [Rev. 19:11-21].

Conclusion:

Those who do not heed to the repeated warnings of God to repent and turn to The Lamb will face a terrifying future on earth and a more devastating future of eternal punishment in the lake of fire. Those who face Christ as their Judge instead of their Lamb will learn firsthand that “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” [Heb. 10:31]. If only they would heed to David’s admonition in Psalm 2:12: Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little [soon kindled]. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

ⁱ The Revelation Record by Henry Morris, p. 260 offers a possible explanation of why the song may be restricted to the 144,000:

Although the words of the song of the 144,000 are not recorded, it surely dwells in part at least on the great truth that they had been “redeemed from the earth.” Although in one sense all saved people have been redeemed from the earth, these could know the meaning of such a theme in a more profound way than others. They had been saved after the rapture, at that time in history when man’s greatest persecutions and God’s greatest judgments were on the earth. It was at such a time that they, like Noah (Genesis 6:8), had “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” and had been separated from “all that dwell upon the earth” (Revelation 13:8). Not only had they been redeemed spiritually but, precursively as it were, they had been redeemed from the very curse on the earth (Genesis 3:17), being protected from pain and death by the guarding seal.

ⁱⁱ Exploring Revelation by John Phillips, p. 180-81 discusses the loyalty of the 144,000 to the Lamb:

They allow no rivals, no refusals, and no restraint to mar their dedication to Him. Does He need someone to stand upon the steps of the Vatican and cry out against the marriage of Christendom to the Beast? There are 144,000 ready to go! Does the Lord need someone to beard the Beast at some high function of state and roundly denounce him, his policy, his state-craft, his religion, his economic boycott, his mark, his ministers, his alliance with Satan? There are 144,000 eager to go! Does the Lamb need evangelists to proclaim to the untold millions the gospel of the coming kingdom of God? To climb the highest Himalayas, to cross the desert sands, to blaze evangelistic trails through steaming jungles, or to mush huskies across wide arctic wastes? There are 144,000 ready to go! And though the Beast’s Gestapo [sic] dog their footsteps and wreak upon their converts his direst vengeance, yet on they go undaunted and undeterred. That was the very spirit of their consecration as they followed the Lamb withersoever He led them on earth, and their reward is in kind.

ⁱⁱⁱ The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22 by John MacArthur, Jr., pp. 95-96 explains the meaning of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints:

The phrase the perseverance of the saints introduces one of the most important and most comforting doctrines in Scripture. It expresses the truth that all those whom God has elected, called, and justified will never lose their faith, but will persevere in it until death. That reality provides assurance, hope, and joy to every true believer in Jesus Christ and brings an end to fear and doubt. It also reveals that believers’ deaths are blessed because death ushers them into the glories of heaven.

Some refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security; others dub it the “once saved, always saved” teaching. While those definitions are accurate, they do not express this truth as clearly as the biblical phrase the perseverance of the saints. That statement emphasizes the reality that God Keeps His own saints by sustaining their faith to the very end, no matter what occurs. True saving faith in its very nature is eternal and cannot be lost or destroyed.