

## 15. The Lamb, the Three Angels, and the Harvest (Revelation 14)

From the devil and his two beasts, the vision turns toward the beginning of the consummation of the revelation. The vision shows the Lamb with the first fruits purchased from among men, the three angels forecast the events about to transpire in the revelation, and the Lord oversees the reapers.

### ***The Lamb and the First Fruits Purchased from among Men (Revelation 14:1-5)***

*14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion.*

John sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. In the Old Testament, Zion was first a fortress and then the city of David. The account in 2 Samuel 5:6-10 tells of the transition:

6 The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off." They thought, "David cannot get in here." 7 Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David.

8 On that day, David said, "Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those 'lame and blind' who are David's enemies." That is why they say, "The 'blind and lame' will not enter the palace."

9 David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward. 10 And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

The prophets used Zion in a symbolic way to refer to the coming city of God. Micah wrote in Micah 4:6-7:

"I will gather the lame;  
I will assemble the exiles  
and those I have brought to grief.  
7 I will make the lame a remnant,  
those driven away a strong nation.  
The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion  
from that day and forever.

That it is the holy city still to come is clear, for it will last forever.

In the New Testament, Zion becomes synonymous with the holy city, the New Jerusalem. Peter connected Zion to the holy city of the New Testament in Acts 2. As he began his sermon in Acts 2:16-21, he preached, "16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." He then proceeded to quote Joel, relating the prophesy to the occurrence on Pentecost:

17 "In the last days, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
18 Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

and they will prophesy.

19 I will show wonders in the heaven above

and signs on the earth below,

blood and fire and billows of smoke.

20 The sun will be turned to darkness

and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

21 And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

In Joel 2:32, the deliverance was to be “on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.” The Hebrew writer explained exactly what the spiritual Zion is in Hebrews 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

*And with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

This 144,000 must be same as those sealed in Revelation 7:4. Not only were they sealed, but they were also marked: “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.” Ephesians 1:13-14. To this, Paul describes the marking: “19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.” 2 Timothy 2:19. The name of the Father is in direct contrast with the mark of the beast (Revelation 13.16-17) which is the name of the beast. In neither case are these literal marks, but figuratively, they describe whose servants we are: “17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Romans 6:17-18.

The term his name has as its antecedent the Lamb. The name of the Lamb and the name of the Father tell us the ownership of the 144,000. As discussed in chapter 13, in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 9:3-6), the Lord had a mark put on the foreheads of those who “grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in” Jerusalem. When the judgment came, the order was given: “But do not touch anyone who has the mark.”

*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.*

The metaphors, expressing the nature of the sound John heard, describe the power and the suddenness and the beauty of this heavenly sound. They occur elsewhere in Revelation:

The voice of Christ was like the sound of rushing waters. Revelation 1:15

The sound like a great multitude in heaven was like both the rushing waters and the peal of thunder. Revelation 19:6

One of the living creatures in a voice like thunder said, “Come!” Revelation 6:1-2

The seven angels with the seven last plagues held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. Revelation 15:2-4

*3 And they sang a 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.*

This is not the first time a new song appears in the text. In Revelation 5:8-10, the elders and the four living creatures sang a new song when the lamb took the scroll with the seven seals. However, in this former passage, the words of the song appear right in the text. There is no doubt about the meaning of the first new song. In the present passage, no one except the 144,000 could learn the new song. We learn specifically that the 144,000 singers are the redeemed of the earth.

*4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

Verse four and verse five offer further descriptions of who the 144,000 are. The use of the present tense places the 144,000 in the here and now. That they did not defile themselves with women and that they kept themselves pure describes their spiritual faithfulness to the Lamb. The church, the bride of Christ, is to be presented "to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:27-28)." In 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, she is to be "a pure virgin to him" with "sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes alludes to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 16:24-25: "24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." The Christian's service, as we follow the Lamb, will require that we "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness (1 Timothy 6:11). The losing ones life is losing the fleshly existence and being raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 3:3-6).

*They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.*

Both God and the Lamb receive the firstfruits of the harvest (Exodus 23:16). The offering of firstfruits is continuous, with the fruit of the harvest offered year after year. The 144,000 are a continuing and reoccurring group of followers still on earth offered up to God and the Lamb. These are the same firstfruits as those sealed in Revelation 7. James 1:18 identifies the followers as a kind of the firstfruits: "18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." Jeremiah gives exact meaning to the symbolic use of the word in Jeremiah 2:2-3:

"I remember the devotion of your youth,  
how as a bride you loved me  
and followed me through the desert,  
through a land not sown.  
3 Israel was holy to the LORD,  
the firstfruits of his harvest;  
all who devoured her were held guilty,  
and disaster overtook them,"  
declares the LORD.

The 144,000 are those still in the desert and are the woman, the church, still in the desert of chapter 12. They continually offer themselves as a sacrifice in the war against the dragon.

*5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.*

In the struggle between the church and the dragon, the truth is a defining element. From the beginning, "You will not surely die." To the man of sin, truth and lie separate good from evil. The very work of the man of sin is a lie described in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12: "11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." In 1 John 2:21-23, John was more specific in describing the antichrist: "21 I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son." Lying is one of those defining sins that leads one to the fiery lake of burning sulfur: "8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and *all liars* – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Revelation 21:8. The firstfruits cannot be liars, but the children of the devil are liars: "44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:43-44.

### ***Three Angels Forecasting the Events about to Transpire in the Revelation (Revelation 14:6-13)***

*6 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.*

In the first five verses, the firstfruits, the 144,000, stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now the vision turns toward the disposition of the enemy. The angel had the eternal gospel to proclaim. This is the only time John uses the word gospel in any of his writings. The NIV New Testament uses the word gospel 96 times, and those are mostly in Paul's writings. Paul used the word gospel in a sense that conveys the totality of the message of Christ. For example, in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." In 1 Corinthians 15:2-5, he included in this meaning the elements of the gospel:

2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

In Ephesians 1:13, he used the word gospel to define the word of truth: "13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Paul's usage of the word gospel as truth became, by that use, the general and common understanding of the meaning of the word gospel.

However, the announcement here, with the addition of the word, eternal, is more in keeping with the proclamation of the angels at the birth of Christ, although in Luke 2:10, the verb form is used by the angel issuing a proclamation of the birth of Christ: "10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

The phrase, for all the people, is similar to the phrase in our text, 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."*

By the angel's pronouncement, the eternal gospel receives its meaning: fear God, give him glory, and worship him. The first, *fear God*, is reminiscent of Solomon's final word as the teacher in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." Both angel and Solomon connect their commands to the hour of the last judgment. Peter, in 1 Peter 1:17, likewise connects fear and the judgment of God, "17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

*Give him glory* expresses the second part of the angel's pronouncement. Paul places this glory in the context of Christ and the church: "21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!" Ephesians 3:21. *Worship him* is the final phase of obligation in this angel's proclamation. The angel describes God as having made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water, all of which are evident of his everlasting power and divinity. Paul wrote, "20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 1:20. All of us are able to comprehend the Lord God, and so worship him.

*8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."*

Just as the first angel announced the eternal gospel, the second angel announces the fall of Babylon the Great. All of six mentions of Babylon in Revelation designate it the great city or Babylon the great. In Revelation, there are eight mentions of the great city with six of those tying directly to Babylon. The first mention of the great city in Revelation 11:8 illustrates its metaphoric use: "8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Babylon, the great city, stands in marked contrast to the holy city, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 11:2; 21:2; 21:10; 22:19). The great and evil nature of this universal but metaphoric city shows in the city's ability to make all nations drink her wine. Later, in Revelation 18:2-3, the city's influence extends to the nations, the kings, and the merchants of the earth:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!  
She has become a home for demons  
and a haunt for every evil spirit,  
a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.  
3 For all the nations have drunk  
the maddening wine of her adulteries.  
The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,  
and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Pervasive is the great city's influence, but she is already fallen by the pronouncement of God's judgment by his angel.

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his 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 his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." The third angel pronounced God's judgment on anyone who worships the beast, his image, and receives his mark on the forehead or hand. These are they who drink the maddening wine of her adulteries (14:8; 18:2-3). Now they must drink the wine of God's fury, poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. *Cup* here has the sense that the Christ prayed in Matthew 26:39, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." By this pronouncement the holy angels and the Lamb will witness their torment in burning sulfur. The duration will be forever and ever (into the ages of the ages) and day and night. There is no rest for those who receive the mark of the name of the beast.

12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

The pronouncements of the angels make the disposition of the faithful, of Babylon, and of those that receive the mark of the name of the beast, certain. However, the pronouncement does not mean it has come, and therefore, the saints must patiently endure in God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Because the Lord has pronounced these things, they will be:

I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like me.  
10 I make known the end from the beginning,  
from ancient times, what is still to come.  
I say: My purpose will stand,  
and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:9-10

and further:

the LORD Almighty is his name:  
3 I foretold the former things long ago,  
my mouth announced them and I made them known;  
then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Isaiah 48:2-3

13 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."

### **The Lord Overseeing the Reapers (Revelation 14:14-20)**

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice 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." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The one seated on the cloud, like the son of man, and with a crown of gold is the Lamb (See notes on Revelation 1:9-18; 10:1-3). He now has a sharp sickle in hand fulfilling, as it were, the prophecy of Joel:

for there I will sit  
to judge all the nations on every side.  
13 Swing the sickle ,  
for the harvest is ripe.  
Come, trample the grapes,  
for the winepress is full  
and the vats overflow –  
so great is their wickedness! Joel 3:12-13

The harvest that is about to occur is that one spoken of in the parable of the sower: “ 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.” Matthew 13:37-39.

The Lord swung his sickle to harvest the earth.

*17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.*

The first harvest appears to have been a harvest of the faithful since those harvested received no consequences. In this passage, the angel in charge of fire called to the Lord that grapes from the earth's vine were ripe. The grapes went into the wine press of God's wrath and the grapes were trampled (compare Revelation 14:10). That grapes went in and blood flowed out shows the metaphoric nature of the passage. We know from the pronouncement of the first angel the judgment is upon those who received the mark of the name of the beast. Therefore, the grapes are the people who that serve the beast. As the juice separates from its grape, their blood—the source of life itself—will separate from their flesh. Enough blood to rise as high as the horse's bridle and spread for 180 miles, shows the completeness and fullness of God's judgment.

The timing of these two harvests is evident in 1 Cor 15:20-26:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . . 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.