

# Study 16: Revelation Chapter 14

## **Introduction**

*“...Just as there were two forces of evil in chapter 13, there are two forces here, the Lamb and the Sickles of judgement...”*

## **Body of the Study**

### **Introduction**

### **The Lamb on Mt Zion**

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### **A Message about Wine**

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### **Conclusion**

## **Homework and preparation for next week:**

*Re-read chapter 14*

*Read the notes as a review of the study*

*Read chapter 15 in preparation for the next study*

*What are the differences between the 144,000 with the Lamb, and Babylon, the beast, and those that worship it?*

*Why couldn't the new song be learned by others besides the selected group?*

## Notes for study 16: Revelation Chapter 14

*“...Just as there were two forces of evil in chapter 13, there are two forces here, the Lamb and the Sickles of judgement<sup>1</sup>...”*

### **Introduction**

Chapter 13 presented the dragon (Satan) and his two helpers – the two arms of the Roman Empire – governance and emperor worship. The beast was all-powerful, and it seems was unstoppable. But in this chapter we see that all is not lost. The Lamb emerges with His people!

### **The Lamb on Mt Zion**

This chapter looks back to the previous chapters, where the Lamb (5:6), and the 144,000 (7:4) were introduced. *“...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...”* (14:1 NIV). Those who belonged to Satan had the mark of the beast (13:17) written on their foreheads, whilst those who belong to the Lamb have the Lamb's name on their foreheads.

Jerusalem was a city built on two mountains – the Temple Mount (Mt Moriah) and Mt Zion. Through the Old Testament, “Zion” is used to point to the Messiah coming to establish His kingdom. Whilst there was a physical fulfilment in the church (God's kingdom) being established in Jerusalem, there is also a spiritual fulfilment in the New Jerusalem. It is a message of assurance to the faithful Christians (in the specific case, the martyrs) who find their reward with the Lamb in heaven.

Regarding the 144,000, Hailey notes<sup>2</sup>:

In the former vision the 144,000 received the seal of their God upon their foreheads; in this scene they have the name of the Lamb and of His Father written on their foreheads – indicating that the seal in chapter 7 was the name of these two. ... As these on earth who receive the mark of the beast belong to him, so those on Mount Zion who have the seal of God belong to Him. The 144,000 are not a group of special saints or martyrs, but they are God's redeemed on earth who have the martyr spirit (12:11); they surround the Lamb at all times.

John hears the sound of music coming from heaven *“...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...”* (14:2 NIV). The music came from the heavenly host, since the 144,000 were still (apparently) learning the song. *“...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...”* (14:3 NIV). The song that they sang was a new song – it was different to the songs before hand. Previously the *new song* had been sung by the four living creatures and the elders (5:9).

This verse and the verses that follow describe the 144,000

- They were *redeemed from the earth* – they had been purchased with the blood of the Lamb (5:9), and hence they are God's people.
- *“...These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure...”* (14:4 NIV). A literal reading would suggest that they were all men, and were all virgins. However, the meaning is spiritual, rather than physical. Hailey notes<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers, p. 31

<sup>2</sup> Hailey, p. 303

This quality refers not to physical celibacy, but to spiritual virginity, for the spiritual chaste belong to Christ (II Cor. 11:2).

- “...*They follow the Lamb wherever he goes...*” (14:4 NIV). This clearly refers to Christians who follow after Jesus, and will follow Him wherever He leads us.
- “...*They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb...*” (14:4 NIV). The term *firstfruits* originates in the feast of firstfruits in the Old Testament, where the first fruit of the harvest was offered in a sacrifice to God (Lev 23:4). After the firstfruits, the main harvest came along a little later. The firstfruits are the guarantee – the deposit – that the main harvest is sure. In the New Testament, the word occurs 5 times, and refers to a guarantee against a later event [the Holy Spirit as the guarantee against our salvation Rom 8:23; Christ’s resurrection as the guarantee of our own resurrection 1 Cor 15:23]. In this case, these people who have been suffering under persecution are the first of God’s people, and their redemption is the guarantee of the redemption of those who will follow after them.
- “...*No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless...*” (14:5 NIV). They had not defiled themselves by lying and teaching false doctrines. This must be compared with the false doctrines being taught amongst the seven churches (2:14, 15, 20; 3:9). The true servants of God had not defiled themselves with such things, and they remain blameless.

In chapter 5 we saw that the 144,000 represented all of God’s people – the faithful Jews of the Old Testament, and the faithful Christians of the New Testament.

### **The Warning Messages**

After the Lamb is revealed with the 144,000, other messages are given by three messengers:

1. A message of evangelism to the world,
2. A message of doom to “Babylon” (Rome) that they will not survive against God,
3. A message of judgment against worship of the beast – it will result in torment.

“...*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...*” (14:6 NIV). The message is for all who live on the earth, whoever they are, and wherever they are. There is a direct contrast to the Sea Beast, who exercised control over “*every tribe, people, language and nation*” (13:7) – God’s message is for everyone affected by the control of Satan. It is the message of the everlasting gospel. Hailey notes<sup>4</sup>:

These are the earth-dwellers from among whom the redeemed had been purchased (5:9), who looked upon the dead bodies of the witnesses (11:9), over whom the beast exercises authority (13:7), and the waters upon which the harlot sits (17:1, 15, except that here “multitudes” is substituted for “tribes”). The message is therefore to be proclaimed to the entire world of the unregenerate. ... The vision of an angel proclaiming the message is symbolic of God’s messengers, His saints, preaching the gospel to the whole world (Matt. 24:14; Col. 1:23).

The proclamation was made for all to hear “...*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."...*” (14:7 NIV). The judgement that has come is not the final judgement, but the judgement that God has brought against the persecutors of the Christians, and that He will bring against the sinful “Babylon”. It cannot be the final judgement if we are to worship Him who made the heavens, earth, sea, and water, as all these will have passed away at

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<sup>3</sup> Hailey, p. 304

<sup>4</sup> Hailey, p. 306-307

the final judgment (2 Pet 3:12). The message is to cause all people everywhere to obey the proclaimed everlasting gospel, and to worship God!

Behind this angel, another message followed "...A second angel followed and said, *"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."*..." (14:8 NIV). This is the first time that Babylon is specifically addressed, although it was alluded to in passing (9:14, 11:8). The previous references were literally Babylon, but the reference here is to Rome. The city was full of immorality, and God had pronounced judgement against it. Even though the city had not yet fallen, when God pronounces judgement, it is certain and can be spoken of as having already happened.

In anticipation of a more extended description in chs. 17-18, the fall of Babylon, the great anti-God system of idolatry, is announced. The actual fall does not occur until the final bowl judgment (16:19). There may be in 11:8 a previous allusion to Babylon as the "great city" (cf. 17:18). (NIVBC).

### *Alternate Views of the Text*

Wallace regards "Babylon" as a reference to Jerusalem. (p. 310): "The *second angel* of this vision was the angel of *doom* – signifying the message of doom on Babylon – which here referred to apostate Jerusalem – and the eminent fall of the once holy city. ...the fallen Babylon of verse 8 is figurative of the spiritual degradation of Jerusalem – "the faithful city turned harlot," and "which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified." Rome was never a faithful city" (*sic*) to "turn harlot," but these phrases are a fitting description of Jerusalem before and during the time of Christ."

Wallace also takes the view that whilst the Sea Beast represents Roman governance, the Land Beast represents governance over Palestine which is subservient to Rome itself.

### **A Message about Wine**

This message contains an expression that will echo through subsequent chapters – a message of wine. It tastes sweet to drink, but the pleasure can soon turn into pain as the effect goes to the head, or in some cases causes us to lose our self-control and allow our bodies to do things that we normally would not (such as engaging in sexual immorality). "Babylon" (Rome) made the nations to engage in spiritual adultery by enforcing emperor worship upon the whole empire. Those who engage in such idolatry will find that there are painful effects that the wine brings, as God pours out His bowls of wrath (yet to come in chapter 16), and enforces eternal punishment on the unfaithful.

God's messenger pronounces the fate of those engaging in emperor worship "...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,* <sup>10</sup> *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..."* (14:9-10 NIV). This links back to the previous chapter, where those who worship the beast (emperor worship) are the ones who have his mark on their hands or foreheads. The Roman Empire would fall when the time is right "*She who made all nations drink the wine of her passionate unfaithfulness!*" (14:9 JB Phillips). The idea is that emperor worship is spiritual adultery, and the heat of passion has fuelled the process – like they were fuelled by a drunken orgy. God will right the wrongs. Not only will the Roman Empire be punished, but those who go along with the emperor worship will also be punished. Fire and brimstone (burning sulfur) was how God totally destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin.

The fire and brimstone caused the recipients to be burned up. They will burn intensely "...*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."*..." (14:11 NIV). There is a parallel back to Jude "...*In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire..."* (Jude 7 NIV). The verse looks

forwards to the time when eternal judgement will be made, and those belonging to Satan will be eternally punished.

Preaching about hell, of course, should never be used as a terror tactic by the church but should always be presented in such a way as to show that God's mercy is the final goal. Yet when all is said and done, the question is not whether the doctrine of hell is detestable but whether it is true. It does have the full support of Scripture and of our Lord (Mt 25:46; Ro 2:3-9; 2Th 1:6-9) (NIVBC).

The Christians suffering persecution under the Roman Empire, and being threatened with death unless they engaged in emperor worship needed to keep God's righteousness in mind, and be patient. "...*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus...*" (14:12 NIV). God's endorsement of His saints follows "...*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."...*" (14:13 NIV). Here is an additional statement of support – even in the face of death, the Christians need to be faithful to the Lord. As part of humanity, we look at the material things of life. We are programmed to preserve our lives. When we get into situations that become life threatening, adrenalin kicks in and "time seems to stand still". It is hard to have to make the choice to die – when we have the choice! Whilst it goes against our nature, that is the very situation that the early Christians faced. The voice from heaven gives an assurance of God's blessings and rest. This is in direct contrast to those who worship the beast, and have God's condemnation and no rest from eternal punishment.

### **The Great Harvest**

As the vision continues, a scene of judgement unfolds. "...*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...*" (14:14 NIV). The one on the cloud was the Christ, and the crown on His head is the crown of victory (*stephanos*). He received this crown when He went out to conquer riding the white horse (6:1-2). At that time His weapon was bow – a weapon of warfare, but now it is a sickle – an tool of harvest. At first glance, one might conclude that this is the final judgement coming, with Jesus on a cloud in the same way that He left the earth (Acts 1:9-11). However that doesn't fit the description that follows.

Another angel appears. The "train" of angels follows on from 14:6, 8, 9. "...*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."...*" (14:15 NIV). The message has come from the heavenly temple (ie from God) to the Christ, that the harvest is ready. Hailey notes<sup>5</sup>:

The one who controls or directs the reaping is described in Scripture as "Lord of the harvest," who sends forth laborers into the fields (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2). These laborers may be human agents (Matt. 9:38; Luke 10:2), or angels (Matt. 13:39, 41). The picture clearly indicates that it is the Christ who puts in the sickle; but a conclusion concerning the nature of this reaping is reserved for the end of the chapter.

"...*So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested...*" (14:16 NIV).

This is followed by yet other angels "...*Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle.*"<sup>18</sup> *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."...*" (14:17-18 NIV). The clear message is that the time for harvest is ready, and it is time for action. We can see what kind

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<sup>5</sup> Hailey, p. 314

of action is in mind from the verses that follow. "...*The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath...*" (14:19 NIV). This is a harvest of retribution – God's wrath is shown by the action of the harvest. There is no mention here of the gathering of the saints – only retribution. "...*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...*" (14:20 NIV).

The blood flow was deep and extensive. A horses' bridle is about 1.5m deep. The image is of the riders of the horses wading through blood that is 1.5m deep. The distance of 1,600 stadia (furlongs) is about 120 km, and so it must be considered as metaphoric – deep and extensive. Hailey notes<sup>6</sup>:

The winepress of Jehovah's wrath must eventually be experienced by those that leave God out of their lives and thinking. All fruit of man's rebellion and sin against Him must be trodden under foot. The vine of earth and its fruit stand in contrast to the true vine and its fruit, which is borne to the glory of God (John 15:1-8). ... As the bodies of the sin-offerings were burned outside of the camp, and as a sin-offering Jesus "suffered without the gate" (Heb 13:11f.); so it is appropriate that the world that rejected Him and His salvation would be trodden without the city.

### **Conclusion**

The judgement expresses *the grapes of wrath*, rather than the final judgement and the associated reward of God's people. The previous chapter has identified the Roman Empire as *the beast* and the tools which Satan uses to do his work. The time had come for the judgement to be made against the immorality and corruption of the Roman Empire. When the time came, the judgement would be complete and extensive. As the Lord reaps His harvest through preaching the gospel, so God's judgement also falls on all who reject it.

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<sup>6</sup> Hailey, p. 315