

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

7-25-18

Revelation 14

As Revelation 13 ends, John leaves the reader anticipating either additional information about the actions of the beasts or information about the final destruction of the beasts. Instead John digresses, as he did before the opening of the seventh seal (see chapter seven) and before the seventh trumpet blast (see chapter ten). In Revelation chapter 14, John pauses in his narrative to give a message of encouragement that falls between the persecutions of the followers of God by the two beasts and the destruction of the beasts coupled with the final victory of righteousness. John tries to encourage Christians to endure persecution by giving them a glimpse into the future. Thus, the events of chapter fourteen are outside the chronological order John has been following in presenting the visions he has received in the Book of Revelation. Within the fourteenth chapter of Revelation are three visions, which are not presented in the order they will occur in the future. Instead, John presents them as three faith-promoting events that will occur in the future. No doubt he believes they will help the saints of his day endure the persecution they are suffering at the hands of the Roman Empire. First he presents a vision of Christ triumphant. Then he presents the two events that will lead to the Lamb's victory: the restoration of the gospel, which will be followed by the coming of Christ to rule and judge the world.

The Lamb and the 144,000 - Verses 1-5

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

14:1 Chapter 13 described the onslaught of evil that will occur when Satan and his helpers control the world. Chapter 14 gives a glimpse into eternity to show believers

what awaits them if they endure. The Lamb is the Messiah. Mount Zion, often another name for Jerusalem, the capital of Israel, is contrasted with the worldly empire. The 144,000 represent believers who have endured persecutions on earth and now are ready to enjoy the eternal benefits and blessings of life with God forever. The three angels contrast the destiny of believers with that of unbelievers.

14:4 These people are true believers whose robes have been washed and made white in Christ's blood (7:14) through his death ("purchased from among mankind"). In the Old Testament, idolatry was often portrayed as spiritual adultery (see the book of Hosea). Their purity ("they remained virgins") is best understood symbolically, meaning that they are free from involvement with the pagan world system. To remain spiritually pure means resisting the seductions and idolatries of the present world—power, wealth, and sexual immorality. To do so requires daily application of God's Word, for it has a purifying effect on the mind and heart. It requires great resolution not to give in to these temptations.

Following Christ, the Lamb, "wherever he goes" requires heroic effort to carry out Christ's commission to face oppression and even death if required. Too many shrink back when the work is difficult or the future looks bleak. Join those who take their stand with Christ and against sin. "Firstfruits"" refers to the act of dedicating the first part of the harvest as holy to God (Exodus 23:19; see also James 1:18).

The Three Angels - Verses 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. 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." 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." ⁹ A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, ¹⁰ they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." ¹² This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. ¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: 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."

14:6-7 Some believe that this is a final, worldwide appeal to all people to recognize the one true God. No one will have the excuse of never hearing God's truth. Others, however, see this as an announcement of judgment rather than as an appeal. The people of the world have had their chance to proclaim their allegiance to God, and now God's great judgment is about to begin. If you are reading this, you have already heard God's truth. You know that God's final judgment will not be put off forever. Have you joyfully received the everlasting Good News? Have you confessed your sins and trusted in Christ to save you? If so, you have nothing to fear from God's judgment. The Judge of all the earth is your Savior!

14:8 Babylon was the name of both an evil city and an immoral empire, a world center for idol worship. Babylon ransacked Jerusalem and carried the people of Judah into captivity (see 2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 36). Just as Babylon was the Jews' worst enemy, the Roman Empire was the worst enemy of the early Christians. John, who probably did not dare speak against Rome openly, applied the name Babylon to this enemy of God's people (Rome)—and, by extension, to all God's enemies of all times.

14:9-11 Those who worship the beast, accept his mark, and operate according to his world economic system will ultimately face God's judgment. Our world values money, power, and pleasure over God's leadership. To get what the world values, many people deny God and violate Christian principles. Thus, they must drink of the wine of God's fury (see Psalm 75; Isaiah 51:17).

14:11 The ultimate result of sin is unending separation from God. Because human beings are created in God's image with an inborn thirst for fellowship with him, separation from God will be the ultimate torment and misery. Sin always brings misery, but in this life we can choose to repent and restore our relationship with God. In eternity there will no longer be opportunity for repentance. If in this life we choose to be independent of God, in the next life we will be separated from him forever. Nobody is forced to choose eternal separation from God, and nobody suffers this fate by accident. Jesus invites all of us to open the door of our hearts to him (3:20). If we do this, we will enjoy everlasting fellowship with him.

14:12 This news about God's ultimate triumph should encourage God's people to remain faithful through every trial and persecution. They can do this, God promises, by trusting in Jesus and obeying the commands found in his Word. The secret to enduring, therefore, is trust and obedience. Trust God to give you patience to endure even the small trials you face daily; obey him even when obedience is unattractive or dangerous.

14:13 While it is true that money, fame, and belongings can't be taken with us from this life, God's people can produce fruit that survives even death. God will remember our love, kindness, and faithfulness, and those who accept Christ through our witness

will join us in the new earth. Be sure that your values are in line with God's values, and decide today to produce fruit that lasts forever.

Harvesting the Earth and Trampling the Winepress - Verses 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. 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.

14:14-16 This is an image of judgment: Christ is separating the faithful from the unfaithful like a farmer harvesting his crops. This is a time of joy for the Christians who have been persecuted and martyred—they will receive their long-awaited reward. Christians should not fear the Last Judgment. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24).

14:19-20 A winepress was a large vat or trough where grapes were collected and then crushed. The juice flowed out of a duct that led into a large holding vat. The winepress is often used in the Bible as a symbol of God's wrath and judgment against sin (Isaiah 63:3-6; Lamentations 1:15; Joel 3:12-13). The distance of 1,600 stadia equals about 180 miles, approximately the north-south length of Palestine.

To those unaccustomed to vivid descriptions of God's anger in judgment, these are disturbing images. People dislike the idea of other people, even evil ones, being trampled like grapes. The depth and length of the blood flow provides a sickening scene of the immensity of God's judgment. But unless we face the necessity of God's judgment, we will never see our desperate need for his mercy. A god with only a grandfatherly kindness would not inspire our repentance, obedience, or worship. God has promised a harsh harvest for those who reject him. Those who know God well enough to fear his wrath know God well enough to desire his grace. The crushing wrath of God is coming. Blessed are those who have had their sins forgiven, and blessed are those who lead others to God's mercy.