

The Book of Revelation

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

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High Level Outline of the Book of Revelation

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The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5)

- *14:1 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 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.* (NIV)

Introduction to Revelation 14

- In the previous two chapters (12 and 13) we saw ***three*** sources of affliction for the first century church: Satan, Rome and Israel's apostate priestly leadership.
- The "*beast rising out of the [Land]*" in 13:11–18 symbolized the apostate Jewish religious system, which serves Rome and pushes people toward emperor worship while rejecting the Messiah and persecuting his followers.
- ***Luke*** describes this persecution of the first century church in the book of Acts using ***historical narrative*** – ***John*** describes it in the book of Revelation using ***apocalyptic symbols***.
- Chapter 14 gives the Jerusalem church a word of encouragement.
- She was the mother church (12:6, 13), and her fate would shape the future of all Christianity.
- Many Jewish movements of that era had ended with their leaders being put to deaths (Acts 5:34–39).
- The Jerusalem church needed to know that their cause would not be wiped out.
- They also needed to believe that the gospel would be preached in the whole world and that those who endured to the end would be saved (Matt 24:13–14).

14:1 *Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.* (ESV)

- The vision opens with "*the Lamb*" standing on "*Mount Zion*" with "*144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*"
- "*the Lamb*" here is, of course, Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Messiah – the same "*Lamb*" we saw "*standing, as though it had been slain*" in Rev 5:6.
- He stands in ***contrast*** to the Land Beast (= the apostate Jewish leadership) that we saw in the previous chapter (13:11) who had the ***appearance*** of a "*lamb*" but was actually a wolf in sheep's clothing (cf. Mat 7:15).

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- The "*144,000*" are the same group that we identified earlier (7:4-8) as the remnant of first century Jews drawn from the twelve tribes of the Land of Israel.
- This same group was ***later*** symbolized by "*the woman*" in chapter 12.
- As we noted in chapter 7, "*144,000*" is ***not*** an exact head count, but a ***symbolic number*** that represents the ***complete number*** of the Jewish believers at that time.
- It combines twelve squared with one thousand: 12×12×1,000=144,000. ***Twelve*** represents Israel's tribes, while ***one thousand*** commonly symbolizes fullness.
- They remained loyal to the Lamb, fled to the wilderness rather than submit to apostate Judaism, and (as we will see when we get to verse 4) were redeemed by His blood as the "*first fruits*" of the harvest.
- They stand ***in contrast*** to those in the ***previous*** chapter (13:17-18) who have the ***mark of the beast*** on their hand and foreheads because they have ***truly*** kept the Shema: having "*his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads*" (cf. Deut 6:4-8).

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- I believe "*Mount Zion*" here refers to the ***earthly*** Mount Zion, the hill of Jerusalem, and the site of the temple – ***not*** the heavenly Mount Zion .
- As we will see in the next verse, while John is looking at the Lamb standing at "*Mount Zion*" he hears "*a voice from heaven*".
- If the "*Mount Zion*" that John was speaking of here were ***in heaven***, a voice "*from heaven*" would not be distinguished from the place where John saw the Lamb standing.
- As you will recall, the group of Jewish believers referred to here as the "*144,000*" were not physically in Jerusalem when it fell under the judgment of God.
- They escaped from Jerusalem ***prior*** to that (12:6, 14; cf. Mt 24:16).
- But for ***dramatic purposes***, in anticipation of the coming judgment, John here portrays Christ and his followers ***as already*** standing there in ***victory***.

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- This depiction of "*the Lamb*" standing with his "*144,000*" followers on "*Mount Zion*", is reminiscent of the Psalm 2:
- That Psalm, which we have looked at before, speaks of the kings and rulers vainly rebelling against and resisting God and the Messiah, and then goes on to declare that God laughs at their futile efforts to unseat Him from his sovereign position.
- God tells them, "*As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill*" (Psalm 2:6)
- Despite all the efforts of the dragon and the beast to eliminate the church, the Judean believers stand secure with the Lord in victory.

14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the [Land]. (ESV)

- John now hears a "*voice… singing a new song*".
- It is described as a ***singular*** voice because it is sung by the ***unified*** throng around the throne.
- It is said to be loud "*like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder*", because angels, martyrs and all creation sing together (cf. 5:13).
- The "*new song*" is a ***victory*** hymn.
- In the Old Testament, a "*new song*" was often sung to celebrate military conquests for Israel:
  - "*Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him*" (Psalm 98:1 – cf. Exodus 15:1-18; Psalms 33:2-5; 40:2-3; 96:1-4; 149:1, 7-9; Isaiah 42:10-13).

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- God is being praised here for justly vindicating his Jewish saints.
- In Revelation, their "*new song*" celebrates the final establishment of the new covenant through the overthrow of old-covenant Israel (Rev. 11:19).
- Only the "*144,000*"—the faithful remnant "*who had been redeemed from the [Land].*" – can "*learn*" this song sung over Mount Zion, because they alone experienced its reality.
- Specifically, the song celebrates their physical rescue from the apostate Jewish leadership along with their spiritual redemption in Christ.
- In contrast, ***Christ-rejecting*** Israel faces inescapable historical judgment and wrath, and is therefore ***unable*** to learn and experience what this song of redemption celebrates (Rev. 6:12–17; Luke 23:28–30).

14:4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. (ESV)

- Here in this verse, we see the 144,000 described by ***three*** *"these who"* statements:
  - They are Pure: *"these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins"*
  - They are Followers of the Lamb: *"these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes"*
  - They are Redeemed: *"these [who] have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb"*

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- "*these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins*"
  - This text has generated ***enormous*** debate, especially by those who have used it as a proof text for monasticism and/or a celibate priesthood.
  - If taken ***literally***, it teaches that the "*144,000*" were all unmarried, celibate men, which historically was not the case.
  - Marriage was to be ***honored*** among believers (Heb 13:4)
  - Those who served as an elders, had to be men of undivided ***marital loyalty*** (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6)
  - John is using these terms ***metaphorically*** of the "*144,000*" to graphically portray their purity and lack of idolatry.
  - The image reflects similar imagery used in other places in scripture:
    - Israel as a Virgin (2 Kings 19:21; Jer 18:13; 31:4; Amos 5:2)
    - The church as a Pure Bride (2 Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7; 21:2)
    - Idolatry as Adultery (Jer 2–3; Ezek 16; Rev 2:20–22)
    - Warriors in the Old Testament practiced abstinence while engaged in military campaigns in order to maintain ritual purity. (1 Samuel 21:4–5; 2 Samuel 11:8–11)

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- "*these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes*"
  - "*Follow me*" was Jesus' call to his Jewish disciples (Matt 4:19–20; John 1:43; 21:22).
  - Following meant taking up one's cross and a willingness to sacrifice worldly things that might interfere with one's commitment to Christ (Matt 8:19–22; 10:34–39).
  - Many crowds "followed" Jesus and then later left (John 6:2, 66), but his sheep do not follow the voice of strangers, meaning false teachers (John 10:4–8, 27).
- "*these [who] have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb*"
  - Since the images of "*virginity*" and "*following the Lamb*" ***may*** be early allusions to the wedding that is to come (19:7,9; 21:2ff.), this "*purchase*" by the blood of the lamb would be equivalent to the practice of paying a "bride price" in the Old Testament (e.g., Ge 34:12; Ex 22:16; Nu 18:11; Ru 4:10; ISa 18:24-27; 2Sa 3:14).
  - Though ***all*** the elect are redeemed (5:9; 7:9–14), the focus ***here*** is on the "*144,000*".
  - "*firstfruits*" shows that this cannot be a far-future group, because Revelation's events "*must soon take place*" (1:1, 3; 22:6, 12).
  - "*Firstfruits*" promise a larger harvest, which came as the gospel spread worldwide through the faithful Jewish remnant who survived the persecutions of those early years.

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- "*and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless*"
  - The "*144,000*" redeemed remnant are true Jews who are in ***contrast*** with the synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9) and the deceiving Land beast (13:13–15).
  - The background for this verse is Zephaniah 3:13: "*those who are left in Israel; they shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall there be found in their mouth a deceitful tongue*."
  - Their truthfulness matters because they proclaim Christ's just judgment on Israel's land, city and temple (1:7).
  - Christ prophesied the temple's fall (John 2:19; Mark 13), the early church proclaimed it (Acts 7), and the two witnesses affirmed it (11:1–7).
  - Israel's authorities, like the corrupt prophets and priests of old, dealt in lies and falsehoods (Jer 5:31; 6:13; Matt 26:60; Acts 6:13).
  - "*blameless*" word used to describe sacrificial victims without defect (Lev 1:3; Num 19:2).
  - Satan accuses them (12:10), but their testimony overcomes him (12:11).

The Messages of the Three Angels (14:6-13)

- *14:6 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."*

The Messages of the Three Angels (14:6-13)

- *14:9 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." 12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. 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."* (NIV)

14:6 *Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell [in the Land], to every nation and tribe and language and people.* (ESV)

- *"I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim "*
- This is the only *"flying"* angel mentioned in the book of Revelation.
- He is flying *"directly overhead"* so everyone can see him – the same place where the eagle of Rev 8:13 cried *"Woe"* to those in the Land.
- His *"eternal gospel "* is the familiar gospel of salvation preached throughout the New Testament.

14:6 *Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell [in the Land], to every nation and tribe and language and people.* (ESV)

- Preaching this "*eternal gospel*" to their fellow Jews who "*dwell [in the Land]*" cost these early Jewish Christians family, friends and even life (Mat 10:21–22, 35–36), and ***most*** of the Jews ***rejected*** it (Mat 23:37; John 1:11; Acts 13:43–50; 17:5, 13).
- The angel assures the church that the gospel is "*eternal*," not a passing movement like others of that day (Acts 5:36–38).
- The proclamation of this "*eternal gospel*" was ***first*** proclaimed "*in the Land*" ("*to the Jew first*" – Rom 1:16) but ultimately to "*every nation and tribe and language and people*" (cf. Matt. 24:14)
- By the late 50s, the apostle Paul tells us that the gospel had been "*proclaimed in all creation under heaven*" (Col. 1:6, 23; Rom. 1:8).

14:7 *And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."* (ESV)

- What we have here is, in essence, a call to ***repentance***.
- The "*eternal gospel*" mentioned in the previous verse is ***foundational*** to this call to repentance.
- With gospel preaching comes the call to "*fear God*" because " *the hour of his judgment has come*."
- As in 10:6b, no more delay; the time for Israel to repent is short.
- Building on the Land beast's idolatrous worship (13:14ff.), John presents an urgent call for Israel's leadership to trust in and worship "*him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water*" (14:7b; cp. 4:11; 5:13; 10:6).
- Old Testament writers ***often*** contrast God's creative power with dead idols (Ps 96:5; 115:3-8, 15; 135:5-7, 15-18; Isa 40:19-20, 22, 26; 45:11-12, 16, 20; Jer 10:14-16; 14:22; 51:17-19; Ac 17:23-24).

14:7 *And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."* (ESV)

- The Jews trusted too much in external rituals (Mt 15:2-9; Ac 21:28; Ro 2:25-29) and their ***temple*** "*made with hands*" (Mk 14:58-60; Ac 6:13-14; 21:28).
- Late second-temple Judaism repeated first-temple Israel's error: "*Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'*" (Jer 7:4).
- Stephen declared they must trust God who "*made all these things*" (Ac 7:50) rather than the ***temple*** "*made with hands*" (Acts 7:48).
- Paul preached similarly in Athens: "*The God who made the world and everything in it… does not live in temples made by man*" (Acts 17:24).

14:8 *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."* (ESV)

- "*Another angel*", a "*second*" one, follows, saying, " *Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality*."
- The drama progresses as follows:
  - 14:6-7 – the first angel declares the eternal gospel to Israel's rulers
  - 14:8 – As a consequence of their refusal, their city is legally declared "*fallen*"
  - 14:9-11 – Consequently, those who submit to their teaching will suffer God's eternal judgment
- This is the first occurrence of "*Babylon*" in the book of Revelation, appearing abruptly, as do ***many*** of the symbols that crop up in this book.
- The word appears ***five*** more times, but the concept of the great city Babylon, its activities and judgment, ***dominates*** chapters 16-18.
- I believe "*Babylon the great*" is used here as a symbol for ***Jerusalem*** rather than Rome (as some commentaries argue).
- Notice how well this fits with what we saw in Rev 11:8 where Jerusalem is called "*the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified*."

14:8 *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."* (ESV)

- Perhaps ***one*** of the reasons why John chooses "*Babylon*" as a designation for Jerusalem here is due to the fact that her ***first*** temple was destroyed by ***historical*** Babylon (2Ki 25:9; Ezra 5:12; Jer 52:13).
- And so he anticipates her ***reliving*** that Babylonian catastrophe through ***Rome's*** destruction of her ***second*** temple.
- John would agree with Josephus (AD 75), who laments that the first-century Herodian temple was effectively destroyed by the Jews themselves: they "*had begun with their own hands to burn down that temple*" (J.W. 6:3:5 §216).
- By dramatic irony, John paints Israel as her own worst enemy: a new Babylon destroying herself – similar to the way he calls her "*Sodom and Egypt*" (11:8).
- The ***historic*** city and empire of Babylon were always depicted by the prophets as the ungodly power ***par excellence*** (TDNT 1.515).
- ***Jerusalem*** is now that ungodly power.

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- The second temple burned on the ***same*** calendar day that Babylon set fire to the first – the tenth day of the fifth month (Av) in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year, corresponding to August 586 BC. (Jer 52:12).
- Josephus says: "*that fatal day was come... the tenth day of the month Lous, [Av,] upon which it was formerly burnt by the king of Babylon, although these flames took their rise from the Jews themselves*" (J.W. 6:4:5 §250-251; cp. 6:4:8 §268).
- Next John draws imagery from Isaiah 21:9b applying Old Testament Babylon judgment language to this new Babylon, Jerusalem:
  - Isaiah 21:9b - "*Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the carved images of her gods he has shattered to the ground*"

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- Later, in Rev 17:4-5, when he is discussing "*the woman*" also known as "*the great prostitute*" who ***also*** symbolizes Jerusalem, John will use ***more*** Babylon judgment imagery from the Old Testament:
  - Rev 17:4-5 - "*The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: 'Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.*'"
  - Jeremiah 51:7-8 – "*Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad. Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed.*"
- Notice how the ***above*** verses (which address Jerusalem as Babylon) overlap with our ***present verse*** which does the same:
  - (14:8) – "*fallen is Babylon*" = (Jer 51:8) "*Babylon has fallen*"
  - (14:8) – "*nations drink the wine… of her sexual immorality*" =
    - (Rev 17:4) "*cup full of… her sexual immorality*"
    - (Jer 51:7) "*nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad*"

14:8 *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."* (ESV)

- "*Babylon*" is said here to have "*made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality*"
- In what way did Jerusalem (represented here as "*Babylon*") make "*all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality*"?
- "*all nations*" here speaks of the empire-wide presence of Jews throughout the world.
- Philo asserts that "*Jerusalem... is the mother city not only of the land of Judea, but also of* ***many countries***" (Embassy 281),
- Josephus states, "*these Jews are already gotten into all cities; and it is hard to find a place in the habitable earth that hath not admitted this tribe of men*" (Ant. 14:7:2 §115).

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- The "*wine of the passion of her sexual immorality*" here symbolizes Jerusalem's corrupting influence over the "*nations*" – the seductive power by which she draws them into complicity with her rebellion, using them to shed the blood of the saints.
- "*all nations drink*" this "*wine*" by succumbing to her influence and putting the saints to death.
- This is confirmed by the later image of the woman (who symbolizes Jerusalem) "*drunk with the blood of the saints*" (17:6; cf. 18:24) – she is intoxicated by the very violence she has incited, reveling in it.
- "*sexual immorality*" (*porneia*) in this context is an Old Testament metaphor for "spiritual adultery" – breaking covenant with God through idolatry and relying on foreign powers.
- First-century Jerusalem committed this betrayal by rejecting the Messiah, declaring "*We have no king but Caesar*" (John 19:15), and allying with Rome's idolatrous system.
- Ultimately, this theological unfaithfulness and alliance with Rome resulted in the violent persecution and murder of Christians who remained loyal to the Lamb.

Class Discussion Time

- In our text today we saw that Chapter 14 was written to give the Jerusalem church a word of encouragement.
- Many Jewish movements of that era ended with their leaders' deaths (Acts 5:34–39).
- Do we need this kind of encouragement in our day?
- For example, today Christians are the largest religious group in the world and Muslims are the second largest.
- But, according to new Pew Research Center projections, that will change by 2035, when Muslims will surpass Christians in population.

Class Discussion Time

- In some of the texts we looked at today, the enemies of Christianity are described as strikingly ***bloodthirsty***:
  - *And I saw the woman,* ***drunk with the blood of the saints****, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly.* (Rev 17:6)
- Do such enemies of the church still exist in the ***world*** today?
- Do such enemies exist in our ***country*** today?
- Might we be called someday to endure what these first century Christians endured?