

## Chapter 14

**V.1-5 The Lamb and the 144,000** In the Chapter 12 study guide we referenced Psalm 2 as an illustration of what was happening behind the scenes spiritually with the dragon and God. This picture that we are presented with in the first verse in Chapter 14 is a fulfillment of God's promise in Psalm 2:6 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." Psalm 2 is God's answer to every king or antichrist or ruler that has ever tried to oppose Him and we see the final fulfillment of His promise to make His Son Jesus the King over all. This is the backdrop of this setting in which we find the Lamb standing on top of Mount Zion just as God had said thousands of years earlier. Zion which is also called the City of David and now Jerusalem was the first stronghold taken by David and so this first city will also be the last city where the Lamb returns. God will finish what He started – it is poetic and dramatic. There is some question whether this scene takes place as John sees it in heaven or on earth but that is not the main point because if it is in heaven then we know that shortly it will be on earth because that is where the eternal Zion and heavenly city will reside in the New Jerusalem where Christ will reign forever and ever. Some commentators argue that it can't be a picture of heaven because the 144,000 were sealed with the protection of God (Chapter 7), but we shouldn't understand that protection as the inability to die but simply protection from the judgments that are being released by God. The two witnesses don't survive the trouble of the antichrist and we shouldn't believe that the 144,000 will necessarily be any different. That is the glorious picture of this event because even though they have died we understand that now they stand victorious with the Lamb and they have conquered the beast through their martyrdom similar to the death of their Savior. I believe that we should understand this chapter to be another overview of the final 3 ½ years even though this is the first time that we don't see that verbiage in over 3 chapters. As a reminder I believe that ever since the revelation of the mighty angel in Chapter 10 John has been describing for us the final tribulation period - although much of it is foreshadowed throughout the history of the church since the ascension, the primary interpretation is to be found in the last days. In review I believe Chapter 11 emphasizes the two witnesses and what is happening in Jerusalem in the final days, Chapter 12 talks about the dragon's activities in the great tribulation, Chapter 13 indicates the activity of the antichrist and false prophet in the final 3 ½ years, Chapters 14 & 15 overview the activity of the angels and people, Chapter 16 will recount the final seven judgments through the bowls of wrath throughout the same time period, and Chapters 17&18 primarily review what happens to Babylon during the last days. Finally, in Chapter 19 we pick back up with the chronological event of Jesus' return and resulting reign on the earth. It is helpful for me to think about these chapters from 11-18 as each being a separate overview of the final great tribulation looking at different participants and concepts. Spattered throughout each of them we find the activity and presence of Jesus which we see clearly in this chapter first as the Lamb in verse 1 and then the harvester in verse 14.

Although I think the most likely interpretation of this scene is pictured in heaven there is at least one other interpretation that makes sense in the context which could also be possible. Before I mention it though the reason that I believe this to be a scene in heaven is because when you read through it, it sounds like the scene in Revelation Chapter 5 with the throne and the four living creatures and the elders. It is not prohibitive to speak of Mount Zion in heaven any more than it is to think of the temple in heaven. We understand humanly speaking that it is our understanding of their place on earth but they receive their inspiration and origin from heaven. We know that their eternal destinies will be in their earthly location but it is not unlikely that they

are in heaven first. Some interpreters see this as a vision of the Lamb reigning in the Millennium but I believe this is incorrect and trying to prescribe something that is not likely since the rest of the entire chapter is about what is happening before or at Christ's return. Regardless of your view of a Millennium it seems unlikely that this is a possibility in this passage especially considering the next chapter which references another scene in heaven with more people singing praises to God. The other possibility that I do see as interpretively honest within the context is a scene of the mid tribulation rapture. For those that believe in a mid tribulation rapture this is a prominent place in Chapter 14 & 15 to view that happening as these are the last places that we see saints in heaven. It appears that the rest of the book illustrates people as being judged on earth and the next place that we see saints after these two chapters is returning with Jesus in Chapter 19. With that understanding of their future exclusion it would be a natural place to picture a rapture before the final bowls of wrath are poured out upon the earth.

The 144,000 were first mentioned in Chapter 7 and it would be good to review that information but we are reminded in this passage that they are specially marked, that they have accomplished something commendable, and that they have remained pure through the time of the end. We indicated in Chapter 7 the possibility of these people being a literal 144,000 Jewish Christians as well as representing the entire faithful bride on the earth. I see nothing to deter this possibility here and we are reminded of their preciousness before God in the sense that only they are allowed to learn the new song (v.3); only they are indicated as a firstfruit offering to God (v.4); and they are described as not defiling themselves, following the Lamb wherever he goes, and having no lies in their mouths (v.4&5). These 144,000 have followed God in truth and purity and have conquered the dragon, the antichrist, and the false prophet through their witness and most likely – death. There is a better resurrection that now awaits them and their rewards will follow them for all of eternity.

**V.6-13 The Three Angels** The messages of these three angels dominate this next section of the chapter and describe for us a Last Call, a Last Judgment, and a Last Warning. Although we talked about a final call given by the two witnesses in Chapter 11 this is really the last call. It's like the last last call. You know – the absolute final call with no take backs. It's like before your server said last call and now the manager comes by just to make sure that you know there are no more chances after this. John sees an angel flying in the sky proclaiming the eternal gospel to every nation, tribe, and people. There will be no one with an excuse when Jesus returns to judge the world. And to make absolutely sure that everyone has heard the gospel God sends one final angel to proclaim it from the sky. We are not told exactly how this happens or how everyone understands it, but it is clear that it will be to everyone. This means for those people who always try and accuse God and say - what about the bush people in Africa who nobody speaks their language – how can they be held accountable for faith in Christ? This is how – God makes sure everyone hears before the final harvest. The second angel declares judgment on Babylon the great and lets everyone know that God is about to make everything right and avenge His people who have been persecuted and martyred. This is the first appearance of Babylon that we see in the book of Revelation and we will take two whole chapters to cover this in more detail. (Revelation 17&18) The third angel came behind these two angels reminding everyone that if anyone takes the mark of the beast or worships his image that they will be tormented with fire and sulfur forever and ever. The Bible is very clear that there will be eternal punishment for whoever worships the antichrist, takes his mark, or worships his image. It is sad and troubling to say the least and many people try and minimize God's

judgment and consequences by saying that God's enemies will be destroyed and they won't suffer forever. This is not what Scripture teaches and the Greek actually says for ages of ages. This is the same verbiage that is used every time that you see forever and ever in your Bible to describe God or eternity or any other eternal attribute. It is hard to hear and think about but the suffering of hell will be forever and ever. That is why it is even more important to share the good news of Jesus with whomever we can while there is still time. John ends this warning by reminding the saints that is why endurance is required and why it is so important to keep the faith and the commandments because the consequences are catastrophic if you don't.

This call for patient endurance is a repeated theme throughout the book of Revelation. That is one of the primary reasons that I think it is unlikely that there is a pretribulation rapture of the church. Seven different times the book emphasizes a call for endurance by the saints. (Rev. 1:9; Rev. 2:2-3; Rev. 2:10; Rev. 2:19; Rev. 3:10; Rev. 13:9-10; Rev. 14:12) The hope of the future in the book of Revelation doesn't appear to be escape from trouble but strength and endurance through it by faith. That is why I think it is encouraging and helpful to think about praying for the Lord Jesus to come and rapture the church but be prepared for the possibility that escape may not be the plan. The book of Revelation is primarily about overcoming and conquering and enduring not escaping, avoiding, and running away. (Although to be honest there are Biblical examples of escaping like Noah & Lot) I really do hope I am wrong because of the pain and agony of the tribulation but I would rather be prepared for the worst and pray for the best. Regardless of the plan for the end - the commendation from John remains the same in this passage -- #1 maintain your endurance, #2 keep the commandments of God, #3 keep your faith in Jesus. This is on the coat tails of hearing about the power and authority of the antichrist in Chapter 13 and then the angelic warning not to take the mark or worship the beast. There will be tremendous pressure and consequences for not following the antichrist. John's advice is to be ready for those adverse circumstances so that you can be blessed for all eternity as your deeds will follow you.

**V.14-20 The Final Harvest** We begin this section by looking at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ on the clouds of heaven. As already indicated these chapters are summarizing the events over the last days and in this section, we see one of the final events in the history of the world. What we are seeing described here is what Jesus spoke about during His earthly ministry.

“Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.’ He answered, ‘The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.’ (Matthew 13:36-43)

The resemblance is unmistakable and telling for us about what is really happening in Chapter 14. This is a picture of the final harvest of the earth even though Jesus' return does not happen "officially" until Chapter 19 we see it here pictured as the end time harvest. We know this because of all of the details that are shared about Jesus' return. First, we see it is the Son of

Man, which Jesus called himself in the above passage. Second, we see him coming on the clouds of heaven which is how Jesus describes His own return. Finally, we see Him with a crown of gold and a sharp sickle in His hand. There is no question whether this is describing the final harvest or not but there is a question of whether this harvest includes believers and unbelievers or unbelievers only. The reason for this is that there appears to be two reapings – one by Jesus (the Son of Man) and the other by an angel with a sickle. We know that the second group is unbelievers because of the wrath of God that is described for them in the remaining verses. What is not completely clear is when Jesus swings His sickle whether it is the beginning of the judgment of the unbelievers or if He is removing the final believers before the wrath of God is completed in what appears to be the scene at Armageddon. My take on it is that these are the final believers that have not taken the mark of the beast. They were not with the 144,000 who were commended for their faith and dependance on Christ. I believe that this final harvest of believers is of those who are saved through their faith but as those who suffer loss. 1 Corinthians 3:15 says “If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.” I take this to be transpiring with Jesus’ final act of reaping. These individuals were not redeemed with the 144,000 who did not defile themselves and who followed the Lamb wherever he went, but they kept the faith and, in the end, did not take the mark or worship the antichrist. I am not advocating an understanding of a different type or level of faith only a different level of rewards which is taught throughout the Scriptures. Admittedly this is conjecture and it is very possible that at this juncture Jesus is pictured with the sickle because the wrath of God has begun. Jesus is able to judge and this could very well be the case as it says in John 5:26-27 “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man.” Jesus is the Son of Man and He has the authority – be warned that this could be that judgment.

Let’s take a closer look at how this scene transpires with all of these angels. The first angel (v.15) tells Jesus that it is time to reap and to put in His sickle. We shouldn’t be disturbed by this angel telling Jesus what to do. It is not as much of a command as it is communication from the Father. Jesus told us that He did not know the day or the hour and we get the impression that the communication from this angel means – here it is. Jesus could know this information if He wanted to, He is the Son of God and completely omniscient, but He chose to deny Himself the right of knowing this fact in order to serve His Father. In Revelation 14 we see a picture of the secret being revealed to Jesus and there is no hesitation or delay. The second angel that we see (v.17) has a sharp sickle and we get the impression that he is ready to reap as well. The third angel (v.18) comes out from around the altar of incense and he calls with a loud voice to the angel with the sickle - “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” At this point the angel swings his sickle and the harvest is thrown into the winepress of the wrath of God. This is obviously not a good place to be and we get the impression from the following verse that everyone is destroyed because the blood is described as flowing for 180 miles at about four feet high. This is really difficult to even think about and we get the impression with that much blood that this is a picture of the scene at Armageddon. Again, we will see this happen sequentially in Chapter 19 when we see the full picture of Jesus’ return, but here in these verses we see what is happening behind the scenes with the angels.

As we study about the final harvest there are many Old Testament verses that talk about this transpiring and I think it is helpful context for us to look at a few of those. We have already

talked about Isaiah 63 in this study and I think that is an obvious reference to Jesus and His authority to reap. Some of the other references are:

“Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.” (Joel 3:13)

“Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light...For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.” (Hosea 6:5,11)

“For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while and the time of her harvest will come.” (Jeremiah 51:33)

As with the illustration of the Ark and the flood there will be a time when God shuts the door and there is no more opportunity to get on the boat. This is part of the realization that Jesus will come like a thief. Whenever that time is - it will be too late and the mark will not be undone. I think it is spiritually helpful to imagine turning down the mark of the beast regardless of the consequence. This discussion should not make us afraid, but it should make us long for the return of Christ. Whatever the antichrist can offer you to take the mark it is temporary and fleeting and your faith in Christ will serve you for all of eternity. Do not bow and do not turn. Whether it is for food or safety or the lives of your family members or even yourself – there should be nothing that would make you submit to the threat of the antichrist to deny the true Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus knew what He was doing when He turned down the devil in the wilderness and He knew the consequence would be His death. Follow His example so that you can spend eternity with Him forever on the New Heavens and the New Earth in your resurrected bodies with no more disease, or sickness, or crying, or pain.