

THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST AND THE JUDGMENT OF THE WICKED IN REVELATION 14

INTRODUCTION

- Chapter 14 consists of a series of pronouncements about the final outcome of the Tribulation age, a preview of Christ's ultimate victory
- It begins with the assurance that Christ will ultimately stand in triumph over His enemies
- It concludes with a series of judgments being pronounced on the wicked
- It provides a bright contrast to the darkness associated with Antichrist and the false prophet in chapter 13

THE WORSHIP OF THE 144,000

Their Identity

Revelation 14:1 ~ Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

- The scene for this occasion is “the Lamb standing on Mount Zion” which refers to the Second Coming of Christ
- This will be a monumental moment in redemptive history, anticipated often in the OT:

Psalms 2:6-9 ~ But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain. 7 I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.’

Psalms 48:2 ~ Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion in the far north, The city of the great King.

Isaiah 11:9-12 ~ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious. 11 Then it will happen on that day that the Lord Will again recover the second time with His hand The remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, And from the islands of the sea. 12 And He will lift up a standard for the nations And assemble the banished ones of Israel, And will gather the dispersed of Judah From the four corners of the earth.

Isaiah 24:23 ~ Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, For the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, And His glory will be before His elders.

Zechariah 14:4 ~ In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south.

- Some have identified Mount Zion as the heavenly Zion, the abode of God (i.e. namely that the 144,000 are in heaven at this point in John's vision)

- But a problem exists with this view: “The whole point would be lost if Mount Zion refers to heaven, because that would be the one hundred and forty-four thousand had died. In that case, their sealing with the mark of God...would be rendered meaningless.”¹
- The 144,000 mentioned here are the same ones that were mentioned at the beginning of the Tribulation in Rev 7:4-8
- They are seen here later in the Tribulation, having survived the catastrophes already experienced on the earth up to this point because of God’s gracious preservation
- Most likely, their presence here anticipates their triumph at the time of Christ’s return from heaven to earth
- The preferable view is that “this is a prophetic vision of the ultimate triumph of the Lamb following His second coming, when He joins the 144,000 on Mount Zion at the beginning of His millennial reign.”²
- They will emerge triumphant from the worst holocaust in history
- John provides more information here about the nature of their seal on their foreheads (Rev 7:2-3): “having his name and the name of His Father on their foreheads”
- This expression clearly identifies them as belonging to both the Father and the Son
- As a result of this seal, God will not permit them to be harmed

Their Song

Revelation 14:2-3 ~ And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

- Verse 2 describes a scene reminiscent of chapters four and five
- “The preponderance of evidence seems to indicate that this is indeed a heavenly scene which John is seeing ‘in the Spirit’ while his body is on earth. If the 144,000 are on earth in Zion, who then are the company in heaven? Though the natural questions concerning their identity are not clearly answered in that text, the heavenly group are probably the martyred saints of the tribulation, in contrast to the 14,000 who are on earth and do not suffer martyrdom. Both groups, however, experience the trials of the great tribulation and therefore are alone worthy to enter into the song of redemption recounting their victory over these enemies and praising God for His grace which has numbered them among the redeemed.”³
- “Chronologically, the song John hears is their hymn of praise in heaven during the time of the great tribulation, but the same song is echoed by the 144,000 who stand triumphantly on Mount Zion after the tribulation.”⁴
- The “new song” is the song of redemption and only those purchased by Christ’s blood can sing this song
- The reason the song is restricted to only the 144,000 is not stated; however, it may be related to the fact that they are uniquely protected from pain and death during the Tribulation by the guarding seal of God
- As a result, they make it through the fiercest persecution in history, unscathed

Their Holiness

¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 71.

² John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 214.

³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 215.

Revelation 14:4-5 ~ These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

- These descriptions point to God’s ability to keep believer pure during the Tribulation on earth
- “not defiled with women” – this could refer to:
 1. Abstinence from marriage during the Tribulation (but sex within marriage doesn’t defile anyone)
 2. Spiritual purity (i.e. not defiled by a love for the world or a compromise with evil) – the term “virgin” is used in this context in 2 Cor 11:2
 3. Resisting all temptations to sexual immorality – sexual immorality will be likely associated with the worship of Antichrist; however, the 144,000 will stand apart from this aspect of the sinful culture around them
- “the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” – refers to them living their life for the glory and honor of Christ; they will be completely loyal to Him
- “purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb” – The 144,000 “are the godly nucleus of Israel which is the token of the redemption of the nation and the glory of Israel which is to unfold in the kingdom.”⁵
- They point to the harvest of many other Israelites who will turn to the Lord at the end of the Tribulation and during the Millennium (Zech 12:10)
- “no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless” – “lie” = *pseudos* = there is no falsehood in them; they have been kept clean from the false religion of the Tribulation
- This is a reminder of the importance of being holy and blameless in the midst of the wicked world we live in, both in the present (Eph 1:4; 5:27; 1 Peter 1:15-16, 19; Col 1:22) and the future

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE ANGELS

- The proclamations of the first three angels warn about siding with Antichrist against God

The First Angel – announces the Gospel

Revelation 14:6-7 ~ And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7 and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”

- This angel appears in “midheaven” – a place above where he will be most visible to those on earth and also beyond the reach of Antichrist who has been confined to the earth (Rev 12:7-9)
- He comes preaching an “eternal gospel” to the unbelieving world who has already heard the gospel preached by the 144,000 evangelists, the two witnesses, and other believers
- Despite those previous evangelistic efforts, most of the unbelieving world will reject the gospel
- So, God will send the gospel to them again through this angel
- He will preach the “eternal” gospel, the one which brings everlasting life, the same one proclaimed throughout all of history

⁵ Ibid., 216.

- He will proclaim the good news that it is not too late to repent and believe in Christ before God’s judgment continues
- This evangelistic angel will proclaim the gospel “to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people,” demonstrating the comprehensive, worldwide extent of the angel’s proclamation
- “The message of this gospel is to all the world. It is God’s last call of grace to a world that persists in rejecting Him and that openly defies Him.”⁶
- This will be necessary so that “[t]his gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matt 24:14)
- His message will be: “fear God...give Him glory...worship Him,” an invitation to all people to forsake their allegiance to the beast and instead worship the Lamb
- The 3 invitations point to a life lived entirely for God and His purposes
- This will be necessary because the “hour of His judgment has come” and opportunity is fading fast because the bowl judgments are about to be poured out, followed shortly by the return of Christ
- The reason the angel gives for worshipping God alone is that He is the One “who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters”
- He alone is creator God (Ps 19:1-4; Is 40:21-26; Rom 1:18-20; Rev 4:11) and is, therefore, the only one worthy of worship

The Second Angel – announces judgment

Revelation 14:8 ~ And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.”

- The fact that this angel’s message is one of judgment points to the sad reality that the first angel’s offer of the gospel will be largely rejected
- Perhaps “Babylon” here refers to a restored city of Babylon which will be Antichrist’s capital city (Rome?)
- But, it likely refers to much more than an actual city and includes Antichrist’s political, economic, and religious empire
- “Babylon has from its inception symbolized evil and rebellion against god. It was founded by Nimrod (Gen. 10:9), a proud, powerful, God-rejecting ruler. Babel (Babylon) was the site of the first organized system of idolatrous false religion (Gen. 11:1-4). The Tower of Babel, the expression of that false religion, was a ziggurat; an edifice designed to facilitate idolatrous worship. God judged the people’s idolatry and rebellion by confusing their language and scattering them over the globe (Gen. 11:5-9). Thus the seeds of idolatry and false religion spread around the world from Babylon, to take root wherever these proud rebels and their descendants settled.”⁷
- The repetition of “fallen” emphasizes that its demise is absolutely certain and final such that it can be spoken of as something that has already taken place
- Thus, this reference to “Babylon” is apparently in anticipation of the demise of Antichrist’s kingdom
- Two reasons are given for its destruction:

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 123.

⁷ MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 90.

- Its immorality
- The fact that it infected other nations with its great sin
- Babylon's destruction comes when the 7th bowl is poured out:

Revelation 16:17-19 ~ Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done." 18 And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

- Revelation 17-18 give details of Babylon's destruction

The Third Angel – announces damnation

Revelation 14:9-11 ~ Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

- This angel announces the fate of those who "worship the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand"
- This refers to the doom awaiting all those who receive the mark of the beast (see Rev 13:15-18) and worship him

The Wrath of Their Punishment

- They will "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger"
- They will experience God's "wrath" (*thumos*) – refers to a vehement fury, a hot anger, a fierce outburst of wrath, more sudden in its rise, but does not last long
- They will experience God's "anger" (*orge*) – refers to a settled indignation, less sudden in its rise, but longer lasting
- When used together, these words intensify the reality of God's anger
- He will unleash the white heat of His wrath that has been restrained for so long
- To "drink of the wine of the wrath of God" is an OT way of picturing the awfulness of God's future judgment
- To drink it "mixed in full strength" is a reference to the fact that it will be undiluted and in its greatest concentration (i.e. untempered by the grace and mercy of God)

Psalms 75:8 ~ For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup, And the wine is red; It is fully mixed, and He pours it out; Surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth Drain *and* drink down

Jeremiah 25:15-17 ~ For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations to whom I send you to drink it. 16 They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them." 17 Then I took the cup from the LORD'S hand and made all the nations to whom the LORD sent me drink it:

The Pain of Their Punishment

- Those who worship the beast "will be tormented with fire and brimstone"

- Fire may be literal fire, but more likely it symbolizes the horrible suffering of the unrighteous in hell
- Brimstone is a fiery sulfur
- Taken together, “fire and brimstone” are often associated with divine judgment in Scripture

Revelation 19:20 ~ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into **the lake of fire which burns with brimstone**

Revelation 20:10 ~ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into **the lake of fire and brimstone**, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever

Revelation 21:8 ~ But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part *will be* in **the lake that burns with fire and brimstone**, which is the second death.

- This description of hell fits with the rest of Scripture where it is described as a place of untold grief and pain:
 - The outer darkness – Matt 8:12
 - The place where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth – Matt 22:13; 25:30
 - Eternal fire, a place where fire is not quenched, a fiery furnace – Matt 13:42; 18:8
 - Place where worm does not die – Mark 9:48

“There is no way to describe hell. Nothing on earth can compare with it. No living person has any real idea of it. No madman in wildest flights of insanity ever beheld its horror. No man in delirium ever pictured a place so utterly terrible as this. No nightmare racing across a fevered mind ever produces a terror to match that of the mildest hell. No murder scene with splashed blood and oozing wound ever suggested a revulsion that could touch the border lands of hell.”⁸

The Location of Their Punishment

- This punishment will take place “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”
- In some degree, hell is in the very presence of God...hell’s true master is God, not Satan
- True, they will be separated from God, barred from His love, grace, and mercy

2 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

- But they will be punished “in the presence” of God’s wrath
- So, God will be the hell of the one and the heaven of the other

The Duration of Their Punishment

- Their punishment will be eternal in that “the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night”
- This is not a momentary torment but one that continues forever
- Many have invented ways to get around the reality of eternal destruction, like assuming annihilationism
- But the Scriptures repeatedly affirm that punishment in hell is eternal:

⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2304/the-furnace-of-fire>

Matthew 25:46 ~ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Jude 7, 13 ~ Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire...wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever

2 Thessalonians 1:9 ~ And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power

Mark 9:47-48 ~ And if your eye causes you to stumble, cast it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell, where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED”

We can conceive but little of the matter, but to help your conception, imagine yourself to be cast into a fiery oven or a great furnace where your pain would be as much greater than that occasioned by accidentally touching a coal of fire as the heat is greater. Imagine also that your body were to lie there for a quarter of an hour full of fire. What horror would you feel at the entrance of such furnace? How long would that quarter of an hour seem to you? And after you had endured it for one minute, how overbearing would it be to think that you had to endure another 14? But what would be the effect on your soul if you knew you must lie there enduring that torment to the full for 24 hours, for a whole year, for 1000 years? Oh then would not your heart sink if you knew that you must bear it forever and ever? That there would be no end? That after millions and millions of ages your torment would be no nearer to an end and that you never, never should be delivered? But your torment in hell will be immensely greater than this illustration represents.⁹

The Blessing of the Saints

Revelation 14:12-13 ~ Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, “Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

- Although Antichrist will try to bring the world under his control, some will “keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus”
- Rather than taking the easy way out by worshipping the beast, they will faithfully follow Christ in the time of great tribulation
- As a result, many of them will be martyred (“the dead who die in the Lord from now on” refers to those who die as tribulation saints)
- They will demonstrate the “perseverance of the saints” – i.e. that God keeps His own saints secure by sustaining their faith to the very end
- True saving faith is eternal and cannot be lost (cf. John 6:37-40, 44, 54; 10:28-29; Rom 8:29-30, 35-39; Jude 24-25)
- Even the horrible events of the Tribulation and the persecution of the Antichrist will not cause true believers to be lost
- “There is not stronger evidence that saving faith perseveres than the reality that the most tested believers in history will maintain their saving faith until the end.”¹⁰
- These who die in the Lord will be “blessed”
- This is the second of seven beatitudes in Revelation (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14)

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, <https://www.gracegems.org/09/01/HELL.html>

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 96.

- They are blessed for two reasons:
 - For how they lived (v. 12)
 - For how they died (v. 13)
- “It is far better to be dead at the hand of the beast than to have favor as his worshipper.”¹¹

The Judgment of the Son of Man

Revelation 14:14-16 ~ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” 16 Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

- Although some have identified the “son of man” as an angel, it is more probable that it is Christ Himself for a number of reasons:
 - The title “son of Man” is often used to refer to Christ, especially in Matthew (Matt 8:20; 9:6; 11:19; 12:8, 32; 13:41; cf. Dan 7:13-14)
 - The “golden crown on His head” suggests One with royal dignity who conquers and rules
 - The “sharp sickle in His hand” suggests judgment, a privilege bestowed on Him by the Father (John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31)
- Another angel calls for Christ to “put in your sickle and reap,” likely in response to God the Father indicating that it is time for Christ to move in judgment
- The reason for this is because the earth is “ripe” (*exeranthe*) = dry, withered, overripe, rotten
- The picture here is of a fruit that has become so ripe that it has begun to dry up and wither
- This is a picture of the moral condition of the world at this point in the Tribulation
- The inhabitants of earth have passed the point of any usefulness and are fit only to be burned with fire (cf. Matt 13:40)
- This is an invitation for and a prelude to Christ’s judgment to be unleashed in His 2nd Coming
- This is a preview of what is to come in the Battle of Armageddon, when Christ mows down His enemies like a farmer cutting grain
- This will begin with the bowl judgments (the first phase of the final reaping of the earth) and will culminate in Christ’s return

The Angel with the Sharp Sickle

Revelation 14:17-20 ~ And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. 18 Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. 20 And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

- Another angel with a “sharp sickle” appears to help in the harvesting
- Jesus stated that angels will participate in the judgment of the world at the end of the age:

Matthew 13:39-42 ~ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man

¹¹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 220.

will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- Angels will assist in God’s judgment because “her grapes are ripe,” a reference to the need for unrepentant sinners to be finally judged
- The “wine press” is used to paint a gruesome picture of God’s judgment which will be poured out “outside the city”
- The Battle of Armageddon will be waged in the valley of Megiddo (cf. Rev 16:13-16; 19:17-19)
- Har-Magedon = in Hebrew “the mountain or hill of Megiddo”
- Mt. Megiddo is located 60 miles north of Jerusalem
- Megiddo or Tel Megiddo, an ancient fortified city, is one of the most famous battlegrounds in the world. Historians believe that more battles were fought at this location than anywhere else on earth
- The valley of Megiddo, now known as the valley of Jezreel, will serve as the gathering place for the final battle between Christ and Antichrist’s
- Actually, the final battles will encompass the entire length of the nation of Israel



- The battle will result in enough blood spilled to cover the entire nation five feet deep (“up to the horses’ bridles”)
- Perhaps it will actually be this deep: “If at the end of the Tribulation, 1.5 to 2 billion people remain on earth, and if 10 percent of them are fighting at Armageddon, that means 150-200 million people will be fighting and, presumably, most slaughtered. The valley of Megiddo, where the war will be fought in the north of Palestine, drains into the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea, allowing sufficient distance to literally fulfill this prediction.”¹²
- Or perhaps it is illustrative of the devastation of that battle: “A better interpretation, whether there are actual horses involved or not, sees this as hyperbole to suggest the slaughter in which blood will splatter into the air profusely along the whole length of the battle. When the slaughter reaches its peak, blood could flow deeply in troughs and streambeds.”¹³

¹² Ryrie, *Revelation*, 126.

¹³ MacArthur, *Revelation 13-22*, 117.