



REVEATION Class 10: Revelation 14: *The Choice is Yours!*

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

You cannot understand Revelation 14 apart from chapter 13: where *Satan attempts to exterminate the people of God*.¹ In Rev 13 a false trinity of dragon (13:2), beast (13:1), and false prophet (13:11ff., 16:13) *counterfeit the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to lead the world into rebellion*. Chapter 14 is the climax to these events. God responds to vindicate His people (14:1-5) and judges the beast-system (14:7-11). Both verdicts are made visible and final at Christ’s gathering of His people to Himself (14:14-16), and by the destruction of the wicked “outside the city” (14:17-20).

Structure of Rev 13-14

<p>The beast-system’s judgment upon all those who follow the Lamb wherever He goes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. persecution 2. condemnation 3. death 	<p>(Proleptic Visions) God's “judgment” [judicial perspective] of those who follow the Lamb:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. unity with Christ 2. salvation 3. security <p>(Consummation) Rev 14:14-16 Christ's final, visible harvest of His people: the “firstfruits of the Lamb.”</p>	<p>God's “judgment” of those who worship the beast [spiritual Babylon]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. final offer of grace 2. condemnation 3. death <p>Rev 14:17-20 The final destruction of the wicked as grapes in the wine press of God's wrath.</p>
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The two chapters are a unit: counterpoints to each other. They contrast the beast (*therion* [monster]) with the Lamb (*arnion*).² They also contrast **false worship** with **true worship**; and the *multitudes of earth* who follow the beast and receive his name or mark on their foreheads or hands; with the 144,000 who *follow the Lamb* and have His name (*seal*) written on their foreheads. As a unit, they show that unity with the Lamb, which brings *the wrath of the dragon*

¹ The true Church has always known the reality of tribulation and persecution (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12), and the final tribulation will only be a universal intensification of this age-old phenomena. See Ladd, Revelation, p. 118.

² Eller' s comments on the duel of “the therion vs. the arnion,” are helpful for understanding the irony of the situation in Rev 13 and 14 where John sets up a showdown in which a dreadful monster (i.e., therion) is challenged by a small Lamb (i.e., arnion). Eller, pp. 79-80.

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(12:17), or unity with the beast, which brings the wrath of God (14:8-10). **We must choose.**

Revelation often shifts from scenes of persecution and even martyrdom for the saints to visions of their ultimate victory and the assurance of salvation in the Lamb. This is true in 14:1. Right after the beast issues a death decree upon all who refuse to give him allegiance, John declares:

Revelation 14:1-2

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. 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

Once again John wants us to see not just the Christ—but the crucified/risen Christ (“**the Lamb standing**”) as God's **ultimate answer** to Satan's **ultimate challenge**. The Lamb stands on “**Mount Zion**,” which, in Old Testament prophecy, represents the place of victory, divine glory, and eschatological deliverance (Isa 26:1; 10:5; Micah 4:6). Describing of the “*day of the Lord*,” the prophet Joel had said: “*And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion . . . there will be deliverance*” (Joel 2:32).

For John, **Zion** is no longer the **temple compound** within literal Jerusalem (which had been destroyed by the Romans). Now it is the **temple within the city of the living God**, the New Jerusalem, **already present** on earth in the church “*whose names were written in heaven*” (Heb 12:22ff.; Gal 4:26; Eph 2:21-22; cf. Rev 20:9).⁴

The **144,000** does **not symbolize limitation**, but **the fullness** of the redeemed community.⁵ It is the **kingdom number**, 12, times itself, times a thousand (**12 x 12 x 1000**). **Wherever they are geographically**, they are **united spiritually in one place—around the Lamb**. To live by faith in Christ is to be on Mt. Zion, the place of God's promised deliverance on the day of His wrath (Joel 2:32; 3:16-17; Rev 17:14). **Their location** symbolizes **their victory** over the beast.

In contrast to the **beast's mark**, which is **his name** (13:17), the 144,000 have the “name” of the Father and of the Lamb written on their foreheads. Like the Old Testament prophets, for John the

³ Beasley-Murray recognized the **dramatic intensity of the juxtaposing of 13:15-17 and 14:1-9**, declaring: “**In the face of the threat of total annihilation for the church, chapter 14 conveys assurance of vindication for the followers of the Lamb of God and judgment upon the followers of the beast**” (Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 221 [emphasis supplied]).

⁴ Ladd, *Revelation*, pp. 189-90, discusses the references to “**Mt. Zion**” in the New Testament which uniformly speak of **a spiritual reality, the church of Christ, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament eschatological hope**, and not the literal temple mount located in Jerusalem.

⁵ See also Barclay, *Revelation* 2:69; Ezell, pp. 57-65. See comments on pp. 180-82 of this study.

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divine name denotes God's glory, that is, His character, especially as revealed by His redemptive work in Christ (John 17:6ff.; 12:28; Ex 33:18 19, 34:6).⁶ A **seal or mark on the forehead** signifies the **alliance of the mind**. Gathered around the Lamb, the **144,000 consist of those whose lives are define by the revelation of God in Christ** (cf. Heb 12:2), and they are **being conformed to His image** (2 Cor 3:18).

Here as everywhere in Revelation, John uses the **proleptic** technique of picturing the earthly saints as **already glorified citizens in heaven** amidst their great tribulation on earth. While those who **reject Christ** “*dwell on the earth*” (6:10; 13:8), those who “*follow the Lamb*” are already seen as those who “*dwell in heaven*” **with Christ** by virtue of His sacrifice (7:9-14; 12:12; 13:6-8; 17:14; 18:20; 19:2; cf. Eph 2:6 and Phil 3:20). **Their location indicates the divine verdict of acceptance they already possess through their union with the Lamb** (12:1, 11-12; 7:9-14). This truth is the **main point of Rev 14:1-5**. Mounce commented:

That they have been purchased from the earth [14:4] does **not** mean they were removed bodily from the earth (see John 17:15) but that they were **separated** from the evil ways of the world and the tyranny of its pernicious philosophies.⁷

Revelation 14:1-5 **mirrors the vision** found in **Rev 7**. By portraying Christ's community as **already in heaven**, they both offer the **same message** to those who steadfastly trust in Christ (see 14:4 and 7:14). Even as they face persecution and martyrdom, **their salvation is assured**. John uses OT symbols to present the same truth found in the Pauline concept of justification (Rom 5:1-10): that the **positive verdict of God already belongs to those who truly follow the Lamb--they need not wait with apprehension wondering what their standing is**.

Revelation 14: 3-5

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**. They did not defile themselves with women, for they are **virgins: they follow the Lamb wherever He goes**. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as **firstfruits** to God and the Lamb. **No lie** was found in their mouths; they are **blameless**.

⁶ H. Bietenhard, “Name,” *NIDNIT*, 2:653. Said Swete: “The Divine name on the forehead suggests the imparting of a character which corresponds to the mind of God and the consecration of life to His service” (Swete, p. 177). See also Hendriksen, pp. 181-82

⁷ Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 269. Milligan concurred, stating: “The 144,000 are in full possession of their Christian privileges and joys. They are not 'in heaven' in the ordinary meaning of the term. They are on earth. . . but **they are both sealed and in the presence of the Lamb**” (Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 243).

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The 144,000 sing “**a new song before the throne**” and “*no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand purchased from the earth.*” We already have the words of the new song of redemption in **Rev 5:9-10**.⁸

The 144,000 are **symbolically identified as virgins** (sexually undefiled; 14:4; see 2 Cor 11:2). They have resisted the seductions of the great harlot who has made “*those who dwell on earth... drunk with the wine of her immorality*” (17:2). She is the “**mother of all harlots**” and to worship the beast-Babylonian system is “**fornication**” (*porneia* **14:8**; 17:4; 18:3; 19:2). **Idolatry as immorality** is often used in the Old Testament where **faithful** Israel is called a virgin and **idolatrous** Israel an adulteress. Here too God sees the saints as “**undefiled**” (Rev 3:4) because “*they follow the Lamb wherever He goes*”—even unto death (12: 11). **Virginity equals following the Lamb alone.**⁹

The 144,000 are the “**first-fruits:**” the **total portion of humanity which belongs [gives allegiance] to God and not to men.**¹⁰ They have been *purchased by the blood of the Lamb* (Rev 5:9-10; 1:5-6). Therefore, they are **reckoned by God** as having “*no lie in their mouth,*” a quotation taken from **Zephaniah 3** describing the “**remnant**” redeemed by the Lord *in the last days* (Zeph 3:11-13; cf. Ps 32:2; Rom 1:25). They are also accounted “**blameless**” (*amomoi*, see Eph 1:4; 5:27) through their union with the Lamb. In Christ, the **144,000** are seen as “**without blemish**” (1 Pet 1:19; 2 Cor 5:21) and **without “guile”** (2 Pet 2:22).

God knows those who are His (2 Tim 2:19). **Because they are united to the Lamb, they are eternally secure.** Now John turns to “**the hour of [God's] judgment,**” but only after assuring all who follow the Lamb that they are not in jeopardy. These symbols of acquittal clearly offer divine assurance to the church as it faces the wrath of the dragon who knows “*his time is short.*”

The Three Angels Messages (14:6-13): The First Angel: “The Hour of His Judgment”

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of the “new song” see the comments on Rev 5:9-10 on pp. 159-60 of this study. The new song is an Old Testament redemption concept. Every time God wrought a mighty deliverance for Israel and vindicated it by judging its enemies, a new song of praise was sung (Exodus 15:1ff.; Ps 96:1-2; 98:1; Isa 42:10-13).

⁹ Devine, pp. 1-5.

¹⁰ Hendriksen saw the “**first fruits**” as all who belong to God: “**The first fruits were for the Lord.** As such they were set apart from men in general. Cf. Jas 1:18. The world of humanity, which is ripening for final judgment, is often compared to a harvest, Matt 9:37; 13:30; Luke 10:2; John 4:35 [In Rev 14:14ff.] the first fruits are for the Lord, vss. 14-16; the rest are for Satan, vss. 17-20. The symbolism rests upon the O.T. law with respect to the first fruits. All the first fruits were offered to the Lord, after which the Israelite was at liberty to use the rest, Exod 23:19; Num 15:20; 18:12; Deut 26:2; Neh 10:35. Similarly, here we have a contrast between first fruits on the one hand, and men in general on the other. Hence, *all the redeemed, the full number of the elect, are included in these first fruits. Whatever does not belong to these first fruits is not the Lord*” (Hendriksen, p. 184 [emphasis supplied]).



Revelation 14:6-7

Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven. He had the **Eternal Gospel** to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. 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.”

This 1st angel’s message is for a 4-fold designation of people: the whole world (7:1-2). It is the “**Everlasting Gospel**.” There is **only one Gospel** and it presents the **substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the Cross as the atonement for all mankind's sins** (1 John 2:2), which **freely offers salvation** to all who **trust in Christ** (Rev 7:14; 1:5-6; 1 John 5:11-13; 2 Cor 5:14-21).¹¹

The New Testament **knows of no other gospel, not even if an angel from heaven should proclaim it** (Galatians 1:8-9). As Caird suggested, John wrote the term *gospel* and “***expected his readers to fill it with the full rich content of the apostolic preaching***.”¹² This message calls men to “**Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sins of the world!**” that “**whosoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life**” (John 1:29; 3:16).¹³

The Lamb is not only the **sufficient hope of the saints** (14:1-5); He is the **only hope for the ungodly** in “**the hour of judgment**.”¹⁴ The **urgency** of this final proclamation of the “everlasting gospel” is highlighted by John’s familiar phrase “**with a loud voice**” (14:7; cf. 7:2; 11:15; 12:10; 16:17; 18:2; 19:1) which specifically declares a note of redemption or salvation just before God’s judgment falls. This is also its significance here.

The 1st angel presents the **final offer of grace to rebellious creatures** from their **Creator prior to the outpouring of His wrath in judgment**. His message **combines Gospel with judgment**.

This **integration of gospel and judgment** is found throughout the New Testament. God’s ultimate verdict of acquittal (justification) for the believer in Christ is declared in anticipation of the threat of final judgment.¹⁵ **That is the Gospel**. Those who **reject God’s grace**, in the person

¹¹ “The great positive sign which was to precede the end was that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations (Matthew 24: 14). Here is the fulfillment of that prophecy: **the earth is given a final opportunity to accept or reject Jesus Christ**” (Barclay, 2: 143-44).

¹² G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, p. 183. See also the discussion of the phrase “everlasting gospel” in G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, pp. 224-25.

¹³ The meaning of this “eternal good news” is clearly understood by **comparing Rev 14:6 with John 14:6**: “Jesus therefore said, **I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes unto the Father but by Me.**”

¹⁴ Ford commented that “this verse has something to say to every group which claims it has God’s last message for the world. **Unless that message centers upon the gospel of the atoning death of the Lamb of God it is not God’s final offer of hope to a world heading for judgment**” (Ford, *Crisis*, 1:109).

¹⁵ Ladd described the eschatological implications of justification and judgment: “An essential element in the salvation of the future age is the divine acquittal and the pronouncement of righteousness; this acquittal,

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of the **Lamb**, receive **God's wrath**, in the person of the **Lamb** (Rev 6:15-17; cf. 7:14-17). **That is judgment.** This link between believing in Christ and deliverance from the wrath of final judgment is especially prominent in John's writings.¹⁶

“**The hour**” (*ha hora*) is a specific judgment term for John. In the 4th Gospel “*the hour*” points to the hour Jesus bears our judgment at the cross.¹⁷ There it equals Christ's passion, which is the revelation of God's glory and the judgment of the world (John 12:27-28, 31-33).

In Revelation, *ha hora* reappears and **points to God's final judgment** (14:7-11; cf. 18:10, 20).¹⁸ These “hours” are **counterparts**; in the first *Christ bears the wrath* which is rightly mankind's, and in the second *those who refuse His substitutionary suffering* now personally drink the same cup of wrath. This is the consistent definition for “**the hour of His judgment.**”

In **14:7 judgment** is defined by the verses which immediately follow it (8-11): God's judgment hour is the outpouring of His wrath on Babylon.¹⁹ This is made even more explicit in chapter 18 (which *repeats and enlarges 14:6-10*) where the three terms--hour, judgment, and Babylon--are

justification, which consists of the divine absolution of sin, has already been effected by the death of Christ and may be received by faith here and now. The future judgment has thus become essentially a present experience. God in Christ has acquitted the believer; therefore, he is certain of deliverance from the wrath of God (Rom 5:9), and he no longer stands under condemnation (Rom 8:1)” (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975], pp. 442-43).

¹⁶John 5:24-29; 6:40; 8:51; 9:39ff.; 12:31-32; 47-48; see also 1 John 4:10-19. John declares that each person passes judgment on himself by the attitude he takes to Christ's work for him (1John 5:11-13; John 3:16-19). Whosoever believes in Him will not perish--in judgment--but have everlasting life. Conversely, as Paul states, those who repudiate the gospel of Christ “*judge themselves unworthy of eternal life*” (Acts 13:36; cf. John 3:36).

¹⁷John 2:4; 4:21; 5:28; 7:30; 8:20; cf. 12:23, 27-33; 13:1; 17:1-5 cf. 21:19. For John, the cross is the judgment that saves and the salvation that judges, leading Caird to conclude: “In the cross judgment and salvation coincide in such a way that he who will not have Christ for his Savior must have Him for his Judge” (John 5:24; 3:16-19). (G. B. Caird, “Judgment and Salvation; an Exposition of John 12:31-32,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 2 [October 1956]:232).

¹⁸H. C. Hahn, “*hora*,” *NIDWIT*, 3:848. See also Ladd, *Theology of the NT*, pp. 249,307-8; and Morris, *Revelation*, p. 185.

¹⁹In Revelation the two Greek nouns translated “judgment” (*krima*: 17:1; 18:20; 20:4; and *krisis*: 14:7; 16:7; 18:10; 19:2) are used synonymously and interchangeably. Each occurrence of the word “judgment” denotes active condemnation, the exercise of divine wrath against the unrepentant, leading Schneider to declare: “Divine judicial authority is such that generally judgment and its effects are seen as one, so that *krima* [or *krisis*] means not only judgment, but also condemnation, damnation and punishment” (W. Schneider, “Judgment,” *NIDNIT*, 2:362-66.) Based on the evidence by Charles and others that John thought in Hebraic terms and was deeply rooted in Old Testament concepts, the words of Morris concerning judgment in the Old Testament are also helpful: “The dynamic character of the word [judgment] must be stressed. It is not an intellectual activity carried out in academic detachment. It is not an exercise in balancing evidence. It is an activity of discrimination and vindication. He who does *mishpat* [judgment] seeks out the wrongdoer to punish him, and the righteous to vindicate his cause” (cf. also Rev 11:18). (Morris, p. 17; see also pp. 16-25).

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repeatedly united. Both chapters present a final appeal to turn to God which is followed by a warning of judgment and then judgment, i.e., the active destruction of idolatrous rebellion.

The thematic correspondence between chapters 14 and 18: figure 4.

REV 14	REV 18
v. 6 I saw another angel, . . . having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth.”	v. 1 I saw another angel coming down from heaven . . . the earth was illuminated by his glory.
v. 7 “ <i>the hour of His judgment has come.</i> ”	v.8 For the Lord who judges her is strong.”
	v.10 Woe, woe, the great city <i>Babylon</i> ... for in <i>one hour your judgment has come.</i> ”
	v. 17 For in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!” 19-20. “. . . for <i>in one hour she has been laid waste!</i> Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints, apostles and prophets, because God <i>has pronounced judgment for you against her.</i> ”
v7. Fear God . . . and worship Him who made the heavens, the sea and the fountains of water” (forsake all false worship).	v. 4 Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues.”
v8. Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.	v2. He cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great.”
v8. She who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.”	v3. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality.
v9-10 If anyone worships the beast he <i>also</i> will drink the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed full strength in the cup of His anger.	v6. In the cup that she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.
v10-11 [The worshipers of the beast] will be tormented with fire and brimstone . . . and the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever.	v8-10. She will be burned up with fire . . . the smoke of her burning . . . the fear of her torment” (19:3: The smoke from her goes up forever and ever)

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The verb form of *erchomai* in 14:7: “**judgment has come**,” can indicate an event which has past or right now: either the hour *has occurred* or the hour *is here*.²⁰ Linguistically the first meaning is correct, but the latter meaning is the obvious one. Because the believers’ judgment at the cross, **John wants us to see both meanings**. Both the Cross and the time of the 2nd Coming are ‘judgment hours’ when God effectively deals with sin. Therefore, here and everywhere in the New Testament, judgment has a dual dimension of “*finished*” and “*yet to come*.”

For the Christian who “*follows the Lamb wherever He goes*” the **judgment hour “has come”** already in the Cross-resurrection event. There Jesus Christ bore God’s judgment on sin (1 John 2:2; cf. Rev 1:5-6, 18; 2:25; 5:5, 9-10; 7:10- 14).

But for those who reject this gift of the “*finished*,” substitutionary bearing of divine punishment, in the end time, their hour of judgment “*has come*” (14:7): it has arrived (14:8-10; 19-20).²¹

This truth connects all three angels' messages. The **first** positively *offers the true Gospel* and calls men to worship their Creator before judgment falls; the **second** declares that *Babylon's false gospel is fallen and ready to be judged*; and the **third** warns that the *consequence of false worship is the wrath of God* that is unmixed with mercy, thus pointing to the necessity of choice:

“The first is an **invitation**, the second a **warning** and the third a **prophecy** concerning the results. **All three speak of judgment**, but at different levels.”²²

The Second Angel: “Babylon Is Fallen”

The message of the second angel (14:8) is the **shortest of the three**. It declares the collapse and bankruptcy of Babylon:

Revelation 14:8

A second angel followed: “**Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great**, which made **all the nations** drink the maddening **wine of her adulteries**.”

The **first time Babylon is named in Scripture** (Gen 11:9; cf. Gen 10:10), it represents **humanity’s determination to reach heaven by the works of their own hands**. **It is a city founded in rebellion against God's covenant of grace**. Babylon becomes the **political and**

²⁰ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapt. of 4th rev and Aug. ed., 1952, by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. “erchomai,” pp. 310-11.

²¹ “It may seem strange that the angel with the gospel is followed immediately by the angels of doom. But **the gospel has of necessity a double-edged quality**. It is *good news* for those who receive it and welcome it and submit to it; it is *judgment* to those who reject it and disobey it and spurn it. And the condemnation of those who reject it is all the greater because they were given the chance to accept it” (Barclay, vol. 2: 144 [emphasis supplied]).

²² D. Ford, *Crisis* 2:597.

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religious capital of a world empire renowned for its luxury and moral corruption. Above all it was the **great enemy and persecutor of Israel**, God's people (Isa 21:9; Jer 50:2; 51:8). Isaiah identifies the spiritual ruler of Babylon as **Lucifer** (14:1, 12-14) who sought to be as God.

The **literal city-empire** reached its zenith of power during the reign of **Nebuchadnezzar** who **arrogantly erected an image of worship to himself** and declared in open rebellion: *“Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built... by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty”* (Dan 4:30, 5:20-24). Drawing on these sources John presents Babylon as that individual or corporate spirit of pride, self-worship, and ungodliness which, *in every age, has turned men from the worship of their Creator and faith in His righteousness*²³

What John states in this one verse he spells out in great detail in chapters **17-18**. Both chapters chronicle **“the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters”** (17:1). Babylon, the mother of harlots (17:5), stands in intentional contrast to the pure woman clothed with the sun in Rev 12:1. As the pure woman represents the loyal people of God in every age, the **harlot, dressed in scarlet, riding upon the beast** (17:3-4) points to *apostasy from God's truth*.

The **harlot forsakes the wilderness** (17:3), the place of God's provision, no longer looking to God for her needs; to create her great city of lust and greed. The **“great city”** engages in prostitution—the common biblical symbol of unfaithfulness to God (e.g., Jer 2:20, 24, 33; Ezek 16:15-59; 2 Cor 11:1-3). She is no longer guided by the Spirit but carried by the beast, *in her desire to receive the riches and power of the merchants and kings of the earth* (18:9-15; 11:8).

Babylon's list of priorities puts **gold and silver first and human lives last** (18:12-13). In turning away from the saving truth and peace of God, she seeks power and pleasure through union with the beast (17:3). This spirit of **false** (18:2), **proud** (18:7), **sensual** (18:3), **self-righteous** (17:4), and **greedy** (18:14) **religion** is directly responsible for **“the blood of the prophets and of the saints and of all who have been slain on the earth”** (18:24).²⁴ The inclusiveness of Babylon's guilt *for all the bloodshed and violence* in human history, again

²³ For further discussion of Old Testament background of the Babylonian system, see: Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 79. See also Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 273-74; and Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 184.

²⁴ In the Old Testament literal Babylon's animosity towards righteousness had two dimensions: one vertical, reflected in its antagonism to God's revealed will known through Jerusalem's sanctuary and horizontal, expressed in its hostility towards God's covenant people and their worship of Yahweh, the one true God. Both are crucial to understanding John's antitypical picture in Revelation 14-18 of a universal and spiritual “Babylon.” The essential character of Babylon is plain--it was the archenemy of both Israel and her covenant God. It rejected the truth of saving grace as revealed in the sacred temple of Jerusalem, blasphemed the God of Israel, and oppressed the people of God. This is the *theological* character of Babylon as religious type that continues in all her future manifestations, especially in her apocalyptic antitype during the time of the end.” LaRondelle. *Chariots of Salvation*, p. 87.

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indicates that no one system or organization is exclusively intended.²⁵

Rather, *from Cain's slaying* of righteous Abel *onward* (cf. 1 John 3:12), *Babylon has existed in every heart and religious system that professed to worship and represent God*, but in reality, worshiped the power, pomp, and sensual pleasure of human pride and self-exaltation.²⁶

Babylon is **demonic** (18:2; cf. 9:20 and Isa 14:1-14). She is the **mother of harlots** (Rev 17:5), spawning a multitude of twisted religious systems which have *polluted the knowledge of God* among men. Finally, spiritual Babylon offers religious justification for the murderous and self-righteous spirit of the beast to *carry forward its work in the name of God* (17:6; cf. John 16:2-3).

Isaiah (44-45) and **Jeremiah** (50-51) prophesied God's verdict of destruction and its execution upon ancient Babylon. This paved the way for Israel's vindication, release and return to Zion (Isaiah 40).

More specifically, **Isaiah depicted Babylon's collapse** through a sudden catastrophe (47:10-11) involving the **drying up of her waters**, i.e., the Euphrates (44:27), and the conquering of her gates by Cyrus, Yahweh's anointed king of kings from the east (44:28-45:6). This prophecy **became reality** approximately a century later in 539 B.C. At that time the troops of Cyrus, a Persian monarch, diverted the waters of the Euphrates, entered the city of Babylon by a dry riverbed, **slaying Belshazzar**, king of Babylon, as recorded in **Daniel 5**. Belshazzar and his nobles had **arrogantly defied the God of Israel and dishonored His temple** (Daniel 5:22-30) while **holding His covenant people in bondage**. For this their kingdom was judged.

Now, through Christ, God's antitypical "**Messiah**" (i.e., anointed One), **worldwide Babylon is exposed, defeated, and destroyed** as was its historical type. **At the Cross the sin of spiritual Babylon was exposed and defeated**. Finally, **at the 2nd Coming the presence of Babylon as a material reality is destroyed in a manner that recapitulates the fall of literal Babylon**, as Revelation 16:12, 18:4-10 and 19:2, 3 illustrate. John indicates in 17:16, 17 that Babylon's physical destruction comes when **the evil systems she has seduced and deceived act as the agents of divine vengeance**. Babylon's fall occurs because "**God has pronounced judgment for you** [the saints] **against her**" (18:20).

The Greek verb "**fallen**" is the **first word spoken by the 2nd angel**. It is an aorist of completed action and it is repeated for emphasis. These factors combine to give the impression of

²⁵ John pictures the woman sitting on the seven heads of the beast, which are seven (completeness) mountains (kingdoms) (17:7-9). Seven kingdoms do not indicate a quantity of selected kingdoms, but rather points to the fact that Babylon's spirit has ruled over all the religio-political systems of unregenerate humanity throughout history.

²⁶ Of this spirit Brunner wrote: "**Man's arrogance consists in believing that he can look after himself better than God can, that he knows what is good for him better than his Creator**" (Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1939], p. 131).

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accomplished certainty--there is no doubt about the fall of this city.²⁷ Like the dragon, **she is already doomed** (16:19).

The Third Angel: Worship of the Beast and the Wrath of God

The 3rd angel's message vividly **describes God's judgment** and identifies "**worship**" as the key issue which **determines who receives this judgment and who does not**. **A clear line is drawn**. **There are only 2 groups, 2 choices**: those who accept the **Gospel** and worship their **Creator** (14:6-7), and those who **reject the Gospel** and *worship the creature* (the beast, 14:9; 19:10):

Revelation 14:9-10

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, **they also 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.

The wine of God's wrath is poured "**full strength into the cup of His wrath**" (14:10). God's "cup of wrath" is a frequent Old Testament metaphor (Jer 25:15; 49:12; Isa 63:6; particularly Isa 51:

This is what your sovereign Lord says, your God, who defends His people: "See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from **that cup, the goblet of My wrath**, you will never drink again. I will put it into the hands of your tormentors." (Isa 51:22-23)

The **Gospels** refer to this **dreaded cup of suffering** which **Christ must drink** (Matt 20:22; 26:39, 42; Luke 22:42; John 18:11). Thus **Rev 14:9-10** serves as a **commentary on the sufferings of Calvary** where *Christ drank this cup for us*.

In the **final judgment** many will *drink again from the same cup* of unmixed wrath. But **only because they have rejected Christ**--and therefore *refused to appropriate as their own, the judgment against sin He experienced for them*.²⁸ Because they spurned Christ's sin-bearing, they carry their own sins on the last day. This is the "**second death**"—a separation from God as real as Christ experienced on Golgotha (Mark 15:34). The 3rd angel's message has a *redemptive purpose*.

²⁷ Barclay remarked: "Behind all this there remains the eternal truth that the nation or the man whose influence is to evil, the nation or man which loosens the bonds of the moral law. . . which makes vice more attractive, sin more easy, virtue more difficult, will not escape the avenging wrath of God" (Barclay, *Revelation*, 2:146).

²⁸ Richardson commented concerning Christ's substitutionary bearing of divine wrath: "It must be remembered that the New Testament teaches that in the miracle of the divine mercy it is Christ himself who is the actual bearer of the divine wrath . . . upon him the Messianic woes have fallen and he has borne on behalf of mankind the full weight of the judgment of God, so that God remains righteous though He acquits sinners (Ro 3:24-26). **The Cross of Christ is the visible, historical manifestation of the orge tou Theou: it is the supreme revelation of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men** (Rom 1:18; cf. 2 Cor 5:21)" (emphasis supplied). Alan Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 77.



It warns that the coming of divine wrath against sin is the inescapable reality which makes receiving the Gospel of divine mercy so necessary.

The symbols of “**fire and brimstone**” are drawn from the **fate of Sodom and Gomorrah** (Genesis 29:24; Luke 17:29) and become a **suitable fate** for this “**great city which is figuratively called Sodom**” (Rev 11:8). **Babylon will become as Sodom and Gomorrah** and so will be all who dwell in her (**Jude 7; 2 Pet 2:6-10**).

Revelation 14:11-12

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.**” This calls for **patient endurance** on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and **remain faithful to Jesus.**

Revelation 14:13-14

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.*”

The smoke of their torment ascending forever is **quoting Isaiah’s depiction of the utter destruction of Edom** (see Isa 34:8-10). This is **not an eternal hell.**²⁹ In Revelation, **their destruction** takes place “*in the presence of the Lamb*”—a forensic phrase that indicates the **Savior affirms the just destruction of those who despised His salvation.**

The 3rd angel’s message ends with a **reminder to the saints of their need for endurance.** They **must continue to trust in God’s salvation** (“faith in Jesus”) and respond in **obedience to God’s revealed will** (“keep God’s commandments”). To this encouragement is added the **2nd of 7 beatitudes** found in Revelation: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on,” and the Spirit personally affirms this verdict (14:13; cf. **1 Cor 15:56-58**).³⁰

Redemption and Judgment Consummated (14:14-20)

Revelation 14 contains **three visions of divine judgment** (1) **14:1-5**; (2) **14:6-13**; (3) **14:14-20**.

²⁹ Caird strongly rejected the idea that these judgment scenes implied an eternal existence of torment for the wicked: “If we protest that we cannot accommodate our minds to the idea of eternal torment, the answer is that neither could John. He believed that, if at the end there should be any who remained impervious to the grace and love of God, they would be thrown, with Death and Hades, into the lake of fire which is the second death, i.e., extinction and total oblivion (xx. 14ff.)” (G. B. Caird, *Revelation*, pp. 186-87).

³⁰ Death has lost its terror for the dead who die in the Lord, for they are united to Him who by His death and resurrection conquered death for them (Rev 1:17-18, 1 Cor 15:20ff.). The phrase “from now on” [henceforth] probably refers to the “now” of Christ’s redemptive victory (Rev 12:10). See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 227.



They all respond to the challenge of the beast's judgment on the saints in Revelation 13.³¹

In the **3rd vision (14:14-20)** John sets forth the consummation of the first two visions: the redeemed will be **literally gathered to Christ** (14:14-16; cf. 14:1, 4) and the **wicked literally receive eternal punishment**: God's undiluted wrath.

Revelation 14:14-16

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. 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.”* So He who was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and **the earth was harvested**.

John now sees **“One like the Son of man”** wearing a **golden crown** (*stephanon*). The **crown** is the victor's crown. The white cloud is the manifestation of divine glory at the Parousia (Matthew 24:30; 25:31). The sickle gathers His harvest (cf. Matt 24:31). The crucial phrase, **“One like the Son of man,”** identifies Christ with the **vindication-judgment passage of Dan 7:13-27**. In the synoptic Gospels **Christ declared Himself** to be Daniel's true **“Son of man”** (Luke 22:69-70). **Jesus' coming in glory is the judgment of the Cross consummated**: *vindicating* all who accept His atoning death and *destroying* all who reject it (Luke 9:23-26; 18:6-8; 2 Thess 1:6-10).³² In the truest sense the **Son of Man's appearing in judgment only reveals how all people have related to the judgment He bore on the Cross** (John 5:27).

“...the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” **The hour** signifies both the readiness of those who trust for redemption and the final maturation of rebellion for destruction. **“Harvest”** is an Old Testament metaphor for judgment/redemption on the **“Day of the Lord”** (Jer 51:33; Hosea 6:11). In New Testament apocalyptic passages the **Son of man harvests the earth by sending out His angels** to *“gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven and earth to the other”* (Mk 13:27; Matt 24:32; 1 Thess 4:15-17).

The New Testament writers use **harvest** to picture the **gathering of men into the kingdom of God** (Matthew 9:37; Mark 4:29; Luke 10:2; John 4:35-38; cf. Matthew 3:12: “And He will gather His wheat into His garner”).³³ Thus **Revelation 14:15 is Christ's harvest of His own people, those identified in Rev 14:4 as the “first fruits to God and to the Lamb”**.

³¹ J. W. Bowman, “Revelation, Book of,” *IDB*, 4:66.

³² O. Michel, “Son,” *NIDNIT*, 3:633; and also D. Ford, *Crisis* 1:105.

³³ “Jesus Himself spoke of the role of the Son of Man in the eschatological judgment which he likened to a harvest (Matt 13:37ff.); . . . the separation of the righteous from the wicked (Matt 25:31ff.)” (Ladd, *Revelation*, p. 199). There are three angels identified in this third vision series (14:14-20) that correspond to the three angels found in the second vision series (14:6-12).

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The Winepress of the Wicked (14:17-20)

Revelation 14:17-18

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a **sharp sickle**. 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**.”

This **angel from the altar** is undoubtedly the **same angel** described in Revelation **8:3-5**, who, in response to the prayers of the saints, takes “*fire from the altar*” and **hurls it to earth**. **Fire** symbolizes *retributive judgment* (Luke 9:54; 2 Thess 1:7). In Rev 6:9-10 the martyred saints pled for God from the base of the altar (where sacrificial blood was poured, Lev 4:7), to judge the wicked and avenge their blood. **Their prayers are now fully answered.**

This vine is the counterpart of Christ and His church (John 15:1-5). *Rather than clinging to Christ*, its tendrils grow downward **clinging to “the earth”** (14:8). Its fruit is arrogance and the persecution of righteousness (17:2-6; 18:20-24). “**Ripe**” portrays evil as **fully matured**, which Milligan described as: “. . . *sin, bold, determined, loved, and clung to as the sinner’s self-chosen gods, the sin of sinners who will die for sin as martyrs die for Christ and holiness.*”³⁴

Revelation 14:19-20

The angel swung his sickle on **the earth**, **gathered its grapes** and threw them into the **great winepress of God’s wrath**. 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.

The **reaping** of the wicked and **their destruction** in the “*wine press of the wrath of God*” (14:19-20) is a highly symbolic metaphors drawn from Old Testament and intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic sources (Joel 3:12-13; Isa 63:2-4; Ezek 38:22). The **blood which rises to the horses’ bridles** is a quotation from 1 Enoch 100:1-12: “. . . the horse shall walk up to the breast [bridle] in the blood of sinners.”³⁵ The **1600 furlongs** or “stadia” (RSV) is also symbolic (**4 x 4 x 10 x 10**) and stands for the “**complete judgment of the whole earth** and the destruction of all

³⁴ Milligan, *Revelation*, p. 250. Bollier identified the primary sins of the wicked in the Apocalypse as rejection of the Lamb and the persecution of His people, commenting: “Judgment is pronounced against those who slay the saints because they are the saints of God, the followers of Christ, those human agents who help carry on Christ’s battle against the powers of evil on this earth. Consequently, just as those who oppose the Messiah himself, so those who oppose Messiah’s agents must suffer judgment” (Bollier, p. 16).

³⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, p. 230.

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the wicked.”³⁶

Yet even in the midst of this horrible scene of carnage John inserts a **gospel note**. The **followers of the Lamb are already with the Lamb on Mt. Zion**, which is **within the holy city, the New Jerusalem** (14:1; cf. 20:9). But in this terrifying scene it must be noted that the **winepress of God's wrath is only trodden “outside the city”** (14:20). **To be with the Lamb [on Zion] is to be secure in the hour of judgment.**³⁷

Three visions—but **only two choices**. Choose wisely...

³⁶ **1600 is the product of 16 (the square of four, the number of the whole earth [Rev 7:1; 8:1], which is the abode of the wicked) and 10 x 10 (the number of man's kingdoms)**. Morris, *Revelation*, p. 186; or for an explanation of 1600 as 40 x 40 see footnote no. 45 in Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 283.

³⁷ Joel 3:2, 12-14 is the primary source for this judgment scene. Mounce comments: “The judgment of the nations in Joel 3:12-14 . . . takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat [Jehovah is judge], which tradition links with the Kidron valley lying between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Zechariah 14:1-4 places the final battle on the outskirts of Jerusalem . . . **judgment 'outside the city' must certainly be an allusion to the One who suffered for the sins of man 'outside the gate' (Heb 13:12; cf. John 19:20). “Those who refuse the first judgment of Christ's Cross must take part in the second at His coming”** (Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 282 [emphasis supplied]).