

## Chapter Fourteen

Chapter 13 seems to suddenly end without being resolved. It is essentially a description of how Satan has deceived mankind into devising its own way to heaven. It portrays the mechanics of his kingdom, its origin, and who uses it to exercises their influence. Satan is behind the scenes, pulling the strings of puppets he has brainwashed. The result is worldwide deception, where many follow the road to destruction. This is stuff that goes on even today. It's not future; it's now.

Chapter 14 now shows the true method of redemption. It is almost the heavenly equivalent of chapter 13. Thus, we move from the kingdom of Satan in the world, to the kingdom of Christ as it is found in the spiritual realm. Satan's harvest of souls now becomes Christ's harvest of judgment of those same souls who followed the beast (those who embraced humanism).

### The New Song, Babylon's Fall, and the Great Harvest

**14:1 And 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.**

Here is the juxtaposition between Good and Evil. In the previous chapter, the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Satan had lost his heavenly throne, was cast to the earth, and established a kingdom built on the unstable nations. Here, the Lamb is established, but not on sand, on a kingdom (mountain) that cannot be shaken:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...Therefore, since we receive *a kingdom which cannot be shaken*, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:22-29)

*144,000*: The saved remnant from among the Jews but probably representative of all of God's chosen people. They are standing *with* Christ. This is not a literal number, but represents the remnant who is called out from the true Israel (see notes on 7:4). The number 12 signifies *national* origin, while the number 1,000 means *many*, or *uncountable*.

*His name—name of His Father written on their foreheads*: The term *name* carries with it the person's authority and title (see notes on 2:17). It is written on their foreheads, meaning that it is engraved on their hearts (minds). That they are children of God is foremost in their minds, as the word indicates. The authority by which they walk (live) is a public acknowledgment made plain to all who see (see notes on 13:16).

You are our epistle written in our hearts, *known and read by all men*, having been *made plain* that you are the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, not having been written with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone, but in fleshly tablets of the heart (on the forehead). (2 Cor 3:2-3)

**14:2 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.**

*Voice—sound of many waters and loud thunder:* The voice of the nations saved by God (see notes on 1:15). The Great Harlot “sat on many waters,” which is interpreted as “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.” (17:15)

Not only was this voice majestic, but also sounded like *harpists playing on their harps*. The harp is mentioned more than any other musical instrument in the Bible. (2 Chr 29:25; Psa 147:7; Isa 23:16) David used a harp to soothe the evil spirit that troubled King Saul. (1 Sam 16:16, 23) Thus, the voice is *comforting*. It is the soothing song of redemption from the nations proclaiming their salvation by the Lamb of God.

**14:3 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.**

It is the 144,000 (True Israel; God’s chosen people throughout time) who are singing this song. It is a spiritual singing, taking place before the throne and the heavenly assembly. This is the only place in Revelation where the word *learn* appears. It signifies a grasping. Christians are to learn (grasp) what is pleasing to the Lord. (Eph 5:10) The text implies that no one could understand the new song (covenant) except those who had been redeemed.

*New song:* The words of this song are found in 5:9-10:

They sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” (Rev 5:9-10)

The psalmist wrote of “a new song,” wherein he says, “The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight *of the nations*.” (Psa 98:2) Each time the term *new song* appears in the OT, it signifies praise to God (Psa 40:3; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10), the truthfulness of His word (Psa 33:3, 4), and His salvation. (Psa 96:1ff; 98:1) From these scriptures, the new song can be rightfully understood as the new covenant found in the blood of Jesus.

Water shall flow from his buckets, His seed shall be in many waters (many nations), His king shall be higher than Agag, His kingdom shall be exalted. (Num 24:7)

**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. And no lie was found in their mouth;**

**they are blameless.**

*Not defiled with women:* A clear Jewish euphemism, referencing readiness and consecration. God told Moses that before the Israelites could witness the events on Mt. Sinai, they had to avoid sexual relations the night before. (Exo 19:15) During times of war and for certain religious rites, men avoided sexual relations with their wives to help sharpen their mind and senses.

The word *defiled* isn't necessarily negative. And, we can't limit this to mean unmarried men, since it would exclude women who have also kept themselves chaste, as in the case of those virgins who served the Lord. (Acts 21:9) As with the rest of the Revelation, "chaste" and "defiled with women" are all symbols, not literal. They are spiritual *concepts* being described in common, everyday language. Nearly all references to scriptural defilement refer to some sort of idolatry, a term used by God to mean *spiritual adultery*. (Jud 2:17; 8:27; 8:33; 1 Chr 5:25; Psa 106:39) Judgment came upon Israel because they defiled themselves with idols. (Ezek 23:30) A man does not defile himself by joining to a wife, since marriage is an institution of God.

These are Christians who have kept themselves from fleshly indulgence and fleshly attractions. Their sole mission has been to serve Christ.

*First-fruits:* The first ones harvested, as seen in Acts 2, where the Jews were the first Christians. The term first appears concerning the Feast of Harvest (Exo 23:16) and the Feast of Weeks. (Exo 34:22) The idea was that by giving to God first, the remainder would provide a bountiful harvest for the people. Upon entering the Promised Land, the Israelites were to bring the first-fruits of harvest to the priests, who benefited from the food. (Num 18:12; Ezek 44:30) The offering of first-fruits was connected to the portion (tithe) the Israelites gave back to God. (Neh 10:35ff) The term also means first-born. (Psa 105:36)

Christians possess the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:23), referring to the promise of resurrection. Jesus is called the first-fruits of those who are asleep, meaning He is the first of the bodily resurrection. (1 Cor 15:20) "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, *the first-fruits among His creatures.*" (James 1:18) Thus, the early church was the first-born as a result of the New Covenant. These were the Christians who were to meet the Lord first. (1 Thess 4:15) It is not the entire body of believers. By its very definition, the term implies that there are other fruits.

*No lie was found in their mouth:* They spoke the Word of God. (John 17:17) They did not embrace the teachings of Satan. (1 Tim 4:1)

*They are blameless:* They are *without fault*. They have been justified by grace. When the blood of Christ justifies a person, he or she stands before God as if they had never sinned.<sup>1</sup> They are blameless. Offering blemished animals was detestable in God's sight. (Deut 17:1) Those who are without spot or blemish are considered "altogether beautiful." (SOS 4:7) In comparing the Mosaic Law, the Hebrews writer says, "the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself *without blemish* to God is able to cleanse our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." (Heb 9:14)

These are the first-fruits of God, the beginning of the harvest of the true church into the kingdom of righteousness. They are the children of God from out of the nations (144,000), marked with God's seal. Paul said that salvation goes first (first-fruits) to the Jew, then to the Gentile. (Rom 2:10)

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<sup>1</sup> A good way to remember the meaning of 'justified' is to say, "**just if I'd** never sinned."

**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; 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 the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”**

This verse clearly demonstrates the distinction made in Revelation between those that dwell on the earth (Palestine) and the people of other nations, kindreds, and tongues. It says an angel (messenger) possesses the everlasting gospel to preach to those that dwell on the earth *and* to every nation, kindred, and tongue.

*Angel flying in midheaven:* The word *midheaven* only appears in Revelation. Three entities use it as their medium:

- (1) The eagle warning of coming troubles for those on the earth. (8:13)
- (2) The angel with the eternal Gospel preaching to those on earth. (14:6)
- (1) The birds who eat the flesh of various men who dwell on the earth. (19:17)

The word is properly rendered ‘midst of heaven.’ Thayer translates it to mean *the highest point in the heavens, which the sun occupies at noon, where what is done can be seen and heard by all.*

The redeemed in heaven sings a song of praise to God. They are purchased from those *on the earth*. The implication is that they are already with Christ, as the text says. They are the multitudes from the nations. Now, an angel has the “eternal Gospel,” preaching to those same nations still on the earth. The call is to repentance because God’s sickle is about to be put into the field (the world—Matt 13:38) and the works of men thrown into His wine press for destruction.

*Eternal Gospel:* The plan of salvation determined before the foundation of the world. Eternity has no beginning or end. Created things (temporary) are those which can be shaken. Un-created things (eternal) cannot be shaken. (Heb 12:26-29) Christians were chosen “from before the foundation of the world.” (Eph 1:4) The righteous have an everlasting foundation (Prov 10:25) which cannot be shaken.

My people shall know My name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, “Here I am.” How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” (Isa 52:6-7)

Zacharias was preached the Gospel by an angel (Luke 1:19), as were Joseph and Mary. (Luke 2:10) This good news was the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, made real in Christ’s death and resurrection. (Acts 13:32-41)

*Hour of His judgment has come:* The time of judgment that God foretold through the prophets. Once the plan of redemption was completed through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, there were no more excuses for mankind:

He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity...For He who requires blood remembers them; He does not forget the cry of the afflicted...The Lord has made himself known...The wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God...Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail; let the nations be judged before

Thee. Put them in fear, O Lord; let the nations know that they are but men. (Ps 9:8-20)

He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness. (Ps 96:13)

This judgment is done through His Word:

With righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the *rod of His mouth*, and with the *breath of His lips* He will slay the wicked. (Isa 11:4)

‘Striking the earth’ and ‘slaying the wicked’ is done through this eternal Gospel, not on a futuristic battleground. It is done with God’s *mouth* and *lips*. Do not view this as some sort of diluted payback—God said, “Let there be XYZ,” and it materialized.

God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus. (Rom 2:16) The death of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians is done via Christ’s presence and the Word of Truth. But in the immediate context, who is facing judgment? Is the text referring to the end of time? Or is it speaking of the Jews? A casual reading of both Thessalonian letters show over and over again that it was the unbelieving Jews who were causing all of the Christian persecution. And it was they who were about to face God’s wrath. They are called *Babylon, the Harlot*. In order to understand it, however, we have to turn to the book of Acts.

The next Sabbath nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. (Acts 13:44-45)

A primary reason for the Jews rejecting the Gospel was because God’s salvation included the Gentiles. When they saw the Gentile crowds, they were enraged.

Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46-47)

The Jews saw the Gentiles as the unclean of the earth, wallowing in paganism and sin. Hence they were severely critical of any idea that promoted God welcoming them into the kingdom, an inheritance they saw as strictly theirs. As Jesus told them, “the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him.” (Matt 21:31-32)

For so the Lord has commanded us, “I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth.” When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. (Acts 13:47-49)

This is the meaning of the angel (messenger) flying in midheaven, spreading the Good News. It is described in poetic form, but the messengers were the apostles. So is the reflection of “whatever happens on earth also happens in heaven.” To ignore the obvious and embrace some future antichrist is

forcing the text and mishandling the Word of Truth.

*Worship Him who made heaven, earth, sea, springs of waters:* God is the Creator of all things, and it is He who deserves the praise. It speaks to chapter 13, where “those who dwell on the earth” worship Satan, his kingdom, and the Satanic image. We are not to worship anything except God, and it is to Him that all glory belongs. Satan’s design in chapter 13 is to thus nullify the first two commandments:

(1) You shall have no other gods before Me. (Exo 20:3)

They worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast. (Rev 13:4)

(2) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. (Exo 20:7)

(The beast) opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle. (Rev 13:6)

**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.”**

Here is the first mention of the Great Harlot, Babylon. Having spoken of the nations, the focus is suddenly on Jerusalem. This is the prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction, which will be described in chapters 17 and 18. Many have wandered into error, thinking that Rome is being described. Rome was never destroyed in the classic sense. It faded away and disappeared, remaining a world power until 430 AD or thereabouts. Revelation deals with God’s relationship with the Jews, past, present and future. Why would Rome be of any consequence?

In the previous chapters, it was the unbelieving Jews who crushed the saints (chapter 11). In that chapter, Jerusalem was called Sodom and Egypt. (11:8) Here it’s called Babylon. Using human means, Satan tried to mislead and destroy the church (chapter 12), seeking to establish his earthly kingdom after being ejected from heaven (chapter 13).

The Christians who lived in Smyrna had to deal with the “blasphemy by those who claimed to be Jews,” but were actually employed by Satan. (2:9) The church in Philadelphia was promised that those same Jews would be bowing down at their feet, confirming God’s acceptance of Christians. (3:9) Jesus warned the Jews, “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you will see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and *yourselves being thrust out.*” (Luke 13:28) Jerusalem was Satan’s kingdom, an empire among the Jews who had rejected the True Messiah. The bowing down at the Christians’ feet would be a sign of their total defeat and humiliation. Satan had no interest in the pagan nations, including Rome—they were already lost in darkness. It was God’s people—the children of Christ’s kingdom—whom he sought to destroy.

*Babylon the great:* Israel was exiled to Babylon in fulfillment of Jeremiah 20. Chapter 50 portrays the ancient city’s destruction. The term, ‘Babylon the Great,’ is only used by Nebuchadnezzar, who boasted, “Is this not *Babylon the great*, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of *my* power and for the glory of *my* majesty?” (Dan 4:30) In the NT, ‘Babylon the Great’ only appears in Revelation, each in reference to its fall. Just as Nebuchadnezzar exalted himself and his kingdom above God, the Jews sought to exalt themselves, their city, and their traditions above Christ’s kingdom. In their mind, they were likened to Nebuchadnezzar: “Is this not Jerusalem, which we have built as God’s

royal residence by the might of *our* power and for the glory of *our* majesty?” They had faith only in their own self-righteousness.

Zion (Israel) was named the daughter of Babylon. (Jer 51:33) Peter mentioned a Christian woman who lived in Babylon. (1 Pet 5:13) Although the OT Babylon no longer existed during Peter’s time, scholars claim he was using a code word for Rome. However, Rome is freely mentioned in other epistles with no attempt at subterfuge. (Rom 1:7, 15; 2 Tim 1:17)

History tells us that Roman citizens initially viewed Christians as oddballs, since they only believed in one God and had no visible idols. The Roman persecutions that later followed were a result of Jewish provocation and Nero blaming Christians for the fire which he himself had orchestrated. The seed of Christian persecution was planted in Jerusalem, not Rome.

“The blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, (will) be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.” (Luke 11:50-51)

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt 23:37-38)

The notion that Rome is the object of God’s wrath has no scriptural foundation. The evidence clearly speaks of Jerusalem. The problem is that people have bought into the notion that Rome was another Sodom and Gomorrah, desperately wicked and decadent beyond measure. Yet Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and other historical writings show that the decadence was confined to the elitists and aristocracy, not the man in the street. The Roman citizens were disgusted with these despicable emperors and senators.

*Drink the wine of the passion of her immorality:* Wine alters a person’s personality, and is used in a variety of metaphors to describe reaping one’s harvest. There is the wine of violence. (Prov 4:17) Wisdom has “mixed her wine.” (Prov 9:2) There is a wine for Destiny (Isa 65:11), and the wine of God’s wrath. (Rev 14:10) The drinking brings unpleasant results. This phrase, “wine of the passion of her immorality,” appears twice. (14:8; 18:3) Jerusalem’s influence was such that the Jews swayed people away from God instead of being light in the world. Since it was through the Jews that the world was to eventually come to God, their disobedience had the opposite effect: it drove people away from God. This is seen in Jesus’ words to the Jewish religious leaders: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of Heaven against men. For you neither go in, nor do you allow those entering to go in.” (Matt 23:13) Although they had a passion for the law and its precepts, they had turned their religion into spiritual immorality. As a result of the Jewish failing to carry forth God’s truth into a dark world, the nations end up drinking this wine. They suffer. In chapter 19, Satan deceives the nations, and it is in this that the two are related. This is why Jesus referred to the Jerusalem as Satan’s throne and synagogue in chapters 2 and 3.

**14:9-10**      **And 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 upon his hand, 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.

*Another angel...followed them:* First, the Gospel is preached. Second, Jerusalem—the seat of Jewish power—is taken down. Now, we have judgment rendered on those who followed the kingdom of unrighteousness. The comparison is made between Jerusalem (Babylon) and the beast's kingdom. However, the qualification is, if *anyone* worships the beast... This is an all-inclusive term implying following in another person's footsteps. In other words, it is a warning not to reject the Gospel as the Jews did. Since the context is referring to Jerusalem's demise, we are speaking here of a *national* judgment, not a personal one. There is no reference here that anyone is even dead. We tend to read these verses and automatically paint a picture in our minds of people standing before the throne, being judged, and summarily tossed into hell. The better interpretation is to see this as the removal of apostate Israel as a nation under God's counsel and protection.

*Tormented with fire and brimstone:* The Greek word for 'fire' means *lightning*, while brimstone is *sulfur*. Where lightning strikes, the smell of sulfur follows, and literally means *fire from heaven*. This is the Lake of Fire, and only appears in Revelation. It is the place where God's final judgment is carried out. It is the same judgment used on Sodom and Gomorrah, where it rained fire (lightning) and brimstone. (Luke 17:29) To be destroyed like Sodom was one of the curses of the law. (Deut 28:21-23) Did the Jews disobey the OT covenant? Many times. Were they punished for it? Every time. Did God carry out this covenant curse with literal fire and brimstone? Never. The punishment was captivity, exile, etc. Yet the punishment was *likened* to fire and brimstone.

*In the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb:* Christ and the angels do not gloat over the eternal demise of their enemies:

...that lawless one (the false prophet) will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth (word) and bring to an end by the appearance (manifestation) of His coming (presence); that is, the one whose coming (revealing) is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thess 2:7-12)

Note the elements contained in the text, and how they relate to truth and untruth:

- *False prophet exposed* (How? Truth made known)
- Christ will destroy (expose) (How? With His Word)
- False prophet brought to end (How? By Christ's presence—the Word)
- *Deception* of wickedness (deceived into believing something not true)
- Those perishing do not love the *truth*
- God sends them a delusion to believe what is *false*
- Those judged don't *believe* the truth although it is revealed in His Word.

Satan and his mouthpiece, the false prophet, deceive others. Both end up in the Lake of Fire, along with those who swallowed their deceptions. The judgment seems to be the complete and utter

destruction of the Jewish design to disrupt God's plan. Their removal was completed in the witness of heaven—in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.

**14:11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.**

There is no solution to their problem. Their punishment is Final and Eternal.

*Smoke of their torment:* This text hearkens back to chapter nine, where we see a similarity. (The text has been rearranged slightly to make it clearer):

*Smoke* went up out of the (bottomless) pit...and out of the *smoke* came forth locusts upon the earth...they were told that they should hurt only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads...their *torment* was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man...in those days men will seek death and will not find it...They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss, [whose name is Destroyer]. (Rev 9:2-11)

The bottomless pit is the nations (see notes on chapter 9). Smoke is a metaphor for deception—it blocks light. From this deception comes anguish because men are now in darkness, stumbling around seeking for the truth. However, because they hate the light, God sends them a delusion, which causes them to embrace the darkness wholeheartedly. They believe they're enlightened, but are really in darkness. Behind all of this is the god of this world, the prince of disobedient spirits, the dragon standing on their backs. From another standpoint, we can get a better understanding of this smoke and torment:

The kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the *smoke* of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come." (Rev 18:9-10)

**14:12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

The perseverance of the saints doesn't come as the result of sinners being cast into the Lake of Fire; it is found in the next verse and is based on their obedience to and faith in Christ.

**14:13 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, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."**

Certain events have taken place, and after these events (discussed later in the chapter), "blessed are those who die in the Lord *from now on*." There is no end of the world here, but a change of rule. Satan no longer rules humanity, but Christ. Those who die *after* this "change of command" are blessed. Why? Because they enter a rest and their deeds go with them. There is no more laying in the grave, asleep, as it was prior to Christ's victory over death and the grave. The blessing and the reward of good works now come at death. There is no more waiting for a determination. Christ has won the victory. This is the meaning of Ephesians 4:8—*When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives*. Who

were held captive and where were they being held? They are those righteous ones who had died since Adam, all of them “asleep with their fathers.”<sup>2</sup>

The saints’ perseverance comes about because they have assurance that they are blessed in death, that it no longer has a hold on them. They are assured that there will be rest in Jesus and that they will reap the fruits of their righteousness.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account. (Rom 4:7-8)

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” And *it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.* And he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” (Rev 19:7-9)

Therefore, dying in the Lord and being invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb amount to the same thing. They both point to the victory of good over evil. The reward of eternal life is God’s ultimate blessing upon those who choose Christ. Sometimes, trials and tribulations are blessings, refining our faith and deepening our sanctification. Therefore, a blessing from God constitutes something of great value and demands our thanks and worship. It is not something to be taken lightly or snubbed as trivial.<sup>3</sup>

*Rest from their labors:* The Greek word for ‘rest’ means *cessation of motion; relaxation.* There are three instances in Revelation:

- (1) The souls under the altar resting for “a little while longer.” (6:11)
- (2) Those who worship the beast “have no rest day and night.” (14:11)
- (3) The dead who die in the Lord rest from their labors. (14:13)

The first instance of rest is when God rested on the seventh day. (Gen 2:2) The Israelites rested after their 40-year wandering. (Exo 16:30) This day of rest was made holy. (Exo 20:11) Those who disobey God will not rest. Failure to enter God’s rest (Heb 4:4-6) is the same as *the smoke of their torment.* It comes about as a result of disobedience to the Gospel. (Heb 4:9-11)

*Their deeds follow with them:* There are many verses confirming that people will be paid back for what they have or have not done.

Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man *according to his deeds.* (Rom 2:5, 6)

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<sup>2</sup> The “White Throne Judgment” and resurrection of the dead is looked at in greater detail in chapter 20.

<sup>3</sup> That being said, saying “God bless you,” in response to a sneeze is an insult to God, as if blessings were handed out like trick-or-treat candy. The phrase is rooted in pagan tradition, where Romans responded, “Jupiter bless you,” when they sneezed. (Tertullian *de Idololatria*, e. 20, 21, 22.) Christians can become superficial and casual when they don’t “meditate on God’s word day and night.”

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Gal 6:7, 8)

“You can’t take it with you,” is an old maxim taken from scripture: “We have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.” (1 Tim 6:7) We are dust, and to the dust we shall return. (Gen 3:19) As a person’s conduct is in this world, so shall their reward be in the next one. “The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after.” (1 Tim 5:24) In other words, some sins are so heinous that they reach God before the sinner does. These usually invoke God’s wrath in this life.<sup>4</sup> Other sins will be dealt with at the judgment, after the person dies.

**14:14 And 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.**

The loop is tied at this point. The last time we saw Christ, He was taken up to heaven after His earthly ministry. (12:5) Now He appears in judgment, a crown of victory on His head.

*White cloud:* Clouds are called God’s chariot. (Psa 104:3) As such, they convey His coming and presence to invoke judgment. The day of the Lord was depicted as a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds. (Joel 2:1-2; Zeph 1:15)

The Lord is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. (Isa 19:1)

Behold, He goes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined! (Jer 4:13)

These are poetic descriptions not literal events witnessed by physical eyeballs. If we remain consistent and rely on the OT to unlock these interpretations, we can better understand NT verses that speak of Jesus “coming in the clouds.” It simply meant His coming judgment upon the Jews as He predicted. (See notes on 1:7)

*Golden crown:* The only other person who wore such a crown in scripture was the high priest (Lev 8:9), who was a type and shadow of Jesus Christ, our High Priest. (Heb 8:1) In chapter 6, Christ rode a white horse, wore a crown, and carried a bow. (6:2) Here, He is depicted riding a white *cloud*, wearing a crown, and carrying a sickle. They are similar descriptions.

Gold signifies a *precious* righteousness, something of great value. Crowns were used to symbolize a person’s high status and authority. The high priest and the early kings of Israel also wore crowns as a mark of their office and authority. (Lev 8:9; 2 Sam 1:10) Revelation portrays Christ with many crowns on His head, signifying His kingly authority over many dominions. (Rev 19:12) Our inheritance as Christians is described as a crown. (Rev 2:10; 3:11) We will receive an imperishable crown as a reward for our faithfulness (1 Cor 9:25), one that will not wither or fade away, and a crown of eternal life. (James 1:12) Christ’s golden crown symbolizes His kingly authority.

<sup>4</sup> Sam Kinneson was a hugely popular comedian who began making fun of Christ and His crucifixion on stage. After a short time of these blasphemous public appearances, he was killed in a car accident. The irony lies in the fact that Mr. Kinneson had been a Christian preacher who had exchanged the pulpit for big money on the comedy circuit.

*Sharp sickle in His hand:* Christ's crown shows He possesses the authority and rule of a king. There is no scepter here, however, but a sickle, a sharp blade used to reap the harvest of souls. Thayer translates 'sharp' to mean *swift, sure*. This is the King's Judgment, swift and sure from the clouds (heaven), from the hand of Him who rules.

**14:15 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, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe."**

Here is the Christ sitting on a cloud; a picture of the King holding a sickle. He is waiting for something, a *message* originating from the temple. What was the angel doing in the temple? What moved him to come out of the temple and give this command to the Lord? Let's review the temple before we attend to dissecting the events here.

The OT had no specific word for *temple*. It refers instead to the *house of a deity*. There are several temples mentioned in scripture: Solomon's Temple (2 Chr 3), Ezekiel's Temple, which was a future city (Ezek 40-43), and the Second Temple, which was reconstructed after the Israelites' freedom from Babylon by King Cyrus of Persia. (Ezra 3:12)

- Jesus referred to the temple as the *house of God* (Matt 12:4)
- Jesus called it His Father's house (John 2:16)
- It was a physical building doomed to destruction. (Mark 13)
- The cleansing of the Jewish temple was foretold in Malachi 3.
- Jesus referred to his own body as a temple. (Matt 26:60-61; Mark 14:57-58)
- When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was ripped in half (Matt 27:51), signifying an end of the old and the beginning of a new. (Amos 9:11-12; John 4:21-23; Acts 15:16)
- The church is the temple now. (John 14:23)
- As individuals, the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1Cor 6:19)
- The church corporate is Christ's body—His temple. (1Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16)
- The church is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:21-22)
- Each Christian is a "stone" being used to build this house of God. (1 Pet 2:4-5)

What of the temple in Revelation? Let's examine its properties from the book's view:

1. The faithful will be established in the temple. (3:12)
2. God's throne is in it, where He is worshiped. (7:15)
3. Its location is in the spiritual realms. (11:19; 14:17)
4. Angels (spirit messengers) come from it. (15:5)
5. Commands and announcements are issued from it. (14:15-17; 16:1, 17)

What is striking is that this temple disappears in chapter 21 and is replaced by the body of believers. (21:22) Essentially, this is God's spiritual abode, out of which, a messenger comes forth to announce judgment on mankind (in this context, upon the unbelieving Jews). We can perhaps understand it clearer when compared to the sword coming from His mouth. It is a message issuing from God.

*Hour to reap has come:* There are scriptures depicting men being harvested to Christ (being saved). (John 4:35; James 1:18) However, this harvest in Revelation doesn't seem to be that type of harvest. This seems to be a harvest of souls.

Verse 13 spoke of, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" Why are they blessed? Because they were killed for their faith and refused to embrace the ways of the world. They refused to "follow the beast." (14:12) This harvest, then, is being done through death by persecution, but is described in poetic language as Christ harvesting them and bringing them into heaven (his barn) (Luke 3:17)

There are several parables in Matthew 13 showing the harvest of both the earth and the sea. In Revelation, the sea represents the Gentile nations—churning and unstable. The earth represents Israel. In the present chapter, what is being reaped? The earth—Israel. Remember the 144,000 who stood with the Lamb? (14:1) Those were the remnant from Israel and the first-fruits for God. They are the ones now ripe for the harvest and are reaped—how?—through martyrdom—why?—they are an offering to God. Therefore, this harvest is of the earth, not the sea, because Jewish Christians were the first-fruits to God. In chapter 15, you have the harvest from the sea—from the Gentiles. So then, this is the pattern: First, the Jewish remnant is gathered, then those from "every tribe, tongue, and nation" are gathered. (7:4-9, 14)

*Harvest of the earth is ripe:* The first-fruits were already sealed. (14:1) Although they are standing with Christ, this doesn't mean they are with Him enjoying their heavenly reward. Jesus said, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest." (John 4:35)

#### **14:16 And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.**

The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil; and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know. The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head. But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come. (Mark 4:26-29)

His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3:12)

Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matt 13:30)

He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt 24:31)

How does all of this fit into Revelation? It connects to the early Christians living in a time of intense persecution. The OT had already warned of a coming "day of the Lord."

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and *our gathering together to Him*, (sound familiar?) that you not be quickly shaken from your

composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. (2 Thess 2:1-2)

The word *gathering* is the same word as in Matthew 3—He will *gather* His wheat into the barn. In the OT, when one of the patriarchs died, it was described as being “gathered to his people.” (Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33, etc.) Thus, the Thessalonians were anticipating a gathering, and had been coned into believing it had already taken place. Why would they think such a thing? *Because it was an invisible event.* If it had been visible, there would not have been an issue. Paul warned the Ephesians to put on armor. Why? The evil day was coming. (Eph 6:13) To whom was it coming? To Christians in the year 3012? Better put on that armor, guys, cause in several thousand years...

A similar warning is given to the Corinthians, who were far removed from Jerusalem, yet would reap the collateral persecution later:

I think that in view of the **present distress** it is good for a person to remain as he is. ...This is what I mean, brothers: **the appointed time has grown very short.** From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. **For the present form of this world is passing away.** (1 Cor 7:26-31)

Was Paul trying to prevent the Corinthian Christians from living life to its fullest? Or was something bad coming? Clearly, bad times were coming upon the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians. If not, then God was making up stories to keep these early, simple-minded Christians in faithful anticipation. God formed a counsel and said, “Let us convince these folks that the end is coming so that they’ll stay committed. After all, they don’t have the New Testament yet. So we’ll dangle this carrot in front of them. They’ll eventually die, and it won’t matter. Then, when they get here, we’ll explain to them that we were *really* talking about the distant future.”

This is how many interpret NT prophecy. Everything written pertains to *us*, not them, when it should be the other way around. Just because we didn’t witness the events on CNN, we discount the thrust of what Paul was saying: something was coming—and appointed time—upon the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

The day of Christ would be a time of testing and purifying for the church, a time of destruction for His enemies. In the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt 13), the wheat represents the Christians, while the tares (weeds) represent the Jews. It was the unbelieving Jews who would be gathered into bundles and burned at the end of the Mosaic age, not sinners at the end of time.

I will also bring upon you a sword that will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you *gather together into your cities*, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands. (Lev 26:25)

Where were the rebellious Jews gathered together in one place as Rome prepared to slaughter them in 70 AD? *Jerusalem.* This is why Jesus forewarned His disciples “those who are in Judea (not Nebraska) must flee to the mountains. Pray that your flight will not be on a Sabbath.” (Not “during Sunday morning worship services.”)<sup>5</sup> The wheat would be gathered into the barn. Thus, when Paul spoke to the Thessalonians about “our gathering together to Him,” Christ was going to protect them

<sup>5</sup> Some believe that the 70 AD prophecies also carry a secondary prophetic meaning, aiming at the future. They may be, but the bible does not bear this out. God chose to focus the scriptures on His Son and our redemption, not on really cool and exciting end-of-the-world events.

from the evil times that would soon envelope Jerusalem. Revelation speaks to a persecution engineered by Rome, which would serve as harvest time. In all of this, He is in control.

I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, *but not a kernel will fall to the ground*. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword. (Amos 9:9-10)

**14:17-18** And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. And 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.”

*Another angel:* A messenger different from the first. Christ would reap the first-fruits, but this angel had a different commission.

The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matt 3:10)

Who held the ax? Rome had the power and might to punish. John said it was *already* in position and was going for the roots—for the ones responsible for the rebellion. Clearly, he was referring to something imminent.

In that day the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (that is, with the king of Assyria), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard. (Isa 7:20)

We have no trouble understanding that the text is not speaking of God actually shaving His beard, but to bring punishment upon Judah. Yet note in the context here of God’s people being rescued *within Babylon*:

Dwell in the field, and go to Babylon. There you will be rescued; there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. And now many nations have been assembled against you who say, “Let her be polluted, and let our eyes gloat over Zion.” But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord, and they do not understand His purpose; for He has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor. (Mic 4:10-12)

Who were saved? The ones who went to Babylon, as the Lord commanded through Jeremiah. Who was destroyed? The ones who remained in Jerusalem. They were “gathered together” for judgment.

*Angel with the power over fire:* Fire is a metaphor for judgment. This messenger comes from the altar, from the place of sacrifice and offerings. He stood at the altar, ministering in behalf of God’s people. He is the one in chapter 8 who sends the prayers of the saints up to God. (8:3-4) The prayers have been answered, and so he delivers the answer to the angel with the sharp sickle: “Begin your work.” Fire seems to point to final judgment. The Lake of Fire is the essence of finality in judgment. The burning up the “elemental things” is indicative of God’s final dealing with the old ways. (2 Pet 3:10) So it is with this angel of fire, who orders the gathering of evil men.

*Gather the clusters from the vine of the earth:* This angel is not concerned so much with the fruit as he is with hacking down the very vine that grew them. It is a *vine of the earth*. The vine is where the clusters of grapes grow and draw their nourishment. Jesus called Himself the vine, and believers as the branches. (John 15:5) This “vine of the earth” also bears grapes. Instead of being harvested for salvation, however, they are thrown into the “great wine press of the wrath of God.”

My well beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill...He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. (Isa 5:1-2)

*Vine* comes from a word meaning *support*. Instead of depending on God, the Jews wanted to make their own way, albeit a way unacceptable to God. He hacks it down. In almost every *spiritual* reference, ‘vine’ refers to the Israel God planted. (Psa 80:8, 14-15; Isa 5:2-7; Jer 2:21; Eze 15:6, etc) The symbol here, however, points to a vine *not* planted by God. It is hacked down and its works (fruit) thrown into judgment. This is false Israel; those from Satan’s synagogue.

**14:19 And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God.**

Christ swings His sickle *above* the earth, or in the heavenly realm. This angel, however, swings his sickle *to* the earth, (on earth, as it is in heaven) effectively chopping down the entire plant. The Jewish ideal of righteousness through traditions and external rituals are removed and are brought before God for destruction.

*Great wine press of the wrath of God:* Figurative of God’s judgment, where clothing became stained with blood from walking on and smashing the grapes beneath the feet. Those who are being smashed, so to speak, are the ones who suffer God’s wrath. They are the wicked whom God crushes.

Who is this who comes...with garments of glowing colors...this One who is majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength? “It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” **Why is your apparel red, and your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?** “I have trodden the wine trough alone, and from the peoples there was no man with me. I also trod them in My anger, and trampled them in My wrath; and **their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I stained all My raiment.** For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and My year of redemption has come. And I looked, and there was no one to help, and I was astonished and there was no one to uphold; so My own arm brought salvation to me; and My wrath upheld me. And **I trod down the peoples in My anger, and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.**” (Isa 63:1-6)

The Lord has rejected all my strong men in my midst; He has called an appointed time against me to **crush my young men**; the Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah. (Lam 1:15)

He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called **The Word of God...He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God**, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” (Rev 19:13-16)

**14:20 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.**

Interwoven with scenes of judgment and great slaughter are scenes of rescue and escape for the saints. Not a single Christian died in the conflagration that overtook Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

*Trodden outside the city:* Under Moses, sinners were stoned *outside* the camp, the idea being not to contaminate the Israelite camp with the sinner's blood. (Num 15:35; 1 Kgs 21:13) The unclean things found in the temple were hauled into the court, which is *outside* the temple, to be disposed of later. (2 Chr 29:16) In an OT type and shadow, merchants and traders camped *outside* of city walls, interfering with the Sabbath. (Neh 13:20) The homes of lepers were torn apart and taken to a place *outside* the city, where "an unclean place" was designated. (Lev 14:40-45) Those *inside* the city are safe; those *outside* are in jeopardy. (Num 35:27) Idol images were thrown there. (2 Chr 33:15)

*Blood up to the horses' bridles:* This is hyperbole describing the great extent of this judgment. Many are those who go to destruction. (Matt 7:13) In other words, much blood, or many souls will be lost. The bridle is symbolic of God leading obstinate people in the "way which they came." (2 Kgs 19:28; Isa 37:29) It holds the animal in check, because of their lack of understanding. (Psa 32:9) It is a bridle that leads men to ruin. (Isa 30:28) Horses are symbols of war and judgment (see notes on 6:2). If we break down the symbolism, we can see the following:

Sickle	=	Judgment from God
Vine	=	Men's devices
Grapes	=	Fruit/result of men's labors
Blood	=	Works destroyed
Horses	=	Judgment (war)
Bridles	=	Leading to judgment

This gathering of grapes (works in opposition to God's plan) is also described elsewhere in Revelation, but using slightly different language. If we consider the alternate language, a better understanding of horses, war, and men's ability to control war will be reached. The *gathering grapes for destruction* and the *gathering of nations to fight God* are two ways of saying the same thing:

...they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to **gather them together** for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Rev 16:14)

Satan...will come out to deceive the nations...to **gather them together** for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (Rev 20:7-9)

In other words, blood flowing from God's wine press of wrath is the same thing as fire coming down from heaven and devouring the opposition. Any alignment with evil is done willingly or in ignorance of the consequences.

The OT prophet describes how the Babylonians captured other nations, using a picture of fishermen who have already netted more than their share:

<sup>6</sup> *The Consummation of the Ages*, p. 285

The Chaldeans bring all of them up with a hook, drag them away with their net, and gather them together in their fishing net. Therefore, they rejoice and are glad. Therefore, they offer a sacrifice to their net. And burn incense to their fishing net; because through these things their catch is large, and their food is plentiful. Will they therefore empty their net and continually slay nations without sparing? (Hab 1:15-17)

*For a distance of two hundred miles:* There is no scriptural symbol identifying this distance. However, Israel was approximately 200 miles in length. If true, the language suggests that the entire Jewish nation was utterly judged and its works destroyed. This was fulfilled when the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, scattering the surviving Jews throughout the world in its aftermath.

Josephus gives the number of those slain in the city at 1,100,000, not counting those killed in ensuing battles that ravaged the whole of Israel, or who were slaughtered in foreign cities.<sup>7</sup> The 200 miles refers to the whole length of land being thoroughly polluted with the blood of the slain.

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<sup>7</sup> Josephus, *Wars*, VI, viii, 5