

DECISIONS DETERMINES DESTINY

Summary and Historical Background

This chapter is about decisions and destiny. It concludes the series of insets, which began in chapter 10 and were only interrupted briefly by the announcement of the seventh trumpet in the latter part of chapter 11. The insets revealed the strong angel with the little scroll (Rev. 10), the two witnesses (Rev. 11), the woman and the dragon (Rev. 12), and the two beasts (Rev. 13). The rapid rise of the Antichrist and his worldwide dictatorship seem to indicate that Satan will be victorious over God and will rule the world forever. This chapter, however, shows the opposite. It reveals that God will allow all of these events to happen in order that He might bring the earth to the harvest time of judgment. Satan's kingdom will be destroyed and then Christ will establish His Kingdom on earth where righteousness can prevail. It should be remembered that God's revelation is truth for all ages. It serves as a message of hope to all believers now and, to believers who will be severely persecuted during the Tribulation. In addition, it is a warning of judgment to the lost so they will repent and turn to Christ before it is too late. God is graciously telling the world how the Tribulation will end so they do not have to suffer eternal loss. This chapter, then, is a message of hope, but it also is a message of doom.

I. The Virtue of the 144,000 – 14:1-5

A. Their Identity – 14:1

14:1 – John looks and sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. This is Jesus Christ (cf. Rev. 5). With Him are 144,000 Israelites with the seal of the Lamb and of the Father on their foreheads. Although some disagree, it is certain that they are the same Israelites who were sealed in the middle of the Tribulation (cf. 7:1-8). There are two substantial arguments for this. **First**, John does not use the term “another” which is so common when there are identity changes (cf. 10:1; 13:1, 11). **Second**, these have the names of the Lamb and the Father on their foreheads, as did those previously mentioned (7:3). A more serious problem is to identify the location of Zion. Is it on earth or is in heaven? Some identify Mount Zion on earth in Jerusalem. This is the normal location for Zion in the Bible (2 Sam. 5:7; Ps. 2:6-9; Isa. 2:3). Others identify it in heaven, but the only reference to a heavenly Zion is in Hebrews 12:22. If it refers to the earthly Zion, this is a reference to Christ's Second Coming to earth after the Tribulation when the 144,000 will join Him and they will follow Him wherever He goes. If it refers to the heavenly Zion, this means all 144,000 will die in the Tribulation to join Christ in Heaven before the end of the Tribulation. Taking the normal meaning of sealing and the location of Zion into consideration, it seems better to understand the 144,000 sealed servants of God are preserved from death during the Tribulation to meet Christ on Mount Zion in Jerusalem to celebrate their victory over Antichrist.

B. Their Rejoicing – 14:2-3

14:2 – John hears a voice from Heaven. The description of this voice is like that of Christ's (1:15), but it could be the Father's, since His voice also comes from Heaven before the bowls of wrath are poured out where it is called a “great voice” (16:1). The voice has three characteristics: it is a voice from Heaven to give it authority; it is a voice like many waters and great thunder to give it majesty; and it is a voice like the sound of harpists to give it melody.

14:3 – The harpists will sing a new song in Heaven before the throne of God, the four living creatures and the elders, which only the 144,000 could learn. The content of the song probably speaks about their redemption, which is mentioned at the end of this verse, and the unique victories that Christ gave them over Antichrist during the Tribulation. This would be like the song that Moses and the Israelites sang after they were delivered from Pharaoh's army when they drowned in the Red Sea (cf. Ex 15:1-21). The 144,000 are redeemed from the wickedness on the earth. Jesus Christ paid the redemption price for all sinners to free them from the ravages of sin found on the earth by pouring out His blood on the cross (5:9; Tit 2:14). It is by His blood that they are able to overcome the attacks of Satan and of the unsaved

ones that dwell on the earth (12:11).

C. Their Virtue – 14:4-5

14:4 – The 144,000 will not be defiled with women. This does not deplore the marriage relationship (Heb. 13:4), but it shows that they will be totally dedicated to God. They are virgins, a term used frequently of Israel in the Old Testament (2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Jer 18:13; 31:4, 21; Lam 2:13) and of the Church in the New Testament (2 Cor 11:2). It shows that they will be morally pure. They will not be defiled with temple prostitutes, a common practice among idolaters, nor with immoral sex prevalent in a society that would despise God's laws. Their purity is a testimony of the power of Christ to give His people victory over sin in the midst of an immoral and wicked society.

The 144,000 will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They will be totally loyal to Christ in opposing Antichrist. They will go where He wanted them to go, say what He wanted them to say and do what He wanted them to do. They will be devoted followers of Christ. They, no doubt, will enjoy a special place next to the King in the Millennial Kingdom for their faithful obedience to Him during the Tribulation.

The 144,000 will be the first Jews to receive Jesus as their Redeemer after the Rapture. They will be the first fruits presented to God and the Lamb. Old Testament believers gave the first fruits of their crops as a token offering to God at the beginning of their harvest to show their thankfulness to Him (Lev. 23:10, 17). The offering was a simple contribution to God without any obligation on His part to bless them with a large harvest in return for their offering. If a large harvest followed, that was God's grace, but not His obligation. God will be pleased with this first fruits contribution of 144,000 Israelites that come to Him during the first half of the Tribulation. By His grace He will empower their witness and give them a great harvest of Jews around Jerusalem that will flee to the wilderness in the middle of the Tribulation and a great multitude of Gentiles that will be saved during the last half of the Tribulation (cf Rev 7:1-17).

14:5 – No lie will be found in the witness of the 144,000 regarding Jesus Christ. They will speak the truth by telling the world that Jesus Christ is God and His Gospel will save them. Antichrist, on the other hand, will lie about himself and tell people that he is god and many people will be deceived to believe him (2 Th 2:4, 11). The 144,000 will be spotless and without fault in their witness for Christ. They will be sorely tested and persecuted, yet they will remain blameless in their lives (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15). They will be a testimony to all believers that God's grace is sufficient to empower them to live godly lives in the midst of a wicked generation.

II. The Voices of the Three Angels – 14:6-12

The six insets in 14:6-20 introduce the Bowl Judgments that will be revealed in Revelation 16.

A. The First Angel and the Everlasting Gospel – 14:6-7

14:6 – John saw “another” angel fly in the midst of heaven with the “everlasting Gospel” to preach unto all the inhabitants of the earth. Another angel refers to some previous angel, not too far removed from this one, probably Michael (12:7). The “everlasting Gospel” must refer to the first good news that God gave to Adam and Eve after Satan had wrested the Kingdom of God from Adam. God promised that He would send the seed of a woman to crush his head, indicating that He would restore the Kingdom to Himself (Gen 3:15). The one that would crush Satan's head would be Jesus Christ as later prophesies would make clear. Satan suffered a severe blow when Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of the world by dying on the cross and rising from the grave. This gave sinners the authority to receive Christ and become God's children and citizens in Christ's Kingdom (Col 1:13-14). The everlasting Gospel will be completely fulfilled, when Jesus Christ casts Satan into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10). This angel is reminding the world that Satan and his followers are doomed and soon they will be removed from the earth. This will make it possible for Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth. Then the earth will once more bring glory to God as it was created to do in the beginning. So the angel's message of everlasting good news will be turned into bad news for those that “dwell on the earth,” the followers of Antichrist. “Dwell on the earth” is a technical term in Revelation for the wicked sinners that are unsaved.

The Gospel (good news) is the final defeat of Antichrist and the victory of Jesus Christ. It is a devastating blow to Satan's attempt to continue as the god of this world (cf 2 Cor 4:4). He will be cast into the great abyss after the Tribulation and remain there for a thousand years. However, his final defeat will come after the Millennial Kingdom when he is released from the abyss. Then he will gather an army of unbelievers, who were born during the thousand-year Kingdom of Christ, and attack Christ at Jerusalem in an attempt to regain his rule of the world. He is defeated once again and is cast into the Lake of Fire to be there forever. The angel's message is a serious warning to those that worship Antichrist and Satan, but it can be good news to unsaved people in every nation, kindred (tribe), tongue and people. It will be good news to them if they respond properly to his message.

14:7 – A proper response to the angel's Gospel message is threefold. (1) "Fear God," which means a sinner should turn from his sin and submit to Him as his Master. (2) "Give glory to Him," which means a saved person will live to bring glory and honor to God. (3) "Worship Him," which means a saved person will humbly acknowledge that God is his Creator and the Creator of all things

B. The Second Angel and the Fall of Babylon – 14:8

14:8 – The message of the second angel is closely related to the message of the first angel. The second angel's announcement of Babylon's fall is an extension of the judgment of the everlasting Gospel. The double announcement of Babylon's defeat (fallen, fallen) is to declare the certainty of its occurrence. The use of the aorist verb (has fallen) speaks with certainty that it is about to happen, even though Babylon had not yet fallen when the angel made his announcement. It is a certain prediction of the fate of Babylon. The six insets (14:6-20) are given to prepare the reader for the imminent fall of Babylon.

Babylon, the great, refers to the city on the Euphrates, not to Rome. This city was built by Nimrod and is well known for attempting to build a tower to heaven. The purpose of the tower was not to reach heaven, but to worship the celestial bodies of the heavens. This was being built to worship the creation instead of the Creator. The Bible marks Babylon as the birthplace of idolatry, not Rome. Babylon is called the Mother of harlots, because idolatry and immorality go hand in hand. Babylon made the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality. She began the idol worship that is found in most of the false religions of the world including Egypt, Greece and Rome. In the last half of the Tribulation the whole world will be coerced to drink the wine of her immorality when the people are told to worship the image of Antichrist and receive his mark. They will do this so they can buy and sell the products that they need to live, but if they refuse to worship Antichrist and receive his mark, they will be killed (13:14-17). By this means Babylon on the Euphrates, the capital of Antichrist, will control the religious, political and economic life of the nations and their people.

C. The Third Angel and the Fate of Beast Worshipers – 14:9-12

14:9 – The message of the third angel logically follows the messages of the other two angels: judgment has come and Babylon is judged for introducing idol worship. The third angel declares that worshippers of Antichrist (the beast) and his image will be tormented forever. His message will be a warning to those who read or hear this message in Revelation before they make the decision to worship Antichrist. It is very likely that the many witnesses for Christ will refer to this warning to advise unbelievers to trust Christ and not worship Antichrist and receive his mark. Those who worship Antichrist and receive his mark will commit an unpardonable sin. They will be doomed to suffer the torments of fire and brimstone forever. However, this angel will not come with his message until the Tribulation is near the end of the seven years. His message will be too late for those who have already worshipped Antichrist. They have his mark on their foreheads or on their right hands. Most have worshipped the Antichrist for more than three years when this policy was put in place so they could buy and sell the necessities of life (cf. 13:16-17). This warning will be too late for them. In that case the "if" clause could be translated "since." Since those that worshipped Antichrist at his image and received his mark, they will drink the wine of the wrath of God. The message of the angel is not a warning to them, but it is a declaration of God's judgment for their decision to worship Antichrist at his image.

14:10-11 – The wine cup of God's righteous judgment speaks of his judgment of sin. To drink of this cup

is to receive God's wrath: suffering, death, Hell and Lake of Fire. The wine cup of Babylon's fornication (14:8) speaks of her pleasure in sin. To drink of her cup is to worship idols: immorality, demons, Antichrist and Satan.

God's wrath is poured out without mixture; it will not be diluted by any means. Those with the mark of Antichrist will receive the full force of God's wrath for worshipping Antichrist. The nature of God's wrath is torment with fire and brimstone. The duration of God's wrath is forever, night and day. The recipients of God's wrath are all who will worship Antichrist and receive his mark. The observers of God's wrath are the holy angels and the Lamb.

The place of punishment in Revelation 14:11 is a description of the Lake of Fire (19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:8). It is the place of eternal torment for those who refuse to accept God's righteousness through Jesus Christ. The unsaved are reserved in Hell until the end of Jesus Christ's Millennial Kingdom and then they will be resurrected to stand before Him at His Great White Throne to be judged for their works and unbelief (20:11-15). God is gracious to reveal the awful destiny of the wicked in advance so they can repent of their sin and receive Jesus Christ to save them before they die. It is a fact that Jesus, who is the greatest lover of sinners, referred to "Hell" (*gehenna*) 11 of the 12 times that it appears in the New Testament and He referred to "Hell fire" and other expressions of Hell 12 of 19 times. He warned sinners of this place more than any other person in the New Testament. John, the apostle of love, is second to Jesus in writing about this eternal destiny of the wicked. It would be foolish to think that this is not a real place of torment in the light of the testimony of His Son and that of His closest apostle.

14:12 – John concludes the messages of the three angels, especially the last one, with a word of encouragement for the believers that remained steadfast in their faith. They were keeping the commandments of God, which was the result of their faith in Jesus Christ. These believers would include the 144,000 (cf 12:17) and others that have refused to worship Antichrist and receive his mark. It was wiser to suffer the wrath of Antichrist than to suffer the wrath of almighty God.

III. The Victory of the Saints – 14:13

14:13 – John hears a voice from Heaven that tells him to write a word of blessing, "Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord." This is the second of seven beatitudes in Revelation (cf 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). This blessing refers specifically to the Tribulation martyrs who die as a result of their faith (cf. 7:13-17). A twofold blessing will be upon them. First, their labors in resisting Antichrist will be exchanged for rest. Notice the contrast with those who yielded to Antichrist: they will have no rest day and night (14:11). Second, their works will follow them where they will be exchanged for the great reward that Christ promised to those who are persecuted (Mt 5:10-12; Rev 22:12). This beatitude can be applied to any believer as an encouragement to work for the night is coming when no man can work (John 9:4).

IV. The Vision of God's Wrath – 14:14-20

A. The Lord of the Harvest – 14:14-16

14:14 – John receives a fifth inset to prepare him for the Bowl Judgments. In this inset he sees one like the Son of man sitting on a white cloud. This is Jesus Christ, the Lord of the harvest. The use of "like" has caused some to conclude that this is not Jesus Christ, but another angel like Him. However, John does not indicate that this is an angel. In the same way "like" is used to identify Jesus Christ in 1:13. The Son of man sitting on a white cloud is reminiscent of Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of man comes to the Ancient of days on the clouds of Heaven to receive His Kingdom. The position of Christ sitting on a cloud shows His glorious position over the events happening on the earth. The golden crown (a *stephanos*) indicates that he will be victorious over Antichrist. After the victory is won, He will receive many royal crowns (*diadems*) of a King. He will have a sharp sickle in His hand. The sickle signifies His judgment and its sharpness indicates the severity of His judgment (cf Ps 2:7-9).

14:15 – Then John sees another angel. This angel comes out of the open temple in Heaven (11:19; 15:5). He carries a message from God to His Son that it is time to put in His sickle and reap the earth,

because the harvest is ripe. The word “ripe” means the fruit has “become dry or withered” like overripe grain, therefore, the time of judgment is at hand. This is a harvest of unbelievers, not believers. The harvest focuses on Christ, the Lord of the harvest, because all judgment is given by the Father to Him (Jn 5:22, 27). The sin of the people has reached its limit and God will purge the earth of its wickedness.

The harvest of the wicked is exactly what Jesus taught in His parable of the wheat and tares or darnel. Jesus taught His disciples that He would send angels to reap the wicked ones out of His Kingdom and cast them into the furnace of fire. The righteous ones would be left to shine as the sun in the Kingdom (Mt 13:36-43; cf Dan 12:3). This parallels Joel’s end-time prophecy of judgment (Joel 3:11-16).

14:16 – The Son of man, in obedience to His Father, swings His sickle over the earth and it is reaped. It is quick and it is thorough. This judgment takes place in the Bowl Judgments and in His return to earth (Rev 16; 19).

B. The Severity of the Harvest – 14:17-20

14:17 – John sees another angel come out of the temple in Heaven with a sharp sickle in his hand. God sends this angel to assist His Son in the same judgment described under the grain harvest. The harvest and the vintage depict the same judgment as it does in Joel 3:13. Two references to the same judgment is God’s way of making an emphatic statement!

14:18 – Then John sees another angel come out from the altar having power over fire. This angel is coming out of the altar of incense which is related to the prayers of the saints (cf. 5:8; 8:1-5). The prayers of the saints are going to be answered by this judgment. This angel commands the angel with the sickle (v 17) to gather the grapes of the vine of the earth. These are not godly grapes, but ungodly grapes. The vine of the earth is in contrast to the vine nurtured by God (Isa 27:2-3). The pagan nations are contrasted to true Israel. The word used for “ripe” here is different from that of v. 15. Here it is used of fully ripe grapes, almost bursting because of their fullness. The point is that the earth is at the prime of ripeness in its sin. It is ready to be judged for its sin.

14:19 – The angel swings his sickle across the earth and gathers the grape clusters from the evil vine. Then he throws these clusters into the great winepress of the wrath of God. The culture of that day clearly understood this symbolism of the winepress. Ripe grapes were placed in a rectangular sealed trench where men would stomp on the grapes and cause the juice to flow. God’s final judgment will be like a winepress; it will cause men’s blood to flow like a river. Antichrist’s armies from many nations will gather at Megiddo and move the troops southward to attack the Israelites at Jerusalem. After taking half of the city captive, Jesus Christ will suddenly come to the Mount of Olives, east of the city, to destroy these armies with the sword of His mouth (Rev 16:15; 19:15-21; Zech 14:1-4). It seems like the judgments of the seven bowls will also cause many deaths in Antichrist’s army.

14:20 – The blood will reach up to the horse bridles. This may refer to the spattering of blood to the horse bridles, but many believe the blood will be flowing, at least in some places, up to the horse bridles (4½ feet deep), for a distance of about 184 miles (294 kilometers). The river of blood will flow from Bozrah, south of the Dead Sea, where Christ begins His warfare (Isa 63:1-6), to Jerusalem, the center of the battle, where Jesus defends the city from complete destruction. The river continues northward to the Plain of Esdraelon, north of Megiddo, where the nations will assemble their armies to attack Jerusalem. This is where the battle of Armageddon gets its name. “Armageddon” means mountain of Megiddo (cf. Rev. 16:16).