

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF REVELATION 14

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Translation of Revelation 14

- (1) *And I saw, and behold the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him were one hundred and forty four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.*
- (2) *And I heard a sound out of heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of great thunder. The sound I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps,*
- (3) *and they sing [as it were] a new song before the throne and before the four living beings and the elders, and no one could learn the song except the one hundred forty four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth.*
- (4) *These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they are celibates. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from humankind as first fruits to God and to the Lamb,*
- (5) *and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.¹*
- (6) *And I saw another² angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people,*

¹MSS that add γαρ after αμωμοι (P⁴⁷ a (051) 1 1006 1611 1841 2329 2351 MajT a t vg^d sy^{ph-h} co Or) imply that the 144,000 do not lie because they are without blemish. Metzger notes that some MSS add ενωπιον του θρονου του θεου after εισιν.

²Αλλον is omitted by P⁴⁷ a* MajT sa Or Vic.

- (7) *saying in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."*
- (8) *Then another angel, the second³ one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, who has made all the nations drink of the [maddening] wine of the wrath of her fornication."*
- (9) *Then another angel, the third one, followed them saying in a great voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receive a mark on his forehead or on his hand,*
- (10) *even he will drink the wine of God's wrath, mixed undiluted into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented in fire and sulfur, before the holy⁴ angels and before the Lamb.*
- (11) *And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever. There is not rest day and night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name."*
- (12) *Here is the endurance of the saints, who keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus.*
- (13) *And I heard a voice of out of heaven, saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord." "Yes⁵," says the Spirit, "so that they will rest from their labors, for their works follow after them."*
- (14) *Then I saw, and behold a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, who has a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.*
- (15) *Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, "Send forth your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe."*
- (16) *So the one who sat on the cloud put forth his sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped.*
- (17) *Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.*

³δεύτερος is omitted by 69 pc vg.

⁴A pc bo Spec omit αγγέλων, while the MajT adds the definite article τῶν.

⁵This is omitted by P⁴⁷ a* pc.

- (18) *And another angel came out of the altar, the one who has authority over fire, and he spoke with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe."*
- (19) *And the angel put forth his sickle to the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth and threw it into the great winepress⁶ of the wrath of God.*
- (20) *And the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the winepress as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about 1,600⁷ stadia.*

Revelation 14 in Its Context

Among other Biblical courses I have taken at Calvin Seminary, this class is somewhat a class with a lot of freedoms. I think this is because of the nature of the book of Revelation; its structure, context, and interpretation that can be approached from many different angles. Michaels⁸ himself admits that there is always the circular argument in interpreting the book of Revelation. One's view of the whole will bring effect on the part and vice versa. Therefore, he suggests that it is better for one to make his own outline of this passage and then try to adjust it as much as one thinks fits to one's interpretation. I am going to use this method under the consciousness that we live in the community of interpreters where "one interpretation ... checks and balances another."

The book of Revelation is full of series of visions. Michaels thinks that the book might be better called the book of "Revelations." Among other interpreters' outlines, I think Michaels' outline of the book of Revelation is the closest to my own study outline.⁹

There are two main divisions in the book of Revelation. First, there are the introduction to the book (1:1-6) and the oracles of Jesus

⁶Sinaiticus (1006 1841 1854 2053 al gig sy^h) reads την μεγάλην while P⁴⁵ 1161 pc sy^a have του μεγαλου.

⁷Some MSS (a⁹ pc sy^h) read χιλίων διακοσιων (1200). Metzger tries to explain that this numeral lends itself better to symbolic interpretation (679).

⁸J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992)

⁹However, I classify chapter 12-14 as a unit with a theme of "The Christ versus his enemies."

Christ to the seven churches (1:9-3).¹⁰ Within these oracles, several events happen: John hears his commissioning (1:10-11) and sees the angel-like figure speaking to him (1:12-16). Being afraid of this figure, John falls at the figure's feet. The rest of the chapters (1:17-3:22) is the long uninterrupted oracles of Jesus addressed by Jesus himself to the seven churches in Asia.

Secondly, there are series of the visions of John (chap. 4-22). In a nutshell, John introduces the series of visions with the throne scene of the Lamb and the Scroll (chap. 4-5). This material can be regarded as one continuous vision of heaven introducing another seven-part series, just as the vision of the resurrected Jesus introduces the seven messages to the churches.¹¹ Chapters four and five give an opening way to the seven seals (6:1-8:5) and to the seven trumpets (8:6-11:19). Within the series of the visions, a common picture of the world is "trouble." The world is in trouble and Christian believers are in "great tribulation" (7:14) and believers are at war with human enemies. However, the believers are faithful to their confession, to the Spirit and the Word of God even to the point of death. However, God shows His patience and justice to the world. The torment scenes are depicted by John as punishment for those who persecute believers. Then the dead believers will come to life and reign with Christ, the Lamb, forever.

Now we come to the major part of our pericope. Chapters 12-15 contain a vision of signs. It is interesting to look at so much of the material which intervenes between the end of chapter 11 and the introduction of the seven plagues in chapter 15. Michaels calls the material in between the two chapters an interlude.¹² Hendriksen claims that this material is another vision which "takes us through the entire course of this era, from the first to the second coming of Christ."¹³ John, he says, brings us back to the moment of Christ's birth and ascension (12:1-5). The vision ends when we see the "One sitting like the Son of

¹⁰Many believed that the vision narrative introduced at 1:9 extends to the end of chapter 3.

¹¹J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 53.

¹²*Ibid.*, 63.

¹³William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 134.

man, with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand" (14:14). These three chapters introduce the main characters that arise in opposition to Christ and His Church. They are the dragon, the beast out of the sea, the beast out of the earth, Babylon, and the men that have the mark of the beast.

Within chapters 12-13, there are two main characters which play a role: the woman and the beast. Beginning in chapter 12, Satan's hostility to the people of God is developed. Since the child of the woman is safe, the attention is turned toward the woman and the rest of her children. The woman is usually interpreted in two ways: with a Midrash on Genesis 3:15; and with the prostitute of chapter 17 and the bride of chapter 21, as a metaphor for a city or community of people.¹⁴ It is hard to interpret who she is, but in any case she is definitely not the dragon (12:9) or the male Child who will "rule the nations with a rod of iron" (v. 5). Furthermore, it is the same case with the beast. There are two beasts introduced in chapter 13, one is from the sea (13:1-10) and the other one is from the earth (13:11-18). There is always a figure in the New Testament (NT) that at the end of the age there will be a power outbreak of evil. In this passage John calls it the beast. It is useless to interpret this as a particular power in the past or in the present. However, from the characteristic, it is best to associate this to Satan himself.

The material following (chap. 15-22) starts another series of visions. It starts with the angels pouring the bowls of God's wrath manifested in seven plagues. Most commentators agree that these plagues are the final plagues. The judgment is complete now. God has waited and he does not delay the punishment of the hardness of humanity's heart. The vintage and the harvest have been exercised (14:14-20). The plagues leave no more opportunity for repentance. Death finally brings the wicked to the eternal punishment of the just God. It seems that this part has the closest link to the end of the vision of the trumpets (chap. 8-11).¹⁵ However, the judgements and the plagues come forth to the unrepentant ones in chapters 15-16.

¹⁴Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 124.

¹⁵This proves Michaels analysis of the interlude material in chapter 12-

Compositional Structure of Revelation 14

Most commentators agree that Revelation 14 is mainly divided into two divisions: the blessedness of the redeemed standing before the Lamb and learning the new song (vv. 1-5), and the harvest of the end: the proclamation of the gospel of judgement and happiness (vv. 6-13), and the execution and the harvest (vv. 14-20). Within these two divisions, there are three parts indicated by the clause, "and I saw/looked," "Kai eidon," in the beginning of verses 1, 6, and 14. By careful grammatical and style analysis, my outline of Revelation 14 is as following:

- I. The blessedness of the redeemed standing before the lamb and learning the new song (vv. 1-5)
 1. Kai eidon kai idou starts the verse with the introduction to the Lamb on Mt. Zion and the 144,000 who had the name of the Lamb and the Father. (v. 1)
 2. The sound of nature, like playing a harp, is the new song which is sung only by the 144,000. (vv.2-3)
 3. The Identification and the activity of the 144,000 (vv. 4-5)

- II. The Harvest of the End

The proclamation of the angels (vv. 6-13)

 1. Kai eidon starts verse 6 with the vision of "another angel," who has the eternal gospel (vv. 6-7)
 2. Another angel (the second angel) follows and the fall of the great Babylon (v. 8)
 3. Another angel (the third angel) follows and proclaims the restless and torment of the worshipers of the beast (vv. 9-11)
 4. The interpretation of this vision: the endurance of the saints in keeping the commandments of God and faithful to Jesus (v. 12)
 5. Sound of the blessing and happy rest for those who died in the Lord (v. 13)

The harvest and the vintage (vv. 14-20)

The harvest (vv. 14-16)

1. Kai eidon kai idou again introduces the last section which starts with a vision of one like the son of man dwelling on the cloud (v. 14)

2. The Vision of reaping (vv. 15-16)

- a. Another angel (the fourth angel) comes out of the temple and calls out the one sitting on the cloud to take the sickle and to reap (v. 15)
- b. Then the reaping is happening (v. 16)

The Vision of Vintage (vv. 17-20)

- a. Another angel (the fifth angel) comes out of the temple and has a sharp sickle (v. 17)
- b. Another angel (the sixth angel, has authority over fire) comes out of the altar and commands the one who has the sharp sickle to vintage (v. 18)
- c. The angel with the sickle does the vintage and gathers the grapes. (v. 19)
- d. The result: blood flowed and spread out of the press (v. 20)

From this structural outline, we can see some implications of the relations within the sub-structure of Revelation 14. First, it is interesting to find the material in between the two groups of three angels (vv. 13-14). In these two verses, those who die in the Lord find blessing and rest. And this vision of Sabbath does not stop here. God is exercising his justice to those who are against him. Our group study of Revelation 14 finds out that these two verses could possibly be the center of the passage.

Secondly, between the lamb standing in verse 1 and the one like the Son of Man dwelling on the cloud, we found the gospel message - the salvation (v. 7) and judgements (vv. 8-11). The gospel message in verse 7 is very unique and interesting: "Fear God and give him glory... Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." It means that the God who loves the world is the God the creator. He is the faithful God who will keep his covenant to those who love him and will punish those who rebel against him.

Thirdly, our group finds a very interesting *inclusio* in Revelation 14. In the first section (vv. 1-5), we see the anthropomorphism of Christ, the Lamb dwelling on the Zion. This scene is the perspective from

the heaven. There is an explicit presence of Christ where the actions in heaven and on earth are related. In the second section (vv. 6-13), interestingly, the anthropomorphism of Christ is not present. From the earthly perspective, the section mainly concentrates on the pronouncement of the gospel and the judgment of those who do not believe in God. There is an implicit presence of Christ where the actions are taken by the angels. In the third section (vv. 14-20), we see again the anthropomorphism of Christ in the Son of Man who sits on the cloud. This section goes back to the heavenly perspective. The explicit presence of Christ is manifested in the appearance of the Son of Man. In this section, the vivid description of how the action takes place in heaven results in the events on earth: the future judgment.

Exegesis of Revelation 14

Moving from chapter 13, which gives us the scene of the beast coming out of the sea and the earth, one can see that chapter 14 gives us a sign of hope. The enemies of the saints have been introduced in 12:13-13:18. They are given the authority to overcome them (13:7) and to seduce the world into worshipping the Evil One rather than God (13:16-17). The dragon, the beast and the second beast have been depicted as successfully prosecuting war against the people of God. Without chapter 14, chapter 13 would end with the triumphant of the Evil power. However, chapter 14 gives another nuance to the narrative.

Wall acknowledges that there are many points of contrast in Revelation 14:1-5.¹⁶ First is the contrast John uses to compare between the description of the beast's followers (13:5-18) and their eternal destiny (14:8-11). This contrast, he says, is to prepare us to move to the description of the eternal gospel in vv. 6-7. Babylon and those who worship the beast will be destroyed by God, but the true Israel, who has the faith of the eternal gospel, will endure. Furthermore, almost all of the descriptions of the vision in verses 1-5 are a contrast to what he has just described as the reign of evil in chapter 13. Wall furthermore says

¹⁶Robert W. Wall, *Revelation*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 178-179.

that the vision of the "oppression has been exchanged for liberation, evil for good, suffering for celebration."¹⁷

John opens the first scene of chapter 14 with the Lamb who is standing on Mount Zion and with him is the 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name. Chapter 14, again, gives hope and encouragement to those who warred against the enemies of God and were persecuted because of the gospel. The narrative does not end in chapter 13; the beasts do not totally overcome the people of God. The Lamb who is slain, the Paschal Lamb, is triumphant. The Lamb is mentioned in 5:1-8. He is the one worthy to open the scroll and to whom the elders and the four living creatures fell down. The Lamb is standing on Mount Zion, the mount of victory in the Old Testament (OT). Zion has been depicted as a place where the messianic king triumphs over his enemies (Ps 2:6). This is a place where Israelites experience deliverance from their enemy (Jl 2:32). This Zion cannot be moved but abides forever (Ps 125:1). Mount Zion is the place of victory for the Lamb against the beasts who stood only on sand (13:1).

Some have argued that this place might be an earthly Zion. Morris and Hendriksen refute this opinion. Morris says that if it were an earthly Zion, the Lamb would have made the transition from heaven to earth without any comment being made on it. Furthermore, John appears to be referring to the final triumph, not an intermediate victory.¹⁸ Hendriksen sees the NT use of Zion as the heavenly Zion (Heb 12:22). This geographical place is a theological idiom of the eschatological place of the true Israel. Moreover, Hendriksen sees an immediate connection to verse 2 when John hears a sound from heaven.¹⁹ Therefore, it is likely to be a heavenly scene.

Accompanying the Lamb are the 144,000 who have the name of the Lamb and his father written on their foreheads. These marks, the marks of God, form a contrast with the followers of the beast who bore his name on their foreheads or right hands (13:16). Scholars have

¹⁷Ibid., 178.

¹⁸Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, Tyndale NT Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 170.

¹⁹Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 151.

different opinions of who the 144,000 are. The literal and out-of-context interpretation of this group has colored the predicted scene of the end of time. However, John himself has mentioned this group in 7:4. This group is not only sealed from all the tribes of Israel, but also has the seal on their foreheads (7:3). The number signifies the complete number of God's elect and the repetition in this passage tells us that the number of elect stays the same in spite of the persecutions and tribulations.²⁰ This is God's people, the true Israel, the true church. They are those who faithfully respond to the gospel of Jesus. They have been persecuted by the beasts, however, now they enjoy the bliss of heaven.

Then, in verse 2, John hears the sound from heaven, the voice of nature, the rushing waters and a loud peal of thunder. This voice of waters and thunder becomes the voice of the beautiful sound of harpists. This is the voice of God's creation praising the holy Creator. Morris notifies us that John may pick up these metaphors from the earlier chapter of Revelation.²¹ In 1:15, the roar of rushing water is like the voice of Christ which is like a loud peal of thunder (6:1). Mounce, however, says that John may pick the language from Ezekiel 1:24 where this kind of sound originated from the winged cherubim as they accompany the chariot throne of God. Furthermore, it is like the voice of God approaching his glory (Ez 43:2).²² I think, wherever the origin of the new song, the quality of the voice is accented, like the beautiful song arranged by a talented harpist. This harpist arranged the voice of creation to create the beautiful song.

This song, called the new song in verse 3, is beautifully sung by the elect, the 144,000. They form a choir to glorify the most high before the throne of Yahweh and before the angelic host of heaven (the elders and the four living creatures). The audience of the choir of the redeemed is picked up from chapter 5 where John sees the elders and the four living beings worshipping the Lamb. Furthermore, it might be possible that the new song is the song sung in 5:9-10. Mounce also agrees that

²⁰Bauckham introduces the 144,000 as the army of the Lord who stand in oppose to the enemies of God in chapters 12-13.

²¹Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 170.

²²Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 265.

this new song is the song of deliverance sung by the psalmists (Pss 96:1; 98:1; 144:9).²³ And only those who were redeemed from the earth and faithful to the gospel can sing this new song. This is not too surprising because only those who have experienced the pang of persecutions and have been redeemed can cheerfully sing their deliverance.

John does not leave the characteristics of the redeemed unexplained. He wants his readers to know who these people really are. The first characteristic of the redeemed is their sexual purity. They did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. If we understand that the 144,000 are the redeemed, it is difficult to interpret this verse.²⁴ First, the true church consists of human beings, male and female. Furthermore, the NT never condemns sexual relations as defiling. Marriage is a state to be commended and sexual relations are a necessary part of this institution, though there are some areas where ministries can be better carried out by the unmarried (1 Cor 7). Following BAGD²⁵, it is possible to refer the word "defile" to "improper sexual relations." However, the passage says that the 144,000 are virgins! What does John mean then? I think it is wise to refer this state to the purity of the relationship between the redeemed and God.²⁶ Morris observes that virginity is ascribed to the state of faithfulness of the people of God in the OT (2 Kgs 19:21; Jer 18:13; Lam 2:13) while the improper sexual relationship is like the unfaithfulness of God (Ez 16; Hos 5:4).²⁷ The redeemed are the church, the bride of the Lamb (21:9) who is described as having no sexual relationship at all.

The women, following Schussler-Fiorenza, are always depicted as the enemies of God. Most of the references of woman in Revelation

²³Ibid., 266.

²⁴Richard Bauckham suggests that this is the ritual purity of the army in the OT (Dt 23:9-14; 1 Sm 21:5). This image is changed with the sacrificial image indicated by the word "blameless" (14:4). *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (New York, NY: Cambridge, 1993), 78.

²⁵Walter Bauer, William Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Danker Frederick, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) (BAGD).

²⁶Some have carelessly identified the 144,000 as those who kept themselves from adultery and fornication. They are literally virgins. I do not subscribe to this opinion.

²⁷Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

(e.g. the false prophetess, Jezebel, and the great prostitute of Babylon) are in opposition to God.²⁸ They symbolize the evil warring against the true believers. However, the true believers do not relate themselves to the evil powers. They kept themselves pure as virgins. They live up to Christ's expectations. This is the cultic purity and holiness of the Lamb's follower (21:9-11) which symbolizes the true allegiance to the holy God.²⁹

The redeemed are not only "sexually pure," but they also follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They do not follow the Lamb in this instance, but they have followed the Lamb in their earthly lives. This motif of "following" might be borrowed from Jesus instruction to his disciples (Mk 8:43). These people may follow the Lamb until the point of death. Secondly, their status is mentioned in the latter part (v. 4). They are the first fruits to God and to the Lamb, purchased from among men. The slain Lamb paid for the redeemed by his blood in 5:9 so that they no longer belong to the world. They now are the first fruits of the most high. This sacrificial language brings us immediately to the OT ritual of offering the first part of the harvest which is special to God (Ex 23:19; Neh 10:35). All the first fruits are offered to the Lord, after which the Israelite is at liberty to use the rest (Ex 23:19; Nm 18:12). James depicts the church as the "first fruits of all he created" (Jas 1:18). Therefore, the first fruits mentioned here definitely refer to the number of the elect, or the true church of Jesus Christ. It is misleading to interpret that there exists a special kind of people who are specially separated from other believers. The first fruits constitute the full number of the people of God.

The redeemed also have a pure characteristic in their speaking. No lie was found in their mouth. John must have Zephaniah in mind who has prophesied that the remnant of Israel would speak no lies, nor would deceit be found in their mouth (Zep 3:13).³⁰ He also wants to put this practice in contrast to those of the pagan world who exchange the

²⁸Ellisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991), 88-89.

²⁹Both Wall, *Revelation*, 181 and Schussler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 88, agree to this explanation.

³⁰Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 268.

truth of God for a lie (Rom 1:25; 2 Thes 2:11). They are ethically blameless. Some commentators agree that this state of blamelessness is also associated with the acceptable offering since this language dominates verse 4.

Following Schussler-Fiorenza,³¹ this passage functions in two ways within the overall composition of the Apocalypse of John. It is the picture of the holy community of the Lamb in the midst of the worshipers of the beast. They sing, worship, and follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They are members of the community because of the blood of the slain Lamb. This gives encouragement to the church after the distressing visions of the two beasts. This scene is always going to be a joyful promise of the people of God in the midst of tribulation and persecution. It depicts the eschatological community of Christians. This is fitting because the judgment scenes are coming immediately after this passage.

Now we arrive in the second half of Revelation 14 which depicts the harvest of the end. I think there are two subdivisions within this latter part of the chapter: the proclamation of the gospel by the angels (vv. 6-13) and the harvest-vintage vision of John (vv. 14-20). While Michaels treats the whole discussion from 12:1-15:4 as a large interlude, Mounce and Morris observe that interludes can be found earlier in 7:1-17, between the sixth and seventh seal; 10:1-11:14, between the sixth and seventh trumpet; and in our second half of the pericope, 14:6-20.³² I think Michaels is more careful in his analysis. It is clear that from the end of chapter 11 until the early part of chapter 15, the reference is to the opening of God's sanctuary in heaven and the appearing of the ark of the covenant in the sanctuary (11:19).³³ John's abrupt glimpse into heaven is echoed in 15:5-6 and serves as an introduction to the pouring of the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth in chapter 16. It is very clear that the material from 12:1-14:20 (15:4) represents a break from the sequences of "seven" which dominated John's vision from the beginning of his Apocalypse.

³¹Schussler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 88-89.

³²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 269 and Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 153.

³³Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 63.

Whatever one may call this material (14:6-20), it clearly brings out the theme of judgment to the narrative. Following the heavenly vision of the 144,000 on Mount Zion, it reminds the reader that the redeemed will be vindicated when judgment falls on the unbelieving world. It reminds the believers and all who have been persecuted for the name of the Lord that God has not forgotten their violent persecution. He will exercise his justice and the eternal death is the price they pay for their conviction and persecution of the people of God.

The scene of the victorious Lamb and his followers (14:1-5) is followed by the proclamations of the three angels (vv. 6-11). These proclamations are organically arranged within the passage and they are progressive. The proclamation of the first angel is basically the content of the eternal gospel (v. 6-7). This angel summons all the inhabitants of the earth to worship God the creator. Then the next angel (v. 8) proclaims a prediction of the downfall of the great Babylon. The last angel in this pericope (vv. 6-11) announces a vivid depiction of the torment awaiting all who worship the beast (vv. 9-11). The purpose behind the appearance of these heavenly hosts, as what they have been doing in this book³⁴, is to proclaim the goodness of God toward mankind so that they will turn their face to God and repent before Him. Then this unit is followed by a voice from heaven pronouncing blessed are those who die in the Lord (vv. 12-13). While in 14:1-5 John escorts the readers to the scene in heaven, now the readers are back on the earth. It is more likely that this happens before the judgment day. Hendriksen affirms that this is taking place just before the second coming.³⁵

The first of the series of angels is introduced by the word "another." One may immediately ask, is there any point of reference to this angel? Both Morris and Mounce agree that the word "another" may only distinguish this angel to the rest of the angels later in the pericope.³⁶ This first angel is sent to those who are living on earth. The proclamation

³⁴See Rev. 8:13.

³⁵Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 153.

³⁶The seventh angel in 11:15 is far too removed for an intended contrast (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 270), and this angel is the first mentioned since Rv 12:7 (Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 173).

is addressed to mankind who is "easy going, indifferent, unconcerned, listless and careless."³⁷ Like the eagle of woe that in 8:13 flies in midair to be seen and heard by all, so does the first angel in our pericope. This angel brings a message to the inhabitants of the earth: the eternal gospel.

Many have commented on what the eternal gospel proclaimed by the first angel really is. It is interesting to explore the meaning of this "gospel" since this is the only occurrence in the book of Revelation. I think Wall gives a very comprehensive meaning of the "eternal gospel."³⁸ Before giving his threefold response, he wonders how the eternal gospel can be a "good news" for God's enemy. First, the content is eternal and "theocentric." It is the word of the almighty God who "was and is and is to come" (4:8). It is to emphasize that all the inhabitants of the earth are finally dealing with God who is above all rulers and authorities. Secondly, because every creature on earth belongs to God, no one can subdue the believers. This "eternal gospel" brings liberation to those oppressed by anti-Christian power. Thirdly, it is not only a liberating word, but also an "inclusive word." It reminds us all again about God's grace and his redemption. In the light of the new song sung in 14:3, God's redemption is for all humanity because the blood of the victorious Lamb. This is the "eternal gospel," the message that Christians have carried for over two millenniums. Schussler-Florenza observes that this very message was used by the early church in their missionary preaching (1 Thes 1:9; Acts 14:15ff; 17:24ff).³⁹ The "eternal gospel" was to be preached before the end of the world as uttered by Jesus in Mark 13:10 and Matthew 24:14. This is the last call for civilization to repent and give him glory.

The message of the "eternal gospel" is picked up from the language of creation in Genesis 1-3. The first angel pronounces it loudly so it can be heard to all. The message is clear: Fear God, give him glory and worship him because the time is up. No one who continues in unbelief will escape God, the almighty one who created the heaven, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water. It is about the worship of God, to whom glory is given rather than to the beast (13:8) since "what

³⁷Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 153.

³⁸Wall, *Revelation*, 183-184.

³⁹Schussler-Florenza, *Revelation: Vision for a Just World*, 89.

can be known about God is plain to the mankind because God has shown it to them" (Rom 1:19). No one can escape this. The worship is the fruit of repentance since it envisions an eschatological decision and because it recognizes that eternal life is granted to those who believe and wrath to those who do not.

After the first angel appears, "another" is following. Again, the term "another" is used to make a contrast with the first. It is likely that the way the second angel comes to the scene is the same as the first one, flying in midair. The second angel prophesies what was said by Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel namely, that judgment has been executed over Babylon (Is 24:19; Jer 51:7; Dn 4:27). Why Babylon?

Mounce says that the Mesopotamian city of Babylon had become the political and religious capital of a world empire.⁴⁹ It was also famous for its luxury and moral corruption. Above all it is the great enemy of the people of God. This designation of the "the great Babylon" has been used throughout Revelation (16:9; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21). It emphasizes the self-importance and self-boasting of the rulers of the city (Dn 4:30). It is the symbol of the spirit of godlessness that in every age lures people away from the worship of the creator. It is contrasted with the blessed place of Mount Zion and the heavenly city of Jerusalem. Furthermore, John does not only condemn the city of Babylon, but he also gives reason why she is condemned. The city "made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion." Is it only a passion or more of a wrath? This adjective word (Θυμοζ) describes the oppressive effect of Babylon's bullying and then the liberating eternal gospel is the cure for this. However, what is at stake in this passage is the "wine of Babylon's impure passion" in contrast to the "wine of God's fury" which brings the city to its knees (14:10). John probably picks this up from 17:2 where the great harlot has made the kings of the earth drunk with the wine of her adulteries. This pictures Rome as a prostitute seducing the world through the intoxicating influence of her corrupt practices. Another concept is from the cup of God's wrath as divine punishment (see 16:19 and 19:5). By using these two symbols the second angel pronounces the wrath of God to Babylon, the symbol of self-boasting of humanity.

⁴⁹Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 271.

"Another angel," the third one, now appears on the scene and pronounces God's judgment. With the same quality description of the loud sound of the first angel, he announces that all those who are with the world will perish with the world. The third angel delivers the third proclamation which is a harsh consequence of rejecting the eternal gospel. The narrative of the third angel addresses those who worship the beast and its image and those who receive marks on their foreheads and hands (13:16). It is a counter-proclamation to that of this image in chapter 13: that those who would not worship the image should be killed and those without the mark of the beast would not be able to sell nor to buy (13:15, 17). This same group is the object of God's fury (*θυμοζ*) and wrath (*οργη*) (v. 10)⁴¹. Because of their hardened heart and their rejection of the eternal gospel, they are to be tormented with fire and sulphur. The eternal gospel brings worship from those who accept it and torment to those who intentionally refuse it.

Mounce studies some references of the language of the wrath of God from the OT. "This wrath is often pictured in the OT as a draught of wine (Jb 21:20; Ps. 75:8; Is 51:17; Jer 25:25-38)."⁴² The effect of God's wrath on these people is they will "get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more" (Jer 25:26, 27). It is very interesting to read the quality of the wine to this people literally in Greek (*κεκρασμενου ακρατου*): the wrath of God "mixed unmixed."⁴³ What does it mean? Mounce suggests that participle "mixed" means that the preparation of wine by the addition of various spices. In Psalms 75:8, he says, "the mixture is apparently poisonous." The adjective "unmixed" refers to the practice of diluting the wine with water. Therefore, the wrath of God is mixed (so as to increase its strength) and unmixed (not diluted with water).⁴⁴

The outcome of this action (drinking the wrath of God) is the torment with burning sulphur in the presence of the angels and the

⁴¹Morris observes that *οργη* more readily denotes the kind of anger that arises from a settled disposition and *θυμοζ* anger of a more passionate kind. In the NT, *οργη* is the usual word for divine wrath, however, in the book of Revelation *θυμοζ* is used of the divine anger in number of places (175).

⁴²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 272-273.

⁴³NIV translates that the wrath of God is "poured full strength."

⁴⁴Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 273.

Lamb. Immediately, one may recall the language of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. This kind of language is also used at the end of Revelation (19:20; 20:10; 21:8). This final outcome of those who deny their faith and the eternal gospel is depicted early in our pericope for the purpose of repentance into God's grace. Though this means of punishment is depicted symbolically, one has to take into account seriously. John is quite sure that the consequence of sin follows sinners into the life to come. The punishment will be before the angels and the Lamb. It accords to what Jesus says in Luke 12:9 that those who disown him before others will be disowned before the angels of God.

One may complain about John's handling of this theme of the torment of unbelievers. Both Morris and Wall say that this is not an element of John's vindication motif.⁴³ John is not gloating over the suffering the wicked. He wants to get serious about the state of the after life for those who refuse the calling of God. This torment does not bring satisfaction or delight to the angels and the Lamb. Rather it emphasizes the certainty of God's promise and consequences of it.

The actualization of the punishment and torment of those who refuse the eternal gospel is lasting forever. Verse 11 depicts the quality of the torment that its smoke will go "up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day or night." This is the eternal price they pay for having chosen evil over righteousness. And again, John spells out the identity of the sufferers at the end of verse 11: those who worship the beast and his image and anyone who receives the mark of his name. This vivid depiction of hell and its qualitative description is actually one of the main messages of our Lord Jesus Christ. God has already manifested the eternal consequences of our sins in the death of Jesus Christ, his Son. It now depends on who wants to accept God's offer of grace and forgiveness.

In verses 12-13, John the seer gives comment on the vision he has seen in the previous 6 verses. Above all these angelic proclamations and eternal punishment to those who reject the faith, there is a clear message for believers, the true people of God. All those events in verses

⁴³Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 176 and Wall, *Revelation*, 186.

6-12 are somehow an encouragement to those who walk in the path of God, by doing his commandments, and the faith of Jesus. They must pass through troubles on this earth, but they know that their troubles are temporary whereas those of their tormentors will be eternally punished. This sense of values keeps them calm in the storm of persecutions and calls them to endure.⁴⁶

These events (vv. 6-12) are not only confirmed by John but also by the heavenly voice in verse 13. Though the heavenly host speaks a more positive encouragement to the readers, they both give an encouragement of the blessedness of believers because of their hope in the Lord. Their endurance to the call of God may result in martyrdom but the faithful dead are blessed in that they have entered victoriously into their rest.⁴⁷ Morris notifies that it is not easy to see the phrase “ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ” (from now on) with what precedes or with what follows.⁴⁸ He agrees that grammatically it can go either way. However, the spirit⁴⁹ furthermore says, “ὡναί” (yes). Therefore it may be taken with what the preceding. However, Wall insists that this is basically the logical outcome of the promise of the blessing (rather than temporal). Therefore, the saints who remain faithful unto martyrdom can expect entrance into heavenly bliss.

Why are they “indeed blessed?” The spirit gives the purpose⁵⁰ so that “they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them” (v. 13). Our group discussion believes that this is the theme of the entire pericope: to encourage believers of the works done and the persecutions they are going through. Morris observes that the word labor (κοπός) means “labor to the point of weariness and sometimes merely pain.”

⁴⁶I think this message is very important to be heard by the church of Jesus Christ. I am thinking about the bride of Christ which is presently going through times of economic and social troubles and persecutions from other religions. This message needs to be heard by them. Her hope and encouragement can come from this verse.

⁴⁷Mounce notifies that this beatitude is the second in the series of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation, *The Book of Revelation*, 275-276.

⁴⁸Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 177.

⁴⁹Morris also notifies that the Spirit does not speak too often in the book of Revelation. The only occurrences are in the letters to the churches (2:7, 11) and in the final invitation (22:17).

⁵⁰Indicated by ἵνα clause.

Heaven gives *shalom* and restfulness of those who have labor to the point of weariness or even pain. The language of "rest" is surely picked up from the concept of Sabbath and Jubilee of Judaism. Believers will "rest" from their κόπος but their έργα (deeds) go into the after life. This gives dignity and encouragement to every godly deed Christians do on this fallen world. They are not going to be insignificant. Their deeds will be rewarded in holy rest and heavenly bliss.

The next two visions (vv. 14-16 and 17-20) of judgment bring our pericope to its close. This section is indicated by the phrase "Και εἶδον." It continues the angelic proclamation of the eternal gospel. John has embedded the language of salvation in the description of the "great winepress of God's wrath."²¹ Verses 14-16 picture the advent of divine judgment in the familiar figure of a grain harvest. Verses 17-20 emphasize the violent nature of the wrath of God as treading of a winepress into which the grape clusters of the earth have been cast. Again, this gives the vision of those who are faithful in the Lord that their faith in God will finally be vindicated.

The harvest of the earth is ready and ripe. This vision of the end of the world is delivered by a familiar context of agriculture in the ancient near east. This is the climatic harvest. While three angels have pronounced judgements (vv. 6-12), now here comes the action. I do not think it is a big issue whether we can tie the identity of the three angels in verses 6-12 to the rest of the angels in verses 14-20. There may be an angel who exercises two different things or even more.

John first sees before him a white cloud and seated on the cloud one like a son of man. The language of the son of man in the NT is often borrowed from the reference in Daniel 7. Daniel depicts the "one like a son of man" comes with the clouds of heaven to receive universal and everlasting dominion in Daniel 7:13-14. But who is this figure? Many have identified this reaper as an angel rather than Christ. It is awkward to have Christ be commanded to harvest the earth by an angelic being (later in v. 15). Furthermore, he should have known the end time. However, isn't it Christ himself who says "But of that day or that hour no

²¹Wall, *Revelation*, 187.

one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32)? Therefore, though normal reference of this figure is for the angelic beings in most of apocalyptic literature, contextually, this figure is likely to be the exalted Christ, the Messiah (cf. 1:13).

The "one like a son of man" comes and uses the attributes of a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle on his hand. Mounce says that the *στεφάνοζ χρυσοῦζ* has also been worn by the twenty-four elders in 4:4 and 10.³² It definitely designates the Messiah as one who has conquered and thereby wins the right to act in judgment. And the sharp sickle is ready to be used by the "one like a son of man" to harvest the earth.

Then the angel comes up to the scene and delivers the divine command to commence the harvest. He comes from the most holy place of the presence of God, the temple. This angel carries the command of the Holy Father to the Son to exercise his power in the harvest. This angel, as the other three angelic beings in verses 6-12, cries in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud that he should take the sickle and reap because the hour has come and the earth is ripe. "The hour" has been addressed a number of times in the gospel of John. Morris says that it denotes the inevitability with which things come to their climax (the cross in John).³³ Here in his Apocalypse, it is the end of the earth which it refers to.

John might have in mind the Lord's saying from Matthew 3:12 that the Lord will gather "his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." He also might be thinking of the symbolism of the wheat harvest as a gathering of the righteous at the end time (Mt 13:30, 38 and Mk 4:29). The language, Morris observes, points to the drying off of plants when the crop is fully ripe.³⁴ The time for this intervention is not chosen arbitrarily. It is in this definite time at which he will harvest. God has delayed his harvest because of his "long-suffering" for mankind to repent.

³²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 277.

³³Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 179.

³⁴Ibid.

This command to harvest is finally exercised by the one who is seated on the cloud (v. 16). He "swung the sickle over the earth and the earth was harvested." Mounce studies this command as uttered in Joel 3:13 ("Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe").³⁵ In the context of Joel, it is the Lord who swung the sickle upon the wicked nations "who run to the valley of Jehoshaphat."

Mounce also thinks the difference of interpretation of the identity of those who will be harvested. Some say that this scene (vv. 14-16) is the gathering of the righteous at the return of Christ and interpret the next scene (vv. 17-20) as the judgment of the wicked. It is difficult to choose a direction in this matter. Both groups have been identified in the NT in the harvest scene: the gathering of believers into the kingdom of God (Mt 9:37-38; Mk 4:29; Lk 10:2; Jn 4:35-38) and unbelievers into the eternal punishment (Mt 13:30, 40-42). In the OT, however, as Mounce identifies, the harvest was a regular symbol of divine judgment (Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11). Therefore, following Mounce, it is wise not to identify a certain group which is gathered. This is more a general picture of the divine judgment at the end of the history of mankind. And so is the next vision.

I think John must have thought that the use of agricultural metaphors effectively transmits the message to his audience. He now uses the more vivid figure of the grape harvest, the vintage. John stresses the violent carnage of that judgment. Mounce observes that there are a number of structural similarities between the two visions (vv. 14-16 and vv. 17-20).³⁶ In each vision, there is an agent of God's wrath bearing a sickle. Furthermore, the call to carry out God's judgment is proclaimed by another angel. Mounce, at the same time, notifies the difference as well. While in the harvest, the one who is seated on the throne, which we claim as Christ himself, is exercising his right to reap the ripe world, in the vintage, an angel comes out from the temple and gathers it. Moreover, the harvest serves as a more general picture of the final judgment while the vintage depicts the violent nature of the judgment.

³⁵Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 278.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 279.

In spite of the differences and similarities between the two scenes, it is still difficult in the grape harvest to say who is being addressed in the judgment. Some say that it can mean the same positive sense of judgment because both in the OT and NT, Israel and the church have been addressed as the vine (Is 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Ez 19:10-14; Jn 15:1-7).³⁷ Others may argue because Christ died outside of the city, this very place is proper for the martyrdom (Heb 13:11-13). Schussler-Fiorenza furthermore connects this image to the one in 19:15, where the positive interpretation is not compatible with it. In this verse, Christ addresses the winepress of the wrath of God. Therefore, following Schussler-Fiorenza, it is likely that this vintage image is influenced by Isaiah 63:3-6 as a picture of Yahweh's terrible vengeance. However, in this instance, the angel does it.

John sees "another angel" who also "came out of the temple" (v. 17). However, John now specifies the place of the temple which is "in heaven." Confirming Schussler-Fiorenza's theory of the vintage, it becomes more surely that this judgment is of Yahweh who dwells in heaven. It is an absolute judgment against those who refuse to follow Yahweh. This judgment is carried out by an angel who, like the one seating on the cloud, carries a sharp sickle.

Then immediately, John sees another angel coming out of the altar to this scene (v. 18). Hendriksen, Mounce and Morris agree on the connection between this verse and 6:9.³⁸ The altar has been associated with the prayers of the saints and with judgment (8:3-5). It may be true that this judgment is the final answer to the prayers of the suffering saints. This angel, as specified by John, is not an ordinary one, but he is "in charge of the fire." This angel, again in a loud voice signifying intensification, calls the one with the sharp sickle (v. 17) to gather the clusters of grapes from the ripened earth. Mounce observes that in the intertestamental period, angels are assigned to the various elements of nature.³⁹ Enoch himself speaks of the angels of thunder, sea, hail,

³⁷Schussler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision for a Just World*, 91.

³⁸Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 155; Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 180; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 279.

³⁹Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 280.

snow, rain, and so on.⁶⁰ This angel, Mounce further says, is closely associated with the angel of 8:3-5 who filled a censer with fire from the altar and cast it upon the earth. Therefore, it again becomes more precise to view this vision as the final judgment of the wicked because fire and judgment are closely connected.⁶¹ As mentioned in the explanation of vv. 14-20 above, it is likely that the vision of Joel (3:14) is the model for this vision as well. Like the grain ready to be harvested, the grapes are fully ripe.

The angel being in charge of the vintage obeys immediately. First, he reaps the earth's vine. 1 Enoch 53 also confirms that there exists "angels of punishment" who are the agent of God to destroy the wicked, kings and mighty of the earth (vv. 3-5).⁶² Later in 19:15, Christ himself treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God, supplying the vultures with a great feast of human flesh. After reaping the vine, John hurls what he gathers into the great winepress of God's wrath. Mounce gives a vivid example of treading of grapes in John's time by means of "foot in a trough that had a duct leading to a lower basin where the juice was collected."⁶³ Therefore, confirming Schussler-Fiorenza's theory that the vintage models Isaiah 63, this is a familiar figure for the execution of divine wrath upon the enemies of God. It is also echoed in Lamentation 1:15 and Joel 3:13.

John does not stop his vivid description of the end judgment of the wicked in verse 19. He continues with the description of where they are thrown and the outcome of the judgment (v. 20). They are thrown outside of the unidentified city. John probably has Jerusalem in mind. Furthermore, he does not mention who trod the winepress. The judgement of the nations in Joel 3:12-14 takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat, which tradition links with the Kidron valley lying between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.⁶⁴ Furthermore, Zechariah and 1 Enoch confirm this theory.⁶⁵ Mounce also thinks an allusion from

⁶⁰Mounce picks these verses from 1 Enoch 60 and Jub 2.

⁶¹At least in NT, it is closely related in Matthew 18:8; Luke 9:54.

⁶²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 280.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 280.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 281.

⁶⁵Zechariah 14:1-4 and 1 Enoch 53:1.

Hebrews 13:12 (the one who suffered for the sins of the human race "outside of the city gate") may well have influenced John's account in this vision.

The outcome of the judgment is also severe: blood flowed out of the press. As the winepress results in the red juice of the grape, so the judgment of God results in a bloody river "rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia" (v. 20). The earth has come to its final end. The hardened hearts are punished. Both Mounce and Morris think that 1 Enoch 100:3 ("the horse shall walk through the blood of sinners up to his chest") is used by John to explain the first quality of the outcome of God's judgment. Furthermore, this river of blood not only as thick as "the horses' bridles," but also as wide as "1,600 stadia." Literally it is a distance about 184 miles (300 kilometers) which is a very close measurement of the length of Palestine.⁶⁶ People have variously interpreted where this number comes from. It may be a result of multiples between the number 4 (which is the number of the earth – cf. 20:8; 7:1) and 10 (which is the number of completeness – cf. 5:11; 20:6).⁶⁷ At any rate, it definitely symbolizes the complete judgment of the whole earth and the final destruction of the wicked. It extends to all mankind everywhere who is against the holy Lord.

Conclusion

In this chapter, John begins by directing the hope of his readers to the ultimate reward for their endurance. While the beast of chapter 13 employed every possible method to gain the allegiance of the entire world, those who are faithful to God are rewarded. He gives a glance of the final blessedness of believers at the end of time. They are triumphantly standing with the Lamb. Their allegiance to the Lord is signified by the identity written upon their foreheads. They alone sing a new song of deliverance which is like the roar of rushing water and a peal of thunder producing a sweet music in John's ear. They are not only pure and blameless but also faithfully following their Lord because they

⁶⁶Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 281.

⁶⁷Both Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 281, Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 181, and Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors*, 156, subscribe to this analysis.

are bought with the blood of the Lamb. They become an offering before the Lord.

John also gives an encouragement to them by vividly expressing the judgment of the wicked (vv. 6-12). Three angels serve as God's messengers to proclaim the eternal gospel and the judgment upon the boasting and unrepentant humankind. Out of this judgment, John again goes back to his main point in the first part (vv. 1-5): encouraging the believers in their hope in God. Verses 12 and 13 serve as the interpretation of John's vision which calls for the patient endurance of the saints who faithfully obey God's commandment and faithful to Jesus. He also gives assurance that the faithful dead will be rewarded with an eternal shalom in heaven because of their deeds on earth.

Wrapping up his discourse, John ends with two visions of judgments: the harvest (vv. 14-16) and the vintage (vv. 17-20). The harvest, done by the one who sits on the cloud, seems to signify a gathering of believers while the vintage, done by an angel, symbolizes the final judgement and its outcome for the wicked. The faith of believers is vindicated by the judgment brought upon their oppressors.