

“The Harvest Is Coming (Chaps. 14 & 15)”

INTRODUCTION

The cosmic struggle of chapter 12 has come to earth in chapter 13: political and religious might unites to crush and persecute God's people. But chapter 14 introduces seven oracles, or foreshadowing, of the future that encourage believers, and chapter 15 introduces the 7 last plagues of wrath & justice (directed mainly at those who have the mark of the beast - 13:6). The end is near, and God's judgement will be complete.

NOTES ON CHAPS. 14 & 15

1. Mount Zion usually refers to the walled city of Jerusalem. Perhaps this is a foreshadowing of the earthly millennial kingdom of Rev. 20:1-6, or this is a reference to the heavenly Mount Zion (Hebrews 12:22-24).
2. The 144,000 are the same group introduced in Rev. 7:1-8. Opinions about this group vary. Some say they are believing Jews who witness to Christ during the future Tribulation, some say they are all Christians/the whole church (144,000 is a symbolic number). The language of 14:1-5 seems to suggest that they have been martyred and are now in singing a “new song” in heaven.
3. Notice the characteristics and traits of the 144,000 in vs 4-5: sexual purity, complete devotion to Christ, trustworthy, blameless. Contrast to Romans 1:18-32.
4. In 14:6-13, three angels each bring an oracle, or a look into the future. The first tells of the actions of those who have heard and believed the gospel (the “good news”) of Jesus Christ. The second tells of the fate of “Babylon the Great” (see below). The third tells of the eternal fate of those who turn away from the gospel and worship the beast.
5. Babylon - historically, a city in modern Iraq which was the center of a political, commercial and religious empire noted for its luxury and decadence. To Israel and Old Testament prophets, Babylon was the epitome of a powerful, evil, worldly city destined for destruction. Some think John uses the name Babylon to represent Rome, the center of power and hostility in his day. Others think he means the world political and religious system in general. Others think Babylon symbolizes a world government that will be established in the last days of earth. And still others believe Babylon will actually be rebuilt and become the center of this world power.
6. Cup of wrath is an Old Testament image symbolizing God's universal, unending hatred of sin (cf. Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15).
7. The foreshadowing of the future judgement of the righteous and unrighteous is stated another way in 14:14-20. Although Jesus isn't mentioned by name, “one like a son of man” is identified as Jesus earlier in 1:13. In the harvests of John's day, a sharp sickle or knife was used to cut the grain or fruit. Good grain or fruit would be gathered up, while weeds and chafe would be burned.
8. The last set of plagues is introduced in chapter 15. John makes it clear that judgement will be completed with these plagues. Bowls were cups used for drinking.
9. The Song of Moses was sung by Jews on Sabbath evenings to celebrate God's great

deliverance from Egypt (cf. Exodus 15:1-18). The Song of the Lamb is like it, and celebrates the spiritual deliverance God has brought all people in Jesus Christ.

10. The "Tabernacle of Testimony" is another Old Testament reference. During Israel's desert wanderings, the Lord's presence dwelt in a tabernacle, or tent, built to His exacting instructions. Sacred objects like the ark of the covenant and the lamp were kept in the tent. Later on, the tabernacle was "fixed in place" in the Temple in Jerusalem.

QUESTIONS:

1. How do you feel you measure up to the characteristics of the 144,000 described in 14:4-5. In which of these traits would you like to grow?
2. Are you needing to have patient endurance in the midst of temptation or hardship right now? How can 14:6-13 help you to cultivate the strength to remain faithful?
3. Why are the last seven plagues introduced with songs celebrating God's deliverance? How does this help us to understand the reason for these judgements? What difference does the promise of God's judgement and wrath, and God's salvation, make for your life today?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Compare the gospel in Revelation 14:6-7 to Romans 1:18-25. Why is God's aspect as Creator mentioned in each passage? What other similarities do you find?
2. Read Isaiah 63:3, Joel 3:13, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; 26:63-64. How do these passages illuminate what you are reading in Revelation?