

Revelation 14 • A Return to the Timeline

Introduction

It is important to keep in mind that Revelation 11-13 is not a chronological extension of events coming in precise succession after the Trumpet judgments, but pausing to temporarily go back to describe what has been taking place not just in parallel, but even continuing on to the end in the background of what is yet to come. The purpose for once again turning our attention to the 144,000 appears to be to synchronize us back to Revelation's chronological timeline so as to press on with the 7th Trumpet. In other words, while Revelation 11-13 addresses general trends taking place in parallel to the major milestones to date and even going forward, Revelation 14 serves to transition us back to the ordered chronology. It does this by presenting the heavenly viewpoint in chapter 14 of what took place as the earthly point of view in chapter 7.

¹Then 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. ²And 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. ³And 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. ⁴These 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. ⁵And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

[Read v.1-5]

Q: How does this connect overall with what was just presented in the previous chapter?

A: John's original writing of Revelation contained no verse or chapter markings so we must continually treat Revelation as a whole, uninterrupted work. Having just described the two beasts and the mark of the beast, John is shown a distinct contrast to the Antichrist, False Prophet and their worshipers with the phrase, "Then I looked" to now focus on the opposite extreme: the Lamb and His followers. What John saw regarding the Antichrist in chapter 13 is directly contrasted here in chapter 14.

Q: How is this reinforced by v.1?

A: God's authentic marking is specified as "having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads", whereas the beast commands everyone "be given a mark on the right hand or on their forehead" (Rev. 13:6) in hopes no one notice the optional counterfeit placement, and likewise takes the form of "either the name of the beast or the number of his name" (Rev. 13:17)

Q: Why are there two different pictures presented of the 144,000 here and in chapter 7?

A: In Revelation 7 we are first presented with an earthly picture, or description, of literal, ethnic Jews selected and sealed by God; here we are given the heavenly, or divine, view that, "These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb". (v.4)

Q: What is significant about their being identified as "first fruits"?

A: In Old Testament Israel, when making an offering, particularly in relation to the Feast of Weeks, the first and best of the harvest was to be given to God. But this was not simply a one-time event, but represented the first of more to follow. In terms of God reverting in the End Times to complete His work in Israel, these are the first of many more to come.

Q: How did the Apostle Paul employ the concept of "first fruits" in both a doctrinal and eschatological context?

²⁰But now **Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.** ²¹For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³**But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,** ²⁴**then comes the end, when**

He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. (1 Co. 15:20–24)

A: The Resurrection of Christ was but the first and best of many more to follow.

Q: How were these “purchased from the earth”? (v.3)

A: This is another way of describing them as redeemed by the blood of the Lamb—they were purchased through their faith in Christ. The underlying Greek word for “earth” actually describes the physical ground, as in, “The farmer works the earth to produce a crop”. It parallels the Old Testament Law requiring the first and best be presented exclusively to God.

Q: What are the chief characteristics of the redeemed according to v.4-5?

1. “...they have kept themselves chaste...” They are free of the sexual immorality that is a chief characteristic of the beast and his followers.
2. “...follow the Lamb wherever He goes...” They are not interested in pursuing their own path but only the Master’s will.
3. “...no lie was found in their mouth...” They cling to the Truth and nothing but the Truth.
4. “...they are blameless.” They have forsaken sin and its influences to such an advanced degree that their natural inclination is to shun and avoid it; in other words, they embrace and live according to His righteousness.

Point: *The 144,000 were not exclusively selected based on ethnicity, but by being models of spiritual faithfulness avoiding immoral behavior and relationships. In Scripture, a right or wrong spiritual relationship is most often illustrated by right or wrong earthly relationships.*

Q: What might be the meaning of their also being “purchased from among men”? (v.4)

A: It seems to refer to the Old Testament practice of redeeming the firstborn. When Israel came out of Egypt, God had Moses take a census of the firstborn and make a special purchase of them. (Num. 3) Thereafter, the practice of redeeming the firstborn became normative in the Law. In this case they are no longer redeemed according to the Law but the New Covenant with the blood of Christ.

Application: *God’s people do not simply resist taking the mark of the beast, but first take God’s mark by following up their redemption by the blood of the Lamb with their changed, faithful behavior.*

[Read v.6-7]

Q: Why is this probably a literal event which will be actually witnessed by everyone on earth?

A: The angel is specified as “flying in midheaven” and not out of sight in heaven proper. “Midheaven” is the highest point in the visible atmosphere which can be observed from the ground and is to be literally applied just like when an angelic call goes “to all the birds which fly in midheaven”. (Rev. 19:17) It also specifies that the angel preaches “to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people”, which clearly must be taken literally.

⁶And 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; ⁷and he said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”

Q: What is the purpose of the message of this first of three angelic messengers?

A: To establish first and foremost that regardless of conditions, the only correct thing to do is to “fear God”, “give Him glory”, and “worship Him”.

Q: What appears to be happening to the division between heaven and earth as the book of Revelation progresses?

A: It would appear that the heavenly and the earthly begin to merge so that all things can be witnessed by both.

Point: *There was a time in eternity past when there was no such physical division, and by the end of Revelation we glimpse the same thing in eternity to come. The “end of the age” seems to effect that transition and many previously hidden heavenly activities begin to merge into the earthly venue and literally witnessed on earth.*

Q: Why would “an eternal gospel” be preached in between the Trumpets and Bowls if they are exclusively the expression of God’s wrath being poured out on the unsaved?

A: It appears that we are being taken back to the Revelation timeline at the point of Revelation 7 where we first saw the 144,000 and about to revisit the removal of the Church. It is likely that what takes place here actually occurs before the removal of the Church while there is still an opportunity for everyone to respond to the Gospel.

Observation: *The first presentation of the “gospel”—the meaning of “good news” when the angel and accompanying host appeared to the shepherds (Lk. 2:8-14), and the last presentation of “an eternal gospel” (Rev. 14:6) both come by angelic agency. Both proclaimed Christ as the Savior and Lord.*

[Read v.8]

⁸And 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.”

Q: What is the purpose and meaning of the second angel’s message?

A: Leading up to, and even in the course of executing, His judgments, God makes known exactly why. No one has an excuse that they somehow didn’t know what they were doing or were influenced beyond their own choice.

Q: In combination with the first angel’s warning, how is this second warning to be properly acted upon?

A: Babylon’s key behavior is to embrace sin as normative. When coupled with the first angel’s giving of “an eternal gospel”, this emphasizes the need for repentance and a return to God.

¹⁸And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. ¹⁹The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. **Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.** (Rev. 16:18–19)

Point: *Whereas the 144,000 exemplify the defining characteristic of those redeemed by Christ in that they exhibit the right faithful and biblical behavior, the as yet unredeemed are exhorted to do the same thing.*

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⁹Then 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 on his hand, ¹⁰he 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. ¹¹And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

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

[Read v.9-11]

Q: What is the meaning of this third and final message? How is it different from that of the second angel's concerning Babylon?

A: This is a specific warning against following and worshiping the beast. Babylon represents the world system of values that has always existed and tried to entice all men away from God. The beast is something unique that exists only for the duration of these last few years. So everyone is warned specifically about the consequences of following the beast in addition to the siren call of Babylon promoting sin.

Q: What is revealing about the conditional statement “If anyone worships...” in v.9? What would the opposite mean?

A: It means that to take the mark and worship the beast is done out of choice and that it's possible **NOT** to choose to take the mark and/or follow him.

Observation: *In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus specifies that one of the first events to take place in the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom is a judgment of the nations. (Mt. 25) It would appear that there may be those who have resisted taking the mark of the beast and yet have not fully embraced Christ either. (There is much debate over the meaning of this separation of the sheep and goats.)*

Q: What is the greater emphasis where the mark of the beast is concerned?

A: While it was previously mentioned that there will be an economic restriction attached to the mark, what is here reinforced by Scripture is the choice as to whom one assigns their worship.

Application: *Both the redeemed of God and the followers of Antichrist are differentiated by whom they choose to worship and how they subsequently behave.*

[Read v.12]

Q: What is the key word that tells us it's possible to choose and follow God even under these most extremely difficult circumstances?

A: “Perseverance”. It means that it is something that must be endured and striven for—there will be resistance and neither will it be easy.

Q: How does this indicate that the text is returning us to the Revelation timeline?

A: Because it is a call for perseverance to resist both the Antichrist and his world system in the character of Babylon which is still possible then.

Q: What is the first key behavior that allows the saints to successfully persevere?

A: “...keep the commandments of God...” Essentially this is obedience to His Word rather than to our personal desires.

Q: What is the other key behavior?

A: “...keep...their faith in Jesus...” This is keeping an eye on the end result regardless of the present circumstances, knowing that because Jesus said He would redeem us it will happen just as sure as if it already has.

Application: *God's End Times call to believers is always one focused on perseverance and faithfulness.*

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Overall Point

Apply these messages not just to those who will be living during the Last Days but to your self personally:

1. *Fear and worship the One True God. (v.6-7)*
2. *Resist the enticements of the world to sacrifice eternity for temporary gratification. (v.8)*
3. *Refuse the mark of the beast, to follow him. (v.9-11)*
4. *Trust Christ, keep His Word, and persevere through all that is to come. (v.12)*

Application: How does this apply to your pre-End Times life today?

[Read v.13]

¹³And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'"

"Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

Q: How does this fit with the teaching so far?

A: First, it shows the extreme limits attached to "the perseverance of the saints"; we must endure everything even to the point of death. Second, it affirms that it is possible to fulfill all the qualities of v.12 as evidenced by "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them".

Application: This is the end result of worshiping God alone, resisting the world, refusing the advances of the beast, and keeping our faith in Christ and the commandments of God. Our success is in direct proportion to the quality of our obedience, which become our "labors" and "deeds".

Q: How does this parallel what Christ taught in the Olivet Discourse?

1. "But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Mt. 24:13)
2. "...they will put some of you to death" (Lk. 21:16)
3. "By your endurance you will gain your lives" (Lk. 21:19)

Q: How would this indicate we are returning to the original timeline?

A: It harkens back to that time at the end of the Seals when, according to the Olivet Discourse, it is the "great tribulation", the darkest spiritual time on earth which believers in Scripture are repeatedly admonished to "endure", "overcome" and "persevere" until His coming.

Application: Whereas what "follows" those choosing to worship the beast and behave in his character is God's cup of wrath (v.9-11), those authentically worshiping Christ have their biblical behavior following them into heaven.

[Read v.14-16]

¹⁴Then 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. ¹⁵And 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, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Q: Who is being "reaped"?

A: Believers. Just as in a real harvest, the good stuff is removed first before the cleanup and pruning and burning of the refuse takes place.

Q: What does this parallel on the Revelation timeline?

A: The multitude "who come out of the great tribulation". (Rev. 7:14)

Q: How is this textually similar to the two appearances of the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14?

A: Like them, there is first the earthly perspective and now the heavenly one. Here we see that the Church's removal is effected by angelic agency, just as has been repeatedly stated in Scripture. (Joel 3:13; Mt. 13:39-41; Mk. 4:29) Whereas Revelation 7 begins on earth and ends in heaven, Revelation 14 begins in the upper reaches of the atmosphere as

connecting to what is taking place in heaven. They are two perspectives of the same thing, but again notice that this is all visibly taking place—it is not “secret”.

Q: How is this similar to the rescue narratives of Noah and Lot to which Christ likens the Last Days?

A: The faithful are taken just before God’s wrath is poured out on the unfaithful left behind. In the first part of the harvest, the faithful are removed, but the unfaithful remain to undergo a harvest of God’s wrath.

Observation: *This will correspond to the removal of the Church between the 6th and 7th Seals and “the day of the Lord” corresponding to the Trumpets and Bowls for those left behind.*

Application: *Just as “the first resurrection” comes before “the second death”, so the harvest of the faithful comes before that of the unfaithful.*

[Read v.17-20]

¹⁷And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸Then 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.” ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God. ²⁰And 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.

Q: How is this different from v.14-16? How do we know?

A: This is final judgment for non-believers. It’s revealed in v.19 that the angel “*threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God*”. The wrath of God is experienced only by those who reject Him.

Q: How do we know that at this time they are not being cast into heaven?

A: The “*great wine press of the wrath of God*” is an expression to show that they are going to have to experience the Trumpets and Bowls.

Q: Where is this further proved by the stated location of the wine press?

A: It is located outside Jerusalem, the place which we know to be the object of the great, final battle.

Q: How would the metaphor of a wine press indicate that the wrath of God will be poured out over the course of the Trumpets and Bowls and not necessarily all at once?

A: The grapes are added and trodden down over time so that the vat becomes so full that it overflows while more and more grapes continue to be added. Whereas we are given an earthly view of the havoc each of the Trumpets and Bowls wreak on earth, this overall picture of the winepress is the heavenly perspective of what is taking place. Each angel blowing one of the Trumpets or pouring out one of the Bowls is, in effect, adding more grapes to the vat.

Point: *This is the ultimate result of how one responds to the three angels’ messages in v.6-12—to heed their words is to experience the first reaping, to dismiss them the second.*

Consider John the Baptist’s message concerning the role and mission of Christ:

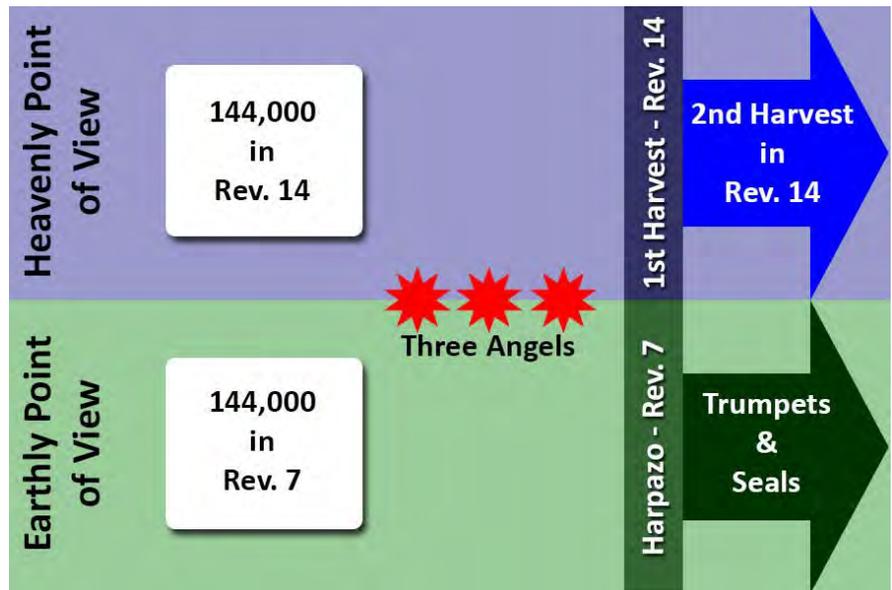
John answered and said to them all, “As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

—Luke 3:16-17

Application: Whereas Christ first comes to save and rescue the faithful, He also comes to judge and overcome the unfaithful. Christ comes for everyone, the only question being will it be sooner for salvation or later for judgment?

Overall Point

The following shows how Revelation 7 & 14 parallel each other with the 144,000 and Harpazo of the Church, synchronizing us back to Revelation's timeline where the second harvest of the unfaithful in the picture of the winepress parallels the Trumpets and Seals:



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