

“The Grim Reaper and the Grapes of Wrath” (Revelation 14:1-20)

In the world of sports timeouts are one of a coach’s greatest tools. A good coach knows how to use his allotted timeouts. Often, he will call a timeout just to ensure that his player’s heads are in the game and that they are giving a 100%. A timely timeout can often make the difference between winning and losing. This morning, as Emmanuel’s coach, I need to call a timeout.

Last September, we embarked on a study through the book of Revelation. Today, we are in chapter 14. We’ve come a long way and you have shown great perseverance. Yet, as we move into the summer, I sense some of you may be feeling weary. Maybe you’re not sure how much more of this revelation you can receive. I understand how you may be feeling. Athletes and coaches both grow tired. But I want to affirm you. Many of you have been faithful to hear and heed God’s Word. As a result, Revelation 1:3 declares that you will be “blessed.” Revelation is relevant! It really is. Even when you don’t feel it may scratch you where you itch, it’s strengthening your spiritual muscles. It’s making you the believer God wants you to be.

Now before we delve into Revelation 14, we need to remember that we are currently in a parenthetical section. This section began in chapter 10 and runs through chapter 15. These chapters do not move forward chronologically, rather John sees visions of peoples and events that encompass the tribulation period. For example, chapter 13 tells us about the Beast, the False Prophet, and the mark of the Beast. Revelation 14 then serves as a timeout to provide encouragement by telling of the ultimate triumph for those who refuse the beast’s mark¹ and to predict the doom of those who do receive it.²

[In Revelation 14:1-20, we will discover three future facts about God.]

1. God will honor His remnant (14:1-5). In these five verses, we move from agony (13:1-18) to ecstasy. In this vision John describes the setting, the sound, the song, and the separation. In 14:1, John describes the setting: **“Then I looked,³ and behold,⁴ the Lamb⁵ was standing⁶ 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.”** This verse fast-forwards to the triumph of the Lamb and the 144,000 (cf. 7:1-8). They are standing together on **“Mount Zion,”** a place of worship in Jerusalem.⁷ It is here where Jesus delivers Israel and gathers together His people for His earthly thousand-year kingdom. This again demonstrates God’s faithfulness to His people. It is also worth noting that the 144,000 have the name of the **“Father written on their foreheads.”** This is in contrast to the mark of the Beast (13:16-17; 14:11). These are those whom God set apart as His own. They march to the step of the Father. This remnant is faithful to God.

In 14:2, John describes the sound: **“And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.”** Verse 3 suggests that the **“voice from heaven”** refers to heaven’s angels.⁸ The phrases **“like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder”** refer to authority and power. The mention of **“harps”** and **“harpists”** refers to comfort and love. While we are not told what the voice says, clearly the 144,000 hear words of commendation. These men were hated by the world during the seven-year tribulation. They were cursed by men and hunted by the Antichrist as criminals. Yet, now as they are in Christ’s presence, He commends them.

How do you and I live our lives? When it comes down to it are we willing to pay the price to please God? Are we willing to be misunderstood and scorned by men? Who will you choose, Christ or the crowd?

In 14:3, John describes the song: **“And they sang a new song⁹ 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.”**¹⁰ These angels sang a new song. In the Old Testament singing a new song represents praise for something God has done.¹¹ It is worth noting that a “new song” is not necessarily a song new in time (*chronos*), but one fresh with a new (*kainos*) response and understanding so that it is sung as though it were new. This has application for us as well. When we worship the Lord, any song can be a “new” song IF our hearts are right before the Lord. We can revel in His worth and declare His praise with an ancient hymn or a brand-new chorus. It is a matter of the heart. God desires us to come and worship Him for who He is, for all that He is. This should inevitably lead to fresh praise! An interesting point is that the song this group sang in heaven is one that only the 144,000 of all God’s creatures could learn. Apparently, there was a special significance to the lyrics of this song that would have unique meaning to these faithful men. God had **“purchased”**¹² them from the earth for their special ministry in the great tribulation (cf. 14:4), not just for salvation. The principle is this: Special faithfulness in the present world leads to special reward in the future kingdom.

In 14:4-5, John describes the separation: **“These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.¹³ These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.”** The character of the 144,000 is summarized by the word **“blameless”** (14:5).¹⁴ More specifically, they were honest and truthful: **“no lie was found in their mouth.”**¹⁵ These men refused to bow the knee to the religious lies of the Antichrist (13:15; 2 Thess 2:11). Furthermore, they spoke the truth even though deception abounded.

The most puzzling part of this description is the fact that these men **“have kept themselves chaste.”** They have not, we are told, **“been defiled¹⁶ with women.”** Since this statement is perplexing, I will take a moment to put the matter in context, so that all of the women who might read this might have their minds put at ease.¹⁷ In the New Testament, sexual abstinence and celibacy are seen as options, but not imperatives.¹⁸ Paul spoke of the possibility of a man and wife abstaining from normal marital sexual activity, for the purpose of prayer (1 Cor 7:5). He could also recommend the celibate life to those who saw this as freeing them from family obligations in order to devote themselves to other responsibilities and opportunities (1 Cor 7:7; 25-35). He also said, “I think then that this is good in view of the present distress, that it is good for a man to remain as he is [single]” (1 Cor 7:26). In the context of the whole chapter, as well as the “present distress” of that day, we can understand how it would be good for a man or woman to choose to remain single. Surely if the distress of Paul’s day was so severe as to warrant celibacy, the great tribulation of the last days calls for celibacy even more.¹⁹

In our culture, being single is undervalued. Yet, a single person can accomplish great things for the Lord. As wonderful as a spouse and children are, they can be distractions (albeit blessed) that can keep a disciple from accomplishing what he/she could as a single. If you sense that the Lord would have you be single, then maximize the single life for the glory of God.

The 144,000 will receive special commendation because they followed the Lamb faithfully during their lives (14:4b). They experienced intimate fellowship with Christ. This was especially difficult due to the time in which they lived, the great tribulation. They receive honor because they not only experienced purchase by God but because they were firstfruits to God. Some view this as expressing the idea that they are the first of others who will follow, specifically believers who will enter the millennium as living believers. However, there will be no others who follow that are just like the 144,000; they are unique. Probably the firstfruits figure represents them as a special gift to God.²⁰

[Not only will God honor His remnant...]

2. God will judge mankind (14:6-13). In 14:6-7, John writes, “**And I saw²¹ another angel flying in midheaven,²² having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth,²³ and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, ‘Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.’**” John next saw another angel (cf. 7:2; 8:3; 10:1) flying between heaven and earth (cf. 8:13).²⁴ He had an “**eternal gospel**” to preach to the worldwide population.²⁵ “**Gospel**” means good news.²⁶ What this good news is comes out in the next verse. It is “**eternal**” because it has eternal significance. In 14:7, the angel spoke loudly, revealing his urgency and concern. The loudness of his voice implies that everyone will hear his message. This angel gives three commands: “**Fear God,**” “**give Him glory,**” and “**worship Him.**” The phrase “**fear God**” indicates that people must respect God for who He is. Fear carries the idea of awe. We must first gain an awe of God if we are going to respect His work. The reason for fearing God is “**because the hour of His judgment has come.**”²⁷ This is the very last chance that these unbelievers will have to change their allegiance from Satan to God before the final judgments of the great tribulation begin. An expression of the fear of God is to believe His promises. The most important promise being that He gives eternal life to those who believe (John 6:47). To “**give God glory**” means to repent, having acknowledged His attributes (cf. Deut 6:13; 10:20; Matt 4:10; Acts 14:15-17).²⁸ The only way to glorify God is to accept the principle of grace. Grace means that God does the work. If God does the work, then He gets the glory. If we do the work then we get the glory. God made every provision we need to execute the Christian way of life in Christ. If we accept and believe that, we glorify God. Finally, God commands men to “**worship Him.**” The word “**worship**” means “to prostrate one’s self.” All men are called upon to worship the God who is the Creator. This is an expression of the Gospel in its most elementary terms (cf. also Acts 14:14-18).

It is important to note that the angel referred to natural revelation in making this appeal. God is worthy of worship because He is the Creator, and He has the right to judge what He has created (cf. Neh 9:6; Ps 33:6-9; 146:6). People are told to worship Him who “**made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.**” Our own nature witnesses that there is a God. It takes four years of college and two years of postgraduate work to deny that! That is the fundamental witness of God found everywhere in the world (Rom 1:19). It is the witness that no one can miss because it is manifest all around us. This calls attention to the ageless and universal message of creation itself. Age after age creation has called man to recognize God’s existence and to seek after Him (cf. Acts 17:26-27 with Ps 19:1-6). This means men are without excuse and that the hour of the Creator’s judgment is about to fall (Rom 1:18-20).

A second angel now cries out in 14:8: “**Fallen, fallen is Babylon²⁹ the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.**” Since the downfall of Babylon is described in detail in chapters 17-18 I will merely say that the point of this proclamation is that the system (of which the Beast is the head) is doomed. If Babylon is fallen, then so is the Beast! The system that has overcome the world and the saints is indeed, short-lived. How foolish to fall before the Beast or his image, when Babylon is destined to fall.³⁰

In 14:9-12, a third angel cries out: “**If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger;³¹ and he will be tormented³² with fire and brimstone³³ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.**”

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night,³⁴ those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the perseverance of the saints³⁵ who keep³⁶ the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”³⁷

As God looks upon the wickedness of man, his rejection of His Son and his worship of the Beast, He is left with only three choices: (1) He can indulge it and allow it to go on forever. That means that all the injustice, pain, and suffering in this world would continue indefinitely. Neither man nor God want that. (2) God can force man to obey. But this would take away our capacity to give our love to God freely. (3) God's only other remaining choice is to withdraw Himself from those who refuse His love. He must let them have their way forever. God doesn't want anyone to go to hell. You'll have to step over the body of Jesus Christ to get there!

The Scriptures make it clear that if a person rejects Jesus Christ, he/she is condemned eternally (cf. Matt 25:41).³⁸ Why would the Lord tell tribulation believers this? Tribulation saints will suffer great persecution for refusing to take the mark. They will see unbelievers who take the mark avoid the persecution they are experiencing. This would be discouraging for any believer who was shortsighted. Verses 9-11 are thus designed to give the tribulation saints (and believers of all ages) the big picture. We might paraphrase 14:12 in this way: This [knowing the fate of those who take the mark] is a motivation for believers to endure the persecutions and to persist in obeying God's commands and in keeping the faith. In view of their hope, believers in the great tribulation should persevere in obedience and trust, good works, and faith in God, plus ethical conduct and reliance on Jesus Christ. This is an encouragement to persevere, not a guarantee that the saints will persevere.³⁹

In 14:13, the Lord gives a positive incentive to remain faithful that balances the negative warning previously given (14:9-12). John hears a voice from heaven say, **“Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’⁴⁰ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’”** This **“voice”** was probably the Lord's.⁴¹ The voice told John to record that it would be a blessing for the believers who live during the great tribulation to die as martyrs.⁴² There are two reasons given in this verse for the blessedness of dying in Christ. The first is that by dying they will **“rest from their labors.”** The term **“labors”** stresses the pain and the persecution of living as witnesses in a wicked world which seeks to overcome them (cf. 2 Cor 6:1-10). The second reason for the blessedness of the saints who die in the last days is that their **“deeds follow with them.”** If there are consequences for wickedness and unbelief, so there are consequences for righteousness and perseverance. What is a cause for fear on the part of sinners is a cause for faith on the part of the righteous (1 Cor 15:58). As J. Vernon McGee once said, “God does not save anyone for his works, but He does reward us for our works. Our works (good or bad) are like tin cans tied to a dog's tail; we cannot get away from them. They will follow us to the *bema* seat of Christ.”⁴³ Always remember the words of Hebrews 6:10: “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work.” He will reward you one day!⁴⁴

3. God will harvest the earth (14:14-20). In these remaining seven verses John sees an end-time harvest.⁴⁵ **“Then 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. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.”** Verse 14 describes one sitting on **“a white cloud.”** **“The cloud”** probably represents the glory of God. The whole description is very similar to Daniel's prophecy of Messiah's second coming (Dan 7:13-14). **“Son of Man”** is a messianic title of Jesus Christ in Scripture (cf. 1:13; Dan 7:13-14; Matt 8:20; 24:30; 26:64; John 5:27).

It seems clear that this “**son of man**” is Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ He is wearing a victor’s crown (*stephanon*) and holding a sharp sickle (*drepanon oxy*) with which He does the work of judging (cf. Mark 4:29). Since the sickle is sharp, the reaper can do His work swiftly and completely. “**The harvest**” is an Old Testament figure used for divine judgment (Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13). This judgment will occur at the end of the tribulation (19:17-21).⁴⁷

God judges because He sees all the evil in the world and it angers Him. He must judge because He is loving and just. If He did not judge, He would be immoral. This is an easy concept to understand if you are a parent. There are times when I don’t want to discipline one of my children. I may be weary or frustrated or I may not have the heart to discipline. There have been times when Lori has said, “Keith, we must discipline for disobedience. We can’t make exceptions.” Since God is just and righteous, He must discipline His children and punish His enemies.

In 14:17-20, John continues to reveal God’s harvest judgment: “**And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then 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.’ So 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.**⁴⁸ **And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.**” In 14:18, another angel, the sixth in this chapter, came out from the golden altar of incense in heaven (8:3). This is probably an allusion to his responding to the tribulation saints’ prayers for vengeance from under the altar (6:9-10). His “**power over fire**” may indicate his authority to execute punishment.⁴⁹ In 14:19, the earth had yielded a crop of unbelievers that now, at the end of the tribulation, would come into judgment. The angel took them from the earth to undergo judgment in God’s great grape press (cf. Isa 63:1-6; Lam 1:15; Joel 3:13). The picture here is drawn from the imagery of the winepress. When grapes were put into the winepress, people inside it would stomp around on the grapes so that the juice would flow down into a collection vat. The treading of grapes was a familiar figure for the execution of divine wrath upon the enemies of God.

On Friday evening, we had some friends over for dinner. Lori was showing our guests her strawberry patch and she was distributing berries to the kids. Well, Justin, our middle child, took his berries and laid them on our back porch and began stomping on them. I felt my blood begin to boil when all of a sudden one of our guests said, “Look at the glee on his face.” At that very moment, I calmed myself and realized I had a sermon illustration. Many people think that God is like Justin. He stomps out his wrath and fury for no real purpose. Apparently, He has nothing better to do than to gleefully get His kicks out of being angry. I can assure you that nothing could be further from the truth. God’s wrath is His righteous response to man’s sin. He is loving and compassionate but He is also a righteous Judge.

In 14:20, we read a gruesome verse: “**And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.**” Since the city in view escapes this judgment, Babylon is evidently not the city in view. It is instead Jerusalem. The Old Testament predicted that a final battle would take place near Jerusalem, in the valley of Jehoshaphat (i.e., the Kidron Valley just to the east of Jerusalem; Joel 3:12-14; Zech 14:4; cf. Rev 11:2). It seems probable that blood will literally flow up to the height of horses’ bridles (about four and one-half feet) in some places in that valley. Obviously many people will have to die for this amount of blood to flow.

Blood will come out from the wine press of God's wrath for a distance of 200 miles (lit. 1,600 stadia),⁵⁰ the length of Palestine. Evidently, this figure describes the judgment that will take place all over Palestine, not just in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Much of this action will take place in the valley of Jezreel in northern Israel (i.e., the battle of Armageddon; 19:17,19). In that place God will put vast numbers of people to death (cf. Isa 63:1-6). The blood will evidently drain out of the Jezreel Valley for a distance of 200 miles, probably eastward down the Harod Valley, to the Jordan Valley, and south into the Dead Sea. What gruesome gore! Yet the central message is, God is not to be messed with! He will judge His enemies. He will be victorious over the Beast, the False Prophet, and all of Satan's henchmen.

As we conclude this challenging passage, I can almost hear Jesus calling a timeout. If Jesus, the ultimate Head Coach, was to speak audibly right here right now, I believe He would say, "Christian, timeout! Stop for just a moment and evaluate your life. Are you living in light of my return? If not, when this timeout is over, get back in the game. I want you to win. I want you to strive for my glory and your good." I believe He would then say, "Pre-Christian, timeout! Stop for just a moment and evaluate your eternity. Are you prepared to meet Me? If not, before this timeout is over, you must trust me as your Savior from sin. I want you to spend eternity with Me. There is still time but you must not put off believing in Me."

In Christ's first coming, He came as the meek Jesus, giving His life for the ransom of men, like a lamb silent before His shearer's. But when He comes again, He will come as the mighty Conqueror in the full wrath of the holy God of the universe. But today is a day of grace. The invitation remains open to those who will trust in Christ and who will receive the grace of God to be saved from the coming wrath of the Lamb, which may be even at the door of our generation.

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Notes

¹ It is typically thought that the sealing of the 144,000 protected them from martyrdom. While this may be true, it is not specifically stated. Neither, I must add, are we told precisely what the 144,000 are sealed for (cf. Rev 7:3-4). It is generally assumed that these sealed Jewish saints are protected from martyrdom so that they may evangelize. They are thus thought by some to be the instruments of God for the salvation of the innumerable host (7:9-17). While this is possible, it is not stated. I am personally more inclined to see the emphasis fall on the stated fact (14:4) that they are first fruits to God, a guarantee of the salvation of the entire nation Israel.

² These scenes lay the groundwork for the seven bowl judgments.

³ “Then I looked” or “And I saw” (*kai eidon*) introduces three scenes (14:1, 6, 14; cf. 13:1, 11).

⁴ “Behold” (*idou*, cf. 14:14) calls special attention to the greatness of the sight that John saw here.

⁵ See Rev 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16 cf. John 1:29, 35.

⁶ The word “standing” (*estos*) is in the perfect tense, which emphasizes completed action with abiding results. Jesus has taken his stand and reigns.

⁷ E.g., Ps 48:1f; Isa 24:23; Joel 2:32; Zech 14:10; Rom 11:26. Some interpreters understand “Mount Zion” to be a reference to heaven (cf. Heb 12:22). Yet, “Zion” appears 162 times in the Bible and refers practically every time to a locality related to the city of Jerusalem. See Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 190.

⁸ John did not identify the person who spoke from heaven. This could be the voice of Christ (cf. 1:15; Ezek 1:24; 43:2), the tribulation martyrs (7:10), an angel (cf. 6:1; Dan 10:6), or many angels (5:8, 11; 7:11; 19:6). Perhaps the last option is best in view of how John described it here and in the next verse (pl. “they sang”). These angels do not include the four living creatures and the 24 elders, however (14:3). See Thomas L. Constable, *Revelation Notes* (www.soniclight.com).

⁹ This new song is somehow related to the new song of Rev 5:4 and 15:3.

¹⁰ The argument that the 144,000 must be in heaven as they hear the song before the throne may be disputed. There is no statement to the effect that they hear the song, only the declaration that they alone can learn it. See John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 214.

¹¹ E.g., Ps 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10.

¹² Twice in 14:3-4, the 144,000 are said to have been “purchased.” The difference between these men and those who were defiled is to be found only the redemption, which Christ wrought on the cross. The only ones who are righteous are those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

¹³ This verse can also be understood figuratively. If this is correct, it would mean that the 144,000 had remained faithful to the Lord, as the NIV translation “they kept themselves pure” suggests (cf. 2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22; Jer 18:13; 31:4, 21; Lam 2:13; Amos 5:2; 2 Cor 11:2).

¹⁴ Cf. Phil 2:15; Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; Jude 24.

¹⁵ Cf. Isa 53:9; Zeph 3:13; John 8:44; 1 Pet 2:22.

¹⁶ The aorist passive verb “defiled” (*emolunthesan*) should be rendered “defiled themselves.” See BDAG, Electronic Ed, the ESV, and the NET Study Bible (<http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>)

¹⁷ I attribute the following insights to my friend, Bob Deffinbaugh’s unpublished notes on Revelation.

¹⁸ Jesus seemed to esteem the single life. He spoke approvingly of those who voluntarily chose to live a celibate lifestyle (as eunuchs, Matt 19:12). He also used the term “virgins” to represent those who awaited the coming of His kingdom (Matt 25:1-13).

¹⁹ The Old Testament established the concept of “holy war.” In such war, the soldier was to be very careful not to be defiled, lest it have a negative effect on the army of God. Achan’s sin, for example, brought defeat to the army of God (cf. Jos 7). So, too, strict sexual regulations were laid down concerning defilement (cf. Deut 23:9-14; Lev 15:16-18). This included the prohibition of marital sexual relationships in the case of war (cf. 1 Sam 21:4-5). Uriah is a stellar example of the dedication of a soldier, refusing the normal enjoyment of sex with his wife, because of the war in which he was engaged, all this in contrast to David, who took the war lightly, and who took Uriah’s wife to bed with him (2 Sam 11). This OT perspective is helpful to me, however, Thomas points out that during the tribulation, the 144,000 will not be called to fight but to lay down their lives (13:9-10). See Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 196.

²⁰ In two out of every three of its 66 occurrences in the Greek OT, the word “firstfruits” (*aparche*) refers to a contribution without the connotation of a larger harvest to follow (e.g., Num 5:9; Deut 18:4; 26:2; Ezek 48:8, 10, 20). See Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 198.

²¹ “And I saw” (*kai eidon*) signals another scene of this vision on earth. In this one John heard four announcements that provide incentives for remaining faithful to God and resisting the beasts. Angels made the first three announcements, and a voice from heaven gave the fourth.

²² He was flying in midheaven, so nothing hindered people on earth from hearing his words.

²³ The angel was to preach this message to everyone who “who dwell on the earth.” It is primarily the good news that God at last is about to deal with the world in righteousness and establish His sovereignty over the world.

²⁴ This is the first of six specific angels who individually participate in the events recorded in this chapter (14:8, 9, 15, 17, 18).

²⁵ I understand this proclamation to be the necessary fulfillment of the words of our Lord, when He said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come” (Matt 24:14).

²⁶ This is the only time that the word “gospel” (*euaggelion*) is used in Revelation.

²⁷ The phrase “the hour of His judgment has come” is a reference to the final judgments of the tribulation, the bowl judgments that are about to occur. These will conclude with the return of Christ Himself (Rev 19) and lead to the removal of all unbelievers. The emphasis then is to not delay because the time is short.

²⁸ The positive response to this invitation appears in Rev 15:4 and the negative response in 16:9, 11 and 21

²⁹ The city of Babylon was built by Nimrod after the flood and is infamous for the tower of Babel, which was a symbol of man’s pride and rebellion. It became the seat of Satan’s ancient counterfeit strategy to destroy and corrupt the knowledge of God as well as God’s plan of salvation as anticipated in Gen 3:15. The term “Babylon” is open to at least four major interpretations. (1) Babylon could be a reference to the literal rebuilt city of Babylon. (2) Babylon could be a reference to the worldly system symbolized by Babylon. (3) Babylon could be a reference to the religious system of the Beast. (4) Babylon could be a veiled reference to ancient Rome.

³⁰ In Revelation, “Babylon” seems to represent an entire world system in rebellion against God. The OT prophets often prophesied the fall of Babylon, the capital empire (Assyria) that destroyed Jerusalem and carried away God’s people into captivity. So here Babylon becomes a fitting image for a society that persecuted believers but which God will ultimately destroy. See Earl Radmacher, Ronald B. Allen, H. Wayne House, eds., *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 1754.

³¹ The combination of “wrath” (*orges*, settled indignation) and “anger” (*thumou*, vehement fury) stresses the reality and severity of God’s hostility (cf. Num 12:9; 22:22).

³² “He will be” is a first person singular verb. This is an experience everyone who rejects Christ must face alone. The torture will be physical, mental, and emotional. The lake of fire is prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt 25:41). It is not God’s desire for anyone to spend eternity there. Unbelievers make that choice of their own accord.

³³ “Fire and brimstone” refer to the ingredients or content of the lake of fire already prepared for Satan and his angels (Matt 25:41). These are one and the same. The lake is the place and the fire and brimstone the ingredients (Rev 20:10; Matt 25:41, 45; Rom 2:3-9; 2 Thess 1:6-9).

³⁴ “The smoke” evidently stands for their cries and pain which consume their purpose and meaning for existence. “Goes up” is a progressive present and means the smoke “keeps on ascending.” The torment never lets up. “For ever and ever” is literally “unto ages of ages.” This is without the article and stresses the qualitative idea of infinite duration. This is the strongest Greek expression for eternity. The word order is literally “unto ages of ages ascends up.” This passage shows the error of the view or belief that God will annihilate the unsaved. “And they have no rest day or night.” “No rest” (*anapausis*) signifies rest that comes from a temporary cessation from something. They won’t know even a moment’s rest from this torment. Remember it is “undiluted.” “Day or night” further emphasizes the concept of no rest.

³⁵ The Reformed doctrine called the perseverance of the saints is not exactly the same as eternal security. Eternal security says that once a person is saved he cannot lose his salvation. Perseverance says, however, much more than this. It says that all saved people will persevere in a life of godliness and holiness. While temporary times of sin and carnality may occur, no true believer will persist in such a state for very long. I believe the Bible teaches the eternal security of the believer.

³⁶ The present active participle *terountes* (“keep”) means, “to guard.” This is a military term. It means to stay on guard to God’s Word like a soldier standing on watch against the enemy. Those who “keep” the commandments God [apply the promises of the Word of God] can endure trial.

³⁷ The phrase “faith of Jesus” may mean either “faith in Jesus” or “faithful to Jesus.” Either translation implies that “Jesus” (*Iesou*) is to be taken as an objective genitive; the difference is more lexical than grammatical because

“faith” (*pistis*) can mean either “faith” or “faithfulness.” See the NET Study Bible (<http://www.bible.org/netbible/index.htm>)

³⁸ “A. A. Hodge in his theology says there is no word more emphatic for eternal than the one used of hell in the New Testament. Leon Morris says the word was applied to an age that was never to end. Ajith Fernando in his outstanding book, *A Universal Homecoming*, reminds us that sixty-four times the same word is used to remind us of heaven’s eternity. Would it not be logical to conclude that in the seven occurrences of ‘eternal’ to describe the antithesis of these blessings (eternal punishment), the idea is that of duration without end? Hell’s eternity is also talking of an unending, physical, real separation from God.” Preaching Today Citation: Ravi Zacharias, “The Lostness of Humankind,” Preaching Today, Tape No. 118.

³⁹ See also Bob Wilkin, *Grace Evangelical News*, June, 1991, 2-3.

⁴⁰ The text specifically states that from now on those who “die in the Lord” are blessed. I believe that the Bible teaches that those who die in the Lord are always blessed (cf. Ps 116:15; 2 Cor 5:1-10; 1 Thess 4:13-18, etc.). There is here, however, an indication to the saints that things will progressively get worse, before they get better. “From now on” keys in on the intensified persecution that lies ahead. If it has always been true that those who die in Christ are blessed, it will be particularly true in the last days of the tribulation.

⁴¹ See Rev 1:10-11, 19; cf. 10:4, 8; 11:12; 14:2; 18:4; 21:3.

⁴² This is the second of seven beatitudes in Revelation (cf. 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

⁴³ J. Vernon McGee 5:1011.

⁴⁴ An example of a modern day eventual martyr is Philip Ghabboush is a beloved man in the eyes of Sudan. For years he has stood up against the injustices and persecution suffered by believers under the radical Islamic government. As a result he has been beaten and tortured. He told his torturers that he would die for the Truth saying, “My blood would speak louder than all the words spoken throughout my life.” He is continually watched and regularly threatened with death.

⁴⁵ Following the pattern of Joel 3:13, the scene furnishes two pictures of the same judgment for the same reason that Joel does, i.e., to emphasize the terror of it. The two reapings seem to describe a single judgment at the end of the great tribulation (19:15, 17-21). The vine may represent Israel and the wheat Gentiles.

⁴⁶ The person John saw was evidently Jesus Christ, though some commentators think he was an angel in view of Rev 14:15.

⁴⁷ Jesus also likens the final judgment to the harvest of the earth (Matt 13:30, 39).

⁴⁸ See Isa 63:1-6; cf. also Jer 6:9; Lam 1:15; Joel 3:13.

⁴⁹ It’s possible that the “fire” will burn the tares separated in the harvest (Matt 13:38-43).

⁵⁰ *Gk* “1,600 stades.” A stade was a measure of length about 607 ft (185 m). Thus the distance here would be 184 mi or 296 km.