

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

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CHAPTER 14: ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE

Verses 1-5

The first five verses of Revelation 14 described the sealed Old Testament community. John saw Christ standing on Mount Zion. With Him were 144,000 Old Testament saints. They were sealed with Christ's name and the name of His Father. These were the same 144,000 found in Revelation 7. The Old Testament church still served God in His temple, and they sang a new song before the throne. John described the 144,000 as those who followed the Lamb wherever He went. This symbol was drawn from Old Testament verses like Deuteronomy 33:3. Moses said, "Indeed, He loves the people. All Your holy ones are in Your hand, and they follow in Your steps, everyone receives Your words." Israel followed Christ through the wilderness. Israel would also follow their great Shepherd in the New Earth forever.

John described those who walked with Christ as celibates. They were blameless, and no lie was found in their mouths. John was not suggesting that anyone in the Old Testament had lived without sin. The story of Christ's children in the Old Testament had been a record of daily rebellion. Moses smashed his stone tablets on Mount Sinai because God's covenant was always being broken while it was being formed. People were saved in hope. Believers lived looking forward to the time when they would be delivered from their sin by Christ's return. Hebrews 12:23 described the saints in the New Jerusalem as "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." As men made perfect, Revelation 14:4-5 said that believers would become celibates. Consecration in the Old Testament involved abstinence from physical relations (Exodus 19:14-15; I Samuel 21:4). When Christ returned, His people would be consecrated forever. Then Christ said that they would not marry or be given in marriage (Matthew 22:30).

The Old Testament church was purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. Old Testament Israel was commanded to give to God the first ripe produce, the first offspring of each animal, and redemption for the firstborn child in every family. The offering of first fruits signified that everything belonged to God. In Revelation 14:4, the Old Testament community was described as first fruits to show that the entire Church was holy, and it belonged to God. Paul used the idea of first fruits a similar way in Romans 11:16. Paul wrote, "And if the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also. If the root is holy, then the branches are too." The symbol of first fruits was also applied to Israel in the Old Testament. Jeremiah wrote, "Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of His harvest" (Jeremiah 2:3).

Verses 6-13

The Old Testament community was sealed and joined Christ in heaven. Then John saw three angels flying in midheaven. The first angel had an eternal gospel to preach to all the nations. The angel said, "Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water." The first angel's gospel can be broken into two parts. First, it was a command to fear God and give Him glory. Through Revelation, believers always gave God glory for judging the earth. Rebels cursed God to His face. This angel was calling the gentile nations to repent and to join those who praised God for His coming judgment. So this angel pointed to Israel's exile and the age of the gentile church.

The second half of this angel's gospel described God's judgment. The angel said that the hour of God's judgment had come. Then the angel specifically mentioned the heaven, earth, sea, and springs of water. These things would all be judged when the gentile age ended with the new Babylon's fall. The trumpets and the bowls of wrath described Babylon's fall in terms of God's judgment on the air, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water. So this angel was calling gentiles to repent because God was about to judge Babylon. This prophecy was fulfilled when a second angel flew in mid-heaven. This second angel cried, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great. She made all the nations drink the wine of the passion of her

immorality." God's judgment had begun, and the new Babylon had been destroyed. This angel's cry would be repeated in Revelation 18:2-3. Then John would see a detailed picture of Babylon's destruction.

Finally, a third angel flew in mid-heaven. This angel warned that anyone who received the beast's mark would suffer God's wrath. After the new Babylon fell, the Antichrist would establish his empire. Many saints would lose their lives opposing him. Christ assured His church that those who followed the beast would drink of the wine of God's wrath which was mixed in the cup of His anger. Those who accepted the beast's mark would be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the angels and the Lamb. The wine of God's wrath was a common Scriptural description of God's judgment. It can be seen in Psalm 75:8, Jeremiah 25:15, and Isaiah 51:17-22. The wine of God's wrath was also an intentional parallel to the wine of Babylon's immorality.

The Antichrist's defeat would complete the persecution of Christ's church. Revelation 14:12 noted, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." Christ's children had proven their perseverance and faith. They had come out of the fire refined as silver was refined and tested as gold was tested. Revelation 14:13 claimed that Christ's kingdom had come. John was told to write, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on that they may rest from their work, and their deeds will follow them." Now the dead received the results of their actions. Those who died in Christ would be blessed and would enter their rest.

Verses 14-20

The rest of Revelation 14 showed the Antichrist's judgment from two other vantage points. In verse 14, Christ was seen on His throne on the cloud of heaven. Several prophecies said that Christ would return on the clouds (Mark 13:26; 14:62). The golden crown on Christ's head meant that the whole earth had become His kingdom. Christ had taken His great power and had begun to reign (Revelation 11:7). Another angel had come out of the temple. It may have carried the Father's command to judge the earth. This would be consistent with Christ's statement in Matthew 24:36 that only the Father knew when the final judgment would come. Even the Son in His humanity would have to be told by His Father. The final judgment was commonly described as a harvest (Mark 4:29). Christ swung the sickle fulfilling John the Baptist's description of Him in Matthew 3:11-12. A similar verse can be found in Isaiah 63:3 where the Lord declared, "I have trodden the wine trough alone. From the peoples, there was no man with Me. I trod them with My anger and trampled them in My wrath. Their life blood was sprinkled on My garments, and I strained all my raiment." So Christ harvested the earth and sent the beast to hell. He gathered His children like wheat from the tares (Isaiah 27:12-13; Matthew 13:30).

Revelation 14:17-20 described the same event in terms of the seven trumpets. An angel came out of the temple with a sharp sickle. A different angel who had power over fire told this angel to gather in the grapes of the earth because the harvest was ripe. The angel who had authority over fire was probably the angel who blew the sixth trumpet of Armageddon (cf. Revelation 16:5). The angel called forth the next trumpet of final judgment. The final angel gathered the harvest of men and threw them into the great wine press of God's wrath. The grapes were trodden under foot in the place of cursing outside of the city. An Old Testament parallel can be seen in Jeremiah 6:9 where God's judgment was called a grape gathering. Another example of the same symbol can be seen in Joel 3:13. Joel wrote, "Put in the sickle because the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, because the wine press is full. Its vats overflow because their wickedness is great." Joel was talking about Armageddon and Christ's return in judgment. John said that this final angel would gather men from the earth and would destroy them in judgment.