



The Last Word

A Bible Study on Revelation by Stan Key

SESSION 11. THE GRAPES OF WRATH REVELATION 14–16

I. Judgment and Wrath.

A. Preaching the Terrors.

Pastor John had no intention of shielding his listeners from the terrors of God's coming **wrath!** Others in history have done the same. For example, on July 8, 1741 in a church in Enfield, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards preached his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The effects were powerful (weeping, fainting, convulsing, etc.). Such preaching was an integral part of the First Great Awakening. Using Deuteronomy 32:35 as his text ¹, Edwards graphically portrayed the coming wrath upon sinners:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider... is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire.... O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God... You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder....

We can debate the pastoral sensitivities of Rev. Edwards and discuss the wisdom of using "hellfire and damnation" sermons to scare people into the Kingdom. But one thing we can never debate is that Scripture plainly and clearly teaches that a day of unimaginable wrath and **torment** is coming on all those who refuse to worship the Lamb.

B. Two questions.

In chapters 12–13 we were introduced to the Dragon, Beast (Antichrist) and False Prophet. We learned how the False Prophet caused everyone on earth to be marked with the "mark of the beast". Only those who followed the Lamb refused the mark. Such a situation would have caused John's readers to ask two questions: 1) What happens to those who **refuse** the mark? 2) What happens to those who **receive** the mark?

Chapters 14–16 answer both questions.

II. Overview of Revelation 14–16.

A. The Song of the Redeemed (14:1–5).

On the heavenly Mount Zion, the redeemed (all 144,000 of them) are singing with **one voice** a "new song." Their united voices are as loud as Niagara Falls and as loud as a roar of thunder. But only the redeemed know this song. Not even the angels can join in this chorus.

¹ "In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."



B. The Three Angel Messengers (14:6–13).

1. The first angel (14:6–7). Judgment is **about to begin** (“the hour has come”).

The earth has one final opportunity to respond to the Gospel so that judgment is averted. Repent and believe the Gospel, before it is too late! To speak of an “eternal gospel” is to speak of a message that is **permanently** valid and **universally** applicable. Jesus foresaw a final movement of global evangelization before the end.

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then **the end** will come. (Matt. 24:14).*

2. The second angel (14:8). Judgment has already **begun**.

We will learn more details about the fall of Babylon in chapters 17–18. Here we see simply the reality of her doom and the two reasons for her destruction:

- Her **immoral** behavior and impurity.
- Her evil **influence** on the nations.

3. The third angel (14:9–13). The final judgment is **now**.

Those who worship the beast (antichrist) and receive his mark will:

- Drink the wine of God’s wrath ² poured full strength into **the cup** of his anger.
- Be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the Lamb and the angels.
- Have no **rest**... forever. But note the contrast with the saints in heaven who “rest from their labors” (14:13).

Conclusion (14:12–13): “Here is a call for the **endurance** of the saints...” The followers of the Lamb should endure³ because “blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labors and their deeds follow them.” The troubles of the saints are only **temporary**. But the troubles of the unbelievers will be **eternal**.

C. The Fields are Ripe for Harvest (14:14–20).

Often in Scripture, the final judgment is depicted as a **harvest**. Jesus spoke of this coming harvest in a poignant manner in his Parable of the Weeds (see Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43).

*Let the good grain and the weeds **grow together** until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn...” (Matt 13:30).*

² Notice how Babylon makes people drink the wine of her impure passion (*thumos*) (14:8) and God makes these same people drink the wine of his pure passion (*thumos*) (14:10). One cup leads inexorably to the other! But remember, it was this latter cup of God’s wrath that Jesus chose freely to drink himself (Luke 22:42)... all of it!

³ Greek, *hupomone* (literally: abide under). Other translations are “patience,” “steadfastness,” “perseverance.”

In Revelation 14:14–20, the harvest is described in two ways:

1. The **Son of Man**, seated on a cloud, puts in his sickle “and the earth was reaped” (vv. 14–16. See Matt. 24:30–31; Rev. 19:11ff.). Though the text does not say so, this may refer to the wheat harvest, when Jesus gathers in **the saints** for safe-keeping.
2. Another angel puts in his sickle “and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great **winepress** of the wrath of God (vv. 17–20). This image of the winepress inspired Julia Ward Howe to write:

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword—
His truth is marching on. (The Battle Hymn of the Republic)*

D. The Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath (chapters 15–16).

1. God’s final judgment is manifested in the **7 bowls** poured out on the earth. These need to be seen in conjunction with the **7 seals** (6:1–17; 8:1–5) and the **7 trumpets** (8:6–9:21; 11:15–19) which also describe the coming wrath and judgment.
2. The prelude to final judgment is in chapter 15. Seven angels are given “7 golden bowls full of the wrath of God” (15:7). One by one they pour out the contents of these bowls on the earth. With these 7 plagues “the wrath of God is **finished**” (15:1).
3. The seven bowls of wrath:
 - a. The 1st bowl is poured out on the earth which results in painful (**canker sores**) on all those who bore the mark of the beast (16:2).
 - b. The 2nd bowl is poured out on **the sea** and it became like the blood of a corpse so that everything in the sea died (16:3).
 - c. The 3rd bowl is poured out on rivers and springs and all the water became **blood** (16:4–7). The angel explained: the worshippers of the beast have shed the blood of saints and so they shall drink blood, “it is what they deserve.” The punishment fits the crime.
 - d. The 4th bowl is poured out on the sun so that it **scorched** people with fire (16:8–9). This is “global warming” with a vengeance! Yet, people still did not repent!
 - e. The 5th bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast and its kingdom was plunged into **darkness** (16:10–11). Yet, people still did not repent!
 - f. The 6th bowl is poured out on the Euphrates River so that it dried up making possible an **invasion** of an enemy army from the east (16:12–16). Three unclean spirits (like frogs) work to assemble an army from many nations to withstand the invasion. They gather for battle at a place called Armageddon, probably referring to the hill of Megiddo and the nearby Valley of Jezreel (14 miles wide and 20 miles long). You could say that this valley forms the **junction point** of three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe).

- g. The 7th bowl is poured out into the air (16:17–21). There was lightning, thunder and an **earthquake** greater than any in history. Hailstones weighing 100 pounds fell from the sky. Islands disappeared and mountains sank. And the city of Babylon was destroyed as well as the cities of the nations.

The end of the matter: *Note then the **kindness/goodness** and the **severity/sternness** of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.* (Romans 11:22).

III. Do You Want to Join the Choir? (Revelation 14:1–5).

John goes to some lengths to describe the characteristics of the members of the heavenly choir which is composed of those who have been redeemed from the earth (the 144,000 are only the “first fruits”, many more will join). Pastor John wants us to understand the **entrance requirements** for heaven:

- A. They have been **redeemed** (purchased, bought). The price of their redemption was the blood of the Lamb (I Pet. 1:18–19). They have been **sealed** by God and belong to him (7:1–4; 14:1; 22:4). They refuse the mark of the beast because they do not belong to him. They belong to God! They don't even belong to themselves (I Cor. 6:19–20).
- B. They are chaste and pure. It is doubtful that John intends the word “virgin” to be understood literally. He is not prohibiting marital sexual relations but rather the unholy love of **the world** and the things in the world (I John 2:15–17; James 4:4). John is speaking symbolically of the redeemed as the **bride** of Christ preparing for her wedding day (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:9). They may be **in** the world but they are not **of** it.
- C. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. When Jesus said “**Follow me,**” he meant it (Mark 1:17). Being a Christian is a walk, a relationship, and not just a static condition (ticket to heaven, “getting saved”, legal standing, etc.). *For all who are **led by the Spirit** of God are sons of God* (Rom. 8:14).
- D. No lie is found in their mouth. They are “blameless” because they hate **lies** and **falsehood** in whatever form they may appear. Satan is a liar from the beginning and the father of lies; there is no truth in him (John 8:44). But those who follow the Truth (John 14:6), are lovers of truth... and truth sets them free (John 8:32).
- E. They love to **sing** and **worship** the Lamb! Their song is always “new” not because it is has been recently written but because it is always fresh and alive ⁴. And when they sing, though there a millions of them, they sing with one voice (Unison? Or perhaps harmony?). Though the words of the song are not mentioned here, we get a glimpse of what the redeemed are singing in heaven in Revelation 5:9–10.

*Worthy are you (the Lamb) to take the scroll and to open its seals,
For you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God
From every tribe and language and people and nation,
And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
And they shall reign on the earth.*

⁴ There are two words in Greek rendered “new” in English. *NEOS* refers to time, something recent. This word is not used in Revelation at all. *KAINOS* refers to quality, something that is fresh and vitally alive. This is the word John uses over and over in Revelation to describe a new name (2:17; 3:12), a new Jerusalem (3:12; 21:2), a new heaven and earth (21:1), and a new song (5:9; 14:3).

TABLE TALK

1. When was the last time you heard a sermon about God's wrath? What was it like? Should preachers seek to "scare people" into the kingdom? Why or why not?
2. Describe your personal reaction to Biblical passages that depict God as angry, pouring out his wrath on sinners. Does your concept of God fit with such passages? Why or why not?
3. Pastor John wants us to be assured of our place in the choir of the redeemed? He wants us to be strong and not to despair as the forces of evil are unleashed in the last days. Are you confident of your salvation? Are you able to stand in the evil day?
4. When was the last time you heard a sermon on the sin of worldliness (warning against the dangers of loving the world and the things in the world)? Can anyone who loves the world be saved?
5. In the Parable of the Weeds, Jesus told us that it was his will that the weeds and the wheat should grow together until the harvest. Describe your reaction to this parable.