

A Reader's Guide to Revelation 11:19-16:11

Introduction

The Guide for chapters 6-11 finished without discussing 11:19. When the seventh angel sounds the trumpet (11:15), and the heavenly voices make their exclamation that the end has come (11:15-18), then we read this:

Read Revelation 11:19

The ark of the covenant was the box that rested in the most holy place of the Jewish tabernacle (and later in their temple). It was covered with the "atoning lid." If you read Exodus 25:8 and 22, you will see that the ark was the place of God's presence among His people. It also represented His commandments, and was called the "ark of the covenant" because a copy of the ten commandments were kept inside this box. God and His commandments were a fearsome thing: the Old Testament repeatedly emphasized the great danger of the ark (Leviticus 10, Leviticus 16, II Samuel 6). Sinful people could not have any contact with the presence of God, or they would die. Only the blood of a spotless sacrifice, sprinkled on the atoning lid, could spare them.

Before you read the comments below, consider why you think the ark of the covenant would appear at this point in Revelation. How does it serve as an appropriate conclusion to chapter 11?

While it is possible that the appearance of the ark at this point represents the mercy and saving faithfulness of God (represented by the atoning lid), I wonder if it may be best to see it as representing the dangerous holy presence of God. Here are a couple of reasons why that might be best:

- The great storm that accompanies its appearance (at the end of verse 19) suggests something fearful, and sounds very similar to the appearance of God's presence in Exodus 19 and 20:18-20.
- The arrogant earth-dwellers celebrate as if when they got rid of God's witnesses, they ridded themselves of God himself (11:10). But they face something far more terrifying than God's witnesses: they must face the presence of God Himself (represented by the ark).
- It is possible that there is a connection between 11:1 and 11:19 - the chapter is sandwiched between visions of the temple. Maybe (this is just a suggestion) the temple in verse 1 is the heavenly temple of God (and the worshippers are those heavenly worshippers described in chapters 4-10); the outer court is earth, still under the control of Satan and his forces; but the temple is being measured as if in preparation for something. It looks as if Satan and his forces have sway on the earth, until in verse 19 the temple opens, and the presence of God is pictured by the ark. Now those in the "outer court" can no longer hide from the presence of God Himself. The time has come for the kingdom of the world to become His kingdom, etc. (verses 15-18).

Let's continue on and see what this vision of the temple introduces:

Read Revelation 12

This chapter uncovers (remember "Revelation" is *apokalypsis*, uncovering) forces and battles that determine the course of events on earth, though we cannot see them with our physical eyes. This is not just a chapter of interesting details about the future - it uncovers the basic conflict behind

everything that will happen in the end times. Revelation 12 is essential for understanding what is going on in the world today and what will go on at the end.

Who are the major characters to appear in Revelation 12?

Which of those characters seem to appear for the first time at this point in Revelation?

If Revelation 12 was a play, how many major scenes would it have? It will be very helpful if you write out for yourself a brief outline of the major scenes in this chapter.

In verse 9 Satan is called "the serpent of old," indicating a close connection between Revelation 12 and Genesis 3. What are the parallels between the characters and themes in Revelation 12, and the characters and themes in Genesis 3 (especially Genesis 3:15)?

What are the major themes in this chapter, such as the rule of God (verse 5) and the sovereignty of God (verse 6)? Which of these themes sound familiar because they have already shown up in Revelation several times before?

Make a list of everything this chapter teaches about the character and works of Satan.

If you had to summarize Revelation 12 down to one main point, what would it be?

Now we'll get into some of the details - but don't let the details distract you completely from those larger points that you just uncovered!

12:1 *a woman*: she is clearly symbolic of something else, and she probably contrasts with the symbolic 'great harlot' in chapters 17-18. So here in chapter 12 we are introduced to the first of two very important symbolic women in Revelation. From verses 1-2, however, it is very difficult to discern what (who) this woman represents.

12:2 *in labor*: labor pains are very frequently used in Scripture to illustrate times of great spiritual pain, sorrow, or anticipation.

12:3 *a great red dragon*: this is the first appearance of the dragon in Revelation, but the chapter leaves no doubt as to who this is.

12:3 *seven heads and ten horns ... seven diadems*: we'll discuss these things more when we get to chapter 17. If you're familiar with the prophecies of Daniel 7, you may recognize the idea of "ten horns," though it's very difficult to directly connect Daniel 7 and Revelation 12.

12:4 *stars*: stars in Revelation seem to usually be either literal stars or angels (1:20; 8:10-11; 9:1; etc.) What do you think they would be here in verse 4?

12:5 *a son*: This is undoubtedly Jesus, based on the prophecy of Psalm 2:9. And if this son is undoubtedly Jesus, then we have a major clue to the identity of this symbolic "woman," for in some sense Jesus is born through her. While Mary was the mother of Jesus, it is impossible to understand this woman in Revelation 12 as being Mary (for example, verses 13-17 are absurd if the woman is Mary). She is a symbol - part of this great sign - but what (whom) does she symbolize? Through whom was Jesus born?

12:5 *caught up*: this could refer to the resurrection of Jesus, though it may be more likely that it refers to His ascension.

12:6 *one thousand two hundred and sixty days*: This same time period is described five times in Revelation:

- 11:2 the time when the nations are allowed to tread under foot the holy city (42 months)
- 11:3 the time of the prophesying of the two witnesses (1260 days)
- 12:6 the time that God nourishes the woman in the wilderness sometime after her child is born (1260 days)
- 12:14 the time that God nourishes the woman in the wilderness after Satan is thrown down to the earth (a time, times, and half a time)
- 13:5 the time that the beast has authority (42 months)

So this three and a half year time period is very important in Revelation. Now if you're thinking "I thought the tribulation lasted for seven years?", here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- the tribulation probably does last for seven years,
- but Revelation never refers directly to a seven-year time period (of course you can get that by combining two of these 3.5 year time periods),
- and Revelation never refers directly to the "seven weeks" of Daniel 9:25

So the conclusion that there is a final seven-year time period comes more from Daniel than from Revelation. In Revelation you'll find only references to three and a half years, as here in chapter 12.

12:7 *Michael*: The rest of what the Bible says about Michael you can read in Daniel 10:13, 21; Daniel 12:1; and Jude 9.

12:9 *his angels were thrown down with him*: Do you think this phrase in verse 9 is referring to the same event that verse 4 refers to?

12:10 *accuser of our brethren*: for clear examples, see Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3

Note how similar 12:10 sounds to 11:15.

Be sure you take sufficient time to meditate on 12:11. "They overcame Satan" - who overcame Satan? And how did they overcome him? While the theme of the testimony of God's people has been developing throughout the book, this verse raises that theme to an even greater level of importance. Satan is defeated because of the martyrs! Now of course it is ultimately because of Christ ("because of the blood of the Lamb"), but the text unashamedly says "they [the martyrs] overcame him" and this was "because of the word of their testimony, and because they did not love their life even when faced with death." Satan killed them - and contributed to his own defeat in the process (just as he did with Jesus!). The testimony of Jesus was more precious to them than life itself.

12:12 *he has only a short time*: So whatever is being described in verses 7-12, it occurs only a "short time" before Satan is bound (Revelation 20:2).

12:13-17 raises a lot of questions about the persecution of the woman, the divine protection, and then the persecution of the rest of her children. You can see how those things can be viewed from various perspectives in the section that follows.

When will (or when did) the events of Revelation 12 occur? I'm just going to summarize some various perspectives about how all of these things fit together, and you can see for yourself how they measure up to what the chapter says. Some of these perspectives will overlap - they aren't completely distinct:

✠ Perspective 1: The woman in this chapter is "true Israel," which would include believing Jews and the church. Verses 7-12 describe Christ's defeat of Satan at Calvary, and since then the church has faced great suffering through the hatred of the dragon. When Jesus was born, Satan first tried to destroy Him, then turned upon His followers (throughout the church age). But God's people can rest assured that He has prepared a place of spiritual refuge for them. The flight of the woman in this chapter symbolizes that spiritual protection for the church any time she is persecuted. The "short time" that remains for Satan is the church age (which the 1260 days also symbolize).

✠ Perspective 2: The woman represents the whole people of God, especially the persecuted people of God expectantly waiting for the Messiah. Satan's original fall is described in verse 4a and expanded upon in verses 7-9. Having been previously cast out of heaven, Satan tried to destroy Jesus during his earthly life. The dragon's persecution of the woman prophecies of Satan's final persecution of the church in the future. The protection and nourishment is spiritual in nature - Satan will be allowed to kill the body but not the soul. The 1260 days is not literal, but means that Satan's final persecution of the church will be short and strictly controlled by God. The rest of the woman's offspring is the believers down through the ages since the time of Christ. The river is a flood of lies and deceit that Satan pours at the church in the last days.

✠ Perspective 3: The woman symbolizes the true people of God in both Old and New Covenants. Throughout the church age, Christ rules with a rod of iron. Satan is not cast down literally from heaven, but through the work of Christ he loses any opportunity to accuse the believers. The protection of the woman and her offspring pictures the spiritual protection of the church in this age. The devil cannot destroy her, and the church is granted a certain amount of protection from him. The true church is not fooled by the devil's river of lies and delusions. "The rest of the woman's children" means that since he cannot destroy the church as a whole, he goes after individuals in the church.

✠ Perspective 4: The woman is the faithful remnant of Israel; her flight after Christ's ascension represents the escape of Jewish believers from Jerusalem before it was destroyed in the 1st century (history records such a flight). The 1260 days is probably symbolic of the 1st century period of persecution, though it could correspond to an exact 1st century time frame such as the length of the Jewish War or Nero's persecution of the church. The battle in verses 7-9 occurred at Calvary (John 12:31), which ended Satan's opportunity to accuse the brethren. Unable to do this, he turns his attention to hindering the progress of the gospel - he knows his time is short for the gospel will reach its goals and the end will come. Verses 13-17 recount again the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem before the city fell. The eagle is figurative of this flight; the river is symbolic of the devil's attacks on the church; the swallowing up of the river symbolizes the failure of Satan's attacks on the church. [an alternative on this perspective views the rest of Revelation as describing Christ's defeat of the Roman Empire, who persecuted the church after Jerusalem had fallen]

✠ Perspective 5: Revelation 12 uncovers the hidden forces behind the climactic events in the end times. The woman is national Israel, from whom the Messiah came (see the close connection between the woman, described in verse 1, and Jacob/Rachel and their sons [from whom the twelve tribes of Israel came] in Genesis 37:9-10). Verse 2 introduces Israel's expectation of the coming Messiah. Verse 4a refers to angels who fell with Satan in history past. Verse 4b introduces Satan's attempts to destroy the Messiah when He came. Verse 5 moves quickly from the birth to the ascension of Jesus. Just as verses 4 and 5 jumped quickly from the fall of Satan to the birth of Jesus to His ascension, so the specific details of verse 6 show that we have jumped ahead again to a future flight of Israel away from Satan. This happens midway through the tribulation, and the 1260 days of verse 6 refer to the second half of the tribulation. The song in verses 10-12 (especially as it parallels the song in chapter 11) shows that the war in verses 7-9 must be a war in the end times, probably at the midpoint of the tribulation (see also Daniel 12:1). The eagle represents the powerful and rapid way in which God provides for Israel to escape Satan's wrath during the tribulation. This is a literal flight from Jerusalem, based upon the literal flight from Egypt. The river is either literal water or representative of an army that Satan stirs up against Israel. Satan has to vent his fury on Israel's seed, because Israel is no longer within his reach. Her seed, then, may be other saved Israelites who were not able to flee, or it may be the 144,000 (this conclusion is based upon the fact that at the end of this section, in 14:1-5, the 144,000 appear victorious with the lamb).

As you can tell, it's very hard to fit all of Revelation 12 together without running in to some troubles. None of these perspectives is without its weaknesses, and I'm sure you feel the weakness of your own understanding as you've tried to read through them! But hopefully you are coming to understand the chapter better as you struggle to discern which of these seems to most faithfully explain what God inspired in Revelation 12. Even if you don't feel like you've begun to understand it all, the process of thinking carefully about God's Word honors Him and will bear good fruit in your life. Do not be discouraged!

Though Revelation 12 seems to speak primarily of end-time events, Satan's great defeat began long ago, and was confirmed and made certain at Calvary. Ever since then Satan has been in a death struggle, fighting for his power and existence. While we may not live in the last three and a half years of this earth's history, we do live in a time when Satan is attacking the church viciously - sometimes directly (through persecution), sometimes indirectly (through deceit, distraction, or temptation). As you finish your study of Revelation 12, meditate on how this chapter can serve as both warning and encouragement for you today.

Read Revelation 13

Jesus is coming to set up His kingdom (11:15, 12:10), and Satan knows it. He rushes to set up His own kingdom first.

13:1 *stood on the sand of the seashore:* We haven't really come across anything in Revelation to help us understand why the dragon stands like this, unless this is a weak imitation of the authoritative posture of the great angel in chapter 10? But what is his obvious purpose in coming to the sea?

13:1 *beast:* Where was the beast mentioned previously in Revelation? [he will be mentioned in every chapter from here through chapter 20]

13:1 *ten horns, seven heads, ten diadems*: While there is a lot of potentially confusing symbolism here, that we'll discuss more in chapter 17, note that this is very similar to yet slightly different from the description of the dragon in 12:3. Apparently the beast and the dragon are distinct, yet relatives!

13:2 *power, throne, great authority*: What is the source of his authority? From the rest of verses 2-10, what can you tell about the realm or extent of the beast's authority?

13:3 *one of his heads as if it had been slain*: It's a little difficult to discern what is going on here, since the beast's heads and horns are obviously symbolic, and this wound happens to only one of the heads. Yet verse 15 says that it was "the beast who had the wound of the sword and [yet] has come to life." So whatever happens here is deadly for the beast, not just one of his heads.

As this chapter reveals Satan's imitation of Christ's kingdom, you'll find many imitations in chapter 13. Can you see how 13:3 seems to imitate what God did in chapter 11?

13:3 *the whole earth*: this is repeated and expanded upon in verses 7-8. Clearly the realm of the beast's authority extends beyond just Israel (earth ≠ the land of Israel here), or even the realm of the 1st century Roman Empire.

13:4 *who is like the beast?*: From the perspective of the ungodly earth-dwellers, the dragon and the beast are matchless. Of course Satan is trying to usurp the worship that belongs to God alone (Exodus 8:10, 15:11; Psalm 71:19, 89:8; Isaiah 44:7, 46:5; Micah 7:18). You, the reader of Revelation, can see the astonishing deception going on here. You know (from chapter 12) that the dragon is actually in the throes of death, struggling, gasping, with only a very short time left. You know that God is demonstrating His great power and accomplishing His purposes. You know that it is ridiculous to ask: "Who is like the beast?" Yet the god of this world will successfully blind the minds of the unbelieving of the whole earth, so that they will give to the beast the worship that belongs to God alone (II Cor. 4:4).

13:5 *was given*: in the immediate context, who is giving the beast his authority? But in the overall picture, who is giving him his authority? Who has determined the 42 months, the short time that the devil has left?

13:6 *blaspheme*: This is not just about the promotion of Satan, but the demotion of God. Since Satan lost the battles in the heavens and could not demote God there (chapter 12), he hopes to demote God in the hearts of men on earth. Is it possible that in small ways each day, Satan could accomplish something like this in our hearts?

13:7 *make war with the saints*: The saints here are apparently the same group as "the rest of [the woman's] children" in 12:17.

13:9-10 Verse 9 echoes the messages to the church in chapters 2 and 3, and reminds us that the rest of Revelation is part of the message to the churches also. Each church needed the entire Revelation, including this chapter. Verse 10 is a little bit difficult because of the verbs ("this must happen") that are implied. But it seems quite clearly to refer to a divine "must" - in other words, "If in the will of God anyone must go into captivity, then to captivity he goes." As the end of verse 10 clarifies, this is a message for the saints. What is that message? What do verses 9-10 teach the saints?

13:11-12 This is apparently a religious leader who turns the world's amazement into worship of the beast. Later in Revelation he is clearly called the "false prophet." Why do you think he looks like a lamb? (see Matthew 7:15)

13:14 *make an image of the beast*: This chapter is loaded with connections to the book of Daniel, and this image of the beast sounds a lot like Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 3. Nebuchadnezzar, like this beast, was an arrogant ruler who tried to usurp God's rightful place.

13:15 The false prophet is able to animate these idols so that they appear to live and can even kill. Combined with the great signs of verse 13, we are seeing here Satan at his very best, awing the earth-dwellers with visual imagery and effects that would make Hollywood look like child's play. These are desperate, blatant attempts to distract from the majestic displays of power and authority by the true God.

13:16-17 The false prophet uses peer pressure and economic pressure to force commitment and conformity.

13:16 *a mark*: How is this mark an imitation of something else we've already seen in Revelation? (see also 14:1 and 22:4)

13:18: *the number is that of a man*: It is most likely that this means "the number represents a specific man, namely, the beast." How does the number 666 represent the beast? There have been countless guesses, but it seems likely that this will not be plain until the beast arises on earth. But until he comes, any attempts to figure out the connection between the number and the man will fall short.

There are so many ways in which Satan is trying to usurp God's authority - yet the best he can do is to produce imitations of God's realities. He essentially creates his own trinity here: "As Christ received authority from the Father (Matt. 11:27), so Antichrist receives authority from the dragon (Rev. 13:4), and as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14), so the false prophet glorifies the Antichrist (Rev. 13:12)." (Mounce) The beast is slain - the word used in verse 3 is the same word used for Jesus in 5:6. The beast lives - the word in 13:14 is the same word used for Jesus in 2:8. What other parallels and imitations can you find in this chapter?

Before we expand a little bit more on the topic of the Antichrist, let's take a brief look at some perspectives on this chapter:

✠ Perspective 1: Everything in this chapter pictures the attacks of Satan on the church during the church age. The beast from the sea symbolizes the ways Satan persecutes the church through governments. The beast from the land symbolizes the ways Satan persecutes the church through religions and philosophies. The head which received a death stroke was likely the first-century Roman empire, but it represents the many times in history when the enemies of God have risen to persecute the church again. The overcoming of the saints (v.7) predicts the day toward the end of the church age when the church as a mighty organization for the spread of the gospel will be completely destroyed, through the individual souls cannot be touched by Satan. The mark of the beast on the head and the hand symbolizes the thoughts and deeds of each person who rejects God and follows the world's system.

✠ Perspective 2: While the previous chapters focused on the final destruction of Israel, this chapter turns the attention to the destruction of Rome. The beast is the Roman Empire in general

and more specifically Nero (one of the primary evidences for this would be the association of the beast with the seven mountains in chapter 17, which would be the seven hills of Rome). The forty-two months refer to the period from November of AD 64 to June of AD 68 when Nero persecuted the church. The death and revival of the beast speaks of the near-demise of the Roman Empire after the death of Nero, only to be revived again to glory through Vespasian and other emperors.

✠ Perspective 3: The specific details of Revelation 13 must await a future fulfillment, during the final 42 months (great tribulation) before the return of Christ. While there will be many world rulers involved, one world ruler will rise above all the rest (some would say in a revived Roman Empire). He will have worldwide authority both politically and spiritually (verses 7-8). He will be a Satanic tool to try to prevent Christ's kingdom from being established on earth. He will martyr the saints (v.7), and with the help of the other beast will establish the worship of himself alone. There will be a literal mark of some type that will identify his followers (vv.16-17). Whether God allows him to literally die and be resurrected, or whether this is a deception created by the dragon and false prophet, the world will think he has been raised from the dead and will worship him as the great God. All of the world's opposition to God, both political and religious, will find its climax and summation here in the Antichrist.

You have probably noticed that the word "Antichrist" didn't appear in this chapter (and it does not appear in Revelation at all). So where does the idea of "the Antichrist" come from, and does Revelation 13 really describe the arrival of that one individual in the last days?

The word "Antichrist" only appears in I and II John. John says "you have heard that antichrist is coming" (I John 2:18). Apparently the Christians to whom John was writing understood what he was talking about. But how could they have understood?

The concept of a singular world leader in the end times begins in the prophecies of Daniel. He prophesied about a leader who would destroy the city of God, bring abomination into the temple of God, and speak very boastful things against God (Daniel 8:9, 9:26-27, etc.). This probably found an initial fulfillment in the raging Greek ruler Antiochus IV who destroyed Jerusalem and set up Zeus worship in the temple in 167 BC. Antiochus also referred to himself as deity ("theos epiphanes," the manifest God).

But Antiochus "Epiphanes" was not the final anti-God ruler, for 200 years after his time Jesus used the words of Daniel when he spoke of a yet-future "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14). Jesus spoke of that abomination not just as a thing, but as a person standing (masculine participle). Jesus was indicating that there would be another person, like Antiochus IV, who would rise up and oppose God and desecrate the temple. In this same message (Mark 13) Jesus spoke of false christs and false prophets who would arise.

A few years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, the Roman Emperor Caligula threatened to set up a statue of himself in the temple in Jerusalem. Yet Caligula was also not the final anti-God ruler, for he was assassinated before he could accomplish this. Some years after this Paul wrote in II Thessalonians 2:1-12 about a "man of lawlessness," a "son of destruction" who was still going to come, "take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as God." So Antiochus IV and Caligula were just examples of the kind of person who was still going to come.

So when John wrote "you have heard that antichrist is coming" in I John 2:18, he knew that the Christians were expecting (based on the teachings of Daniel and Jesus) that a great ruler, a false christ, would arise to oppose Christ. John goes on to say that already "many antichrists have appeared," and that "the spirit of the antichrist" was "already in the world (I John 4:3). There would be many like Antiochus and Caligula who would demonstrate the spirit of antichrist in boasting against God and defiling the worship of God.

With this background in mind, the description of the beast in Revelation 13 is not new news at all! The arrogance, the blasphemy, the imitation, the idolatry are very similar to the leader Daniel described and the false christs and "abominator" Jesus warned of (for example, the Greek of Revelation 13:5-6 is very similar to the Greek translation of Daniel 7:6, 8). So despite the fact that Revelation does not use the word "Antichrist," there are good biblical reasons to believe that all of those earlier antichrists would find their fulfillment in this great and final one described here in chapter 13.

Before you finish your study of chapter 13, spend some time meditating on:

- the majesty of Christ. Seeing a cheap imitation makes you appreciate the real thing - and seeing Satan's cheap (and terrible and deceptive and destructive) attempts to keep up with Jesus in this chapter should lead us to worship the true Lamb who was truly slain and truly lives and truly speaks for God and truly rules all nations with all authority and truly marks his people as his own.
- the sober words of verses 9-10.

Revelation 14 is fairly distinct in the book, giving a series of quick visions that seem to picture and explain other events in the book, rather than giving any kind of chronological sequence of events. Some have described chapter 14 as "a series of commentaries on the main action of the book," or even as being like "a table of contents of the things in the remainder of the book."

Read Revelation 14:1-5

14:1 *Mount Zion*: After God took Israel to Himself to be His people by bringing them out of Egypt, God manifested His presence to them at Mt. Sinai. There He also instructed them to build a tabernacle so that He could dwell among them. When that tabernacle was brought into the promised land and replaced by the temple in Jerusalem, they spoke of Jerusalem and the temple mount as "Mount Zion," the place of God's presence (for example, Psalm 51:18). But since heaven was the ultimate place of God's presence, they also spoke of heaven as "Mount Zion." Two New Testament references speak clearly of heaven as Mount Zion: you'll want to read Hebrews 12:22 and Romans 11:26. So do you think this "Mount Zion" in Revelation 14:1 is earthly Jerusalem (maybe the Mt of Olives where Jesus will return?) or heavenly "Mount Zion"?

14:1 *one hundred and forty-four thousand*: is there any reason to think these are different from the 144,000 we met in chapter 7?

14:1 *written on their foreheads*: an obvious contrast with the mark of the beast

14:2 *new song*: There are many "new songs" in the Bible (Ps 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, Is 42:10), and we've already had one in Revelation 5:9. Maybe this means that at times God's people see Him and His works in a fresh way and respond with a song like they have never sung before. It is

not clear who sings this song in verse 2, though it is clear who listens to the song and who learns the song (v.3).

14:3 *purchased from the earth*: does this mean they were martyred? or just that they were saved? or selected by God? It's hard to know, but the explanation at the end of verse 4 helps.

14:4 *not been defiled with women ... chaste*: While these phrases could refer to spiritual purity (i.e., abstinence from idolatry), the specific phrase "with women" suggests that they should be taken literally. Paul referred to the need for celibacy during certain times of severe circumstances (I Cor. 7:26). The immoral climate described in Revelation 2-3 and propagated by the beast certainly highlights the significance of their purity.

14:4 *first fruits*: What do you think it means, that they have been purchased as first fruits to God?

Before you read on, consider the main point of this brief vision. How does it fit here at the beginning of chapter 14? What would main themes would it communicate?

Surely these verses are intended to contrast with the terrible worldwide scenes of Satanic rule and deception in chapter 13. From all appearances it looks as though Satan will win - can you imagine living on earth during the time described in chapter 13? How would you have any hope? Yet this vision shows the end: the Lamb and His people will triumph.

Now there are certainly various perspectives on these verses, as well as some hard interpretive questions regarding the exact identification of the 144,000. From one perspective these represent the Christians suffering under Roman persecution; from another, they symbolize all believers during the church age, set apart in purity to God; and from another, they represent a particular group of Jews who either die during the tribulation or live to the end of the tribulation and stand with Jesus when He returns. They are firstfruits because they are the first believers in the church age; because they are a special gift set apart for God; or because they are the first of the Jewish believers in the tribulation. But none of these differing perspectives changes the main point of these verses: Jesus will reign, and the people who bear His name will stand in ultimate triumph.

Read Revelation 14:6-20

Remember again that Revelation 14 is giving a series of quick visions that seem to picture and explain other events in the book.

14:6 *flying in midheaven ... to preach to those who live on the earth*: Note that this message (and probably these three messages, through verse 12) is not just for John, but a message for all the nations. This is why the angel flies in 'midheaven,' potentially even visible to the earth-dwellers. Remember that we read of something similar in 8:13. Is it possible that more of Revelation, even the signs of chapter 12, might be visible or audible in some way to those who live on the earth during the tribulation? I certainly don't know for sure, but Jesus promised that there would be signs in the sky in the last days (Luke 21:25), and here in Luke 14 we read of an angelic message that all of the nations can apparently hear.

14:6 *eternal gospel*: Though some would argue that this cannot be the gospel of redemption, but a message of forced submission, every other use of the word "gospel" in the New Testament is for the gospel of redemption through Christ. It is most likely that this is a call for people to be saved through

these terrible final events before the end comes. Revelation is not *just* a message of judgment: God continues to save!!

14:7 The time just before the final judgment is a time to accept the eternal gospel, to fear God (instead of the beast), to give God glory (instead of the beast), to worship God (instead of the beast). This is a time for salvation!

14:7 What specific aspect of God's character is highlighted at the end of this verse?

14:8 *Babylon the great:*

For all of the talk about Revelation and the Roman Empire (or Roman Catholic Church), Rome isn't actually named once in the book. Babylon, however, is mentioned several times in chapters 14-18. Why Babylon? Has there been any connection with Babylon in the first thirteen chapters of Revelation?

The answer is certainly yes. Revelation connects very directly with Daniel over and over again. Where was Daniel? In ancient Babylon, a captive along with the rest of the Jews. There in Babylon he received visions from the Lord of future events. He also lived and worked under a Babylonian ruler who was idolatrous, boastful, and vicious. The nation that Babylon represented had crushed God's people.

In Daniel 4:30, Nebuchadnezzar even arrogantly called his city "Babylon the Great" - the exact phrase used here in Revelation 14:8. The angels words "fallen, fallen is Babylon" are the same words used in Isaiah 21:9 for the fall of ancient Babylon, and the end of Revelation 14:8 comes directly from a description of ancient Babylon in Jeremiah 51:7.

So there is obviously a strong connection between the prophecies of Revelation and the arrogance and fall of Babylon the great during the time of Daniel. But that connection doesn't seem to help us, because the prophecies of Revelation certainly aren't predicting the fall of Babylon centuries earlier. So why does this angel in 14:8 proclaim the fall of "Babylon the Great"?

Think again about the Satanic kingdom of the Antichrist in chapter 13. Does it better some resemblance to the ancient kingdom of Babylon? Could we say that Satan's arrogant kingdom will fall, just as the arrogant Babylonians did? Satan's defeat of God's people will not be final, just as the Babylonian defeat of Israel was not final? The Antichrist will be humbled, just as Nebuchadnezzar was? And if those are helpful parallels, then couldn't we refer to the Satanic kingdom of the tribulation as "Babylon" - a new arrogant, oppressive, anti-God kingdom that arises like Babylon in the last days?

Now from another perspective, "Babylon" in Revelation represents not the Antichrist's final empire, but the 1st century Roman empire. But I would suggest that the 1st century Roman Empire was yet another arrogant, oppressive earthly kingdom that tried to oppose God and His purposes. You could call it "Babylon" in that sense. But when Revelation speaks of "Babylon," it is speaking not of ancient Babylon or ancient Rome, but of the final Satanic kingdom described in Revelation 13. In Revelation 14:8, the angel proclaims to all the inhabitants of the earth (14:6) that the final "Babylon" has fallen. God always wins.

14:8 *immorality*: the Satanic empire has a seductive power over the other nations of the other. Whether this involves seduction to sexual immorality, or just seduction to sin and godlessness in general, the point is that the kingdom of the Antichrist will have had immense spiritual power over the nations of the earth.

14:9-11 What is the warning in these verses? How is it more specific and personal - for each earth-dweller - than the proclamation in 14:8?

The false prophet threatened great economic loss to those who would not worship the beast (13:17); God threatens eternal spiritual loss to those who do. So Matthew 16:26 *What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*

14:12 If the message of verses 9-11 is for those following the beast, why is there a caution here for the saints?

note the theme-word "perseverance" - see 1:9, 2:2-3, 2:19, 3:10, and 13:10

14:13 *from now on*: This is an unusual verse, in which the scene suddenly shifts into John's writing-room. There he is told to write about the blessing on those who die in the Lord "from now on." This could mean "from some point in the tribulation to the end" - but could it also mean "from John's time to the end"?

14:13 *die in the Lord*: do you think this refers to any Christians who die, or to martyrs in particular?

14:13 why are those who die blessed?

14:14 *one like a son of man*: Read the prophecy of Daniel in Daniel 7:13-14. The term "son of man" frequently points to Jesus as the fulfillment of Daniel 7:13-14. Do you think this is Jesus here in Revelation 14:14?

14:15 *came out of the temple*: this phrase (here and in verse 17) fits with the interpretation of the ark of the covenant that we suggested in our comments on 11:19.

Read some of the prophecies of the final harvest/battle before the judgment: Joel 3:12-13, 21; Isaiah 63:1-6; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-42.

14:20 *outside the city*: By the indications throughout chapter 14, we would expect this final harvest/battle to occur around the world. But the grapes are crushed "outside the city." What city? First of all, keep in mind that "Babylon" here is the Satanic kingdom of chapter 13. So the "city" of Babylon is not actually just a city, but represents a worldwide empire (just as Babylon the city represented the *Babylonian Empire*). If this is a specific city, though, it could be Jerusalem (later we'll discuss the location of the Battle of Armageddon), and the nations could be gathered to the Antichrist there.

14:20 *two hundred miles*: While this might be symbolic (of judgment extending everywhere) or hyperbolic (the blood of the battle was splattered across a battle ground of this size), it also could be quite literal if the great majority of earth-dwellers are killed at once.

✘ Perspective 1: Revelation 14:6-20 prophecies of the Roman attack and slaughter at Jerusalem in the 1st century (Jerusalem = Babylon). Josephus wrote frequently about the whole city flowing with blood.

✘ Perspective 2: Revelation 14:6-20 symbolically pictures the gospel going out in the church age, the warning of judgment on those who will not believe, and the final judgment on those who will not believe. (the world system as opposed to God = Babylon)

✘ Perspective 3: Revelation 14:6-20 gives a final gospel call to the inhabitants of earth in the tribulation, announces the fall of the Satanic kingdom (=Babylon), and describes the battle/judgment of Christ upon the beast and his followers at the end of the tribulation.

Now that you've made it through the details, read back over 14:6-20. What are the big themes that you must not miss in this section?

Read Revelation 15

This brief chapter introduces the seven bowls of wrath. We've seen two other sets of seven already: the seven seals and seven trumpets.

- Six seals: 6:1-17
 - The seventh seal is broken in 8:1 - but instead of another judgment coming, it seems that the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets (8:2)
- Six trumpets: 8:7-21
 - The seventh trumpet sounds in 11:15 - but again instead of a specific judgment, there is a heavenly scene and then the temple of God in heaven was opened (11:19)
- Now here in chapter 15, the last seven angels come out of the temple (and are given the bowl judgments). So it seems that the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets; and that the seventh trumpet contained the seven bowl judgments.

If this is correct, then the three sets of seven happen in a generally chronological order. But it is also possible that the three sets of seven give three different ways of looking at the same time period or events.

If you take the perspective that the three sets are basically chronological, then you have the challenge of explaining why the sixth seal (6:12-17) and sixth trumpet (9:13-21) sound very much like a description of the end, if there are still many judgments to follow after them. You also have to explain the remarkable parallel between the sixth trumpet (9:13-21) and the sixth bowl (16:12-16). If you take the perspective that the three sets are actually describing the same time period or events from three angles, then you have to explain why most of the three sets of seven are entirely different from one another, and why the third set is called "the last" and in them "the wrath of God is finished" (here in 15:1).

Based on the clear statements here in 15:1, it seems best to view the three sevens as happening in order, so that these seven bowl/plagues occur at the very end of the tribulation. But regardless of how these things fit together chronologically, the meaning of chapter 15 is quite clear.

What is the meaning of chapter 15? What are the big themes?

15:2 *victorious*: This is the same word for "overcoming" that has shown up many times already (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 5:5; 6:2; 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 17:14; 21:7). What a glorious scene this is! When

I read the mention of harps at the end of verse 2, I think of those who picture heaven as a boring place where you sit on clouds and pick at harps. They obviously weren't paying the least bit of attention to the context of Revelation 15:2! After having read chapters 12-14, this scene of the victorious saints is more magnificent and powerful than anything any motion picture producer has ever come up with. If you have time, go back and read straight through from 12:1 through these verses - that will place these verses in their proper perspective.

15:3 *song of Moses*: Though this song does not come directly from any song of Moses in the Old Testament, it is full of Old Testament language and is a victory song just like that of Moses after the plagues fell on Egypt and God's people emerged victorious (Exodus 15). That victory was a type of this great, final victory. Egypt was a mere hamlet compared to the worldwide Satanic empire that is being defeated here in Revelation.

What attributes and works of God are specifically highlighted in the song of the victors?

On 15:5-8, review the discussion on 11:19 at the beginning of this guide.

Read Revelation 16:1-11

As you read these first five plagues, make a list of the actions and attitudes of men that are listed in these verses, as well as the actions and attributes of God. Which of these themes have become quite familiar through the first 15 chapters of Revelation?

Which of these plagues parallel the plagues which fell on Egypt? (Exodus 7-11)

When do these plagues occur? Let's remind ourselves of some of the general perspectives we have mentioned earlier:

- ✘ Perspective 1: These plagues symbolize various calamities that God sent upon the popes and the Roman Catholic Church, especially through cultural shifts like the French Revolution which greatly weakened the papacy.
- ✘ Perspective 2: Throughout the age of the church, wicked people who refuse to be warned by the trumpets of God are judged by the bowls of God's wrath. This happens throughout the age to wicked people.
- ✘ Perspective 3: The judgments symbolically describe the calamities that fell upon Israel during the Jewish War of the 1st century. God promised Israel that if they disobeyed Him He would smite them with the same plagues with which He had smitten Egypt (Deut. 28:27f). (at alternative to this perspective sees these plagues as falling on the persecuting Roman Empire in the 1st century)
- ✘ Perspective 4: These judgments will happen in the future, at the end of the tribulation just prior to the second coming of Christ. Just as the Egyptian plagues happened literally, so will these.

Which of those perspectives seems to most accurately reflect the text of Revelation 16:1-11?