

December 30

Revelation 14-19.5

Hi, my name is Mark Ashton. Today we were transfixed by the sight of the Lamb standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 and the thunderous music of a new song. They are chosen from the twelve tribes of Israel and now stand with Jesus, the Lamb of God. A song of praise is played on their behalf, they sing a new song composed just for them and they become the first fruits from the tribulation saints to reign with Jesus.

Who are those 144,000? There are some weird interpretations of this. Jehovah's witnesses say it will be the total number of people saved. Some think it is a symbolic number - 12 Tribes times 12 Disciples times 1000 meaning a multitude is 144,000 – meaning all believers. But chapter 7 indicates that there are 12,000 Jewish people from each tribe set aside for a specific purpose. And we see this purpose in the beginning of Chapter 14.

Then you get three angelic warnings. The first angel of Chapter 14 is crying: "Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come." The second angel is specifically announcing the fall of Babylon. The third angel warns that anyone who receives the mark of the beast will "drink of the wine of God's fury which has poured full strength into the cup of His wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb and the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever." God is never cruel, but He is both holy and just balanced by holy love for all people.

In chapter 15, the song that the martyred tribulation saints in heaven are singing as the angels come forth to pour out these bowls of wrath is the same song that Moses taught Israel to sing after the Red Sea! Now think of the relevance this had to John's original audience - the first century Christians called upon to endure the horrible persecutions of the Roman Empire. They are pointed back to the past and they see Israel persecuted terribly by Pharaoh crying "Oh, God, where are you?" Then come the judgments against Egypt and deliverance and victory! Then John says, 'Look forward to the very end of time. There will be terrible persecution. But then God's judgment will fall upon the persecutors and God's people will be delivered.'

Next, John introduces 7 angels with the 7 last plagues. These plagues are the contents of the 7 bowls of wrath.

The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> bowls bring us to Armageddon and then to the end, to the cataclysmic events in nature that come at the end of the age as described by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse? This is the conclusion of the second vision. The 6<sup>th</sup> seal, the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet and the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl are all referring to same event - the second coming of Christ at the very end of the age in Revelation 19.

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At the beginning of Chapter 17, we are entering a third vision of the Book of Revelation. We are into a new section of the book and the subject upon which we are focusing here is the final judgment of Babylon, the great harlot, at the Battle of Armageddon which concludes with the return of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

It would be useful for us now to stop and identify Babylon in chapters 17 through 18. Here are the most obvious options:

1. Babylon means Babylon. The Old Testament city will make a great comeback and be a player on the scene at the time of Christ's return in its old familiar role as a God-hater and persecutor of righteousness. Currently, the old site of Babylon is a part of a wasteland in Iraq.
2. The second possible identification is Rome. "The seven heads", John says, "are seven hills on which the woman sits". The city of Rome is built upon 7 hills and Rome in 90 AD, was the capital city of a godless empire which seemed to indulge in and enjoy virtually every kind of immorality. Babylon could be a code word for Rome.
3. Some modern commentators say that Babylon in Old Testament times and Rome in New Testament times were the personification of greed, violence, and wickedness and that John is simply pointing to an end time empire that embodies all of the wickedness and self-centeredness and blasphemy that its predecessors represented.

I am not sure which view you will pick for Babylon but I can say with certainty that there will be great sadness by those who found pleasure or profit in this city or their destroyed lifestyle. These include kings, merchants and sailors who indulged or traded in the city's wares only to see it destroyed in one day.

There is sadness by many on earth but rejoicing in heaven by those delivered by God from this city. They rejoice in Jesus, sing hallelujah and call on all the multitudes in heaven to praise God!

How should we understand this vision? First, God in his holiness judges sin. He has to be true to his character so the bowls of wrath and his judgment must be poured out on a sinful city like Babylon. Next, he is a God of mercy who offers a way of repentance through 7 bowls that warn the earth's inhabitants of his power but extend an invitation to turn from their ways. Will people recognize God or continue in their waywardness?

We can be part of the celebration in heaven by accepting what Jesus did for us. He is the risen Lamb of God who paid for our sin and offers us eternal life. Thanks for reading, join me tomorrow for the final section in Project 4.4 when Jesus wins!