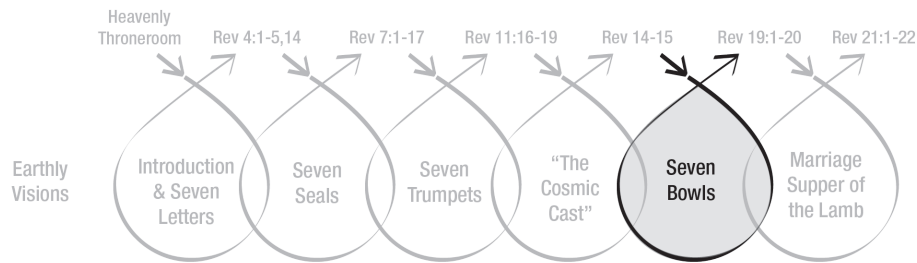


Session 7 – Questions

REVELATION

The Kingdom Yet to Come

Revelation 14-15 • Praising the Lamb



A. Review the Context

Chapters 12-14 are often called the “unnumbered visions” since they are not organized around a set of seven like the previous visions, but rather introduce us to the main characters in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. We met most of those beings in chapters 12-13. Revelation 14 provides a welcome relief from the satanic beasts introduced in the previous chapter. It transports us from “sea level,” where beasts emerged from the ocean and the valley floor, to a mountain—and not just any mountain, but Mount Zion itself. This is one of the names in the Old Testament for the true city of God. Almost always synonymous with Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, Zion is the dwelling place of God with his people. Here the false lamb of Revelation 13:11 is eclipsed by the brilliant vision of the Lamb of God and a great throng of the redeemed.

Though we want to remain in the heavenly courts, more angelic announcements will begin in chapter 15. This time they usher in the final set of judgments in the form of seven bowls of God’s wrath: a final recapitulation of the judgments unleashed by the seven seals and seven trumpets. Sides are drawn again between the powers of God and his enemies, and neutrality is not an option. The visions in Revelation 14-15 will give us a momentary glimpse into the ultimate outcome of the conflict and invite us to hope and have patience in our own times of trial and struggle.

B. Read the Story

Now carefully read **Revelation 14-15**. Ask yourself the questions: *Who? What? When? Where? How? Why?*

As always, pray before you read.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will draw you into the heart of the story. If you don’t understand something, make a note to bring it up in the discussion.

The Heavenly Zion and the Winepress of God’s Wrath (Revelation 14)

1. Describe those who are gathered around the Lamb on Mount Zion.

Why “chaste”?

The spotless 144,000 redeemed souls of Revelation 14 are chaste; they “have not defiled themselves with women.” Does this mean that sex is sinful? On the contrary. Rather, a contrast is being drawn between these followers of God and those who belonged to pagan cults. In the seven cities of Revelation 2-3, sexual activity was practically inseparable from the cult prostitution and pagan worship in the temples. In the letters addressed to them, fornication (2:14), adultery (2:22), and uncleanness (3:4) were connected to idolatry. To reject sexual immorality at that time was also to take a radical stand against the culture and cult of the Roman Empire. These redeemed souls are chaste not because they have kept themselves from sex but because they have kept themselves from idolatry.

2. In the next verses, we meet three new angels. Read Revelation 14:6-11 carefully. What message do they proclaim?

3. At this point the narrative is interrupted with an invitation to fidelity (vs. 12). There will be suffering for saints as well as sinners in the final days. In the midst of judgment, believers are invited to endure suffering and to trust and hope in the Lord.
 - a. What grounds for hope does the voice from heaven give?

 - b. Turn to **James 5:7-11, 5:13**. What advice does James give to suffering Christians?

4. Verses 14-16 reveal the crowned Son of Man enthroned on a heavenly cloud (see Daniel 7:13). We expect him to be holding a scepter, but instead he grips a sickle. This isn't the first agricultural image in Revelation 14. Earlier the 144,000 were called the “first fruits of God and the Lamb” (14:4). This means they were the first souls harvested from this world to the honor of God and the Lamb.

John is using images familiar to his audience, both through their knowledge of Jesus' words and their daily life in an agrarian society. Turn to the following passages. What images do they use in relationship to harvesting grain and spiritual realities?

Matthew 13:24-30:

John 4:35-38:

5. Following the Son of Man's harvest, another angel comes out of the Temple, sickle in hand, to harvest clusters of grapes (vss. 17-20). Unlike the previous harvest of holy souls, these are grapes of wrath. As we saw in Jesus' parable above, the process that gathers the good souls at the same time discards and destroys those who have rejected God. Salvation and judgment are flip sides of the same coin.

Judgment imaged in a harvest was a favorite motif of the prophets. Turn to the following prophetic passages. How do they use the harvesting of grapes in relationship to judgment? Remember to look at the broader context of the chapter.

Isaiah 63:1-6:

Joel 3:1-2, 3:13 [Joel 4:1-2, 13 in the New American Bible]:

The Song of Moses and the Lamb (Revelation 15)

6. Revelation 15 introduces seven more angels with seven plagues. What hope does verse 1 hold out for those who are weary of judgment?
7. Before the plagues begin, John sees another vision of the throne room of God, "a sea of glass mingled with fire." Who is there and what are they doing?
8. Turn to **Exodus 15:1-18** and read the song of Moses, servant of God.
 - a. What similarities do you see between it and the song sung in Revelation 15:3-4?
 - b. How does the heavenly worship here transcend the joy of the Exodus of Israel?

9. At the close of Revelation 15, John sees “the temple of the tent of witness” opening before him. This probably corresponds to the tent Moses was originally shown by God as a pattern for the ancient tabernacle (Exodus 25:9). Even the angels are dressed like priests (see Revelation 1:13; Leviticus 16:4). What is given to these seven priestly angels, and how does the chapter end?
10. It can be difficult for us to view judgment as anything but negative. Turn to *Catechism No. 1040*. What are some of the positive elements of God’s judgment?

D. Application

These questions will help you apply some of the key themes of the lesson to your life. After meditating on them, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.

- Those who die in the Lord will find rest from their labors and their deeds will follow them (**Revelation 14:13**). What deeds do you hope will follow you into the next life? If you could imagine a family member or friend reflecting on your life and legacy at your funeral, how would you want to be remembered?
- In what ways can we act against injustices in the world today as an anticipation of the final justice brought by God at the end of time? (Use *Catechism Nos. 2818-2820* as a guide.)

Dear Lord,

Session 7 – Responses

Revelation 14-15 • Praising the Lamb

REVELATION
The Kingdom Yet to Come

A. Review the Context

Discussion Leaders: Take some time to review the context and what was learned last week. If you like, have someone read the introduction to this lesson (“Review the Context” in the Questions). Place yourself in the overall story by finding the reading in the diagram.

B. Read the Story

Discussion Leaders: Ask someone to summarize **Revelation 14-15**.

C. Take a Deeper Look

Discussion Leaders: Take your group through the questions, encouraging participation. Try to make sure the points covered in the Responses are brought up, even though discussion will often go beyond them. It may help the process to have someone read each passage before it is discussed.

The Heavenly Zion and the Winepress of God’s Wrath (Revelation 14)

1. *Describe those who are gathered around the Lamb on Mt. Zion.*

This great crowd of 144,000 have the names of the Lamb and of the Father written on their foreheads—in contrast to those who bore the number of the beast. (Remember that 144,000 is just a large number symbolizing the whole number of the faithful, all Israel both old and new, gathered together.) They are singing a new song to God, the words and music of which are known by this heavenly choir alone. They are chaste, faithful followers of the Lamb, redeemed from among mankind as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb. There is no deceit in their mouths, and their souls are “spotless” — literally “unblemished,” a term used to describe an appropriate sacrifice. In this they are like the Lamb Himself who “offered himself without blemish to God” (Hebrews 9:14).

2. *In the next verses, we meet three new angels. Read **Revelation 14:6-11** carefully. What message do they proclaim?*

The first angel carries a message from God himself, an eternal word of Good News for every nation, tribe, tongue, and people. The message is simple: the hour of judgment has come. Fear and glorify God, worship the Creator of all that is. The second angel announces that Babylon—the symbol of this world’s power—has fallen. That which drew the nations into “her impure passion” has power no more. The third angel warns that those who have given their lives and hearts to this world system (those who worship the beast and receive his mark on their head or their hand) will suffer eternal torment.

3. *At this point the narrative is interrupted with an invitation to fidelity (vs.12). There will be suffering for saints as well as sinners in the final days. In the midst of judgment, believers are invited to endure suffering and to trust and hope in the Lord.*

- a. *What grounds for hope does the voice from heaven give?*

Faithfulness to the Lord may lead to death, but the voice from heaven proclaims that those who die in the Lord are blessed. Death means rest from their labors and reward for their good deeds in the new life that follows.

- b. *Turn to **James 5:7-11, 5:13**. What advice does James give to suffering Christians?*

Keeping God's commands and faith in Jesus may be hard if we are faced with the kind of suffering described in Revelation 14, which will come at the end. James reminds us to patiently and faithfully await the Lord's coming. That coming is at hand and could be at any moment. Like a faithful farmer that waits for the fruit of his labors, we should wait with vigilance for God, establishing our hearts and avoiding judging others lest we be judged. As examples of suffering and patience he holds up the prophets and Job; they were steadfast in their faith and therefore "happy," or blessed. In their example we see God's purpose, his compassion and mercy. Finally, James exhorts those who suffer to pray. As he later reminds us in verse 16, "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects."

4. ***Verses 14-16** reveal the crowned Son of Man enthroned on a heavenly cloud (see Daniel 7:13). We expect him to be holding a scepter, but instead he grips a sickle. This isn't the first agricultural image in Revelation 14. Earlier the 144,000 were called the "first fruits of God and the Lamb" (14:4). This means they were the first souls harvested from this world to the honor of God and the Lamb.*

John is using images familiar to his audience, both through their knowledge of Jesus' words and their daily life in an agrarian society. Turn to the following passages. What images do they use in relationship to harvesting grain and spiritual realities?

Matthew 13:24-30: In this parable, Jesus compares the spiritual reality of God's kingdom on earth to planting seeds of grain in a field. During the farmer's time of slumber, his enemies sow weeds among his new wheat. Weeds appear with the wheat, competing for scarce resources. Against the advice of his servants who want to remove the wheat immediately, the wise farmer chooses to harvest the entire field at the end of the season, weeds and all. At that time, the reapers will gather the weeds for destruction and the wheat into the safety of the farmer's barns.

John 4:35-38: Jesus reminds his disciples to use their time learning at his feet as if they were farmers standing with sickles before a field plump with new grain. In so doing, they will gather fruit for eternal life. Jesus (the Sower) and the disciples (those who reap) can then rejoice together at the harvest (souls brought into God's family) that will follow. The disciples themselves will reap the harvest of those who sowed before them.

Facilitators: Recall the missionary work performed by the Samaritan woman that prepared the way for the apostles to later carry the Gospel into Samaria (Acts 1:8).

5. *Following the Son of Man's harvest, another angel comes out of the Temple, sickle in hand, to harvest clusters of grapes (vss. 17-20). Unlike the previous harvest of holy souls, these are grapes of wrath. As we saw in Jesus' parable above, the process that gathers the good souls at the same time discards and destroys those who have rejected God. Salvation and Judgment are flip sides of the same coin.*

Judgment imaged in a harvest was a favorite motif of the prophets. Turn to the following prophetic passages. How do they use the harvesting of grapes in relationship to judgment? Remember to look at the broader context of the chapter.

Isaiah 63:1-6: God appears in glorious crimson garments, announcing his power to save his people. God tells Isaiah he has trodden the winepress alone, crushing the enemies of God's people in his righteous anger.

Joel 3:1-2, 3:13 [Joel 4:1-2, 4:13 in the New American Bible]: God promises Joel that in a future time he will restore God's people and bring his righteous judgment upon her enemies. Joel asks the Lord to do as he has said and swing the sickle to harvest the nations. He prays that God will himself tread upon the wicked nations in his heavenly winepress.

The Song of Moses and the Lamb (Revelation 15)

6. **Revelation 15** introduces seven more angels with seven plagues. What hope does verse 1 hold out for those who are weary of judgment?

This series of seven judgments will be the last: "With them the wrath of God is ended." It represents the fullness of God's judgment on evil in this world.

7. Before the plagues begin, John sees another vision of the throne room of God, "a sea of glass mingled with fire." Who is there and what are they doing?

Those who conquered the beast are holding harps and singing a new song: the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. That they stand by a "sea" mingled with fire brings to mind the Red Sea of the Exodus, next to which the children of Israel stood after crossing it and gaining victory over Egypt.

8. Turn to **Exodus 15:1-18** and read the Song of Moses, servant of God.
- a. What similarities do you see between it and the song sung in **Revelation 15:3-4**?

Although there is no exact literary correspondence between the two songs, both focus on the character and beauty of God. Both proclaim the salvation of God and the revelation of his judgment—his provision of victory in this world over the enemies of God's people.

- b. How does the heavenly worship here transcend the joy of the Exodus of Israel?

For over a thousand years, the Exodus was the primary motif of God's salvation of his people in every age. It is not coincidence that the imagery of Revelation presents the events of the last days as the final and eschatological Exodus of the people of God. But while it was possible to return to slavery from that first Exodus, in this final one God's enemies will be definitively destroyed, and sin and death will lose their grip on Creation. This can be seen in the differences between the songs: in the earlier one, Israel exults over the defeated enemy and the other nations are described as shrinking in fear of God. In contrast, the heavenly song in Revelation sees all nations drawn to God and worshiping him at the revelation of his judgments. This joy is greater than the joy that only pointed to it: all nations will worship the Lord and enter the rest he promises to those who come to him with faith.

9. At the close of **Revelation 15**, John sees "the temple of the tent of witness" opening before him. This probably corresponds to the tent Moses was originally shown by God as a pattern for the ancient Tabernacle (**Exodus 25:9**). Even the angels are dressed like priests (see **Revelation 1:13; Leviticus 16:4**). What is given to these seven priestly angels, and how does the chapter end?

One of the living creatures gives each of the angels a bowl of God's wrath. These might suggest the bronze basins that received the ashes of sacrifice in the Old Covenant (Exodus 27:3). The chapter ends in anticipation. The temple is filled with smoke, giving evidence of God's glory and power, and just as no one could enter the Holy of Holies while it was filled with God's glory and presence, no one will be able to enter here until the seven plagues—the fiery wrath to be poured out on earth from the bowls—are ended.

10. *It can be difficult for us to view judgment as anything but negative. Turn to **Catechism** No. 1040. What are some of the positive elements of God's judgment?*

The Last Judgment of Christ will reveal to us the ultimate meaning of all of God's creative and salvific work. It will show us all the inner workings of the divine providence that ordered all things to their final end. The Final Judgment will reveal that God's justice will triumph over all human injustices.

D. Application

Discussion Leaders: If time allows, have group members share their responses to the following application questions:

- *Those who die in the Lord will find rest from their labors and their deeds will follow them (**Revelation 14:13**). What deeds do you hope will follow you into the next life? If you could imagine a family member or friend reflecting on your life and legacy at your funeral, how would you want to be remembered?*
- *In what ways can we act against injustices in the world today as an anticipation of the final justice brought by God at the end of time? (Use **Catechism Nos. 2818-2820** as a guide.)*