

Voices of Victory Revelation 14—16

One of the themes that links **Revelation 14—16** together is expressed by the word *voice*, which is used eleven times. In the events recorded, God speaks to his people or to the lost world, or His creatures speak out in praise of the Lord or in warning to the world. As the world moves into the last half of the tribulation, heaven is not silent.

- **The Voice Of The 144,000 (14:1-5)**

This special group of Jewish men was sealed by God before the seventh seal was opened (**Rev. 7**), and now they are seen on Mount Zion with the Lord Jesus Christ. Contrast this picture to the one described in **Revelation 13**: the followers of “the beast” whose mark is on their foreheads (**Rev. 13:16**). God always has His faithful people, no matter how wicked the world may become.

The 144,000 are *standing* with Christ on Mount Zion, but which Mount Zion: the heavenly one (**Heb. 12:22-24**) or the earthly one? It is believed that this is the heavenly Mount Zion, and that the scene anticipates Christ’s coronation and the establishment of His kingdom when He returns to earth (**Zech. 14:4ff.**). Christ today is enthroned in the heavenly Zion (**Ps. 2:6**), and we are enthroned with Him (**Eph. 2:6**). The scene in **Revelation 14** is the assurance to God’s people that He cares for His own and finally will take them to glory.

- a. Not only are the 144,000 standing, but they are also *singing* (**Rev. 14:2-3**). Because of the special experience they had during the tribulation, they have a new song to sing that others cannot share. They are accompanied by heavenly harps and other heavenly voices. It is encouraging to know that one day our sorrows will be transformed into song!
- b. John pointed out their *separation* (**Rev. 14:4-5**). The 144,000 did not belong to the earth because they had been redeemed *out of* the earth. They were not earth-dwellers, but citizens of heaven. Believers today do not belong to this very special group but like them, we have been redeemed and are not part of this world system (see **John 17:14-19**; **Phil. 3:17-21**).
- c. The phrase “defiled with women” does not imply that sex within marriage is evil, because it is not (**Heb. 13:4**). It merely indicates that these 144,000 Jewish men were unmarried. In the Bible, fornication and adultery are pictures of idolatry (**Ex. 34:15**; **James 4:4**). While most of the world bowed down to the image of “the beast,” the 144,000 were faithful to the true God. While others lied to get what they needed, the 144,000 were without guile and blemish.

- d. The term *firstfruits* means “the very finest.” But it also carries the idea of an expected harvest. On the Feast of Firstfruits, the priest waved the sheaf before the Lord as a sign that the entire harvest belonged to Him (**Lev. 23:9-14**). The 144,000 may be the firstfruits of the harvest yet to come; they may be the nucleus of the coming kingdom. However, it would seem difficult for a *heavenly* company such as this to establish an earthly kingdom.

- **The Voices Of The Angels (14:6-20)**

At least six different angels are involved in this scene, each with a particular message to proclaim.

- 1) **“Judgment is come” (vv. 6-7).** During the present age, the angels are not privileged to preach the gospel. That responsibility has been given to God’s people. While the nations will fear “the beast” and give honor to him, this heavenly messenger will summon them to fear and honor God alone. It is a reminder that God is the Creator and He alone deserves worship. This is not the gospel message as we know it (**1 Cor. 15:1-4**); rather, it is a return to the message of **Romans 1:18ff.**, what theologians call “natural theology.”

All creation bears witness to God’s existence as well as to His power and wisdom. Nonetheless, “the beast” will convince men that he is in charge of the world, and that their destinies are in his hands. The message of the angel calls men back to basics: God is Creator—worship and serve Him. The fear of the Lord, not the fear of “the beast,” is the source of wisdom (**Prov. 9:10**).

- 2) **“Babylon is fallen” (v. 8).** This proclamation anticipates the events of **Revelation 18** (see also **Rev. 16:18-19**). We will consider it in detail then. “Babylon” is God’s name for the world system of “the beast,” the entire economic and political organization by which he rules. “The harlot” (**Rev. 17**) is the religious system that “the beast” uses to help build his organization. When the Antichrist establishes his own religion (**Rev. 13:11-15**), he will destroy the “harlot,” but it is God who will destroy Babylon.
- 3) **“Escape God’s wrath” (vv. 9-13).** The third message is directed especially to those who are deciding about following “the beast.” It is a warning that “the easy way” is really the hard way, that to “go along with the world” means to go away from God. The Greek text reads, “If any man continues to worship the beast,” suggesting that there is still opportunity for repentance and salvation.
 - a. “Drinking the cup” is sometimes used as an image of judgment (**Jer. 25:15ff.**). God’s final judgment on mankind will be “vials of wrath” poured out from heaven (**Rev. 16**). God will not mix mercy with this

judgment (**Ps. 75:8; Hab. 3:2**), but will pour out His undiluted indignation on a rebellious world.

- b. Images like “fire and brimstone” (**Rev. 14:10**) and “smoke” (**Rev. 14:11**) upset some people. They ask, “How can a God of love actually permit His creatures to suffer eternal torment?” But we must keep in mind that God’s love is a *holy* love, not one based on sentimentality, and therefore He must justly deal with sin. We may not like the word *torment*, but it is here just the same.
 - c. We must also keep in mind that God has repeatedly warned sinners and given them opportunity to repent. The first angel in this series invited sinners to turn to God, and the second one warned that the whole “Babylonian” system would be destroyed.
 - d. John intended for his readers to see the contrast between **Revelation 14:11** and **Revelation 14:13**: no rest for the wicked, but eternal rest for the saints (see **2 Thess. 1:3-12**). Better to reign with Christ forever than with the Antichrist for a few short years! Better to endure persecution patiently now than to escape it and suffer throughout eternity!
- 4) “**The harvest is ripe**” (**vv. 14-20**). The Person pictured here on the white cloud is undoubtedly our Lord Jesus Christ (see **Dan. 7:13-14; Rev. 1:13**). We have had the image of the cup, and now we have the image of the harvest, both of the grain and of the grape. Again, this anticipates the final judgment of the world.

While winning lost souls to Christ is sometimes pictured as a harvest (**John 4:34-38**), this image is also used of God’s judgment (**Matt. 13:24-30**). God permits the seeds of iniquity to grow until they are ripe, and then he judges (**Gen. 15:16**).

The grape harvest is often a picture of judgment (see **Joel 3:13ff.**, which anticipates the day of the Lord). In actuality, Scripture portrays three different “vines.” Israel was God’s vine, planted in the land to bear fruit for God’s glory, but the nation failed God and had to be cut down (**Ps. 80:8-16; Isa. 5:1-7**). Today, Christ is the Vine, and believers are branches in Him (**John 15**). But the world system is also a vine, “the vine of the earth” in contrast to Christ, the heavenly Vine, and it is ripening for Judgment.

The wicked system—Babylon—that intoxicates people and controls them, will one day be cut down and destroyed in “the winepress of the wrath of God.”

Some see in this image an anticipation of the “battle of Armageddon,” when the armies of the world will gather against Jerusalem (**Zech. 14:1-4; Rev. 16:16**). Certainly, John is using hyperbole when he describes a river of blood four feet deep and 200 miles long (see also **Isa. 63:1-6**). Today, God is speaking to the world in grace, and men will not listen. One day hence, He must speak in wrath.

Knowing the Bible Series, Stephen Witmer, Crossway; Life Application Study Bible, Tyndale; ESV Study Bible, Crossway; King James Open Study Bible, Nelson; Be Victorious, Warren W. Wiersbe, David Cook.

The bitter cup will be drunk, the harvest of sin reaped, and the vine of the earth cut down and cast into the winepress.

- **The Voice of The Victors (15:1-4)**

At this point, John saw the seven angels holding the seven vials of God's wrath, poised for action. The wicked world is about to "drink of the wine of the wrath of God" (**Rev. 14:10**), but before the angels pour out their judgments, there is an "interlude" of blessing. Before sending the "third woe" (**Rev. 11:14**), God once again reassures His faithful people.

- a. John saw the believers from the tribulation who had overcome "the beast" and his system. These are the people who "loved not their lives unto the death" (**Rev. 12:11**). Since they did not cooperate with the satanic system and receive the mark of "the beast," they were unable to buy or sell (**Rev. 13:17**). They were totally dependent on the Lord for their daily bread.
- b. The entire scene is reminiscent of Israel following the exodus. The nation had been delivered from Egypt by the blood of the lamb, and the Egyptian army had been destroyed at the Red Sea. In thankfulness to God, the Israelites stood by the sea and sang "the song of Moses." The tribulation saints whom John saw and heard were standing by the "sea of glass" in heaven (**Rev. 4:6**), just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea. They were singing "the song of Moses" and also "the song of the Lamb."
- c. "The song of Moses" is recorded in **Exodus 15**, and its refrain is "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation" (**Ex. 15:2**). The 144,000 sang a song that nobody else could sing, but this is a song all saints can sing.
- d. In the future, when God shall call His people back to their land, Isaiah prophesied that they would sing this song again (**Isa. 11:15—12:6**). "The song of Moses" is indeed an important song in the hymnal of the Jewish nation.

This scene would give great assurance and endurance to suffering saints in any age of the church. It is possible to be victorious over the world system! One does not have to yield to the "mark of the beast." Through the blood of the Lamb, we have deliverance. Our Lord's work on the cross is a "spiritual exodus" accomplished by His blood (note **Luke 9:31** where the word "decease" is *exodus* in the Greek).

In their song, the tribulation saints praise God's works as well as His ways. The earth-dwellers certainly would not praise God for His works, and they would never understand His ways. God's works are great and marvelous, and His ways are just and true. There is no complaint here about the way God permitted these people to suffer! It would save us a great deal of sorrow if we would acknowledge God's sovereignty in this same way today!

- e. The phrase “king of saints” can also be read “king of ages.” God is the eternal King, but He is also in charge of history. Nothing happens by accident. **Revelation 15:4** is another anticipation of the kingdom, foretelling the time when all nations shall worship the Lamb and obey Him. This verse also announces that God’s judgments are about to be manifested.

- **The Voice Of Fulfillment (15:5-16:21)**

The “great voice” out of the temple commands the seven angels to pour out the contents of their vials (**Rev. 16:1**), after which he announces, “It is done” (**Rev.16:17**). The “mystery of God” is finished (**Rev. 10:17**)! The martyrs in glory had asked, “How long?” (**Rev. 6:9-11**) and now their cry would be answered.

The seven angels emerge from the heavenly temple (see **Rev. 11:19**), because their work is holy as are the judgments they bring. The angel’s clothing remind us of the priestly garments, for their service is a divine ministry.

Each of the angels has a specific “target” for the contents of his vial. The earth-dwellers have already suffered from the seal and trumpet judgments, but this final series of judgments will climax God’s plan, leading to Babylon’s fall and Jesus Christ’s return to earth.

- a. **Grievous sores (v. 2).** This vial judgment reminds us of the sixth plague in Egypt (**Ex. 9:8-12**). Only those who have submitted to “the beast” and who have rejected the warning of the first angel will experience this judgment.
 - 1. **Revelation 16:10-11** suggests that these sores do not disappear, for by the time of the fifth vial, people are still in pain from the first judgment. Yet their pain will not cause them to repent.
 - 2. It is an awesome thought to consider almost the entire population of the world suffering from a painful malady that nothing can cure.
- b. **Water turned to blood (vv. 3-6).** The second and third vials parallel the first plague of Egypt (**Ex. 7:14-25**). The second vial will center on the sea and the third will turn the inland waters (rivers and fountains) into blood. When the second trumpet judgment occurred, a third part of the sea became blood, but with this judgment, the entire system of seas and oceans will be polluted. The third trumpet made a third part of the inland waters bitter as wormwood, but the third vial will turn all of those bitter waters into blood.
 - 1. Heaven gives justification for this terrible judgment: the earth-dwellers have shed the blood of God’s people, so it is only right that they should drink blood. In God’s government, the punishment fits the crime.

- c. Great heat from the sun (vv. 8-9).** All earthly life depends on the light of the sun. In previous judgments, a part of the sun had been dimmed (**Rev. 8:12**), but now the heat of the sun is increased. Anyone who has been in the desert knows how merciless the sun's heat can be. Remembering too that the water system is now useless, you can imagine how people will suffer from thirst. Alas, even this judgment will not bring men to their knees (see **Mal. 4:1**)!
- d. Darkness (vv. 10-11).** This is not worldwide darkness; only "the beast," his throne, and his kingdom are affected. This reminds us of the fifth trumpet (**Rev. 9:2**) and the ninth plague (**Ex. 10:21-23**). Where is the throne of "the beast"? His image is in the temple in Jerusalem, so that may be the center of his operation. Or perhaps he is ruling from Rome, in cooperation with the apostate church headquartered there.
1. When God sent the ninth plague to Egypt, the entire land was dark, except for Goshen where the Israelites lived. The judgment of the fifth vial is just the opposite: there is light for the world, but darkness reigns at the headquarters of "the beast"! Certainly, this will be a great blow to his "image" throughout the earth.
- e. The Euphrates dried up (vv. 12-16).** This famous river was mentioned earlier in Revelation, when the sixth trumpet sounded (**Rev. 9:13ff.**) and the angels were loosed who were bound therein. At that time, an army of demonic horsemen was also released. Now, an army from the nations of the world gathers for the great battle at Armageddon. The drying up of the river will make it possible for the army of the "kings of the East" to come to Palestine and invade the Holy Land.
1. We often speak of "the battle of Armageddon," but nowhere does the Bible use that phrase. On September 2, 1945, when General Douglas MacArthur supervised signing the peace treaty with Japan, he said, "We have had our last chance. If we will not devise something greater and more equitable [than war], Armageddon will be at our door."
 2. The name *Armageddon* comes from two Hebrew words, *har Megiddo*, the hill of Megiddo. The word *Megiddo* means "place of troops" or "place of slaughter." It is also called the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel. The area is about fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long, and forms what Napoleon called "the most natural battlefield of the whole earth."
 - a. Standing on Mount Carmel and overlooking that great plain, you can well understand why it would be used for gathering the armies of the nations.

From a human viewpoint, it appears that the armies of the nations are gathering on their own, but John makes it clear that the military movement is according to God's plan. The satanic trinity, through demonic powers will influence the nations and cause the rulers to assemble their armies. They will even work miracles that will impress the rulers and cause them to cooperate. But all this will merely fulfill the will of God and accomplish His purposes (see **Rev. 17:17**). The Gentile nations will look on Armageddon as a battle, but to God, it will be only a "supper" for the fowls of the air (**Rev. 19:17-21**).

Zechariah 12 and 14 describe this event from Israel's point of view. Since "the beast" has set up his image in the temple at Jerusalem, and since many of the Jews will not bow down to him, it is natural that the Holy City should be the object of attack. However, the Jews are not the only ones involved, for God has a purpose for the Gentile nations as well. **Joel 3:9-21** parallels the Zechariah references, and **Joel 3:19** makes it clear that God will punish the Gentiles for the way they have treated the Jews.

The outcome of the "battle" is recorded in **Revelation 19**: The Lord returns and defeats his enemies. Obviously, the assembling and marching armies create no problem for Almighty God. When the nations rage and defy him, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure" (**Ps. 2:4-5**).

- a. **"It is done" (vv. 17-21)**. The devil is "the prince of the power of the air," so perhaps this seventh vial has a special effect on his dominion (**Eph. 2:2**). But the immediate result is a devastating earthquake that effects the cities of the nations. Satan's entire system is now about to be judged by God: his religious system (the harlot, **Rev. 17**), his political system and economic system (Babylon, **Rev. 18**), and his military system (the armies, **Rev. 19**).

The "great city" (**Rev. 16:19**) is probably Jerusalem (see **Rev. 11:8**). The prophet Zechariah prophesied of an earthquake that would change the topography of Jerusalem (**Zech. 14:4**). But the key idea here is Babylon would fall (see **Jer. 50-51**). "The beast's" great economic system which subjugated the people of the world, would be completely destroyed by God.

Added to the earthquake will be a hailstorm with hailstones of tremendous weight. (A talent of silver weighs about 125 pounds.) This judgment is reminiscent of the seventh plague in Egypt (**Ex. 9:22-26**). Just as Pharaoh and the Egyptian leaders did not repent, so the earth-dwellers will not repent; in fact, they will blaspheme God! No wonder the hail comes, for blasphemers are supposed to be stoned to death (**Lev. 24:16**).

Reviewing these three chapters, we see the encouragement they give to suffering Christians. The sealed 144,000 will arrive on Mount Zion to praise God (**Rev. 13:1-5**). The martyrs will also be in glory, praising God (**Rev. 15:1-4**). John's message is clear; It is possible to be victorious over "the beast" and be an overcomer!

Movement of armies, confederations of nations, and worldwide opposition to God cannot hinder the Lord from fulfilling His Word and achieving His purposes. Men think they are free to do as they please, but in reality, they are accomplishing the plans and purposes of God!

Every generation of Christians has been able to identify with the events in **Revelation 14-16**. There has always been a 'beast' to oppress God's people and a false prophet to try to lead them astray. We have always been on the verge of an "Armageddon" as the nations wage war.

But in the last days, these events will accelerate and the Bible's prophecies will be ultimately fulfilled. Many believe the church will not be on the scene at the time, but both Jewish and Gentile believers will be living who will have to endure the Antichrist's rule.

The admonition in **Revelation 16:15** applies to us all: "Behold, I [Jesus] come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." Jesus Christ may return at any time, and it behooves us to keep our lives clean, to watch, and to be faithful.

Homework: Desolation And Destruction!. Read Revelation 17—18 .