

A thick black L-shaped frame is positioned on the left and bottom edges of the page, framing the central text.

# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapters 14-15

# Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,  
all our actions by your holy inspirations,  
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,  
that every prayer and work of ours  
may begin always from you,  
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

# Summary of chapters 13-14

- We were introduced in chapter 13 to the devil's primary minions: the beast and the false prophet
  - *With political power and deception, they will work through human agencies to destroy the 'offspring of the Lamb' (the faithful of the Lord) and ceaselessly work against the Church.*
- As history progresses and the final battle draws near, the 'battle lines' will be clearly drawn and the choice before all people will be manifestly evident:
  - *Either we are the people of God, marked with his seal (the 144,000)*
  - *Or we are the 'inhabitants of the earth,' belonging to the beast and marked with his seal*
  - *As Fulton Sheen once said, at our judgment, we will hear either Christ or the devil say one word to us: "mine"*
  - *Hence the exhortation to set ourselves securely on the side of the Lord in faith and perseverance, to "be all the more eager to make your call and election firm." (2 Pt 1:10)*

# Summary of chapters 13-14

- Those that do so will share in the glory of being the “Lamb’s companions,” of being numbered among the blessed of heaven (the 144,000) who will “sing a new hymn before the throne” (which we will see in chapter 15)
- What follows is a continuation of that heavenly scene and another exhortation to the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ to turn to God before the final “harvest.”

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

- This vision symbolically depicts the great missionary and evangelizing message of the Church, preaching the saving Gospel of Christ to every nation
  - *and once again demonstrating the patience and mercy of God towards the 'inhabitants of the earth,' not wishing them to perish, but to turn to him and join the 144,000 in the Kingdom*
- In the same way that the work of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet is manifested through human agency, so this proclamation of the Gospel by the three angels symbolizes the preaching of the Church.

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

## The first angel

- “Flying high overhead” – revealing that this Good News is directed to the whole world (just like the mission of the Church – Mt 28:18), and reaches to “every nation, tribe, tongue and people.”
  - *Notice that John does not refer to them as the ‘inhabitants of the earth,’ those opposed to God. This “everlasting good news” that God’s eternal reign is about to begin is meant for everyone.*
- “Fear God and give him glory” – a call to repent and to abandon the worship of the beast (anything except God) and to come and join God’s people in the Church
- “His time has come” – the fullness of God’s reign is about to be inaugurated
- “Worship him who made heaven and earth” – turn away from whatever idols you are worshiping. That is, don’t worship anything created – rather, worship the Creator

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

## The second angel

### ■ “Fallen, fallen is Babylon”

- *First mention of Babylon, which will be a major ‘character’ in the coming chapters.*
- *Babylon was the capital of the empire that destroyed the Temple of Solomon in 587BC and sent the Jews into exile.*
- *It was also the site of the Tower of Babel (Babylon), representing pride and defiance of God’s law. It has become ever since a symbol of the enemies of God and his people.*
- *In Revelation, Babylon symbolized Rome to its first century audience, but also represents the oppressing, persecuting and corrupting influence of the world or a worldly power against the Church in any age.*
- *Notice the “prophetic past tense” - (Babylon is fallen) – the certainty of God’s victory is beyond question.*

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

## The second angel

### ■ “drink the wine of her licentious passion”

- *Babylon is personified as a woman in Revelation, specifically as a harlot.*
- *As we will see, she will offer quite a contrast to the faithful “woman” of chapter 12, who we’ll see again later.*
- *This phrase from the Greek literally means the “passion of her fornication,” a reference both to sexual immorality but also to idolatry*
- *More on Babylon to come...*

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

## The third angel

- This third message is an exhortation and a warning to the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ about what will happen if they do not repent and turn to the Lord
- As we’ve said, to “worship the beast or accept its mark” is to acknowledge anyone or anything as superior to God, to accept the usurpation of God’s place by anyone or anything else, to follow or participate in its evil, or most formally, to render devotion and adoration to anything except God.
  - *All of these in direct violation of the First Commandment.*
- “drink the wine of God’s fury” – a common OT metaphor and an awful image of suffering God’s inescapable judgment unto damnation (Is 51:17; Jer 25:15; 49:12, 51:7; Ezk 23:31)

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

- “tormented in burning sulfur” – literally “fire and brimstone,” the same judgment as befell Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24)
  - *In other words, the eternal punishment of hell*
  - *And as we will see, it is the ultimate fate of the devil, the beast and the false prophet (and those who follow them)*
- “smoke of the fire will rise forever and ever” – there will be ‘no relief’ from this unthinkable punishment
  - *Reminiscent of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna to which Jesus referred in the Gospels as the eternal penalty for the wicked (Mt 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15; Mk 9:43, 9:45, 9:47; Lk 12:5)*
- While the vision of heaven portrayed many times in Revelation gives hope to the faithful, the vision of hell likewise gives motivation to the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ to repent.

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

“Here is what sustains the holy ones...”

- Another translation for v12: “Here is the patience of the saints, who keep the commandment of God, and the faith of Jesus” (DR)
- A summary of the Christian life:
  - *Perseverance in holiness*
  - *Keeping the Commandments*
  - *Believe and follow Jesus, imitating his faithfulness*
- “Write this”
  - *Presumably, John has been writing down all these things he has seen. This specific command tells us this is an important pronouncement. Indeed, it is part of the central message of the entire Book.*

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord”

- Meaning those who die as a result of persecution and martyrdom or as a faithful follower of the Lord, persevering in faith through the temptations and challenges of life.

“From now on”

- Not excluding those who came before but a reference to the coming persecution that the faithful will have to endure at the hands of the beast and the false prophet as the end approaches

The Spirit speaks

- The Spirit tells us why those who die in the Lord are blessed: they will “find rest,” the opposite of the eternal torment of the wicked, who will find “no relief.”

# The Three Angels (14:6-13)

“Their works accompany them”

- Every good deed carried out for love of God and love of neighbor, and every act of faithfulness and perseverance will be remembered into eternity and will be rewarded by God
- Recall the lesson of Mt 6 (from Ash Wednesday) to pray, fast and give alms in secret so that “your heavenly Father, who sees in secret will repay you.”
  - *This is the moment of repayment!*
  - *Have faith that God sees and knows the love behind our faithful actions*
  - *What an act of faith if only God knows of them!*
- Thus the message conveyed is not to fear the persecution to come or even death. You are blessed!

# The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)

- This is an image of the Day of Judgment, and it uses a metaphor of the harvest, a familiar image to John's first-century audience.
- Jesus himself used this image (Mt 13:30 – the parable of the wheat and the weeds)
- The harvest of the grain symbolizes the gathering of the faithful in heaven, while the harvest of the grapes symbolizes gathering of the 'inhabitants of the earth' into hell
- “Fully ripe”
  - *the time of the Church has ended, and the moment known to the Father from all eternity for the end of history has arrived (Mt 24:36)*
- “Swung his sickle”
  - *An image of the harvest. The single swing reminds us that the moment of judgment is effortless for God and happens in an instant*

# The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)

## ■ “Wine press of God’s fury”

- *His wrath, the just punishment for obstinate and unrepentant sinners*
- *Again, an effortless, instantaneous act by God. (Evil never had a chance)*
- *The blood of the wicked flows out like wine from a wine press, an awful image of the judgment of the wicked*
- *It is a large number of people – enough that their blood covers an area 200 miles long up to the height of a horse’s bridle*

## ■ 200 miles

- *Literally 1600 stadia (or furlongs), a Greek unit of distance*
- *$4^2 \times 10^2$*
- *As we’ve said, four is a symbol of the whole world (the four corners of the earth), and ten is a symbol of completeness or totality. Squaring the numbers implies a ‘super-totality,’ the entire earth. A frightening picture of the number who will be lost*

# The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)

## ■ “Outside the city”

- *The judgment of the wicked takes place outside the city, reminiscent of the law of Moses, which ordered that certain activities associated with sin and death are to be done outside the camp, symbolically separated from the community of the faithful.*

## ■ Judgment of the Living

- *Note that this double judgment (the faithful and the wicked) is for those living on earth on the Last Day.*
- *We will see the judgment of the dead later in chapter 20*
- *The judgment of the wicked is truly awful, but it is purposefully depicted as such, as it is impossible to overstate the dread of freely rejecting God’s offer of salvation in Christ.*

# Intro to Chapter 15

- Our time period for chapter 15 is the Day of Judgment, just after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which we heard back in chapter 11.
- The intervening chapters, as we have said, are basically a retelling of part of salvation history, with the birth of the Messiah to the time of the Church and leading up once more to the last day.
- We pick up the story once more with the seven last plagues from the seven bowls of God's wrath, which will tell us in more detail how God will bring judgment upon the wicked and salvation to the faithful

# Intro to Chapter 15

- We recall back in chapter 9 that three plagues were unleashed against the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ (fire, smoke and sulfur)
- With these last seven, the total number of plagues will be ten, like the ten plagues unleashed against Pharoah in Exodus.
- These are the ‘last’ plagues, representing the finality of God’s judgment, through which his “fury is accomplished.”

# Excursus: “Judgment” “Wrath” and “Fury”

- We should not think of these terms as like human emotions in applying them to God.
- These expressions, found throughout the Bible, are images given in human terms that we can understand to reflect the justice and rightness of God’s sentence upon the world or individuals
- In Revelation, these terms are not used to describe the various calamities that God allows to befall the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ or even the entire world.
  - *Those calamities were allowed for the purpose of conversion*
- Rather, Revelation reserves ‘judgment,’ ‘wrath’ and ‘fury’ to describe God’s final response to those who obstinately refuse to cooperate with his grace and accept the free gift of salvation in Christ by repentance, baptism and faith.
  - *These words also reveal the severity of sin and its fundamental incompatibility with the holiness of God*
- In the chapters that remain, this final response will be revealed

# The Song of the Victors (15:1-4)

“Those who won the victory over the beast”

- These are the faithful – the martyrs and all others – who remained steadfast despite the temptations of evil and the persecutions of the world.
  - *They were faithful to Christ until the end, and here they are described as ‘victors,’ sharing in the salvation and victory of Jesus over death*
  - *We recall in chapter 2-3 that Jesus calls upon all the seven churches to remain faithful and become ‘victors’ themselves.*
  - *Let’s all get there – run so as to win the prize! (1 Cor 9:24)*
- Holding harps
  - *The perennial image of the blessed in heaven*
  - *Harps are musical instruments, and it follows that the triumphant faithful will sing a song to God in worship and thanksgiving – the “Song of the Lamb” – on the Last Day (which is the first day of heaven!)*

# The Song of the Victors (15:1-4)

## ■ The Song of the Lamb

- *Praise of the Lord's works, for they have accomplished all that he promised – the destruction of evil and the eternal salvation of the just*
- *His ways are just – we will see and understand his will and his judgment as good and right and perfect*
- *Who will not fear and glorify you? – the right response to the consummation of God's plan and the glory of his face*
- *He alone is holy – one of the chief characteristics of God, the source and perfection of all holiness*
- *All nations will come – Salvation is open to all peoples, and as we've seen, many converted and came to faith (the Church did her job!)*
- *His righteous acts have been revealed – the entirety of his plan, the fullness of his wisdom in human events will be seen and understood in its totality as perfect and good and worthy of praise.*

# The Heavenly Temple (15:5-8)

- “Tent of Testimony”
  - *Another name for the tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The very dwelling place and ‘footstool’ of God.*
- White linen and gold sashes
  - *The angels are dressed in formal liturgical attire, solemnly processing out of the Temple to carry out this final act of God’s judgment*

# The Heavenly Temple (15:5-8)

## ■ “Filled with smoke”

- *God’s glory and presence is commonly signified by smoke (or cloud), particularly at the first temple (tent) in the desert (Ex 40:35) and the Temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 8:11)*
- *Our modern-day use of incense is reminiscent of these scenes from Scripture*
- *The amount of smoke mentioned here signifies the prodigious and overpowering nature of God’s presence as he prepares to render his final judgment upon evil*

## ■ Seven gold bowls

- *These represent the seven last plagues and will be poured forth upon the ‘inhabitants of the earth’ in the coming chapters*
- *They symbolize the finality of God’s judgment, the absolute destruction of evil and the precursor of the full inauguration of the Kingdom.*

# In Two Weeks...

- Next class Wednesday, March 17
- The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath
- The Harlot Babylon
  
- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.