

***AN ENCOURAGEMENT FOR BELIEVERS
AND A FINAL WARNING FOR UNBELIEVERS***

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PART 1. THE ETERNAL STATE (14:1-5)

a. Explanation of the symbols

Revelation 14:1-5 takes Christians beyond time and gives them a glance of *the eternal state in heaven*. The present history of the world has come to an end and the eternal salvation is fully enjoyed by God's elect. After Christ's second coming not a single person of the complete number of believers in the Militant Church on earth will be missing from the Triumphant Church in heaven!

14:1 "Then I saw"¹. John sees another vision. This is a vision of events that will happen *after* the end of world history.

"The Lamb standing on Mount Zion"². The Lamb is Jesus Christ (John 1:29). In contrast to the beasts that rise continuously or again and again out of the sea and earth (present tense, 13:1,11), Christ stands firmly and unmoveable, holding his ground (perfect tense) as the Victor!

In the Old Testament, Mount Zion was *a symbol* representing either the *people* of God in Israel (Isaiah 49:14), or the *land* of Israel (Isaiah 51:3), or the *city* of Jerusalem (Isaiah 52:1-2), or even *heaven*, the place where God dwells (Psalm 50:2) or rules (Psalm 2:6; Micah 4:7). It was also a symbol of the place of deliverance for the survivors, whom God called and who consequently called on the name of God and were saved (Joel 2:32). Mount Zion was a symbol of unshakeable durability (Psalm 125:1).

In the New Testament, Mount Zion is *a symbol* of the city of the living God in heaven, the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24; cf. 11:9-10,13-16; 13:14; Galatians 4:24-26), which John sees coming down from heaven onto the new earth in Revelation 21:1-2. God will dwell and reign there in the midst of his people forever (21:3; 22:3-5).

Mount Zion cannot be the literal mountain on earth, because John heard a sound from heaven (14:2) and the people singing on Mount Zion were redeemed from the earth (14:3). Conclusion: Mount Zion is *a symbol* of heaven where God's throne stands (14:3).

Not only the Old Testament prophetic books, but also the book of Revelation speaks of literal realities in figurative language that far surpass what the symbols express literally.

"and with him 144 000". The 144 000 in Revelation 14:1 are the same group of 144 000 as in Revelation 7:4. It is *a symbol* of the total number of believers in history. Because Revelation 14:3 uses the definite article "*the* 144 000" and Revelation 7:4 also uses the definite article, "*the* number ... 144 000", both passages refer to the same group of people.

¹ και ειδον (viaa)

² το αρνιον εστως > ιστημι/ιστανω (vpra) επι το ορος Ζιων

Like all the numbers in the book of Revelation, this is a symbolic number referring to a literal reality. The number 3 symbolises the Triune God. The number 4 symbolises the whole earth. The number 12 (3x4) symbolises God's work on earth, thus, God's believing people in the Old Testament period (the 12 sons of Jacob as the heads of the tribes of Israel) and God's believing people in the New Testament period (the 12 apostles as the foundation of the Church). The number 10 symbolises completeness and the number 10x10x10 symbolises absolute completeness. Therefore, the number 144 000 (12x12)x(10x10x10) symbolically represents the absolute complete number of believers during the whole Old Testament and New Testament period, from the creation to the recreation of everything (Romans 11:12,25-26). It is an even number and as such expresses the fact that in God's eyes there is complete equality between believers from among the Jews and believers from among the Gentiles (Romans 10:12) and that every form of separateness or rivalry between them has been abolished (John 10:16; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14-15; 3:3-6).

“The 144 000 servants from the twelve tribes of Israel” (7:4) is a symbol representing all God's people from all nations in the world throughout the history of the world pictured at the beginning of their struggle on earth. It symbolises the Militant Church on earth after Christ's first coming. They are exposed to the attacks of their enemies (symbolised by the second to fourth seal) and the judgements of God (symbolised by the first to sixth trumpet). But they are nevertheless protected by God, because they have been sealed by God (cf. Ezekiel 9:4-6; Revelation 9:4).

“The 144 000 standing on Mount Zion” (14:1) is the same group of people pictured at the end of their struggle on earth. They symbolise the Triumphant Church in heaven after Christ's second coming. Throughout the trials (persecutions, oppressions) and temptations (seductions) on earth and despite everything that happened to Christians and the Church between Revelation chapter 8 to chapter 13, not one person belonging to Jesus Christ and his Militant Church on earth went lost (Matthew 24:24; John 17:11-12;15-17)! Every single believer in Jesus Christ remained sealed (protected, unharmed)(7:3) and undefiled, blameless (14:4-5). Their number remained absolutely complete! Only because of Jesus Christ they too stand firmly and unmoveable with him as Victor. Compare this with the promises of Jesus in John 5:24 and John 10:27-29.

“They continuously had³ the name of the Lamb and his Father's name written permanently⁴ on their foreheads” (3:12; 22:4; cf. 7:2-3; 9:4; Ezekiel 9:4-6; Matthew 27:66; 2 Corinthians 1:22). The name of God on the forehead is a symbol of protection and ownership. It marks them as the special possession of God and the Lamb and pictures them as bearing the characteristics of the one whose name they bear. Contrast this with Revelation 13:16 and 17:5.

14:2 “I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.” John could hear their singing and music from heaven. It was quite overwhelming, like the constant thunder of a great waterfall. And yet it was attractive and touching at the same time, like people playing on harps (cf. 5:8; 15:2). These are symbols of the overwhelming joy and attractive singing and music in heaven.

14:3 “And they sang a new song⁵ before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.” After Christ's first coming the twenty-four elders as representatives of the Church prophetically sing a new song (5:9-10). After Christ's second coming the full number of God's Old Testament people and God's New Testament people (all the elect) will also sing a new song (14:3; cf. 15:2-4; 19:1-7). The new song is a symbol of the completely new experience of complete and perfect salvation and joy in the final state.

“No one could learn the song except the 144 000 who had been redeemed (purchased) from the earth” (... “from among men”)(14:3-4). Only believers who experience the salvation of God in its fullest biblical sense can sing about it! Unbelievers do not experience that salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) and therefore cannot even learn to sing it. The redeemed from the earth⁶ means those bought and thus acquired as property from among all the rest of the people on earth. The word ‘from’⁷ indicates from whom or from what the purchase separates (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The purchase separates them from the sinful world (14:3), from the godless and wicked people of this world (14:4) and from the dominion and slavery of Satan (Colossians

³ εχουσαι (vrpa). The present tense emphasises that they *continuously* have the name of Christ written on their foreheads!

⁴ γεγραμμενον > γραφω (vrpr). The perfect tense indicates the continuing result of the authoritative writing. It remains written forever!

⁵ αδουσιν (vira) [ως] ωδην καινην ενωπιον του θρονου

⁶ ηγορασμενοι > αγοραζω (vrpr) απο της γης. The perfect tense indicates the continuing result of the purchase.

⁷ απο

1:13). Christ paid the price with his blood, which is a symbol of Christ's substitution sacrifice of the cross. He paid this price for all believers (cf. 5:9; 7:14; 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2 Peter 2:1). The good shepherd laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:11). Therefore all believers can sing about this salvation. The emphasis in their singing is on what Jesus Christ, the Redeemer has done for them (cf. Acts 14:27).

14:4 “These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure”. Literally “for they are chaste men”⁸. It does not refer to a special group of celibate male workers in the Church or a special group of saints within the community of believers, but to all believers, male and female. All believers remain faithful to Christ and are presented to Christ as a pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2). This expression is a symbol of faithfulness to Christ by not participating in the godlessness and wickedness of this world. This statement, therefore, does not look down upon marriage as God's institution for ordinary men (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6) or for elders (1 Timothy 3:2; 4:1-3). The 144 000 are symbolically “virgins that have not defiled themselves” with physical or spiritual immorality. They are pictured as the Triumphant Church, the Church made perfect and blameless. They are protected (by the seal of God) and remain standing in spite of all the trials and temptations that happen in Revelation chapter 8 to 13. Not one of them will be lost in the trials (persecutions) and temptations (seductions). That is why their number will remain complete (cf. John 17:11-12,15-17)!

Literally, “They keep on following the Lamb wherever he may go”⁹. This is a symbol of continual faithfulness to Christ when they were still on earth (Matthew 10:32,38; Luke 9:23) and later in heaven (7:17). Because the context refers to their lives while they were still on earth, a possible better translation is, “They kept on following the Lamb wherever he went”.

“They were purchased (redeemed) from among men, (as) first fruits to God and the Lamb”¹⁰. They have been purchased and thereby set apart from the rest of wicked mankind in the world. The word ‘purchased’ is explained in Revelation 5:9.

In the Old Testament, the first fruits of the harvest (Exodus 23:19; Numbers 18:12; Deuteronomy 18:4), of the people (Exodus 22:29), and of the cattle (Exodus 13:2,12,15) were always set apart from the other products of the harvest, people or cattle in general. They were separated to belong only to the Lord. The bringing of the first fruits, the best of their initial harvest, was a yearly obligation for all God's people to appear before the Lord (Exodus 34:22-23,26). Nothing of the new season's crop was available for ordinary consumption until the first fruits had been presented (Leviticus 23:9-14). The first fruits were given as food to the priests and Levites and their households (Numbers 18:12-13). Note that the first fruits of the harvest were presented on a Sunday, the day after the Sabbath day (Leviticus 23:11)! None of these references invites any comparison between the first fruits and the remainder of the crops, except that once the first fruits had been offered, the remainder of the crops was free to be used. God's people, Israel, were regarded as ‘holy’, that is, set apart from the evil world to belong to God. The words ‘the first fruits of his harvest’ stands parallel to the word ‘holy’ and therefore means the same thing (Jeremiah 2:3).

In the New Testament the world of created humanity, which belongs to God and is ripening for the final judgement, is often compared to a harvest (Matthew 9:37). The wheat (believers) is harvested and gathered into the barn (heaven), while the chaff or weeds is harvested and thrown into the fire (hell)(Matthew 3:12; 13:30). This is also done in Revelation 14:14-20, where the first fruits of humanity is harvested and gathered to belong to the Lord forever (14:14-16) and the rest of humanity is to be punished together with Satan (14:17-20).

Thus all believers in Jesus Christ are a kind of first fruits of all that God created (James 1:18). Out of everything God created they only are set apart to belong to God forever. Whoever does not belong to these first fruits, is not a believer. The first fruits is a symbol of the full number of all believers, another designation for the 144 000. They do not constitute a kind of select group in heaven, a group of super-saints. They constitute all believers purchased away from the rest of the people in the world. While they have the

⁸ οὗτοι εἰσιν (vīpa) οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολυνθῶσαν > μολυνῶ (vīam), παρθενοὶ γὰρ εἰσιν (vīpa).

The word ‘παρθενοῦς’ usually refers to a virgin, but here to a chaste man.

⁹ οὗτοι οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες (vīpa) τῷ ἀρνίῳ ὅπου ἀνὴρ ὑπάγει (vīpa)

¹⁰ οὗτοι ἠγορασθησαν > ἀγοραζῶ (vīar) ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ. When Christ is called ‘the first fruits’

(1 Corinthians 15:20,23) it means that he is the first One to be raised from the dead and as such is *set apart from* the rest of humanity who still face physical death. Here all genuine believers have been set apart from the rest of mankind.

name of God on their foreheads (14:1), the rest of humanity has the name of the beast on their foreheads (13:16-17). Thus, the first fruits consist of *all* God's elect, *all* believers.

14:5 “No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless”¹¹. In the Old Testament, this was a requirement for those who may dwell in God's sanctuary, who may live on his holy hill, Mount Zion, (Psalm 15:1-5). This would also be the characteristic of the faithful remnant of Israel, that is, of God's believing people within the nation of Israel (Zephaniah 3:13). What is said of the Messiah in the Old Testament, “there was no deceit in his mouth” (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22) is also said of the 144 000 in the New Testament. They did not accept the lie of Satan (John 8:44) and they did not yield to the propaganda of the false prophet (13:11-15), that is, of any false prophet on earth (Matthew 24:24). Like Jesus Christ, all believers in Jesus Christ are blameless (1 Peter 1:19). This is God's stamp of approval on the lives of all his people. They are not simply called ‘Christians’, but possess the righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30).

b. Different views about the number 144 000 (14:1)

There are four views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The 144 000 refers *literally* to a select group *during the future tribulation period*, the beginning of the restored nation of Israel. They are identical with the 144 000 from all the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7:3-8 and therefore *must be Jews*.¹²

If the 144 000 in Revelation 14:1 can be identified with the male child (12:5), they are *a select group of Jewish believers* snatched into heaven together with the Church in the middle of the future tribulation period (between 6:11 and 6:12). Here they stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion in heaven.¹³

Second view. The 144 000 refers *figuratively* to a special group of celibate male workers in the Church *throughout the whole New Testament period* who have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom (Matthew 19:12).¹⁴

Critique.

Although the Old Testament ceremonial law regarded sexual intercourse as causing people to be ceremonially unclean, the New Testament revelation regards the marriage relationship and the sexual relationship inside the marriage relationship just as holy as the relationship between Christ and the Church (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4). Only false teachers forbid believers (including elders¹⁵) to marry (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

Third view. The 144 000 refers *figuratively* to a special group of servants of God *throughout the whole New Testament period* who are to be distinguished from all other genuine Christians.

Because Revelation 14:3 uses the definite article *the* 144 000 they are to be distinguished from the 144 000 in Revelation 7:4. They are thus *a special group among all believers, chosen and called to a special service for God* and suffering for the Lord. Because only they experienced the special help of God in their special service and suffering, only they could sing about it. Only they are the first fruits. They are a special group of dedicated Christians who had kept themselves pure from spiritual adultery with the sinful world (James 1:27; 2 Corinthians 7:1).¹⁶ This view is refuted in the explanation above.

Fourth view. (The correct explanation) The 144 000 refer *symbolically* to the total number of believers *throughout salvation history*. Because Revelation 7:4 also uses the definite article, “*the number ... 144 000*”, both passages refer to the same group of people. They have been redeemed, not from all believers, but from all the rest of the people on earth (14:4). All believers are *redeemed out of the sinful world* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). All believers are compared to *faithful virgins* for Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). All believers are together the *first fruits* in God's creation (James 1:18). All believers are the *first fruits* in salvation that are harvested on the final judgement day (14:14-16).¹⁷

¹¹ και εν τω στοματι αυτων ουχ ευρεθη > ευρισκω (vīar) ψευδος αμωμοι εισιν (vīra)

¹² Larkin, Revelation p. 131

¹³ Tenney p. 78

¹⁴ Groenewald refutes this view on p. 147

¹⁵ πρεσβυτεροι (‘presbyters’, the Greek word from which the English word ‘priests’ derives its meaning.

¹⁶ Greijdanus p. 217-219

¹⁷ Hendriksen p. 183-185

PART 2. THE FINAL CALL TO REPENTANCE (14:6-13)

Revelation 14:6-13 takes Christians back into time *shortly before this present history of the world comes to an end*. Three angels bring a final warning to the people of this world about the coming final judgement. They fly in mid-air so that all people may see and hear them. They are symbols of God warning people with respect to the coming final judgement and calling them to turn to God in true faith.

The first angel announces that the final moment God's judgement is *about to happen!*

The second angel announces that this wicked world and its seductive culture *will certainly fall*.

The third angel announces that the people of this wicked world must realise that the coming wrath of God is *terrible*.

The announcements of the angels concern events that will happen in reversed order so as to impress people to repent before it is too late. People must choose between repentance and sharing the terrible fall and judgement of the godless and wicked world. The book of Revelation does not intend to describe events in chronological order. Just as Revelation 11:12 depicts the resurrection of the dead and Revelation 11:13 depicts events shortly *before* that event, so Revelation 14:1-5 depicts the eternal state after the end of the world and Revelation 14:6-13 depicts events shortly *before* the end of the world.

a. The first angel (14:6-7)

The first angel has the eternal gospel to proclaim to every nation on earth. His message is that the hour of the final judgement has arrived for each individual. Everyone must know that the God of the Bible has all the time been there. The God that was kicked away by people on earth, from whom people hid and from whom they fled demands worship. Not the scientific, industrial and agricultural accomplishments of man on earth are great. Not the 'gods' which man made from stone or devised with his religious mind is great. Not the worthless falling prostrate before gods devised by philosophers and false prophets are great. Only the God who reveals himself through the prophets in the Bible and through Jesus Christ is great! Only he must be worshipped!

14:6 "Then I saw another angel flying in mid air"¹⁸. John sees another vision: three angels flying in mid-air. Their announcements are *chronologically* in reversed order, because the emphasis is on the final event – the final judgement is about to happen! He urges people to repent before it is too late.

"and he had an eternal gospel to proclaim"¹⁹. The eternal gospel is not *the* message about salvation (Acts 20:24; Matthew 24:14), but a message about judgement. He announces that the final judgement day is about to happen (14:7). Their intention is to call the people of this world to repentance and conversion (cf. 2 Chronicles 30:6-9; Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11; Joel 2:12-14; 1 Timothy 2:4).

For believers who are suffering in this world this is good news, because it implies their final deliverance (cf. Habakkuk 3:13; Malachi 4:1-3)! For those who persist in their unbelief this is bad news, because their final judgement is imminent. The message is eternal, because both its promises and threats are not only proclaimed from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming, but will also be realised fully and will last forever.

How every nation, tribe, language and people will hear this message is not said. One could think of the calamities that must strike the earth before the end comes (Matthew 24:4-13). One could also think of ways of communication as sure as the radio or television that announces messages across the whole world today. If Christ can create everything quicker than light (Psalm 33:6,9), he can also warn everyone living on earth quicker than light (14:6), resurrect the dead and renew the still living believers quicker than light (1 Corinthians 15:52), and reveal himself to people in every country on earth quicker than light (1:7)! We must stop to think about God or Christ as limited to our categories of time and space!

"over those sitting on the earth"²⁰ and over every nation and tribe and language and people". The warning about the imminent judgement is proclaimed *over* those *sitting* on the earth, a symbol of the people on earth that are easy-going and indifferent, unconcerned, listless, careless and unconscious of the danger until it is

¹⁸ και ειδον (viaa) αλλον αγγελον πετομενον (vppn) εν μεσουρανηματι

¹⁹ εχοντα (vppa) ευαγγελιον αιωνιον ευαγγελισαι (vnaa). The infinitive expresses purpose.

²⁰ επι τους καθημενους (vppn) επι της γης

too late! It characterises people in general throughout all ages (Psalm 1:1), but especially in the period just before the final judgement. Just before the final judgement, people in general will be fascinated with earthly charms to the extent that they will not realise that the judgement is creeping upon them. They will be unconscious of their peril ... until it is too late (Luke 17:26-36).

14:7 “Fear²¹ God and give him glory” ... “Worship him who made the heavens, the earth and the sea”. To fear God is *to have awe* for God’s holiness and *to trust* God’s faithfulness. To glorify God is *to exalt* his attributes and deeds in word and deed. To worship God is to have an attitude of awe, adoration, submission and dedication (devotion) to God, which is expressed in different kinds of prayer and daily lifestyle. God is no longer pleased with worship in special religious buildings or special religious places (John 4:19-22). He is not served by human hands or their offerings (Acts 17:24-25). The God of the Bible seeks true worshippers, believers that worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

The content of the message is the same as that of Psalm 96 and 98: God comes to judge the world in righteousness. From the beginning, God has revealed his salvation, love and faithfulness to his people. All the ends of the earth have seen it (Psalm 98:2-3) and all God’s people were exhorted to proclaim it to the nations (Psalm 96:2-3). From the beginning, God has revealed his righteousness to the nations of the world (Psalm 98:2) and exhorted them to acknowledge his greatness, splendour, majesty, strength and glory, to worship him and tremble before him (Psalm 96:8-9), to acknowledge that God reigns on earth and that he will judge the peoples with equity, righteousness and truth (Psalm 96:10,13). Throughout the Bible, God has proclaimed *his coming for the salvation of his people and for the judgement of the others* (Matthew 13:41-42; Jude 1:14-16). Even the theme of the book of Revelation is “the Lord is coming!” (unto salvation and unto judgement) (1:7; 22:12,20).

“because the hour of his judgement has arrived”²²! The divinely appointed moment of the final judgement has arrived. The tense of the verb emphasises that this event *will certainly take place!*

The fact that this vision must be taken to heart by everyone who reads the book of Revelation (1:3) means that the final moment of Christ’s coming unto salvation and judgement is about to happen for every person in every generation. God keeps his promises and threats for every generation – his message is an ‘eternal gospel’, eternally dependable and eternally applicable. From the first coming of Christ onwards his coming unto salvation and judgement is about to happen to each person, because their unpredictable death is in a way the final moment of decision for each one of them (Proverbs 27:1; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2)!

b. Different views about the eternal gospel (14:6)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The eternal gospel is the message about grace and *salvation during the future tribulation period*. Even within the future tribulation period between Christ’s future first return (for the Church) and Christ’s future second return (for especially the Jews), until the very last hour, the door of faith is still open.²³

Second view. (The correct explanation) The eternal gospel is the message about the final *judgement* that is about to happen just *before Christ’s second coming*. It is not *the* message about salvation (Acts 20:24; Matthew 24:14), but a message about judgement. The angel announces that the final judgement day is about to happen (14:7).

²¹ φοβηθητε > φοβεω (vmam)

²² οτι ηλθεν (viaa) η ωρα της κρισεως αυτου. The so-called *futurist aorist tense* is a past tense that describes a future event as if it has already taken place. John’s intention is to emphasise that this event *will certainly take place!*

²³ Tenney p. 78

c. [The second angel \(14:8\)](#)

The second angel announces the crashing of the kingdom of the world. For the very last time the God of the Bible calls the sinking world to halt, turn and repent. His message is a warning and an appeal.

14:8 “A second angel followed²⁴ and said: ‘Fallen! Fallen²⁵ is Babylon the Great!’” Again the tense of the verb emphasises that this event *will certainly take place!* The fall of Babylon is proclaimed as if it has already happened in order to emphasise the absolute certainty of its impending fall. Revelation 18:21 describes her fall in Old Testament terms (Jeremiah 51:63-64).

The literal city of Babylon was founded by Nimrod and developed in rebellion against God (Genesis 9:1; 10:8-12; 11:1-9). It was marked by the zenith of Gentile pride under Nebuchadnezzar (Habakkuk 1:6-11; 2:2-12; Daniel 4:30). It exported her adulteries as “wine which made all the nations mad” (Jeremiah 51:7). Babylon was the implacable foe of the people of God, under whom they went into exile (Jeremiah 25:8-11). As the prophets prophesied, the city of Babylon literally fell to rise no more (Isaiah 13:19-20; 21:9; 47:7,11; Jeremiah 51:6-8,37,63-64; Daniel 5:30-31). By the first century A.D., Babylon had long ceased to be a world power. However, the spirit and domain of Babylon had passed on to Rome and ‘Babylon’ became the nickname for the city of Rome, because Rome was the capital of the oppressing Roman Empire (17:9; cf. 1 Peter 5:13). Nevertheless, the symbolism of Revelation chapters 17 and 18 transcends the Roman Empire in the days of John.

In the Old Testament, ‘Babylon’ is the *symbol* of the godless and wicked civilisation of the world (Isaiah 47:12-13) just as ‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ is the symbol of the believing and righteous community of God (Isaiah 54:10-14). Babylon is the symbol of the mandatory worship of the human ruler who represented the state (Daniel 3:1-4).

In the New Testament, Babylon continues to be the symbol of the godless and wicked civilisation of the world. The great prostitute is a symbol of the great city, Babylon (17:5,18), which in its turn is a symbol of something else (17:4-6). It is a symbol of Satan’s *antichristian world and its seductions*, especially in industry and commerce, business and finance, education and justice, luxuries and pleasures, art and sports, and certainly also in every kind of worldly religion (18:2-3,20,22). In short, it is a symbol of Satan’s *antichristian culture* connected to the world empires throughout the period from Christ’s first coming to Christ’s second coming. By means of all these seductions she seeks to entice and seduce people, to infatuate and blind people in order to turn them away from God (19:2). Babylon represents the world viewed as the centre of luxury, glamour and vice, as the embodiment of “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes and the boasting of what he has and does”. Babylon is “the world and its desires that pass away” (1 John 2:16-17).

“which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries”²⁶. ‘Adulteries’ mean spiritual, moral and physical adulteries, that is, doing the opposite of what God and his Word commands, whether in the spiritual, moral or physical realm. Compare this with what God will make the world drink (14:10)!

d. [Different views about Babylon \(14:8\)](#)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) Babylon is *a literal city* that would be rebuilt in the future in Iraq, which would *fall in the end of the second half of the future tribulation period* and be supplanted by the future millennial kingdom of Christ.

Second view. (The second futurist view) Babylon is *a symbol* for the entire godless world system of man’s culture, which would *fall in the end of the second half of the future tribulation period* and be supplanted by the future millennial kingdom of Christ.²⁷

²⁴ ηκολουθησεν (viaa)

²⁵ επεσεν (viaa). The so-called *futurist aorist tense* is a past tense that describes a future event as if it has already taken place. John’s intention is to emphasise that this event *will certainly take place!*

²⁶ η εκ του οινου του θυμου της πορνειας αυτης πεποτικεν > ποτιζω (give or cause to drink)(vira) παντα τα εθνη.

²⁷ Tenney p. 78-79

Third view. (The correct explanation) Babylon is *a symbol of Satan's antichristian culture* connected to the world empires throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming and will *fall at Christ's second coming*.

e. The third angel (14:9-12)

The third angel announces the reward of those who persevere in their faithfulness until the end. On earth they may be oppressed, persecuted, imprisoned and killed, but they will certainly rest from their labour and struggles on earth and their good deeds will certainly follow them (cf. Revelation 21:24).

14:9 “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships²⁸ the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand.’ The angel speaks in a loud voice in order to be heard in every part on earth. The beast is the beast out of the sea, who represents *Satan's antichristian governments and its persecutions*, especially in the great world empires with their kings that follow one another throughout the period from Christ's first coming to Christ's second coming.

In the final judgement it will become clear whom people have worshipped. God will not tolerate the worship of anyone or anything besides himself. He is not the ‘god’ of any other religion, but the God who revealed himself in the Bible, in the prophets of the Bible (Exodus 20:3-6; Deuteronomy 6:13-14; Hebrews 1:1) and finally in Jesus Christ (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:2-3). The word ‘anyone’ makes clear that the final judgement will not simply be global and communal, but will certainly be individual and personal. Anyone not belonging to Jesus Christ must face the terrible final judgement of God.

14:10 “he too will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been mixed undiluted into the cup of his wrath”²⁹.

In the Old Testament God's wrath is *symbolised* by a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices, ready to be poured out on the wicked of the earth (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17,22; Jeremiah 25:15-18,27-29). In those days, wine was drunk mixed, that is, diluted with water in order to make it more drinkable, or it was kept unmixed, that is, undiluted.

Also in the New Testament period the cup with the wine of God's fury is *a symbol* of God's wrath that is already poured out into a cup, which God's opponents must drink. The words are heaped upon one another in order to emphasise the terrible wrath of God.

With a view to the present time, God's wrath is as it were still “poured out mixed” with his grace: God makes his sun shine also on the evil and sends rain also on the unjust (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:15-17). It is still the time of grace and people are called to repent and believe the gospel (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). But with a view to the final judgement, God's wrath has already been mixed with his fury and undiluted (in full strength) into his cup! It is ready and waiting to be drunk. It must be drunk and drinking it is unavoidable, inescapable! In hell, God's wrath will be exercised in its full strength!

“He will be tormented³⁰ with burning sulphur” (cf. Genesis 19:24; Isaiah 34:8-10; Matthew 13:42; Mark 8:42-48; Revelation 19:20; 20:10,15). Fire causes pain and sulphur causes choking. Burning sulphur is a symbol of hell. It depicts a reality that is far worse than anyone can describe or even imagine. There will be torment of body and soul, excruciating pain as well as anxious despair (Mark 9:48). Those who are attached to this wicked world are going to receive a terrible punishment together with this wicked world. No one can sin and get away with it! If a person chooses to serve Satan or this wicked world, he must expect to suffer the full consequences.

“in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb”. This is not an indication that the angels and Christ would enjoy this punishment, but rather that they will acknowledge that this punishment is completely just and fair (15:3; 16:7; Luke 12:47-48). This is an indication that the wicked will realise that they are punished because they had rejected Christ. It is precisely the guilt and shame of the wicked, their final realisation that this punishment is fully deserved, that makes it so painful. They had denied Christ publicly on earth and at the final judgement Christ will deny them publicly (Matthew 10:32-33). Therefore this punishment does not awaken the pity of Christ or his angels.

²⁸ προσκυνει (to prostrate oneself before, to fall down and worship)(viba)

²⁹ πιεται (vifm) εκ του οινου του θυμου του θεου του κεκερασμενου (vprp, mixed with spices) ακρατου (undiluted by water)

εν τω ποτηριω της οργης αυτου

³⁰ βασανισθησεται > βασανιζω (to torment, to torture)(vifp)

14:11 “And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night³¹ for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name”. Their punishment continues forever (Matthew 25:46) and their torment will not be diminished. Separated from the glorious presence of God (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9), they will never experience peace (Isaiah 57:20-21). The sin that leads to such punishment, namely, the worship of the beast instead of the living God, is mentioned again in order to urge people to repent (change their thinking) and turn away (actively) from it.

f. The exhortation of John (14:12)

14:12 “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus”³² (cf. 13:10). This exhortation comes probably from John. The fact that this never-ending punishment awaits those who persecute the Christian Church and hate the Lord Jesus Christ should encourage believers to hold out under trials (persecutions, oppressions) and temptations (seductions). The reign of all antichrists are times of great anxiety for the saints (the Christians) and especially the reign of the final antichrist will be a time of great anxiety (cf. 12:17). Satan and his cronies will do everything to cause people to fall away from Christ and his Word. In such times, the true Christians are called to endurance, that is, not only *to bear* such unjust treatment, but also *to persevere* in holding on to Christ and doing his Word in spite of such treatment. They are called to persist in trust and obedience to the faith as it is revealed in the Bible.

g. The consolation from heaven (14:13)

14:13 “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” This consolation comes from heaven. There are seven ‘blessed’ pronouncements in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). The word ‘blessed’ expresses the happiness, joy and well being of a person as a result of what God gives. And what God gives is never taken away.

To die is often a terror for those who do not believe (Hebrews 2:15), but a blessing for those who do believe. By dying they enter real life, joyfully living the perfect life in the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Philippians 1:23). “From now on” means from the time of Christ’s first coming and his completed work on the cross onwards. The New Testament believers have received much more clarity than the Old Testament believers have about the intermediate state of the dead. The blessedness of the redeemed is described in Revelation chapters 2, 3, 7 and 14:1-5 and consists of living in the presence of the Lord. From now on, those who die in the Lord Jesus Christ will see face to face the One who died for them and always lives to make intercession for them. They will see him in his glorified and exalted human nature!

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them”³³. This consolation comes from the Spirit. They will rest from all their labour: toil or hard work that causes weariness and hardship and suffering that causes worries, problems and spiritual harassment on earth. They will also enjoy the rewards for their good works on earth, their forbearance, perseverance, faithfulness, exertion in faith, hope and love (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Their good deeds will *constantly* follow them. The Christian character and good works will go with them to heaven. They had developed and produced their character and good works on earth by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:10) and faith (James 2:14-26) and these were thoroughly sanctified by the Spirit. Their character and good works will be rewarded with the reward of God’s grace and glory (1 John 3:1-3; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). Such rewards are given by grace only (19:8; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Nothing that is done “from God, through God and for God and his glory” (Romans 11:36) will be forgotten. “Your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58)!

h. Different views about the blessed dead (14:13)

There are two views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The futurist view) The blessed dead are *a special class* of people who die in the Lord *during the second half of the future tribulation period.*

³¹ και ο καπνος του βασανισμου αυτων εις αιωνας αιωνων αναβαινει (νιρα), και ουκ εχουσιν (νιρα) αναπαυσιν ημερας και νυκτος

³² Ωδε η υπομονη των αγιων εστιν (νιρα), οι τηρουντες (νιρα) τας εντολας του θεου και την πιστιν (objective faith in) Ιησου

³³ αναπαησονται > αναπαυομαι (νιρ) εκ των κοπων αυτων. τα γαρ εργα αυτων ακολουθει (νιρα) μετ αυτων

Second view. (The correct explanation) The blessed dead are *all people who die as believers* in Jesus Christ *throughout the whole New Testament period.* The whole book of Revelation is a message of encouragement for all believers in every century from the time of the apostle John in the first century until Christ's second coming (1:3).

PART 3. THE FINAL JUDGEMENT (14:14-20)

Revelation 14:14-20 pictures the end of time that has arrived. While in Revelation 14:6-13 the final judgement is *announced*, in Revelation 14:14-20 the final judgement is *executed*. The final judgement is depicted by two kinds of harvests: a wheat harvest and a wine harvest. John uses the so-called *futurist aorist tense*, a past tense that describes a future event as if it has already taken place. His intention is to emphasise that this event *will certainly take place*. The two kinds of harvests are depicted as already executed, so certain will they be executed! The righteous and the wicked will be harvested on the same day Christ is revealed (at Christ's second coming)(cf. Luke 17:30,34-35; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), but they will be harvested in different ways (cf. Matthew 3:12; 13:30; 24:36-41; 25:46). And then they will be carried to their eternal destinations (11:12).

a. The final judgement of the righteous (14:14-16)

14:14 “I looked, and there before me was a white cloud”. A cloud can be a symbol of a means of transport (11:12). It can also be a symbol of the final judgement (1:7). It is not stated what the cloud consists of, but it could consist of an uncountable number of angels (19:14; Matthew 24:30-31; Ezekiel 1:4,5,22,26,28). White is a symbol of what comes from heaven, is pure and holy (10:1).

“and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man”³⁴ (1:13; Daniel 7:13). He is the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezekiel 1:28). He is the visible likeness of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). He is Jesus Christ. God the Father has entrusted all judgement to God the Son and he will judge those who still live and those who have already died (John 5:22,28-29). He will be the Judge on the final judgement day (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15).

“with a crown of gold on his head” (1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 4:8). On his head was no longer a crown of thorns³⁵ (Matthew 27:29), but a crown of gold³⁶ in the form of the victory wreath, the sign that he has conquered on the cross (cf. 6:2) and the sign that he conquers on the final judgement day (14:14). Here Christ wears the victor's wreath, while in Revelation 19:12 he wears many royal crowns³⁷. Both are symbols: the wreath is a symbol of victory and the crown is a symbol of kingship. But because the King is viewed as the Victor (cf. 19:11-17), there is not a sharp distinction between these two terms in these two passages. Gold is a symbol of what is high and exalted and of what is used in exalted service (cf. 5:8; 8:3; 21:21).

“and a sharp sickle in his hand”³⁸. A sharp sickle (14:14) or a sharp vine knife in the form of a small sickle (14:16) is the instrument used in the harvest. It is the symbol of his function as Judge.

14:15 “Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud”. Because the final judgement has arrived, this angel comes out of the temple, the place of God's holy presence in heaven. The word ‘another’ refers to the three angels that preceded this angel in the vision (14:6-13). It is not implied that this angel was a higher being than Jesus Christ and could therefore give a command to him. He is rather a heavenly messenger announcing that the hour for the final judgement has arrived. He called in a loud voice so that everyone in the universe may know that the hour of the final judgement had arrived. Compare this with the words: “with a loud trumpet call” (Matthew 24:31) and with the words: “with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

³⁴ ομοιον υιον ανθρωπου

³⁵ στεφανον εξ ακανθων

³⁶ στεφανον χρυσου

³⁷ διαδηματα

³⁸ δρεπανον οξυ (sharp sickle or sharp vine knife)

“Take (literally ‘send’) at once your sickle and begin to reap, because the time (literally: ‘hour’) to reap has come”³⁹. Just as the winnowing fork⁴⁰ is a symbol of the instrument used for the continued harvest throughout world history (Matthew 3:11-12), so the sickle is a symbol of the instrument used for the final harvest of both the saved and the lost on the final judgement day. ‘The hour’ to reap is a figure of speech: God has determined a definite moment for everything, also for the final harvest (Matthew 24:36; John 5:28-29).

“for the harvest of the earth is ripe (literally: ‘has become dry’)”⁴¹. The picture of a harvest speaks of growing and becoming ‘dry’, that is, becoming thoroughly ripe. According to Jesus, everything on earth goes through a process, a development, a ripening. Everything (seen) is not yet what it really is. This includes the believers, the Church, as well as sinful humanity and the wicked world. The end of everything comes only when the wheat and the weeds have reached their full growth. In Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 the wheat is a symbol of the sons of the kingdom and the weeds is a symbol of the sons of the evil one. The harvest is a symbol of the end of the age. The harvesters are a symbol of the angels. In Revelation 14:14-16 the harvest spoken of is also a wheat harvest, because the wheat had grown, died and become golden as a sign that it is completely ripe. The harvest is Christ’s own harvest, because the people symbolised by it are the first fruits (cf. 14:4), the full number of believers in history.

14:16 “So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested”⁴².” He literally *threw* his sickle towards the earth and the earth was reaped. Because the full number of believers had been gathered in (Matthew 24:30-31; Romans 11:25; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 11:11-12), there was no longer any reason to continue the history of this present world!

b. The final judgement of the wicked (14:17-20)

14:17 “Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle”. This angel comes out of the temple in heaven, that is, he has received his orders from God to be executed at the predetermined time. The harvest spoken of here is a wine harvest. The sharp sickle is a sharp vine knife in the form of a small sickle, a symbol of judgement.

14:18 “Still another angel who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice”. This angel comes from the altar in heaven. Thus we have to think of Revelation 6:9-11 and 8:3-5 and view the final judgement of the wicked as God’s final answer to the prayers of the saints. The final judgement of the unrighteous is symbolically executed by two angels, the angel who had the sharp sickle and the angel who had charge of the fire, probably the judgement fire (cf. Matthew 3:12; 13:41-42; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15; Revelation 20:8). It is an indication that revenge will be taken against those who persecuted and oppressed God’s people (the Church) on earth.

“Take your sharp sickle and gather the bunches of grapes from the grapevine of the earth, because its clusters of grapes are ripe (‘at its peak’)”⁴³. The grapevine of the earth is a symbol of the wicked world, the entire multitude of evil people and their evil devices. Its grapes are a symbol of the individual unbelievers. Its grapes had ripened or reached its highest peak. Not only the wheat had grown to full maturity, but also the clusters of grapes on the grapevine had reached the peak of their development. Both Christians and non-Christians had finally become what they really are (in essence). Both had reached their maturity at the same time, that is, both the godly people and ungodly people had reached their top and full number at the same time. The hour of the final judgement of the world had struck.

14:19 “The angel swung (literally: ‘threw’) his sickle on the earth, gathered the grapevine and threw it into the great winepress of God’s wrath”⁴⁴ (Isaiah 63:1-6). Now not only the clusters of grapes (individual unbelievers with their unbelieving families or communities) are destroyed, but also the whole vine itself (the whole wicked world itself)! Never again will anything grow out of it! With the final judgement day the

³⁹ πεμψον (vmaa, ingressive aorist send at once) το δρεπανον σου και θερισον (vmaa, ingressive aorist, begin to reap), οτι ηλθεν (viaa) η ωρα θερισαι

⁴⁰ το πτυον

⁴¹ οτι εξηρανθη > ξηραινω (viar) ο θερισμος της γης

⁴² και εβαλεν (viaa)... το δρεπανον επι την γην, και εθερισθη (viar) η γη

⁴³ και τρυγησον > τρυγαω (vmaa, to gather ripe fruit) τους βοτρυας (bunch of grapes) της αμπελου (grape vine) της γης,

⁴⁴ οτι ηκμασαν > ακμαζω (to be ripe, to be at the peak) αι σταφυλαι (ripe grape clusters) αυτης

⁴⁴ και ετρυγησεν (viaa) την αμπελον της γης και εβαλεν (viaa) εις την ληνον (winepress) του θυμου του θεου τον μεγαλ

wicked people together with the wicked world and all its wickedness is finished forever. “Christ will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil” (Matthew 13:41)!

This picture is used of the final judgement in order to depict the treading down, the flattening and the crushing of the grapes, that is, the crushing and the punishment of the wicked. The winepress is a very large hole cut in a rock, and is here a symbol of God’s final holy and righteous wrath against the godlessness and unrighteousness of the wicked (Romans 1:18).

The vine with its juicy grapes is taken as a picture of the wicked, because in this present world they had their share of good things (cf. Psalm 73:4-9; Luke 16:19f; 1 Corinthians 15:19). And the wheat with its dry and withered kernels is taken as a picture of the righteous, because in this present world they often suffered oppression and persecution.

14:20 “They were trampled in the winepress outside the city”⁴⁵. Just as grapes are trodden, pressed, crushed, so the wicked will be punished and destroyed forever. This will happen outside the city, that is, outside the New Jerusalem and thus outside the new earth. God’s community consisting of the New Jerusalem will not witness their destruction. Inside God’s community there will never again be any wickedness (21:8,27; 22:15).

“and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia.” An old Jewish story says that the distance between Tyre and Egypt is 1600 stadia, but this is not literally the length of the land of Israel. One stadia is about 200 meter. Thus 1600 stadia is literally a distance of about 300 kilometres or 60 hours of travel. Like all the numbers in the book of Revelation, the number 1600 is probably figurative, but it is not explained. The number 4 is the number of the earth and the number 10 is the number of completion on earth. Thus the number 1600 or 4x4x10x10 is possibly a symbol of God’s thorough and complete judgement of the whole wicked earth.

The stream of blood is so deep that it reaches up to the horses’ bridles, that is, the horses are pictured as swimming or drowning in the blood. Horses are symbolic of battle (cf. 6:2f; 13:16). The picture is of a terrible great battle. It is *the final battle* at Christ’s second coming, in which, symbolically, Christ on his white horse together with his army on white horses engage the army of Satan and his followers (cf. 16:14; 19:14-19; 20:8). The intention of this depiction is to impress the readers with the terrible fate of those who have chosen the evil world and continued to live according to their sinful nature.

c. Different views about the wheat harvest and the wine harvest (14:14-20)

There are three views. See supplement 6 and the explanation of the symbols above.

First view. (The first futurist view) The wheat and wine harvest is the judgement of *the Gentile nations* before Christ’s throne of heavenly glory *at the end of the future tribulation period* (Matthew 25:31).⁴⁶

Second view. (The second futurist view) The wheat harvest is the judgement of *believers* that lived *during the future tribulation period* and the wine harvest is the judgement of *unbelievers* that lived *during the future tribulation period*. These two judgements are *parallel* and refer to the final harvest of the earth. Christ reaps the harvest that belongs to him and the angel reaps the vine of the earth, the final fruition of evil.⁴⁷

Third view. (The correct explanation) The wheat harvest is a symbol of the final gathering and judgement of *the righteous* and the wine harvest is a symbol of the final gathering and judgement of *the wicked at Christ’s second coming*. The wheat harvest describes the same event as the believers being resurrected and caught up to meet and welcome Christ in the air at his second coming on the last day (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Matthew 24:40-41; cf. 25:6-12). The wine harvest describes the same event as the unbelievers being resurrected and driven in front of Christ’s throne of heavenly glory later on that same last day (Matthew 25:31-32; 13:37-43; 3:10-12; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Revelation 20:11-15).

⁴⁵ και επατηθη > πατεω (viap) η ληνος εξωθεν της πολεως

⁴⁶ Larkin, Revelation p. 137

⁴⁷ Tenney p. 79