

Revelation Chapters 14, 15, & 16 (Week 12)

Today we turn our attention to Revelation chapters 14, 15, and 16 — a powerful section that features the triumphant 144,000 with the Lamb on Mount Zion, three angels proclaiming the eternal gospel and warning of judgment, the two great harvests of the earth, the victorious saints singing the song of Moses and the Lamb by a sea of glass mixed with fire, and the pouring out of the seven final bowls of God’s wrath, culminating in the gathering at Armageddon.

Revelation 14: The 144,000, Angelic Messages, and Two Harvests

The Lamb stands with 144,000 sealed on Mount Zion (pure, firstfruits). Three angels proclaim: (1) eternal gospel to all nations (“Fear God and give him glory” – v. 7); (2) Babylon’s fall; (3) warning against the beast and his mark. Call for “patient endurance of the saints.” Two harvests: grain harvest by “one like a son of man” on a cloud; grape harvest of wrath (blood to horse bridles). See Joel ch. 3

- **Preterist:** 1st-century fulfillment. 144,000 = faithful Jewish-Christian remnant preserved during the Jewish-Roman war (AD 66–70). Angels symbolize the gospel’s spread before Jerusalem’s fall; harvests depict God’s judgment on apostate Israel/Rome (“Babylon” = Jerusalem). Endurance call fits early church persecution under Nero/Domitian.

Supporting Scriptures: Rev 1:1, 3 (“soon”/“near” – time indicators); Matt 23:36–24:34 (this generation/judgment on Jerusalem); Luke 21:20–24 (desolation of Jerusalem).

- **Idealist:** Timeless symbolic conflict. 144,000 = the redeemed church/remnant in every age. Angels represent ongoing calls to repentance, warning, and gospel proclamation. Harvests symbolize God’s perpetual separation of righteous from wicked—salvation vs. final judgment.

Supporting Scriptures: Eph 6:12 (spiritual forces of evil); Matt 13:24–30, 36–43 (parable of wheat/weeds – ongoing separation); John 12:31 (now is judgment of this world).

- **Progressive Dispensationalist:** Future with inaugurated kingdom. 144,000 = Jewish remnant preserved in tribulation, but church shares in kingdom blessings. Angels proclaim universal gospel amid end-time events. Harvests depict final ingathering of believers and judgment on nations, with some overlap in tribulation experience (already/not yet).

Supporting Scriptures: Dan 12:1–3 (end-time deliverance of saints); Matt 24:14 (gospel to all nations before end); Eph 2:11–22 (Jew/Gentile unity in one new people); 1 Cor 15:51–52 (resurrection at last trumpet).

- **Classical Dispensationalist:** Future end-times. 144,000 = literal Jewish evangelists sealed during the 7-year tribulation (distinct from the church, already raptured pretrib). Angels give a final global gospel call and warnings before the second coming. Grain harvest = rapture of tribulation saints or gathering of elect at end; grape harvest = Armageddon/battle of nations.

Supporting Scriptures: Dan 7:13–14 (son of man on clouds); Matt 24:30–31 (gathering of elect at parousia); 1 Thess 4:16–17 (rapture, but pretrib here); Rev 7:1–8 (144,000 parallel).

Revelation 15: Victory Song and Preparation for Bowls

Saints who conquered the beast stand by sea of glass mixed with fire, singing “song of Moses and the Lamb.” Seven angels receive bowls of God’s final wrath; temple inaccessible until plagues complete.

- **Preterist:** 1st-century deliverance. Saints = early Christians victorious over Roman/Jewish persecution. Song echoes Exodus deliverance from Egypt (now from Rome/Jerusalem). Bowls = judgments poured on 1st-century oppressors (e.g., plagues, civil strife leading to AD 70).

Supporting Scriptures: Exod 15:1–18 (song of Moses parallel); Rev 11:8 (“great city” = Jerusalem); Deut 32:1–43 (song of Moses as covenant judgment).

- **Idealist:** Symbolic victory through trials. Sea mixed with fire = refinement of saints amid persecution in every era. Song celebrates God’s faithfulness in spiritual battle. Bowls = complete, recurring divine judgment on unrepentant evil.

Supporting Scriptures: 1 Pet 1:6–7 (trials refine faith); Rom 8:35–39 (more than conquerors); Ps 78:1–8 (recurring deliverance/judgment themes).

- **Progressive Dispensationalist:** Future victory with kingdom overlap. Saints include church experiencing tribulation but protected from wrath. Song blends OT/NT deliverance; bowls complete God’s wrath after partial judgments.

Supporting Scriptures: John 16:33 (tribulation in world but overcome); 2 Thess 2:1–12 (man of lawlessness before day of Lord); Rev 7:14 (great tribulation saints washed in Lamb’s blood).

- **Classical Dispensationalist:** Future tribulation saints (post-rapture church or Jewish believers). Song by those who endured the beast. Bowls = literal final plagues after church is removed; wrath reserved for earth-dwellers.

Supporting Scriptures: 1 Thess 5:9 (not destined for wrath); Rev 3:10 (kept from hour of trial); Exod 15 (deliverance pattern for Israel in tribulation).

Revelation 16: The Seven Bowl Judgments

Bowls poured: sores on beast-worshippers; sea/rivers to blood; scorching sun; darkness; Euphrates dried for eastern kings; Armageddon assembly; massive earthquake/hail. People curse God, no repentance.

- **Preterist:** 1st-century plagues/wars. Bowls parallel Roman civil wars, Jewish infighting, and disasters around AD 70 (e.g., blood in seas/rivers as literal or symbolic of bloodshed). Armageddon = symbolic of Rome’s or Jerusalem’s defeat. Hardened hearts = unrepentant Israel/Rome.

Supporting Scriptures: Rev 11:8; 17–18 (Babylon = Jerusalem); Jer 51 (oracles against Babylon); Josephus’ accounts of AD 70 events as historical parallels.

- **Idealist:** Recurring patterns of judgment. Bowls = God’s ongoing response to evil (plagues, environmental collapse, political chaos). Refusal to repent shows universal human hardness apart from grace. Armageddon = ultimate symbolic clash of good/evil.

Supporting Scriptures: Rom 1:18–32 (God’s wrath revealed against ungodliness); Amos 4:6–12 (repeated judgments without repentance); Eph 6:10–18 (spiritual armor in cosmic battle).

- **Progressive Dispensationalist:** Future culmination with progressive elements. Bowls follow earlier seals/trumpets; church may endure some but raptured before final wrath. Armageddon leads to second coming and kingdom.

Supporting Scriptures: 1 Cor 15:23–28 (kingdom progression); Isa 13–14 (cosmic judgment language); 2 Pet 3:8–13 (final day of judgment with cosmic signs).

- **Classical Dispensationalist:** Literal future plagues at tribulation’s end (post-rapture). Targeted at beast’s kingdom; Armageddon = literal battle of nations before Christ’s return. No repentance shows final hardening.

Supporting Scriptures: Dan 11:40–45 (end-time kings); Zech 14:1–21 (Armageddon battle); Matt 24:21–22 (great tribulation shortened).

Comparison Table:

Element (Ch 14–16)	Preterist	Idealist	Classical Disp.	Progressive Disp
144,000/Harvest	1st-cent. remnant/judgment on Jerusalem	Redeemed church/timeless separation	Jewish evangelists/tribulation rapture	Jewish remnant + kingdom ingathering
Bowls/Wrath	AD 70 plagues on Rome/Jerusalem	Recurring divine judgment on evil	Literal future plagues (post-rapture)	Final wrath with already/not yet kingdom
Supporting Key	Rev 1:1 (“soon”); Matt 24	Eph 6; Matt 13 parables	Dan 7; 1 Thess 4–5 (pretrib)	Dan 12; John 16:33; Eph 2

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the supporting Scriptures strengthen each view’s reading of these chapters? Which view best explains the “soon” language or symbolic elements for you?
2. Rev 14’s eternal gospel and endurance call— Which views best make sense of this?
3. The unrepentant in ch. 16 curse God despite judgments. What warning/hope does this offer our culture?

Dr. M. Robert Mulholland Jr. (1936–2015) **Cornerstone Biblical Commentary on Revelation** (Tyndale, 2011)

Overall Approach and Hermeneutic

Mulholland approaches Revelation as a **visionary, apocalyptic-prophetic letter** rooted in the historical context of first-century churches facing Roman imperial pressure and internal compromise. He takes the book's **Old Testament imagery** and Jewish apocalyptic genre seriously but stresses that John **transforms** these elements through a distinctly Christian lens—centered on the finished work of Christ's death and resurrection.

He acknowledges the four classic interpretive frameworks (Preterist, Historicist, Futurist, and Idealist) but does not strictly align with any one of them. Instead, he draws strengths from each while avoiding their extremes. He warns against reducing Revelation to:

- A detailed blueprint of future events (strict futurism).
- A coded map of all church history (historicism).
- Purely past events with no ongoing relevance (some preterism).
- Or overly abstract symbolism detached from real spiritual conflict (some idealism).

Mulholland emphasizes that Revelation is **not primarily about predicting end-times chronology** or satisfying curiosity about the future. Rather, it is a **call to radical discipleship** and holy living in the present.

Central Message

At its heart, Revelation reveals **Jesus Christ as the victorious, slain Lamb** who has already won the decisive victory through His death and resurrection. The book contrasts two realities:

- **Babylon** — the fallen, seductive, oppressive world system (imperial Rome in John's day, but any power or culture that opposes God's reign).
- **New Jerusalem** — the holy people of God, the bride of the Lamb, living as faithful citizens of God's kingdom amid a hostile world.

John writes to encourage persecuted and compromised believers to persevere with **patient endurance** (a repeated theme, e.g., Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12). The visions repeatedly call the church to overcome, worship the Lamb, reject the beast's mark (allegiance to worldly powers), and live as a counter-cultural community of holiness, justice, and witness.

Key Emphases Relevant to Chapters 14–16

In line with the broader themes of his commentary:

- **Chapter 14** — The 144,000 represent the faithful redeemed (often linked to the sealed multitude of ch. 7). The three angelic messages proclaim the eternal gospel, announce judgment on Babylon, and warn against beast-worship. The two harvests depict the separation of the righteous and the wicked. Mulholland sees this as encouragement for endurance and a universal call to fear God rather than a strict future timeline.

- **Chapter 15** — The victorious saints (those who conquered the beast) sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, celebrating deliverance amid trials. The preparation of the bowls shows God’s final, complete wrath against unrepentant evil. The “sea of glass mixed with fire” symbolizes refinement through suffering.
- **Chapter 16** — The bowl judgments are severe divine responses to hardened hearts that refuse to repent even in the face of plagues. These visions underscore human responsibility and the justice of God while reinforcing the call to patient endurance for believers.

Mulholland consistently ties these scenes back to the present: believers are called to live as citizens of New Jerusalem **now**, even while surrounded by Babylon. The judgments serve as warnings and invitations to repentance, while the victory belongs already to the Lamb.

Practical and Spiritual Application

Mulholland’s commentary is strongly devotional and formational. Revelation, for him, is about **spiritual formation** — dying to the false self shaped by the world and being conformed to the image of the Lamb. He stresses union with God, obedience, and becoming agents of God’s redeeming grace in a broken world. The book ends with an invitation to radical discipleship: “Follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (cf. Rev 14:4) as faithful citizens of God’s kingdom in the midst of a fallen world.

In summary, Mulholland presents Revelation as a **powerful pastoral letter** that unveils Christ’s victory, exposes the true nature of evil systems, and summons the church to holy, persevering witness. It is less a puzzle to decode for future events and more a **vision that equips believers to live faithfully today** — a message that aligns well with the sermon series emphasis on salvation, eternal life, and even mustard-seed faith amid trials.

His tone is irenic, scholarly yet accessible, and deeply concerned with how the text shapes Christian character and community in an “unholy world.”

Preterist Parallels: Josephus’ *The Jewish War* and Revelation 14–16

Preterist interpreters (such as Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. and others in the *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*) see Revelation 14–16 as largely fulfilled in the Jewish-Roman War of AD 66–70, with “Babylon” symbolizing apostate Jerusalem. Josephus, an eyewitness Jewish historian and former rebel commander who later worked for the Romans, provides detailed accounts in *The Jewish War* (especially Books 4–6) that preterists cite as striking historical parallels. These are not exact one-to-one matches but are viewed as the outworking of God’s judgment on unrepentant Israel, echoing the plagues on Egypt and the calls for endurance and repentance.

Below is a chapter-by-chapter summary of the most commonly cited parallels, drawn from preterist commentaries and direct references in Josephus.

Revelation 14: The 144,000, Three Angelic Warnings, and the Two Harvests

- **Angelic warnings and the “eternal gospel” / call to fear God (vv. 6–11):** Preterists link this to supernatural voices warning Jerusalem of doom. Josephus records a man named Jesus son of Ananus who, for over four years before the war (AD 62–66), wandered the city crying “Woe, woe to Jerusalem!” day and night until he was killed by a catapult stone during the siege (*Wars* 6.5.3). This is seen as a real-world “angelic” proclamation of judgment on “Babylon” (Jerusalem).
- **Departure of the glory / Shekinah from the Temple (context for the harvests and later bowls):** At Pentecost in AD 66 (just as the revolt began), priests heard a quaking, a great noise, and “a sound as of a great multitude saying, ‘Let us remove hence’” (*Wars* 6.5.3; paralleled in Tacitus). Preterists interpret this as the departure of God’s presence (and possibly the seven angels of chs. 15–16), signaling the start of final judgment. The barley harvest (start of the Jewish revolt) and grape harvest (Roman offensive under Cestius) are seen as the literal timing of the “grain” and “grape” harvests.
- **The two harvests and blood up to the horses’ bridles for 1,600 stadia (~200 miles) (vv. 14–20):** The grain harvest (gathering the elect) and grape harvest (wrath/trampling) are linked to the massive slaughter during the war. Josephus repeatedly describes rivers, lakes, and the Sea of Galilee choked with Jewish corpses, turning waters blood-red and killing fish: e.g., “the lake [of Galilee] all bloody, and full of dead bodies” (*Wars* 3.10.9); “the Jordan could not be passed over, by reason of the dead bodies” (*Wars* 4.7.6); and in Jerusalem, “the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many houses was quenched with these men’s blood” (*Wars* 6.8.5). Streets were so filled with bodies that they were stacked “up to the horses’ bridles” in places. Preterists see this as the “winepress of God’s wrath” outside the city.

Revelation 15: Victorious Saints and Preparation of the Seven Bowls

- **Victorious saints singing the “song of Moses and the Lamb” by the sea of glass mixed with fire (vv. 2–4):** This echoes the Exodus deliverance but now applied to judgment on Israel. Preterists note the ironic reversal: God’s people (the church/remnant) are delivered while apostate Israel receives plagues like Egypt.
- **Seven angels receiving the bowls of wrath from the temple (vv. 5–8):** The same Pentecost AD 66 event (above) is often seen as the angels departing the temple with the final plagues (*Wars* 6.5.3). The temple doors miraculously opened by themselves earlier that year, further signaling divine abandonment. The “sea of glass mixed with fire” symbolizes the trials/refinement the saints endured amid the war.

Revelation 16: The Seven Bowl Judgments

These are viewed as the climactic plagues poured out during the Jewish War, especially the siege of Jerusalem (AD 69–70), completing God’s wrath.

- **First bowl: painful sores on those who worship the beast (v. 2):** Linked to diseases, famine, and the physical afflictions from siege conditions and internal strife.
- **Second and third bowls: sea and rivers turn to blood; springs of water become blood (vv. 3–7):** Direct parallels to Josephus’ descriptions of the Sea of Galilee, Jordan River, and other waters filled with blood from mass slaughters (see Rev 14 parallels above; e.g., *Wars* 3.9.3; 3.10.9; 4.7.6). Unrepentant “earth-dwellers” (those in the land of Israel) still blasphemed rather than repented.

- **Fourth bowl: scorching heat (v. 8–9):** Interpreted as the intense suffering from famine, drought, and the summer heat during the prolonged siege.
- **Fifth bowl: darkness on the beast’s kingdom (v. 10–11):** Possibly the chaos, civil war, and despair in Jerusalem under the beastly leadership of the Jewish factions.
- **Sixth bowl: Euphrates dried up; kings from the east gathered for battle at Armageddon (vv. 12–16):** Roman forces (including client kings from the east, such as Sohaemus of Emesa and Antiochus of Commagene) converged on Judea. Preterists sometimes see “Armageddon” (Har-Magedon) as symbolically linked to the gathering of armies near Megiddo or the broader conflict culminating at Jerusalem. Miraculous signs in AD 69 drew forces together (*Wars* 4.7.3ff.).
- **Seventh bowl: great earthquake; the great city split into three parts; islands flee; huge hailstones ~100 pounds (vv. 17–21):**
 - Jerusalem was literally divided into three warring factions (led by Eleazar, John of Gischala, and Simon bar Giora), fighting each other like “wild beasts” while the Romans approached (*Wars* 5.1.1–5).
 - Massive earthquake and thunderstorm reported during the siege.
 - “Hailstones” of about 100 pounds (a talent): Roman catapults (*ballistae*) hurled white limestone stones weighing roughly one talent; Josephus notes they were visible from afar because of their brightness, and the Romans later blackened them to hide them (*Wars* 5.6.3). These stones crushed defenders and buildings.

Preterists emphasize that Josephus (who was not a Christian) unwittingly confirms the fulfillment of these judgments on unrepentant Jerusalem (“Babylon”), while the church was called to patient endurance (Rev 14:12) and exodus from the city (echoing Jesus’ warnings in the Olivet Discourse). The judgments mirror the plagues on Egypt, vindicating the saints and proclaiming the eternal gospel even amid wrath.

These parallels are strongest in preterist literature (e.g., works by Gentry, and sites drawing on his approach) and are used to show that Revelation was written before AD 70 to encourage first-century believers facing the crisis. They reinforce the book’s message of salvation and eternal life through the Lamb amid tribulation—tying back to the sermon series emphasis on mustard-seed faith in the face of judgment and hope.