

**The Facebook Commentary on Revelation**  
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**Revelation Chapter 14**

**Rev 14 (Introduction)–**

Like many turning points in Revelation, this chapter opens a new vision with “and I saw” (Rev 5:1; 6:1; 8:2; 10:1; 13:1; 14:6; 15:1, etc.). Like chapter 13, this chapter is an elaboration on the foundational, basic, nut-shell passage of Revelation 12:17. The last verse of chapter 12 comes at the climax of Christian history, after the birth and ascension of the male child (12:5), after the war in heaven (12:7-12) and after the 1260 days/years (12:6, 13-16). According to 12:17, at the close of history there will be a final battle between two sides, the dragon and the remnant. The dragon was the main character of chapter 12, appearing in every scene, including the last.

According to 12:17, the dragon will be angry and make war with the remnant of the woman’s seed. Chapter 13 elaborates on the dragon’s side of that conflict. The dragon calls up a sea beast and a land beast to join him in the battle. Together they form a counterfeit trinity which seeks to deceive the nations of the world into worshiping the sea beast rather than the true God. Chapter 14, on the other hand, elaborates on the remnant’s side of that final conflict.

Revelation 12:17 provides a nutshell summary of the end-time battle that is elaborated in the rest of the book of Revelation. It describes a war between the dragon and the remnant. Chapter 14 elaborates on what God will do through the remnant in that final conflict (the designation 144,000 is another name for the remnant, see notes on Revelation 14:1). The chapter opens with a description of the remnant’s location and character, and particularly their relationship with Jesus (14:1-5). In verses 6-13, the remnant’s message is described in the form of three heavenly angels proclaiming messages to the entire world. These messages are a warning that the end-time gospel in the context of judgment is the world’s only hope. In the last part of chapter 14 and the first part of 15, the outcome of the final battle is described in terms of a double harvest, first wheat and then grapes (14:14-20). In the first part of chapter 15 (1-4) the people of God are no longer called remnant or 144,000 but simply “those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name” (15:2, NIV).

**Rev 14:1-5 (Introduction)**

In Revelation, whenever a new figure is introduced, there is first a visual description (12:1, 3; 13:1-2) followed by a summary of its previous history (12:2, 4, 13:3-7). Then the character’s actions in the vision itself are described (12:5-16; 13:8, 12-18). It is somewhat unclear, however, just how this literary strategy applies to the 144,000 in the early part of chapter 14. If the 144,000 are the same as the remnant, 14:1-5 serves as the introduction of the remnant. On the other hand, if the remnant and the 144,000 are two different characters in the book, this passage witnesses the return of a character that has already been introduced (7:4-8).

Since, as we will see, the description of the 144,000 here is grounded in one of the key remnant passages of the Old Testament (Joel 2:32), I believe it is helpful to see the descriptions in 14:1-5 as the introduction of the remnant. In this case the remnant and the 144,000 are two ways of describing the same entity, the end-time people of God. The identity of that remnant is established in the first five verses of the chapter (Rev 14:1-5).

While not noticed by most commentators, an allusion to Israel's Mount Sinai experience (Exod 19) is an interesting possibility for this passage (along with the more accepted Joel 2 reference above). Both this passage and Exodus 19 begin with a location, Mount Sinai (Exod 19:2) vs. Mount Zion. The ten commandment scene took place at the foot of the mountain (Exod 19:23), this scene occurs on top of the mountain (Rev 14:1). In both passages the twelve tribes were present (Exod 19:1, 3; Rev 14:1). In both contexts there is a voice from heaven and musical instruments (Exod 19:16; Rev 14:2). The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt (Exod 19:4) and the 144,000 were redeemed from the earth (Rev 14:3). In both cases there is a call for sexual purity (Exod 19:15; Rev 14:4).

It is interesting that just after chapter 14 is a clear allusion to the Exodus in Revelation 15:2-4. So the latter passage may be more closely connected to this one than has been generally understood. The Exodus background of 14:1-5 may also set the stage for the allusion to the fourth commandment in 14:7c. Just as Exodus 19 set the stage for the giving of the ten commandments in chapter 20, so this passage sets the stage for a reference to that law a couple verses later.

The 144,000 in Revelation 7:4-8 is the answer to the question at the end of chapter 6, "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" The image represents the totality of Israel, twelve tribes with all of their clans and subdivisions. In chapter 14, the 144,000 are an end-time version of Israel, the final remnant. God will have a people who stand for him when the final crisis of earth's history comes. The identity (14:1-5), mission (6-13) and destiny (14-20) of that end-time people is clarified in this chapter.

#### **Rev 14:1–**

Mount Zion in the Old Testament usually describes Jerusalem as a whole and becomes simply another name for the city (2 Sam 5:7; 1 Kings 8:1; 1 Chr 11:5; 2 Chr 5:2; Psa 51:18; 102:21; Isa 40:9; Jer 26:18; Joel 3:16). On occasion, however, it describes just a portion of the city, particularly the part that included the temple (Psa 20:2; 76:2– in today's Jerusalem Mount Zion is the neighborhood just south of the Armenian Quarter). In the prophets the term Zion became one of their favorite ways of speaking Jerusalem in the future. Mount Zion would become the center of God's rule when God Himself would break into history or send His Messiah to Israel (Psa 2:6; Isa 24:23; 35:10; 59:20; Obad 17; Mic 4:7). So the mention of Mount Zion would bring to a Jewish reader's mind the eschatological victory of the Messiah, and through him of God Himself. In the book of Hebrews Mount Zion refers both the church and the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:18-24).

In this verse standing on Mount Zion with names written on the foreheads recalls a particular Old Testament background text, Joel 2:32. There "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the

LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls" (NIV). In Joel's picture of the End there is a group of people standing on Mount Zion calling on the name of Yahweh. At that time there will be a deliverance by God for the "survivors" ("remnant" in the KJV) that He has called. The Hebrew word translated "survivors" here means "remnant" or "the rest," "those who are left." By alluding to Joel 2:32 in the opening verse of Revelation 14, John indicates that the 144,000 and the remnant in Revelation are the same (see Revelation 11:13 and 12:17).

Writing a mark on the foreheads suggests total, whole-hearted commitment. There are two names on the foreheads of the 144,000: 1) the name of the Lamb, and 2) His Father's name. Just as there is a mark on the foreheads of those who serve the beast (Rev 13:17), the names of God and the Lamb are written on the foreheads of the 144,000. In the Hebrew context, a person's name represents their character. The 144,000 will have characters molded in the image of God and of the Lamb (Jesus Christ). (for more on the symbolism of the "Lamb" in Revelation see comments on 5:6) In contrast, the mark of the beast is placed on the foreheads of those whose characters are molded in the image of the dragon/Satan. Those marked on the hand represent those who are not strongly committed either way, but go along with the unholy trinity to preserve their ability to buy and sell (Rev 13:16-17).

#### **Rev 14:1– (spiritual lesson)**

This verse indicates that there are two sets of end-time people: 1) those that serve the dragon and the beast and develop the character of deception and coercive force (like the dragon); and 2) the 144,000 (the remnant) who develop the gracious and self-sacrificing character of the Lamb. Unlike those marked on the hand (Rev 13:16), there are no nominal followers of the Lamb. To be associated with Christ in name only is not enough. One must be committed also in character and in action. While the beast is followed by some who are seriously committed and others who follow only for economic and personal advantage, the followers of the Lamb are made up only of those who are fully committed.

#### **Rev 14:2-3–**

For the concept of voices from heaven see notes on 14:13. These verses contain allusions to Revelation 4-5. Both passages contain songs and the songs in each case are sung in front of the throne. And both passages make mention of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. So although Revelation 14:1 mentions an earthly site, Mount Zion, the scene is a heavenly one like the throne scene in Revelation 4-5.

The 144,000 learn a song of deliverance, called the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev 15:3). The original song of Moses described the experience of deliverance through the Red Sea after the final attack of the Egyptians in Exodus 15. In this case, the song is sung by those who have escaped the captivity of the beast with a final deliverance like no other in human history.

Singing a song that sounds like "many waters" occurs again in Revelation 19:1-6. There it is the redeemed celebrating the fall of Babylon. That fits with this scene that is also part of the final battle between the dragon and the remnant (12:17). Here it is a "new song" because of the unique experience the 144,000 has gone through. This song is grounded in the Lamb that was slain (5:9-10). They have survived the great tribulation (7:14). It is the song of Moses and

the Lamb (see notes on 15:3-4) that they sing. They are the new Israel that has experienced the end-time exodus.

In this passage the 144,000 are “redeemed” or “purchased” from among the human race. The English word “purchased” is particularly close to the Greek word here (*agorazô*). This Greek term is widely used in the New Testament in its natural sense of “buy” or “purchase.” But used in relation to the gospel, as it is in this verse, the word “purchase” takes on the extended meaning of ransom or redeem, for which there is also a specialty word in Greek (*lutron, antilutron*— Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 Pet 1:18-19). When “purchase” is used in a spiritual sense it refers to the mission of Jesus Christ (Luke 1:68; 24:21), particularly in relation to what He accomplished on the cross (Gal 3:13; Rev 5:6-10).

The ransom idea in the New Testament is grounded in release from slavery. Its classic Old Testament root is the significant exodus texts in the Pentateuch (Exod 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8). God spoke of Israel as being subject to Pharaoh’s control and in need of being “ransomed.” In the New Testament, the cross of Christ is described in the same kind of ransom/redemption language (Mark 10:45 and parallels; Rom 3:24; Heb 9:12, 15; Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Paul can also use the language of having been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). Ransom in the NT, however, may be less about transaction than about the value that God places upon us.

“Redeemed from the earth” implies removal to a heavenly location. On one hand, the heavenly location could be a scene after the second coming when the redeemed are literally in heaven. On the other hand, it could be a spiritual description of their condition during the final battle of Revelation 12:17. Most translations put the verb for singing in verse 3 in past tense (ESV, KJV, NIV, NASB, etc.), yet in all manuscript traditions it is a present indicative, which means ongoing action in the present tense. If this is following on from the tenses of chapter 13 (see comments on Rev 13 [Introduction]), it would be action at the time of the summary in 12:17. The 144,000 are not yet literally in heaven, but are sheltered in “Mount Zion” during the final crisis.

In Revelation, often the “heaven dwellers” are actually the earth dwellers who follow Jesus. Just as those who live on the earth (“the inhabitants of the earth”) are always associated with the wicked so those who live in heaven are always associated with the righteous. Those described here seem to be facing the last great attack in human history. If that is so, the heavenly location is an anticipated one, they go through the final crisis “in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

### **Rev 14:1-3 Summary—**

The book of Joel contains a prophecy that in the latter days ancient Israel would be huddled up on Mount Zion waiting for the final attack of the wicked (Joel 2:32). In Joel the people of God on Mount Zion are called “the remnant.” Revelation 14:1-3 picks up on the story (but instead of “remnant” God’s people are called “the 144,000”) and applies it to the final conflict of Revelation 12:17. Revelation 13 describes great preparations for the final attack that have been made by the sea and land beasts and the image to/of the beast (Revelation 13). Chapter 14 builds on the prophecy in Joel 2 to shift the scene back to the remnant (144,000) and their role in the same attack/crisis. In chapter 14 the people of God are identified as

remnant (see 12:17), 144,000 (see also 7:4-8) and “the saints” (14:12). Their hearts are in heaven, and their characters are like Christ (Revelation 14).

#### **Rev 14:4–**

Although translations are all over the map, the Greek word describing the 144,000 is clearly “virgins” (*parthenoi*). In the New Testament, the term “virgin” is generally used in the natural way: referring to the mother of Jesus (Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:27 and 37), the daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9), and virgins in general (1 Corinthians 7).

Metaphorically, however, it can be used to mean “readiness for the wedding with Christ.” In other words, being a spiritual “virgin” means to prepare your character for the wedding with Christ at the Second Coming (see also Matthew 25:1-13). Paul says, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, NIV.

Biblically, the term “virgin” doesn't mean absolutely pure in the sense that there was never unfaithfulness. In the Old Testament, Israel was called a virgin not only in the early stages of her relationship with God, but also after being called an adulteress (when the term would be inappropriate in the physical sense— see Jer 14:17; 18:13; 31:4, 21; Lam 1:15; 2:13; Amos 5:2). When Israel is promiscuous in her relationship with God, He still calls her a virgin when she comes back and is once again set apart for Him. As in modern sex education, there is the concept of secondary virginity, that a person who has engaged in premarital sexual relations can still abstain from that activity and hold themselves in loyalty to the one whom they will eventually marry.

In Revelation, this “virginity” means that the 144,000 are totally loyal to Jesus, continually in relationship with Him, and mature in their determination to stay faithful to Him no matter what the cost. They have seen through the end-time deception and maintained their loyalty to the truth about God.

“Woman” is used frequently in the Bible as a symbol of Israel and the church (see notes on Revelation 12:1-2). It is probably used in the plural here because it anticipates Revelation 17:4-5, where prostitute Babylon, which represents an end-time confederacy of religion, has many daughters. The 144,000 are those who do not go along with Babylon, the dragon and the beasts in the final conflict. They are God's faithful New Testament Israel.

In the NT, Israel is counted not in terms of ethnicity or geography, but rather in relation to Christ (Gal 3:28-29). The remnant of Israel in Revelation 14 are those who “follow the Lamb.” Just as literal Old Testament Israel was redeemed from Egypt, the new Israel in Jesus Christ is “redeemed” from the earth. This redemption is described in symbolic terms later on in the chapter. The 144,000 are seen as the wheat harvest or first fruits at the end of earth's history (Revelation 14:15). But in this verse the focus is specifically on the behavior of the redeemed during the final crisis.

According to Stefanovic, the concept of “first fruits” (Greek *aparchê*) in the Greek Old Testament is grounded in the first fruits of the yearly harvest, which were to be brought to the

sanctuary. Metaphorically this is applied to the people of God, who constitute a special offering to Him (Jer 2:3). They are distinct from the nations who oppose God and have oppressed His people. Jeremiah's idea is applied to Christians in James 1:18 and here. Jeremiah's contrast between faithful Israel and the enemy nations is continued in Revelation 14. God's first fruits is the wheat harvest of 14:14-16. In contrast is the grape harvest of enemy nations (14:17-20). The idea here is not that the 144,000 are the first fruits of many other faithful ones to follow, but they are God's portion, set aside in contrast with the rest of humanity, which is classed with the grape harvest.

#### **Rev 14:5–**

This verse contains a strong allusion to Zephaniah 3:13. There the remnant of Israel speaks no lies, nor is a deceitful tongue found in any of their mouths. The concepts of remnant and Israel are here once again applied to the end-time followers of Jesus. The lack of lies is appropriate to those preparing for the New Jerusalem, since one characteristic of those excluded from the New Jerusalem is lying (Rev 21:27 and 22:15). It is essential preparation for the end-time deception as Satan produces lying wonders and those who are deceived will believe a lie (2 Thessalonians 2:9 and 11). God's people will not believe the world's deceptions because their experience will be real and authentic.

The goal of Christian existence is to be blameless before God (Ephesians 1:4 and 5:27; and Philippians 2:15). It is the result of the cross of Christ and His intercession (Colossians 1:22 and Jude 24) and was characteristic of the earthly Jesus (Hebrews 9:14 and 1 Peter 1:19). By studying and beholding Jesus, God's end-time people have become conformed to the image of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Here the 144,000 are described as "blameless" or "without fault." The Greek word for this is *amômos*. In the Greek Old Testament the concepts of "first fruits" and "blameless" are closely related. "Blameless" was the word used to describe an animal that was without defect and thus appropriate to be used as a sacrifice (Num 6:14; 19:2; 28:19, 31; 29:, 13). In the Greek Old Testament there was also a metaphorical use in relation to human behavior ("without fault"– Psa 15:2 [14:2 in LXX]; 18:23 [17:24 in LXX]; 119:1 [118:1 in LXX]; Prov 11:20; 22:11). As such, it is not surprising that the New Testament uses the word in relation to Jesus Christ, as God's perfect sacrifice (Heb 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19). New Testament believers are encouraged to emulate Christ and live lives that are as "unblemished" as possible (Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; Col 1:22; 2 Pet 3:14; Jude 24). No doubt there is also an element of self-sacrifice implied here as well. Our "blamelessness" is to be like His when we went to the cross.

Blamelessness, therefore, is not a quality unique to the 144,000 and only available to the last generation. It was the expectation for all Christians at all times, to walk with God the way Abraham walked (Gen 17:1). In the final conflict, those who are faithful to Christ are counted as blameless as faithful believers in the past. The very concept of "144,000" does not set it apart from earlier generations, but identifies with them as the totality of Israel (see notes on 7:4-8). This blameless condition is achieved through "washing" (7:14) and through constant relationship with the Lamb (14:1, 4).

### **Rev 14:1-5 (conclusion)–**

What have we learned about the “remnant” (God’s end-time faithful people) from this passage? 1) God’s end-time faithful people can be named by many different names in the book of Revelation. They were called remnant in 12:17, but here they are called the 144,000. In chapter 7 the 144,000 are also called the great multitude (see notes on 7:9). 2) They reflect the character of Jesus (have His name on their foreheads). 3) They are totally loyal to Jesus, living in continuous relationship with Him (follow the Lamb wherever He goes, virgins). 4) They are authentic (no lie), not being deceived by the end-time deceptions of the unholy trinity of chapter 13. 5) They are becoming more and more like Jesus, seeking to do His will in every facet of their lives (blameless). These characteristics can be added to the two that we learned about in 12:17. There the remnant was characterized by obedience to all of God’s commandments and the possession of the “testimony of Jesus,” an end-time visionary gift of prophecy similar to the one exercised by John in this book (see notes on 12:17).

### **Rev 14:6-13– (Introduction)**

In this passage we come to the climax of the message of Revelation. The book is structured in terms of seven major visions (churches, seals, trumpets, 12-14, bowl-plagues, millennium, New Jerusalem) relating to each other in the form of a pyramid or chiasm (first and last parallel, second and next to last parallel, etc.). Revelation 12-14 forms the center of this Hebrew chiasm and is thus the key portion of the book. Within the center, everything is working toward the climax in 14:6-13, the three angel’s messages. That makes this passage the center of the center of the Book of Revelation.

In 12:17 we have a nutshell summary of the final crisis that follows. The dragon makes war with the remnant. In chapter 13 the dragon’s side of the conflict is summarized. In chapter 14 the focus is on the remnant (called 144,000 [14:1-5] and “the saints” [14:12]). In 14:1-5 the character of the remnant is in focus (see notes on 14:1-5 Conclusion). In 14:6-13 the focus is on the message that the remnant will deliver to the world during the final crisis of earth’s history. That message is not given in detail, but presumes the entire picture of God’s end-time people given through chapters 10-14.

In this passage there are three angels with the everlasting gospel message to proclaim to the world in the very final crisis of earth’s history. In chapter 16 there is a demonic counterpart to these three angels. There three frogs (16:13-14– “the spirits of demons”) go out to the whole world with another gospel message. That counterpart to the three angels presents the gospel of the demonic trinity. In the last days it will be trinity versus trinity and gospel versus gospel. This is the essence of the final conflict and the final deception. The result will be an end-time showdown between the two Gods and the two gospels similar to the one that occurred at Mount Carmel in Old Testament times (see notes on 16:16). So the three angels’ messages here are the crucial center of the book of Revelation’s message.

### **Rev 14:6–**

Although this book is the “revelation of Jesus Christ,” the Greek words for “gospel” occur only twice in this book, the noun form (*euangelion*) here and the verb form (*euangelisen*)

in 10:7. While most translations say “the” eternal or everlasting gospel, the ESV is correct in translating the Greek “an eternal gospel.” While the word “gospel” is normally used in the New Testament with the definite article (“the” gospel), here the article is missing, which calls for some attention. Evidently most translators either didn’t notice the absence of the article or assumed that it was unimportant. Gospel is gospel. But I would like to suggest that the absence of the article was deliberate and points to something important.

G. K. Beale argues that this proves that it is not the “gospel” of Paul and Jesus that is being referred to here, but simply “an eternal message” of doom against the wicked. In that case, Revelation 14:6-7 would have nothing to do with the final proclamation of the New Testament gospel of Jesus Christ, but simply be a proclamation of doom on those who have already rejected the gospel. But this doesn’t sound right in the context. For one thing, the message of doom in 14:9-11 is blended with a gospel statement in 14:12, so this is not entirely a message of doom. For another, the message of verse 7 is a command to fear, glorify and worship God, not a statement that the wicked have not been doing that. And since there are other words in Greek for message or proclamation, the rare use of “gospel” here seems an intentional connection with Matthew 24:14 and similar texts throughout the New Testament.

I believe John uses “an eternal gospel” instead of “the eternal gospel” because he wants to highlight both the similarity with other gospel calls and, at the same time, that this final call is different in some way. This is the end-time gospel call. Some of that difference may be detected in an allusion to Psalm 96:2 in the Greek. My translation: “Sing to the Lord, praise (or “speak well of”) His name, preach (*euangelizesthe*) His salvation from day to day.” The Greek of this verse is fairly literal word for word translation of the Hebrew, so no distortion is brought in by the Greek translator’s choice of terms. In Psalm 96:2 the good news of God’s salvation is paralleled to speaking well of His name.

Psalm 96 as a whole is a magnificent backdrop to Revelation 14:6. The gospel message of Psalm 96 encompasses heaven and earth (verses 1, 5 and 11) and its perspective on time encompasses all the way from the distant past to the far future (“day to day”). The message is eternally valid. God is worshiped in this psalm not only because He is creator but because of His way of doing things. The “gospel” in this verse **includes** personal salvation, but is not limited to it. What is set right in this final proclamation is not just human standing with God, but God’s standing with the universe. The absence of the article in this verse points to a bigger context than just human salvation.

The allusion to Psalm 96 would seem rather jarring in its immediate context were it not for the somewhat more distant context. It is from the beginning of a story that the rest of the story gets its meaning. This verse is a climactic part of a section (chapters 13 and 14) that elaborates on the final spiritual battle of earth’s history (Rev 12:17). But that final battle is grounded in a much earlier battle between Michael and the dragon, or to use other words, between Christ and Satan (12:7-11— see notes on this passage). That battle echos humanity’s first contact with evil at the dawn of human history (Gen 3:1-6). The first battle began with Satan’s charge against the government of God (Gen 3:1). But even that spiritual battle was not the first. Well before then the battle between Christ and Satan began in heaven (12:4, 7— see notes on these verses). Like the garden, it was a spiritual battle over the character of God and

Satan and their respective visions for the universe. It is clear that the battle is a spiritual one because the weapons in this war are lies (see note on 12:4) as occurred in Eden (12:9), accusations like those Satan placed against Job (12:10, cf. Job 1-2), and the testimonies of those who overcome by the blood of the Lamb (12:11). As in John 12:31-32, the cross addresses the cosmic issues raised by Satan in heaven.

In conclusion, the allusions to Psalm 96 and the earlier story of Revelation 12 indicate that the gospel of Revelation 14:6 is concerned with much more than just human salvation, it is cosmic in its scope.

As already noted, the message the remnant gives during the final crisis of earth's history is the "everlasting" (KJV) or "eternal" (NIV, ESV) gospel. The full phrase "everlasting gospel" is also grounded in the "everlasting covenant" (Hebrew *berith olam*) mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. The first reference to the "everlasting covenant" (Gen 9:16) comes in relation to the promise of God to never again destroy the world by flood (Gen 9:9-17). Since the covenant included the animals of the world, it is clear that human beings could do nothing to earn or achieve this covenant. It rested solely in what God can and will do for the creatures He has placed on the earth. The everlasting covenant is based on the promises of God, God binds Himself to actions which benefit His creation. The "sign" of this covenant with Noah is the rainbow.

The everlasting covenant was renewed with Abraham, many centuries after the covenant with Noah (Gen 7:7-8, 13, 19). The special focus of this covenant, at first glance, was with Israel (the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob) rather than the whole creation (see also 1 Chr 16:13-25; Psa 105:10; Ezek 16:60; 37:26). In this covenant God promised Abraham a continuing relationship with him and his descendants, many descendants, and the land of Canaan (Gen 17:1-8). But this version of the covenant is not a narrowing of the promise made to Noah, through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and Israel (Exod 19:5-6) God intended to bless all the nations and peoples of the earth. The sign of this covenant was circumcision. This everlasting covenant with Abraham and Israel was further focused on the role of David and his descendants in the promises of God (2 Sam 7:8-16; 23:5).

In the Old Testament prophets, the everlasting covenant is also significant. Although it has been narrowed in focus from Noah to Abraham to David, it remains valid for the entire human race (Isa 24:5). In Isaiah 55:3, the everlasting covenant (grounded still in the covenant made with David) is given a future dimension (Isa 55:4) that remains worldwide in focus (Isa 55:1-11, see also Isa 61:8-11).

In the New Testament, the everlasting covenant in all of its different manifestations is focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ, particularly His death on the cross (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 1:72). Jesus becomes the focus of a new Israel (with twelve disciples just as Israel had twelve tribes— Matt 19:28). God's covenant and promises to Israel would now be fulfilled in relationship to Jesus Christ (Acts 3:18-25). The gospel of Jesus Christ, therefore, is the successor and fulfillment of the everlasting covenant with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David. The true son of David, Jesus Christ, is the one through whom God would bless all the peoples of the earth (Luke 1:68-75; Acts 3:25). Thus, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the New Testament counterpart of the mighty acts of God for His people in Old Testament times. In the gospel of

Jesus Christ, the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David become a living reality for those in relationship with Jesus Christ. This everlasting gospel is to be at the heart of the remnant's message in the Book of Revelation.

The New Testament gospel is well summarized at the beginning of Revelation (1:5-7-- see comments there). There Jesus loves us continually (Greek present indicative), has washed or freed us from our sins at a point in past time (Greek aorist indicative-- the cross), has elevated us to extremely high status (a kingdom and priests), and will return with the clouds so that every eye can see Him. As in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, the gospel brings freedom from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The preceding comments make it clear that the end-time gospel to be proclaimed by the remnant (144,000) is not something new or different from the gospel proclaimed by Jesus, Paul and John, but it does have additional points of emphasis. The everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 is uniquely relevant to the final events of earth's history, but it is not a rejection of or deviation from the New Testament gospel. This final version of the gospel builds on the everlasting covenant with Noah, Abraham, Israel and David. It is grounded in the person and the work of Jesus Christ (particularly the cross). And it completes the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan. The end-time gospel of the remnant will gain the attention of the world, uplift the character and promises of God, and win many out of "Babylon" in the final events of earth's history (see Rev 18:1-4).

This end-time gospel will be uniquely designed to fit the circumstances of the final crisis of earth's history (see Rev 14:12 [Excursus on the Remnant]). But the fact that this end-time gospel is "everlasting" ensures that it still the gospel of Jesus, Paul, and John, the same gospel that was proclaimed in New Testament times. It has identical roots and is fundamentally the same--the great mighty acts of God in Christ. It is all about what Christ has done--His ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement in heaven, intercession, and second coming. And what Christ has done is reveal the true character of God before the entire universe (John 1:14-18; 12:31-32). This will be at the heart of the message of the remnant.

The message of this first angel, the everlasting gospel, is "preached" to those who live on the earth. The word "preached," also translated "proclaimed" (NIV, ESV), is actually the verb form (*euaggelisai*) of the noun "gospel" (*euaggelion*). A literal translation could be "having the everlasting gospel to gospel to those who live on the earth." "Those who live on the earth" is normally a phrase for the enemies of God and His people in the book of Revelation, rather than simply all humanity.

The objects of this preaching are further defined as "every nation, tribe, language and people." This grouping occurs five times in the book of Revelation. In 5:9 they represent those from whom God has purchased His people by the blood of the Lamb. In 7:9 this grouping indicates the full extent of people-types on earth from whom the great multitude is drawn. In 11:9 these words represent the larger body of people on earth from whom some, perhaps "those who live on the earth" (11:10), refuse to allow the bodies of the two witnesses to be buried. In 13:7 these words represents those over whom the sea beast has authority. But that is only after the sea beast has overcome the saints. So the domain of the beast is not described as willing subjects of the beast, it is "those who live on the earth" who worship the beast (13:8).

I would conclude, then, (from the previous analysis) that although every nation, tribe language and people is connected with “those who live on the earth” here, the two groups are not exactly the same. “Those who live on the earth” represents the wicked, those who have rejected the gospel. Every “nation, tribe, language and people” represents those in need of the gospel, whose minds and hearts can still be turned to God. Some of them are saved (5:9; 7:9) and some overtly reject the two witnesses and worship the beast (11:9-10; 13:7-8). I would conclude, then, that every nation, tribe, language and people includes all humanity, not just those who are lost. Since the verb for “preaching” implies good news rather than a proclamation of doom, and those to whom it is preached are a mixed group, I would conclude that the preaching of the “everlasting gospel” here is the same event as described by Jesus in Matt 24:14 and Mark 13:10. It is the world’s final opportunity to turn to God in the context of the last battle (12:17).

John himself, of course, cannot preach or prophecy again to the world (compare with the slightly different grouping in Revelation 10:11 and the notes on that verse). So the first angel of Revelation 14 corresponds to the remnant, which proclaims the message of the book of Revelation to the world in the end-time (see also 12:17). The Book of Revelation (10:11) will become central to the world-wide gospel initiative at the end. And this end-time gospel will come at the end of earth's history and take on the unique form laid out in Revelation 14:6-7).

**Rev 14:7 (Introduction)**– The content of the “everlasting gospel” is summarized in a series of significant statements. There are four primary components to the end-time gospel.

- 1- Fear God.
- 2- Give Him glory.
- 3- Hour of judgment has come.
- 4- Worship Him who made heaven and earth.

The first, second and fourth components are the essential content of the end-time gospel and the third component provides the context or setting in which that gospel is proclaimed. The first, second and fourth components are centered around aorist imperatives. That means that “*fear* God,” “*give* Him glory,” and “*worship* the Creator” are all commands at a specific point in time. They are the core of the proclamation. This is not a general proclamation of the gospel throughout history, but a specific call at a specific time. The third element, judgment, is grammatically subordinate to the other three. It is the context in which the proclamation is made. It is the everlasting gospel in a unique and specific context.

#### **Rev 14:7–**

The word “fear” in English has some connections with the biblical use of the term but there are also differences. Fearing God in the biblical sense certainly does not generally mean to run and hide when God appears. In the Old Testament, the fear of God means to have reverence or awe for Him: it includes things like knowing God personally (Proverbs 9:10); doing His commandments (Psalm 111:10; Eccl 12:13) and avoiding evil (Proverbs 3:7 and 16:6). As summarized by Stefanovic; the fear of God means a relationship with God that includes full surrender to His will (1 Sam 12:14, 24; Neh 7:2; Psalm 40:3; Jer 44:10, etc.).

In modern terms, the fear of God means to take Him seriously enough to enter into a relationship with Him, to follow His warnings to avoid evil, and to do His commandments, even the ones that may be inconvenient. It is a call to live and act as those who know that they will give account to God one day. According to this verse, such a serious call will be a part of the experience of God's end-time people.

There is a natural connection between the fear of God and giving glory to Him. The two are listed together several times in the book of Revelation; 11:13 and 15:4 as well as here. Those who fear God in the biblical sense understand how much there is to praise Him for. Perhaps the fear of God in this verse refers to a right relationship with God, while giving Him glory refers to the obedience that follows from that relationship.

In any case, there is a call to God's last generation to give glory to Him. By nature, human beings glory in themselves— things they possess, performance and achievements, the esteem of other people. When they have an outward focus toward God and what He has done, instead of an inward focus toward what they have done, the end-time generation will truly thank and praise Him.

There are a number of ways that the followers of Jesus can glorify God. They give glory to Him by teaching the gospel with power and clarity. They give glory to God when they recount the mighty acts that he has done, especially in the Christ event. The essence of Old Testament praise was recounting God's mighty acts, such as the creation and the Exodus. On the other hand, the essence of praise for New Testament Christians is Christ's life, death, resurrection, and exaltation to heaven. The end-time people of God are those who fear Him (11:18; 15:4; 19:5), keep His commandments (12:17; 14:12; possibly 22:14), and give glory to Him.

In a surprising twist, Paul suggests a unique way in which believers can glorify God; by eating and drinking right, by treating their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31.

The gospel says that we are valuable to God. When we truly appreciate the cross of Christ we learn to value ourselves the way God values us. We will value our bodies, our health, our time, our money, our minds, etc. We give God glory when we treat ourselves as objects that are valuable to Him.

A crucial context for the end-time gospel is that God's final judgment has come. Since the verb "has come" (*elthen*) is an ingressive aorist indicative, it means that at some point in the past, from the perspective of the angel's call, this final judgment had begun and would continue throughout the final battle summarized in 12:17. The final judgment is not, therefore, a singular event at the Second Coming itself, it is a process that begins before the final crisis and leads up to the Second Coming.

The events of the Second Coming make a final division between righteous and wicked, so the final judgment needs to ratify who is on who's side ahead of the End. While God Himself knows exactly where each person stands at all times, such a process is of high value to the watching universe that will be asked to accept those redeemed from the earth into their

neighborhoods (for details on this point and the final judgment in general see comments on Revelation 11:1-2 and Conclusion to Revelation 11:1-2).

The Greek language has two main words for “judgment.” One is *krisis* (from which we get the English word crisis), which expresses the action or process of the judgment. The other word is *krima*, which expresses the verdict of the judgment, its very final outcome. There is also a verb form of judgment (*krinô*) which can express either aspect depending on the context (Rev 6:10). The word in this text is *kriseôs*, the genitive singular form of *krisis*. So the focus of this verse, as the context would imply, is on the process of judgment, investigating and determining how people have responded to the preaching of the everlasting gospel (14:6). The verdict or outcome has not yet been determined, so this judgment precedes the final verdict and execution of judgment.

The word *krisis* is repeated in several later texts of Revelation (16:7; 18:10; 19:2). In 16:7 and 19:2 the word expresses the correctness of God’s decision-making process in relation to those who have not received the gospel. In 18:10 it expresses the process by which Babylon has been brought to destruction. The word *krima* is found in 17:1 and 20:4. In 17:1 it focuses the chapter on the outcome of God’s judgment of the prostitute Babylon. The first verse of the chapter anticipates the outcome in 17:16. In 20:4 it focuses on the role of the martyrs in the final decision process of the judgment.

In the New Testament, judgment can occur at any time. In fact, the New Testament focuses in on three main events of judgment in the course of Christian history. First, judgment occurred in the person of Jesus at both the cross and the resurrection. At the cross, Jesus was recognized as the representative of the whole human race. As such, all the sin of the human race was placed upon Him and was condemned in His suffering and death (Rom 8:3; 1 Pet 2:24). On the other hand, at the resurrection of Jesus the whole human race was raised to approval with God in Him (John 12:31-2; Acts 13:32-33; 1 Cor 1:20). So the New Testament writers understood the Christ event to be a judgment (both positive and negative) on the whole human race.

Second, whenever the gospel is preached, people are held accountable to God and judgment takes place (John 3:18-21; 5:22-24). Whenever the gospel is preached, people are either drawn closer to Christ or are deepened in their unwillingness to accept the gospel. So even though the goal of preaching is to draw people to Jesus, there are both positive and negative outcomes in response to that preaching. Gospel preaching produces judgment on the whole human race, but in small doses throughout Christian history.

Third, judgment occurs at the End, when people’s response to the words of Jesus in preaching becomes the basis for a final assessment on whether or not a person has truly committed to a relationship with Him (John 12:48; 2 Cor 5:10). The final judgment does not overturn the decisions made throughout history, rather it ratifies them in heaven and for all time.

While the book of Revelation contains all three phases of judgment, the Greek words for judgment are used primarily in relation to judgment at the End. The first phase of judgment is highlighted in Revelation 5, although the words for “judgment” are not found there. This was a judgment on the whole human race in the person of Jesus Christ (who is worthy?). The second

phase of judgment is highlighted in chapter 6. The gospel goes out to the world and the various horses represent the various responses that the gospel receives in the course of human history. But the sole appearance of judgment language in the chapter is with reference to the future judgment at the End (Greek *krineis*, 6:10) Most of the Greek words for judgment occur in chapters 12-14 and beyond. The specific focus of judgment in Revelation 6:10 and throughout the second half of the book is on the crisis in the last days of earth's history. So for the book of Revelation, the appearance of judgment language is not related to the cross or preaching (as is often the case in the Gospel of John), it is focused on the period of history just before the Second Coming of Jesus.

The final judgment mentioned here arrives before the Second Coming (some call it the Pre-Advent Judgment) because when Jesus comes His reward is with Him both to reward the saints and destroy the destroyers of the earth (Rev 11:18, 14:14-20; 22:11-12). So the investigative side needs to be complete before the outcome of the judgment is announced and executed at the Second Coming. The great end-time judgment, therefore, is a pre-advent judgment in the context of world-wide preaching of the gospel.

An interesting corollary of the pre-advent judgment is the condition of people after death. If the final judgment has occurred for each person at death, then the non-biblical idea that people go to heaven when they die makes some sense. But if the outcome of the judgment is seen only at the resurrection of the dead when Jesus comes, then the resurrection awaits the finality of judgment. When judgment is complete the end-time resurrections occur (Dan 12:1-3; John 5:28-29; Rev 20:1-10), some to eternal life and some to eternal destruction. The biblical teaching is that when people die the body returns to the ground and the "spirit" (breath, software of the personality) returns to God. Consciousness only returns at the resurrection, when God's software is reunited with the hardware (the body). As N. T. Wright makes so clear, resurrected life is bodily life.

There are other important biblical parallels to the pre-Advent judgment in this verse. In Matthew 25:31-46 is the parable of the sheep and the goats, indicating a division at the return of Jesus on the basis of how people have treated others. This parallel text has some interesting differences with this verse as well. Revelation 14:7 focuses on the relation of judgment to the final preaching of the gospel, the Matthew text focuses on the verdict of the final judgment at the Second Coming. This verse focuses on the gospel as a message to the world, particularly those who have been in opposition to God and His people (those who "live on the earth"), while the Matthew 25 passage focuses on the church (note the focus of the earlier parables in the chapter, such as the ten virgins and the talents), dividing between followers of Jesus who either have or have not treated others as if they embodied the person of Christ. The focus of Revelation 14 is on the first table of the law (commandments related to God and worship), while the focus of Matthew 25 is on the second table of the law (commandments related to love of others). One could describe the contrast briefly, in Revelation 14 the focus of the gospel message is on the world, in Matthew 25 the focus of the gospel message is on the church. The heavenly, end-time judgment has powerful implications for the final generation of human beings on the earth.

The last part of the end-time gospel is the call to worship the "one who made. . ." A look

at the context suggests that worship is the central issue in the battle between the dragon and the remnant. In Revelation 13 and 14 the word “worship” is used seven times in relation to the beast, the dragon or the image of the beast (Rev 13: 4 (twice), 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11). Seven is, of course, the most significant number in the book of Revelation. What is particularly interesting is that there is only one call to worship God in this entire narrative. The only reference to positive worship of God in this section of Revelation is in this verse. That makes Revelation 14:7 the most important verse in this entire section of the book, perhaps the most important text in the entire book.

The phrase “the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water” has an important parallel to the two major plague sequences of Revelation, the first four of the trumpets and the bowls respectively. The first trumpet affects the earth (8:7). The second trumpet affects the sea (8:8). The third trumpet affects the rivers and the springs or the “fountains of water (8:10).” The fourth trumpet affects the heavens; the sun, moon and stars (8:12). This listing of four regions of the earth is ultimately derived from the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2. The first four days of creation speak of the creation and naming of “heavens, earth and seas.” The “rivers” are then named in Genesis 2:10-14, making up the full complement of the cosmos in Hebrew thought. The Greek word for springs or fountains even appears in the LXX of Genesis 2:6. These same four regions in the same order are also mentioned in the seven bowl-plagues of Revelation 16:2-9. The first angel’s message, then, becomes a bridge between the trumpets and the bowl-plagues. The ultimate issues of both the trumpets and the bowls is whether the human race will acknowledge God as supreme, as creator over all.

Who are the end-time remnant of God’s people supposed to worship? The one who, according to the NIV, “made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water (NIV).” But the Greek of this verse actually uses the singular for “heaven,” as reflected in the ESV and the KJV. This ambiguity reflects the Hebrew word for “heaven(s)” (*shamayim*). *Shamayim* is a plural form which can be translated either “heavens” or “heaven.” But the early Greek translation (Septuagint) of “heaven” (Gen 1:1; Exod 20:11) uses the singular, as does the Greek of this verse. In English the plural is usually used for the starry universe and the singular either for God’s dwelling or “the sky.” But the Hebrew word form doesn’t make that distinction, so it is unwise to make too much of the various English translations in texts like Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 20:11.

As most scholarly Greek texts indicate, therefore, the language of Him who made heaven, earth and sea recalls the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, the Sabbath command. The Sabbath command states: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day." (Exod 20:11, ESV) There is a strong verbal parallel in the reference to God along with the idea of making heaven, earth and sea. The reference to the fourth commandment in Revelation 14:7 is one of the strongest allusions to the Old Testament in the entire book (see Excursus on the Sabbath allusion in Rev 14:7).

Before we look at the significance of the allusion to the fourth commandment in this verse, we should pay a little more attention to the important difference between this verse and Exodus 20:11. Exodus 20:11 mentions “heaven, earth and sea” followed by “all that is in them”

(ESV). In place of “all that is in them” the author of Revelation has “the springs of water.” This seems odd on the face of it and raises the question as to the theological meaning of this switch. In Exodus 20:11 “all that is in them” would seem to be a reference to the filling of the heaven, earth and sea on the fifth and sixth days of creation. On the fifth day God filled the sea with swimming creatures and filled the sky (“heaven”) with flying creatures. Then on the sixth day God filled the earth/land with animals and human beings. So Revelation 14:7 breaks off the allusion to the fourth commandment to introduce something else. This is the typical way that Revelation works, creating a mosaic of allusions that often speaks a thousand words in a short sentence. The question is, why are the “fountains” introduced here and what meaning does the author intend to convey?

The Bible presents God (or the spirit of God) as the one who is in charge of the waters, including rains and storms (Gen 1:2; Jer 10:13; 51:16). Concepts such as sea, rain, waters, rivers, and springs, therefore, are often invested with theological meaning. Rain and springs of water usually have a positive meaning. Sea and floods, on the other hand, could represent human rebellion because they the ancients saw in them water attempting to get out from under God’s control (although these attempts are never successful in the end). The Flood story in Genesis, for example, is portrayed in the Bible as a reversal of creation. In Genesis God creates by means of separation and distinction (Gen 1:4, 7, 9, 18). In the Flood those separations and distinctions are obliterated (Gen 7:11, 20) and the world is returned to its original pre-creation condition (Gen 7:18-20; 8:1). In the Flood story God is portrayed as relaxing His control over the waters (or deliberately undoing His original creation) in an act of judgment against human rebellion.

Allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation often tap into those theological meanings. The core theological meaning of water references is related to God’s complete control over His creation.

The word “springs” in this text (*pêgai*, root form is *pêgê*) is fairly rare in the Bible compared to the language of the rest of this verse. Within Revelation itself, the word appears twice in the plague sequences of the trumpets and the bowls. The third trumpet falls on a third of the rivers and of the “springs of water” (Rev 8:10). The third bowl falls on all the rivers and springs of the earth, escalating the destruction beyond that of the trumpets (Rev 16:4). These two plagues target the world’s sources of fresh water (as opposed to the “seas,” which are affected by the second trumpet and the second bowl-plague). In Revelation 7:17, the “springs of water” represent the positive place to which the Lamb “shepherds” those who have survived the cataclysms of the end (Rev 6:15-17). In these texts the springs are a positive element for the benefit of humanity, from the divine perspective, but can be taken be removed from human use by judgment.

When it comes to “springs of water” the Old Testament reference that really jumps out to the reader of Revelation is the double reference in the Flood story (Gen 7:11; 8:2). In Genesis 7:11 the beginning of the forty days and nights of rain is described as follows: “The fountains (*pêgai*) of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened (ESV).” In Genesis 8:2 (ESV) the conclusion of the flooding rain is described as “the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed.” This rare and expressive language seems deliberately echoed in Revelation 14:7.

In Jewish apocalyptic the Flood story was understood as a type of God's judgments at the end of time. This verse is operating within that world view to prepare the reader for the judgments of God at the end of the world. "Fountains of water" well expresses the two-sided nature of judgment in the Bible. Springs provide nourishment and sustenance in dry places. As such they represent God's judgment blessings on the faithful (Josh 15:19; Jdg 1:15; 35:7; 41:18; 49:10). But when these springs help to flood the earth, as occurred in the Flood story, they can signify God's judgment against human rebellion (Gen 7:11; Matt 24:36-39).

So Revelation 14:7 is alluding to creation, through the wording of the Sabbath command, and also to the Flood, which was the destruction and then re-creation of the earth. The Flood reference underlines the judgment context of the verse. To refuse worship of the Creator (by worshiping the beast and/or his allies) is to ultimately bring about ones' own destruction. And in today's scientific environment, it is interesting that this verse connects creation with the Flood, something that the book of Genesis also does (see my book *Meet God Again for the First Time*, chapter Two). The best explanation of geologic phenomena from a creationist perspective requires catastrophism on a worldwide basis. The biblical account of the Flood provides that kind of historical and geological event.

#### **Rev 14:7 (Conclusion)–**

The message of the first angel is surprisingly basic and direct. In the context of the final, pre-advent judgment of the world the first angel calls the inhabitants of the earth (those not following God) to do several basic things. To fear God means to take Him seriously and not entertain other options. To give Him glory means to focus on Him rather than on the cheap imitations offered by the dragon and his allies. To worship Him only is to acknowledge the true God's claims in the face of the great counterfeit offered by the unholy trinity. That acknowledgment will be expressed in relation to the Sabbath command of the Decalogue. It echos the language of Moses appeal to Israel to fear God, obey His commandments and worship Him only (Deut 6:13, 17; 10:12-13, 20).

In the Jewish context of the first Christian century, the one God was characterized by three things. He is the sole ruler of the world and of the universe. He is the sole creator. And He is the only one worthy of worship. Thus this text is a strong affirmation of Jewish monotheism. It is a call to acknowledge as the sole ruler the one who made all things and is therefore the only one who is worthy of worship. One's response to this call will particularly be seen in the realm of worship.

#### **Rev 14:7– (spiritual lesson)**

The end-time proclamation of the gospel will be a solemn and serious time. Everyone on earth will be held accountable. To those who prefer to live their lives without any accountability, such a message sounds threatening and negative. But in reality very little good is accomplished in this world without some kind of accountability. Have you ever accomplished something great without knowing that people were depending on you for it? Have you ever had a successful

exercise program without an exercise partner to push you along? Being accountable to God every moment can have a positive influence in our lives and cause us to take action on things that we already know to be right. So living in the time of judgment can have a very positive impact on the decisions we make from day to day.

Judgment can also be positive in the sense that one day God will deal with the world's oppressors. Judgment means that the Rwandas and Bosnias of this world will be set right. The quiet acts of righteousness through all the ages will be rewarded (Matthew 10:40-42). Everything we do, such as wiping counters and getting up at 3 AM to feed a crying baby, is remembered in the judgment. Everything we do matters in the ultimate scheme of things. Even the most ordinary of lives can be filled with meaning and purpose when we realize that all we do is marked by God and celebrated at the End.

### **Rev 14:7 (Excursus on the Sabbath allusion)–**

The most controversial part of the above exegesis would be the centrality of the reference to the Sabbath as expressed in the ten commandments. While the evidence offered in the previous exegesis would be enough for most allusions in a commentary, this particular allusion is frequently resisted and, therefore, deserves a more careful outline of the evidence. This is all the more so because Revelation never directly quotes the Old Testament. Instead, it alludes to it with a word, a phrase, a name, a place, or a mere hint of the author's intention. It is rare to find more than two or three words in common between the text of Revelation and its Old Testament antecedents. Any suggested allusion with four or more major words in common jumps out as very likely to be intentional. At first glance, then, the allusion to the fourth commandment is one of Revelation's strongest uses of Old Testament language. When you compare Revelation 14:7 with Exodus 20:11 you find the following verbal parallels: "made," "heavens," "earth," "sea," and "God (Him)." There are four words directly in common and the fifth is a clear reference to God even though the word isn't used. So on the basis of verbal parallels alone it seems extremely likely that John had the fourth commandment in mind as he wrote this verse.

There is a major objection to the idea that Revelation 14:7 contains a powerful verbal parallel to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. It has been noted that the same language found in Exodus 20:11 is also found in Psalm 146:6: The one "who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them." Since both texts are referenced in the critical margins (scholarly references) it is legitimate to ask which of the two Old Testament texts is truly being referenced here.

The truth is that the Greek version of Psalm 146:6 is even closer to Revelation 14:7 than Exodus 20:11 is. Both Revelation 14:7 and Psalm 146:6 read "the one who made" (Greek participle) while Exodus 20:11 reads "the Lord made" (Greek noun and finite verb). So on purely verbal grounds the parallels to Psalm 146:6 in this verse are slightly closer than the parallels to Exodus 20:11.

While there are strong verbal parallels to both Psalm 146:6 and Exodus 20:11 in this

verse, there are other considerations that can help us decide which of the two verses John likely had in mind as he wrote (see chapter 7 of *The Deep Things of God* for guidelines in determining allusions). Intentional allusions usually involve parallel themes in the two contexts as well as words. And that is certainly the case with Exodus 20 and Revelation 14.

The ten commandments in Exodus 20 are grounded in the theme of God's salvation. God's claim on Israel's obedience is the fact that He saved them from their situation as slaves in Egypt (20:2). With the second commandment there is also a strong theme of judgment in a jealous God who responds to both lawlessness and faithfulness (20:5-6). Finally, in the Sabbath command itself (20:8-11) there is the aforementioned theme of creation, a reference to Yahweh's creation of heaven, earth and sea and all the creatures they contain (20:11, cf. Gen 1). In Revelation 14:6-7 one finds all three themes as well; the theme of salvation ("everlasting gospel"– 14:6), the theme of judgment and the theme of creation (14:7). So the thematic parallels between Revelation 14 and the first four commandments of the Decalogue are very strong.

A look at the context of Psalm 146, however, reveals the same three themes there. There is no salvation to be found in princes (146:3), there is the aforementioned reference to creation (146:6), and the creator is also the one who executes justice for the oppressed (146:7). So the thematic parallels between Revelation 14 and both Psalm 146 and Exodus 20 are strong, with a slight edge this time to Exodus 20. So was John alluding to Exodus 20 or Psalm 146 in Revelation 14:7? We need to examine whether there are structural parallels between these texts before making a decision.

The most convincing parallels for determining the presence of an intentional allusion are structural parallels. That is where a number of verbal and thematic parallels occur in parallel contexts. The structural parallel is particularly convincing when these parallels occur in roughly the same order in both later and earlier text. One example of a structural parallel is the book of Ezekiel in Revelation. Numerous scholars have noted that Revelation alludes to the entire book of Ezekiel with clusters of allusions occurring within Revelation in roughly the same order that the same concept occur in Ezekiel. A couple of other examples of structural parallels are the Exodus and creation in the trumpets and Daniel 7 in Revelation 12 and 13. A structural parallel within Revelation occurs between the trumpets (Rev 8-11) and the bowl-plagues (Rev 16). When a structural parallel is present, it increases the likelihood of more minor allusions between the same texts.

In evaluating whether Revelation 14:7 is alluding to Exodus 20:11 or Psalm 146:6 (or both) it is helpful to consider the role or lack of it that each of these OT chapters plays in Revelation 12-14. This I will attempt to do in the next couple of postings.

Is there a structural parallel between the central section of Revelation (chapters 12-14) and the ten commandments as presented in Exodus 20? The most obvious evidence is the dual reference to the "commandments of God" in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. The sanctuary introduction text for Revelation 12-14 (Rev 11:19) includes the only reference to the ark of the covenant in the book of Revelation. The ark was the place when the ten commandments were

stored. Both 11:19 and 15:5-8 allude to Exodus 34, which is one of the strongest ten commandment narratives in the Old Testament (see notes on Rev 11:19). These two texts serve to bracket Revelation 12-14 and indicate that the ten commandments are a central focus of the entire section.

The previous indications of a structural parallel to the ten commandments as a whole are confirmed by a closer look at the role of the first table of the law (the first four commandments, which focus on the human relationship with God) in Revelation 13. The beast and his allies in Revelation 13 are portrayed as deliberately counterfeiting the first table of the law. The first commandment says to "have no other gods before me." The dragon and the two beasts are portrayed as a counterfeit trinity in Revelation 13. To worship them is to transgress the first commandment. The second commandment concerns the making and worshiping of images. An image to the beast is set up in Revelation 13:15, and the worship of that image is commanded there on pain of death. The third commandment says to not "take the name of the Lord in vain." The sea beast of Revelation 13 is covered with blasphemous names (13:1) and utters many blasphemies (13:5-6).

And finally, scholars have noted how the language of Revelation 13:16-17 echos instructions related to the ten commandments in the Old Testament (Deut 6:5-8) in the light of ancient covenants (see notes on 13:16-17). Ancient covenants had a seal that recognized the covenant giver, the ground of His authority and the territory over which he ruled. The Sabbath command serves that purpose within the ten commandments (Exod 20:8-11). It names the author of the commandments, gives the ground of His authority (creation), and indicates the territory over which he rules (heaven, earth, sea and all that is in them). So the mark of the beast is the counterfeit of the seal of the commandments, the Sabbath. The entire chapter, Revelation 13, is a structural parallel to the first table of the law in Exodus 20:3-11.

There is a second listing of the ten commandments in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 5:6-21. But this listing is not relevant to the issue of an allusion in Revelation 14:7 because it does not contain the creation language of Exodus 20:11. Instead reference is made to the Exodus as the ground of Israel's obedience to the commandments. Deuteronomy 5 is a parallel text to Exodus 20 but is not the text John is alluding to in Revelation 14:7 and it is not a structural parallel to Revelation 13 in the full way that Exodus 20 is. Exodus 20:3-17 is constantly lurking behind the scenes throughout Revelation 11:19 - 15:8, particularly the first table of the law (20:3-11). This is further confirmed by the thematic parallels of salvation, judgment and creation in Revelation 14:6-7.

What about Psalm 146? There are certainly verbal and thematic parallels to Psalm 146:1-7 in Revelation 14:6-7. But no one has ever made the case that Psalm 146 is a major structural background to Revelation 12-14, the way Exodus 20 and Daniel 7 are. If Exodus 20 didn't exist one could make the case that John was alluding to Psalm 146:6 in Revelation 14:7. But the presence of powerful allusions to the ten commandments all over Revelation 11:19 - 15:8 (and nowhere else in the book in similar degree) strongly supports an intention on John's part to highlight the fourth commandment at exactly this high point in the narrative of Revelation 13

and 14. According to Revelation, the Sabbath command will play a crucial role in the final conflict of earth's history. Just what that role will be is the topic of the next couple of posts.

John's allusion to the Sabbath comes in a startlingly powerful context. The surface impression of the language of Revelation 13 could be that this is forecasting military, economic and political activity in the final stage of earth's history. And that is the way many read the chapter. But upon a more close and careful reading with Revelation 14 in mind, a different picture appears. The issue that arises over and over again in Revelation 13 and 14 is worship (see earlier exegetical notes on the last part of Revelation 14:7). Seven times in these two chapters there is a reference to worship of the dragon, the beast or the image to the beast.

The overall story is about a counterfeit god, a counterfeit trinity, which invites the worship of the entire world. It is a spiritual crisis and a spiritual battle. There is also a strong historical element in these texts and one can trace the impact of these themes throughout Christian history. But the central focus of Revelation is not on the military, economic and political events that are coming, but on Christ and Satan. The focus is on a universal contest regarding the character of God and whether He is truly worthy of worship. Seven times in these chapters is a reference to worship of the dragon and his allies. It is the central theme of this part of the book.

Ironically, while there are seven references to worship of the dragon and his allies in Revelation 13 and 14, only one time in the same narrative is there a reference to worship of God, and that is the call to worship the Creator in Revelation 14:7. That makes this call the central focus of this section, the purpose of the whole narrative. And since Revelation 13 and 14 is at the center of the book and this call to worship is at the center of the center, that makes the call to worship the creator the central theme of the entire book. And at the heart of this crucial passage is a call to worship God in the context of the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue. That makes the Sabbath a crucial issue in the final crisis of earth's history.

To many readers, particularly those not schooled in the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, John's emphasis on the Sabbath may seem trivial in the extreme. What spiritual significance could the Sabbath possibly have that would put it at the center of the final conflict forecasted in this book? That will be the topic of the concluding posts in this excursus.

Is it legalistic to call people to specifically worship God on Saturday rather than on another day? I would say not at all. Instead, I would suggest that Sabbath worship is the ideal response to the gospel. The Sabbath calls us to rest from our labors (Hebrews 4:9-11) just as God did from His after His work of creation (Genesis 1-2). And since the creator God is defined in New Testament terms as the Logos who became flesh (John 1:1-3, 14), the creator is Jesus, who is also the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). So as the memorial of creation, the Sabbath is also about Jesus.

In creation Jesus worked six days and then rested on the Sabbath. In the new creation (John 1:1-3; 2 Cor 5:17) Jesus died on Friday with the words "it is finished," rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment (Luke 23:54-56), and rose on the first day to His new ministry at the right hand of God. So the Sabbath is not only the memorial of creation it is

also the memorial of the New Creation accomplished at the cross. The Sabbath should no longer be kept only because it is commanded in Exodus 20, it should also be kept in honor of the Lord who rested in the tomb after the completion of His work of salvation.

It is because of the doing and dying of Christ that we can rest from our striving to earn favor with God. We keep the Sabbath, not in order to earn our salvation with God, but in honor of the fact that Christ earned our salvation at the cross.

The Sabbath is also the ideal test of loyalty to God in the final crisis of earth's history. The other commandments all make sense from a human perspective. If I don't want to be killed I should not kill. If I want my marriage protected and my wife to be safe, I had better not be wrecking other marriages through adultery. If I want my own possessions to be respected, I had better not be stealing what belongs to others. If God is Who He claims to be, it would be foolish to worship any other god or to practice idolatry.

There is only one commandment that doesn't contain an element of self-interest or human logic. To worship on one day over another does not make sense from a human perspective. There is no scientific or experiential difference between one day and another. It rains on Sabbath just as much or little as on any other day. The earth looks the same from space on Sabbath as on any other day. The only reason to favor one day over another is because God asks us to. It is a call to follow Him in every detail of our lives, to be completely loyal to Him, even if it is inconvenient or illogical to us.

It is like going out on a date. Let's say my wife and I agree to go out for lunch on Tuesday. But sometime after agreeing to that, I decide to meet her on Wednesday instead. Am I showing respect to my wife, even though in my mind Wednesday is just as good as Tuesday? But what matters is not the day I choose, it is the day and time my wife is expecting me to show up. The Sabbath is like that, it is important because God invites us to spend special time with Him on that day. And that day receives His special blessing (Exod 20:11).

There is one further element in relation to Sabbath-keeping. Jesus never kept Sunday. There is no text in the New Testament that says so. Instead He is always seen to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Matt 12:9-12; Mark 1:21; 3:1-2; 6:2; Luke 4:16; 6:6; 13:10). The apostles were all seen to do likewise (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). So in Jesus and the apostles we have an inspired model for our own Sabbath-keeping. The church is modeled on Christ. So at the end of time, the church will bear witness in its actions to what Jesus was like when he was on earth.

And more than this, Jesus obedience to the Sabbath is part of His righteousness (action in harmony with the covenant), which is imputed to us by faith. Our own Sabbath keeping will never be flawless, it will never be good enough (Rom 3:23). But we can rest in the knowledge that His perfect Sabbath-keeping is ours by faith. By contrast, since He never kept Sunday, we can never claim His perfect Sunday keeping in place of our own imperfect Sundaykeeping. The gospel points us to the Sabbath.

**Rev 14:1-7 (Spiritual lessons)–**

1) A key mark of the remnant (same as the 144,000) is their genuine and authentic character. They will follow Jesus and be loyal to Him. But more than that they will develop a character like His. And it will not simply be outward acts. They will be authentic. Through the power of the Spirit the gospel they profess will be worked out in their lives. They will preach only that which has already changed their lives. There will be no contrast between their profession and their practice.

According to verse 7 a crucial aspect of the remnant will be their accountability to God. Accountability is at the core of the fear of God. The remnant will take God seriously in all that they do. But accountability is particularly central to the judgment theme. The remnant lives its life in full consciousness of the End and of the judgment.

When you come to the end of your life and look back, what will truly matter to you? Will you wish you had played more video games? Will you wish you had watched more television or more movies? I don't think so. When you look back on your life from the other end, it will be clear that what really mattered was God and the kind of character that you invested yourself in. The remnant will live their lives and make daily decisions with the end and with the judgment in mind. That is what accountability is all about.

The end-time judgment will set everything right. When you look only at the present situation, it is clear that there is no justice in this world. Life is rarely fair. The rich get richer and the poor have children. Many people, including whole ethnic groups, have known only abuse and oppression. But the judgment means that in the end God will set everything right. All the good deeds that were overlooked will be noticed and rewarded. All the evil and the oppression will be recognized and condemned. God will set everything right. It is our great hope.

#### **Rev 14:8–**

The first angel's message is fully contained in verse 7. In this verse we find the second angel's message. The first angel has called the world back to the worship of the true God. The fact that the second angel "followed" the first indicates that the two messages are related. In returning to the true God, people are now urged to repudiate all philosophies and institutions that get in the way of their faithfulness to God. So in many ways this second message is the reverse or counterpart of the first. There are not only benefits to accepting the gospel, there are consequences of unbelief.

The double "fallen" with which this verse begins is a Greek aorist indicative, which normally expresses a specific event in the past. Scholars, however, generally see this particular kind of expression in Revelation as an echo of the Hebrew "prophetic perfect" which means that a normally past tense verb can express the certainty of a future event that is being prophesied. In other words, a prophesied event is described as if it had already occurred (see, for example, Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:8; an unmistakable parallel within Revelation can be found in 10:7–"should be finished" [KJV]). See note on 10:7. The fall of Babylon is here announced as if it has already occurred, thus expressing the certainty of Babylon's future destruction.

This message contains the first mention of Babylon by name in the book of Revelation.

When Babylon is named, it is almost always called “Babylon the great” (see also 16:19; 17:5; 18:2). This is likely an echo of Nebuchadnezzar’s boast in Daniel 4:30: ““Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?” (NKJV)

It is also likely, however, that the actual first reference to Babylon is in 11:8, where it speaks of “the great city.” The concept of the “great city” is frequently associated with Babylon in Revelation 16-18 (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19), where the fall of Babylon is described. End-time Babylon in Revelation seems to be a composite of the unholy trinity of Revelation 13: the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (Rev 16:13, 19). It is a world-wide alliance of religious institutions in service who are serving Satan in the guise of serving God (see also John 16:2).

The concept of “Babylon” in the book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament descriptions of ancient Babylon and its fall to the armies of Persia under Cyrus (2 Kgs 24-25; 2 Chr 36; Isa 44-47; Jer 25-29, 50-51; and Dan 1-6 among others). The Greek word translated Babylon was a loan word from ancient Akkadian (*babili*), which combined the semitic words for “gate” (*bab*) and “God” (*il*). So the word Babylon probably meant “the gate of God” to the ancients. It is not hard to see how the very name could be seen as a counter claim to genuine faith in the God of Israel. So in the Old Testament Babylon was the “poster child” for systematic opposition to God and His people. Babylon represents all human attempts to provide salvation apart from the true God.

Babylon’s role as a counterfeit gate to God was substantiated in Israel’s history. Babylon’s opposition to the true God went all the way back to the Tower of Babel (*babel* is Hebrew for “gate of God”) story (Gen 11:1-9). The ancients hoped their tower would be high enough to access God. But in a play on words, the Hebrews thought of the name as more like “babble” (Gen 11:9), the place where God confused the languages. Babylon was also associated with Lucifer (Isa 14:12-14). So its actions are seen as directed and motivated by Satan. In 1 Peter 5:13, Babylon may well be a reference to Rome. But in this verse “Rome” has become a spiritual and worldwide concept, the worldwide end-time alliance of religious institutions against the true God and His faithful followers..

This message of doom is actually good news for those who are faithful to God, for Babylon is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the martyrs of Jesus” (17:5-6). The good news is that Babylon is a temporary phenomenon very short in duration. It gains control of the entire world for a short time through an adulterous union with the political powers of the world (17:2). Those powers are represented as the Euphrates River (16:12; 17:1, 15), the “kings of the earth” (17:2) and the beast with its ten horns (17:3, 12-14). That union is described in this verse and in 17:2. Here the union is achieved through “the maddening wine of her (Babylon’s) adulteries.” (NIV) In 17:2, it is the kings of the earth that commit adultery with her and the people of earth are instead described as “intoxicated.” The world’s leaders are forecast to knowingly “get in bed” with the world-wide religious alliance that Babylon represents. The citizens follow along because they are “drunk” or deceived (13:14). God’s people suffer as a result, but the dominance of Babylon is fortunately brief, as this verse indicates.

The actions of Babylon are here described in terms of three interesting Old Testament concepts: wine, wrath and fornication. Babylon comes to power through confusion of belief (wine), force (wrath) and mutual self-interest (fornication). At times in the OT Babylon was the agent of God's wrath (Jer 25:25; 51:7). In other words, when Israel chose to forfeit divine protection God allowed the Babylonians to have their way with God's people. Rule by Babylon was the consequence of Israel's unwillingness to submit to God.

Immorality in the Old Testament is often a symbol of unfaithfulness to God (Ezek 16:15-17, 25-35; 23:1-23). Fornication is also associated with pagan worship (Isa 57:3-8). In the final crisis of earth's history Babylon seduces and/or forces the rulers and people of the world to offer allegiance to the beast and his image (Rev 17:2; 13:14-15). They join Babylon for the security and prosperity they hope to gain from her (Rev 18:3, 9-19).

Babylon's making all nations drink the wine of her wrath is parallel to Revelation 13:15-17, the demand for all to receive the mark of the beast on either forehead or hand. It is her end-time attempt to force worship of the unholy trinity. But as we will see in verse 9, the wine of Babylon's wrath provokes the wine of God's wrath in return. This too is based on the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 25:15, God makes Babylon drink the wine of His wrath because they overdid their commission to exercise God's wrath upon Israel. To accept Babylon's wine of fornication is to experience first Babylon's wrath, then afterward the "wrath of God" (verse 10). God does not generally intervene to undo the consequences of foolish human choices. This is just. What Babylon does to others comes back upon her at the end (see also 18:8).

Before end-time Babylon rises and falls, the remnant of Revelation (also known as the 144,000 [14:1] and "the saints" [14:12]), represented here by the second angel, gives out a warning that worldwide religion will soon serve, not the True God, but a counterfeit god, the unholy trinity. A corollary of the final gospel message to the world is a forecast of the doom of all alternatives to the true gospel. While religious institutions are created to honor God and His mighty actions in history, over time they are all too prone to lose focus on the original mission and instead focus on self-preservation. An excellent way to preserve any religious institution is to seek power and wealth through alliance with worldly business and power.

This was at the heart of what went wrong with the church in the Middle Ages. If our analysis in Revelation 13 is correct, this verse forecasts that the end-time church of Rome will once again seek to dominate the world for its own purposes. Revelation 18:4 makes it clear that God has many faithful people in the churches called Babylon, but at some point such individuals will have to leave such institutions if they wish to remain faithful to God.

The spiritual danger is clear. If people simply believe what they have always believed and go wherever their religious institution goes, they could end up on the wrong side of the equation at the End. Ultimately, Babylon represents all human attempts to find salvation apart from the work of God in Jesus Christ. And all such attempts will ultimately fail.

In the 1840s, forerunners of the Seventh-day Adventist Church known as Millerites proclaimed the imminent return of Jesus (see notes on Revelation 10:8-10). Rather than being welcomed in mainline Protestant churches, many were disfellowshipped from their churches for

emphasizing a message (the Second Coming of Jesus) that rightly seemed to them at the very core of the New Testament. That bitter experience led them to this verse. They came to understand that in persecuting those who were attempting to live faithfully by Scripture, Protestant churches took on the spirit of medieval Rome and thus were rightly placed in the camp of Babylon. While Seventh-day Adventists later affirmed this interpretation, they also recognized that Protestantism's "fall" (and that of all other branches of Christianity) was not final, but would only be terminal in the very final crisis of earth's history (Rev 18:1-4). See notes on Revelation 18:1-4.

### **Rev 14:9-13 (Introduction)–**

The warning of verse 8 intensifies in the message of the third angel here. Once again the language of "followed" occurs, tying the three angels of Revelation 14:6-9 together and uniting their three messages. Three more angels appear in the latter part of chapter 14, but the language with which they are introduced differs from that of the first three, so while it is appropriate to speak of "the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-13," it does not appear to be John's intention that the six angels of chapter 14 bear a common message. The first three angels are angels of proclamation, while the last three are angels of action or execution. It is likely, however, that the six angels of the chapter and the son of man in verse 14 make up an intentional grouping of seven. See note on 14:14-20 (Introduction).

At first glance the third angel's message would seem to be entirely negative. It warns those tempted to worship the beast and his image and receive the beast's mark that the consequences of those actions will be severe. They will drink the wine of God's wrath in full measure and be tormented with fire and brimstone "forever and ever." But the opening word of verse 12 (*hōde* in the Greek) clearly connects verse 12 with the preceding three. It can be translated "on this occasion" or "under these circumstances." If we remember that Revelation was written to be read in public, *hōde* functions rather like a dramatic pause to regain the attention of the audience. What follows is of crucial importance. The circumstances described in verses 9-11 provide the context for the positive message of verse 12, and that positive message is the most important element of the whole. The third angel's message is a mixture of positive and negative, with emphasis on the positive.

It is a little less clear whether verse 13 belongs with what precedes or what follows. The "heard and saw" pattern would seem to connect verses 13 and 14 together (see note on verse 14). On the other hand, reference in verse 13 to those who die in the Lord refers back to the earlier events summarized in verses 6-12. So with Stefanovic I have chosen to connect verse 13 more with verse 12 than with the verses that follow.

### **Rev 14:9–**

The combination of "if anyone" (Greek: *ei tis*) in this verse with "the same" (KJV) or "he too" (ESV) in verse 10 (Greek *autos*) places the focus on specific hearers of the message. The theme of the first two angels is continued, but here the worldwide focus of verses 7 and 8 is

individualized. Everyone who rejects the message of the first angel--the call to worship God--is on the radar here. The first two angels describe a world-wide confrontation regarding worship. The message goes first to every nation, tribe, language, and people (Rev 14:6). But the message of the third angel goes to every individual on earth (Rev 14:9-11).

The mention of "beast," "image" and "mark on forehead or hand" clearly ties this verse to the end-time actions of the two beasts in chapter 13. In the final crisis of earth's history, the worldwide death decree of the land beast (13:15) is countered by God's own death decree. Those who worship the beast or his image will reap the consequences of rejecting the true God.

### **Rev 14:10--**

There are actually two different Greek words for wrath in this text, *thumos* and *orgê*. According to Stefanovic, *thumos* ("the wine of God's 'wrath,'" ESV) is strong or passionate anger, the kind we call rage. *Orgê* ("the cup of His 'anger,'" ESV), on the other hand, can be a little more detached, a demonstration of displeasure, sometimes righteous indignation. *Orgê* is the most common word for divine wrath in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline tradition (Rom 1:18; 3:5; 5:9; Eph 5:6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 2:16). But in Revelation both *thumos* and *orgê* are used for God's end-time expression of wrath (14:10; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). The two words are often used together in the Greek Old Testament to intensify the expression of God's wrath in judgment. In this verse the use of both words expresses the full and final intensification of eschatological wrath.

The "wine of God's fury" (NIV) anticipates the seven last bowl-plagues in Revelation 15 and 16. The seven bowls there are associated with the temple of God in heaven (15:5-8). So the bowls of wrath recall the drinking vessels associated with the table of shewbread (Num 4:7, KJV--"of the Presence" in the NIV and "of the Bread of the Presence" in the ESV) in the Old Testament sanctuary (Exod 25:29; 37:16; Num 4:7). So the "wine of God's wrath" is poured out in the seven bowl-plagues of chapter 16.

According to Revelation 11:18, the final events of earth's history will be characterized by the anger of the nations and also by the wrath of God. The anger of the nations finds its elaboration in the anger of the dragon (Rev 12:17) which is worked out in detail in Revelation 13. The plagues referenced here and in chapters 15-16 are God's response to the anger of the nations manifested in the dragon's attack on the remnant. In the very final events wrath is poured out unmixed with mercy (see also Revelation 15:1).

The wrath of God is a major Old Testament concept. There are several things that ought to be said about it as a background to Revelation. First, the Hebrew language does not contain the breadth of vocabulary that is experienced in English. The available words, therefore, often have a more expansive range than equivalent English words. The wrath of God in Hebrew is not irrational anger although the word is capable of expressing such. Instead it more often means a measured and purposeful judicial response to actions that undermine the social order. God's wrath is reactive. In other words, wrath is not essential to God's nature, but is a reactive response to evil, abuse and oppression. In terms of Revelation, God's wrath is seen in His

response to the abusive actions of Babylon and the beasts. The wrath of Babylon provokes God's corresponding wrath in return.

There is a clear allusion to Isaiah 51:17-23 in this verse. Using the NIV, we note the following language: "Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, . . . Your sons have fainted; . . . they are filled with the wrath of the LORD and the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk, but not with wine. . . 'See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again. . . I will put it into the hands of your tormentors.'"

The original language applied to God's "wrath" (see previous paragraphs above) on unfaithful Jerusalem. But then the Lord takes the cup back and pours it out instead on those who tormented Israel. So the cup of wrath is a symbol of God's judgment which can be poured out on His people or their enemies. The common pattern in the Old Testament is that God allows enemies of Israel to provide the consequences of Israel's disobedience. But in time those enemies overplay their role and the consequences of their actions are visited back upon them.

Building on the allusion, Babylon here represents the worldwide religious alliance (see comments on Babylon in chapter 17) at the End which seeks to eliminate God's faithful followers. Using language from the Old Testament, the third angel promises in this verse that God will intervene in behalf of His people when that time comes. The cup is drained to the dregs on those who have persisted in the rejection of God and His people.

This scene of torment by fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb points to the passage at the end of chapter 20 (9-15). At the close of the millennium is a judgment (20:11-13) followed by a lake of fire instigated by fire from heaven (20:14; 9-10). This final judgment is in the presence of the great white throne (20:11). So the scene in verses 10 and 11 anticipates the scene at the end of the millennium when all opposition and even death itself are finally destroyed in the lake of fire. The gruesome images here have disturbed many and will be addressed in a brief excursus on violence shortly.

#### **Rev 14:11–**

The description here is heightened with expressions of torture. And these expressions use language such as "forever and ever" and "day and night," which suggest to many eternal torment. The language of these verses raises two compelling questions. First, what do we do with the language that can be read in terms of eternal torment? And, second, how can anyone justify the use of violence, particularly in the presence of the Lamb (verse 10)? The first question may be easier to answer than the second.

The tormenting sulfur is an individualization of the fate reserved for the beast in Revelation 19:20. So the warning of the third angel is an act of mercy. Individuals can escape the fate of the beast and false prophet if they respond to the final call of the gospel. The severity of the language expresses God's desire that none experience the fate of the beast (the institutional system). The language here anticipates the final fate of the wicked at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:11-15). The "no rest day or night" is in direct contrast with verse 13, where the saints

who die in the Lord rest from their labors. See comments on 14:13.

The sea beast of Revelation 13 has used fear in order to get people to worship it and its image (13:7-10, 15-17). In this verse God responds to that fear with a greater fear. Those who respond to the everlasting gospel will escape the fate of the beast and the false prophet (see also Rev 19:17-21; Matt 10:28).

There is a strong allusion here to Isaiah 34:8-10. In that passage the eternal fire does not actually burn throughout eternity. The land of Edom will not burn forever. The destruction of ancient Edom was complete and its location is in modern day Jordan. I have been there and there are no fires burning there now. So in the Hebrew context forever does not carry the same infinite connotation that it does in English. In Hebrew “forever” means long enough to accomplish God's purpose. The final judgment is uninterrupted (no rest day or night) and continues until it has completed the purpose for which God brought it in to being.

I am glad that the Bible does not teach an everlasting, burning hell. An eternally burning hell for the wicked would also be a hell for the redeemed. They will not need to wander by a great volcanic pit where their loved ones are being tormented in flames throughout eternity. When it becomes necessary to remove evil from the universe, the fires of destruction will last only as long as necessary. After a short time they will be brought to an end and the entire universe will be clean.

#### **Rev 14:10-11– (Thoughts on Violence)**

In verse 10 the reader is told that the violence and torment of the third angel occurs in the presence of the Lamb. This suggests the Lamb's supervising approval. This is one of the most challenging texts in the Bible for people who believe that violence is never redemptive and that the cross shows that God will never exercise violence in the face of evil. The violence in the Old Testament can be explained as prior to the full revelation of God in the New. The God of the Old Testament needs to be explained by the Jesus of the New. But Revelation was written after the cross and after Jesus has assumed rulership over this earth (see notes on Revelation 5:6). Yet there are many images of violence in the book. There is violence against Jesus (Rev 1:5, 7; 5:6; 12:11). There is violence against the followers of Jesus (Rev 2:10, 13; 6:9-10). There is violence acted out by the enemies of the Lamb (13:7; 16:6; 17:16; 18:7, 20, 24). But what bothers some people the most is the divine violence in the book, of which Rev 14:9-11 is the most graphic. How can the Lamb be, on the one hand, the victim of violence and on the other hand the one who torments and destroys?

What people often overlook is that any truly good government must at some point exercise violence in order to restrain evil. Governmental violence is not always graphic and bloody, of course. It may simply involve the kind of restraint that occurs when a policeman pulls you over at a speed trap or the IRS sends an agent to audit your taxes. You don't consider that violence? Well, let me ask you some questions. How fast would you drive if there were no police? How much taxes would you pay if they were voluntary? How eager are most convicts to stay in jail? Good governments provide a necessary restraint so we can all live together in peace.

Not every citizen considers what is good for others or for the whole when they act.

Most people are used to a certain amount of “governmental violence.” When dealing with an Adolph Hitler or a Saddam Hussein, however, just violence becomes necessarily more brutal. Oppression demands justice (Rev 6:9-11; 16:6; 18:7-8), but evil never gives way voluntarily. And the greater the power and brutality of evil, the greater the force needed to undo that evil.

The images of Revelation are not pretty, but they assure us that God will do whatever it takes to end violence and oppression. The fact that divine violence is said to occur in the presence of the Lamb does not mean He enjoys horrific images. To me it means that One who has suffered much has been placed in charge of the process. While God’s violence is necessary, it is overseen and limited by the Lamb. Why the Lamb? Only the Lamb fully understands the cost of suffering. The Lamb can be trusted to be merciful in the exercise of divine justice. The Lamb that was slain will undo evil without overkill. There will be suffering from divine justice, but not one iota more than necessary.

#### **Rev 14:12–**

This verse offers a positive message after the conclusion of the challenging judgment warnings. This is still part of the third angel’s message, see notes on 14:9-13 (Introduction).

“Patient endurance” (NIV) translates a single Greek word (*hupomonê*). This is a compound word made up of *hupo* (which means “under”) and *monê*, which is a noun form of the word *menô*. The Greek verb *menô* means to live, dwell or remain. So the basic meaning of this word is “remaining under.” Patient endurance means accepting the challenging circumstances (as if carrying a great weight) one is faced with and not seeking to alleviate the challenge by avoiding the consequences. The “saints” demonstrate their faithfulness to God by enduring the end-time challenges as a commission from God. What is meant by patient endurance at the End is elaborated in the two phrases at the end of this verse, The “saints” are “those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” (My translation– see comments in an upcoming post)

The “saints” here correspond to the saints of Revelation 13:7, the remnant of 12:17, and the 144,000 of 14:1. God’s faithful people at the end of time are named by many names in the book of Revelation: 144,000 (7:4-8), great multitude (7:9; 19:1), remnant, the saints, those who keep their garments on (16:15, ESV) and the “called, chosen and faithful” followers of Jesus (17:14). At the End, God’s people cannot be swayed by either deception or coercion, they are loyal to God to the point of losing everything.

The basic meaning of the Greek word for “saints” (*hagiôn*) is a person who has been set apart by or for God for a special purpose. While this concept can carry the implication of moral perfection (Mark 1:24; Eph 1:4), the most common use in the New Testament is for the members of the church who are called into a special relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Rom 1:7; 15:25-26; 1 Cor 6:1-2; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 2:19; Phil 4:22; Heb 13:24; Jude 3, etc.). As such the focus is less on moral perfection than it is people’s identity in Christ. So the term saints

functions well as an equivalent for remnant and 144,000 in the book of Revelation.

This verse shows God's awareness of the suffering of His "saints" and calls for them to exercise patient endurance until His justice is done (see also Revelation 13:9-10). That full and final justice of God is publicly portrayed in 14:9-11 and it is in that context that the "patience of the saints" (14:12, KJV) is to be exercised. From here until the end of the book Revelation answers the question of the saints under the altar previously (6:9-10, NIV), "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" The answer to that question is the primary focus of the two harvests (14:14-20), the plagues, and the millennium (Rev 15-20). What is meant by patient endurance at the End is elaborated in the two phrases at the end of this verse, The "saints" are "those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." (My translation)

Keeping the commandments recalls 12:17 and 11:19 (see comments on those verses). The ten commandments are a major focus of the central portion of Revelation (chaps. 12-14). The section is bracketed by the ark of the covenant (11:19), which stored the ten commandments under the "mercy seat" and 15:5-8 which contains multiple allusions to Exodus 34, which also focuses on the ten commandments (see notes on 15:5-8). We have also seen that chapter 13 portrays the sea beast as attempting to counterfeit each of the first four commandments and 14:6-7 share the themes of salvation, judgment and creation with the first table of the law (see Rev 14:7– (Excursus on the Sabbath Allusion) for detail on this last sentence. So this verse again underlines the importance of obedience to all the commandments of God as part of the patient endurance needed to remain faithful in the final crisis.

The final characteristic of the remnant is that they "keep. . . the faith of Jesus" (KJV). The Greek word for faith (*pistis*) can be understood both as "faith" and "faithfulness." The phrase "the faith of Jesus" could also be either a subjective or an objective genitive in the original. In the second case the faith OF Jesus would mean either that they have faith IN Jesus (ESV) or they are faithful TO Jesus. As a subjective genitive, however, "the faith or faithfulness OF Jesus" means that what is in view here is not the believer's faith IN Jesus, but rather the faith that Jesus Himself had and expressed in His faithful obedience (faithfulness) to God. Which kind of genitive is correct has been a long-standing debate among scholars as the grammar itself is ambiguous. It can only be determined by the context. See comments on a similar expression ("the revelation of Jesus Christ") in Revelation 1:1.

A good argument for an objective genitive (the saints' faith IN Jesus) can be found in Stefanovic. He compares this phrase with similar expressions in the New Testament (Rev 2:13; Mark 11:22; Jam 2:1) where he feels an objective genitive is required. The word "keep" (Greek *têrountes* in this verse) should be understood as "maintain" as in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have kept the faith." To "keep the faith" means to remain loyal to God, so the focus of an objective genitive would be on the actions of the saints. In this context the patience of the saints would be exhibited by their living faith in Jesus, which enables them to keep His commandments and sustains them in their persecution. The core of this argument is the way that this phrase and its equivalents are used elsewhere in Scripture.

A good argument for a subjective genitive (Jesus' faith or faithfulness) is offered by Sigve Tonstad in his book *Saving God's Reputation*. He argues that the best translation of the Greek phrase (tên pistin iêsou) is "the faithfulness of Jesus." He grounds this translation on several observations. First is its role in the larger story of the book. To the heavenly council (5:1-3) and the victims of injustice (6:10) God's faithfulness to His character and claims are in question. By His faithfulness unto death Jesus vindicated the character of God. Second, its twin in the verse ("the commandments of God") must be understood as a subjective genitive. They are clearly God's commandments not commandment keeping IN or TO God, which suggests that in the second phrase we are dealing with Jesus' faithfulness not faith IN Jesus.

Third, using Isaiah, Revelation makes clear that Jesus fully represents divine activity, what Christ does God does. John applies Isaiah's titles for Yahweh, therefore, to Jesus (Isa 44:6; 48:12; Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 21:6). And just as faithfulness is the hallmark of the divine character in Isaiah (Isa 65:16), Jesus is invested with that quality in Revelation (Rev 3:14; 19:11). This weights the meaning of "faith" in 14:12 toward "faithfulness." Fourth, the parallel phrase "the testimony of Jesus" (1:2, 9; 12:17; 20:4) is generally recognized to be a subjective genitive, so why should "faith of Jesus" in 14:12 be different? Finally, the word "to keep" (Greek *têreô*) can have a wide range of meaning from "keep" to "obey" to "maintain." Read with the latter nuance in mind, the reading "the faithfulness of Jesus" fits very well in this verse.

As was noted in the comments on Revelation 1:1, John often uses ambiguous genitives to highlight both options. The book of Revelation is both a revelation FROM Jesus and a revelation ABOUT Jesus. While less likely John's intention here in 14:12, it is possible that John intended the reader to apply both meanings to the phrase "the faith OF Jesus" and that the ambiguity was deliberately chosen because of its double meaning potential.

If one has to choose between the subjective and objective genitives, my preference is for the subjective genitive, referring to the faithfulness of Jesus rather than the believer's faith IN Jesus. I will explore the deeper meaning of that reading in the post that follows.

According to Romans 3:23 all have sinned (Greek aorist indicative) and continually fall short of God (Greek present indicative). Jesus' faithful obedience to God ("the faith of Jesus," see also Romans 3:22) not only stands in place of our sin, it also makes up the difference in our falling short. In other words, the sin problem is not just the bad things we do, it is also the fact that the good things we do are simply not good enough to attain "the glory of God." According to this verse, the "saints" are forgiven their sins and are also covered by His righteousness in all of their best attempts to model their lives on His. Jesus' perfect obedience all the way to the cross is their security when the wine of God's wrath is seen on the earth and the plagues (Rev 16) begin to fall. In this reading of the text, the "faith of Jesus" could be interpreted "the faith DEMONSTRATED BY Jesus."

If this reading of Revelation 14:12 is correct, the worshipers of the beast and his image are here contrasted with the worshipers of the true God. The worshipers of the beast seek to save themselves and find security on this earth in a counterfeit religious system. The worshipers of the true God, on the other hand, stand in their obedience to all of God's commandments

which is grounded not on their own righteousness but on the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

This verse completes the marks of the remnant which have appeared throughout this central section of the book of Revelation (chapters 10-14). Three such marks stand out in this verse. God saints (the remnant and the 144,000) are those who exercise patient endurance in the final crisis of earth's history. They are in continual relationship with God that is manifested in their obedience to all of God's commandments, not just those that are convenient or that fit with our lifestyle, but true obedience to all God's commandments, no matter what the cost to us. And finally, the saints of the end-time are those who keep hold of the faithfulness of Jesus. Their walk with God is grounded in the doing and dying of Christ rather than a faithfulness of their own.

### **Rev 14:13–**

The concept of a "voice from heaven" is a frequent occurrence in the book of Revelation. The first occurrence is in the seven thunders of Revelation 10:4. The expression is repeated in 10:8 and 11:12 and is probably the main voice throughout Revelation 11:1-13. The expression "voice from heaven" occurs also in Revelation 14:2 and 18:4 as well as here, and there is also a "loud voice from heaven in 16:17.

The same expression occurs in two places in the Old Testament. In 2 Samuel 22:14 a poetic parallelism declares: "The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered his voice." In this case the voice speaking is clearly Yahweh. The other occurrence is in Daniel 4:31. There the voice from heaven pronounces doom upon Nebuchadnezzar for the arrogance expressed in the previous verse. So in the Old Testament the voice from heaven is always God's voice, but it can come in judgment as well as blessing.

Within the New Testament the voice from heaven appears at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). In this event the voice from heaven does not pronounce doom, but rather God's approval of the mission and performance of Jesus. Interestingly, while there appears to have been a "voice from heaven" at the transfiguration of Jesus (2 Peter 1:17-18), in the gospels this voice is described as coming from a cloud around Jesus rather than from heaven (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). Like the voice at His baptism, it commends Jesus' character and mission. In John 12:28 Jesus again hears a voice from heaven commending Him as He prepares to go to the cross (John 12:23-24). So in the New Testament outside of Revelation the voice from heaven appears to be God's voice, and it appears at various points in the career of the earthly Jesus to provide Him with assurance and encouragement.

The concept of a voice from heaven was well-known in the Early Judaism of New Testament times. "*Bath kol*" is a Hebrew expression that means literally "daughter of a voice." It came to be associated with audible voices from above that were reported at various times during this period. With the prophet Malachi, the gift of prophecy is thought to have ceased in the following centuries among the Jews. We know this from the witness of the Apocrypha (1 Maccabees 4:44-46; 9:27; 14:41) and also the *Mishnah* (*Pirke Aboth* 1:1), an early collection of the traditions of the rabbis. Psalm 74:9 also appears to reflect this conviction. It was hoped that

the gift of prophecy would return with the coming of the Messiah (see Joel 2:28-29 and Jer 31:33-34).

In prophecy God spoke to His people through the voice of a human prophet. But in the absence of prophets there were occasional manifestations of a heavenly voice, the *Bath Kol*. It is viewed in the Talmud as the only remaining means of direct communication between God and man in the absence of prophecy. The *Bath Kol* once settled a dispute between the followers of Hillel and Shammai. The opinion of Hillel was upheld on that occasion. On most occasions the *Bath Kol* voiced God's approval of the character of one person or another. It especially occurred in the context of martyrdom.

In Revelation, the voice from heaven is used in ways that are different from both Judaism and the rest of the New Testament, with one exception. Within the book of Revelation the voice from heaven often gives instructions to various characters within a vision, including John himself (10:4, 8; 11:12; 18:4). In Revelation 14:2-3, the voice from heaven turns out to be the multiple voices of the massed choir of the 144,000, which is a unique usage of that voice in the NT. In 16:17 the voice from heaven declares the completion of God's work at the end of the seven bowls.

The one place in Revelation where the voice from heaven functions in a way similar to the rest of the NT and Early Judaism is the example in this text. Here the voice takes on the form so common elsewhere, it validates the character of those who died in the Lord as martyrs. So the usage in this verse is absolutely typical of contemporary Judaism, including the life and experience of Jesus.

This is one of seven blessings or beatitudes in the Book of Revelation (see comments on the first instance, in Revelation 1:3). In this case the blessing comes as the result of dying in the Lord. This is startling. To most human experience death is a tragedy. But here the Spirit steps in to explain that death provides "rest from their labors" (ESV). Evidently, the text suggests there will be faithful martyrs in the context of the final crisis. Death will bring relief from persecution and since their salvation is secure ("their deeds will follow them," NIV), an extension of life might serve no eternal purpose.

But it is possible also that this blessing suggests a special resurrection for those of God's people who die for the Lord during the time of the final proclamation of the gospel (see Daniel 12:2). Revelation 1:7 has already indicated that those responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus may be present when Jesus returns. Perhaps selected saints will also be raised to see Jesus come even though they did not live until that day.

Such a position goes a step beyond what is absolutely clear in the text. What is clear in the text is that God's people will be divided into two groups at the end of time: 1) those who survive the final events—deception, persecution and natural disasters (their blessing consists of living to see Jesus come; and 2) those that die ahead of time who will be blessed because they get to rest from their labors and avoid all the troubles of the end-time.

The martyrs are commended for their "labors" (*kopôn*). The Greek word implies, in the words of Stefanovic, "labor to the point of weariness and exhaustion." It is the kind of work that

takes absolutely everything you have, both mind and muscle, in order to accomplish. In Revelation 2:2, as well as 14:12-13, this kind of labor is associated with patient endurance (*hupomonê*). In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul uses the word to express how he outworked all the other apostles. In 1 Thessalonians 2:9 Paul defines labor (*kopôn*) as working “night and day” so as not to burden the Thessalonian believers! As with Paul, his labor was performed in the proclamation of the gospel, but in this case it is achieved during the final crisis of earth’s history. The blessed ones did not love their lives even unto death (Rev 12:11). The rest offered to the martyrs here is the same (Greek *anapausontai*) as that offered to the martyrs in Revelation 6:11, so this verse connects with that one and is followed by an elaboration of the final outcome in 14:14-20.

The works that follow after them refer specifically to their obedience to God’s commandments and their keeping of the “faith of Jesus” as listed in verse 12. A major part of Jesus’ faithfulness to God was His willingness to go to the cross to save humanity and demonstrate the depth of God’s gracious character. The martyrs of the last days can see their experience as following in the footsteps of their Lord. While their actions may not be saving actions in the way that Jesus’ death was, they too will have the privilege of exhibiting the character of Jesus in their faithful death and in so doing demonstrate how God chooses to work in this world. It will be a significant rebuke to the rulers of the world who think that they are serving God in their persecution of His saints (see John 16:2). In this verse their faithfulness is behind them and they get to rest until the hour of the resurrection.

#### **Rev 14:9-13 (Spiritual lesson)--**

In the end-time, Christian life calls for patient endurance. Sociologists have been saying for decades that the pace of life is accelerating and that trend continues. More and more people seem to be worn to a frazzle. So “patient endurance” is increasingly necessary even in the everyday activities of life, it will be the only way to survive during the challenges of the End. But in the book of Revelation, this patient endurance is more than the ordinary kind that all need to survive, it is uniquely fueled by “the faith of Jesus.” The serenity that comes through the gospel will never be more crucial than in the final events of earth’s history.

#### **Rev 14:14-20 (Introduction)--**

The multiple angels of this chapter point the way to an interesting structural feature. There are three angels in 14:6-13. Each brings a message and the three are connected by the language of following (14:8-9). Three more angels appear in this passage (14:15, 17, 18), all of which produce actions. In the center of this pair of trios is the son of man who sits on a cloud. These seven figures together make up a chiasmic (pyramid) structure in which the first three balance the last three, putting the focus on the character in the center of the chiasm:

Another angel (6-7)

Second angel (8)

Third angel (9-13)

Son of Man (14)

Another angel (15-16)

Another angel (17)

Another angel (18-20)

There is a major structural parallel in this passage to the end time scene of Joel 2:28-3:21. The allusion to Joel 2:32 in verse 1 helps prepare the reader for the more extensive allusion here. In the Joel passage 1) the Spirit is poured out (Joel 2:28); 2) there are heavenly signs (Joel 2:30-31; 3:15-16); 3) the remnant is attacked by the nations of the world who gather outside Jerusalem in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 2:32 - 3:2, 9-12); and, 4) God pronounces judgment from Mount Zion and “threshes” His enemies (harvest language— Joel 3:13-14). There is also a double gathering in the passage where the “remnant” are gathered from out of all the nations to Mount Zion and the wicked gather in the Valley of Jehoshaphat just outside Jerusalem to attack them, but instead meet their fate (Joel 3:1-2, 13-14).

In this passage there is a brief mention of the Spirit (14:13) followed by the heavenly sign of the son of man on a white cloud (14:14). The double gathering of Joel is paralleled by a double harvest, wheat and grapes (14:15-19), in Revelation. Then the grape harvest of the wicked is trampled “outside the city” (14:20), just as takes place in Joel.

The allusion to Joel clarifies the imagery of this passage. In the Old Testament the final battle of earth's history is pictured in local and literal terms: Jerusalem stands on a hilltop and is surrounded by valleys on three sides. The image is of God's people huddled together inside a fortress surrounded on all sides by enemy forces. In interpreting Revelation, however, the local and literal things of Israel become world-wide and spiritual. The picture of Israel huddled for protection in Jerusalem becomes the church in hiding throughout the world during the final crisis. The gathering language of Joel has been spiritualized. The world at the end is not divided into Israel and the gentiles. Rather it is divided between those who follow the three angel's message and those who follow the message of the three frogs (Rev 16:13-14. In Revelation, the final battle is spiritual and world-wide.

In the New Testament in general and the book of Revelation in particular warfare is a major metaphor for Christian spiritual life (2 Cor 10:3-5). The end-time battle is not about tanks, planes and assault rifles, it is rather a battle for the mind, a battle to control our thought processes, to preserve our relationship with God against thoughts, ideas and theologies that might steer us away from God. See comments on the Battle of Armageddon in chapters 16 and 17.

This section portrays a great division between the followers of Jesus Christ (14:12-13) and those who follow the counterfeit trinity (14:9-11). This division is described in terms of two harvests, a wheat harvest of the righteous (14:15-16) and a grape harvest of the wicked (14:18-20). The destiny of every member of the human race has been decided, probation has closed and the final destiny of each becomes evident in the harvesting scene that follows.

in the course of His earthly ministry, Jesus used similar language to describe the same event. In Matthew 13, the parable of the wheat and the tares illustrates this division in terms of

separating the wheat and the weeds during the harvest process (Matt 13:24-30). Jesus then explained the parable in plainer language in Matthew 13:36-43. Another metaphor for the same process involved the sorting of fish at the end of a fishing expedition (Matt 13:47-50). Jesus elsewhere explains that the gathering of the two harvests at the End is grounded in the work of the “harvesters,” the faithful church on earth (Matt 9:37-38; Luke 10:2, cf. John 4:35-38). The harvest of the righteous is mentioned alone in Mark 4:29, while John the Baptist refers to the harvest of the wicked alone (Matt 3:12). In Matthew 13:40-42 Jesus anticipates John’s depictions of the destruction of the wicked in this passage, the seven last plagues (chapters 16-18), the great supper of the birds (19:17-21) and the end of the millennium (Rev 20:7-15).

The concept of harvest as a metaphor for eschatological judgment is grounded in the language of the Old Testament, although the references are not many. Harvest language is used for both positive and negative judgments, although the two concepts are not always described together. For example, there is the implication of negative judgment after harvest in Jeremiah 8:20. In Hosea 6:11 there is a brief mention of harvest in relation to God’s restoration of Judah after the approaching exile. In Jeremiah 51:33, on the other hand, the doom of Babylon is described in terms of a wheat harvest. And eschatological judgment is described as the trampling of grapes in a winepress in Isaiah 63:2-3.

The key background text, as we have seen, is found in Joel 3, where harvest language is used in both positive and negative ways. Harvest language is used in a positive sense for the gathering of God’s people in 3:1-2. The negative harvest of the enemies of God’s people is then brought into play in verse 13. In contrast with Revelation, however, the negative harvest of Joel 3:13 is at first the language of a wheat harvest, although the later reference to vats being full is more appropriate to a grape harvest.

#### **Rev 14:14–**

On the concept of “cloud” in the Old Testament and elsewhere in Revelation see comments on 10:1. In the Old Testament clouds are often depicted as “God’s chariots” (Psa 68:4; 104:3; Ezek 1:7, 28), which enhances the identification of the son of man in this passage as a divine figure. Since the “son of man” in Daniel 7:13 comes to the ancient of days “with the clouds of heaven” there is a strong allusion to that passage in Daniel.

“Son of man” is not a new character in the book of Revelation. But there is a puzzle here. The phrase is mentioned first in 1:13, where it is clearly a divine figure (see comments on Revelation 1:14-18). Most or all scholars agree that the first reference to “son of man” in 1:13-18 applies to Jesus, who used this phrase as His most common self-designation. On the other hand, “son of man” here in 14:14 is treated like a new character, with a visual description. He also takes orders from an angel later on, which seems strange where Jesus is concerned. It seems to me, however, that the first reference to “son of man” (1:13-18), combined with an allusion to Matthew 24:30 (see tomorrow’s post) overrides the last two observations in weight and steers the reader in the direction of a reference to Jesus here.

The strongest connection with sayings of Jesus is probably not Rev 1:13-18 but an

allusion to Matthew 24:30. There the sign of the son of man appears in heaven, all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven (see also Matthew 26:64). The connection with the tribes mourning is also found in Revelation 1:7 where “son of man” does not appear, but the pronoun “he” clearly points back to Jesus Christ in the previous verses. Since Jesus was clearly referring to Himself when He used the phrase “son of man” this collective background clarifies the scene in this verse. The son of man here is Jesus Christ returning to earth to deliver His people and to judge those who have opposed Him and oppressed His people.

In this verse, therefore, the son of man is to be understood as Jesus returning to earth at the end of history. In Revelation 12-14, therefore, Jesus appears a number of times with different names. He is Michael in 12:7. He is God’s Christ in 12:10. He is the Lamb of 12:11 and 13:8. And here He is the son of man seated on a cloud. This underlines the point that the major characters of Revelation usually appear in the story with several different names.

The crown of gold on the son of man’s head is a *stephanos* (Greek) crown, which is the laurel wreath (equivalent to today’s gold medal) of Olympic fame rather than the royal crown of a king (the Greek word for the royal crown is *diadêma*). It is the same crown that is offered to the overcomer (2:10) and also worn by the 24 elders (4:4), which may be associated with redeemed humanity. It also echos the rider on the white horse of 6:2 and the woman of 12:1. The latter is associated with the people of God on earth, so the crown implies association with the gospel and the people of God.

The son of man wearing a *stephanos* crown pictures Jesus as one with the human race. The cross was His great “time of trouble” (7:14), the greatest that any human being has faced. But this verse depicts Him as the compassionate Saviour, the son of man who wears the crown of the redeemed. Those who are faithful to God in the final crisis will need to have no fear of Jesus, He understands human experience and has demonstrated His unfailing compassion for humanity.

The concept of a “sickle” (Greek *drepanon*) appears seven times in this passage and only five times elsewhere in the Bible. In the Old Testament the sickle is clearly the instrument commonly used to harvest grain (Deut 16:9; 23:25; Jer 50:16). A similar reference is used by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Mark 4:29). But the chief point of reference in this passage is Joel 3:13, as there are many parallels between this passage and the latter part of Joel (see comments on 14:14-20 [Introduction]). The harvest scene of Revelation 14 universalizes the local picture of Joel 1 and 3. The seven-fold references to a sickle are all related to the double harvest of both grain and grapes in the verses that follow. The sickle is observed here in the hand of the son of man, and He is the one who actively harvests the grain (14:15-16) at the direction of “another angel” who comes out of the temple (14:15). In the rest of the chapter a sickle is wielded by another angel who comes out of the temple in heaven (14:17) at the direction of still another angel (14:18). So the grain harvest is reaped by the son of man and the grape harvest by “another angel.”

### Rev 14:15–

On the angel here see comments on Rev 14:14-20 (Introduction). The word for “temple” here is from the Greek word *naos*, which can refer to the temple as a whole (Rev 11:1-2) or to the Most Holy Place within the temple (Rev 11:19). From here through chapter 16, use of this word is frequent in the book of Revelation.

The first reference to temple (*naos*) is in the seven churches, where the overcomer in Philadelphia is promised to be made a pillar in “the temple of my God” (3:12). Those who have washed their robes (7:14) serve God day and night before the throne in His temple (7:15). See the extensive comments on the temple and sanctuary language in relation to Revelation 11:1-2 and 11:19. Two of the angels in this chapter (14:15, 17) are said to come out of the temple or the Most Holy Place in heaven. There are then four references to the “temple of the tabernacle of the testimony” in Revelation 15:5-8 (KJV). In chapter 16 a voice from the temple in heaven (16:1) commissions all seven bowl-plagues and then announces their completion at the end (16:17). And finally in the New Earth there is no temple seen because the living presence of God and the Lamb take the place of the temple. In a sense, the city itself becomes the temple (shaped like the Most Holy Place)

The key point seems to be that the heavenly temple is the governing center of the universe. The command in this verse comes straight from God Himself. In God’s world worship and rule are intimately related. We worship God not only for who He is, but for the way he chooses to rule the world (see comments on the eternal gospel in 14:6 and the summary comments on 12:10-11).

The angel from the temple gives a strange command to the son of man on the cloud. “**Send** (*pempon*) you sickle and reap.” This unusual expression (“send”) has an interesting history in the Bible. First of all, the Greek Old Testament version of Joel 3:13 uses a synonym for “send” (*exaposteilate*– from the root of “apostle”), a further connection between this verse and Joel 3, so the expression of “sending a sickle” is not unique to Revelation 14. In the parable of Mark 4:29 the farmer (and by implication God) “sends” (*apostellei*) the sickle to reap the eschatological harvest. In other sayings of Jesus it is not God who reaps but the angels, so the role of angels in the harvest of Revelation 14 is consistent with the teachings of Jesus (Matt 13:39-43, 49-50; 24:31; Mark 13:27). The “sending of the sickle” in this passage, therefore, seems parallel to Jesus’ sending the angels (Matt 13:41; 24:31; Mark 13:27) to separate the righteous and the wicked at the Second Coming.

As we have noted earlier, the angel directing the son of man on the cloud is alluding to a passage in the Old Testament which sets the stage for the entire scene here: “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow--so great is their wickedness.” Joel 3:13, NIV. In Joel, the literal people of Judah and Jerusalem were barricaded in literal Jerusalem and surrounded by enemy armies in the valleys around the city. The language of harvest was used as a metaphor of the physical deliverance that Yahweh would bring about for His ethnic and geographically located people. Most OT scholars feel the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” refers to the Kidron Valley, between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives.

The scene here in Revelation echos this Old Testament deliverance, but expands the scope in a spiritual and worldwide way. Ethnic Israel is spiritualized as those who believe in Jesus and the enemies of Israel are expanded to the whole world (see multiple references to the earth in this passage— 14:15-16, 18-19). In Revelation, the harvest is divided along spiritual lines and is the harvest of the entire earth.

#### **Rev 14:16—**

The language here follows up on the previous two verses with references to the cloud, the sickle, the earth and the harvest. Presumably, this is the grain harvest, the harvest of the faithful followers of Jesus (Rev 17:14) and of the first fruits of Revelation 14:4. The first thing Jesus does when He comes is to make sure that His people are rescued. But that is not all that happens, as we will see in the verses that follow.

#### **Rev 14:17-18—**

In this passage we are introduced to the last two angels of this chapter, making a total of six (see comments on Rev 14:14-20 [Introduction]). In addition to the wheat harvest of verses 15 and 16 we here have a harvest of grapes. This probably means that at the time when the righteous are harvested, probation is closed for the wicked. The judgment introduced in 14:7 is complete and the human race is divided into two camps. There is no more repentance on the part of the wicked who are here represented by the grapes. This gathering into two camps echos Joel 3, of course, and also Revelation 12:17, where the two sides are represented by the dragon and the remnant.

On “sending” the sickle see notes on 14:15.

There were two altars in the earthly sanctuary; the altar of burnt offering at the center of the outer court and the altar of incense in the Holy Place of the sanctuary itself (see comments on Rev 8:3). The altar of burnt offering is seen in Revelation 6:9-11, where the martyrs cry out from the base of the altar. The altar of incense is featured in Revelation 8:3-4. The Greek language of this verse does not clearly indicate which altar is in view.

In favor of the Altar of Incense is the context in verse 17. The previous angel came “out from (*exêlthen*) the temple,” now this angel comes “out from (the verb is understood here, not stated, in the earliest manuscripts) the altar.” The Altar of Burnt Offering was not inside the temple, it was in the outer court, so the Incense Altar would be favored if the “angel of the altar” assumes the “out from” of some manuscripts. In that case the actions of this verse signal the close of human probation symbolized by the ministry at the altar (8:3-5). The angel also has “authority over the fire” (ESV), which points back to the outcome of the activity at the Incense Altar in 8:5.

If the altar mention here is the Altar of Burnt Offering, this is a powerful theological connection with the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11. The judgment on “those who live on the earth” (6:10) is acted out in the harvesting and crushing of the grapes here. In that case the ugly scene here is a message of hope and promise that the persecuted and oppressed in this

life will be vindicated at the return of Jesus. Of the two options (altar of incense or altar of burnt offering), I lean toward the latter. But since both altars are connected in 8:3-4 (see comments on verse 3), the primary reference point does not matter to interpretation. The prayers of the saints in 8:3-4 refer back to the cries of the martyrs in 6:9-11. So all three verses (6:9-11; 8:3-5; 14:18) are interconnected. The angel of chapter 8 is the one who gives the command to harvest the grapes.

In this passage, therefore, the sins and oppressions of “those who live on the earth” (6:10) have reached their full extent. With the harvest of the righteous, probation closes for those who have opposed God and oppressed His people. They are left without shelter from the judgments of God.

In Palestine there are two main harvest seasons, one related to grains and the other to fruit. Palestine is a relatively dry region, with a total annual rainfall averaging around 20 inches (50 centimeters) per year. Even in good years, this kind of rainfall is barely enough for agriculture to survive, much less thrive, without drastic measures such as irrigation and terracing. Most of the rainfall comes in the winter months, from November through March, while summer brings a drought, it almost never rains from June through September. Since frost is possible in the winter months and trees are deep rooted, the growing season for fruits is over the summer, with the early Fall rains helping finish and ripen the fruits. Since grains are shallow rooted and resistant to frost, they are best grown over the winter. So the “early rains” of the Fall germinate the seeds and start the growing process. Then the “latter rains” of spring help to ripen the grain for harvest.

Palestine, therefore, has two harvest seasons. 1) The winter wheat and barley is harvested in the Spring, between Passover and Pentecost, and 2) the fruit is harvested in the Fall, around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. The two harvest seasons are, therefore, separated from each other by the cycles of nature. In this passage, as we have seen, the two harvest seasons represent the fate of the two sides in the final crisis of earth’s history.

#### **Rev 14:19–**

Winepresses in ancient Palestine were usually carved out of rock. They would include two depressions hollowed out of the rock, one a little higher than the other, with a narrow channel between the two. The grapes would be placed in the upper trough where they would be crushed by the feet, with the juice flowing through the narrow channel from the upper trough into the lower, where it is collected. When the grapes in the upper trough were thoroughly crushed, the pulp would be removed and a fresh pile of grapes inserted. When the lower trough was full, the juice could be scooped out into a jar for storage or preservation. Beside this passage, other biblical references to the process of treading grapes can be found in Isaiah 63:2, 3, 5, Lam 1:15 and Revelation 19:13-15.

#### **Rev 14:19-20–**

The "great winepress of God's wrath" is a metaphorical use of grape harvest imagery

along with the subsequent crushing of grapes to produce grape juice or wine. But in this passage the crushing of the grapes produces blood rather than wine, making the reference clearly metaphorical. This metaphor anticipates the close of probation, when everyone on earth has responded to the final proclamation of the gospel (Rev 14:7) and made settled decisions, either for or against. The phrase also anticipates the seven last bowl-plagues of Revelation 15-16. These plagues fall only on the rejecters of God's mercy, therefore they imply that a final assessment of the whole human race has occurred in heaven.

We have already noted that there is a structural parallel to Joel 3 in this section of Revelation (see notes on Revelation 14:14-20 [Introduction]). In Joel the crushing of grapes takes place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat "outside the city" of Jerusalem, a very local situation. But here God's wrath is clearly worldwide (note six references to "earth" in 14:15-19). The crushing of grapes represents the worldwide consequences of the human race's end-time rejection of God and the gospel. As elsewhere in the New Testament, the second coming of Jesus (14:14) is accompanied by the destruction of those who rejected Christ and persecuted His people. Just as the coming of Jesus is world-wide, so is that destruction. In Revelation the literal and local things of Israel and its enemies are expanded into the worldwide realities of the end-time situation.

"Outside the city" may also look forward to the New Jerusalem climax of the book (chapters 21-22). The grapes in that case would be crushed outside the city because nothing unclean can enter there (21:27).

Blood flowing as high as a horse's bridle is a literary exaggeration to describe the massiveness of the end-time slaughter. The technical term for such exaggeration is hyperbole, where more is said than is literally intended. Hyperbole is a common figure of speech in most cultures to heighten the drama of a literary description. A similar expression in the context of the final judgment can be found outside in the Bible in 1 (or Ethiopic) Enoch 100:3. There the blood flows as high as the horse's chest in the day of judgment, when the Most High executes judgment upon all the sinners. See the English translation in James Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, volume 1, page 81.

Another good example of hyperbole in the Bible is Mark 1:4-5 where the language implies that every single person in Judea was baptized by John. But Luke 7:29-30 makes it clear that even among those who came to John many rejected the call to be baptized. Hyperbole is exaggeration for effect, John's ministry had a huge impact. Other biblical examples of hyperbole can be found in Deuteronomy 1:28, Matthew 5:29; 23:24 and John 12:19.

The reference to 1600 stadia or furlongs is rather puzzling, as it pops into the description seemingly out of nowhere and has parallels only in the description of the New Jerusalem and its measurements in chapter 21. The exact length of a *stadion* in the ancient world is not clear, ranging from 150 to more than 200 meters. Using the shorter measurement, 1600 stadia (about 120 miles or 200 kilometers) is roughly the length of Palestine. But while that is true for the modern-day nation of Israel (running from Mount Hermon in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south), would such a reference be recognizable to ancient readers of the book? More likely they would notice that the number 1600 is based on multiples of four and ten (4 x 4 x 10 x 10).

Four is the number of the earth (for example, see the four “corners” reference in Revelation 7:1 and the four points on a compass) and the number ten signifies completeness and comprehensive scope. So the reference to 1600 stadia may be another way that the author signals the worldwide scope of the final events. The judgement that falls on Jerusalem (Joel 3) at the end is a world-wide judgment.

#### **Rev 14:14-20– (Summary and Conclusion)**

It is abundantly clear in this passage that, at the end, everyone in the world is aligned with one or the other of two groups: 1) those who serve God; and, 2) those who serve the counterfeit trinity. The two groups in this passage are distinguished by their fates. Those who serve God are harvested like wheat, presumably to enjoy eternity with God (Revelation 21-22). Those who serve the counterfeit trinity are harvested and then crushed like grapes. The followers of God were gathered by the three angels of Revelation 14:6-13. It will become evident in chapter 16 that those who serve the counterfeit trinity are gathered by the proclamation of the counterfeit three angels, represented by three demonic frogs (see comments on Revelation 16:13-14).

#### **Rev 14:14-20 (Spiritual lessons)--**

Motivations come in both positive and negative forms. It would be a fine thing if human beings always responded to positive motivations, but sometimes negative motivations are necessary in order to get human beings to act. In this passage the fate of the followers of the counterfeit trinity provides a negative motivation to encourage people to turn down the incentives evil provides to those who walk in its ways. Sin is both attractive and deceptive, particularly in the short run. So God lays out the consequences of sin in often graphic detail in order to get us to take them seriously. Such negative motivations are often spurned or misunderstood today, but they are provided as a warning. When the final events occur it will be too late for them to serve as a motivation to right living. So God provides the dark details in advance in the hope that some may choose His ways before it is too late.

#### **Rev 14 (Conclusion)–**

In Revelation 12:17, the final battle of earth’s history is summarized in a nutshell. There are two main combatants in that struggle, the dragon and the remnant. In chapter 13 the dragon “went off to make war” (12:17, ESV) by gathering allies (beasts from the sea and the land) for that final conflict. In chapter 14 we view things from the remnant’s side of the conflict. In verses 1-5 we see the location and the character of the remnant. In verses 6-13 we see them proclaim the everlasting gospel in the end-time context of judgment. And in verses 14-20 we see the outcome of that preaching in a worldwide division between those who accept that gospel and those who reject it. The chapter ends with the fate of the wicked (14:17-20). In a sense the powerful preaching of this end-time gospel produces a worldwide “ripening” of spiritual interest. Those inclined toward God become more and more committed to God and His mission. Those

inclined toward the enemy of God (12:9) are increasingly opposed to the gospel until they make every effort to destroy those who follow receive it (13:15-17).

At the heart of this chapter is the end-time proclamation of the gospel (14:6-13). But in this chapter the gospel is proclaimed by angels rather than disciples of Jesus (as in Matt 28:19-20). Stefanovic observes that in the final analysis it is God who brings the gospel proclamation to a close with divine action more than human effort. The final gospel message “will be preached” (passive in Matt 24:14), the text doesn’t spell out by whom. This is likely a Hebrew-style “divine passive” (see many examples in Matt 5:3-12) which implies divine action without spelling it out. While we are called to always be ready to preach and share, the good news is that ultimate success is not based on human wisdom, efforts, skills or methods but on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform human lives. How we share the gospel does matter (see my books *Present Truth in the Real World* and *Everlasting Gospel, Everchanging World*), but in the End conversion is the Spirit’s work, not our own.

#### **Rev 14 (Spiritual Lesson)–**

The everlasting gospel of this chapter (14:6-7) is at its core the same gospel as that preached by Paul, but in the special end-time context of Revelation. The core of the gospel for Paul (1 Cor 15:1-11) is the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ at the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary (Rom 8:34, cf. Heb 1:3; 8:1). In Revelation we see that same Christ (named by many names) seated on the throne at God’s right hand (Revelation 5) bringing the history of the world to its end (Rev 14:14-20). The imagery of this chapter is both warning and encouragement. It is a warning that the attractive things of this world should never distract us away from a focus on Jesus Christ and His ongoing ministry in heaven. It is also an encouragement to renew that relationship every day. Now is the day of salvation, not tomorrow. It is also a strong appeal to share the gospel message every day with those around us.

#### **Rev 14 (Excursis on the Remnant)–**

One of the central texts for Adventist self-understanding is Rev 12:17. I translate this text from the Greek as follows: “And the dragon was angry with the woman, and he went away to make war with the remnant of her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.” Seventh-day Adventists through the years have come to identify themselves with the remnant described in this text. They understand themselves to be a people that God has raised up at the end of time who keep His commandments and have the “testimony of Jesus.”

But this traditional position has been losing ground in recent years. In my travels around the world I have found that increasing numbers of Seventh-day Adventists are unconvinced that the text can be focused so narrowly on a specific denomination and its beliefs at the end of time. Not only that, outreach efforts in the post-modern context have encountered more resistance to the remnant idea than to such traditional Adventist “testing truths” as the Sabbath, the state of the dead and tithing. I find the perception, even among students at the Seminary, that the very

phrase “the remnant church” smacks of arrogance and exclusivity. In the evangelistic context, such an impression can become an immediate barrier to acceptance of the church and its teachings.

How should the remnant of Revelation be understood? How can the concept best be expressed in today’s world? It seems to me that questions such as these invite a fresh look at the biblical concept of the remnant, not only in Rev 12:17, but in the rest of Scripture as well. In future posts I will offer a preliminary and suggestive survey of the evidence, but I believe that if we submit our various preconceptions of the remnant to the testimony of Scripture, we will find that the biblical remnant concept points to a clear and exciting picture of the Adventist identity and mission. I will begin tomorrow with a survey of the evidence in Revelation.

As we have already seen from Rev 12:17, the concept of an end-time remnant is a central piece of Revelation’s story. A careful examination of the biblical text indicates that the remnant concept is not to be limited to those passages where the actual term “remnant” (*loiapos* in Greek) appears. The end-time remnant of Revelation is, in fact, named by many names; the 144,000, the great multitude, the saints, the kings of the east, and the called, chosen and faithful followers of Jesus, among others. This can be seen from the markers in the text that equate the 144,000 with the great multitude (Rev 7:1-17), with the remnant (Rev 14:1, cf. Joel 2:32) and with the saints (Rev 14:12).

This remnant is the central player in the work of God at the end of time (Rev 12:17). Revelation 12:17 comes at the climax of chapter 12. That remnant is obedient to all of God’s commandments and possesses a prophetic, visionary gift (Rev 12:17). It is a spiritual movement that delivers a message that rallies the faithful of all nations to the true worship of God (Rev 10:11; 14:6-7).

The idea that the “testimony of Jesus” represents the prophetic gift is a point that is also becoming controverted among Seventh-day Adventists. But I believe the opening passage of Revelation supports such an interpretation. Revelation 1:1-3 portrays three stages of revelation. The Greek of Rev 1:2 identifies “the testimony of Jesus,” not as the Book of Revelation (called “the words of this prophecy” in verse 3), but as the visionary gift of John himself (“the testimony of Jesus, which he saw” [verse 2– my translation]). A comparison of Rev 19:10 and 22:8-9 indicates that John and his brethren “the prophets” share in “the testimony of Jesus.” So when Rev 12:17 describes the remnant as “having the testimony of Jesus,” the best explanation seems to be that the end-time remnant will have a visionary gift among them that is similar to John’s.

To fully understand the remnant theme in the book of Revelation, one must study all that is said about the remnant and associated terms for the people of God through Revelation 10-14. The first crucial text is Revelation 10:5-7. According to Revelation 10, there will be a great spiritual movement at a specific period just before the End (see comments on Revelation 10:7 for detail on the following). There is an angelic proclamation that “time will be no more” (10:6). That “time” is related to the time prophecies of Daniel 12, which summarize the apocalyptic message of the last half of the book of Daniel (Daniel 7-12).

The remnant of Revelation will proclaim the “mystery of God” (Rev 10:7), which is

“announced,” utilizing the Greek verbal equivalent of the noun “gospel.” This term “mystery of God” is used frequently in the New Testament for the proclamation of the gospel (see Rom 16:25-27 and Eph 3:2-7, for example). Revelation 10 is saying, therefore, that toward the end of human history there will be a period in which a final message would be proclaimed to the world (that gospel message is referred to again in 14:6). Daniel calls that period “the time of the end” (Dan 11:40; 12:9). In Revelation 10 the final period runs from the end of Daniel’s time prophecies to the close of human probation (Rev 10:7).

Revelation 10 not only points to the final proclamation of the gospel, it suggests that the final proclamation of good news to the world will include careful attention to the apocalyptic messages of Daniel and Revelation. The angel of Rev 10:5-6 explicitly recalls the wording of Daniel 12, and John himself is told that he must “prophesy again to many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Rev 10:11, translation mine). I see 10:11 as an affirmation that the message John placed in writing (in Revelation) would have even greater impact at the Time of the End, the time is elaborated in Rev 10:5-7, than in John’s day. The end-time gospel revival, therefore, will be in the context of the eschatological teachings of Daniel and Revelation.

The first two verses of Revelation 11 add a further element to the final proclamation of the gospel. The end-time spiritual revival will include a focus on the heavenly sanctuary and the final judgment that is to take place there. While in the New Testament, sanctuary language can apply to the literal temple in Jerusalem, the church, and the body of the Christian, the reference in 11:1-2 is to the heavenly sanctuary (see comments on 11:1-2). John is told to “measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months (Rev 11:1-2, NIV).” So the remnant’s final proclamation of the gospel will include a message regarding the heavenly sanctuary.

Further aspects of the end-time spiritual message are found in Revelation 12-14. The remnant will have a strong focus on obedience, the keeping of all God’s commandments, not just those which are traditional or convenient (Rev 12:17; 14:12). Related to this, of course, is the powerful allusion to the fourth commandment in Revelation 14:7. This suggests the importance that a revival of emphasis on the Sabbath will be an important part of the gospel message at the end of time. True faithfulness to God is not selective and occasional, it gives constant attention to the whole counsel of God. But in chapter 14 this end-time call to obedience will not be some new type of legalism, it is grounded in the context of intimate relationship with the Lamb (Rev 14:1-5, 12). So the remnant’s final message balances the gospel and the law in a way that provides both encouragement to persevere in hard times (14:12-13), but also the seriousness to follow through in the “fear of God” (see comments on 14:7).

Revelation 13, of course, also speaks to the context of the time of the end. The chapter’s concept of an unholy trinity projects that there will be a great deal of confusion and deception regarding the identity of God and just where He can be found in the final period of earth’s history. The end-time remnant will be warning the world about that end-time deception and providing the keys to staying on the track outlined by God.

The role and message of the end-time remnant occurs in the context of “the hour of God’s judgment” (14:7). The world will be called into judgment regarding its refusal to accept the message of the remnant and repent (Rev 14:7; 13:15-17; 16:8-9). So the final proclamation of the gospel occurs in the context of judgment, which is a crucial part of the message of the end-time remnant.

The final remnant in Revelation comes at the end of history (Rev 12:17) and has a message that is universal in scope and is relevant to the entire world (10:7; 14:6-7). The context of that message, as expressed in Revelation, can be summarized in the following list:

Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)

Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)

Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)

Keeping all God’s commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)

Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)

Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)

Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)

Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

The Book of Revelation is, in many ways, the finale of the biblical symphony, the climax of the Bible, tying together themes from throughout the other 65 books of the Bible. So the best way to understand the remnant of Revelation is to understand its entire context throughout Scripture. We will begin our search for understanding in the Old Testament.

The person who, more than any other, dominates discussion on the remnant concept in the Old Testament is Gerhard Hasel (one of my teachers and mentors). The former Dean of the SDA Theological Seminary, his work on the remnant in the Old Testament is widely cited and his findings are generally accepted. One of his most significant findings was that the remnant concept in the Old Testament comes in three different types. His detailed exposition of this can be found in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1988), volume 4, pages 130-134. Building on Hasel and others is the new book from the Biblical Research Institute (*The Remnant*, edited by Angel Rodriguez). I was one of those who helped vet the chapters in that book, which I think is extremely helpful.

The root concept behind the Hebrew and Greek words for “remnant” is “survivor” or “those who remain” when all others are destroyed. At its core, the word remnant refers to the survivors of a disaster. In the ancient world the survival of a tribe or a nation was not to be taken for granted. They could be threatened by natural disasters, like floods, storms and earthquakes. They could be threatened by the outbreak of a contagious disease. They could be threatened by genocidal enemies, seeking to seize their land or preclude the possibility of a future threat. At their most severe, any of those threats could result in the complete extinction of that tribe or nation (seen any Hittites lately?).

But if a remnant of the tribe or nation survives, then there is hope that that group of people could reconstitute itself over time through the production of more children. Thus the ancients had a strong sense of the importance of a remnant. It was the remnant that secured

the future. With no remnant there is no future for a tribe or a nation. Thus it was imperative in a disaster to ensure the survival of at least a portion of the group. This concept took on a spiritual dimension in the Old Testament.

According to Gerhard Hasel, the remnant concept comes in three different types in the Old Testament. The first type he called the historical remnant, which describes a group which survived some major catastrophe in the past, a catastrophe so severe that the entire group could have been wiped out.

Hasel called the second type of Old Testament remnant the faithful remnant. While the historical remnant could be spiritual, it was often merely the physical survivors of a disaster, whether faithful to God or not. In contrast to this is the faithful remnant, which distinguishes itself from the historical remnant by its faith commitment to God.

The third type of remnant in the Old Testament Hasel called the eschatological remnant. The eschatological remnant would emerge victoriously from the judgments and calamities of the end-times. It will be helpful for our purpose to explore these three types of remnant in more detail. We will begin with the beginning, the book of Genesis.

The first mention of “remnant” in the Bible is found in the Flood story. In the worldwide catastrophe of the Flood only Noah and those who were with him “remained alive” (Gen 7:23, KJV, based on Hebrew: *yishaer*; Greek: *kateleiphthê*). Noah and his family were the survivors (remnant) saved from the destruction of the Flood in the Ark. A second reference to remnant in Genesis is found in Gen 45:7 (NIV, Hebrew: *she'erith*; Greek: *kataleimma*). In the words of Joseph: “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a *remnant* on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” God acted through Joseph to deliver the family of Jacob from the famine which might have wiped them out in Canaan.

Both of these accounts are describing events in the past from the perspective of the author of the Pentateuch. Noah and Jacob are, therefore, historical remnants who have become part of the “family tree” of those to whom the Pentateuch was written. In both cases there is a spiritual dimension to the historical remnant. Noah was considered a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time (Gen 6:9). He, therefore, found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8). Jacob was the recipient of the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, cf. 28:13-15; 35:10-13; 46:2-4) and so God’s preservation of him and his family by Joseph has spiritual implications.

If Noah and Jacob are designated remnants, then Abraham most certainly should also be thought of as a remnant, even though remnant terminology is not used in relation to him. Abraham is chosen out from the seventy nations of Genesis 10 and he is chosen to be a blessing in behalf of those nations. Gen 12:2-3 (NIV): “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” So while the term “remnant” is not used in the Abraham story of Genesis, it is clearly implied by the context. He is the remnant called out from the nations, and he is the model of the blessing that God intends for all peoples.

The remnant idea, therefore, is not limited to those parts of the Bible where the explicit

language of remnant can be found. In Genesis the Abraham story has powerful remnant implications. Abraham and his descendants became a historical remnant that laid the foundation for the whole history of Israel.

But in each of these historical instances; Noah, Jacob and Abraham, there is a spiritual dimension to their “remnancy” as well. The historical remnant in each case is not just the survivor of a disaster, but the object of God’s spiritual intervention. Through Noah, Abraham and Jacob God was working to keep faith alive in the world and to preserve a people that would be the custodians of that faith.

But while historical remnants like Noah, Jacob and Abraham often exhibit a spiritual dimension, it is equally clear in the Old Testament that in many instances the concept of a historical remnant has nothing to do with faith. In Joshua 23:12, for example, there is a remnant (Hebrew: *yether*, another word for “remnant”; Greek: *hupoleiphtheisin*) of the Canaanite nations who are in opposition to God and who threaten the spiritual vitality of Israel. In 2 Sam 21:2 the Gibeonites are described as the physical remnant of the Amorites, a heathen tribe. 1 Kings 22:46 makes reference to a “remnant of the sodomites,” which Asa removed from the land of Israel. Amos 9:12 speaks of the remnant of Edom. In these and other cases the historical remnant are the physical descendants of non-Israelite peoples, they are not a remnant of faith. And even in the case of Noah, Abraham and Moses, many family members are counted in the historical remnant on the basis of someone else’s faith rather than their own. So, at best, historical remnants are mixed groups, including people of living faith, like Noah, Abraham and Jacob, and people who are descendants of those faithful ones, but not necessarily faithful themselves.

We learn from the Old Testament that historical remnants are usually a mixed bag of faithful and unfaithful people. Historical remnants are realities of history. You can name them and count them, they are visible and identifiable by all. But they are not necessarily faithful to God, even though they may profess such. And even if the institution itself remains faithful, not all of its adherents are equally committed to the mission.

In the spiritual sense historical remnants are what we call religion. Religion is the human response to the work of God in the world. People who see God at work usually want to memorialize that in some way and spread the knowledge of God’s actions to those who did not experience them. So they institutionalize the memory of God’s actions, sometimes with God’s encouragement (Exod 19:5-6) and sometimes without (1 Sam 10:18-19). And at its best, religion is a beautiful thing, finding efficient ways to keep the knowledge of God alive in the world. The problem with historical remnants, however, is that they eventually become more concerned with self-preservation (as an institution in this world) than with the original mission.

From the standpoint of various biblical writers, therefore, a historical remnant is a group, faithful or unfaithful, that represents the survivors of physical and/or spiritual disaster. The term “historical” is appropriate because there is a past dimension to this type of remnant.

The second of Hasel’s three types of remnant is the faithful remnant. In a spiritual sense, the faithful remnant are that portion of the historical remnant who are faithful to the mission and identity of the original remnant. This type of remnant functions more in the present tense,

although faithful remnants can be spoken of in the past or the future tense as well.

As noted above, Noah, Abraham and Joseph/Jacob represent faithful remnants who are saved by God out of literal or spiritual crisis. It is on account of their faithfulness that God acts in their behalf. "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen 6:9, NIV) It is for this reason that he "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8, NIV). Abraham lived under the blessing of God and became a faithful remnant with the capacity to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). Joseph was the faithful remnant who, like Noah, became the means of saving his whole family (Gen 45:7), which included the faithful Jacob.

A striking example of a faithful remnant is found in the Elijah story. It was a time of great spiritual danger for Israel. The faith had been so widely abandoned that Elijah thought he was the only faithful follower of Yahweh left (the word translated "left" in this text is a remnant word in both Hebrew and Greek. Hebrew: *yether*, Greek: *hupoleleimmai*) and he was running for his life (1 Kings 19:14)! But God assures him that the faithful remnant numbers not one but 7000 (1 Kings 19:18). The faith will survive in the faithful remnant.

In this story Israel as a whole represents the historical remnant. It can trace its history back to the Exodus, when God established his people as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6). But that promise and that mission was contingent on Israel's response, "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant" (Exod 19:5). And that past remnant has become in Elijah's day a present reality in which the vast majority no longer hold to the mission and values that should have changed the world. In that context, God assures Elijah of a faithful remnant who would preserve the original mission. So there is a strong sense of present tense in the concept of a faithful remnant.

The Elijah story illustrates a number of points regarding the faithful remnant. First of all, it is the faithful portion of a much larger historical remnant. Unlike the historical remnant, the faithful remnant is not a mixed bag, but its identity is defined by its faithfulness. That means that the faithful remnant is not visible in the same way that the historical remnant is. While one may sense that another person is faithful to God, one cannot be absolutely sure in human terms. So the faithful remnant is invisible to human eyes. In the ultimate sense, it is known only to God (2 Tim 2:19). At any given point in history, therefore, the faithful remnant is those among a historical remnant that respond to God and are known by Him. They constitute the present core of the original mission that produced the historical remnant.

Because the faithful remnant embody the core of God's ongoing work in the world, the prophets of the OT often speak of a faithful remnant in future terms. At that point, perhaps, Elijah's negative premonition had been largely fulfilled. While not denying that there were faithful ones present, the hope of the prophets is directed to God's promise that he will preserve a faithful remnant as the basis for the eschatological remnant that is yet to come. As was the case with Noah, Abraham and Joseph, the faithful remnant becomes the seed or foundation of a much larger group that God will gather, but now the emphasis shifts from the present to the future.

In Isaiah 4:2-3 there is the promise that at some point in the future, Jerusalem would be purified so that the entire population of the city would be faithful to God. In Isaiah 6:12-13 the present and future senses of the faithful remnant are even combined. While “faithful remnant” is a present concept, the tree stump of Israel is also a “holy seed” (ESV) that bears in itself the promise of a bigger and better future. The future element of this faithful remnant seems also to be the focus of Jer 23:3 (ESV): “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” The immediate focus of both prophecies is the exile to Babylon and the return. The faithful remnant preserve the mission and identity of Israel for the time when God will rekindle that mission afresh. God will use the faithful few to gather a greater remnant yet to come.

The future time of Israel’s renewed mission is the time of the eschatological remnant, the third type of remnant in the Old Testament. The prophets of the Old Testament look forward to an end-time remnant that will be bigger, more glorious and more faithful than the remnants of the past and the present. From the immediate perspective of the OT prophets, that end-time remnant would arise in the context of the return from Babylonian exile. Isa 11:10-11 (NIV): “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant (Hebrew: *she’ar*, Greek *kataleiphthenti*) that is left (Hebrew only: *yisha’er*, the Greek OT uses a cognate accusative to express this term: *kataleiphthen*) of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.” In the eyes of the prophet this will be a mighty event, similar in scope to the Exodus from Egypt (Isa 11:16).

This remnant after the exile will be large, visible and faithful. It is gathered from the nations and centered on the land of Israel. It will have abandoned idolatry and become faithful to the laws of God at the heart level (Ezek 11:17-20). This eschatological remnant will call on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32) and will no longer speak lies (Zeph 3:9, 13). They will be spiritually refined on the analogy of pure silver and gold and they will be in intimate relationship with God (Zech 13:8-9).

If we limited ourselves to the previous day’s texts, one might get the impression that the eschatological remnant of the prophets was limited to the physical descendants of Israel. In that sense the eschatological remnant would be nothing more than a few faithful descendants of historical Israel. But according to the Old Testament prophets, the return from Babylonian exile was only the beginning of the work God was going to do in order to establish the eschatological remnant. The purifying of the remnant of Israel would be in order that they might “proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD.” (Isa 66:19-20, NIV). While at first this may seem simply an extension of the return of Israelites to their land, Isaiah defines these “nations” as more distant than Babylon and Assyria, they are nations “that have not heard of (Yahweh’s) fame or seen (Yahweh’s) glory.” These nations are so distant that they have not been exposed to Israelites the way Babylon and Egypt had been. So the “brothers from all the nations” (66:20)

are not Israelites. The eschatological remnant is bigger and more international than the previous (historical and faithful) remnants. The end-time remnant is a complete surprise to those familiar with earlier expectations.

Isaiah 66 is not alone in the expectation of a diverse, international remnant from among the last places you would expect. Amos 9:12 (all texts in this post NIV) tells us that the remnant (Hebrew: *she'arith*, Greek: *kataloipoi*) of David will come to possess Edom and "all the nations that bear my name." Zechariah 14:16 tells us that: "The survivors (Hebrew: *hannôther*, passive of *yather*, Greek *kataleiphthôsin*) from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles." Zechariah 8:22-23 tells us that: "Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him," and "In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.'" The eschatological remnant foreseen by the OT prophets was bigger and more international than expected. It is always a surprise. The eschatological remnant was, therefore, of a different character than the historical and faithful remnants.

The most amazing picture of a future remnant is the prophecy of Isaiah 19: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together" (Isa 19:23). Egypt and Assyria were the two great superpowers of the ancient world, first one then the other dominating Israel. They had no love for each other and the very idea of them worshipping together would be incomprehensible in those days. But what God will they be worshipping together?

"In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth" (Isa 19:24, NIV). Notice the phrase "blessing on the earth." This is an echo of Genesis 12:3, where it is promised that Abraham would be a blessing to all the nations of the world. That promise was never fulfilled through Israel, although in the time of Solomon a glimpse of that role became possible (1 Kings 8:56; 10:1-9). Isaiah 19 is an amazing verse that expands the promise of Genesis 12 beyond Abraham's descendants to include Egypt and Assyria. That is a complete shocker. God's plan for the eschatological remnant just went to even more unimaginable levels. But there is still more.

"The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance'" (Isa 19:25, NIV). "My people" is a common designation in the prophets for Israel (Hos 1:9; 2:25 [Heb., English 2:23]; Joel 2:26-27; Amos 9:14; Mic 1:9; 6:1-5; Zech 8:7). "Handiwork" (Hebrew: "the work of my hands") is also a common reference to Israel, especially in Isaiah (Isa 29:23; 45:11; 60:21; 65:22). So in this text Egypt and Assyria are raised to full status as people of God, as if they were direct descendants of Abraham (Isa 19:24).

This text is the capstone of many texts that indicate the eschatological remnant was intended by the prophets to be far bigger than historical and ethnic Israel. It would be far more international than most Old Testament Israelites ever came close to grasping. The eschatological remnant would transcend all past experience and move the plans and purposes of God to levels

unimaginable before the time of the prophets.

From the preceding posts we discern that the eschatological remnant in the Old Testament comes in two phases. The first is a purified and faithful remnant of historical Israel. The historical remnant lives on and is reconstituted in an end-time faithful remnant of the larger body. In the second phase of the eschatological remnant, this faithful few go out to the nations and bring in a vast harvest of shocking diversity and massive proportions. One could almost speak of four types of remnant in the Old Testament: The historical remnants of the past, the faithful remnants in the present, the faithful remnant that is yet to come (return from exile and beyond) and the final glorious and universal remnant of the end-time. Among Hasel's three types of remnant, then, the faithful remnant is the most ambiguous, functioning either in the present or in the future, depending on the standpoint of the prophet.

What seems clear from the preceding posts is that at any point in Israel's Old Testament experience, God had three different types of remnant in view, one past (historical), one present (faithful) and one future (eschatological). The historical remnant, from the perspective of the Old Testament prophets, was the Israel of the Exodus. While that Israel was a mixture of faithful and unfaithful, as a body it bore witness to God's purpose to develop a kingdom of priests that would bring blessing to the world (Exod 19:5-6; Gen 12:1-3).

The faithful remnant, from the perspective of the Old Testament prophets, were those individuals who supported the prophets in their attempts to restore Israel (and/or Judah) to the original purpose of God. They were the faithful ones who served God, even in Babylon.

The eschatological remnant envisioned by the prophets was, in the initial case, the returnees from Babylon who were to restore the theocracy that had been derailed by the Exile. But this future, faithful remnant was merely the harbinger of the bigger, more unpredictable, more international end-time remnant that would see the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel, the blessing of the Gentiles and the ultimate restoration of the Garden of Eden. That ultimate restoration finds a powerful fulfillment in the church of the New Testament. I list the remnants of Isaiah's time as follows:

Historical Remnant = Israel of the Exodus

Faithful Remnant = faithful in Babylonian Exile

Eschatological Remnant = returnees from Exile (then the church of the NT)

In the last post I suggest that the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's remnant would be the church. And that would be bigger, more international and more surprising than anything even Isaiah would have taken from his prophecy. Imagine if Isaiah could be raised from the dead today and someone told him that there are two billion people in the world from every tribe and nation that count Isaiah as a prophet and read his book! I'm sure he would say, "I never saw that coming!" Looking at it from Isaiah's point in time, the church of today is truly stunning and unimaginable. This suggests that the eschatological remnant of the End will probably surprise us as well.

Purists in studies of the Old Testament, of course, will object at the mention of the church as a fulfillment of the eschatological remnant of Isaiah. But it seems to me that some

reference is justified here by the remnant pattern throughout the Old Testament. To Abraham was given the promise that he would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen 12:3). This was not fulfilled within his lifetime, rather the opposite (Gen 12:17; 20:3-10). To Israel was given the promise that they would be a “nation of priests” (Exod 19:5-6) to bless the world as Abraham’s seed, but this was not fulfilled within the pages of the Old Testament. The prophecy of a mighty eschatological remnant was not fulfilled within the pages of the Old Testament or the subsequent history of Second Temple Judaism. So the clearest fulfillment of the eschatological remnant of the OT prophets was that claimed by Jews within the church (Gal 3:6-16). The blessing of Abraham had truly reached a massive fulfillment in the eschatological events witnessed in the New Testament. It was bigger, more international and truly not fully predictable in terms of what was written in the Old Testament prophets.

As noted above, the national promises made to Israel in Gen 12:3 and Exod 19:6 were never fully fulfilled. At times portions of Israel even took the lead in promoting idolatry and frustrating the plans of God. The promise of blessing to the nations was rarely achieved even in part, most notably in the stories of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10), the healing of Naaman the Syrian and the apparent conversion to the true God of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (Dan 4:34-37). On the whole, the history of Israel in the *Torah* and the Prophets was a history of failure to achieve the expansive vision that God had communicated to Abraham and to Israel at Mount Sinai.

But the vision of Genesis 12:3 did not die. Instead, as we have seen, it was re-directed toward the remnant of Israel, a group that was, on the one hand, a faithful subgroup of Israel proper, yet would become the means to a massive, international, end-time fulfillment of the original promise to Abraham. This end-time remnant would not only be made up of the scattered remnants of the Israelite diaspora, it would include large numbers of people from beyond Israel (Zech 8:23; 14:16; Isa 19:19-25). This Old Testament remnant theology speaks of a great, end-time spiritual revival that would transcend the borders of the traditional people of God.

Sidenote: The designation of Old Testament Israel’s history as a history of “failure” in the previous post is not meant in an anti-Semitic way. If one is truly honest, there is no history that is not a history of failure. One of the special marks of biblical history is its candor about the shortcomings of human efforts, even when those efforts are guided by God. In ancient times people wrote their own secular histories as stories of grandeur and success, so a mark of the reliability of the Bible is its truthfulness regarding history and also its truthfulness regarding the flaws in even its most heroic characters, such as Moses, David and Paul.

In the New Testament, the explicit and technical language of “remnant” (*leimma, loipos*) along Old Testament lines is limited to Romans and the Book of Revelation, although the concept is frequently implied. But the reference in Romans exhibits the same kind of possibilities as we have seen in the Old Testament. Paul argues in Romans 11 that the followers of Jesus constituted a faithful remnant carrying out the original purpose of God for Israel. It was a Jewish movement in response to the Jewish Messiah, but it would expand to include Gentiles. Note the

language of Rom 11:1-5, NIV:

“I ask then: **Did God reject his people? By no means!** I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel: ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me’? And what was God’s answer to him? ‘I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ So too, **at the present time there is a remnant (*leimma*) chosen by grace.**”

When Jesus’ ministry began, he did not set out to start a new religion. The kingdom that Jesus brought was a reform movement within Judaism. Similarly, the New Testament does not describe a church that breaks the bonds with Israel, rather the early Church saw itself as a fulfillment of the Old Testament remnant concept that would eventually fulfill the original promises to Abraham in behalf of the nations (Gal 3:8-16). The followers of Jesus were a faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel. OT Israel constituted the historical remnant that safeguarded the revelations of God and kept alive the promise that the Messiah would come and restore all things (Acts 3:22-24). So while the early Christian movement more and more became a Gentile entity, the original core was a faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel. In Romans 11 Paul expresses more continuity than discontinuity between Israel and the Church (Rom 11:12-15, 24-26).

How then does Paul describe the three remnants so clearly outlined in the Old Testament? For Paul the historical remnant (past) was the Israel that was rooted in the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), that was confirmed as a nation at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:5-6) and that passed through several remnant stages during the time of the Old Testament prophets. He refers to that historical remnant as “God’s people” and “Israel” (Rom 11:1-2).

On the other hand, the faithful remnant, for Paul, was the church of his day, the followers of Jesus. Paul in Romans 11 sees the church along the lines of Elijah’s remnant. The descendants of OT Israel might look around and think they were the only ones faithful to God, but the followers of Jesus became the “7000” others that surprised Elijah (Rom 11:3-4). The followers of Jesus began as a faithful remnant of Israel (Rom 11:5), an in-house Jewish movement, seeking to restore the original purpose and mission of Israel (Gen 12:3; Exod 19:5-6).

But already in Paul’s day, one could get an initial glimpse of an international remnant that included both Jews and Gentiles. And the followers of Jesus, with all their flaws, have continued to expand into nearly every corner of the globe. But Paul unpacks a big surprise in Romans 11. Paul’s eschatological remnant includes an end-time rebirth of messianic Judaism that would unite with the Gentile followers of Jesus in a new totality of Israel (Rom 11:12-15, 24-26).

The full, three-fold remnant of Paul’s day could be illustrated as follows:  
Historical Remnant = Old Testament Israel, embodied in the Jewish nation of Paul’s day  
Faithful Remnant = followers of Jesus  
Eschatological Remnant = End-time union of Jews and Gentiles

In Paul the future remnant is not as clearly defined as it comes to be in the Book of Revelation. But there are a few things that can be said about it. The final remnant will be in continuity with Israel, it is not constituted outside Israel. While the branches of Israel's tree may be diverse, the root and the trunk are one (Rom 11:17-24). Paul also hints at the "surprise" of the eschatological remnant in that it contains both the "fullness" of the Gentiles and a full restoration of Israel (Rom 11:25-27). Like the Old Testament eschatological remnants, it will be bigger and more international than most Jews and Christian would have thought at that time. But there is an ironic twist on the Old Testament precedents. In Paul's scenario it is the faithful Gentile remnant that draws the Jews back to the olive tree at the End (Rom 11:23-24, 31). The scenario of Isaiah (66:19-20) and Zechariah (8:22-23) is reversed in Romans!

If Paul were resurrected today and came to realize that there are two billion people in the world who read his letters and follow Jesus in one form or another, I think he would be astounded! He would say, "I didn't see that coming." He would no doubt believe that the next big thing would be the restoration of the Jewish people to the Messiah. But he would see that the expanded end-time remnant of Romans 11 has become even bigger and more international than he envisioned in the first century.

Moving back to Revelation, the end-time remnant there, as we have seen, plays a unique role at the end of history. It arrives at the close of Daniel's time prophecies (Rev 10:5-7). It has a worldwide mission (Rev 14:6) that causes it to become the object of worldwide attention (Rev 13:15-17; 17:14). It has a unique message that comes to have worldwide significance (Rev 10:11; 14:6-7). The message of Revelation's remnant can be summarized in the following list:

Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)

Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)

Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)

Keeping all God's commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)

Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)

Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)

Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)

Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

For Seventh-day Adventists the list of teachings in the previous post are familiar. The reason is that the Adventist pioneers deliberately drew their teachings from the prophetic expectations of the Book of Revelation. This raises the question, *How does the remnant of Revelation relate to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has sought to develop and live out the above teachings of Revelation? Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church the sum total of the remnant, past present and future?* After all, Adventists keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus. But is it possible that Adventists have not filtered this conviction through the lens of Scripture? Can we learn something from the Old Testament distinctions between three types of remnant? If we applied that Old Testament data to the book of Revelation, what would the remnant look like?

At every stage of Israel's history, the remnant concept had a past, a present and a future

dimension. I believe this is also true of Revelation's remnant, for the following reasons.

First of all, the three-fold remnant pattern is so pervasive throughout Scripture that it would be surprising if it had no relevance at the very end. At every standpoint throughout biblical history there has been a past, present and future dimension of the remnant, even where one or the other of the three is not explicitly mentioned. Until the close of human probation, past, present and future elements of the last-day remnant will remain relevant.

Second, recent research into the remnant of Revelation by Leslie Pollard highlights the fact that there are actually three positive remnants in Revelation, the remnant of Thyatira (Rev 2:24), the remnant that responds to the message of the two witnesses (Rev 11:13) and the remnant of Rev 12:17. So Revelation itself points us in a three-fold direction.

I would see the remnant of Thyatira in terms of a faithful remnant in the midst of apostasy. While this certainly has application to the situation of the faithful few in the Middle Ages, it also has timeless relevance to the faithful remnants through the Christian era (Rev 2:29). The remnant of Rev 11:13 is clearly eschatological, occurring just prior to the close of probation (Rev 11:15, cf. 10:7) and in response to the preaching of the historical remnant predicted in Rev 14:7. Revelation 12:17 then focuses particularly on the historical remnant that arises at the close of Daniel's time prophecies (see Revelation 10:5-7). The remnant of Rev 12:17 represents what is left of the church after the relentless march of human history from the enthronement of Christ (Rev 12:10) all the way past the persecutions of the 1260 days (Rev 12:6, 14) into the time of the end.

I would like to support the idea, therefore, that the historical remnant of Revelation is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, rooted in the Millerite movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, arising at the time when the time prophecies of Daniel came to a close (Rev 10:5-7). The Church is grounded in the remnant mission and message of Revelation 10-14 (summarized above). Like Old Testament Israel, the Adventist Church has clear roots in the past actions and purposes of God. Yet the current manifestation of this historical remnant is a remnant with a mixed character. This historical remnant is to be equated with all who have elected membership in the worldwide institution known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, regardless of their level of faithfulness to God or the mission of the remnant.

In saying that the historical remnant of Revelation is the Seventh-day Adventist church I do not wish to show disrespect to earlier Christian movements. To be a historical remnant it is not necessary to be perfect or to be completely pure in a doctrinal sense. Historical remnants have always been a mixed bag. After all, has any movement of institutional religion ever born witness to the complete character and plan of God? We are all "feeble and defective." In that spirit I would see the Lutheran Church today as a historical remnant of the Reformation. With all of its flaws it remains a living witness to some of the things God was trying to do then. The Methodist Church remains as a historical remnant of the Wesleyan movement (along with many others). The Catholic and Orthodox Churches can trace their institutions all the way back to the beginnings of the church. Just as Judaism continues by its very existence to bear witness to such truths as the Sabbath and faithfulness to the laws of God, so Catholicism continues to remind

the world each year of the birth, death and resurrection of Christ and important teachings like the trinity.

Clearly, to be a historical remnant is no cause for boasting and pride. It may rather be a reason for mourning as we realized how far each institution has slipped from some of the ideals and practices of Scripture. But just as God used Balaam's donkey to pass on a message from Him, God can still use very flawed institutions and individuals to bear witness to some aspect of His character and mission. Historical remnants are marked by their history, not their faithfulness.

In light of the previous post, I would understand the faithful remnant today as those within the Seventh-day Adventist Church who have a clear concept of the message and mission of the Advent movement as God intended it. They are the bearers of the original identity and are striving to apply that identity in the challenging context of a new millennium. I would not see members of other churches as part of this particular faithful remnant, even though they personally may be faithful to God and have the seal of His approval (2 Tim 2:19). Their salvation is not in question, but to be called remnant at this stage of history requires an understanding of the unique message and mission that drives the Advent movement. So the faithful remnant of Revelation are those rooted in the historical remnant who have a clear conception of the remnant's identity and mission.

To avoid misunderstanding, let me be clear that the "remnant of the remnant" idea that is implicit here does not require a "coming out" of the faithful from the historical body. The biblical examples all indicate a continuity from historical to faithful to eschatological remnants. The bigger, more unpredictable, more international remnant is always rooted in the historical remnant of each era. If the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant of Revelation, it must, as flawed as it may be, have something to do with the great final remnant that is yet to come.

Taking my cue from the Old Testament data, the eschatological remnant will be connected to the historical remnant through the mission and ministry of the faithful remnant. But it will be bigger, more international, more unpredictable than we can currently imagine. At the vanguard of that eschatological remnant are those grounded in the historical message and identity of Adventism.

It could be objected that the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is already the full and final fulfillment of that "bigger, more international, more unpredictable" remnant. The Adventist Church is represented in nearly every country on earth. But the reality is our presence in many parts of the world is limited to a handful of people or a small minority with little influence or impact on the majority culture. The "10/40 Window" still has half the world's population and hardly any Christians, much less Seventh-day Adventists. Even in North America less than 5% of the population has any clear understanding of the mission and message of the Church. The full biblical concept of an end-time remnant seems to transcend any single movement or institution in the world today.

I believe that the eschatological remnant at the close of history will include a significant influx of messianic Jews who have not been part of the historical remnant (Rom 11:12-15, 24-26). Note also the elaboration on this text by Ellen White in *Acts of the Apostles*, 372-382. Of

special interest: “In the closing proclamation of the gospel, . . . God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. . . As [the Jews] see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. . . “Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God” (page 382).

Experience has also taught me that the remnant message can and will find a home within Islam, and I expect a corresponding group of messianic Muslims to join forces with the faithful remnant and the messianic Jews. Based on the biblical model, the eschatological remnant will be massive, international and unpredictable in nature. They will come from every nation, language, people and religious tradition. I illustrate the three-fold remnant of Revelation as follows.:

Historical Remnant = The Seventh-day Adventist Church

Faithful Remnant = Bearers of the Original SDA Identity

Eschatological Remnant = Massive and Unpredictable Surprise

#### **Rev 14 (Excursis on the Remnant, Conclusion)–**

Here I draw some conclusions from the biblical study of the remnant concept we have just completed. There are four points, which I will cover today and tomorrow. 1) We have learned that there is more than one remnant in Scripture and history. At any point in time three remnants can and could be identified. Looking to the past there is a historical remnant, the institutional successor of a movement to respond to a mighty work of God in the world. That remnant is datable, countable and visible. Looking to the present reveals a faithful remnant among the historical remnant, those who are faithful to the original mission and message. These are “invisible” in the sense that they are known only to God. Looking to the future, the eschatological remnant breaks the boundaries of the historical remnant in ways that are bigger, more international and truly surprising, even in terms of the prophet who foresees it.

2) There is no guarantee for historical remnants. They are always a mixed bag of faithful and unfaithful. Being part of a historical remnant is no ground for boasting, rather it is a opportunity for those who understand the original mission and message. Being a historical remnant means bearing witness to a mighty act of God in that remnant’s past. But it is no guarantee of salvation or any reason to think oneself better than others.

3) What counts is not historical connections or institutional success, but faithfulness to the message and mission of that historical remnant.

4) There is something way bigger coming. The ultimate purpose and mission of a historical remnant will be fulfilled in ways that cannot be fully anticipated ahead of time. Success in that mission is in God’s hands rather than ours. Our mission is to be faithful and to be open to God’s surprises.

While it is not directly relevant to a commentary, I plan to add an Excursis to Revelation 14 that explores a way that the eschatological remnant of Adventism could manifest itself in the

real world. I will do so under the title “The Open Remnant,” starting tomorrow.

### **Rev 14 (The Open Remnant)–**

To many, the thrilling and expansive remnant of the end-time just doesn’t seem possible in today’s polarized world. While “with God all things are possible” in theory, in practice the differences among religions and cultures just seem too great to bridge in the gathering of an international remnant. Not only this, how would the teachings of Revelation and the distinctives of the Adventist message ever come to be seen as crucial and significant for the entire world? In what way would the remnant message become the object of worldwide attention? What would it take for the news media and the governments of this world to focus that attention on the last-day remnant? I believe that recent research into the early history of Christianity sheds fascinating light on the need for the remnant’s message and mission at the end of time. We will explore two or three recent books, whose findings have a bearing on our topic, in my opinion.

An important book on early Christianity is *The Partings of the Ways* by James D. G Dunn (pages 18-229). The bottom line of Dunn’s book is that Christianity emerged out of Judaism at a very early period. Or to put it another way, Jesus didn’t come to start a new religion. He came to reform the one that was already there. The earliest Christians considered themselves to be a subset of Judaism and were not perceived by others to be independent of it. Followers of Jesus thought of themselves as Messianic Jews. Jews and Christians served the same God, read and obeyed the same Scriptures, and worshiped in the same temple. They thought of themselves as one people, not two.

But Dunn makes it clear that the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians was strongly advanced already in the first century of our era. As more and more Gentiles became followers of Jesus, ties to the temple and the synagogue loosened. Although they continued to read the same Bible and follow the same God, Jews and Christians largely parted ways during the period between 70 and 135 AD (Dunn, 230-259).

The key point I took away from James Dunn’s book *The Partings of the Ways* was that when religions break apart they both tend to lose something. It was almost as if Jews and Christians sat down at a table around 100 AD to negotiate their separate futures. In that imaginary scenario the Jews said to the Christians, “We love the Messiah, but whenever we talk about Messiah people think we’re Christians, and we can’t have that, so you keep the Messiah.” And the Christians said to the Jews, “We love the Sabbath, but whenever we worship on the Sabbath people think we are Jews, and we can’t have that, so you keep the Sabbath.”

Then the Jews said to the Christians, “We love eschatology, but whenever we start talking about eschatology the Romans come and beat us up again, so why don’t you take the eschatology.” And the Christians said to the Jews, “We love obedience to God, but whenever we talk about obedience people think we are Jews, so why don’t you maintain that as an emphasis.” And so it goes. In order to set solid boundaries against each other, each religion gives up a part of what God gave it to witness to the world. When religions break apart, they both lose something. And so it was with Judaism and Christianity when they broke apart in the late first

century. Neither was entirely the same after the breakup.

The second book I want to highlight in my quick overview of Christian history is *Lost Christianities*, by Bart Ehrman. In *Lost Christianities*, Ehrman adds another dimension to this parting of the ways. He asserts that there were five or six different versions of Christianity in the second century (a similar point is made by the more conservative historian Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, volume 1, 68-120). Based on my reading of Ehrman, I would list the six versions of Christianity in the second century as Emerging Orthodoxy (Ehrman calls it Proto-Orthodoxy), Jewish Christianity, Marcionism, Montanism, Gnosticism, and Monasticism, with the last of these being the most questionable as a distinct expression of what Christianity could and should be. While each of the alternatives to Emerging Orthodoxy tends to be seen as “heretical” today, adherents of each of these alternatives could and did argue their case from traditions that ultimately produced what we call the New Testament today. In other words, New Testament Christianity could have gone a number of different ways (Ehrman, 252-253). Only one of these versions became what we call “orthodox.” All the others were suppressed by the fourth century, although elements of each have lived on in one form or another within orthodox Christianity. Today all branches of Christianity are either grounded in the original orthodoxy or in reaction to it. None of these other forms of Christianity have survived.

Oddly enough, the family of Jesus itself sided, not with the emerging orthodox branch of Christianity, but with the Jewish Christian branch that became known as the Ebionites (Ehrman, 99-103). Jewish Christianity maintained strong ties with Early Judaism, even after the more general parting of the ways we have discussed earlier. In the words of Ehrman, Jewish Christians believed that “Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures. They also believed that to belong to the people of God, one needed to be Jewish (Ehrman, 100).” Jewish Christians continued to keep the Sabbath, eat Kosher food and circumcise all males. There was a strong emphasis on obedience as a necessary and natural part of being a follower of Jesus, and there was strong adherence to the law as expressed in the Scriptures (Old Testament) inherited from the Jews. Jewish Christianity could truly lay claim to be the earliest form of Christianity. In spite of that reality, however, and in spite of its strong continuity with the Old Testament and the ongoing support from the family of Jesus, Jewish Christianity ultimately did not survive as a viable option for the emerging church.

In many ways the demise of the Ebionites as a candidate to shape the emerging orthodoxy is no surprise. Although the Ebionites could make good use of New Testament books like Matthew and James, their full adherence to Judaism required that the writings of Paul be rejected to a large degree. And without Paul, it is unlikely Christianity would ever have become the major player it has been in the world for more than a millennium.

There were, however, significant consequences resulting from Christianity’s ultimate rejection of its Jewish beginnings. According to Ehrman, the Orthodoxy that emerged from the early Christian centuries became free to shape the form that Christianity would take for all subsequent history. There is a sense in which all branches of Christianity; Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant or Charismatic; have been definitively shaped by what took place in the

early centuries. Orthodoxy was able to determine the structure of Christendom, to write its creeds, and to compile its revered texts into a sacred canon. Had things turned out otherwise, not only Christianity but all of history would have turned out quite differently (Ehrman, 110, 159). One cannot argue that the course of history has taken the only possible road, or even the best of all possible roads.

The consequences of Christian orthodoxy's victory included a number of "losses" by the fourth century. As noted by Dunn, there was increasing and mutual hostility between Judaism and Christianity which resulted in both sides pulling back from positions that the two sides had held in common at the beginning (Dunn, 243-258). As both religions developed respective "orthodoxies," positions hardened against each other. As the two faiths each sought to define themselves, they did so in polemical terms toward each other. The core of each faith's identity was defined as distinct from the other.

Christianity, for example, had no serious reason to give up the Sabbath, except to demonstrate that it was distinct from Judaism. The resulting orthodoxy not only gave up the Sabbath, it has fostered a general ignorance of the Old Testament and a very narrow and selective use of the New. Christianity today is not what it once was or what it could have been. Even Ehrman, who does not consider himself a believer, laments what Christianity has lost along the way. (Ehrman 110, 159) Identity creation, in a sense, deliberately fences off the "other." In defining what a faith is not, a community discovers itself. But in defining itself over against the other, the community walls off elements of its own heritage that were a healthy component at an earlier period. The Christianity of the third through the sixth centuries was not what it once was. It was ripe for some sort of reformation

Let me reflect a bit further on the above. Religions can decline in more than one way. We are accustomed to the idea of "liberal" decline. People over time take various aspects of a historic faith less and less seriously. But there is a more subtle form of "apostasy." It is the "conservative" type, the more "black and white" mentality. We define ourselves more and more exactly, in the process walling ourselves off from healthy interaction with those who disagree. We end up hardening in a more narrow faith that over time becomes less and less in touch with reality. In a way, this type of apostasy is more dangerous than the other because it seems so faithful and right. Within Adventism, it was clearly witnessed in the opposition to Waggoner and Jones in 1888.

The trend toward religious decline is a natural one, like entropy. It is most dangerous when no one notices. Thus there is a continual need for "revival and reformation." But in the more conservative type of decline, "revival and reformation" can be twisted into a further narrowing and hardening, exacerbating the very process it attempts to reverse. I mean here no slap against one group or another in the church today. My primary concern is to note that whether one is "liberal" or "conservative" religious decline or "apostasy" is as natural as breathing. There, but for the grace of God, go I.

One fascinating outcome of the hardening of Jews and Christians against each other was the rise of Islam. While many are not aware of this today, including most Muslims, Muhammad

did not rise to start a new religion. A careful reading of the Qur'an suggests that the original impetus for Islamic faith was the desire to restore what was lost in the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians [*Al Isra'* (17) 77; *Al Nisa'* (4) 136, 150-152; *Al Baqarah* (2) 4, 40-41, 136, 285; *Al Ma'idah* (5) 46-48; *Al 'Imran* (3) 3-4; *Yunus* (10) 94; *Al An'am* (6) 154-157]. According to the Qur'an, the prophets of both Judaism and Christianity were to be respected and treated as equals [*Al Baqarah* (2) 135, 136]. Throughout history God sent many messengers and no distinction is to be made between them [*Al Nisa'* (4) 150-152]. Muslims were not allowed to pick and choose among the prophets. And among those prophets are Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

In teaching that Islam is grounded in the prophets of Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an goes on to assert that the Scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity were valid revelations that were normative for the Muslim [*Al Baqarah* (2) 4; *Al 'Imran* (3) 3-4; *Yunus* (10) 94]. The peoples of the Book (Christian Bible) were to be treated with respect and were not to be forced to convert [*Al 'Imran* (3) 20; *Al Nahl* 16:125-128]. The worship of the true God takes place in synagogues, churches and monasteries, not just in mosques [*Al 'Hajj* (22) 40]. In other words, in its original context, Islam was not conceived of as a new religion, but rather as a restoration of one that was very old. Muhammad seems to have had the intent of restoring what Judaism and Christianity had lost in the parting of the ways (note that the Qur'an is very positive about the Sabbath [see *Al Baqarah* (2) 65-66; *Al Nisa'* (4) 47, 154; *Al A'raf* (7) 163; *Al Nahl* 16:124]).

In spite of the benevolent sayings in the Qur'an, it was well before the death of Muhammad that hostilities broke out between the new monotheistic faith and its two predecessors (For a sympathetic Western account of this tragic development see Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* [(NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 182-210.]). Positions hardened on all three sides. Ideas with which each faith tended to identify were marginalized or even demonized by the other two. The end result of this hardening was a sharp division among the three monotheistic faiths and increasing violence over the centuries, climaxing in the brutality of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Holocaust on the Christian side with corresponding atrocities on the Islamic side (such as the massacre of the Jews at Medinah and September 11).

For Christianity, the losses in these separations were considerable (see Ehrman, 253-257). Christian orthodoxy pursued narrow and selective readings of the New Testament in defense of its faith. There was general ignorance of the Old Testament. The Sabbath was lost sight of. The Bible's picture of the End became allegorized and largely faded from view. In the absence of knowledge about the Old Testament character of the Christian gospel, the practice of the Christian faith was increasingly secularized (even paganized). So the triumph of orthodoxy was not an unmitigated blessing in the course of Christian history.

A brief look at the core values of the three monotheistic faiths will illustrate how the separation and hardening against each other diminished all three religions to some extent. Christianity increasingly focused on the core values of Jesus, grace and the gospel at the expense of such biblical teachings as obedience, the Sabbath and eschatology. Judaism focused on its distinctive values of law, obedience and the Sabbath at the expense of eschatology, grace and

the concept of Messiah. Islam increasingly focused on its distinctive values of submission, judgment and eschatology at the expense of grace, Jesus, Old and New Testament Scripture and Sabbath. And so the three faiths no longer offered a common witness to the one true God but rather a truncated and one-sided witness to each faith's unique picture of that God. I summarize this polarization in core values as follows:

Christianity: Gospel, Grace, Jesus

Judaism: Law, Obedience, Sabbath

Islam: Submission, Judgment, Eschatology

Is there any way for this polarization between Christianity, Judaism and Islam to be healed? Does God have a plan to truly retrieve His faithful ones from every "nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev 14:6)? And from every religion as well? I believe that another recent book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, by Philip Jenkins, helps us see the hand of God in some recent events. A major point of Jenkins' book is the way the heart of the Christian faith has shifted geographically through the centuries (pages 1-3). Christianity began as a Middle Eastern faith nurtured under the umbrella of First Century Palestinian Judaism. But within the lifetimes of the apostles, the center of gravity of the Christian faith shifted to Asia Minor and within a century to Rome (16-17).

While the ancient churches of the East (in the Middle East, Northern Africa and parts of Asia) continue in some form to this day (18-27), Europe became the dominant center of Christianity for more than a millennium. The Roman Catholic Church has always been dominant in Southern Europe, the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and since the Protestant Reformation, Protestant Christianity has dominated Northern and Western Europe. It was from Europe, primarily, that missionaries went all over the world during the great mission movement of the Nineteenth Century (39-53).

With the "discovery" of the "New World" and the rise of the United States as a major world power, the center of gravity of Christianity has gradually shifted from Europe to North America within the last century. As the churches of Europe declined in the face of secularism and modernism, the churches of North America retained vitality and provided a strong financial base for emerging churches in the Southern and Eastern hemispheres during the Twentieth Century. But by the turn of the millennium, these emerging "Third World" churches were taking on a life and character of their own. North America and Europe are no longer the mission and theology-shaping force that they once were. The churches in the Southern Hemisphere are growing, spreading and changing theologically on their own (141-162). Within a few decades, Jenkins suspects, the overwhelming majority of Christians will be outside the Christian West and Christianity will once again be dominated by an eastern mentality, rather than the western one that has dominated the religion since the Second Christian Century.

The significance of Jenkins' observations (see two previous posts) for our thesis is that Christianity is, in a real and vibrant sense, presently returning to its roots in the East. Along with that shift, the impact of European orthodoxy on the way the faith functions is decreasing. More and more, people express their Christian faith in ways that are shaped by eastern modes of

thought and action. In a sense, the emerging church in the developing world offers Christians a fresh opportunity to assess the direction the faith has gone over the centuries and make whatever course corrections might be needed. In a sense, the church is coming home.

This golden moment offers the opportunity for Christians to re-examine what was lost in the partings of the ways with both Jews and Muslims. In many ways the orthodoxy of the Christian West has made Christianity a faith that is increasingly distant from its eastern roots. Along with this distance comes increasing distance from its monotheistic cousins. While the new easternization of the Christian faith may seem strange and threatening to Christians raised in the West, it will provide them with an opportunity to read their own sacred texts afresh and to re-discover their essentially eastern character. When this is done, the gulf between Christians, on the one hand, and Jews and Muslims on the other, will not be nearly as great.

It seems to me that at this significant juncture in history, the theme of the remnant will become especially helpful in restoring what was lost in the partings of the ways among the three monotheistic religions. And this topic may also prove to be particularly attractive to those in the western world that have abandoned Christianity in search of a more modern or post-modern expression of spirituality. I have discovered, to my surprise, that many elements of “post-modern” thinking are reminiscent of ancient thought patterns that Muslims have maintained through the centuries. When Muslims approach the Bible, they read it unencumbered by centuries of Christian tradition. In so doing, they often see emphases in the texts that Christians have lost the ability to see. This is a promising discovery.

Why should the remnant theme become particularly important at this point in history? Because in Scripture, the concept of a remnant is tied to the survival of the human race. The first mention of remnant is in reference to Noah and his family at the time of the Flood. The whole human race would have been destroyed had it not been for the remnant that consisted of Noah and his family. Today, the survival of the human race is once again at stake. The events of September 11, the War on Terror, and the new threats of weapons of mass destruction have caused many to question whether the human race will long survive.

But rather than increasing hostility toward each other, the events of September 11 have provoked thinking Jews, Christians and Muslims to know more about each other. There is the recognition that the gulf of separation can no longer be ignored, that dangers lurk in our ignorance about each other. There is the wistful longing to discover that there is more in monotheism that binds us together than that which tears us apart.

Is it at all possible to restore that which was lost in the partings of the ways among Jews, Christians and Muslims? In a recent lecture, reflecting on what he had learned in writing the book *The Next Christendom*, Jenkins offered an interesting proposal. He suggested that the easternization of Christianity would set the table for a restoration of the things that Christian orthodoxy had lost in its march toward the West. The churches of the East (and South!) are thinking more wholistically, as the ancient Hebrews did. They are much more at home in the Old Testament than are the churches of the West. And the book of the Bible that is most critical in this new Christendom is the Book of Revelation! And the book of Revelation is exactly what we

have chosen to study in this Facebook Commentary. And the remnant theme is placed at the center of Revelation's picture of the final stages of human history.

I suspect that the final proclamation of the gospel, as foreseen in Revelation 14:6-7 will be based on a fresh approach, one not bound up in traditional formulations that insult or irritate Jews and Muslims. It will point to the Messiah as one who is not the exclusive domain of Christian groups, but the one who will save all peoples at the end of time. The message will have power in its fresh application of Scripture and its respect for the footprints that God has left in the other monotheistic faiths.

Once more I summarize the primary teachings of the remnant according to the book of Revelation:

Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)

Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)

Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)

Keeping all God's commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)

Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)

Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)

Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)

Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

What fascinates me is the way this list of ideas correlates with the core values of the three monotheistic faiths as outlined earlier and here:

Christianity: Gospel, Grace, Jesus

Judaism: Law, Obedience, Sabbath

Islam: Submission, Judgment, Eschatology

It is as if the remnant of Revelation were uniquely designed to draw all the followers of the one true God into full faith fellowship with one another in the context of earth's final days (it sounds like something only a God could do). The historical remnant, flawed as it may be, becomes the meeting point where Jews, Christians and Muslims can learn to appreciate the best in the others. It becomes the place where God restores to each what was lost in the separations of the past. The remnant of Revelation becomes the meeting point of all followers of the one true God.

The correlation between the remnant of Revelation and the three monotheistic faiths of today suggests to me that the best is yet to come for the remnant of Revelation. God's plans for the remnant are bigger and more universal than we had imagined up until now. In the past the mission of Adventism has been primarily adding value to the lives of other Christians. We take believing Christians and invite them to add Sabbath, sanctuary and other biblical doctrines that are generally neglected among Christians. But the study of the last three weeks suggests a much bigger mission. God will use faithful Adventists to do a work whose breathtaking outcome will be as unpredictable as the outcome of the eschatological remnant foretold in the Old Testament prophets. Jew, Muslim, Christian and more will find common cause in the teachings of the remnant as foretold in the Book of Revelation (I will explore the "more" briefly at the end of this

Excursis).

The work of reconciliation and restoration among the monotheistic faiths is not a call for ecumenism in any institutional sense. I suspect most religious institutions will not abandon their traditions in earth's final hour. But true believers from all backgrounds will recognize the final call of the gospel and discover kindred spirits among the "enemy," or perhaps better "the other." This will be a God-ordained and Spirit-driven unity, not one grounded in religious politics or ecumenical dialogues. It will be the ultimate fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus (John 17:20-23, NIV):

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **that all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity** to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

The eschatological remnant will be the fulfillment of the original promise to Abraham. In a sense, the entire remnant theme comes full circle in the final acts foretold in Revelation. According to Genesis 12:1-3, all the nations of the world were to be blessed in Abraham. While the whole human race was blessed in a representative way through Jesus the Messiah (Gal 3:8-16), the eschatological remnant concept sees that spiritual blessing distributed in a more visible and tangible way to every nation, culture and people (Rev 14:6). Since Abraham is the common father of all three monotheistic religions, the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled on a bigger, more unpredictable way than we had imagined up until now.

Some have wondered why I stop with the monotheistic religions. What about Buddhists, Hindus, and the followers of Confucius and Lao Tse. What about secular people and agnostics? Will the message of the remnant have no application to them?

In an email dated June 30, 2007, Andrews University professor Duane Covrig suggested that I expand the trio to include a fourth element that will be reached by the eschatological remnant, the secular. He argued that most secular people today have three central values that are at the heart of SDA faith: 1) The Adventist emphasis on religious liberty connects well with the secular imperative for tolerance and acceptance. 2) The Adventist emphasis on the whole person is shared in secularism's appreciation of the whole body. For the monotheisms, the spiritual trumps the other aspects of life, often marginalizing the full nature of human beings. Adventists and seculars emphasize the importance of body and mind to full humanity. 3) The Adventist view of creation and Sabbath should lead to respect and care for the environment, one of the key emphases of the secular culture today. It has also led Adventists to be more open to scientific tools of investigation than most religious perspectives, a point of contact with secular culture. A reasoned study of Scripture is the best safeguard against end-time deceptions. The monotheistic religions can benefit greatly from a more rigorous and scientific analysis of how sacred texts are used to support beliefs.

The reason I did not explore Buddhism, Hinduism and other non-Christian religions is

two-fold. First, I do not know a whole lot about these religions so it would be presumptuous of me to attempt any major analysis of their similarities and differences with the message of Adventism. Second, none of the other major non-Christian religions have a biblical foundation, as Judaism and Islam do. Both Judaism and Islam contain and retain many ideas that are found in the sacred scriptures of Christianity. So points of contact and intersection are much easier to discern where the monotheistic faiths are concerned.

But I do know people who have worked with Buddhists and Hindus in southern Asia. And these fairly consistently tell me of the numerous points of contact between Adventism and these religions, vegetarianism being an obvious starting point. One missionary went so far as to say that in his experience Adventism is closer to the indigenous religions of southern Asia than it is to the way Christianity is generally expressed and lived out in those settings. So if there is any truth in the remnant theme as we have been exploring it, we should expect that God's design for the end-time remnant will find points of contact with every major people group in the world. God often moves (what appears to us as) slowly to effect His will in this world, but He does move with great precision.

Another objection to the thesis of the remnant as a restoration of the monotheistic faiths is that any affinity between Adventism and Islam seems like quite a stretch. But such a perspective arises out of a lack of knowledge of both the Qur'an and the Middle East. The affinity between Adventism and Islam should be no surprise to any Adventist who has spent time among Muslims in the Middle East. I have never spent an hour with a Muslim in the Middle East without the question arising, "If you are from America, how come you are not a Christian?" When I asked why they thought I was a Muslim rather than a Christian, I made an important discovery. In their minds the defining marks of a Christian are;

- 1) Drinking alcohol,
- 2) Eating pork,
- 3) Dressing immodestly,
- 4) Following the Pope,
- 5) Idolizing America and Hollywood,
- 6) Lax in obedience to God.

I came to realize that on all the practical issues that define a Muslim from his or her Christian counterparts in the Middle East, Adventists track with Muslims rather than Christians. And once I accepted that the label "Christian" was a gross misrepresentation of who I was in the Middle East, I had no further barriers in engaging Muslims on spiritual themes. I believe that the Adventist context is the ideal place where Muslims, Christians and Jews can find common ground as we approach the End.

#### **Rev 14 (The Open Remnant Conclusion)–**

In the Nineteenth Century Seventh-day Adventists as a people found their mission and message in the remnant theme of the Book of Revelation. To be a Seventh-day Adventist, then, is much more than simply being against things that other churches believe and do. It is more

than just isolated activities like keeping the Sabbath and avoiding certain foods. Being an Adventist is to have a sense of prophetic destiny, that the lives we live and the doctrines we teach were marked out in advance by Jesus as the appropriate response to the end of the world. Being an Adventist means being the bearer of a unique and vital message designed to restore things that have been lost and reconcile people who have been at odds with each other for many centuries.

To be a Seventh-day Adventist is, however, no guarantee that I or those I love will be saved. It is no guarantee that the particular community I am a part of will stay faithful. This remnant identity is a calling and a gift from God, it is not a basis for arrogance or boasting. While Ellen White has offered promises that the “ship of Adventism” will somehow make it through, the same author has said, “All the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional” (MS4, 1883; 1 SM 67). So identification with the Adventist Church should not lead to feelings of superiority, but to feelings of responsibility in the face of the great opportunities that lie before the people of God at the very end of history. It is the mission, not the institution, that is glorious.

The sad experience of past historical remnants should warn us that even the best of religious institutions is flawed. If Satan cannot achieve his goals by outright error and deception, he tries to get the people of God to mix truth and error, what has come to be known as syncretism. But where that doesn't work he tries to use truth to hurt people. It is often well-meaning institutions of religion that hurt people even in the way they promulgate the truth. So it should not surprise us if many have been steered away from the path of God by the well-meaning yet mistaken actions of the entities that bear witness to His truth.

All religious institutions are human attempts to respond to God. At their best, religious institutions are designed to promote God's plans in the world. But over time, being part of an institution that we believe is serving God can make us feel superior to outsiders, it can eventually cause us to demonize those who are different from us. As a result, outsiders avoid the message of God on account of His people. And God's people lose the corrective effect of those who think differently. So it should not come as a surprise that the Seventh-day Adventist institution is flawed in its attempts to respond to the initiatives of God.

What does it mean to be a faithful remnant today? Where is the best path toward becoming part of God's great, international, eschatological remnant? Should we avoid an institution like the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of its flaws? Absolutely not! The remnant theology of Scripture informs us that the only safe place as we approach the End is to be a faithful part of the historical remnant available to us. In other words, feeble and defective as the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be, it is the only institution on this earth that has sought to pattern itself upon the model and the message of the remnant in the Book of Revelation (correct me if I am wrong on this). While the institution and its members are flawed, the eschatological remnant will be a consequence of the efforts of faithful ones within the historical remnant.

While the final remnant will be bigger, more international and more unpredictable than we may have thought, there will be a clear thread between the historical remnant and the

eschatological one. What we don't know is how thick that thread will be. That thread will be made up of the faithfulness of a remnant that retains and maintains its connection to the original message and mission of the historical remnant. But that mission and message will be uniquely fitting to context of the final events. And that will require a level of openness, flexibility and connection with God that will challenge a movement that has becoming increasingly satisfied with the status quo.

As we approach the end of time, faithful Adventists can stand firmly in the present, having a strong sense of who we are. We know where we have come from, seeing the hand of God in our past history. And we have at least some sense of where we are going, in the light of both prophecy and the history of God's dealings in the past. While there are certainly flaws in the historical remnant, I believe that the best is yet to come!