



LIFE GROUP NOTES

Studies in Revelation



Ch 14-16

The harvest and the plagues

Warm Up

What makes you trust someone enough to follow them? Does it come easily or is it a struggle?

Background and context

The number 144,000 seems significant. We have come across it before in chapter 7. Some suggest it refers to the number of the faithful remnant of Israel. 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. Others suggest that it is a symbol of the multitude of faithful believers who live through the "tribulation" in the last days. Whoever they are, they are clearly God's people, marked with the Father's name. True followers of the Lamb are identified by John in v4 as not being defiled by women. This is probably a reference to pagan lifestyles and worship and not about total abstinence. The reference to "They follow the Lamb wherever He goes" is a clear link to Jesus and the Lamb of God. Many times Jesus called people to "follow Him." John's readers would have understood this.

It is also possible that the 144,000 are a symbol of God's army ready for battle with Satan and his demons. Ancient Israelite laws forbade soldiers from becoming impure through sex before a battle, as war was seen as holy (remember David trying to get Uriah to sleep with his wife!)

This multitude are not the sum total of believers, they are a sign of an even greater harvest to come. That is made clear in v 4 with the reference to "first fruits." At the ancient Jewish harvest time, the first collection of produce was offered to God as "first fruits", signifying the expectation of a much greater harvest. This 144,000 should be an encouragement to the church. There is a great number already, how much more is to come!

Babylon was always a picture of corruption and evil in the Old Testament and in Revelation it holds the same symbolism. Here in Revelation John is clearly speaking of Rome. He sees Rome through the lens of the Old Testament Prophets. There are clear links between the imagery in Revelation and Isaiah 40–55 and Jeremiah 50. John wants his readers and us to understand that the condemnation of Babylon and the rescue of God's people in OT times applies in his time too, and ours today.

Ch 14:14-20 gives a vivid and bloody description of a harvest of souls. Is this a judgement of the wicked? Many have thought so as it speaks of the winepress of God's wrath. However, this seems to be contrary to the imagery of harvest, which is usually a positive thing. The previous chapter warns God's people not to worship the monster and the following chapter describes them as being victorious and singing a new song. How have they got from one place to another... through judgement or salvation? Could this be an image of suffering not judgement, an encouragement to persevere?

The bowls of God's wrath seem to be in two parts, like the seals and trumpets. However the final two bowls come directly after one another. Time has run out for repentance. This is a warning to remain alert and watch out for deception. Stay faithful. Remember that sequencing of events is not always chronological in apocalyptic writing, therefore these things described may not take place before chapters 17-20. They could be different angles of the same ultimate reality.

And finally...Armageddon or Meggido (still exists today as a town) was a common battle site. Many key battles had been fought there. It would be unusual for John to name a specific place, where he has not done so in the past chapters. It likely just refers to the final showdown. A key battle.

Thinking it through: Main discussion/activity

What are the surprising things in the passage? What is new? What don't you really understand? This could be a time to discuss and share reflections and ideas on the passage or watch a Bible project type video that helps explain things.

READ Ch 14:1-5

1. Who are the people gathered around the Lamb? Are they the same as the ones we encountered early in the vision?
2. Why have they got God's name on their foreheads?
3. What does "first fruits" imply? Does this encourage you? Why?
4. If we are to follow the Lamb, then we must first ask, 'Where is He going?' How would you answer that?
5. As we follow the Lamb He reveals to us Satan's lies. As believers we have chosen to reject Satan's lies. What lies does he tell us about God and the world?

READ CH 14:6-13

6. What is the 'eternal Gospel,' that the angel announces?
7. How is the spirit of Babylon still prevalent in our world today?
8. What is the judgement for those who fall for Babylon's seduction?
9. Why should this bring believers hope or encouragement?

READ 14:14– Ch15-8

10. What would be your reaction if God responded to all the fullness of human evil by saying ... "Hey ho! Boys will be boys eh!" How does your reaction help understand God's response to a final judgement?
11. God turns the judgement of the wicked and turns it into a victory parade for the righteous. Does this bring you hope? Why?

READ CH 16

12. What do the first four bowls have in common?
13. What is the implication or significance of these four bowls?
14. God's wrath is seen in two ways. 1. He lets human wickedness work its way to destruction naturally. He steps in directly to stop it when it gets out of hand! Where do we see this revealed in the first four bowls?
15. What image of God does this reveal?

The last chance has gone. Those under God's judgement have clearly chosen not to repent.

16. Of what would the fifth and sixth plagues remind Jewish believers?
17. How is the sixth plague a reversal of Exodus 14?
18. Why are the kings of the earth drawn into such a foolish confrontation in vv13-14?
19. Is the 7th plague literal or a metaphorical image of the collapse of social/political systems?

Try to leave 15-20 mins to talk about prayer needs of the group and to pray.

We want to encourage the development of prayer, to help everyone grow in confidence in praying. There are many creative ways of praying together: writing prayers, using candles as a focus, reading prayers or praying for each other in pairs.

