

# Lesson 33

To begin, I need to clear up something I said in a previous lesson. I said earlier that the phrase “The antichrist” (with the definite article) is not used in the Bible. While that statement is true of the King James Version of the Bible (which I use and teach from), that statement is not true of the Greek text, and I should have checked the Greek text before I made such a sweeping statement.

To clear up that confusion, I think it would be helpful to quickly look at the five times the word “antichrist” appears in the Bible (which are shown on the left side of the handout available at [www.ThyWordIsTruth.com](http://www.ThyWordIsTruth.com)). But before we do that, let’s start with a more basic question: what does the word “antichrist” mean? We usually think of the term as a title (and usually capitalize it as we would a title), but the Greek word just means “against Christ.” The antichrist or an antichrist is someone who is opposed to Christ.

With that definition in mind, the phrase “the antichrist” immediately sounds strange to us — why? Because “*the* antichrist” suggests that there is only one opponent of Christ, while of course we know there are many opponents of Christ. It would be just as strange to hear the phrase “the atheist” or “the unbeliever.” And I think when we look at the four verses in the Bible that use the word “antichrist” we will see that that is precisely the point that is being made — there is not just one antichrist, there are many antichrists. Or, put differently, there is not just one opponent of Christ, there are many opponents of Christ.

- **1 John 2:18** says that many antichrists were around in John’s day.
- **1 John 2:22** says that an antichrist is anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ.
- **1 John 4:3** says that an antichrist is anyone who confesses not that Jesus is come in the flesh. **2 John 1:7** makes the same point.

Based on the those definitions, we would all have to agree that, as in John’s day, there are many antichrists in our own day. In fact, there has never been a shortage of antichrists. They have always outnumbered Christians.

In the Greek text, two of the four uses of the singular word “antichrist” are preceded with a definite article: “the antichrist.” The first is in 1 John 2:18 —

“ye have heard that **the antichrist** shall come,” and the second is in 1 John 2:22 — “He is **the antichrist** who denies the Father and the Son.”

I think the first of those two instances is referring to Domitian. While the second instance also uses the definite article, I think it is just making the point we discussed earlier: “You are waiting for THE antichrist? Well, look around you, THE antichrist is anyone who denies Christ.”

We looked at Domitian when we studied Daniel 7, and we will look at Domitian in great detail when we get to Revelation 17. Also, I think Paul was referring to Domitian in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4. In fact, John’s readers already knew something about the antichrist — they had heard that he was coming (1 John 2:18 and 1 John 4:3). I think what they had heard was the prophecy of Daniel and the prophecy of Paul.

Had Domitian already come by the time of 1 John? I think so. In 1 John 2:18, we see that it was already the last time (the critical hour), and that many antichrists had come. I think Domitian was included in that number, and in fact he was their leader. 1 John 4:3 is more explicit: “and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; **and even now already is it in the world.**” The internal evidence of 1-3 John also suggests that they were written after AD 81, which is when Domitian came to power.

In short, what I think John is saying is this: “You have heard that a great opponent of Christ is coming? Well, he’s here already, and he has a lot of company!”

And how do we overcome the antichrist? John also answers that question:

*1 John 5:4-5 — For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

In Revelation, the choice is between Christ and Caesar; between faithfulness and unfaithfulness; between the church and Rome. The choice was to confess Christ or to deny Christ. And what about anyone who denies Christ? “He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). That was the choice then, and it remains the choice today.

**One more point before we get back to Chapter 14:** The book of Revelation is focused on the first century conflict between the church and Rome. Most observers would have bet on Rome to win that fight, but Rome never stood a

chance. The church's victory had been foretold six hundred years earlier by the prophet Daniel.

This book is about Rome, but is it only about Rome? No. In a larger sense this book is about any earthly kingdom that would set itself against the Lord's eternal kingdom.

One of the most frequent images in the Bible for the nations of this world is the restless sea. One wave comes in, full of sound and fury, but it soon vanishes away, only to be followed by another wave full of sound and fury. That is how God sees the nations of this world, be it Rome or the United States. There is but one eternal kingdom, and it is a kingdom made without human hands.

When we ended last week, we had just read the first five verses of Chapter 14. And what a contrast we saw between Chapter 13 and Chapter 14! Chapter 13 describes the followers of the beast who wear the mark of the beast, but Chapter 14 describes the followers of Christ who wear the mark of Christ. Caesar or Christ? That was the daily choice in the first century, and it remains the daily choice in the twenty-first century.

What group is described by the opening five verses of Chapter 14? Last week we looked at nine clues from the text as to the identity of this group, and we saw that all nine of those textual clues are pointing straight at the church.

- The 144,000 in verse 1 is a beautiful symbol for ALL of God's people.
- The Father's name is written on their foreheads in verse 1.
- In verse 3, there is a new song that only the 144,000 can learn. That tells us that this group has a special relationship with Christ that no one else can share.
- In verse 3, this group is described as those "which were redeemed from the earth."
- In verse 4, this group is described as virgins, which stresses their purity.
- Verse 4 tells us that they "follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."
- Verse 4 tells us that they are "redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."
- Verse 5 tells us that "in their mouth was found no guile."
- Verse 5 tells us that "they are without fault before the throne of God."

Who else could this be but the church? Just compare those nine clues with what we know about the church:

***Ephesians 5:27** — That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*

***Titus 2:14** — Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

***1 Peter 2:9** — But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.*

***2 Corinthians 11:2** — For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

***James 1:18** — Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Those who take the 144,000 as a literal number miss out on one of the most beautiful symbols in the entire book! But worse than that — they end up carving the church into pieces, with 144,000 in one group and everyone else in another group or in yet other groups. Does that make any sense at all? Is that what the first century Christians needed to hear — that God was going to take care of **SOME** of them? Or did they need to hear that God was going to take care of **ALL** of them? That is what the symbol 144,000 depicts — **ALL** of God's people! With **NO ONE** left out!

We have already seen many of the symbols in the opening five verses, and we won't repeat here all that we said about them earlier (but we will repeat some of it). The Lamb, of course, is the resurrected Christ. Although the Lamb had been slain (Revelation 5:6), the Lamb now stands on Mount Zion. What about the harps? We saw that before in Revelation 5:8. What about the new song? We saw that before in Revelation 5:9. We have also already talked about the four beasts and the elders and the great voices.

What is Mount Zion here in verse 1? Zion was initially introduced as the stronghold and city of David in 2 Samuel 5:7 and 1 Chronicles 11:5. Physically it was a specific hill in Jerusalem that was located to the south of Mount Moriah (the Temple Mount), but it very soon began to be used as a synonym for Jerusalem itself.

In time Mount Zion came to represent God's dwelling place among his people, as in Psalm 9.

***Psalm 9:11** — Sing praises to the Lord, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.*

Mount Zion was a refuge because God was there, as in Psalm 48.

***Psalm 48:2-3** — Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

Mount Zion was a symbol of security, as in Psalm 125.

***Psalm 125:1** — They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

Zion also denoted deliverance. Psalm 14:7 tells us that Zion is the place from which deliverance comes — “Oh that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!” Romans 11:26 quotes Isaiah 59:20 and tells us that Zion is the place from which the Deliverer will come — “There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

What did the church need? Deliverance! Where are these people in verse 1 now standing? At Mount Zion — at the very source of deliverance!

And who was going to deliver the church? The Lamb, who is standing on Mount Zion in verse 1. Zion played an important role in many Messianic promises.

***Psalm 2:6** — Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*

***Psalm 110:2** — The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*

**Isaiah 2:3** — *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

**Isaiah 59:20** — *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD. (Romans 11:26)*

**Isaiah 28:16** — *Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. (Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6)*

**Micah 4:7** — *and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.*

**Isaiah 35:10** — *And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

**Isaiah 62:11** — *Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.*

Those verses were all fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah. That was when the great deliverance occurred.

**Hebrews 2:14-15** — *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Is that the same deliverance we see here in Chapter 14? Yes and no. No, in the sense that these events involve the persecution of the church by Rome that occurred decades after the cross. But yes, in the sense that God's deliverance of his people over Rome was a spiritual deliverance — and that spiritual deliverance would not have been possible expect for the cross of Christ! That is why we see Jesus as a Lamb in verse 1 — to remind us of that perfect sacrifice that made our spiritual deliverance possible. Jesus opened the door for everyone. Isn't that what John 3:16 says?

**John 3:16** — *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Has there ever been an open door like that one?

But, some might say, this scene really looks like the end of the world. Is it? No. First, we have our time frame, repeated over and over all throughout the book. That time frame should make us reluctant to suddenly leap thousands of years into the future. But second, we have Hebrews 12. Notice the verb tense as I read verses 22-24.

**Hebrews 12:22-24** — *But ye **are come** unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

We don't need to wait to stand on Mount Zion with our great deliverer. Those in the church of the firstborn are standing there now! The church is the city of the living God! The church is the heavenly Jerusalem! The church is Mount Zion! The deliverance of Zion is something we have right now — and something those first century Christians had as well.

Verse 4 describes the church as “they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” In 2 Corinthians 11:2 Paul describes the church as a “chaste virgin” presented to her one husband, Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:21-33 Paul describes the relationship between Christ and his church as a marriage. Throughout the Old Testament, idolatry was viewed as spiritual fornication, and so the church, following the command in 1 Corinthians 10:14 to flee from idolatry, is pictured here as a virgin. This image of virginity may also be intended to emphasize that the redeemed had no congress with the harlot of Rome whom we will meet in Chapter 17.

Verse 3 tells us that only the 144,000 could learn the new song. This new song is the song of redemption we saw in 5:9-10. That **only** the 144,000 could learn this new song confirms that the 144,000 is **all** of the redeemed. The 144,000 is not just a part of the church. The 144,000 is the church. To argue otherwise is

to say that there are some in the church who cannot sing the new song of redemption.

The church is the body of the saved. If you are saved, then you are in the church. If you are lost, then you are not in the church, either because you never were or because you have fallen away from Christ. How do we know that for sure? Look at verse 5. “They are without fault before the throne of God.” That statement can be true only of the faithful children of God. Only they can approach the throne **boldly** (Hebrews 4:16).

Verse 4 is a beautiful description of the church: “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” We generally think of a lamb as following a shepherd, but here the church is the one following and the Lamb is the one who is leading. Earlier we saw the wrath of the Lamb. Here we see a Lamb who is leading. A lamb that has wrath? A lamb that leads? Our Lamb is like no other lamb!

What we see in these first five verses is the church — ALL of the church. No one is left out. God has marked each one so that no one will be misplaced. Had God forgotten about the church? Absolutely not! Did Jesus care what was happening to his church? Absolutely he cared! That is the message of these beautiful verses. There are no more beautiful descriptions of the church of Christ than those descriptions found in Revelation. In fact, they are so beautiful that many think they are describing heaven rather than the church. But if that is our view, then we don’t properly understand the church.

If we ever think that some description is too beautiful to be describing the church, then we aren’t seeing the church as God sees the church. Can any description ever be too beautiful to be describing the body of Christ? God forbid that we would ever think such a thing! We must always seek to see the church as God sees it. Why? Because when we do, then this book of **Revelation** will become a book of **revolution**! When our view of the Lord’s church changes, we will change as well. If we see the church as just another in a long list of denominations, then we will never be the people God wants us to be. But if we see the church for what it is — the beautiful immovable unshakable eternal kingdom of Christ that will sweep away all the kingdoms of this earth — then we will begin to live and to act as the people of such a powerful kingdom should live and act. We can’t be the people God wants us to be if we fail to see the church as God wants us to see the church.

**Revelation 14:6-7**

**6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, 7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.**

Verse 6 is the only occurrence of the word “gospel” in any of John’s writings. This angel delivers an eternal gospel — good news to those who follow God and a warning to those who don’t. If there is a final opportunity for repentance in this book, this would seem to be it. The hour of God’s judgment has come. But even as that hour comes, God continues to proclaim the eternal gospel. It is not God’s will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We have talked before about how God’s people are sometimes represented by angels in this book. The letters to the seven churches in Chapters 2-3 were directed to the angels of those seven churches. When we looked earlier at the war in heaven, we saw that it was being fought between angels and Satan, even though from the text we saw that it was referring to the spiritual battle of the Christians trying to remain faithful to God when faced with terrible persecution. Here we see something similar — an angel who is preaching the everlasting gospel. Who *literally* is proclaiming that gospel? Christians. The church. We have been given the great commission to spread the good news. This flying angel is depicting the church doing the great work it has been assigned to do by God: preach the eternal gospel unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

There is a wonderful example here for us. In the midst of the most terrible persecution and in the face of intense pressure to remain silent, what was the first century church doing? They were proclaiming the gospel of Christ. In fact, they were proclaiming that gospel even to the household of Caesar himself (Philippians 4:22). What would this world look like if we were that coura-

geous? If I were that courageous? Our first century brothers and sisters have left us a tremendous example to follow.

Those who were worshiping the emperor would soon discover they had made a very bad choice. The emperor thought he was God, but he was not. The emperor did not make heaven or earth or the sea or the fountains of water. The emperor was not a creator; the emperor was a creature. The judgment about to come would demonstrate to all that God alone is worthy of worship.

### **Revelation 14:8**

**8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.**

“Babylon is fallen!” We have been waiting 14 chapters to hear that message proclaimed! The church has not fallen, but instead Babylon is fallen.

Who is Babylon? **Who else could it be but Rome?** Who else made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion? Who else did Peter refer to as Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13? Who else at this time could better be described as Babylon, the great enemy of God’s people? In Chapter 17 we will see Babylon pictured as a harlot who is drunk with the blood of the saints. **Who else could that be but Rome?**

Some might say that Jerusalem could be this Babylon. But what effect did Jerusalem have on the seven **Asian** churches who initially received this letter? How did Jerusalem make **nations** drink the wine of her impure passion? Babylon depicts Rome. That was true in First Peter, and it is true in the book of Revelation.

And the good news is that Babylon **is fallen**. Notice the past tense. Does that mean that the fall of Rome had already happened in the first century?

Whatever verse 8 is telling us, it is not telling us that the literal physical fall of Rome had already occurred. In fact, we know from history that that event was still centuries away. The Roman empire in the West continued until AD 476 with the sacking of the city of Rome, and the Roman empire in the East continued until 1453 with the fall of Constantinople. Those events are not what

are in view here in verse 8. How do we know that for sure? Because of our time frame for starters. But also because everything we have seen so far in this book has been pointing to *spiritual* deliverance and *spiritual* judgment rather than *physical* deliverance and *physical* judgment. I think Rome would have been very happy if all it had suffered by way of judgment for its attacks against the church was the sacking of its great city. That would have been a very light sentence for such a crime, but that is not the sentence Rome received.

So why the past tense here? If verse 7 is a final opportunity for repentance, then it seems to have been a very brief opportunity if the judgment has already happened by the very next verse. The solution to that problem is to see here something that we see elsewhere in the Bible — the prophetic past tense.

When God says that something is going to happen, that thing is then so certain to occur that the Bible will sometimes speak of it with the past tense even before it has actually happened. In Genesis 17:5, God said to Abraham, “for a father of many nations **have** I made thee,” even though at the time Abraham had no children! At least fifty years before the actual city of Babylon fell to the Medes, God said, “Babylon is suddenly **fallen** and **destroyed**” (Jeremiah 51:8). Just as the fall of literal Babylon was so certain that Jeremiah could speak of it in past tense fifty years before it happened, so is the fall of Rome just as certain. Yes, Rome fell physically (as will all the nations of this world), but Rome fell spiritually long before when God weighed Rome in the balances and found it wanting — when Rome had played its role in the plan of God and was no longer needed. Nero and Domitian certainly discovered their fate at the moments of their gruesome deaths, but so did every other Roman persecutor at the moment of their deaths. Unlike faithful Christians, who escaped the dragon at their deaths, the unfaithful Romans found themselves in the clutches of that great red dragon at their deaths. Could we image a worse fate than that? Can we image a more terrible judgment than that? This judgment is not a hoard of barbarians sacking the city in 476; this judgment is much much worse!

The “wine of the wrath of her fornication” is likely a reference to a prophecy from Jeremiah about the literal city of Babylon.

*Jeremiah 51:7 — Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.*

We see in verse 8 a mingling of two images — the wine of Rome’s fornication and the wine of God’s wrath.

**Swete:** “The wine of Rome, as of Babylon, was the intoxicating influence of her vices and her wealth; but viewed from another point it was the wine of wrath, the wrath which overtakes sin.”

**Psalm 75:8** — *For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.*

We will see this wine again in Chapter 17 where it will be called “the wine of her fornication” (17:2). In that chapter, we will learn that this wine represents “the blood of the saints” and “the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6). That explains the wrath! Babylon was drunk on sin and drunk on the blood of the saints! Is it any wonder that the hour of its judgment has come? The next angel we see will serve Babylon another drink — the unmixed wine of God’s wrath!

Is there a lesson here for our own country? Was Rome the last nation to have and to share with other nations “the wine of the wrath of her fornication,” which another translation called “the wine of its impure passion”? Was Rome the last nation to be a source of moral infection to the world? Hardly. Our own country also shares the wine of its impure passion with the entire world. By the age of 16, the average child raised in the U.S. has witnessed 26,000 overt sex acts and as many as 400,000 sexual references and innuendos, as well as 200,000 portrayals of violence, including 33,000 murders, in television and in movies. And those numbers don’t include video games. Is it possible that we are already drinking the wine of our own impure passion?

And what about the church? Do we stand apart or do we join right in? Tertulian writing in the second century said that the principal sign of a man’s conversion to the Christian faith was that he renounced the bloodthirsty Roman spectacles (*Spectacles*, Chapter 24). What have we renounced? What is the principal sign of our own conversion? When the world looks at us and looks at our neighbors, what is the principal difference that they see?

**1 John 3:3** — *And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

Christ is pure. Christians work constantly at purifying ourselves so that we can become more like Christ. And we will never be pure if we roll around in

the mud with the rest of the world. The best way for us to live apart from this world and to be seen as different from the world is to be pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).