Blessed Are Those Who Die in the Lord
Revelation 14:12–13

There are different viewpoints as to what happens when you die: The atheist says you become extinct; you did not exist before you were born and you will not exist after you die; that is not a blessing.

Islam teaches there is a heaven and a hell but only terrorists are guaranteed heaven if they die while killing infidels; all other Muslims are subject to the whims of Allah which is determined in the hour of the resurrection.

The Buddhist, the Hindu, the New Ager believe in reincarnation; it is based on the law of karma; if you do good in this life you will someday return to earth more prosperous in the next life; if you did not live a good life you might return as a bum on skid row or worse; however, in Eastern beliefs you might come back as a rat or a cockroach; reincarnationists teach you may go through many cycles of reincarnation until you discover that you are one with the universe and one with an impersonal god; they believe “all is one and all is god;” the climax of reincarnation is Nirvana, which means “unconscious;” so one keeps getting recycled until they become eternally unconscious; that is not a blessing.

The universalist believes that in the end everybody will be saved regardless of the kind of life they lived, whether they were a serial rapist or a mass murderer like Hitler; there can be no blessing in this, for who wants to share heaven with an unrepentant rapist or mass murderer?

The Roman Catholics believe in heaven for the righteous, but first, one has to spend a period of unknown time in purgatory when one is being purified in fire for unforgiven sins. Catholic teaching denies the complete atoning work of Christ on the cross; they teach that there is both an eternal and temporal consequence for sins; Christ paid the eternal consequences for sin so when one puts their faith in Christ, by God’s grace they are forgiven from the eternal consequences of sin, which is hell, and they are guaranteed to go to heaven.
However, man, by his good works, has to pay for the temporal consequences; when his life is finished, the scales of sin will outweigh the good deeds which he has done; therefore, heaven does not immediately await him so he must spend time in purgatory until he has been totally purged and declared holy by a holy God; there is no blessing in death for the Catholic believer, if upon death, he has to spend so many earth years of time suffering in the fires of purgatory, while living relatives do good works on their behalf, hoping to lessen their time in such suffering.

The Bible offers great hope in time of death for the true believer in Christ; Paul said “to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8); this verse teaches we immediately go into the presence of the Lord who is in heaven; the Bible further says “It is appointed for men to die once and then the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27); this verse teaches us there is no reincarnation but there will be a resurrection.

Truly for the true believer it can be said, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...” (Revelation 14:13).

Let’s learn some things about these saints who are called “blessed.”

The Commitment of these Saints

The review of events in chapter 14... We find ourselves in the great Tribulation period; chapter 14 has been a pause in the action, a time for the reader to step back and take a deep breath; yet this chapter is also a panorama of what is to come; it begins with the 144,000 Jewish evangelists standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb; they have come through the great Tribulation victoriously; there is not one missing as they sing a new song before the Lord; they are the redeemed and they praise Him who sits on the throne; they stand with their Lord undefiled, pure and holy; they follow the Lamb wherever He goes; they are the finest from an exceptional harvest as they were very productive for the Lord; when they spoke, they always told the truth, no deceit was found in their mouth; they did not worship the beast, but remained faithful and were not taken in “the lie” which the Antichrist and the False Prophet preached (2 Thessalonians 2:11); these 144,000 were an exceptional group of Jews who have every right to be called “blessed” (14:1–5).
Then we met three angels flying in the midst of heaven; the first one had the everlasting gospel; this angel is taking the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue and people; he is fulfilling the great commission and seeing to it that everyone has heard the gospel before the Lord returns (Matthew 24:14); he spoke a message of grace as the opportunity to accept Christ and be saved for salvation is still open to all people; he said, “Fear God. Give Him glory. Worship the Creator for the day of judgment is coming” (14:6–7).

Then came the flight of the second angel pronouncing doom on Babylon, the headquarters of the Antichrist; Babylon is fallen because she has made all the nations drink of the wine of her fornication, for she has led the nations astray and invoked the wrath of God (14:8).

Then came the third angel speaking with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark, he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone and the smoke of their torment will ascend forever and ever” (14:9–11).

Sandwiched between the message of the third angel and the final harvest of the wicked are these words, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on” (14:13).

*The reaping of the earth’s harvest*... One like the Son of Man comes on a white cloud having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle to bring judgment; then an angel comes out of the temple in heaven also with a sharp sickle, and cries with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Put in Your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So He who sat on the cloud thrust His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped; then another angel came from the temple with a sharp sickle, and yet another angel, this one from the altar, who had power over fire; he told the angel with the sickle to thrust it to earth and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, and throw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God; and the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood came out from the wine press up to the horses’ bridles for a distance of two hundred miles (14:14–20).

*The reason the martyrs are called “blessed”*... This is not a time in history when anyone of us would want to be alive; it is a time when the earth is ripe with evil and wickedness; however, it is also a time when our Lord returns to bring an end to the great Tribulation, to judge the wicked and to establish His earthly kingdom; so the “blessed” are those who are martyred for their faith at a time when the Antichrist is forcing people to worship him or face the possibility of death; these
saints are truly committed to God at a time when such commitment is hard and dangerous!

Yet, there is much we can learn from these “blessed” saints, for all of us who die in the Lord are “blessed” whether we die as a martyr or from natural causes.

The Commending of these Saints (14:12)

They kept persevering in hard times... “Here is the patience of the saints...” (14:12a); the saints that are called “blessed” are those who came to Christ during the great Tribulation knowing good and well that they might be martyred; yet, they showed patience and persevered through that difficult time until their lives were taken.

Life is not fair; nor does it seem fair that some Christians have to face far more persecution and even martyrdom for their faith than others; if you were a Christian in Saudi Arabia, you would be at risk of losing your head; there are over 50 nations around the world where it is dangerous to travel if it be known that you are a Christian; you might get arrested for being a spy for our government, if not put to death; here in the USA we might get mocked or ridiculed, but certainly our lives are not in danger.

Yet, regardless of our circumstance, every Christian is expected to persevere in the faith to the very end; a phrase that is very familiar to theologians is “the perseverance of the saints;” while I am not a Calvinist in that God elects those and preserves those He chooses to save apart from man’s free will, I still maintain that to be saved, God’s saints must persevere; the Christian life is not a short sprint, but a marathon and we are expected to finish the race; Jesus said, “He who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

There is a two-fold aspect to the doctrine of perseverance: man’s part and God’s part.

Let’s look, first of all, at man’s part; when a person confesses his faith in Christ and repents of sin, he is vowing to God that he is making a lifetime commitment to serve Him; he is saying, “Whatever may come, hell or high water, I will not forsake you, Lord. I am committing my life to you until death.”
Tragically, many people don’t seem to fully understand that when they make their confession of faith they have to remain committed to their faith to the very end; but when hard times come, many fall away; for them, as long as everything is going “hunky-dory” they remain faithful; but when those hard times come, they blame God, and if things don’t get better soon, they begin to walk away from their church, their prayer life, their Bible study, their Christian friends and finally from God; some never return; these are the ones whose confession was shallow, perhaps based on emotion and not well thought through; these are the ones who were never saved, even though they may think they are; here is a fact: true saints persevere; true saints don’t quit when the going gets tough; true saints lean on God all the more during the tough times; Job put it like this, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15).

Then there is God’s part; He looks on the heart of man (1 Samuel 16:17); He knows whether one’s confession is sincere or not, whether there is commitment to finish the race; to those people God has promised, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13); God’s guarantee to the truly saved is that He will not allow Satan to overpower you with temptation, and in fact, His Holy Spirit will show you a way out before you fall into Satan’s trap.

Peter tells us that true believers “are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5); Jesus spoke of God’s keeping power when He said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:27–30).

Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “... the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His’...” (2 Timothy 2:19); God has put His seal of ownership on those whose confession of faith is committed to endure, for He knows those who will finish the marathon and those who will fall by the wayside.

Those who have a saving faith will never lose it; it will persevere through everything that life throws against it; these saints that come out of the great Tribulation that are called “blessed” had to endure the worst of times that human
history has ever known; it is a time when crops are destroyed, water is polluted, heavenly bodies fall out of the sky bombarding the earth, the food supply is pricy and limited by famine; it is a time when demons run loose everywhere; when people are being cruelly martyred for their faith, yet, these blessed saints persevered to the very end; that becomes a lesson for us; salvation only comes to those who endure to the end.

*They kept the commandments of God...* “...who keep the commandments of God...” (14:12b); obedience to God is a sign of a saving faith; those who obey will persevere; Jesus said “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15); I believe in “Lordship salvation;” that is to say, it is not enough to say you believe in Jesus, for as James said “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20); faith is a verb; it must be acted upon; we are not saved by our works (Ephesians 2:8-10); however, the only way our love for God is demonstrated in our obedience and in what we do for Him.

So many people want Jesus as their Savior, but they do not want Him to be Lord of their life; you cannot have one without the other; if Jesus is not Lord first, then He is not your Savior; of the 42 different titles of Jesus in Scripture, by far the most common is “Lord;” over and over again we come across the phrase, “Lord and Savior;” it is always in that order and never the reverse; Jesus is called “Savior” apart from Lord, and He is called “Lord” apart from Savior, but when the two titles are put together, it is always “Lord” before “Savior;” before you take Jesus as your Savior, you must understand that He is to be your Lord; He is Lord of your life when you obey His commandments.

*They kept the faith...* “…who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (14:12c); faith in Jesus is essential to salvation; as Peter said, there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved than the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12); faith in Jesus is the only way to persevere as a Christian and overcome the world; John wrote, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4–5).

When you go to the Bible Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11 you read of “all these who died in faith” (v13); you read about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Japheth, Samuel, David and the prophets (to name a few), who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped by the edge of the sword, were valiant in battle; still others had
the trials of mockings and scouragements, of chains and imprisonment, stoned and sawed in two, yet it says of them, “All of these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise” (Hebrews 11:39).

What promise did they not receive? The promise of knowing they will have total forgiveness of their sins through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross; they all lived before the time of Christ; they did not know about all the blessings that Christ would bring to those who believe; they did not understand the promise of heaven in the afterlife; yet, they all died in faith believing that God would provide something better; however, their uncertainty of that promise did not keep them from enduring all the trials and persecutions, which they suffered for God; true faith cannot be killed; true faith is relentless; and so these blessed saints of Revelation 14 who die in the Lord during the great Tribulation do so as victorious, persevering saints. Why? because they have kept the commandments of the Lord and the have kept the faith; the one difference between those Tribulation saints and the OT saints is they knew the promises of God and believed in them to their deaths; the OT saints believed something would be better, but they “did not receive the promise” of what that would be! Yet many of those suffered in death unsure of what death would bring.

**The Celebration of these Saints (14:13)**

“Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (14:13).

*Their rejoicing... “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...” (14:13a); the word “blessed” is *makarios* and it means “happy;” it is time to rejoice when you die in the Lord; why? Because there is life after death; because you have gone home to be with the Lord; because you have a mansion prepared for you in heaven (John 14:1–3).*

The world does not think of death as a blessing; they want to avoid death; unless one is a terrorist, or a doctor who practices euthanasia, one does not see death as a blessing; in fact, there is an attempt on the part of science to eliminate all diseases and thus eliminate death and create a utopia on this earth; death is not seen as a blessing; but to the true believer, when the time comes to leave this life, there is something far better on the other side and that is what makes the true believer “blessed.”
**Their reassurance**... “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...” (14:13b); that phrase, “from now on” uniquely applies to the Tribulation saints; they missed the rapture; they accepted Christ at the worst time possible, yet, that does not mean they missed out on the blessings of the afterlife.

Remember the anxiety of the believers at Thessalonica? They thought they missed the rapture and were in the Tribulation because Roman persecution had begun under Nero; however, Paul assured them that the Tribulation had not come for he said, “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:9); the Tribulation was the day of God’s wrath, and though under Roman persecution this was not a pleasant time for believers, the day of God’s wrath had not come.

While the believers in Thessalonica thought they missed the rapture, but didn’t, those who come to faith during the Tribulation did miss the rapture; they did experience the wrath of God that comes on the world at that time, yet, the assurance that they are receiving is that their death in the Lord will be no less a blessing than those who were caught up to meet the Lord in the air; they too shall ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18).

**Their rest**... “... that they shall rest in their labors...” (14:13c); the word translated “labors” (kopon) means, physical weariness, to be exhausted, to wear oneself out; heaven is a place of rest; the writer of Hebrews said, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His” (Hebrews 4:9–10); that is good news! Life on earth can be such a grind at times; we have worked hard to get an education, to provide a living for our family, to raise up a family, to serve the Lord, to live out His values in a world that is opposed to those values; but think of these Tribulation saints; they have the extra responsibility of providing for their family and keeping them safe from the threats of the Antichrist; living during the great Tribulation will prove to be an anxious, stressful, exhausting time; but now their death is blessed because the Holy Spirit has promised them there is no more struggle of any kind; no more hunger, no more thirst, no more worry about paying the bills, no more government looking over their shoulder all the time, no more worry about disease or death; hallelujah! No wonder it is a blessed thing to die in the Lord!

**Their reward**... “…that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (14:13d); “… their works follow them.” What is the first thing that happens when one gets to heaven? They stand before the judgment seat of Christ and
they are judged according to their works; Paul put it like this: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The word translated “bad” (phaulon) actually means “worthless;” some folk serve the Lord for selfish reasons, or do so with an unrepentant heart; however, one’s salvation is not the issue here; salvation is by faith (Ephesians 2:8–9), but deeds issuing from that faith will be evaluated (1 Thessalonians 1:3); this is not a judgment of condemnation, for there is “no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he mentions the same kind of judgment; every believer is to build their lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ which is the Word of God; then he writes: “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:11–15).

Those whose works are worthless will have them burned and they will suffer loss, a loss of reward; they will be saved but barely so; they will be like a piece of timber snatched from the fire.

Those whose works stand the test receive a reward; the writer of Hebrews writes, “God will not forget your labor” (Hebrews 6:10); Revelation closes with the Lord Jesus saying; “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work” (Revelation 22:12); those rewards are seen as crowns; there are five crowns to be given for various services rendered for Christ.

1. There is the crown of life for those who persevere under trial and are faithful unto death (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

2. There is the crown of righteousness for those who live the Christ-like righteous life while longing for the coming of Christ (2 Timothy 4:8).

3. There is the crown of glory for those who have been faithful pastors and shepherds of the flock (1 Peter 5:4).
4. There is the victor’s crown for those who discipline their life like an athlete competing in a race to win a perishable crown; however, the disciplined Christian competes to win an incorruptible crown (1 Corinthians 9:24–25).

5. There is the crown of rejoicing for those who are soul winners and who faithfully share the gospel and their testimony to those who know not Christ (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

When those crowns are distributed to those blessed saints for their perseverance, for their obedience to God’s commands, and for their faith, they take those crowns and cast them before Him who sit on the throne as they fall down and worship Him; they begin to sing praises to God the Father and to Jesus the Lamb (Revelation 4:10).

To God the Father they sing “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty. You are worthy O Lord to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Revelation 4:8, 11).

Then their attention is turned to the Lamb, Jesus and they sing: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 4:12).

Then they praise both the Father and the Son: “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (Revelation 4:13).

And everyone in heaven said “Amen!”

Now you know what your first activity in heaven will be—a time of grateful praise that you will rest from your labors and praise God that He has rewarded you for faithful service to Him; no wonder, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” Amen and Amen!