

## UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part seventeen

Sunday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2032

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### ASSURANCE FOR CHRISTIANS WHEN THE WORLD FACES THE FIRE OF GOD'S COMING END-TIME JUDGMENT (continued)

**Revelation 14:1-20** - "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [2] And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, [3] and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. [4] It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. [6] Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. [7] And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water." [8] Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." [9] And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, [10] he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." [12] Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. [13] And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" [14] Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. [15] And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe. [16] So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. [17] Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. [18] And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." [19] So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia."

There is so much to unpack in Revelation chapter 14. Having considered two points last week, today we continue with three more thoughts:

#### 3) **A QUICK PREDICTION OF THE FALL OF BABYLON AND HER CORRUPTION**

From this point on, chapter 14 pictures events that are still to be covered in later chapters of Revelation. However, we see these future events as though already accomplished.

**Revelation 14:8** - "Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

Again, this is a very brilliant prophetic chapter. The actual fall of Babylon isn't on the scene until Revelation 17 and 18. But, like a *prequel* in a movie, John sees it here as an already accomplished fact. Babylon's doom is that certain and imminent.

I said in our last study that Babylon isn't to be interpreted as any one actual city or location. I believe it is a symbolic picture of the world's system that lures mankind into immorality and idolatry. Babylon, throughout the Old Testament became symbolic for the ultimate enemy of the people of God. John picks up this theme to describe the world's system, designed not only to *persecute* God's people, but to *entice and lure* them into sin.

So we've seen John describe *antichrist* and the *political structures* organized against devotion to Christ. Then we saw *the beast* and the construction of *worship structures* organizes against devotion to Christ. And now John

sees **Babylon**, representing the **enticement structures** of this world constructed to pull people into an easy **tolerance and enjoyment** of things displeasing to God.

Remember, these visions are first given to John and a people with centuries of Old Testament background and study. Babylon is the ultimate picture of everything that held Israel captive for so long in idolatry and judgment.

The Apostle Peter even uses the name Babylon to refer to the persecution his readers were receiving from ancient Rome - **1 Peter 5:8-13** - **"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. [9] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. [10] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. [11] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. [12] By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. [13] She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son."**

Most scholars see Peter's reference to "Babylon," which had been in ruins for many years, as a cryptic reference to the dominating power of Rome at that time. Then, as now, Babylon is a biblical picture for the civilizations which generate hatred of Christ and are the source of the idols this world puts in His rightful place. More on Babylon in future studies.

#### 4) **THE DOOM OF THE WORSHIPERS OF THE BEAST**

**Revelation 14:9-13** - **"And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, [10] he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." [12] Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. [13] And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"**

We're meant to see the parallel structuring of this passage. John paints a deliberate contrast between the present work of Babylon the great - **"...she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality"** - and the coming wrath of God - **"he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger...."**

Remember, up to this point in the book, God's wrath has only been seen in **measure**. The intent of it's manifestation was to turn the hearts of the people of the earth to the gospel. Now, however, God's wrath will be poured **"full strength"** upon those who worship the beast and receive his mark.

John very cleverly paints another striking contrast in these verses between the future state of these two groups of worshipers. Those who worship the beast and receive his mark will escape **immediate** persecution and trouble. They will drink from Babylon's cup. But this is only an **apparent** escape. While those who **refuse** to buy into this world's pleasures and idolatries will suffer **immediate** persecution, but will then enter ultimately into rest and blessedness.

Notice how John compares these two destinies and the idea of future rest:

**Revelation 14:11 & 13** - **"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.....13.... And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"**

#### 5) **THE TWO HARVESTS AND THE END OF THE AGE**

**Revelation 14:14-20** - **"Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. [15] And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour**

to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." [16] So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. [17] Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. [18] And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe. [19] So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. [20] And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia."

It's interesting to compare the this order of events with Jesus parable in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 - "He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, [25] but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. [26] So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. [27] And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' [28] He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' [29] But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. [30] Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.....'"

[36]...."Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." [37] He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. [38] The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, [39] and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. [40] Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. [41] The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, [42] and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [43] Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

The picture here is one of God's absolute sovereign control over the events of the future. That these two harvests will both become ripe symbolizes the fact that events will come to term just as inevitably as a crop will mature unto harvest. John sees two harvest or gatherings. The first is the gathering of the righteous unto the goal of their salvation. The second is the gathering of the wicked to be eternally punished for their obstinate and unreasonable refusal to honor and glorify God through Jesus Christ.

Notice that the judgement in John's vision seems to be released from under the altar - Revelation 14:18 - "And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe."

Here we see John carefully taking us back to the place where the saints, under the pain of persecution, began crying out to God to judge and avenge:

Revelation 6:9-11 - "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. [10] They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" [11] Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, *until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete*, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

Clearly, the martyrdom of the saints was intended by God to serve as a witness (that's what the word "martyr" means) to the people of the earth. The obedient devotion of these saints to Jesus, even in the face of persecution and death, would speak loudly to onlookers, just as Paul was moved at the death of Stephen. This is the reason for our presence here on earth during the great tribulation. And *refusing* this most powerful witness to the beauty of Jesus Christ is also pictured as the source of the fullest measure of God's wrath and judgment.