

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 31 - Chapter 14

As we work our way through Revelation chapter 14, keep in mind that John's visions have reached a point in time that is still in our future (that is, it is within the timeline of the End of Days) when the Anti-Christ arrives onto the scene. He is portrayed figuratively as the Sea Beast with 7 heads and 10 horns, and we need to keep in mind that he is not the entirety of the beast but rather seems to be represented by but one of the 7 heads....the one that received a fatal head wound but miraculously survived. The other heads along with all the horns appears to be governments and heads of state that work to elevate the Anti-Christ into a powerful political position. So we can characterize the Sea Beast as generally representing political powers that includes the Anti-Christ.

The False Prophet, in the form of the Land Beast with his 2 horns like a lamb, has also appeared at about the same time as the Sea Beast. The False Prophet performs great miracles by means of the power granted to him by the Dragon who is Satan. He also entices the world to worship the Anti-Christ, orders that an image of the Anti-Christ is fashioned, and then supernaturally gives the image animation enough that it can speak. The False Prophet is representative of religious powers.

The time has also arrived when everyone on the planet is forced to wear the number 666 on their hand or forehead or they will not be able to buy or sell. This of course represents not only absolute financial control of the entire world but also the mark of 666 that one bears represents each person's allegiance to the Anti-Christ who is but the Devil personified. So the world is now completely polarized: those who wear the mark are, in God's eyes, against Him and lost; and those who refuse the mark and are written in the Lamb's Book of Life are with God and eternally His. There is no middle ground; and if the words of Revelation are absolute and not conditional, then once a person has received the mark of the beast there is no turning back to God even if one wants to.

So now understanding the timeframe we're talking about, chapter 14 opens with the next thing to happen, which is Christ returning to earth from Heaven along with the 144,000 sealed with the Father's name written on them. This seal not only identifies them as belonging to God in the same way that the mark of the beast identifies those who wear it as belonging to Satan, but the seal affords them protection from the fury of the Devil and His cronies: the Anti-Christ and the False Prophet. I'll remind you that the 144,000 are Israelites.....no doubt Israelites that are saved. They represent the 12 tribes of Israel, with each tribe contributing the same number of people to the group of 144,000 (12, 000 from each tribe). I'll also remind you that the bulk of modern Christianity says that despite the explicit words of Revelation chapter 7 that calls out each of the 12 tribes by name and the number of their tribal members they contribute to the sealed group, these are not Hebrew Israelites at all.....they are gentile Christians! Why would Christianity say such a thing that is clearly anti-scriptural? Because it is a basic faith principle of most Christian institutions that God has forsaken Israel and turned all their promises and

blessings over to the Christian Church. This is what is today called Replacement Theology or for the more academically inclined, supersessionism.

Christ and the 144,000 suddenly appear on Mount Zion, in the flesh. Or at least in some type of perfected, incorruptible flesh and with a new nature and spirit, with their old human nature having been vanquished upon their death and subsequent presence in Heaven. Their completed perfection is explained in verses 4 and 5. Exactly 7 attributes that speak of perfect wholeness are listed. And, of course, 7 is the divine ideal number that itself is symbolic of perfect wholeness. We spent significant time last week going over each of the these 7 attributes and what they mean, so you can review that for yourself. But perhaps next to the passage indicating perfect wholeness of the 144,000, the most important principle for us to come away with is that the bulk of these attributes attributed to them are required of God's Holy Warriors and are prescribed in what is called The Law of Herem; the Law of the Ban. So, these 144,000 are the vanguard of God's holy army that will fight the final battles of God's Holy War on earth that began with the Israelites' exit from Egypt and will culminate only when Satan is fully subdued.

Let's continue now by re-reading part of chapter 14.

RE-READ REVELATION CHAPTER 14:6 - end

Understanding that all the things we have discussed today are in our future, but as far as the End Times sequence is concerned they have already occurred (or, perhaps better, are occurring and still playing out), we find an angel flying about in mid-heaven proclaiming everlasting Good News to those on earth. First; mid-heaven is talking about the atmosphere....it is where the birds fly....it is not Heaven where God lives. I want you to get a certain picture in mind of what this meant to John and to those who first glimpsed his Apocalypse.

In John's day, the Hebrews envisioned the earth as flat and usually with 4 corners. Above their heads was a dome, with the uppermost strata of the dome being Heaven where God lives, and just below that the area where the clouds float and the birds fly, but also where the stars, sun and moon hang. So the concept that those in John's era would have understood is that the angel went to the zenith.... the highest point..... of the mid-Heaven where he could see everyone on earth, and also where everyone on earth could see him. And from there he made his Good News proclamation. While of course the way the Hebrews (and most other Middle Eastern cultures) in that era envisioned the earth, the sky and Heaven wasn't accurate, we must take what is said in that context to best understand it since although the Bible is God's Word to us, it was written by human hands who were time and culture bound.

Thus this angel is visible to those living on earth (just as the sun and moon are visible to earthlings), and his voice can be tangibly heard just as though he was speaking through a gigantic loudspeaker. His proclamation will be heard by every last human being on earth, so it will be similar to how it was at Shavuot.... Pentecost.... when the Holy Spirit came to Jerusalem and proclaimed a Good News message and every person present heard it in their own language. However this angel will not speak the Good News that we typically think of: it was

not the Gospel of Christ he was proclaiming. It was something else and that something else is the subject of verse 7.

The angelic proclamation was: ***"Fear God; give Him glory. For the hour has come when He will pass judgment! Worship the One who made Heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!"***

Whereas the Good News of The Gospel of Christ is a universal message of forgiveness and deliverance, this Good News is a universal message of judgment. It is Good News only to Believers; for everyone else it is a message of their doom. For Believers the time we have waited for, for eons, has finally come. For non-Believers a time that they thought was only a primitive fairy tale believed by the ignorant and simple minded, is suddenly upon them. That the proclamation is distributed to people of every tribe, language and nation tells us that there are Believers in every tribe, language and nation. But it also tells us that judgment upon those who are not Believers exempts no one, no matter how sympathetic or innocent they might seem to us.

Some commentators say that this angel is making the final altar call; that is, this is the one remaining opportunity that earth people have to turn from their wickedness and towards God that they might be saved. My response to that is that this could only be the case *if* this angel makes his proclamation *before* people are required to take the mark of the beast because once one takes the mark there seems to be no turning back. If what we are reading occurs in the chronological sequence we're reading it then what the angel is pronouncing is not a final call for repentance and salvation; rather, that time has passed. His call is an edict sent from the Most High to everyone on earth.... especially to the doomed.... to acknowledge the reality of God (which most have denied) and of His imminent judgment upon them for their rebellion and idolatry. And, of course, this is all very unexpected by everyone but Believers. Make no mistake: this is no different than offering a condemned man the moment before his execution the opportunity to admit and confess his crime; however it in no way delays or pardons his execution.

One more comment and we'll move on. When we read that "the hour" of judgment has come, we need to take this more as an expression than as a measurement of time. The meaning wouldn't change one iota had the message been "the day" of judgment has come. That said, especially in the New Testament the term "the hour" when something is to occur is almost always reserved for connection with End Times apocalyptic events. So as used here the term "hour" simply means that the foretold End Times judgment is upon the earth's inhabitants right now. Remember; back in chapter 10 the Mighty Angel (who I think is the Angel of the Lord) swore that ***"there will be no more delay"..... "the hidden plan of God will be brought to completion, the Good News as He proclaimed to His servants the prophets"***. So this different angel of Revelation 14 is merely validating and somewhat expanding upon what the Mighty Angel vowed in Revelation 10. And, if we can take what we've been reading in chronological sequence, it means that after the angel of chapter 10 made his proclamation there was still a tiny sliver of time left for repentance and salvation; but the proclamation of the angel of Revelation 14 reveals that the little sliver of time ended when the Beast demanded that everyone take on the mark of 666. At that point a permanent decision had to be made by

every living human.

At verse 8 a second angel appears with another message of judgment; this one is specifically aimed at Babylon the Great. The phrase "She has fallen" is repeated for emphasis. Essentially, outside of Satan Himself, the Lord lays the blame for the deafness of the nations of the earth to His demands of repentance and change upon Babylon the Great. It is Babylon's evil influence that made all the nations suffer God's wrath for their own wickedness and idolatry.

For me, perhaps the most important aspect of this statement is to try to put a face to Babylon the Great. Who or what is Babylon the Great? I feel that it is probably best to begin by investigating what the earliest Church Fathers thought about the meaning of Babylon the Great.

Tyconius who lived in the late 300's says this in his Commentary on the Apocalypse.

Babylon is interpreted as confusion. By it the city and the people of the devil are signified, as is also the entire seduction of the vices that it always exercises for its own ruin and for the ruin of the human race.

So Tyconius sees Babylon as symbolic of the city and people who belong to Satan. But Oecumenius who wrote in the late 900's says: ***"By Babylon he is referring to the confusion and arbitrarily random trials of the present life....for confusion is the meaning of Babylon.... and to the manic stupefaction of those who worship idols..... But if you were to consider the physical Babylon itself, you would not fall down before the sight before you"***.

So for Oecumenius once again Babylon is symbolic of the confusion of our present lives, but also it has no reference to any physical city including the ancient city of Babylon itself. Andrew of Caesarea (around 600 A.D.) in his Commentary more or less agrees with Oecumenius in that ***"He (John) speaks of Babylon, which refers to the confusion of the world and the troubled disorder of this life, which in no way has abated"***. So there is no place or city of Babylon; it is just an expression that speaks of the confusion and disorder of the world.

Over the last few centuries, and especially today, there have been any number of speculations about this matter. Although the archeological site of the city of ancient Babylon is well known, it remains a relic and a ruin although Saddam Hussein attempted some rebuilding. Some believe that in the End Times the city will be resurrected, rebuilt, and made the center of the financial world. Others say that while Babylon will indeed be a physical city, that physical city was and remains Rome. Still others say that the term is purely symbolic of money, greed, and idolatry.... the wicked world system if you would.

Let's walk through this to find out what we can know, and while some speculation must necessarily be involved since this is unfulfilled prophecy, let's try to limit it as best we can to what we're told in the Bible. First and foremost, when we look at where we are in Revelation, we find that Satan always tries to mimic God and His plans. For instance, while God offers Christ for salvation, Satan offers the Anti-Christ to counter him. While God offers John the

Baptist as the true prophet who announces Christ, Satan offers the False Prophet who announces the Anti-Christ in a means to deceive people to believe that the Anti-Christ is the true Messiah (and not Yeshua), and that the False Prophet is the true prophet (and not John the Baptist).

Earlier in this chapter we first hear the word Zion (Mount Zion, actually) and Zion is essentially the redeemed, ideal Jerusalem of the End Times.... certainly not as Jerusalem exists today. It is the purified city of God and so the people living there are the purified people of God. Therefore it is my claim that Babylon is intended to communicate the opposite; it represents the Satanic antithesis of Zion. Babylon is the End Times city of Satan, occupied by the End Times people of Satan, just as Zion is the End Times city of God occupied by the End Times people of God. However, Zion is not only symbolic; it is also a real place. It is literally the city of Jerusalem in Israel. Zion, the redeemed Jerusalem, will therefore be a physical tangible city with buildings and streets and shops and people living in it. So here in Revelation 14 the reason that Jerusalem is called Zion is because it has been purified and made whole. If my understanding of Babylon as being the antithesis of Zion is correct.... the mirror image of Zion, if you would.... then whatever we think Babylon the Great might be or represent, from the far view it must fit the mold as the anti-Zion.

In the most ancient times when Prophets like Isaiah, Daniel and Jeremiah spoke against Babylon as a wicked and idolatrous place, the term Babylon held both symbolic and literal significance in that Babylon was literally an existing powerful and evil city and also that Babylon was representative of the entire pagan world in general that was idolatrous and evil and oppressed God's people. But in the Apostle John's day, while Babylon still existed as pagan and idolatrous, it had become a second rate power as Rome had become the power center of the known world. The pagan and wicked social, political and economic system that at one time Babylon lorded over, now Rome lords over. And this Roman system puts Believers in Christ (and even Jews in general) in John's day under the same untenable position as it was for the Jewish people under Babylon in the era of Nebuchadnezzar. So for John, Babylon was a kind of substitute term for the word Rome because Jews feared speaking out directly against Rome (rightfully so), so instead they used code words understood by the Jewish population. As Dr. David Stern points out in his commentary on the Book of Revelation:

"Babylon was a common code word for Rome in the Pseudepigrapha (2Baruch 11:1, 67:7 and the Sibylline Oracles 5:143 and 159) and in rabbinic writings. Midrash Rabbah on the Song of Songs 1:64 states directly that one calls Rome Babylon.

Babylon, while illustrative and representative of the worst sort of atrocities against God that might occur anywhere on planet earth, nonetheless was a real place.... a real city. And obviously so is... and was... Rome a real city. So I maintain that Babylon the Great retains to this day, and will in the End Times, that same sort of characterization as an enemy and antithesis of God's city and people (Zion), but also as both symbolic of evil, oppression, idolatry, and greed as well as literal in that Babylon the Great will be a real, tangible, identifiable city even though it may not actually be named Babylon.

I think that perhaps the hardest part of my conclusion to accept about what Babylon is, is that I

can't tell you exactly which city that might be in the End Times and guessing is really an unfair slander to any city I might name. Perhaps the next hardest part is to accept that something in the Bible (like Babylon the Great) can be BOTH literal and symbolic at the same time. Some scholars who hold a somewhat similar view as mine on this issue say that Babylon, at least today, is New York City; others see it as London. Why? Because those 2 cities are the financial capitals of the world and without doubt Babylon the Great has as its chief attribute the controller and driver of the world's economic system. I'm not saying that I agree that New York City or London are the modern day representatives of Babylon. But whatever they are today is largely irrelevant as concerns what John is alluding to here in Revelation 14. The pertinent issue is not what city Babylon might best epitomize today, but rather what city will be representative of Babylon, the world's godless economic system, in the End Times. As of now, in 2019, that is the future and so it is currently unknowable.

The reason that God hates Babylon the Great so much is reflected in the second half of verse 8. It is that she has made all the nations drink the wine of God's fury caused by her whoring. First; whoring in the Bible is indicative of an illicit relationship, usually involving adultery. A whore will sell her favors to anyone for the right price and in the process defile her customer as she is defiled. Here this isn't about sex, rather it is about the willing collaboration of people and nations with Babylon, who is also depicted a little later in Revelation as a great harlot.... a whore. By saying that Babylon has "made" the nations complicit in her wicked actions and character doesn't necessarily mean these nations were oppressed and forced into it against their will. Rather it means that the decadence of Babylon was so alluring that they couldn't resist the temptation. These nations became infatuated if not intoxicated with the wealth and influence of Babylon the Great and wanted in, when in God's eyes what they should have done is shun her. While we see this sort of thing happening all around us in trade agreements with utterly evil, idolatrous and oppressive nations this is nothing new; economic ties to mutually benefit nations has occurred all throughout history. Just as we so easily say that the terms politician and liar are nearly one in the same, and we also rather easily accept that this is just an unfortunate necessity in modern politics, lying is not OK to God just because it has been turned into a profession. And neither is it acceptable to Him that a relatively godly nation would, for purely economic benefit, tie itself to an ungodly nation or an ungodly economic pact. That makes the client nation nothing more than a paying customer to a prostitute.

The nations that attach themselves to Babylon the Great will not be able to claim innocence or that they are really victims. Rather God sees these nations as fully responsible for their decision to attach themselves to Babylon and so they will suffer her same fate. And as near as I can decipher from the Old Testament prophecies and from Revelation, as we approach the End Times every nation on earth including Israel will become a client of Babylon to one level or another.

In verse 9 another angel appears; a 3rd one. This one brings a dire warning. It is that if anyone (individual or nation) worships the beast and its image or receives the mark of the beast they will suffer God's wrath. Notice that there is no mention of a call for repentance or of an opportunity for God's forgiveness. Taking the beast's mark and then changing your mind later is not as simple as regretting getting a tattoo and then trying to have it removed. The mark is as permanent and irrevocable as the fate just announced to the wearer of that mark. And the

fate is that those who bear the mark of the beast will be tormented by fire and sulfur for ever and ever. This is describing the rather typical Christian vision of Hell or perhaps the Lake of Fire, or perhaps both. The first image that fire and sulfur brings to mind is of Sodom and Gomorrah; but also it reminds us of Isaiah 34:8 that prophesies the destruction of Edom as well as all other pagan nations. It's worth taking a few minutes to read this prophecy so that its connection with John's Apocalypse is well reinforced in our minds.

READ ISAIAH 34 all

That this is an End Times prophecy is highlighted by the use of the words in verse 8 that the Lord is carrying out His vengeance upon the nations "for the cause of Zion"..... Zion being the idealized End Times Jerusalem. So what Isaiah prophesied around the 8th century B.C., is coming about in Revelation 14. Back to Revelation chapter 14 verse 10.

Notice that the tormenting of those who have turned themselves over to Satan (those wearing the mark of the beast) will occur in the presence of Christ and of the angels. This only highlights the lack of rescue; the inability at this point in redemption history for a person to repent and be saved. Neither Christ nor the angels step forward to mediate the suffering; rather they witness it as a gallery often witnesses the execution of a murderer. It is not because they have sympathy; it is because they want to see justice done.

The next verse ought to be a wake up call to us so that we don't continue to be enticed by too many Pollyannaish modern Church doctrines about Believers and the End Times. Verse 12 says that when all this is going on, this will be the time when our endurance as Believers to suffer the attacks of the beast will be the most difficult to endure because we choose to defy the Anti-Christ and instead continue to obey God's commandments and exercise Yeshua's faithfulness. In other words, Believers living at this time will be given a stark choice and there is no middle ground. Either adore and worship the beast and live, or obey God's commandments and rely on the faithful work of Christ on the cross and be killed. Either give allegiance to the Anti-Christ and have a few more weeks or months of a comfortable life, or maintain allegiance to God by doing His commandments and trusting in His Son, die at the hands of the beast, and then accept eternal rewards in Heaven later. Sounds like an easy choice now while such a choice is purely hypothetical. But it will be unbelievably difficult when that time arrives and our choice will be between life and death (and probably not a quick and painless one) and in many cases it will involve the lives of our spouses and children.

Once again notice the phrase that says what God expects of His worshippers; it is that we are to "obey His commandments AND exercise Yeshua's faithfulness". What was Yeshua's faithfulness? Going to His death for the sake of righteousness. But the part I want to highlight for the moment is that we also are to obey God's commandments. This is NOT that by relying on the grace of Christ that we are obeying God's commandments. Rather it is that two separate things must happen. First, we must obey God's commandments (the Torah Laws), and second we must trust Christ so much that we are willing to suffer our death the same way He did. What happens if we do the latter but not the former? Yeshua covered that in His Sermon on the Mount.

CJB Matthew 5:17-19 ¹⁷ "Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete. ¹⁸ Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah-not until everything that must happen has happened.

¹⁹ So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So here is yet another setting that builds upon what we read in Matthew 5. Continuing our sincere trust in Christ will, no doubt, make us and keep us as part of the Kingdom of Heaven. However in the social hierarchy that Yeshua sets up and rules over, we will be the least among all the members if we deny the ongoing relevance of God's commandments, and therefore disobey them, and even teach that to obey them is a bad thing. But for those who faithfully obey God's Torah commandments as an appropriate response from trusting in the faithfulness of Messiah Yeshua, we will be placed at the top of the social hierarchy in God's Kingdom. Since the duration of this hierarchy is forever (or perhaps is only during the 1000 year reign of Christ), then I think it would be wise to set a goal for ourselves of being greatest and not least in God's Kingdom.

This thought of enduring the nearly inevitable result for Believers living during the time of the rule of the Anti-Christ and refusing to bear his mark concludes with verse 13. It says that those Believers who persevere are the blessed ones, because once dead they no longer have to struggle. They have run their race and crossed the finished line. As we hear from Paul in 2Timothy:

CJB 2 Timothy 4:7-8 ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

⁸ All that awaits me now is the crown of righteousness which the Lord, "the Righteous Judge," will award to me on that Day- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for him to appear.

We'll conclude chapter 14 and begin chapter 15 next time.