

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 32 - Chapters 14 & 15

Before we complete Revelation chapter 14 and then move into chapter 15 I want to briefly highlight what we covered towards the end of the last lesson not only because of the importance of what it says and means to all Believers, but it also sums up what this ministry is all about. The focus is on verse 12; look at it in your Bibles.

Because this verse carries such an impact for followers of Christ, now and always, I'm going to give it to you in a number of different Bible versions so that you can see that there is no issue among Bible translators as to the meaning.

^{CJB} Revelation 14:12 *This is when perseverance is needed on the part of God's people, those who observe his commands and exercise Yeshua's faithfulness.*

^{KJV} Revelation 14:12 *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*

^{NAB} Revelation 14:12 *Here is what sustains the holy ones who keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus.*

^{NAS} Revelation 14:12 *Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*

^{NKJ} Revelation 14:12 *Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.*

^{YLT} Revelation 14:12 *Here is endurance of the saints: here are those keeping the commands of God, and the faith of Jesus.'*

Please notice the consistency and lack of ambiguity in these translations. It is that God's people, Believers, are here described as those "who keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus". It is often said (erroneously) that in the New Testament when we hear the word "commandments" that it no longer refers to the Law of Moses or even the 10 commandments, but rather they are Jesus' commandments. Even if that were the case (which it is not), here the commandments are specifically said to be "God's commandments", and obedience to them is to be coupled with "faith in Jesus". So, as we regularly find in Revelation, God is spoken of separately from Yeshua. Or better, God the Father is spoken of separately from God the Son. So clearly the term "God's commandments" is speaking of the Law; the commandments that God gave to Moses. Intellectual honesty demands that it can be nothing else.

Once again this comports perfectly with what Christ told us in Matthew 5 when He instructed

that not only did He not abolish the Law, but that He also fully expects His followers to obey the Law and to teach others to do so. Let me emphasize that obeying the Law does NOT bring us salvation; only trust in Messiah Yeshua can do that. However, as Christ so carefully and explicitly explains in His Sermon on the Mount, our trust in Him ought to enable a deeper devotion within us to obey His Father's commandments.....the Law of Moses. And the extent to which we intend to obey them, and actually do obey them, will determine where we fit in the social hierarchy of God's Kingdom. Will we be placed among the greatest of God's holy ones or among the least?

But here in Revelation we also find out that our acceptance and understanding of the Law and the Prophets is going to have much to do with how God views us and how well our faithfulness towards Him bears up in the End Times as the persecutions against us increase in intensity. No doubt we are not able to fulfill the Law in modern times to the extent that could be done in ancient times, at least partially because there is no Temple or Priesthood. God knows this; and so our job as Believers is to try to conform ourselves and our behavior to the intent or spirit of each law and especially when doing the letter of that law is highly impractical within our culture, perhaps illegal, or even impossible.

Let's continue with Revelation chapter 14 by re-reading the final passages.

RE-READ REVELATION 14:13 - end

Verse 13 says that the dead in the Lord (those who die in the End Times) are actually blessed because, continues this verse, now they can rest from their efforts. Since the previous couple of verses dealt with the severe persecutions and temptations that Believers will be under in the End Times, especially when the Anti-Christ begins to rule, then verse 13 is in reference to these sufferings. Bottom line: death will be a welcome respite for God worshippers because of what is going to happen to us on earth, beginning with the issue of being required to wear the number 666 on our bodies or being prohibited from buying or selling in what will no doubt be a government controlled cashless society.

I want to pause for a moment to point out something that I have spoken about before, but it is appropriate in this context to bring it up again. Clearly the tribulation that Believers are undergoing in these passages in Revelation during the time the Anti-Christ is in power, is horrific. A time when death will be a welcome thing for Christ followers. So what happened to the Rapture? According to the Dispensational Pre-Tribulation Rapture adherents (a doctrine that is so well accepted in modern Christianity) Believers shouldn't even be around to be suffering such degradations and pain. Yet, these passages clearly show Believers alive and suffering during this time, as they receive encouragement from God to persevere. This is one of several reasons that I cannot accept the notion of a pre-tribulation Rapture that whisks Believers away to Heaven in order to avoid suffering at the hands of men's evil. We've read several passages now that directly addresses the suffering of Believers before and during the time of the reign of the Anti-Christ.

The principle I go by is this: God saves His people that He deems innocent from the wrath that He pours out from Heaven, but He does not tend to save those same people from oppression

and suffering caused by rampant evil on earth. Rather the Lord tends to see such oppression and persecution as an opportunity for us to witness to our faith, and to be refined in the fire of sufferings as was Our Savior. Thus I cannot see God rapturing away Believers any sooner than just before the 6th seal judgment. It is possible that perhaps the Believers we're reading about in chapter 14 are new Believers that have come to faith after the Rapture; but nothing has even hinted at such a thing and so it can only be considered as speculation. Or more likely such a speculation is an attempt to make the Pre-Tribulation Rapture doctrine workable. So what I counsel is the same thing that the Prophets and even Christ Himself counseled: be prepared. Be spiritually and mentally prepared to face the worst; and if it turns out that in God's mercy we are lifted off this planet and not required to face the holocaust of men's evil that is coming, then hallelujah. But if we're not removed and instead remain to go through it, then we will have been equipped to endure and not question or stumble in our faith.

Verse 14 says that John now sees one like a Son of Man (Yeshua) coming on a cloud. This of course references the prophecy of Daniel 7.

CJB Daniel 7:13-14 ¹³ "I kept watching the night visions, when I saw, coming with the clouds of heaven, someone like a son of man. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence.

¹⁴ To him was given rulership, glory and a kingdom, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him. His rulership is an eternal rulership that will not pass away; and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Interestingly we also find this thought in the Gospel of Mark, however it is more directly associated to the End of Days.

CJB Mark 13:21-27 ²¹ "At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look! Here's the Messiah!' or, 'See, there he is!'- don't believe him! ²² There will appear false Messiahs and false prophets performing signs and wonders for the purpose, if possible, of misleading the chosen.

²³ But you, watch out! I have told you everything in advance!

²⁴ In those days, after that trouble, the sun will grow dark, the moon will stop shining, ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with tremendous power and glory. ²⁷ He will send out his angels and gather together his chosen people from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

Notice here in Mark all the things that are going on at the time that the Son of Man comes in the clouds. Watch out, we're told, there will be a false Messiah....but don't believe him. Who else can this be but John's Sea Beast....the Anti-Christ? There will be major cosmic disturbances. And it is during this time that God will send out His angels to gather His chosen people from all over the earth. So this passage from Mark fits hand in glove with John's Apocalyptic visions.

Besides wearing a crown to indicate His glory as king over God's Kingdom, we find the Son of Man who comes in the clouds with a sickle in His hand. A sickle is used for harvesting what has grown and ripened. Interestingly Yeshua does not begin harvesting until an angel gives the order. We have to remember that angels do not act on their own; they are God's servants and seem to be mostly used as messengers of God's oracles. In fact the Hebrew word that we translate in English as angel is *malach*, and it literally means messenger. So here we find once again that the Son of God does not act until God the Father issues an instruction to do so; in this case the message is sent through a heavenly angel. And once again John hammers home the reality that God the Son is NOT co-equal with God the Father. God the Father is preeminent and God the Son is essentially the Father's servant.

Following the proclamation of the angel, Messiah swings His sickle and harvests the earth. Might this be the moment of the Rapture? If it isn't, and instead is an event that comes later after an earlier Rapture, then this means that there are two harvests of Believers in the End Times and not one. I cannot say that this is impossible; but nothing in Revelation or anywhere else in the New Testament hints of two harvests of God Worshipers in the End Times. And if there are two, then exactly what is this second harvest when the Son of Man swings His sickle? How does this "harvest" occur? The Rapture that we're familiar with seems to be about a sudden disappearance. Therefore it seems to me that the Rapture is the only means that God uses to harvest His Believers from earth and I cannot see where the Scriptures reference more than one harvest or Rapture. Therefore it is my conclusion that the harvest of Believers with Christ swinging His sickle is but another way of speaking of the Rapture. Now hear me: the Bible regularly speaks of events that are done in Heaven that might not yet be done on earth. So there might be a sort of spiritual harvest of Believers that occurs before a physical harvest happens.

Interestingly enough, some commentators such as Beale say that this is not a harvest of Believers by Messiah but rather it is Messiah's judgment of the wicked. That is, Christ is harvesting non-Believers. While that can't be completely discounted, I find it odd because in the next verse a different angel shows up, bearing his own sickle, and he gathers what is referred to as clusters of grapes from the earth's vine. And then the verse after that (verse 19) explains that indeed that angel swings his sickle, gathers those grapes, but he throws them into God great winepress of fury!

So in the first instance, Christ Himself harvests; and in the second instance an angel gathers. Look carefully at those verses. What Christ does is to harvest; however what the angel does is to swing His sickle but it is characterized as gathering and not harvesting. Moreover, while nothing is said of what happens to the harvest that Christ brings in, verse 19 clearly says that it is what the ANGEL with the sickle gathers that is thrown into the winepress of God's fury. It is true that Joel 4 uses harvesting and grapes to indicate judgment, and indeed we do have judgment in that regard here in Revelation.....but only as it involves the harvest activity of the angels; the same is not said of those harvested by Christ.

Harvesting in the Bible is used in both a positive and a negative sense. So how do we decide how to take the meaning of the harvest statement about Christ here in Revelation 14? I think we can use His words as recorded in a parable in Matthew 13 to settle the dispute because

they fit so well with the situation.

CJB Matthew 13:24-30 ²⁴ *Yeshua put before them another parable. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, then went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads of grain, the weeds also appeared.*

²⁷ *The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' ²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants asked him, 'Then do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, because if you pull up the weeds, you might uproot some of the wheat at the same time.*

³⁰ *Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest-time I will tell the reapers to collect the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned, but to gather the wheat into my barn."*

In Revelation 14 the harvest time of Yeshua's parable has arrived and the earth is full of wheat and weeds that have grown up together.... roots entangled at times. And as with this parable there will be a positive harvest and a negative harvest and the two harvests will be simultaneous. The good wheat will be harvested, separated out and placed into Christ's own barn. The weeds will also be harvested, but they will be gathered into bundles and destroyed.... burned up. It seems self-evident to me that the harvest performed by Yeshua, the Savior, is of His own.... Believers... the wheat that will be stored in His barn.... while the harvest of the angels is of the wicked.... that is to be burned up... the weeds.

So why do some commentators say, no, even Christ's harvest in Revelation 14 is the judgment of the wicked? In addition to a certain ambiguity in this passage that allows for some wiggle room, such a conclusion is necessary to uphold the doctrine of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture. After all, we've been reading about the tremendous tribulation that Believers have been undergoing, and now comes Christ to harvest. So if this is the moment of harvesting Believers, then the doctrine evaporates that says that the Rapture occurs before tribulation begins.

That the angel that gathers the grapes is an act of judgment cannot be disputed since there is no way that a gathering of Believers (as grapes off of a vine) gets thrown into the vat of God's fury. What is said next is that this winepress was trodden outside the city (meaning outside of Jerusalem) and the blood flowed as high as the horses' bridles for a length of 200 miles. There are a couple of elements of this statement that we need to examine.

First; why the mention of the gathered grapes being trodden OUTSIDE the city? Often this is used as the reasoning to say that this is speaking of the Battle of Armageddon that takes place in the Jezreel Valley. While Armageddon indeed does take place there, it is not the intent of this statement. The reason that judgment that clearly involves the killing of some untold number of wicked is outside the city of Jerusalem is for the same reason that Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem; the Law says that the taking of human blood defiles the ground. In the Old Testament the term "outside the camp" is used (since it is a term that

originated concerning the Wilderness Tabernacle during the exodus from Egypt) instead of "outside the city"; however the effect and intent is the same. Thus in Christ's day crucifixions and other executions had to take place not only outside the city precinct, but even a certain distance from the Temple in order not to defile it. So, the winepress of God's fury (that here means the killing of the wicked) legally must occur outside of the city of Jerusalem to prevent defiling God's holy city and especially the Temple grounds.

The second element involves the enormous amount of bloodshed that is quantified as being as high as the bridle of a horse and extending for 200 miles! For certain this is not a precise measurement of a volume of blood. I truly don't know how to take this except as an expression of an unprecedented amount of human death and carnage and also perhaps as symbolic of the geographic extent of it. In John's day 200 miles would have been the approximate distance from Tyre in the north (which represents the extent of Israel to the north in John's day) to the border with Egypt in south. So it may be expressing that the entire Land of Israel will be a killing ground and certainly not just the Jezreel Valley. However the killing will NOT take place within the holy precinct of Jerusalem.

The Jezreel is a triangular depression between the hills of Lower Galilee to the north and the hills of Samaria to the south. It's bordered on the east by Mount Tabor, the Hill of Moreh and the Gilboa range. On the west it's bordered by the Carmel range. Its long side runs from Jenin to the northern slope of Mount Carmel. From northwest to southeast it measures about 20 miles and northeast to southwest about 14 miles. If you include the Harod Valley stretching to the Beth Shean Valley to the east, then you could say it's about 30 miles wide, but I think that's a little stretch. 200 miles long is an even bigger stretch! At the very most, from Nazareth above the valley in the north to Jenin to the south, it's 35 miles. So to say that this must be talking about the Jezreel Valley because it speaks of 200 miles is a non-starter. Therefore, without further information, I think this statement is symbolizing that the blood of God's enemies will flow heavily throughout the entire length of Israel.

With that, let's move on to Revelation chapter 15.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 15 all

Verse 1 begins with the typical kind of symbolism that we've seen throughout the book: a sign in Heaven of 7 angels and 7 plagues described as the final ones. Recall that we discussed in earlier lessons that in addition to the number 7 symbolizing perfection and wholeness that especially in Revelation it can include the meaning of finality. And here we even get the words that the 7 plagues are the final ones. Upon these 7 plagues being poured out, God's wrath upon humans and upon the earth will have run its course.

These 7 plagues, each one associated with a particular angel, are known as the 7 Bowl Judgments. Some commentators see these 7 Bowl Judgments as the content of the 7th Trumpet judgment; I don't see it that way but such an understanding harms nothing. On the other hand, some take the meaning of the term last or final (judgments) NOT as meaning that of the 21 named judgments that the 7 Bowl Judgments are the 15th through 21st ones, but rather that this vision John is having is the final vision given to him. And there is truth to it that

we need to be very careful not to read Revelation as though it was a daily journal, so that everything we read as we thumb through the pages is in precise chronological order. I find much overlap and have every reason to believe that some of the later visions are meant to supplement earlier ones. However this is the nature of prophetic apocalypse; the sequence of the events can be difficult to pin down with certainty. And since everything we're reading is still future to us then we have no way to prove with any detail what the exact order of events will be.

That said, it is my intent to go forward under the assumption that these 7 Bowl Judgments are indeed the 15th through 21st of the 21 total judgments that Revelation describes, because I can't find anything substantial enough in the text to cause me to suspect otherwise.

Verse 2 says that John is given a vision of a sea of glass mixed with fire. No doubt this is not literal but rather is figurative. But figurative of what? It is usual to think of a sea as meaning a body of water, salt or fresh, and that is what most Bible commentators and theologians believe is in play here. Since what follows is described (partly) as a Song of Moses, then the nearly consensus thought of Bible academics is that the sea of glass (or sea of crystal) is equivalent to the Red Sea. Maybe. But I have a little different thought about it. At this time in history, even though the Temple had been destroyed for probably 2 decades by the time of the writing of Revelation, the laver of water present near the altar was given a kind of nickname: it was called "the sea". This was a popular name given to it because this giant bronze kettle held so much water and had such a large surface area that it was said to be as large as a sea.

The giant water laver, or sea, was where living water used to purify priests and Levites was held. The sea in John's vision is described as being of glass mixed with fire. In the Bible fire is used to both purify and to destroy. But since the water laver called the sea was indeed used to purify, then here instead of water we find that fire is being used as the purifying element. But what is being purified by the fire? The earth and humanity. Why is fire going to be used to purify the earth and humanity if the reference is to the water laver of living water? Because God had already used water once, centuries earlier, to purify the earth and mankind of wickedness (the Great Flood) and He promised never to do it again using water.

Thus we witness those Believers who are defeating the beast, and the image, and the number of its name who are standing by the sea of glass; and the Believers are holding harps. Which Believers hold harps? Levite Believers; just as we saw with the 24 Elders in Heaven earlier in Revelation. This can be ascertained because it was Levites in the Temple who were the musicians, the harp players, so we have the connection between the sea (the living water laver in the Temple) and some Levite Temple musicians who were holding harps.

These Believing Levites holding harps were said to have defeated the beast, his image, and the number of his name. In other words, they were alive during the time the Anti-Christ ruled. They overcame the Anti-Christ, the talking image that the False Prophet made, and they did NOT take on the 666 number required to survive but also which speaks of selling their allegiance to Satan. I see them as martyrs coming out of this terrible time of tribulation. It is those spoken of back in Revelation 14:12; they are among those who are to persevere and observe God's commands and exercise Yeshua's faithfulness.... even if it means their death.

As Revelation 14 further comments, it is those who died in the Lord and are blessed, as they may now rest from their efforts.

We find this group of Believers singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. Let me point out here that Moses has again become front and center because he is the first mediator of Israel and Yeshua is the second and better mediator. Believers..... Christians....take note: both of these mediators are Hebrews. Both are Israelites. And it is in that context that we must understand what is being sung. I must say that it is a great disappointment to me how otherwise superb Bible scholars will no doubt notice what I just told you and yet find a way to discount it in order that Christianity can find a way to ignore its Hebrew heritage and instead pretend that the Church is a gentile creation. With respect for, but in disagreement with, G.K. Beale I want to quote for you a sad example of this from his renowned Revelation commentary that has so greatly influenced the Church but in this case it is influenced in the wrong direction.

Regarding verse 3 he says this: ***"Just as the Israelites praised God by the sea after He had delivered them for Pharaoh, so the church praises God for defeating the beast on its behalf. Like God's people of old, so God's new covenant people praise Him by singing the Song of Moses the bond-servant of God.....However the song now is about a much greater deliverance accomplished by the work of the Lamb. The saints praise the Lamb's victory as the typological fulfillment of that to which the Red Sea victory pointed....."***

Thus for Beale, the mention of the song of Moses is dismissed as merely typology, and in fact the only mediator being praised is the Lamb....Christ. And this is because God's OT covenant people are an old thing of the past, replaced by God's new covenant people, the Church. And so, from his perspective, in reality the defeat of the beast is on behalf of the church and not of Israel. If something in this passage or in this song somehow lifts up the gentile Church and dismisses Israel, it is not visible to me. But this demonstrates how deeply rooted this viewpoint is within Christianity such that a learned and decent man like Beale could say such a thing and not recognize what has clouded his thinking.

New songs in the Bible are typically victory songs and this one is no different. This is a victory song for Moses and for Christ because both play a role in God's plan of redemption. This is, in a sense, a song sung **by** them, and certainly not **to** them. So who is it being sung to? Clearly the Lamb is not signing a victory song in praise of Himself. Rather it is directed towards God (the Father) alone and it of course draws from Scripture passages and events taken from the Old Testament.

The recipient of this song is called God of Heaven's armies, or God of Heaven's hosts. In the Old Testament in Hebrew this is one of God's names: ***Adonai Tzva'ot***. Next He is called King of the nations. Let's remember that John being Hebrew, thinking in Hebrew, immersed in Jewish culture, is visualizing God as being king of the gentile nations, because the Hebrew term ***goyim*** means both nations and gentiles. That God is king of Israel goes without saying. So the song is professing that God is not just king of Israel but is also king of all the other nations of the world, all of which are gentile and thus worship their gentile gods.

This brings us to the conclusion that is the next line of the song. Since God is king of Israel and also king of all the gentile nations, then who is left that will not fear and glorify His name? And this is a reality because despite the multitude of false god systems past and present, in truth the God of Israel alone is holy.

Therefore since God is king of both the gentile nations and of Israel, then every nation on earth will come and worship Him since the wicked idolaters and rebels have been judged and done away with. And this is because God's plan of redemption, here called "Your righteous deeds", has finally come to fruition.

Essentially this song marks a momentous milestone in the history of history. Finality is the theme: eternal judgment for the wicked and eternal victory for the redeemed. Verse 5 returns us to a kind of Temple-focused narrative that underlay Revelation 15 when the Tent of Witness.... the Heavenly Tabernacle.... is opened and we get just a short glimpse inside.

And we shall do that next week.