

Newsletter July 2018

In last month's newsletter, we had moved on into Revelation Chapter 13, wherein we saw Satan call forth the Antichrist, the first beast, as he came to power at the very beginning of Daniel's seventieth week. Antichrist was but a man, a charismatic political ruler, having risen through the ranks of the Gentile world to gain control over the entire earth as the head of a global government. However he was also the tool and slave of Satan. The great war during his reign and its aftermath of famine, pestilence, and death ensued in a chaotic tribulation period, which Jesus mercifully cut short lest all of mankind should perish. Then, we saw 144,000 Jews receive the seal of God upon their foreheads, immediately followed by the appearance of the Church in Heaven. It was after the Church was raptured that Satan called up a second beast, the false prophet, to join and promote the political Antichrist during the second half of Daniel's seventieth week demanding that the whole world must worship the first beast. To force that worship, the false prophet erected an animated idol of the Antichrist, the abomination of desolation, within the holy of holies of the third temple that the Jews had previously built under the auspices of the Antichrist. This blasphemous act immediately resulted in a mass exodus of Jews from Jerusalem into a hidden place of safety that God had especially prepared for them. The false prophet ordered all peoples on earth to receive an indelible mark signifying their ownership by the Antichrist under the penalty of death.

As we continue now into Revelation Chapter 14, we find that the sealed remnant of 144,000 Jews had not left Jerusalem with the multitude, as we noted earlier, but had remained behind, inasmuch as they had been sealed by God to endure the severe trials during the time ahead as a powerful witness to the world for Jesus Christ:

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads” (Re.14,1).

The first thing that John saw was the slain Lamb, Jesus Christ, who was standing upon mount Sion (Zion), God's holy hill within the city of Jerusalem. Conspicuously absent here is any mention of the third Temple that the Jews had built under the direction of the Antichrist, and that as of that moment had the abomination of desolation standing within it. This would tend to indicate that the Temple had not been built upon mount Zion, but had been erroneously built upon some other hill. Moreover, we find the 144,000 Jews are on the hill of mount Zion in the company of their Messiah, the slain Lamb, Jesus Christ. We observe in this verse that the seal the chosen Jews had received consisted of God the Father's name, which had been indelibly written in their foreheads. Thus, they were permanently sealed unto God the Father and had absolute invincibility against Satan's furious wrath and his extreme wave of persecution (cf. Mal. 3:16,17).

“And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth” (Re.14:2,3).

The voice that John heard from Heaven was like the roar of a massive waterfall frequently punctuated by mighty thunderous crashes of water. Within this roar he heard the voices of heavenly singers accompanied by their harps. They sang a new song before the throne of God as the four beasts and elders listened. This was a unique song of redemption that applied only to the 144,000 Jews, who had been saved through a direct act of God the Father in a way that had not been experienced, seen, or known by any other of Adam's fallen race. These are the chosen seed of Israel's race, who were uniquely ransomed from the fall. Only that redeemed remnant could learn and sing that new song heard in Heaven, which echoed the assurance of their unique salvation within their minds and hearts, thus inspiring them to stand firm against all their many adversaries.

“These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb, and in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Re.14:4,5).

Here John gives us a description of these very unique men. First, it is stated that they are “not defiled with women; for they are virgins.” The word “virgin” (Greek *parthenos*) found here is directly applied elsewhere in Scripture only to women – a chaste maiden, an unmarried daughter. Nevertheless, in 2Co. 11:2 the Apostle Paul uses *parthenos* to apply to men metaphorically: “For I am jealous [as a father] over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.” Applied similarly here,

parthenos can be interpreted to mean that these are men who have kept themselves apart from the Antichrist, do not have his mark upon them, and are therefore spiritually celibate and “metaphorically chaste” – fully consecrated to God alone. During the time the Antichrist rules the earth, sexual immorality will be abundant and widespread, yet these men will have kept themselves pure and distant from such sinful activities.

These Jews have been generally assumed to be unmarried men. That would certainly be appropriate for the horrors of the times that they are about to endure (cf. Je.16:1 ff; Mt.24:19), but when it is said that they are “not defiled with women” it does not exclude them from being married to a wife. Marriage is an honorable estate in which there is no defilement (cf. He.13:4). When God saved Noah from the judgment of the flood, he did not save him alone, but his wife and sons with their wives as well (cf. Ge.6:18). As God sealed Noah in the ark, his family was sealed in with him. Therefore, it is quite reasonable to assume that there will be 144,000 men sealed, and that their families also will be carried safely in the “ark” of God’s protection during the flood of judgments that are about to follow. That would not necessarily mean that their families have remained with them in Jerusalem. Their families would most likely have been included within the mass exodus of Jews from Jerusalem to the hidden place of safety that God had prepared for them. This would leave these chosen Jewish men free to follow the Lamb wheresoever He goes as they fearlessly witness of Him and his coming Kingdom throughout the world in the face of incredible threats and attempts to kill them. Nevertheless, they cannot be harmed because of the impenetrable hedge of protection that God has drawn around them through his personal seal.

It is stated here that these men are the “first fruits unto God and to the Lamb.” First fruits were the first and best of the crop offered up to God from the harvest. In that sense, these men were the first and best of the Jewish crop that is offered up to God. It must also be recalled that their sealing and redemption took place just before the Church was seen in Heaven, thus making them indeed the first fruits of those who are redeemed, but instead of being removed from the earth, as was the Church, they must stay upon the earth. Being fully redeemed and sanctified, there is no guile to be found in them nor any other fault that would discredit them before God.

This great company of men along with God’s two witnesses will blanket the entire world with the Gospel during the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week. Many Gentiles will be saved through the preaching of their gospel message during this time. As we now near the end of that seven-year period, God makes one final appeal to the earth dwellers, who have not heeded their message, through three flying angels just before the effects of the seventh trumpet is painfully experienced.

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Re.14:6,7).

“Another angel” indicates that this angel is distinct from other angels that John had previously seen. The last flying angel that John had seen announced woes concerning the last three trumpet judgments (cf. Re. 8:13). This angel’s message likewise will be heard by everyone on earth. This is the only time that the word “gospel” (Greek, *euaggelion*) appears in the Revelation. God had ordained that the Gospel should be preached by redeemed men to the lost (cf. Mt:28:16-20), but at this late hour God will send an angel to preach it from high in the heavens so that every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people clearly hears it. This angel’s message is a final invitation to glorify God and worship him as the creator of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters,” as well as a stern warning that the “hour of his judgment is come.” This is also the first time that the word “judgment” (Greek, *krisis*) is found in the Revelation. This hour had been previously signaled by an angel blowing the seventh trumpet (Re. 11:15), but now the consequences of that ominous sound soon will be felt on earth as seven angels come out of the heavenly Temple carrying seven plagues. These final plagues are soon to be poured out upon all earth-dwellers from seven bowls containing God’s indignation and righteous wrath (cf. Re.15:6,7).

“And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Re.14:8).

This second angel immediately follows the first with the announcement that Babylon is fallen. Babylon, founded after the great flood by Nimrod (Ge.10:9), has been the root of all false religion through the ages, and “she has made the nations drink of the wine of her fornication.” The ancient city of Babylon lies in ruin within today’s nation of Iraq. As such, the angel is directly referring to that ancient city, but metaphorically to the seat of

the Antichrist's vast political, commercial, and religious empire. Although at this point in the chronology of events, the Antichrist's Babylon has yet to be destroyed (cf. Re.17:19; 18:2), her destruction is as inevitable as that of ancient Babylon. The sudden ultimate demise of the domain of Antichrist will come as a terrible shock to the un-redeemed inhabitants of the earth, as to those in ancient days, who have engaged in her spiritual fornication and corrupt commercial activities for their personal gain and for their ungodly sensual pleasure.

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” (Re.14:9,10,11).

This is a very stern warning issued by this third angel regarding any who would “worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,” and it is a statement of impending judgment for those who have already done so. There is no middle ground here; one must choose to serve God or serve Satan. Without the mark of the Antichrist, men cannot procure food, clothing, or shelter. Therefore, those who refuse his mark will most likely suffer physical death from his angry wrath or from starvation. For that reason many will have already accepted the mark of the Antichrist and have drunk of the wine of Babylon's fornication. They must now “drink of the wine of the wrath of God,” which is poured out undiluted into the cup of his indignation eternally; and they “shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night.” For many the angel's warning comes too late. This is the inevitable end for those who “worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” Nevertheless, there are still many yet on earth who by the grace of God have avoided or refused the mark of the beast and have not loved their lives unto death:

“Here is the patience of the saints: here *are* they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Re.14:12,13).

The Church has already been removed from the earth, such that this verse specifically applies to the men and women living on earth during this future period who are under severe persecution by the Antichrist. They have been systematically rooted out and marked for death by his evil idol standing within the third Temple. These are keepers of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, both converted Jew and redeemed Gentile. John is told by a voice out of Heaven to write down a message specifically intended for them in that future age: “Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth,” for through martyrdom they will receive rest from their labors and will be entitled to receive a reward for their great perseverance in the face of certain death.

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle,” (Re. 14:14)

“Son of man” was the title that Jesus most often applied to Himself during his earthly ministry (cf. Mt.9:6; 12:8; 17:22; Mt.24:30; Mk.2:28; Mk.13:26; Lu.12:40 etc.). The imagery here leaves no doubt that the one who sits upon the white cloud is Jesus Christ (cf. Da.7:13,14; Mt. 24:30). The crown upon his head is *stephanos* in the Greek, a victor's crown, which here being uniquely made of gold is an emblem of honor given only to high-ranking nobles who have won a hard-fought victory. In Jesus' hand is a sharp sickle (Greek *drepanon*), a sharp hooked blade mounted on the end of a long pole. Such was commonly used for harvesting a crop of grain when it was mature: “The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”(Mk.4:28,29).

And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe; and he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Re.14:15,16).

Many expositors see this verse as referring to the seven bowls of God's wrath in Chapter 16, but that severe series of judgments can hardly be seen to constitute a harvest. Therefore, in immediate context, this harvest consists of the saints whom we saw in verses 12 and 13 above – the keepers of “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus,” which they firmly held in the face of their certain death (cf. Re 14:12,13). The Father sends an angel out of the Temple to inform Jesus that the time to reap is now come, since this final “crop” of saints has matured – is now complete. This harvest constitutes of the merciful reaping of these saints from the earth by the Lord Jesus just before the seven bowl judgments are poured out. Jesus harvests them from the earth at the very moment of their martyrdom, lest they too should suffer God's fierce wrath.

These seven-bowl judgments of God's wrath will take place next, leaving the earth in shambles and the angry blaspheming reprobate of mankind determined to take one last stand in opposition to Christ as He returns to earth. Under the leadership of Satan they will assemble an army of resistance against Him. The sixth angel who will have poured out the sixth bowl of God's wrath will draw them into a place called Armageddon. The following verses are a preamble to that great battle, which is chronologically recorded later in Revelation 19:11-21.

“And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe” (Re.14:17,18).

Whereas the first reaper we saw was Jesus Christ, who had gathered the “crop” of saints from the earth, this second reaper also carrying a sharp sickle is an angel coming out of the Temple in Heaven. Immediately following this angel, a second angel, which had control of fire, came out from his place at the altar of incense where he had been offering up the prayers of saints in the heavenly Temple; he shouted to the first angel to put in his sickle to gather up the clusters of the vine of the earth's evil system that remain on earth. This operation consists of cutting and gathering up wild vines having clusters of rotten (fully ripe) grapes hanging from them; these grapes represent the works of the ungodly reprobate, who have the mark of the Antichrist upon them.

“And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God, and the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs” (Re,14:19,20).

The angel with the sharp sickle uses it to gather the rotten grapes from the wild vines of the earth and casts them into a great wine press to be crushed under foot. The word winepress (Greek, *leños* = “trough”) is used here as a metaphor for a great trough in the earth – a valley – wherein God has chosen to enact his vengeance upon the reprobate, with a wrath unrestrained by his mercy. This is the great winepress of the wrath of God poured out in the seventh bowl, and Jesus Christ is the one who must crush the reprobate: “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people *there was* none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment” (Is.63:3; cf. Re. 19:13).

The words “without the city” indicates that this great “winepress” is not located in Jerusalem, but is removed some distance from it. “Winepress” is being used as a metaphor for the long valley of Megiddo, located north of Jerusalem near the current Lebanese border. This is where this great battle will begin. The army of Satan makes ready as Christ returns to earth on a great white horse leading the massive armies of Heaven to totally crush his enemies on earth – the rotten grapes hanging from these wretched vines of the earth's satanic system. (cf. Re.19:11,14). As the Antichrist's army is slaughtered, their blood will splash up as high as a horse's bridle (about four feet) from the valley floor. Moreover, this carnage will extend for “a thousand and six hundred furlongs,” or about 190 miles. This is the approximate distance from the Israeli cities of Dan in the north to Beer-Sheba in the south. Thus, we find that this great battle will be waged throughout the entire region of Palestine.

As we now conclude Chapter 14, we have been following a parallel time-line, which had begun at the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week in Chapter 11. That informational timeline comes to an end here inasmuch as we have followed it to the extreme end of Daniel's seven-year period. Therefore, the text of Revelation in Chapter 15 once again resumes the main chronological narrative of the Revelation – just after the seventh and last trumpet had begun to sound. This trumpet had proclaimed the immanence of the dreadful third and final woe, which we shall begin to study more particularly in next month's newsletter.

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