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Revelation 14: 6-13 (ESV)

⁶Then 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. ⁷And 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." ⁸Another 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." ⁹And 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, ¹⁰he 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. ¹¹And 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. ¹³And 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!"

I. The Angelic Gospel Proclamation vv. 6-7

①

This is the first of 6 angels from v. 6 to v. 18 to announce or enact the actions depicted in chapter 14. He is called "another angel", and so we face an interpretive issue right away. The last angel mentioned in Revelation was in 11:15, the angel preparing to sound the 7th trumpet, and that seems like quite a distance from this angel. There is a parallel situation in Rev. 10:1 – "another mighty angel" – which refers back to Rev. 5:2 probably. However, this seems to be a different situation. "Another" does refer back to something, although 1 commentator (Mounce) recommends it should be simply ignored, but it is there for some reason.

It is not referring to the Lamb in vv. 1-5, but the closest reference to angels or an angel is really in chapter 12:7 – Michael & his angels - & this is probably where 'another angel' comes from in this verse.

This angel is seen flying directly overhead and has an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language & people. He is overhead so he will be heard by all beneath him, and he is out of reach of the demons who have now been confined to earth, and this method of evangelism is startling and unique. And again, where is the church whose mandate it was to spread this gospel? The previous proclamation from the sky was the eagle flying

in Rev. 8:13 and warning of the 3 woes to come. That warning was without an offer to escape the coming judgment, but this one now clearly declares the gospel.

This angel's message is more positive – more of a call to worship and a command to fear God – a call to repent really and give Him the glory. The angel refers to God's creatorship as the reason to praise Him and glorify Him. It is this very creation that has now turned on the people of the earth and they are being given a clear message to honour the One so obviously in real control of the events taking place. The "give God glory" aspect of the message is clearly a referral to what we see going on in **Rom. 1: 18-21**, which was in effect in Paul's time and is still going on in ours. Certainly, the Antichrist & False Prophet are not going to take any credit for the things occurring in the judgments, but God will – cf. **Isa. 40:21-26**.

Notice the specificity of the angel's call in v. 7b, "worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea & springs of water", the very things affected by or being utilized by God's judgments and the angels says, "the time of judgment has come", and the One judging is the creator of all.

Some might look at this gospel proclamation of the angel and say, "that doesn't sound like the gospel I am familiar with." Where is the idea of "accepting Jesus as Saviour", or "letting Jesus into my heart"? Although these are common phrases associated with modern day evangelistic appeals, they are not biblical phrases, and really do not even line up well with the biblical gospel. The Biblical gospel is a command as seen here in Rev. 14:7. Notice also these verses: Matt. 3:2,17; Mark 1:15; 2:17; 6:12; LK 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; 20:21; Rev. 2:21; 2 Cor. 4:4. ②

The idea of just accepting Jesus is foreign to the Bible and is strictly a modern sales tactic or concoction of evangelists eager to make new 'converts' – an appeal to the emotions rather than a biblical presentation of the gospel, which is a command to repent and believe. It is an unfortunate by-product of the sorts of appeals developed by Charles Finney in the 19th century, and enhanced by crusade evangelists like Billy Sunday and Billy Graham and used throughout numerous North American churches who are typically not reformed in their theology. This method tends to ignore the words of Christ which talk about "taking up our cross daily, following Him", "counting the cost", & "not looking back", substituting such things as "walking an aisle", going to the front of the church to kneel at an altar, sign a pledge card, etc. The bible says repent and believe and you will be saved.

Many here today may be familiar with the "Lordship Salvation controversy" that went on (& is still going on somewhat) a number of years ago in the late 1980's, which saw a verbal & written battle between John MacArthurⁱ and other reformed people and Zane Hodgesⁱⁱ that has spawned a running battle that still raises its' head even today in theological circles. If anyone wants to learn more about this very important topic, I direct you the books I have mentioned in the footnotes. One of them, "The Gospel Under Siege" by Zane Hodges is out of print

and almost impossible to find, but it is the book that motivated John MacArthur to reply to this unbiblical, almost outrageous presentation of what MacArthur calls “easy believism”.

II. Babylon Has Fallen v. 8

A second angel, “another” angel now brings the 2nd message of 6 and it is brief. Here are the consequences of not heeding the call of the first angel. This is a proleptic announcement that “Babylon has fallen”. It is about to fall, but this is said as if it has already occurred. The reign of the Antichrist has been measured and will fail.

The key to understanding this verse obviously lays in being aware of what “Babylon the Great” refers to, and there is more than one option. For Preterists who date Revelation before the AD 70 fall of Jerusalem, Babylon the Great is Jerusalemⁱⁱⁱ. This makes no sense however for a number of reasons. Likely the most popular view is that Babylon is Rome. The argument here is that since I Pet. 5:13 appears to use Babylon as a sort of code word for Rome, so many believers think this is correct, and it is describing in code the center of the current enemy (in those days) of the Christians – Rome, meaning Nero or Domitian. It is not 100% certain however that Peter is not referring to the actual Babylon on the Euphrates River, so this weakens that argument. John has used city names in Rev. 1-3 literally, and in Rev. 11:8, he even lets us know when he is speaking symbolically about a city name.

③

Some see Babylon as the Papacy because they interpret the False Prophet as a Roman Pope and the false Religious system (referred to as Mystery Babylon in Rev. 17:5) he rules over is a sort of ecumenical hodgepodge of liberal ‘churches’ – those haplessly left on earth after the Rapture. This view is also tending to be weakened by political / economic / religious reality shaping up in the world today, as we have already seen in earlier lessons. The Roman Catholic influence on the world stage is fading rapidly.

It makes more sense to me to see Babylon as simply that – the city of Babylon in the country of Iraq, as the capital from where the Antichrist rules during the Tribulation. It is not just a literal city, but is also the political & religious influence that arises out of the decisions and laws made there. A modern example would be to say that “Ottawa decided today that it will withdraw Canadian troops from Afghanistan.” The city does not make this pronouncement, but those in power are under the umbrella of the name of the city because it there that their influence is generated. It is a sort of Idiom for the Federal Government, and it makes sense that this is what Babylon the Great means in the context of our passage too.

We know from chapters 12 & 13 that this world system will have widespread influence and will corral the wicked as loyalists and persecute Jews and Gentile believers throughout the Tribulation, so when this system falls, it will fall as

Daniel described in prophecy in **Dan. 2:34-35** – total destruction of this final world empire by Christ. He is “the stone that struck the image.”

The nature of Babylon the Great is depicted in v. 8b. It is an evil empire “who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality”. So coercive power is used to force the world to knuckle under to Antichrist’s (Satan’s) powerful demands – using the Mark of the Beast system. The specific sin mentioned here is sexual immorality and certainly, we can anticipate that sexual sin will play a huge role in the End Times if the current degradation of our own culture is any indicator. It is more likely that a secondary meaning is in view as well, that of spiritual adultery. This world system will be fraught with every kind of wickedness and rebellion against God, and this hatred of God and His righteousness is displayed for us in Rev. 11 in the demise and hatred of the 2 witnesses.

III. Warnings For Those Who Take the Mark vv. 9-11

The third angel presents the strongest warning thus far in the book. It is directed at those who ignore the first angel’s command to repent and those who decide to align themselves with the Great Babylon and solidify their loyalty to her by taking the Mark of the Beast. These are the people who have been deceived by the rhetoric of Satan’s henchmen and have consciously decided that they would rather live a little longer and participate in the world system than be outcasts and risk being killed by a government that will quite unashamedly allow no disloyal subjects to survive. ④

This warning clearly outlines the folly of worshipping the Antichrist and also encourages the faithful to stay strong and trust God completely. Those who take the mark may avoid temporal discomfort and live a bit longer, but compared to eternal judgment, this is a foolish choice. Death for non-compliance by not taking the mark is a wiser path to take than taking the Mark and suffering for eternity.

Those who ignore the 3rd angel’s warning will ‘drink of the cup of God’s wrath full strength’ (v. 10). It is this cup which Christ, in the garden of Gethsemane wanted to “pass from Me” – cf. **Matt. 26:39,42**. The physical pain of the cross was not what He feared. It was the outpouring of God’s wrath on Him as the substitute for the elect, the becoming sin for us, the forsakenness of the Father that He knew accompanied that wrath, which He most feared. Those who refuse to accept His sacrifice on their behalf will drink that cup of eternal wrath for themselves.

Notice the first aspect of the result of God’s wrath on these people. “...he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb”. Verses 10-11 here are among the most frightening depictions of Hell in the Bible. Being tormented in fire & sulfur literally is horrible to imagine. Many who believe in an eternal Hell (and astoundingly, not all who call themselves Christians do), try to soften this by saying, “it’s not literal fire & sulfur, it’s only

symbolic.” OK, if it is, is a symbol or sign usually greater than or less than what that symbol is depicting? The reality is always much greater than the symbol. So, if it’s not real fire, then it is much worse than fire and the most painful thing Jesus could use to help us understand the horror of Hell is the imagery of fire.

Notice the next point – “in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.” If you are like most believers you have been taught that Hell is not only a place of fire, but it is also a place of separation from God & Christ, and that is true in the main sense of Hell. We recall the words of Jesus in Matt. 25: 41-46, “Depart from Me you workers of iniquity”, but then we see David’s words in Ps. 139:7-8 and realize that even in Hell, there is no escape from God’s presence, because He is omnipresent. So, in the sense of being apart from God’s blessing, Hell is a separation, but in the sense of Christ’s presence in reality, this verse uniquely paints us a picture of part of the torment of Hell being the ability to sense this presence but being unable to respond to it in a saving way, because that will not be possible. In this sense, Christ will be a warden and the angels prison guards to ensure that there is no hope of escape, because the time of grace has passed.

Far from being an act of remedial punishment (like universalism or purgatory) and therefore temporary, or leading to annihilation, this passage clearly lays out Hell as eternal punishment. Note the very strong wording of v. 11. The key phrases, “forever & ever”, “no rest day or night” are haunting. The permanence of the state of those judged and condemned is indicated by the fact that they will have no rest, as compared to those who are saved – cf. v. 13 – they “rest from their labors”! ⑤

Notice just a few of the numerous verses that give us glimpses of the final torment of the wicked; Isa. 66:24; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 3:12; Rom. 2:3-9; II Thess. 1:9; and Jesus’ comments – Matt. 18:8; 25:41,46; Mark 9:43,48.

We’ll look more closely at the Doctrine of Hell when we get to the Great White Throne Judgment detailed in Rev. 20:11-15. However, for now, note the specific identity of those depicted as receiving this judgment – v. 11c. This seems to indicate that, once you take the Mark, there is no hope and your fate is sealed. When this opportunity to choose comes upon the people in the Tribulation, for most, it will be a no-brainer, and just another government law to follow. For some, especially those who were not raptured because they were unsaved, but who had attended church and knew about the End Times, the decision will be more difficult (& of course, the elect will not take the Mark – God will not allow them to do so). Many will take the Mark anyway because it will be seen to be pragmatic, the right thing to do at the time, because they want to survive, and most will never make the spiritual connection with the Mark being a contract with evil. The elect will recognize the eternal danger of taking the Mark and will not do so, resulting in many martyrdoms and much running away and hiding – cf. Rev. 13:8; 17:8.

IV. A Call for Endurance

vv. 12-13

Some who are weak and easily led need this type of admonition from God to keep the faith. Don't waver – have faith in Christ and trust Him alone, and as a result, keep His commandments, even when it seems like not keeping them will result in gain for you. True saints will endure, they will persevere till the end, because it is God who keeps us to the end. Perseverance is inexorably tied to God's preservation of His elect. Note: **Matt. 24:13; JN 10:28-29; Acts 14:21-22; Rom. 2:6-7; Gal. 6:9; Phil. 1:6; II Tim. 1:12; 2:1,3,12; Heb. 4:14; 6:18; I Pet. 1:4-7; II Pet. 1:10-11.**

This (v. 13) enduring to the end, this refusal to take the Mark will almost always come from believers or the elect whom God knows will be believers. For believers, if they refuse and are caught, martyrdom will virtually in every case be the result. However, here is a precious promise to those who trust God in the face of the most severe persecution the world has ever seen. They are blessed because they will die “in the Lord”, having worked out their salvation in fear and trembling in the crucible of horrific testing, unimaginable to us in North America, but familiar to tens of thousands in other countries today. It is better to suffer temporary death at the hands of those who can only kill the body rather than meet with a vengeful God who can destroy both body and soul in Hell – we must heed what Heb. 10:31 warns us, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

⑥

As v. 13 ends, the Holy Spirit adds, “Blessed indeed, that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them.” A voice from heaven (v. 13 a) tells John to write this down. The disadvantage of no longer being alive on earth brings a special blessing for those who are martyrs. If faithful living results in cruelty, torture and execution, then the sooner death occurs, the better off one is. These people receive the opposite of the beast-worshippers, because they receive rest. Their works – faithfulness, perseverance, obedience (Eph. 2:10), etc. will not be in vain. God remembers them all – note I Tim. 5:24-25 & **Heb. 6:10-12.**

Although I will not quote the lengthy passage in John MacArthur's commentary which outlines 5 biblical pillars on which the doctrine of perseverance rests, here are the 5 points he uses^{iv}:

1. God's promise establishes it – cf. Ps. 37:23-34
2. God's purpose assures it – JN 6:37-40; Rom. 8:28-30
3. God's power guarantees it – II Cor. 5:17
4. Salvation is wholly by God's grace – Eph. 2:8-9
5. God guarantees that believers will persevere – I Pet.1: 3-5; Jude 24

MacArthur also sums up, “The doctrine of perseverance must not be misconstrued as teaching that believers will be eternally saved regardless of their belief or behavior. What it does teach is that, as noted above, true believers will continue in the faith. Justification will be followed by sanctification that leads to glorification.”

Next lesson – Lesson # 46 – Rev. 14:14-20Death

ⁱ John MacArthur, “The Gospel According to Jesus”, Zondervan, 1988; “Faith Works-The Gospel According to the Apostles”; Word; 1993

ⁱⁱ Zane Hodges, “The Gospel Under Siege”; and “Absolutely Free – A Biblical Reply to Lordship”; Zondervan, 1989

ⁱⁱⁱ Kenneth Gentry, Before Jerusalem Fell; Victorious Hope Publishing; 1998, reprint 2010; p. 240-241, footnote # 26

^{iv} John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, Moody, pp. 96-101.