

## 16. The Harvesting of the Earth

### Revelation 14:1-20

In our last three studies in the Book of Revelation, we looked at various scenes during the last seven years of this age under the occupation of our enemy, Satan and his two agents, viz. the Antichrist and his false prophet. In chapter fourteen, the Lord continues to give us various scenes, some that are encouraging, while also giving warning to those who take sides with the enemy and join his ranks by taking his mark of allegiance and ownership, the Mark of the Beast.

Chapter fourteen also gives us a view of the return of the glory of God to Mount Zion, the place where King David “**captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David**” (2 Samuel 5:7). Mount Zion is the place in Jerusalem where Solomon built a temple to the Lord, i.e., the place where God has put His Name. The Lord spoke to David’s heir, King Solomon, that Mount Zion would be a place of consecration to the Lord:

**I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there (2 Chronicles 7:16).**

Since the middle of the seven-year period, the image of the beast (The Antichrist) has been speaking forth blasphemies against God in the rebuilt temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. The Antichrist will proclaim himself as a god (2 Thessalonians 2:4) until Jesus suddenly arrives on the scene: “**Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple**” (Malachi 3:1).

### The Lamb and the 144,000

**<sup>1</sup>Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup>And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. <sup>3</sup>And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. <sup>4</sup>These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. <sup>5</sup>No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Revelation 14:1-5).**

**What characteristics do you see in these 144,000? How have they shown their faithfulness?**

In verses 1-5, we see a glorious sight of the Lord’s return. Just as the *Shekinah* glory of God departed from the temple and went eastwards (Ezekiel 9:3; 10:4), from the same direction, the Lord shall return from the East after descending to the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4; Acts 1:11-12) and stand on the Holy Mount of Zion. The big question we all have is this: Who are these 144,000 redeemed from the earth?

This writer believes that the 144,000 are the Messianic Jewish believers redeemed from Israel, i.e., those mentioned in Revelation 7 as being from the twelve tribes of Israel. We also read about them in chapter 12, symbolized as the woman that the dragon will try to devour

(Revelation 12:13-16). They are kept under God's protection in the wilderness for a time, times, and half a- time (Revelation 12:14). In verse four of chapter fourteen, we note that these 144,000 are called the first fruits to God and the Lamb. So, that gives us a big question to answer: What is meant by the *first fruits*?

The *first fruits* remind a Jewish person of God's instructions to Moses about what the Israelites were to do when they came into their inheritance in the promised land. They were to come before the Lord with an offering of the first fruits of the land brought in a basket to the holy place of God's choice, and there they were to worship (Deuteronomy 26:2-11). The Gospel has always been to the Jew first and then to the Greek (Gentiles) (Romans 1:16). We should not feel left out as Gentiles, for the Jewish people have had a solemn responsibility to protect the Scriptures' integrity and have borne heavy discipline for their idolatry and abandoning their covenant with God. To whom much is given, much is also required. These Jewish Messianic believers, in our opinion, are God's way of showing us that He will always keep His promises to His children, both Jews, and Gentiles. As Gentile believers, we should not feel disappointed or think that we are being left out because we are not Jewish and are not part of the benefits these 144,000 receive in this passage. God has not left us out from that great Harvest! We also are redeemed and purchased by the sacrificial Lamb of God.

To help us understand why these words are given, we should remember the Book of Revelation's context written around 95 A.D. To the Jewish-born John the Revelator, all seemed lost to him, for there could be no greater disaster than the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., with every stone dug up for the gold that melted during the fires of destruction. Jesus' prophetic words of Jerusalem's destruction were wholly fulfilled to the letter (Mark 13:1-2). I believe this to be a promise of God that He will bring forth a remnant from the house of Israel through the darkness of that time to stand with Messiah *Yeshua* (Jesus) when He comes in the clouds of glory. I can only imagine the celebration!

They sing a new song (v. 3). These words take Jewish minds back to the song of Moses after God delivered them from the soldiers of Pharaoh pursuing the children of Israel as they made their escape from Egypt. The escaping Israelites were led through the Red Sea on dry land with walls of water on their left and right (Exodus 14:22). After they got to the higher ground on the other side, the Red Sea fell in on their enemies, totally destroying them. Moses led God's people in a new song (Exodus 15:1-21). This new song is an experiential song of deliverance. They saw God's power right before their eyes to deliver them and destroy their enemies.

This new song of the 144,000 reminds us that there are some truths about which one can read and other truths that one can only experience. Experiential truth takes faith in God to a new level. Have you ever heard the saying, "Don't trust anyone who doesn't walk with a limp?" Seasoned Christians that "walk with a limp" are those who have had their faith tested through trials, and because of various experiences in their journey with Christ, they have learned to put their faith in God. Seasons of trial and testing bring us to a new level of faith and trust in God. For example, when Jacob came to a new level of faith after his wrestling with God and having his hip put out of joint (Genesis 32:22-32), his name was changed to Israel, i.e., "One who has prevailed with God" (*Rashi*). No more would he rely on what he could manipulate, but he would rest in God's power alone.

As believers, each of us has our own experiential songs of deliverance born out of struggle and arising from battling the enemy's attempts to destroy God's children. After I came to Christ and began to study the Scriptures, I was disappointed and grieved over my ruined moral life because I could not say that I was a virgin. I remembered my failures, sins, and lies that were my way of life without Christ. Again and again, I also realized the depth of God's mercy and loving-kindness in His forgiveness of sin. As I now have walked with the Lord for more than forty-three years, I still always appreciate His forgiveness and power to restore and redeem. I do not believe that these 144,000 are born without sin. These Messianic believers are only blameless because the Lord has purged their sins away, just as the Lord applied the coal of holiness to Isaiah, His servant (Isaiah 6:5-7). The Scriptures reveal that all of humanity has fallen short of the standards of righteousness (Romans 3:23), Jews as well as Gentiles.

This passage should make us all reflect on our lives. Are we biblically chaste as spiritual virgins? Have sexual sins plagued us? Even after we have given our lives to Christ, are we still dabbling with the world in a habitual sense? As the Jewish people found deliverance from Egypt, a picture of the world system, through the sacrifice of a Passover Lamb, we also are to break with that which has enslaved us. We also are purchased by the blood of a Lamb (v. 4), and no act of deceitfulness should be found in our mouths. Will we come to the end of our lives and, on our deathbed, reflect on a wasted life? When we stand before God in the judgment, will we be disappointed with ourselves for not making a break from our past life? Are we morally blameless, having made every effort to take the beam out of our eye so that we may help others with their sliver? (Matthew 7:5). We all need the grace and forgiveness of sin (Romans 3:23), but having received God's mercy, we are to walk it out in our lives through the power that God gives us through His Holy Spirit. Thank God that the Messiah has made believers in Christ blameless with His atoning blood!

### **The Three Angels**

<sup>6</sup>Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. <sup>7</sup>He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

<sup>8</sup>A second angel followed and said, “‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.”

<sup>9</sup>A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, <sup>10</sup>they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup>And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name.” <sup>12</sup>This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.

<sup>13</sup>Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Revelation 14:6-13).

In verse 9, the third angel warns all people that they will suffer God's fury and wrath if they take the mark and worship Antichrist or his image. Why would people willfully defy God and worship the Antichrist?

John comments after this warning by saying (v. 12) to the people of God that they must patiently endure and remain faithful. Who are those enduring through these times, and why is this encouragement needed?

We now jump to another scene closer to the end. We cannot tell if this vision is chronological from the first passage in verses 1-5. It could be that the angelic announcements John hears are closer to the end of the second half of the seven-year period, i.e., the time known as the Great Tribulation. An angel flies through the air speaking in a loud voice for all the world to hear one last warning to humanity. He proclaims the eternal Gospel that God wants none to perish and that all are to repent (2 Peter 3:9). If there are any who have not yet heard the Gospel, they will get an opportunity to hear and respond.

A second angel also declares judgment on Babylon the Great. We should not think that a literal Babylon in the Middle Eastern country of Iraq is the focus of this judgment. The prophet Jeremiah spoke that, after the Persians destroyed Babylon, it would never be rebuilt (Jeremiah 51:26; 29; 37; 43; 62). God is speaking of the system of false worship and economic slavery first brought into being in Babylon. This idolatrous false-god system was exported to Egypt, Tyre, Carthage, Rome, and other ancient cities under different names, but the same evil spirits inhabited their idols. Paul the Apostle wrote, "**The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons**" (1 Corinthians 10:20). This world system is resident throughout the world and permeates the religious, political, and economic systems at the end of the age. Like cancer, Babylon the Great has worked its way into every facet of life in the time we live. God will judge it, and it will fall.

A third angel follows the other two angels and warns and proclaims judgment for all who take sides with the enemies of God. To take the beast's mark is to declare allegiance and ownership to Satan and the Antichrist in opposition to God. They will be tormented forever and ever (v. 11). It is likely that, even after this warning, there will be those who willfully take the mark in opposition to God and the Messiah.

In verse twelve, the Lord's call for faithful endurance on the part of the saints refers to the martyrdom and suffering of God's people in the last days. There will be great persecution, and many who stand for Christ and overcome the evil one will receive their victor's crowns.

### **Harvesting the Earth and Trampling the Winepress**

**<sup>14</sup>I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. <sup>15</sup>Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." <sup>16</sup>So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested (Revelation 14:14-16).**

What do you think the Word of God means when it refers to earth being harvested? (v.16).

In the passage above, Revelation 14:14-16, the Lord uses the analogy of a wheat harvest being ripened and gathered when the timing is right. This Harvest analogy is similar to something Jesus spoke of in Luke's Gospel: "He told them, "The Harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the Harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). In parabolic language, life on earth is viewed as God's being likened to a farmer who has prepared his ground well. He has removed all the stones from the ground, planted a choice seed, and is looking to find fruit at the proper time (Isaiah 5:2). Early on in Christ's ministry, He also spoke about the end times using the analogy of the Harvest, saying, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12). Jesus also shared The Parable of the Wicked Tenants in terms of a harvest brought in (Luke 20:9-19).

A similar theme is the Parable of the Wheat and Weeds in which the Lord made it very clear what would happen at the end of the age:

<sup>37</sup>He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, <sup>39</sup>and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The Harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. <sup>40</sup>"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup>The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup>They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup>Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear (Matthew 13:37-43).

Similar to the separation passage above, Revelation 14:17-20 continues by also talking of the grape harvest,

<sup>17</sup>Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. <sup>18</sup>Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." <sup>19</sup>The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. <sup>20</sup>They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia (Revelation 14:17-20).

Verse twenty speaks of the process of making wine, which requires separation and pressure. It is an unpopular thing in our culture today to talk about God's judgment and the reality of good and evil. In our western society, the idea of virtue has been relegated to one's personal choice as if every man can decide his own version of good and evil as in the time of the Judges when every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6). The reality that God will judge every man is very different from how man sees his end. The Lord will judge and bring both rewards and punishment, but He is not willing that anyone should perish! The Lord desires that all men and women everywhere would turn to Him and put their trust in Him. Those who endure at this time will be rewarded. It is said that "They will rest from their labor and their deeds will follow them" (v.13). It is comforting to know that the good we have done is seen by God and will follow us into life eternal. God will use even the fruit of sorrows. He will not waste anything!

We sometimes think of the judgment of God only as a fearful thing. The judgment of God will also herald a new beginning. At the beginning of this chapter, we read of the 144,000 singing a new song unto the Lord. One commentator observes:

The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last.<sup>1</sup>

Prayer: Lord, we see a great harvest that is ripe and that Your laborers are few. Send more laborers into Your Harvest and help us be willing to see what part we have in this great Harvest to obey and have fruit that will remain! Along with our brothers and sisters worldwide, we say, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Song to close: *Almost Home* by Mercy Me. Five minutes, forty-one seconds long:

<https://youtu.be/9lKdHXfpsFQ>

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<sup>1</sup> John Phillips. *Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. Chicago: Moody Press, 1987, p. 187.