

Closing the Door

Revelation 14

Since the beginning, God has been faithful to provide to man a witness to the truth. It began with Adam, then Seth, then Enoch, then Noah, then Shem, then Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then the twelve tribes of Israel, then the prophets, then the greatest prophet – John the Baptist, then Jesus, then the church. In Revelation 4, we saw the rapture of the church pictured in John being caught up to heaven and no sooner than that has happened, the 144,000 Hebrew witnesses are sealed and sent out.

All the way through the wages of sin, which were unsealed from the scroll by the Lamb, through the warning trumpets and woes, these sold out, on-fire men of Israel have delivered the truth of God to a Christ-rejecting, sin-filled world. And there have been many who listened and received the gracious gift of salvation. Most of them, at this point, are in heaven, robed in righteousness and praising God for His patience and mercy.

In the course of this faithful witness, we must wonder, did any give up? Have any turned back? God is wrapping things up. He's about to deliver His wrath, and His Word says that

He has not appointed believers to be under it.

During the tribulation, the antichrist and his forces have hunted down believers to destroy them. How many of these radical Jesus-freaks may have found it easier to surrender, to take the mark? How many stayed the course and gave their all – their lives?

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. I am fully convinced that this is the heavenly Mount Zion in the heavenly Jerusalem mentioned in Galatians (Gal 4:26). And look! It's all 144,000 with the Lamb! Not 100,000; not even 143,999. All God's witnesses have been faithful unto death! You might wonder, 'I thought they were sealed. What gives?' But God never promised them protection from the antichrist with their sealing – it was only implied that they would enjoy protection from God's judgments. And as with the two witnesses, when your testimony is done, you're done.

How inspiring to see this faithfulness in the midst of such apostasy and rebellion. No wonder the halls of heaven are filled with thankful saints praising God for sending these people out during the tribulation.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. This is probably the voice of God as when Ezekiel wrote, *And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.* (Eze 43:2) And as God spoke of Himself to Job, *Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?* (Job 40:9) So there's something special happening. What's He saying?

And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. These harps are instruments of praise given to the 24 elders and all believers redeemed from the earth. However, at this point, it would seem that only the 144,000 are using them. What are they playing?

They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. It seems that the Lord has taught them a new song, one just for them and now they are singing it together before the King of kings and His court.

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they

are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. What an awesome tribute to these faithful ones. The saying that they are not "defiled with women" is probably not in reference to simply being single and celibate for the word for defile means polluted and is always tied to a sinful condition. The lexicon defines these virgins as:

"men who have abstained from all uncleanness and whoredom attendant on idolatry, and so have kept their chastity"

So they are most likely chaste with respect to the more important spiritual definition. That is, they didn't give in and listen to the lies of the devil. They were faithful to follow the Lord's leading during the most trying of times on earth and in heaven they are rewarded with the appropriate gift – to follow the Lamb throughout eternity.

And they are said to be "firstfruits" to God and to the Lamb – that means they are just the beginning – there are many more to come as we'll see shortly. Also, unlike the supposed 'divine one' below, the antichrist who is continually deceitful, they were/are faithful to proclaim the truth including the

grace of God in Christ which covers even them for they “are without fault” and such grace is the only way that’s possible.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” As we began this lesson, we noted the absolute faithfulness of God to provide a witness to the world. In this passage, it would seem that the 144,000 have all finished their testimonies and thus, as a final exhortation, He gives this evil-embracing world one last salvo of truth, one last witness. Recall, Jesus said, *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* (Mat 24:14)

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Babylon has been a source of some confusion to Bible students and it shouldn’t be. The name itself means confusion. Babylon is a condition. In this case, the

condition of the entire planet – planet Babylon. It is and always has been the congregation of the rebellious against God. Don’t let that word translated as city throw you – it simply means a dwelling and originally meant fullness or throng. Here, it is a planet full of evil hearted people. It is Satan’s supreme ‘creation’ against God. Remember, these three angelic messengers are circling the globe with their witnesses, circling Babylon.

And it’s fallen – fallen, fallen. The description is repeated for emphasis. A principle party to this, the spiritual force behind this worldwide condition, is pictured as a woman, one that has finally proselytized the whole earth to a wicked false religion. It’s a religion that began with the tower of Babel and Nimrod. We’ll address it more in chapter 17.

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. 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 ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever

receives the mark of his name.” This witness could be no more dire or sobering. Hell is a real place and its torments are not only terrible but eternal. For the people who have gotten saved during this horrendous time, life will be hellish and they will be continually presented with the temptation to give in to the lie. The good news is that their time of suffering is limited. It will end soon for God is about to bring them home.

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Jesus said, *“In your patience possess ye your souls.”* (Luk 21:19) and James wrote, *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* (James 1:4) Patient waiting upon the Lord will be THE most important aspect of the Christian life for these people in this time. Keeping the faith and keeping the commandments.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’” “Yes,” says the Spirit, *“that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”* This isn’t saying that only those who die in the Lord as martyrs from this point on are blessed. All God’s faithful are blessed in heaven and especially those who

have died in the Lord throughout all history. Here, God is saying that He is about to take His saints home through death. It will be a harvest, for just as he took Lamech and Methuselah home right before the flood of Noah, he will take these believers home as well. They will not see his wrath. The only believers that will be left on ‘Babylon’ are the remnant, who like Noah in the ark, will be protected by the Lord, and in this case, in a wilderness refuge. Just as there came a time for the Lord to shut the door of the ark, so God’s witness is about to end. All that can be saved are saved, all who would listen have listened.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Here it is – the last great harvest of redeemed souls from the earth. It is Jesus Himself, appearing as the Son of Man (i.e. His earthly form) Who upon getting the message from the temple (i.e. Father God) that it is

time to reap, thrusts His sickle in to the earth and it is harvested. Every redeemed soul apart from the remnant is taken to heaven, ensconced and safe from what is to come.

Then 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, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." Did you notice that three times this particular sickle is termed "sharp"? Christ's harvest of the redeemed is a merciful, even gentle deal. He takes His redeemed home in love and joyous expectation. But this harvest is different and requires a "sharp" or "quick" tool to execute.

The "clusters of the vine of the earth" I'm inclined to believe are the wicked, carnal people of Israel but probably includes the rebellious of all planet Babylon as well. And "fully ripe" is not ripe in a good sense. This ancient Greek word has a negative sense, "to become dry or withered." The idea is of something that is *over-ripe*.

And note that it is the angel who has power (authority) over fire who passes the directions on. This is likely the "fourth

angel" in chapter 16 who it says, *poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.*

Indeed, this part of the tribulation will be a fiery time.

Isaiah wrote:

For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.

(Isa 66:15,16)

Zephaniah added:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land. (Zeph 1:18)

Of course, you may wonder about the remnant of believers who are in a wilderness refuge. How will they endure this fiery trial?

If we think back to Daniel's time, we'll recall a story that was not only miraculous but prophetic. It's the three children of Israel who having refused to worship the golden idol of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar were thrown into the fiery furnace which had been heated up to seven times its normal temp. Upon them, the fire had no effect. Daniel three records:

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Notice first that Daniel, who pictures in many ways the church, is never present in this story – that's because the church will not be in the furnace of the tribulation. However, the faithful remnant of Israel will be. Yet, the fire will not touch them.

Zechariah wrote:

And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God. (Zech 13:9)

So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs. Modern vintners employ crushing machines that are quite sanitary but this process will be a bloody mess. The imagery is shocking – there's a stomping on these rebellious people with one intention – to crush them. Now,

why do you suppose this is done "outside the city"? I submit that it is the direct response to what these people, or should I say their forefathers, did to God's Son outside the city. Jesus was crucified on Golgotha, outside Jerusalem. This was in fulfillment of the picture embedded in the practice God gave the ancient Jews of taking the goat, upon which the sins of the people were symbolically placed, outside the camp to kill it.

This event may be referring to the consequences of the war of Armageddon which we will come to later in our studies or more likely to the whole period of the upcoming outpouring of His vials of wrath. Whatever the case, the blood of this crushing judgment will flow deep and long. It will run for some 200 miles which is the length of modern Israel from its northern most point to the mid point of its southern border. In other words, all of Israel will be deep in bloody destruction.

The door of the tribulation 'ark' has been shut. The floods of judgment are coming. Only the remnant has a safe place to hide.