



Sunday School Lesson for May 23, 2004.
Released on: May 21, 2004.

Study Revelation 14. A Call for Endurance
Questions and answers below.

TIME: A.D. 96
PLACE: from Patmos

Revelation 14:6-13

6 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,
7 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.
8 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.
9 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,
10 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:
11 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.
12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.
13 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 labors; and their works do follow them.

Lesson Background

This week's lesson text revolves around three angels seen by the Apostle John in his heavenly vision. The first angel had a message of judgment to preach to all of the people on the earth. It is called "the everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6), but it is not the same as the gospel of grace being preached today, which emphasizes salvation.

The second angel had a somber message announcing the fall of the great city of Babylon, the name of the antichrist's capital in the end times. Much more detail regarding this event may be found in Revelation 17 and 18.

The third angel had an ominous message warning worshipers of the antichrist of their awful destiny. The description of torment by brimstone and fire is frightening.

At the end of the three angels' messages, John had words of encouragement and comfort for all saints, or true believers. They were commended for their patience in enduring all the horrible events of the end times

Added to this was another comment from heaven. A voice instructed John to write that those who died in the Lord from that point on would be blessed. The Holy Spirit explained faithful ones would rest from their labors. Their works would follow them presumably to be rewarded. They had a bright future awaiting them.

Everlasting Gospel (Revelation 14:6-8)

1. To whom was "the everlasting gospel" of Revelation 14:6 specifically directed?

John saw an angel flying about in the midst of heaven. The wording seems to imply that the angel was restless and anxious to be sent on his mission to the earth. The angel had "the everlasting gospel" to preach. This in itself is interesting, for preaching of the gospel of grace during the age of grace in which we now live was committed to men and not angels.

This might be an indication that "the everlasting gospel" was specially pre-pared for people on the earth at the end of the tribulation period just prior to the second coming of Christ and His judgment of the nations. Its contents are given in the next verse.

2. Why did the first angel say God should be feared, given glory, and worshiped (v. 7)?

The message to be given by the angel in a loud voice was a warning to people that they should fear God and give glory to Him. The reason for this was that the hour of judgment had come. Many similar warnings have been issued over the centuries covering Old Testament and New Testament times and right up to the time in which we live. This announcement of coming judgment, however, seems to have a note of finality to it.

The latter part of the angel's message urged that God should be worshiped. He is the one who made heaven, the earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters. The term "sea" here evidently refers to all of the globe's seas and oceans. The term "fountains of waters" evidently refers to all sources of water, which, as we know, is constantly being recycled as it flows below the ground, on the ground's surface, and through evaporation to clouds in the air.

3. What "Babylon" did the second angel say had fallen (v. 8a)?

A second angel appeared in John's vision to announce the fall of the great city named Babylon. The original city bearing that name may go as far back as the building of the Tower of Babel prior to the time of Abraham.

Ancient Babylon was located about fifty miles south of modern Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. It became the center of the mighty Babylonian Empire, which took the Jews captive for seventy years in the sixth century B.C. It ruled over many people in the Middle East until overthrown by the Medes and Persians.

Both the Bible and secular history have much to teach us about Babylon, but all of that has little to do with the Babylon described in the book of Revelation. Only ruins

remain of that great city today. We have to project our thinking into the prophetic future when we consider the Babylon in John's vision.

The Babylon of the future seems to refer to both an apostate religious system and an actual city, the political center of the ten-kingdom confederacy that will be associated with the coming antichrist. Since there is nothing descriptive about Babylon in Revelation 14:8, we have to look at chapters 17 and 18, which are rich in details. Space for this lesson allows us only to summarize what we find there so that we may come back quickly to our current text.

The seven vials, or bowls, of judgment are poured out in Revelation 15 and 16. One of the dispensing angels called John to come see the judgment to be poured out on Babylon, which is described as "the great whore that sitteth upon many waters" (17:1). Subsequent verses describe her as a fornicator with the kings of the earth who is drunk with the blood of saints and martyrs (vs. 2-6).

Heading up a confederation of evil nations will be the antichrist. Babylon, sitting on seven mountains, will be his capital. He will do battle with the Lamb of God, who is also called Lord of lords and King of kings, and be defeated (vs. 7-18). Note how this matches with the description of Christ in 19:11-21.

4. What was the reason for Babylon's destruction (v. 8b)?

The angel who announced the fall of Babylon also gave the reason for her demise: "She made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Chapter 18 reveals that both kings and merchants are corrupted by her evil.

A dreadful sentence is pronounced upon Babylon: "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her" (18:8). Being more specific, destruction is scheduled to come upon her in just one hour of one day (vs. 10,19). As a symbol of this, a mighty angel takes up a huge stone and casts it into the sea (v. 21). This coming event must be very significant to warrant the great amount of attention given to it in John's vision.

Everlasting Punishment (Revelation 14:9-11)

5. Who is the beast mentioned in verse 9?

The third angel proclaimed in a loud voice that anyone worshiping the beast and his image and receiving his mark on the forehead or on the hand will be subject to the wrath of God poured without being diluted into His cup of indignation, or anger. It was a most solemn message.

Once again, we are dependent on another passage of Revelation to get the details connected with this matter. Chapter 13 describes the beast that rises up out of the sea. We take this to be the antichrist rising up out of humanity. He is just a man; however, he will be a special kind of man. Satan will give him his power, seat, or throne, and great authority (vs. 1,2).

This man will receive a deadly wound but recover from it (vs. 3,12,14). People will worship the dragon, meaning Satan, and the beast, meaning the antichrist (v. 4). He will blaspheme God, make war with the saints, and rule the whole world (vs. 5-7).

Another beast will rise up out of the earth with power identical to that of the antichrist (v. 11). He will cause people to worship the antichrist through his use of deceitful miracles. He will give life to the image of the antichrist to cause it to speak,

and any who refuse to worship it will be killed. No one will be allowed to buy or sell without the mark of the beast, or without his name, or without his number, which is 666. This second man has been labeled as the false prophet. He, the antichrist, and Satan will work together (vs. 11-18).

6. Who will have to drink of the cup of God's wrath (vs. 10,11)?

These verses describe the horrendous torment that lies ahead for those who oppose God and Christ and who give their allegiance to Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet. From the cup of God's indignation, or anger, will be poured out fire and brimstone, another term for sulphur. You will recall that God rained down fire and brimstone on wicked Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24). The angel told John that the coming outpouring of these substances will be done "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10), but we are not told the significance of this.

The location of this outpouring is in "the lake of fire and brimstone" mentioned in Revelation 20:10 and 14,15. We are not told how those who are there will react to it, but it is clear that they will be tormented by it.

Revelation 14:11 may well be the most frightening verse in the whole Bible, for it brings out the fact that sinners are going to be tormented forever. Our minds are conditioned to think in terms of beginning and ending. No matter how difficult an experience may be, we take comfort in the thought of it eventually ending. It is almost inconceivable for us to think in eternal terms when it comes to suffering. It would be easier to think in terms of annihilation, but the Bible does not teach that.

The concept of eternal torment should cause sinners to seriously consider their destiny. It should also cause Christians to be more zealous in seeking to win people to Christ so that they can be spared from the wrath of God in judgment (Matthew 28:18-20).

7. How does it affect you to read about God's vengeance?

On the one hand, the certainty of God's wrath ought to make us sad that some people will actually experience that unbearable vengeance. On the other hand, it ought to comfort us that God will execute justice on behalf of all our brethren who have suffered unimaginable cruelties through the centuries.

The certainty of His wrath also should motivate us to remain faithful despite hardships. Nothing can compare with the pain that God can inflict, so His wrath is to be feared above any human's (Matthew 10:28). We appreciate the awe-inspiring justice of God. But at the same time we are to feel a great urgency to help others escape this threatening "downside" of justice.

Everlasting Reward
(Revelation 14:12,13)

8. What is meant by the "patience of the saints" (v. 12)?

In sharp contrast to the sinners who submit to Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet, we now consider believers. Their patience, or endurance, while suffering under the forces of evil is commended by the third angel. True believers are

described as those who keep God's commandments and maintain a faithful testimony for Jesus.

Verse 12 provides us a key for interpreting not only this series of angelic messages, but also the entirety of this Revelation of Jesus Christ.

In the everyday activities of life, we find our faith and our relationship to Christ tested. It is not always easy to make the right choices, especially in unanticipated or unique circumstances. The appeal is strong; the test so real. To assist us in having the patience we need to endure, we have the everlasting gospel hidden in our hearts. It is a ready resource. Since we are aware of "both sides," we want to do whatever it takes to maintain our all-important relationship with Christ.

In a way, we need to set our minds on considering an active plan in dealing with the hard choices and tests. An active plan begins with backing up to get a full view of what is happening. Is it of God, of the devil, or of my own selfishness? Will my choice strengthen my relationship with Christ or weaken it? How will the results of my choice affect the ones who look to me as an example? It takes active resistance on our part to develop patience. We are resolved to do whatever it takes to stay faithful.

Many of life's difficulties can be linked to a lack of will and a failure to consider the outcome. We are thankful that God does not permit us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). The devil cannot really make us do the wrong thing. God is for us, and His Spirit is all-powerful. But we must yield our spirit to His. It takes an act of our will.

Also, our overview enables us to consider the final outcome. If we join the enemy by foolish choices, we can expect due penalty. We can know blessing only when we are willing to do "all that it takes" to keep our relationship with the Lamb. Only then can we anticipate the time when there will be no more tests.

In overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of holiness, we need proper motivation—that motivation is eternal life. To gain that prize we have to continue to keep the commandments of God and hold on to the faith of Jesus. We are strengthened in these when we participate in godly endeavors in the church and in relationships with those who provide insight, encouragement, and accountability. All in all, we must resolve to do whatever it takes to endure with the saints. We can win with Christ!

We are also strengthened by the sure fact that judgment will come for the wicked. There will not be anything lacking in God's vengeance when He repays. Patience is that ability to hold up under a burden with active resistance. We cannot be passive, only observing. We are "in the game" for keeps—and it's no mere game!

9. What blessings will those who die in the Lord enjoy (v. 13)?

At this point, an unnamed voice from heaven (probably the voice of Christ, Rev. 1:12-20) could be heard telling John to write down the fact that those who die in the Lord are blessed. Christians have known for centuries that death for those who are faithful to the Lord brings blessing, for they are ushered directly into the presence of God and Christ in heaven.

The Apostle Paul said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8). He also said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Phil. 1:23,24).

Note, however, that in Revelation 14:13 the voice from heaven told John that it was those who would die in the Lord "from henceforth" who would be blessed. This suggests that a particular group was being indicated. It seemed to be made up of

martyrs from the tribulation period who were willing to die for their Christian testimony.

Then the voice of the Holy Spirit was heard, agreeing with what had been said by the first voice. The Holy Spirit emphasized two things regarding the believers who died in the Lord.

The first thing was that they will be able to rest from their labors. The fact that all of them work for the Lord seems to be taken for granted. Perhaps persecution has that effect on believers. The weak and unstable fall away under stress, and those who remain become stronger and more determined.

The second thing was that their works will follow them. It is a common saying that we brought nothing into this world and can take nothing out of it. However, there is an opportunity for believers to send something on ahead of their arrival in heaven. Jesus said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:20).

Paul said, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (1 Cor. 3:14). This was addressed to believers in this present age of grace. It would seem logical to assume that the same will hold true for those who die in the Lord during the tribulation period as described in Revelation 14:13.

John next saw the Son of man coming down to earth to engage the antichrist and his armies in battle at Armageddon. Christ will be triumphant, and the devastation imposed on the evil confederacy will be total (Rev. 14:14-20). This should make all of us optimistic.

CONCLUSION

The message of Christ is indeed "a sharp two-edged sword" (Revelation 1:16). There are two sides. The one is God's protection, and the other is the reality of judgment.

The everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 gives us another opportunity to consider both sides.

Faithful servants are overcomers. Overcomers are ones who know the strengthening afforded by God's presence. Even in this life we know something of what Heaven is like. Even when we are experiencing opposition, we can lift up our eyes to catch a glimpse of Heaven where trials are no more. Even now we know the presence of the Lamb. He provides and protects, even though we are not yet entirely shielded from hurt. His grace is sufficient for us to be overcomers!

PRAYER

Thank You, God, for the clarity of Your Word. Its light makes it possible for us to have a view of Your work. We are so grateful that that work includes us. We know that our lives will not always be easy. But we are thankful for the help of Your Holy Spirit and the Lamb, Jesus Christ. May we be able and willing to assist fellow Christians when they, too, are tempted. Because of the Lamb and in His name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." (Revelation 17:14).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

The final lesson of the quarter takes us to Revelation 21, which deals with the new heaven and the new earth. Revelation 21:1 through 22:5 should be read in anticipation of next week's uplifting lesson.

I hope you enjoyed this week's lesson !

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