

Revelation Bible Study #36

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 14:6-13

6 Then 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. **7** And 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.”

8 Another 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.”

9 And 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, **10** he 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. **11** And 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.

13 And 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!”

Introduction

With the 144,000 New Testament saints,¹ St. John sees that the Church is not merely a victim. While the infernal trio (the devil, the world and the false teachers) are attempting to destroy the Church, the Church Militant follows Christ wherever He leads them, and counters their mark by being sealed with the Holy Spirit. Now it is time to see what the angels are doing during this time period.

The vision focuses on the interaction of angels against the infernal forces that wage war against the Church. Thus it is not meant to exclude the other duties of angels described in Scripture. They remain ministers of fire tasked with helping believers during their earthly sojourn,² and they remain active in assisting the Church in matters of bringing the Gospel to the forefront.³ It is this latter part that we see in action in this passage, but *oriented* toward the enemies of the Church. And it is in sequence at that. First, the angels are tasked with helping spread the Gospel to the nonbelievers, that those who will repent have the chance to do so, that they may be spared in the Judgment; then, with the proclamation of Babylon's judgment the nonbelievers are *warned* that they shall not have victory if they continue in their wickedness; finally, for those who never repent, all that is left is for them to be damned, a preaching of the Law as the final opportunity for them to come to knowledge of the truth – that they need a Savior.

Vs.6-7

1 Once more, the number is symbolic to show that the Church is small compared to the body of nonbelievers.

2 Hebrews 1:7, Matthew 18:10-14

3 Revelation 7, etc.

6 Then 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. 7 And 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."

The angel proclaims the Gospel in the sixth verse, and a form of the Law in the seventh, but these are not mutually exclusive. We must recall that the word "Gospel" means *good news*.⁴ To the nonbeliever, the return of Christ is terrifying to think of, but to the believer it is a blessed hope.⁵ So the angel *first* preaches the Gospel to everyone, that Christ has died for our sins and risen for our justification, so that they may repent and believe; it is eternal, in that all saints, from pre-Abrahamic times to the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, were saved through faith in it. It is also eternal in that the *consequences* of the Gospel are eternal, namely that of eternal life for those who believe in Christ.

Some interpreters make the mistake of believing that the proclamation of the seventh verse is that eternal Gospel being proclaimed. The idea would be that what is Gospel for the believers is a warning for nonbelievers, thus functioning as Law. Perhaps others, out of a perverse love of wrath, see God punishing people as something to rejoice in for its own sake as opposed to rejoicing in God delivering His people, but the context of the passage forbids us from seeing it this way. The sixth verse features an *eternal* Gospel; the seventh verse features a warning concerning the *hour* of God's Judgment. This is to say, the Gospel shall ring forever: Judgment shall occur in an *hour*. Certainly the *consequences* of that Judgment are forever, but priority is still placed on salvation and the freely offered mercy of Christ.

The Law comes as a warning, intensifying the need to believe. The angel's proclamation in the seventh verse presents the stakes in stark terms, so that no one has an excuse. They have been informed that Christ has died for the sins of mankind, that He rose again for believers' justification, and that He shall return to judge the living and the dead. Before Judgment Day, the angels are tasked with ensuring that this message rings out to all of humanity.

Vs.8

8 Another 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."

The "Mystery Babylon" figure has not appeared yet. Thus, the second angel's proclamation denotes a future event (for St. John's audience at least) in which this figure shall fall. Angels will be tasked not only with helping the Church make the well-meant offer of the Gospel to all people, but they shall also play a role in announcing and enforcing the destruction of God's enemies.

Later chapters of Revelation, namely the seventeenth, will make it clear that the harlot Babylon is a religious figure, a sort of foil to the righteous woman shown in the twelfth chapter. However, as St. Peter refers to the city of Rome using the same moniker,⁶ the entity known as Babylon rested in that place as St. John wrote. Without skipping ahead too much, let the reader understand that she is connected to (and most likely identified with) the figure of wickedness from Zechariah 5.

In the meantime, the angel proclaims Babylon's eventual fall. Like the angel from the sixth verse, this is a proclamation *to* the nonbelieving world. Since all peoples (that is, all nonbelievers) partake in her spiritual harlotry, the message goes out to them to *depart*; there is no victory to be won with her, and no eternal life to be had with her. If they resist the Gospel proclaimed by the first angel, and ignore his warning concerning Judgment, then the next step is to inform them that God shall not permit them to have the ultimate victory which they crave – especially not through Babylon.

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

5 Acts 1:10-11, Titus 2:11-14

6 1 Peter 5:13

Vs.9-11

9 And 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, 10 he 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. 11 And 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."

Jesus makes it clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that sins damn but faith saves. He says plainly in St. Mark's Gospel, "whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."⁷ This is basic soteriology. Those who refuse to believe, do so because they prefer their evil deeds over the offer of salvation.⁸ Otherwise, they would turn and believe, being thus justified by faith in Christ.⁹ This is crucial in understanding the image and mark of the beast. It cannot be allegiance to Rome or worshipping Roman gods or utilizing Roman marques of commerce¹⁰ as the preterists or Catholics might say:^{11,12} since literally every individual who takes it is *damned*, this would mean every Roman who converted to Christianity in the first century is damned despite all the promises of God in this regard. Any interpretation of the mark which nullifies the Gospel is to be rejected, so we retain the interpretation that the mark consists of lifelong rejection of the Christian faith.

The language concerning eternal damnation is difficult. First, we are bound by St. John's hermeneutic guidelines¹³ to recognize that his description of damnation is symbolic. Second, we are *also* bound to St. John's heavy use of the Old Testament. Jeremiah and the Psalmists utilize wine as a representation of the human reaction to God's wrath;¹⁴ this is to say, that being subjected to His full anger at sin and wickedness is akin to a confused drunkenness, leading men to staggering and despair. Fire likewise *may* be symbolic for the painful experience given to those who are damned; it is possible that burning is merely a description of the thing, but since the angel is speaking of a future event it is still on the table. All we know for certain is that damnation is a horrible, eternal experience.

The third angel proclaims this to the mass of nonbelievers, likely working through the Church, as the final resort of evangelism. The nonbeliever may ignore the promise of salvation through the Gospel; he may balk at the warning concerning judgment; and he may disbelieve the promise of destruction against Babylon in which he trusts. But the last warning, concerning being tormented forever, is the single worst thing that can happen to anyone. The heathen are taught honestly that they shall suffer without relief if they continue on in their unbelief; in this fashion, they are warned. Having been offered something good, while being informed of the bad that comes to them if they do not repent, there is no excuse. No one on Judgment Day may say "I had no knowledge of this," and no one may accuse God of injustice for giving them what they have chosen. They have been adequately warned, each man according to his understanding, and they have decided upon damnation; thus they shall suffer.

Vs.12-13

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

7 Mark 16:16

8 John 3:19

9 Romans 3:21-25

10 That is, the supposed ash mark on one's skin required to do business at the Agora.

11 For a particularly sprawling, silly example of this teaching: <https://www.newcovenantway.com/the-mark-of-the-beast>

12 The apparent position of Rome is that the mark is the use of Roman coins: <https://www.catholic.com/qa/the-mark-of-the-beast>

13 That his vision is symbolic, consisting of signs. Revelation 12:1

14 Psalm 60:2-3, 75:6-8, Jeremiah 13:12-14, 25:16-17

13 And 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!”

St. John calls for believers to continue enduring in the faith. This is a rephrasing of his original call to endurance,¹⁵ but on a more positive basis. His first exhortation to perseverance is predicated on the vast and relentless march of persecution against Christians by the devil, the world, and the heretics; believers are to understand that they may suffer for their faith. Here, however, he exhorts us to endurance on the basis of the good that God is working through the angelic host; deliverance is nearer to all believers than it was in the beginning of their faith. Not only this, but endurance is necessary for the sake of those who *will* become Christians. As the angels proclaim the Gospel and their various warnings, the Church stands by to receive those who hearken unto their declarations. They must be Baptized, catechized, and made strong to stand in the assembly along with the rest of the penitent; here, our patience is a precious thing to God, who uses both the angels and the Church to show mercy to sinners who have not yet come to know Christ.

The “dead” are actually alive. When a believer sheds his mortal coil, he does not experience death the same way that a nonbeliever does. To the contrary, Christ promises that whoever trusts in Him shall never die – and St. Paul explains that this is on account of our already having gone through a kind of death at our Baptism.¹⁶ But for those saints who are parted from their bodies before Christ's Return, their works follow them *because they are still alive*. Thus they are blessed forever.

15 Revelation 13:9-10

16 John 11:24-27, Romans 6:1-6