**IT’S HARVEST TIME!**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 14**

When we left off last week in Ch 13 things looked pretty bleak for the Tribulation saints who refuse to bow down to the antichrist. You need to understand that the pressure to follow the antichrist is tremendous. He has great power and influence throughout the world. Those who do not follow him will not receive the mark of the beast and therefore they won’t be able to buy or sell anything. They face almost certain death. So there is a great deal of pressure on those who profess Jesus Christ during the Tribulation. Most will pay the ultimate price for remaining faithful and true to Jesus!

The question at this point is this: against such overwhelming odds, can the Tribulation saints remain faithful to the Lord? The answer to this question is found here in Ch 14.

V. 1: Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

I believe this scene is taking place in heaven. Here’s why: the Lamb is Jesus. He is standing on Mount Zion. Hebrews 12:22 indicates that Mount Zion is the heavenly Jerusalem. So here Jesus is standing in heaven. Notice who’s standing with Him – the 144,000 (the Jews who had been redeemed back in Ch 7. We know that this is the same group from Ch 7 because they have the seal of God on their foreheads, the seal that was placed on them in Revelation 7:3. ALL who were sealed made it to heaven! Not one of them lost their salvation!

How does this group of redeemed Jewish saints from Ch 7 end up in heaven here in Ch 14? Were they raptured? No. Rev 13:15 gives us a very strong hint: “And it (the second beast) was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.” So I believe these 144,000 are now in heaven because the antichrist and his followers killed them for not bowing down to his image. They remain faithful to the Lord even to death!

V. 2-3: And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

While on earth these Tribulation saints suffered a lot. Now we see them joining the heavenly throng singing before the throne of God. Sadness and pain has been replaced with joy and peace. They sing a new song, though we are not told what that song is. What we are told is that only the 144,000 can sing it. Ps 107:1-2 (NASB) says, “Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good; for His loving-kindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary.” That is exactly what these 144,000 Tribulation saints are doing here.

V. 4-5: It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Several key characteristics are mentioned about the 144,000. First they were unmarried. They remain unmarried to devote themselves to the vital work of full time evangelism. They live in the end times, a time of great persecution. So, taking a spouse and starting a family is the last thing on their minds. Who would want to be responsible for providing for a family that depended on you when you cannot buy or sell anything? So they remain single.

The second characteristic of these saints is that they follow Jesus wherever He goes. In other words, they’re obedient. Absolute devotion to Jesus Christ is the driving force behind their ability to live godly lives even in the midst of terrible wickedness on the earth. Jesus once told His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). This group does just that.

The third characteristic is that no lie was found in their mouth. They do not fall for the antichrist’s lies and deception. It IS possible even for Christians to be deceived by the devil and to fall away, to backslide. Read Hebrews and Jude. But these 144,000 are not the least bit fooled by the antichrist.

The final characteristic I want you to notice is that they were blameless. This does NOT mean that they are sinless. They were blameless. They are without blemish – not because of their own goodness, but because they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. That’s the only way anyone can get to heaven – the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The term “firstfruits for God and the Lamb” indicates that they were the first to be saved from among the people of the Tribulation period. They were certainly not the only ones saved during this time, but the first.

So these 144,000 evangelists are now out of commission. So, God provides others to preach the Gospel. This time it is not men, but angels…

V. 6-7: 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. 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.”

At this point in Revelation we are somewhere in the last days of the Tribulation. The church as we know it today has already been raptured. The 144,000 Jewish evangelists have been martyred along with many other faithful saints who opposed the antichrist. Thus, virtually nobody remains to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

One of the evidences of God’s grace is that He always sends a messenger to warn of impending judgment prior to it coming. Before the flood, God sent Noah. Before fire and brimstone fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, God sent Lot (though he failed to deliver the message). Before God destroyed Nineveh He sent Jonah who tried to run away but could not. Before God’s people were taken captive into Babylon, God sent Isaiah and Jeremiah and a whole host of other prophets. The same thing happens here in the Tribulation. God sends His messenger, an angel from heaven to go down to earth and preach the Gospel.

The angel’s appeal to the people of the world is, “Fear God.” As we read on we see no indication that this angel is any more successful in getting people to heed God’s message than either Noah or Jeremiah. Noah was a preacher of righteousness for 120 years. In all that time he was able to influence only eight members of his own family. Then there was Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. He preached God’s message faithfully for 20 years and never recorded a single convert! All he got was ridicule and cruel treatment from the people of Judah.

But God doesn’t just send one angel to preach. He sends yet another…

V. 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.”

This angel pronounces God’s judgment on Babylon. The term “Babylon” is synonymous with the evil world system established by the antichrist. As you are going to see, very shortly God’s judgment WILL fall. In Revelation Ch 17 His judgment falls on the religious Babylon and in Ch 18 God’s wrath falls on the commercial Babylon, the world economic and political system.

In the original Greek, “fallen” in v 8 is in the prophetic aorist tense. That means that God’s prophetic word is so certain that He speaks as though the event had already taken place! It is a sure thing.

But God doesn’t just send two angels to deliver His message to those on the earth. He sends a third angel…

V. 9-11: 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, 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. 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.”

The angel’s message is that all who worship the antichrist and receive his mark and operate according to the world system he’s established will drink the wine of God’s wrath. No exceptions. If you are not for God you are against Him. To accept the antichrist and his way is to reject or deny God. To accept or reject Christ is a free will choice that is not forced upon anybody. Whatever choice we make will have eternal consequences.

So what happens if one chooses to follow the antichrist instead of God? They will be tormented with fire and sulfur…forever and ever…no rest day or night. There is no hope for those who worship the beast. They can expect nothing but the wrath of God poured out upon them. There is no neutral position. There is no fence straddling during the Tribulation.

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

What is it that keeps the Tribulation Christians going while undergoing terrible ordeals? One thing: KNOWING THAT GOD WILL ULTIMATELY TRIUMPH. Isn’t that really the theme of the Book of Revelation? Knowing this encourages all of us saints of God to remain strong and firm no matter what persecution we face. Things may look bleak now, but in the end GOD WINS!

V 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!”

This isn’t the voice of an angel. I believe it is the voice of the Holy Spirit Himself. He declares that those who die in the Lord, those who are saved are truly blessed because they have a home in heaven, an eternal reward. Death allows these dear saints to finally rest from their labors. There is no such thing as a retired Christian. As long as we have breath we are still on active duty. Only when we die do we get to cease our labors for the Lord.

The last phrase of v 13, “for their deeds follow them” identifies what it is that will outlive us. Our investment of faithfulness to Christ today will earn eternal dividends. Jesus said, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matt 6:20). God does not save anyone because of their works – we are saved by our faith in Christ. However scripture does teach that God will reward us when we get to heaven for our good works.

God’s nature is one of both love and holiness. His great love for us compelled Him to send His only Son to die for our sins so that we might be restored to fellowship and live with Him eternally. On the other hand, His holiness means that He cannot tolerate sin. He must punish it. Here in Revelation we see both aspects of God’s nature in perfect balance. He extends grace time after time. The Bible says that He is longsuffering, patient. While some take advantage of it and are saved, most people ignore the opportunity for salvation. They basically thumb their noses at grace even right up to the end. Well, here in Ch 14 the time for repentance has come and gone. As the title of the lesson said, it’s harvest time...

The rule of the harvest is stated in Galatians 6:7-8…“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

The rest of Ch 14 and on into Ch 15 observes the harvest of the entire earth at the end of the Tribulation as seen from heaven’s perspective. This same harvest will be explored in greater detail from earth’s perspective in Chapters 16 thru 19. Of course it all culminates when Jesus returns.

V. 14: Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.

Who is this one “like a son of man”? We concluded in Rev 1:13 that this is Jesus Himself. Eighty-four times in the New Testament the term “son of man” is used for Jesus. He even used the term to describe Himself on many occasions. When speaking about His return to earth at the end of the Tribulation He told His disciples, “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30). That time is fast approaching. We have seen Jesus before as the Sower, but here in Chapter 14 we see Him as the Reaper. Notice that in His hand is a sharp sickle, a farm implement used to harvest wheat.

V. 15-16: And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Judgment has come to the earth. The harvest is fully ripe. Only because of God’s patience has judgment been delayed this long. An angel urges Jesus to swing His sickle over the entire earth. And at God’s predestined appointed time, Jesus swings the sickle and the earth is harvested, saint and sinner alike. A few swift strokes and the harvest is complete!

The events described here correlate directly with Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the tares. Listen carefully to the words of our Lord…

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 13:37-42).

At harvest time the farmer gathers wheat and tares (weeds) alike from his field and then separates out the weeds from the wheat. The wheat he keeps while the weeds are burned up. The Lord of the harvest does likewise. He gathers believers and unbelievers alike and then separates those judged to be weeds from those who are wheat. He quickly separates the true from the false. Being a perfect and righteous Judge, our Lord makes no mistakes. In these verses we see the separating out. The burning, the final destruction will come a bit later in Revelation.

Rev 14:17-19: Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

This phase of the harvest deals exclusively with the wrath of God against an unbelieving world. The righteous have been separated away from those who defy God. Now God unleashes His fury. The wine press is a Biblical symbol of God’s wrath. As a ripe grape is mashed and its juices flow in every direction, so will unrepentant man fall into the horrific vat of God’s final judgment. Joel 3:13 states, “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.”

For those with weak stomachs, let me warn you. The last verse is extremely graphic…

V. 20: And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia (200 miles).

What an awful picture we see here! Just imagine a battle scene so gruesome that the blood from those who had been slain flowed four feet deep for 200 miles! That will be the scene of great carnage at the Battle of Armageddon at the second coming of Jesus Christ. God will ultimately judge all men and completely destroy His enemies.

Today we live in a day of grace. In other words, there is still time to get our lives right with God and to be saved. But time is running out! One day it WILL be too late. As Hebrews 2:3 says, “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” The clear answer from the Book of Revelation is… “we won’t!”