

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Revelation 14:8. This is our thirtieth week in the book of Revelation. We've got a ways to go. If you are new here or you are visiting or you just figure, "Gosh, where can I get everything else?" all of our studies are in the book store, on DVDs, on CDs; they're on the archival page of our website as well for *Growing Thru Grace*. All of the notes are in the book store; you can drop by there when they're open during the week and pick them up. We will be having a coffee shop in the new facility, so I think that's gonna be good. We should serve burgers, I guess. (Laughing) (A reference to In-N-Out burger truck before tonight's study) Oh, man. I am so full. Sorry if I ate one of your five burgers, but you should have come earlier.

The *Great Tribulation* begins with the rapture of the church, and that rapture brings, really, to an end biblically the *Age of Grace*. In chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, we are given not only the *Age of Grace* but then the deliverance of the church from this world. The *Great Tribulation* is going to last exactly seven years, broken up very clearly into two  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year periods.

The judgment of God during this time falls from the throne of heaven in the form of seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowl judgments. The first  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years are characterized by basically two very large events. Number one - the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39, which the Lord will dispose of the threat to Israel from the North and really, in so doing, establish the second, which is the rise of the Antichrist to power through deception and all. We read about it in chapter 6:1 through the first seal.

After those first  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years, many things will occur that we have studied so far. For one thing, Satan will be barred from heaven; he won't have access to the throne of God anymore. He'll be thrown down, if you will, to the earth with the demons. Enraged, he'll turn to persecute Israel whom God will protect in Petra. (We studied that in chapter 12). He will turn to make war with her offspring who believe in Jesus (again, towards the end of chapter 12) who we read, of these Tribulation saints, will overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their life to death (chapter 12 as well).

Additionally, the Antichrist will, at this halfway point of the seven years, come to a rebuilt Temple that he has facilitated and proclaim that he has to be worshipped as God alone. (Read about that in chapter 12). The 144,000 Jewish Witnesses from the twelve tribes will be sealed during that time to go and minister around the world the good news of Jesus, primarily to Israel first but certainly not limited to them (chapter 7). And the judgments begin with death and with war and with persecution from the second seal forward (in chapter 6:3), as the Antichrist is seen for who he is. So really the first half of the Great Tribulation ends in chapter 6:2, and then, from there on, everything we read is in the second half.

This Antichrist, when he comes to power, will make a demand that you take his mark upon your forehead or upon your right hand, or you die. You can't buy or sell without it (chapter 13). There will be a false prophet that will arise to support this Antichrist now possessed by the devil, and he will demand that you worship him. There will be an image made of this Antichrist which will be animated, able to speak and move - certainly a horrible thought from Hell itself. But that will also take place during this time.

And after the sixth trumpet of chapter 9, John stops in all of this presentation to give us some more information. We've told you, I think, a couple of times about these parenthetical chapters. They are chapters of information, of looking around but not moving forward. Because literally this book, aside from a few verses, runs chronologically. We'll find, actually, today a couple of verses that look ahead, and then we'll get more information when we get to that point in the chronology. But, for the most part, it is chronological except these chapters tend to give us information.

So, in chapter 10, John is told by the Lord through an angel that it's almost over. We pointed out to you, when we got to chapter 10, that though half the book is remaining, it literally moves forward very quickly until the Lord's return. Between chapter 10 and 19, weeks pass, not months or years. So, John was encouraged. There were still things to say, things to preach, things to be reported on, but, "Hang in there, it's going to be over soon."

In chapter 11, we are given the measurements of the Temple that will be built during the Great Tribulation and how it can find itself up on the Temple Mount without causing World War III. You find it in the first couple of verses of chapter 11. And then, following that, we're told of these two Jewish witnesses

chosen by the Lord, sealed, with great power. They are eventually killed. The world rejoices that they are out of their hair, only to see them resurrected on the third day. And then we read of the seventh trumpet sounding in heaven; that's to bring forth these final bowl judgments. But before we see what happens in heaven effected upon the earth, heaven rejoices when the trumpet goes off because everyone in heaven knows it's very close now. The Lord is coming. Evil is about to be done away with. Satan's about to get his just reward, so to speak.

In chapter 12, before we are shown the effects of this, we are told about Israel's role in bringing forth the Messiah, how the enemy has opposed her at every step, the purpose of His birth and of His resurrection. And then, in the middle of those verses, a leap forward to the time of the end to show us that God is protecting Israel, and Satan then turns in his anger and in his frustration against the believers who are alive and upon the earth at this time.

In chapter 13, we are shown the beast, the Antichrist. The dragon is Satan himself. And then there is this false prophet who is the mouthpiece, if you will, for the Antichrist.

Last week, in the first seven verses of this chapter, we saw the 144,000 - (towards the end of this  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year period) now right before the Lord (it could be in days) comes back when these final judgments are poured out - arriving safely in glory with the Lord. And looked at an awesome angel, beginning in verses 6 and 7, the first of three angels being sent by the Lord. This one, a phenomenal angel. He speaks every language apparently, and he runs across the world, flying around, if you will, to call men to Jesus. And during this final  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -year period - maybe more towards the end of that period - he brings forth what, at least from a biblical standpoint, is the final cry for mercy, final call for life. The seven plagues are prepared for in chapter 15 but come very quickly in chapter 16. His message is real clear: fear God, give glory to Him, the time is running out, worship Him, He's the Creator. So turn to Him for life.

People often, when they question the Bible or the ways of God, I think the most often question - at least over the years - I've been asked by unbelievers, "If God is so good" or, "If God is so loving, how could He ever condemn a person to Hell for all of eternity?" And I think if you read the Bible, you'll get the impression - and hopefully you will tonight, if nothin' else - the Lord, that's not what He wants, certainly not what He plans. If He gives you free will, you also have to be able to

live with the consequences of it. But at the same time, the heart of God is what Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise.....but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) or what Paul wrote to Timothy, that "He desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). So, when people start lookin' at God and, "How could He?!" I guess the answer is He doesn't want to do that. He's provided the way that you can avoid that, but if you choose to make that decision, that's on you.

I read years ago of an Italian man who lost his wife, and they only had one teenage son at home. But he's a real rebellious, kind of loud-mouthed kid, and so, besides having teenage issues, his mother had passed away. So when they came home from the funeral, he said to his son, "Could you stay home with me tonight? I just need the company." And he said to his dad, "No. I'm goin' out with my friends." He said, "Well, could you just please stay tonight? Just tonight." And he stood at the door, arms open, tried to stop his son. And the boy grabbed his dad, pushed him out of the way and left. And I thought about that because I think if you want to go to Hell, you'll have to do that; you'll have to push Jesus out of the way. Because it'll take that same kind of determination. He will try to block you every step of the way. In your life, He'll lay across the broad road that leads to destruction to block the way for you.

So, no one goes to Hell and has to be able to say, "Why did God send me here?" You'll only end up there if you willfully and insistentlly ignore God's calling, His love and His warning. So, all that to say tonight, in these last verses before this ball goes really quickly downhill, here on display for the umpteenth time, in the middle of God's wrath being poured out, He sends out His final invitations of His grace and His warnings. It takes a lot to run out of chances with God, but there has to be an end to things, and this is it. And you will be delivered far before this. But as we come to the end of chapter 14, these are the final cries of mercy before the end. And they're also the end of these parenthetical chapters before, like I said, things begin to roll forward.

Next week we will look at chapters 15 and 16, at least part of those, return to the chronology, the final outpouring of these seven bowl judgments. And then you'll stop again, and the Lord will say to you, as this destruction is coming, "Here's what is being destroyed," and He'll use the term "Babylon" to represent both political and commercial man's life, religious man's life. It was indeed properly represented

by Babylon, both the city and the world empire, if you will. And so, in those two chapters, the Lord will say, "Here are the things that man has invested himself in religiously and commercially and politically, and this ends now. This is the end of man's attempt to rule himself." By the time we get to chapter 19 and through the end of the book, we'll rejoice in Jesus' return, the millennial establishment of the kingdom, and then the new heavens and the new earth.

But tonight, just chapter 14:8-20. We're just going to look at a couple of more angels that the Lord is sending forth during this second half of the Tribulation as the days grow short and the time is almost over. And I guess if I can ask you to remember one thing from chapter 10 forward, it is just about the end of things. So chapter 10-19 is very quick, not very slow.

All right. Chapter 14:8, "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.' " So after the angel that bears the everlasting gospel that's flying through the earth's air space, comes this angel to warn the world - at the end - of its ways and of its sure demise. Or, in other words, to fly around and say, "Whatever you're into, if it isn't Jesus, it's not gonna work. It's not gonna last. This is the last stop. This is the time to get off before it's too late." "Babylon is fallen, is fallen." Whenever in Greek you read repetition, it is emphasis. It's like an exclamation point. And so, when it's repeated twice, you can be assured that this angel is emphatic about the fact that man's government will not work - both politically, religiously or commercially. This is the first mention of Babylon in the book. Babylon in the Bible is an ancient city. It was a world empire. It exemplified the ways of man in all of those things - politics, commerce and worship.

And, like I said, we will see God's view and judgment of "Babylon" and all that it represents in the next two chapters following the outpouring of the vials. In chapter 17, the religious life of man apart from God; in chapter 18, the commercial life, the make-money-at-all-cost life. And we will see the Lord address it in great detail. But who is He speaking to? The world? The ways of the Antichrist and his supporters? The arrogance of man? Notice He calls it "that great city" that's about to be taken down. It looks for a while like the Antichrist might get away with it. All right. We've had some tough times, but he's still in charge, and he's powerful as ever. "Who can battle him?" the people are crying (Revelation 13:4), and the Lord sends an angel to say, "Well, his triumphs are going to be short-lived and fleeting. He cannot, he will not, he must not last." So, when you read through

all of the prophets, and you read about the power of the Antichrist and who he is - his policies, the economy that drives his leadership, the dominance of idol worship - it's all going to fall apart. The one world government idea that he has aspired to, the "Take my mark to buy and sell, worship me or don't survive," it just doesn't work. Democracy is not the best form of government. A monarchy is.....as long as you have a Monarch like Jesus. If a man's in charge, well you can see how that works in third-world countries. Look at the way Thailand is run and has been for years. Or China. But, at the same time, if the Lord comes and He makes all the rules, and He's a good God, it's going to be just fine. But the Antichrist, he just wants to dominate, and that will not last, and it won't be accomplished. Do you remember when Nebuchadnezzar came to world-dominating power as the king of Babylon? He walked around in Daniel 4:30 and said out loud, to no one in particular, " 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?' " He was filled with himself. And then it says, "While the word was still rolling out of his mouth, a word from heaven came and said: 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And I'm going to drive you from men.....until seven times pass over you, and you're going to live amongst the beasts of the field, and you're going to eat grass like oxen until you understand that only God rules in the kingdom of men.' " Apparently what we read, Nebuchadnezzar, for a while, lost his mind; walked through the fields and just was out of it. Until you get to chapter 5, and then he got Old-Testament saved. He acknowledged the Lord and surrendered. Well, this beast is going to meet the Lord, but he's going to meet the Lord's rod. Nebuchadnezzar met His grace; this beast will not. But, like I said, he's going to look invincible for a time, in complete control, but it is only going to last for a minute.

And so here comes this angel from the Lord, the second one. You've got flying angels everywhere. Except this one is not here to preach the gospel; this one is here to warn you, "Don't be deceived. It isn't everything like it seems. Don't join up. Stay off the sinking ship." I think it's the same advice the Lord would give us tonight. Stay out of the world, man. Get ready for the Lord to come. Right? There really is no life here. I always think about Hebrews 11:24-27, where it says, "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." I

think it's the same counsel this angel would give. "Don't go this route, join up." Look, it's going to be a hard sell because everyone that obeys what this angel says is liable to have his life taken from him - arrested, beaten, beheaded. (At least there's a beheading here towards the end of the book). I'm sure there're a thousand ways to die. But, at the same time, to embrace this message of God's grace is going to be a hard choice. It's much easier to decide to follow the Lord today than it will be then, certainly.

Notice we read, here in verse 8, that " 'she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' " Or, if you will, the spirit behind the world's commerce, the world's religions, the world's politics have driven man deeper and deeper into spiritual unfaithfulness. Right? The world and all that it offers is not a place to be delivered; it is a place to be overthrown. And it grips the heart of the world. Jeremiah wrote this years ago, " 'For Israel is not forsaken, nor Judah, by his God, the LORD of hosts, though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel. Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance; He shall recompense her. Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations are deranged. Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies. The LORD has revealed our righteousness. Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.' " Get out of Babylon! It's the same message that will be delivered by this angel. You can read about it in Jeremiah 51. It's about to go up in smoke. So the first angel declares the gospel; the second angel, "Don't join the movement. Stay away from the liars. Don't embrace the lie. This has a very short shelf life."

And then there is one more angel to come who is now.....his message is, "The choice that you make has eternal consequences. The choice that you make has eternal consequences." Verse 9, "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.' Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. 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 third angel is a blunt guy. He's not beatin' around the bush. It's hard to read secondary messages. You can't really say, "I don't get it." Here, don't get this: take the mark, die, forever. One-way ticket. It is terrifying but extremely and painfully clear. Now you would think that if everyone hears this, they would immediately turn like, "Oh, that's the answer! I'm gettin' off this ship." But that's not the case and never has been because this is a war for the spiritual well-being of men. It's a spiritual battle. There're a lot of people that ignore the Bible. They ignore it today. You were someone that ignored it for years, and then somehow you opened your heart, and you heard the Lord. But it's clear that at least for some people, even in this final hour with the angels flying, the warning has no relevance at all to them. And that's the scary part. Jeremiah wrote in chapter 44:4-6, the LORD speaking, " 'I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, 'Oh, do not do this abominable thing that I hate!' But they did not listen or incline their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods. So My fury and My anger were poured out and kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.' " Talking about the Babylonian captivity.

Just look at how many people today ignore the warnings. So, this angel in flight comes because God is good. If God were not good, He wouldn't warn you; He'd just let you go the way of destruction. But even as the demand in the culture is, "Take my mark or die, worship the beast, put the number of his name on your forehead or on your right hand, if you do that," the angel says, "Gehenna," that final place of judgment and all of its horrors, "will be your future, and there will be no way out." The Antichrist will cry out, "Worship me or die," and God's angel will say, "Worship God and live forever, or die eternally without Him." So, the pressure is on to make a choice because this is the end, this is going to end, this is ending. There's no more tomorrow, if you will. God is so fair in His love that He continues to warn and to invite, to plead, to encourage. He's done everything short of twisting your arm and making you get saved just because He's the only One that can give you life.

And notice, in verse 10, the words "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God." You see, this is a personal issue. This is your responsibility. This is



upon everyone who's alive at that time. If they want to avoid the wrath of God - poured out in full strength - if they want to avoid the lake of fire, if they want to not go to Gehenna, which is awaiting for those who will not listen, they're going to have to turn to the Lord.

Frightening also, in verse 10, is that somehow the suffering in Gehenna will be seen by those in glory, and those in glory will somehow see those in heaven. In other words, there'll be an understanding, a perception, maybe a view of one to the other. When Jesus said, in Luke 13:28, "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out," you'll see that you didn't get there. You remember Abraham and Lazarus, there in Luke 16, that "being in torments, the rich man raised up his eyes in Hell, and he said, 'Abraham, can I go warn somebody else?' " But he was able to see, at least, and talk to Abraham and ask if he could somehow go to warn others about this place that existed that he certainly didn't want to be a part of. So, this place and the description of it are for those who have taken the mark.

Now this suffering does not describe the grave. Sometimes in the Bible you'll read "Hades." Hades was the grave, the place of the dead that wait for their judgment. In fact, when we get to the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the book, we will read that the Hell and the death gave up their dead, if you will (Revelation 20:13). So, this is the final judgment place. Right? This is Gehenna. Chapter 20 of Revelation, when we get there, will say, "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (verse 10). Chapter 20:14-15, "Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." Chapter 21:8 of Revelation, "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Scary place. Final judgment. Most horrible. And I suspect it's meant to be that way so you might say to yourself, "I don't think I want to be there. Whatever it takes, Lord, don't let me go there." Jesus said, in Luke 12:4-5, "I'll tell you who to fear. Don't fear those who can destroy your body and that's all they can do with you. Fear Him, rather, who has the power to cast you into Hell. I say, fear Him!" Well, this is at the end of the line, guys. This is as far as it goes, and the Lord - still with great love - warns, sends the gospel, warns about the

failure of the system that is in charge, and makes a very blunt prediction that, certainly, if you take that mark, if you made that call, if you bent your knee, if you embraced this false prophet, you have made a decision that will be eternal. I think Hell today for the souls that have died - of the unsaved that await judgment - is like being in the county jail. You're just waiting for your sentencing, and then you're going to be sent down the road. When you stand before the Judge, Jesus, one day, this'll be where you end up - the lake of fire - and the consequences are frightening. Eternal life or eternal suffering. You get a choice. But here, at the end of chapter 14, this is it, this is your choice. After this there is no choice, really. The choice has been made. I love the fact that God, even at this very late hour, His desire is to turn the people who listen for life, and He sends the angels to every nation, to every tongue, to every tribe, to every people and every language. One last chance. One last chance. One last hope. Refuse the liar. God isn't sending you to Hell; He's inviting you to life. He's not sending you to Hell; He's inviting you to Jesus. He wants to give you life, and only you can decide and turn away. You can step over the body of Jesus and get to Hell if you want, but you're going to have a.....He's not going to make that easy because He wants you to have life.

On the other hand notice, verses 12 and 13, there will be those who will embrace the message of the angels, will stand for Jesus, will refuse the mark, will probably have to die physically for their faith and trust in the Lord. Like I said, in chapter 20:4, there's a Scripture about "the souls of those who had been beheaded for their faith." It'll be brutal, but that's probably not the only way you die. But, "Here is," notice, "the patience of the saints." Those who believe in the Lord are going to see it through to the end. That's what you and I are going to do - see it through to the end. "I'll make you suffer," cries the Antichrist. "You'll make me a saint," answers the believer. "I'll persecute you to the grave," he yells. "You'll promote me to glory," says the one who trusts in the Lord. "I'll blast you!" "No. You'll bless me!" But what a hard way to live. It'll be a costly road. It'll be worth it, but I suspect that everything that we can read in the Scriptures - most of those who have to get into heaven this way will probably have to be killed. It's not true of all of them, obviously. There're those that God protects in Petra. I'm sure there are outliers who can get by. There are some nations that seem to get along better than others during this time. Maybe there're some political alliances. We don't know. But, in any event, "here is the patience of the saints."

Verse 13 is the " 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " I love that. "Absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). This is, by the way, the second of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation; that all of them describe the glorious condition of the believer. The first one was back in chapter 1:3, where we read, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near." That was the first "blessed is." Right? This is the second one. There're five more coming, so you can watch for them since they're all kind of squeezed at the back. But this is the second one of, like I said, seven. And here the declaration of Jesus to John is to write it down, and the Spirit joins in His agreement. And it says most will face martyrdom for their faith - to refuse the Antichrist and the dragon - but blessed are those who make that choice. That's the right way to go. Don't make the other. And I would say that's the right way to go today. But notice that the contrast for the choices is crystal clear, and God is warning that the easy way is the wrong way, the easy path is the wrong way. I would say that to you tonight - the easy way is the wrong way.

Years ago, when I was a young Christian, we were sure that the Lord was coming back. It was 1976. We were sure, though. We'd had a meeting and decided it could be any day now. So we took ads out in the LA Times every week that said, "If we're gone, here's a number to call and post office box you can go get information from," and we loaded this post office box in downtown LA with tracts about what do you do to survive the Tribulation. And we kept it up for about seven years. And then the Lord didn't come, so we quit. No. I guess we lost that vision, at least for a time. But it is amazing how many thousands of these tracts - people would actually go to the post office and try to get 'em. So I know that people think about it. We should be thinking about it. But the reason I brought that up - at the top of that flyer, of that tract, was this verse, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." So, be ready. Right?

So this is the third angel. He flies to talk about consequences. The first one, "Here's the gospel." The second one, "Don't join with the obvious." The third one is, "Here's the cost if you do. Choose wisely."

Finally, beginning in verse 14, John is then given by the Lord a vision of both a grain and a grape harvest to illustrate the final judgment that is about to run through the earth as Jesus returns, starting with the battle of Armageddon which is mentioned here but is described in great detail in chapter 19. So, here's one of

those things that look ahead. So I guess it's out of sequence, if you will, but it doesn't draw you backward, it just gives you kind of a cast forward and then will explain it when you get there a little bit later.

In the Scriptures, harvest illustrations are used both in terms of salvation - go out into the fields, they're ripe and ready for the harvest, they're white unto harvest - and they are, other times, used to explain judgment as, for example, the harvest of the wheat and the tares and the separation of one from the other by the Lord, the just from the unjust. The picture in all of them is God allows the seeds to grow until there is ripeness for judgment or ripeness for salvation, if you will. You might remember when the children of Israel would eventually be sent into the Promised Land. Way back in chapter 15 of *Genesis*, the LORD makes an indication that there would be at least four more generations to come before the sins of the Amorites who lived in the land would be full, and because it wasn't complete yet, the people were not being sent in yet (verses 15-16). So God was patiently waiting, but there comes a time of reaping, I guess, what you sow.

So, in verses 14-16, it is the reaping of the earth's harvest, and John says, "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," (in heaven) "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."

The first picture is certainly that of Jesus, the Son of Man, who's been given judgment, by the way, over all of the earth. You might remember John 5:26-27 where Jesus says, " 'For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.' " So this is Jesus, this is the time of His judgment, it is the reaping, if you will, of the earth. He was the Sower in Matthew 13. He is the Reaper with His angels now in Revelation 14. We are told that the time has come to reap, that the harvest is ready, that the earth is ripe. The word "ripe" in verse 15 (at the end, there, of verse 15) speaks of grain that is rotting, is drying, is overripe. It's almost like, "We waited just a little too long," but obviously that's not the case because the Lord's.....but the picture is He waits until the very end. Right? Until no one can complain and, "Oh, You should have waited a little longer."

No one can accuse God of rushing to judgment. He has waited until the bitter end. I think Paul used that example in Romans 2:4-6 when he said, "Do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds.' " So God is merciful, and He's gracious until He isn't, and there's only one time in history when He's not, and it's right here. Right?

So turn....even if you go look at the parable of the tares in Matthew 13:24-30, it says this, "Another parable He put forth to them, saying: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, "Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?" He said to them, "An enemy has done this." The servants said to him, "Do you want us then to go and gather them up?" But he said, "No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.' " " So, "Gather them to Me." And then if you jump ahead in Matthew 13:36-43, when the crowds went away, "Then Jesus sent the multitude away....and said to His disciples, 'Do you understand this?' and they said, 'Would You explain to us the parable of the tares?' And He said, 'He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear!' " So here the application in Revelation finds it's time for the tares to be bundled up. This is bundling time. Right? Exactly what we just read. It's an amazing picture, though, of our Lord with a sharp sickle in His hand, ready for the earth's harvest. He has done all that He can to grow the fruit, if you will, to nourish the seed that was sown.

In verse 17 down through verse 20, we are given the same picture, but this time the angels are included in the reaping of the grapes of wrath, really, where we read, in verse 17, "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.' 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." Here is the same picture, if you will. Right? The "great winepress of the Lord's wrath." The Lord will come to trample underfoot the dragon, the beast, the false prophet. In fact, if you read Revelation 19, beginning in verse 15, we will see in action what John is being shown in a vision before it takes place. But it's just right around the corner. So John gets a little taste of it, and he writes it down; this is soon to come.

Verse 20 is interesting, and we're going to get a lot more of this as we go forward to the end of this book. There will certainly be countless millions of people and kings and armies and nations that are directly involved in this final conflict with the Lord when He returns called the battle of Armageddon. The conflict battleground is laid out here. We will read it in a lot of other places as well. A furlong is about 600', so this is about 182 miles of land that this battle will take place; from the area of the Megiddo Valley in the central part of Israel, down the Jordan Valley south, past the Dead Sea twenty miles or so to an area called Bozrah. We only know that's the place because in prophecy we are told that that was the name of the place. So, we're not making that up.

The bloodshed in this valley will be enormous, some places 4' high. That's horrendous, but it tells you the fighting that is taking place and the defiance of man to the very end. Here's what Isaiah wrote of this time, " 'The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made overflowing with fatness, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. The wild oxen shall come down with them, and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust saturated with fatness.' For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (Isaiah 34:6-8).

And Isaiah will write, in chapter 63:1-6, "Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? - 'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? 'I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, and I wondered that there was no one to uphold; therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; and My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, made them drunk in My fury, and brought down their strength to the earth.' " Those are pretty powerful words, but they accurately describe what you read here, in verse 20, in this final gathering together of the people against the Lord. The figure of a grape press is pretty fitting.

We have a tremendous amount of information and insight into this battle from most of the Old Testament prophets. Old Testament prophecy, for the most part, has a near-term fulfillment. It might be written 50, 100, 200 years before something takes place, but there are many of these that have a long-term fulfillment, where you look beyond to the last days as the Lord describes them here. Here's what Joel wrote about this time. He wrote this (Joel 3:9-21), "Proclaim this among the nations: "Prepare for war! Wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am strong.' Assemble and come, all you nations, and gather together all around. Cause Your might ones to go down there, O LORD. Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;" " (same as Megiddo) " 'For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow - for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness. The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again. And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from

the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Acacias. Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted for the LORD dwells in Zion." Some pretty powerful words, but they're right where you're at in these verses right here. This is ultimately the fulfillment of this battle. So from Megiddo - you can look it up in your Israel map - to Bozrah, millions of people gathered in this Rift Valley ready for war, and the armies of the world will stand in their final conflict with the Lord who is coming to rule and reign.

Daniel will tell us - and we're not going to go over it tonight, but I'll just throw it at you, and you can think about it, but we will document it for you in a couple of weeks to come - that the Antichrist will be leading, politically now, a combined Western force on an invasion into Africa through Egypt at this time; like he's defending his policies and all. And he is about to attack Ethiopia when he hears about the invasion from forces to the east of the Euphrates that are mobilizing in and against the land of Israel. And rather than letting that take place, he stops his incursion; he turns around to go to take on this force. In his fury, the Antichrist returns, and he meets these forces from the East at Megiddo. The fighting is terrible. There is already upheaval in this one world government, if you will. But at this time, Jesus will continue to overthrow all that is gathered, and verse 20 will become a reality, and the Lord.....with just a word from His mouth, the war will be over. And many will die. But it's the end! Come on. Don't go there!

Just remember that before this ever takes place, God has warned over and over and over again, and man has willingly decided to turn and to resist God's call. And if you come to the end of your life tonight resisting God's call, there can be no forgiveness for you. It's not His choice. It's yours. The door is open. All that's necessary to be saved has been done. Nothing more can be done. I thank the Lord He saved us and that we are, as a body, just committed to Him. And there's a world outside these doors that needs to know Jesus, and they should be told before it's too late. But it isn't like God hid His intentions or His plans or His future.

Next week, hardest chapter in the book; not hard to understand, just hard to stomach, hard to embrace, as the Lord empties heaven and says, "Leave Me alone until this is over." And He takes this last step of judgments by Himself. It's hard



to embrace. I can't believe the Lord.....He has to come to this at some point, but I'm sure this is probably not His favorite chapter either. But a couple chapters ahead, it will be. So read chapter 15. It's short but to the point. And then it's the prelude to the judgments that we find in one chapter, chapter 16, before we get some more explanations, and then the Lord comes. Hang in here now. You don't want to leave before the Lord comes. (Pastor Jack laughs) Amen? All right.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
August 9, 2021