

LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION

By

H. A. Ironside, Litt.D.

*Author of Notes On Jeremiah and Lamentations; Notes On Ezekiel the Prophet;
Lectures On Daniel the Prophet; Notes On the Minor Prophets. etc., etc.*

Copyright © 1919

edited for 3BSB by Baptist Bible Believer in the spirit of the Colportage Ministry of a century ago

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HARVEST AND VINTAGE

(Lecture 14)

THIS 14th chapter forms a distinct section of the Book. It consists of one vision divided into six parts, and evidently has to do with the closing up of the Great Tribulation and the introduction of the kingdom. It is as though God would give to John, and to us, a heartening view of the consummation, ere depicting the closing trials in detail which will occupy the last half of the tribulation period.

The first part of the vision is that of the Lamb on Mt. Sion. John tells us,

“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living ones, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God” (14:1-5).

This is a beautiful little prophetic picture, quite complete in itself. It sets forth that which is to take place after the desolations of Israel are ended, and the glory is dawning in the land where Jesus lived and died and rose again, and to which He is coming back in person.

Observe, to begin with, that Mt. Sion is on the earth. The vision has to do with the return of the Lamb to the city that once rejected Him.

It is a very common thing for Bible readers to spiritualize the various localities mentioned in the Bible. Thus Jerusalem, Mt. Sion, and Israel are all made to mean the church, or possibly, even heaven itself, whereas they have no such application.

When God says Israel, He means Israel. When He speaks of Jerusalem He does not intend us to understand that either heaven or the church is in view; and Mt. Sion is that Mt. Sion which David first set apart to God, and is a distinct locality to this day in the land of Palestine, within the limits of the city of Jerusalem.

It is a place on earth, not in heaven, and there the Lord Jesus Christ is going to gather the Israelitish remnant to Himself, when He comes to set up His kingdom. For, although many have taught the contrary, I have no question in my own mind but that the 144,000 of this chapter are the very same as the sealed 144,000 of chapter 7. In the earlier chapter John saw them sealed before the Great Tribulation began; God had pledged Himself to protect them. No matter how vindictively their enemies might assail them, He had set His own mark upon them, and He had promised to bring them safely through those tempestuous and difficult days. Now, in chapter 14, we see that same company gathered about the Lamb on Mt. Sion, the firstfruits of the kingdom age.

The Lord reveals His Father's Name to them; the seal of the living God upon their foreheads is, in fact, this blessed revelation. They know God as Father, and rejoice in His protecting care and tender love. In heaven there are those who rejoice with them in a very special way, and these are distinguished from the elders, who represent, as we have already seen, the entire priestly company caught up at the rapture. But, as the Great Tribulation goes on, Jewish believers, who will be martyred because of their faith, will also join that heavenly throng. and so we are told that John heard **“a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; the voice of harpers harping with their harps.”**

These **“sing, as it were, a new song before the throne, and before the living ones and the elders, and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.”**

These in heaven and those on earth will have passed through the same experiences in measure. There will be a sympathetic cord struck, to which both respond. The new song is, of course, here, as elsewhere, the song of redemption.

The company on Mt. Sion are next described as undefiled, a virgin band, who have kept themselves from the uncleanness everywhere prevailing in those fearful days. It is to be their hallowed privilege to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, for they are described as being redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. Thus we have a first fruits of the kingdom age, even as our Lord Himself is described as the first fruits of the present dispensation, and His church, associated with Him, is **“a kind of first fruits of His creatures.”**

The blessing of Psalm 32 pronounced upon the man in whom is no guile, the blessing that our Lord pronounced upon Nathanael, is the portion of this special company.

A guileless man is not a sinless man; he is one who has nothing to hide. When sin is all confessed and judged in the presence of God, guile is absent. And so this guileless company are described as without fault before the throne of God; not, indeed, that they appear there in any righteousness of their own, but saved by the same precious blood that to-day makes faultless every believer in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second section is that of the everlasting gospel, as recorded in verses 6 and 7.

“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, 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.”

This everlasting gospel is not to be distinguished from the gospel that has been proclaimed throughout the centuries. In truth, the very fact that it is called “**everlasting**” shows that it is identical with the gospel as proclaimed from the beginning.

It is the good news, of all the ages, that God is sovereign, and man’s happiness consists in recognizing His authority. To this blessed fact is added, in the present dispensation, the full truth of the gospel of the grace of God. The gospel of the kingdom is but another aspect of this same news from heaven, emphasizing particularly the Lordship of Christ. There can only be one gospel, for the apostle tells us, **“Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”**

But that one gospel has different phases.

In the epistle to the Galatians Paul speaks of **“the gospel of the circumcision”** and the **“gospel of the uncircumcision”** - the same gospel, but presented in one way to the Jews and another to the Gentiles. When the Lord was here on earth ministering, as also was John the Baptist, they preached the gospel of the kingdom; but men rejected the kingdom, and so, for the time being, the kingdom is in abeyance. This is the day of the church.

The Son of Man is likened unto a man who has gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. When the word is given by the Father He will descend to take the kingdom; to be proclaimed as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Throughout the present dispensation He is taking out from among both Jews and Gentiles all who believe on His name, and unites them into the one body, the church. After the church has gone, there will not be a Christian left on earth. Then it is that God is going to commence again to work among the Jews, and will send them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom unto the ends of the earth.

Finally, we have the very last phase of that gospel, immediately preceding His coming. It is the final call for the guilty nations to prostrate themselves in the dust, and pay homage to their Creator. It is mercy indeed, to God’s creatures everywhere, that in that hour of judgment, before the last blow falls, the call will still go forth to men everywhere to own the claims of the Omnipotent One whose mercies have been rejected so long.

We do not hear, however, of any response, at least not in this chapter, but Scripture elsewhere warrants the thought that many, who had never previously heard and rejected the gospel, will, in that day, open their hearts to the message and repent, and thus be led to welcome the King.

The third section of the vision is that of verse 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.”

Babylon is more fully described for us in chapters 17 and 18, but we have to defer any detailed exposition of this subject until a later lecture, except to say that just as Babylon of old was the fountainhead of idolatry, so is mystic Babylon to-day the mother of all false religious teaching in Christianity. In the time of the end it will be headed up in one great false church - that worldly church, which has proved so unworthy and false to her Lord, is to be broken absolutely to pieces, to be utterly destroyed. I have no doubt that all over the world there will then be such scenes as are now going on in Russia, with men crying, “No God; no church.”

I know that many religious leaders at the present time are very enthusiastic about what they call “the reunion of Christendom,” but that reunion will simply be a great federation of Christless churches, forming the most powerful religious association that has ever been known in this world Catholic, Greek, Protestant, and all other systems united into one - after the true believers have gone. For a time, this great institution will dominate everything, until men will say at last, “What is the use of a church like this; why not destroy the whole thing and be done with it once and for all?” And so they will destroy it throughout the world, as they once destroyed it in France, and as they are now destroying it in Russia.

Would that professed preachers of the gospel realized, ere it is too late, that, when men take up religion in which there is no real conversion, and which has no place for the work of the Holy Spirit, the whole thing will soon go on the rocks. In spite of the latitudinarianism of the times in which we live, it is still blessedly true that when faithful men preach the genuine old-time gospel of the grace of God in power, people are willing to go and hear.

Speaking generally, even unsaved men and women have more respect for the old, old story of redeeming love than they have for these modern shams. When a man comes to the place where he no longer believes in the Bible, in the blood of Christ, in regeneration, he says to himself, “What a fool I am, paying money to keep up the church. I had better pay it to a lodge or a club. I can get more out of something like that than I can get out of the church.” Have you ever noticed that Unitarianism has never been a financial success? Therefore when a preacher, in one of our orthodox churches comes to this, that he no longer believes in orthodoxy, you will observe that generally he holds on to his position in the orthodox institution as long as he can. Loaves and fishes are commoner there, after all, than in the heretical systems that are languishing all about us. And so we can understand how it will be in the Great Tribulation. Babylon, for a while, will dominate everything. The head of the nations will be the head of the church. The Antichrist will be supreme in religious matters; but when Babylon falls, what a tremendous smash-up there is going to be!

The next section gives us the third angel's message. We read in verses 9 to 13,

“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, 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: 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. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. 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.”

What a solemn thing this is! A message from heaven declaring that those who turn away from the true God, who reject His Word, who instead worship the Beast and his image, will have to drink the very dregs of the cup of God's wrath.

I need not turn aside to animadvert upon the absurd interpretation given to this vision by the Seventh-Day Adventists. But they tell us that the third angel's message is the Sabbath message, and that worshipping the Beast and receiving his mark consists in recognizing the holiness of the first day of the week.

What can be the mental condition, not to speak of the moral state, of a man or woman who can conceive of a God of love and grace pouring out His wrath upon men because, with earnest desire to glorify Him, they keep the resurrection day, which from the earliest period of church history has been known as the Lord's day? Surely, one must have lost all sense of moral values to advocate a theory so absurd, even though they were mistaken as to the proper day to hallow. But when one realizes that the judgment pronounced here is the doom of apostasy, for which, in retributive judgment, God will press the cup of His wrath to the lips of those who have refused the cup of salvation, all is perfectly clear.

Nor is there any evidence that that judgment will come to an end, for verse 11 distinctly says, **“The smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever 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.”**

It will indeed require courage of a very high order to stand up against all that apostate condition, and firmly hold to the truth of God as then revealed.

And so we are told in verse 12, **“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”**

This is strikingly in line with what we have been pointing out, that these converts will be Jewish believers.

They keep the commandments of God, as made known in the Old Testament, and yet the faith of Jesus as declared in the New.

Their part is not in the body of Christ: that glorious truth of the present dispensation is not for them, but they will have learned, at last, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, who was rejected by their nation when He came in grace, but coming again in mighty power; and so they will bring forth fruits meet for repentance, manifested by their pious, godly lives and desire to glorify the One their nation rejected.

And now we come to a very striking word in verse 13. Notice that little word “**henceforth.**”

You have often heard this verse used in connection with funerals in the present dispensation, and I do not question that it may be so used, and very blessedly too; but its full application refers to a coming day.

A voice from heaven says, “**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.**”

The point, I take it, is this: the darkest part of the Great Tribulation is still before them.

The storm-clouds, heavy with judgment, may break at any moment; but, immediately following, the kingdom is to be set up. Those who pass through the tribulation will enter into the kingdom on earth. Those who die during its course will have their part in the heavenly kingdom, and so a special blessing will be theirs: in other words, from that point on it will really be better to die than to live. They will rest from their labors, be spared further tribulation on the earth, and shall have their place with their Lord in heaven, which will be far better than the highest place in the kingdom here on earth, glorious as that will be.

And now let me press a question upon my hearers, whether saved or unsaved.

You also must leave this scene shortly; what kind of works are going to follow you? If saved, what have you been doing for the Lord? If unsaved, oh then, I beg you remember, your sins will follow after you - those sins you have been trying to forget; those sins from which you have fled; those sins for which, in your folly, you thought you could atone by effort of your own.

When you stand up, at last, poor, and naked, and miserable, before the great white throne, you will find all your sins there, and they will fasten upon you like the hell-hounds that they really are, and drag you down to the lake of fire. Do not, I beseech you, turn away from this solemn truth.

The blood of Christ alone can wash you from all those sins, and then, as a believer in the Lord Jesus, you can live for Him in this scene, and your works will follow you to heaven, for all that is done for Christ will abide for eternity.

The fifth part of the vision is that of the harvest, and a most solemn one it is, as recorded in verses 14 to 16.

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for Thee to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.”

You will remember that our Lord Jesus spoke about the harvest, and He declared that it is the end of the age, the time when the wicked are going to be separated from the just, when He is going to gather the wheat into His garner, but burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable. This is what you have here: it is discriminating judgment.

The earth is reaped: everything that is of God, the Son of Man will claim for Himself; all that is contrary will be given up to judgment. Observe that it is the Son of Man who sits upon the cloud and directs the reapers. All judgment is committed unto the Son: the One who once hung on Calvary’s cross is the same blessed person who is coming to execute judgment.

This is, I take it, the same, in nature, as the judgment in Matthew 25. It is pre-millennial, and not, like the judgment of the great white throne, post-millennial. Jesus is coming back to the world that crucified Him, and He is going to gather for His kingdom, out of all nations, those who have heeded His message and cared for His messengers; but all who have heard His gospel, only to reject it, will be given up to judgment.

The last part of the vision is that of the vintage. It is very different from the harvest, in that the harvest is, as we have just seen, discriminatory, while the vintage is unsparing judgment.

“And 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, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.”

The vintage has to do with the vine - the vine of the earth - and this vine is apostate Israel.

We are familiar with the figure, as used in regard to Israel in the Old Testament. Isaiah uses it, and in Hosea we hear the Lord saying, **“Israel is an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself.”** The same figure is used in Psalm 80 and 81. When our Lord was here He could say, **“I am the true vine.”** He was the only one in Israel bearing good fruit; and all who accept His message become branches in the living vine.

By and by, the vine is going to be replanted in Palestine. In fact, we may go further and say, The vine is being replanted in Palestine. The Jews are going back to their own land; it stirs one’s soul as Scripture is being fulfilled before our eyes. They are being replanted in their own vineyard, but replanted for what? For the vintage of the wrath of God.

A remnant will be gathered out, separated to the Lord, but the rest will be given up to unsparing judgment in the time of Jacob's trouble. Fleshly Israel, the vine of the earth, can produce no fruit for God. But, in that day of great distress, the clusters of the vine of the earth will be cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

And we are told the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. This is said to be the actual length of the land of Palestine. The picture is that of the entire land drenched in blood up to the horse bridles. What will the reality be? O Lord, how long?

Thank God, there are brighter things ahead. In fact, the best days for Israel, and the whole earth, lie beyond that awful scene of wrath and carnage. But we need to remember that the people of the Jews brought their judgment upon their own heads by refusing the Prince of Peace when He came in grace to deliver them. In Pilate's judgment hall they cried, "**His blood be on us and on our children.**"

How dreadfully has this fearful imprecation been answered by a just God the centuries bear witness. The scene depicted in these closing verses of the present chapter shows that a more dreadful fulfilment is yet in the future.

Immanuel's land, once stained with His own precious blood, will be red with the gore of those who reject Him, and who, even in that day, when their own Scriptures will be so marvelously fulfilled before their very eyes, will still refuse Him and own instead the unholy claims of the Antichrist. Of old, they chose Barabbas in place of Jesus which is called Christ. Unchanged in spirit to the very end, they will prefer the "**son of perdition**" to the Son of God, and thus bring upon themselves swift destruction.

~ end of chapter 16 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
