

The Grace of Wrath

Studies in the Revelation of Jesus Christ

Text

Chapter 14:1-20

Topic

In the middle of the Tribulation, God sends an angel into the earth's atmosphere to preach the everlasting Gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people

Title

"Angels in the Atmosfield"

Introduction

Go for it... Go for broke... Pull out all the stops... Go all out.

They are the expressions we use to describe extraordinary effort put into some task.

Racer Jeff Gordon once said, "When you've got the Daytona 500 out there at stake and everything riding on the line, guys **go for it**, and the guys that **go for it** are the ones that are either going to win, or they're going to wreck."

Pro surfer Bethany Hamilton, who survived a shark attack but lost her arm, said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, and I believe He gave me the passion and determination to continue surfing... I had to **go for it.**"

Chapter fourteen of the Revelation of Jesus Christ has a "go for it" spirit. It depicts the extraordinary effort by God in the seven-year Tribulation to reach men with the Gospel before it's too late for them to make a decision.

1. First we see God "go all out" from the very start of the Tribulation by raising-up and sending-out 144,000 Jewish evangelists to preach the Gospel.
2. Second we see God "pull out all the stops" mid-Trib by dispatching an angel into earth's atmosphere "to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people..."

It reminds us, too, that when it comes to Jesus Christ, we all have a decision to make; and that our decision determines our eternal destiny.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Gospel Demands That You Make A Decision, and #2 The Lord Defers To The Decision That You Make.

#1 The Gospel Demands That You Make A Decision

(v1-13)

My favorite thought about the Revelation of Jesus Christ, this time through it, is that, on every page, God is portrayed as calling out to sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to eternal life.

Sure, it's intense; but that's because the time to repent of sin, and be saved, is so short, and running out.

Verses one through five both take us back to the very *beginning* of the seven years, and they show us the *end* of those years.

Rev 14:1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads.

This takes us back because, as the Tribulation began, we saw, in chapter seven, God choose and commission these 144,000 Jews to go around the world preaching the Gospel. They are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel.

They were sealed by God and rendered untouchable by their enemies. Here we see them, safe and sound, at the very end of the seven years, having accomplished their task.

“Lamb” is John's favorite name for Jesus in this book. He's the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

Mount Zion is on earth. This is an earthly scene. It is the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the seven years. There the 144,000 will gather to Him and then accompany Him into the Millennial Kingdom on the earth.

Rev 14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps.

"Harps" are really instruments that we would call guitars.

These sounds coming “from Heaven” will be the soundtrack for the singing of verse three.

Think of certain movies you love, and you'll realize the soundtrack played an extremely important role telling the story.

Rev 14:3 They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

We've seen these characters "before the throne," before:

- The "four living creatures" are a type of angel, whose joy and job it is to worship the Lord day and night.
- The "elders" are the church - resurrected and raptured and safe in Heaven prior to the Tribulation.

Don't the 144,000 need to be in Heaven to be singing "before the throne?" *No.* Whenever we sing, isn't it to God? Aren't we before Him? Doesn't He hear it before His throne?

The 144,000 are on the earth with Jesus, on Mount Zion, at His Second Coming. Heaven is providing a live soundtrack for a song they sing.

It's a "new song." God is preparing a lot of new music for the return of Jesus.

As for our evangelists, "no one could learn that song" except them. They were "redeemed from the earth," saved by grace through faith, as is always the case. But it's clear they are a very distinct, very unique group, among all those who are saved.

Rev 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins...

The fact they “were not defiled with women” seems to argue for their being men.

As to sexual activity they are said to be “virgins.” Why? Think about it: These guys are untouchable by the forces of evil but that would not extend to a wife and family. They are better off without those relationships, in the Tribulation.

The Bible does not teach celibacy as being more spiritual - only that at certain times it is preferable.

It is possible to relate these words to spiritual purity as well, letting us know that these guys avoid all spiritual fornication. But I think the more literal interpretation is intended.

Rev 14:4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

When you read that “they follow the Lamb wherever He goes” it looks forward *after* the Second Coming to their work in the kingdom on the earth Jesus will establish.

Talk about a posse.

“These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” The firstfruits are always the promise of a greater harvest. This is one confirmation that they are God's evangelists. They get saved, and as they go through the Tribulation, God uses them to save multitudes.

Rev 14:5 And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

“Deceit” is a word that can be associated with idols and idolatry. The reign of the antichrist is characterized by lies and idolatry. In fact, we read in Second Thessalonians that there is something called “the lie” that people who follow the antichrist will believe (2:11).

The 144,000 never waver. There is no compromise at all in them. Not only do they all make it through to the end, they do so without being broken by the pressures exerted on them.

The 144,000 are also said to be “without fault.” It could be translated “without blemish.” Jews were familiar with the phrase as describing the quality of the sacrifices that were worthy of being brought to God.

There, standing with the Lamb of God Who was without blemish in His sacrifice on the Cross, are 144,000 followers without blemish.

John wrote these things after the destruction of the Temple in 70AD. The Jews could no longer offer their sacrifices - their lambs - to God. But they didn't need to, because Jesus was the last Lamb, and by faith in Him, the Jews could be given His righteousness, to be like Him.

In the middle of the Tribulation, things will get much more intense for those who dwell on the earth. We saw, in chapter thirteen, the man we call the antichrist will be assassinated, but returned to life. We also saw that he would be empowered by Satan.

Although he can't touch the 144,000, he **is** given power to kill two other powerful witnesses. He has a sidekick who can perform miracles and signs and wonders, and who demands everyone worship the antichrist. If they refuse, they will first be cut-off from society, then cut-down.

At the precise moment when the greatest pressure is on for lost men and women to make the decision that would forfeit their souls to the devil, God dispatches an angel with the Gospel.

Rev 14:6 Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people -

Rev 14:7 saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

Every now and then there is some atmospheric event that gets us out and looking up at the sky. Mid-tribulation, people will tell you to go outside and look up because an angel is flying by, talking from the sky.

Talk about pulling out all the stops, this is **it** when it comes to Gospel preaching. "Every nation, tribe, tongue, and people," meaning EVERYONE, will hear the warning and be invited to receive the Lord as their Savior.

Have you ever heard that the Gospel must be preached to the whole world before Jesus can return? It's true - with regards to His Second Coming. The Gospel will be preached to the whole world by this angel.

The Gospel does not, and most likely will not, be preached to the whole world prior to the resurrection and rapture of the church.

The Gospel is called "the everlasting Gospel." That's because of the particular aspects of it that the angel emphasizes, that "the hour of His judgment has come."

This is their last opportunity to decide. Everlasting life in Heaven or in Hell is always on the line, but in the middle of the Tribulation it will be on the line as never before, because the clock is ticking.

Rev 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."

This next angel looks ahead to the fall and destruction of a literal city of Babylon that will exist in the Tribulation. There is also going to be a false religious system called Babylon. We'll read all about them and their fall in chapters seventeen and eighteen.

The city and the system make "all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." The world wants to get you drunk with its excesses so you will commit spiritual fornication. One aspect of being drunk is you are desensitized to things that would normally be off limits. You feel uninhibited. The world gluts us so that things that we would once have considered off limits don't seem so bad - or even seem good.

Rev 14:9 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,

Rev 14:10 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.

Rev 14:11 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."

Any concern about involuntarily taking the mark of the beast and being lost forever without realizing it should be alleviated by these verses. Whatever the mark turns out to be, you must consciously choose to worship or to not worship the antichrist. You will first be warned by an angel declaring these words from the sky in clear language you can understand.

This is why having a Social Security number, or a credit card, or a national ID card, or even having an implanted microchip, do not bother me in the least. We won't be on earth when the antichrist demands worship. It won't be until mid-trib, three and one half years into it. I will have been resurrected or raptured along with all the believers of the church age.

If you want to oppose microchipping, do it on the basis of privacy issues. It's not a biblical problem, really. Technology is *not* the mark.

Eternal conscious torment is (sadly) taught in the Bible. I wish it wasn't. There awaits the devil and fallen angels, the antichrist and his false prophet, an eternal place of torment with fire and brimstone. It was created especially for them. But it will be the eternal destination of all those humans who worship the antichrist after being forewarned. It will be the address of all those who die without receiving Jesus.

Rev 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Rev 14:13 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."

There *will* be those who refuse the mark. Their “patience” means their willingness to endure whatever earthly consequences come their way. For multitudes, it will be martyrdom. They will be “the dead who die in the Lord” from that decision on.

They will choose Heaven over earth and, thus, they will find eternal “rest from their labors.” It will be difficult to be on the earth without the mark. Once safe in Heaven, “their works will follow them.” The Lord will reward them with those things that cannot corrupt or be taken away.

At the end of verse thirteen you’re told that the Holy Spirit speaks. His words are what you’d expect Him to say as the Comforter. Things are gonna be tough, but it’s all going to be great in the end. Hang in there; live for Jesus, live for eternity.

We tend to think of making a decision to follow Jesus as a one-time event that we can point to in our past, saving us for eternity from eternal conscious torment. True; but if you're saved, **you are to go on deciding to follow Jesus day-by-day.**

The world and the devil exerts pressure upon what the Bible calls your flesh. It's a constant struggle this side of Heaven. You are told to "count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). It's a choice; you decide.

Likewise you are told "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). It's a choice, because you are encouraged to ask, seek, and knock for the Spirit in greater measure (Luke 11:9-13).

At the end of our service, we will give you opportunity to spend time with the Lord, and to make those kinds of decisions - especially asking Him to fill you with His Spirit. Take full advantage of it.

#2 The Lord Defers To The Decision That You Make

(v14-20)

I like movie trailers (except that they tend to show too much). In many cases they are better than the movie.

Our verses at the end of chapter fourteen are like a trailer for the coming Battle of Armageddon that occurs at the end of the seven year Tribulation.

Jesus and His holy angels are depicted as harvesters coming to harvest souls with their sickles in hand. The verses describe this harvest of mankind by comparing it first to a harvest of grain and then to a harvest of grapes. Each focuses on a particular aspect of the final harvest of judgment at the second coming of Jesus.

- The harvest of grain focuses on the separating of believers from nonbelievers.
- The harvest of grapes focuses on the crushing of the armies gathered against the Lord at His Second Coming.

Revelation 14:14 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.

Jesus once said of Himself that the Son of Man shall be seen coming upon the clouds of Heaven (Matthew 24:30). He said that He would send His angels to gather the elect (Matthew 24:31).

The reaper sickle is the most common symbol known to mankind to represent death. Faithfully carried by the Grim Reaper, by death personified, it has been widely depicted in everything from movies and games to religious scripture and mythology.

Not the Grim Reaper but angels will assist Jesus by gathering the human race and by separating believers from nonbelievers.

- Believers will live on into the Kingdom of Heaven on earth that Jesus establishes for one thousand years.
- Nonbelievers are reaped and thus lost for eternity having rejected God's many offers of salvation.

Revelation 14:15 And another angel came out of the temple, 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."

It's an announcement. All of this plays out like a stage production with perfect timing.

The particular words chosen describe overripe grain. Wheat and tares look alike; they are left to over ripen because the grain heads of wheat will eventually bow down whereas the tares remain erect.

The harvest of grain is describing the process of separating believers and nonbelievers at the return of Jesus.

In Matthew twenty-five this same event is described as separating the sheep from the goats.

- The wheat or sheep represents *believers* who have survived the Tribulation; they will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven on earth as its first citizens.
- The tares or the goats represent *nonbelievers* who have survived the Tribulation; they will be cast into Hades to await their final judgment at the end of the one thousand year Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Revelation 14:16 So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

You see why God goes to such extraordinary lengths to reach out with the Gospel during the final seven years. The sickle is about to be wielded.

The harvest of souls is next compared to a harvest of grapes.

Revelation 14:17 Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

If you're counting, this is the fifth angel in this chapter. This harvest is describing the events immediately upon the return of Jesus to the earth, before He sits and judges between sheep and goats, the wheat and tares. The armies of the world will be gathered together to oppose the Lord in the Valley of Megiddo; it's what the Bible calls the Battle of Armageddon. Jesus will easily overcome His enemies. Those who die in this harvest will die in their sins and be lost for eternity.

Revelation 14:18 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."

“Power over fire” probably means this is the same angel which is mentioned in chapters eight and nine who stands by the altar of burnt-offering. He has authority over its fire to offer the incense to God that represents the prayers of the saints.

The coming forth of this angel is the answer to the prayers of the Tribulation martyrs.

Revelation 14:19 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.

A “winepress” was a large vat or trough where grapes were collected and then crushed. The juice flowed out of a duct that led into a large holding vat. The winepress is often used in the Bible as a symbol of God's wrath and judgment against sin. It's an illustration for the punishing, crushing judgment at the Second Coming of Jesus.

Revelation 14:20 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.

The “city” is Jerusalem. Blood from the human armies Jesus defeats at His Second Coming might be pooled as high as a horses bridle for about 180 miles.

I say “might be” because some scholars suggest that the verse only means blood will spatter as high as a horse's bridle. Either way this is a terrible, bloody battle in which multiplied thousands are killed.

People object to the mention of horses since we live in such an advanced technological age with sophisticated weapons of war, like unmanned drones. Well, a lot of stuff will be wiped-out by the judgments of the Tribulation. I have no problem believing that horses will again be used in battle at Armageddon.

Remember, too, that Jesus returns on a great white horse and we, the church, return with him on horses.

The overripe aspect of this final harvest is to remind you that throughout history, and especially in the Tribulation, God is striving with sinners, seeking them to save them.

Both believers and nonbelievers complain God isn't doing enough to curtail evil in the world. God admits that the world is overripe for judgment. He's waiting, waiting, waiting for more to be saved, because the alternative is so drastic; so final; so tragic.

One day His longsuffering must end. It will be too late to repent and believe on the Lord.

Have you made that initial decision - to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? The Lord does all He can to reach you, sending the Holy Spirit to operate on your heart, by grace, to free your will.

But you must decide, and **He will defer to your decision**, because love like that which was shown you on the Cross cannot be forced upon you. It must be received freely, as a gift.

You can receive Jesus any time.

You can receive Him **right now**.