

Revelation 14:6-20 “The Harvest of Humanity”
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The Harvest Moon is the full moon that occurs nearest to the autumnal equinox. Typically occurring in September although it can appear as late as October. “For several evenings, the moonrise comes soon after sunset. This results in an abundance of bright moonlight early in the evening, which was a traditional aide to farmers and crews harvesting their summer-grown crops. Hence, it’s called the “Harvest” Moon! (Almanac). In our text today, there is a harvest. The harvest of humanity at the eschatological equinox. When we examine the text, we learn that *because God will execute justice, then we should believe in Christ that we might not perish.*

Context

Chapter 14 must be read in view of chapter 13. It is part of the same vision which reveals how Satan seeks to destroy the Church, attack Christians. Two methods depicted as two characters in the *Revelation*. The beast from the sea. The beast from the earth. The first beast is a global God-hating government. The sum total of evil government hell-bent on terrorizing the followers of Christ. At whose head is antichrist previewed by Nero, Domitian, Xi Jinping. The second beast, a.k.a., the false prophet is one who prophesies falsely. Prophesying a false narrative, a false worldview which props-up the terror state, popularizing the regime. (1) An anti-god government used to persecute Christians and (2) a *Zeitgeist* false narrative used to deceive the culture into becoming intolerant of Christianity, a “spirit of the age” censorship-cancel-culture hell-bent on canceling the Church.

Does the sinister scheme work? Chapter 14 answers with an emphatic, No! Two ways: Redemption and judgment. The redemption of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion on a new earth. The number 144,000 symbolizes the totality of God’s people. The complete number of God’s people redeemed by the Lamb throughout time from both Jews and Gentiles. Not one is missing, not one lost. They are all standing with the Lamb as more than conquerors. Here is the Church triumphant, victorious. The blessed mountain view is set in stark contrast with the rest of the chapter. The judgment that falls upon the unbelieving world. The judgment unfolds in two ways. The announcement of judgment in vv. 6-13. The execution of judgment in vv. 14-20.

The Announcement of Judgement

The announcement of judgment consists of three proclamations given by three angels. All interrelated, progressive. The angels fly through the air and circle the earth. Broadcasting the message in every language to every nation. The first proclamation. Verse 7, *And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come, and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."* Here we are back to the very meaning of life. The purpose of human existence. To fear God, to revere Him, to acknowledge Him and give Him glory by worshipping Him and adoring Him and marveling at His eternal being, power, wisdom. Of all times, why now the urgency for this command?

Because the hour of His judgment has come. Now is the exact time for judgment. Immediate judgment. This doesn't mean that God's judgments haven't been seen in history. To the contrary, they are revealed in the seven seals, seven trumpets. But now is the time of *final* judgment, the end of the world as we know it, as depicted by the reaping of the harvest of humanity.

The second proclamation. *Verse 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 proclamation is a little surprising. For thus far there has been no mention of Babylon the Harlot. But she is totally identifiable to John's original audience. In the Old Testament, Babylon is the ancient Mesopotamian city to which the people of God are taken captive. The capital of a world empire. The place of persecution. Signaling what city in the 1st century? Rome. The capital of an empire where the people of God are persecuted. In the first century, Babylon is codeword for Rome (1 Pet. 5:13). Babylon is a symbol of Rome and all that the godless city represents. Greed, power, corruption, sexual immorality. Babylon symbolizes unrestrained paganism, utter worldliness. Here pictured as the great harlot who makes the nations drunk with the maddening wine of her sexual immorality. Babylon is the Bar-Babe of utter worldliness who seduces the nations of the earth with her sexuality, sensuality. This mention of Babylon serves as a preview of what is to come in chapters 17-19. In depth coverage of the judgment of Babylon the Bar-Babe, the whore of the earth and mother of whores.

Third proclamation (1st, the *hour* of judgment, the immediacy. 2nd, the downfall of seductive worldliness, sensual paganism). 3rd, the vivid portrayal of torment. *Verse 9, And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented.* This torment is directed at those who wear the mark of the beast which takes us back to chapter 13. The beast. The global government. 13:3...and the *whole world marveled as they followed the beast.* 13:4...*For who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?* The whole world marvels over this new administration. For the global government ushers a utopia on earth. World peace. War over. Poverty ended. Crime eliminated. COVID cured. Alternative fuels. Happiness for humanity. But a trying time for Christians. The *Zeitgeist*-cancel culture cancels the church. *Causing those who do not worship the image of the beast to be slain (13:15).* Therefore everyone is required to receive the mark of the beast. *no one can buy or sell unless he had the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of his name (Rev 13:17).* Chapter 14 challenges with a counter-warning, counterquestion. Chapter 13 those who don't wear the mark of the beast suffer the wrath of the beast. Chapter 14 counterquestions, "What happens to those who *do* wear the mark of the beast?" They suffer the wrath of God. Eternal torment, eternal damnation.

The Reality of Hell

So-called church growth experts warn that moderns cannot tolerate the doctrine of hell. But that is not a modern phenomenon only which serves to show that church growth experts are not experts in church history. The doctrine of hell is offensive to human autonomy. Offensive to moderns and ancients. It offended some of the church fathers. They developed the doctrine of universalism. Universal salvation for everyone. At the end, God will forgive the entire human race. These fathers developed their universalism on Christ's descent into hell. Supposedly, when Jesus descended into hell, He emptied it. Let everyone out except the devil. "For having destroyed hell and opened the impassable gates for the departed spirits, He left the devil there

abandoned and lonely” (Cyril of Alexandria, AD 376-444). Cyril says that no one goes to hell anymore. At the death of the most depraved rogue, he is forgiven and enters heaven. This is the view of Rufinus, Evodius, John Chrysostom, which set the trajectory of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Today in Eastern Orthodoxy universalism is official dogma. If universalism were true, if the Lord were to have evacuated hell in its entirety, then—among the church fathers—no one would have been happier than Augustine. He writes that he would rejoice at the salvation of the classical poets and philosophers whom he so intimately knows and admires through their writings. They ridiculed the false gods of the nations, and lived as models of virtue. Augustine naturally desires that they would be freed from the pains of hell, “were not the verdict of human feeling different from that of the justice of the Creator” (1.516). Human feeling is categorically distinct from the justice of the Creator. Human feeling, emotionalism, does not set the standard for God’s justice.

Therein is the issue. The justice of God. Justice is an attribute of God. That doesn’t mean that justice is part of God’s nature. Rather, justice is His nature. God is just. Justice is identical to His being, His essence. God cannot deny Himself. Because He is just, God must execute justice. Existential necessity. Some people can’t see this because they think that it contradicts God’s love. Not reality. God’s love and justice don’t contradict each other. They don’t need to be reconciled as revealed at the cross. Because of God’s love Christ was crucified. Because of God’s justice Christ was crucified. Crucified in order to execute the justice that I deserved. In my stead, in my place. I deserved the wrath of God for my sin and guilt. Christ absorbed it for me. Such is the love of God. Christ crucified to execute God’s justice otherwise directed at me. At the cross, God’s love and justice are displayed. If the penalty for one’s sin is not paid for at the cross, then justice must be executed in person. What we see here. We cannot seriously deal with this passage and claim that the Bible teaches universalism. Or annihilationism for that matter. Annihilationism is a new favorite among modern theologians. Let over Greek philosophy, microwaved and served again. Annihilationism states that at death the souls of the reprobate are annihilated. Wiped out. Simply cease to exist. Like a mist that vanishes. So while the souls of believers are received into heaven. The souls of reprobate vanish. It is as if they were never born. No punishment. Because, annihilationist’s claim, that would be incompatible with the idea of a loving God. A loving God would damn no one.

Yet here it is. *Verse 10, he also will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented.* God’s wrath is pictured as a cup of wine. A very interesting image taken from the Old Testament. With which Jesus is thoroughly versed during His earthy ministry. Therefore on the night in which He was betrayed, He prayed, *Father remove this cup from Me.* What cup? The cup of the wine of God’s wrath of which Christ drank for those who would believe in Him. ESV reads *poured full strength into the cup.* Literally the Greek reads “mixed undiluted in the cup of His wrath.” The Greek participle for “mixed” refers to the preparation of wine by the addition of various spices or poison (Mounce, 273). The drink is spiked with this deadly intoxicating potion. Not only mixed. It is “undiluted” which refers to the practice of diluting wine with water. Implying that all of God’s previous acts of judgment executed on individuals in world history have been watered down. Judgment on Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, watered-down wrath. Diluted with common grace. Tempered. But the hour is coming when the inhabitants of the earth will drink the wine of God’s fury, “mixed undiluted.” As the ESV translates, *poured full strength* into the cup of His wrath. Not merely potent. Omni-potent. Omnipotently intoxicating.

The effect? The image indicates a certain mental agony illustrated by nature of wine. Wine is intoxicating, mind-numbing. The wine of wrath leads to mind-altering torment. *"Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. 16 When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad..." (Jer 25:15-16 NIV).* Madness. Insanity. The wine of God's wrath intoxicatingly alters the mind. Psychological torment leading to weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. As in the case of the demoniac Legion. Jesus casts the demons out of the man, then what is stated about him? Sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his *right mind* (Mk. 5:15). Whereas previously the demons of hell drove him out of his mind, insane. Such is existence in hell. Crazy madness. A fitting punishment for not keeping the Greatest Commandment. Love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. If one refuses to love God with his mind, then he loses his mind in God's wrath.

This is not to say that people lose their minds to the extent that they are unaware of what is happening. As in the case of dementia or Alzheimer's. Unconscious of their misery. *Verse 10, ... and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.* Tormented in the presence of the Lamb. Those in hell are very aware of the Lamb's presence. Not unaware. Very aware of the salvation and eternal bliss that was offered to them. Which serves to increase their misery all the more. As with the Rich Man in the parable with Lazarus. Very aware of his torment, all the more exacerbated by the awareness of Lazarus' blessings in the bosom of Abraham. Do you see what this imagery reveals about the wrath of God? It isn't some impersonal law of retribution built into the structure of reality, like karma. In Hinduism, Karma is an impersonal force of retribution which determines the nature of a person's next existence in the cycle of reincarnation. But the wrath of God is not an impersonal force like karma, or electricity. The wrath of God is very personal. Personally executed by the Lamb, torment in the presence of the Lamb who acquiesces in it. This helps define hell. Some define hell as the absence of God. Not so. Hell is the presence of the Lamb in all of His fury and wrath.

How long? *Verse 11, And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.* Their torment continues forever and ever. Eternal torment. Skeptics complain that this is totally unfair. Eternal punishment when most people live for only seventy or eighty years. Isn't eternal punishment excessive, unjust? Why not punish only for the duration of one's lifetime? That might be fair? The objection is based on a false assumption. It assumes that in hell, the damned suddenly change their minds about God. That is not what we have seen in the *Revelation*. In the seven trumpets judgment, *The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hand nor give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood (Rev. 9:20).* Those in the judgment of God do not repent. They refuse to repent and worship God. Hell doesn't suddenly change their attitudes about God. Rather it all the more hardens one in his hatred of God. So that they are totally entrenched in defiance of God. For that continual sin, there is continual judgment. Ongoing punishment for ongoing sin. Like the waves of the ocean, rolling on the beach. Over and over, unending waves of torment.

Jesus Executes Justice

So judgment begins. The proclamation of judgment is over. The time for judgment, the very hour, has arrived. Verses 14-20 reveal the execution of judgment using the very familiar

Old Testament imagery of the harvest. Notice who is head of the harvest. *Verse 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.* John sees one like a “son of man” Who is this? Jesus or an angel? Undoubtedly Jesus. Two reasons. First, exegetically, the title “Son of Man” returns the reader to the very first vision of the book. John hears a voice speak to him. He turns around, what does he see among the seven golden lampstands? One “like a son of man” (1:13). Christ. The Son of Man. Jesus favorite self-designation during His earthly ministry. By using it Jesus identifies Himself as the Son of Man-divine being in Daniel’s prophecy (7:13). The God-Man. This Son of Man here is none other than Jesus. The NIV gives it away with scare quotes. Second, the Son of Man is on a cloud. What did we learn in chapter 1 about the manner in which Jesus would return? *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him* (Rev 1:7). In this harvest scene, John undoubtedly sees Christ.

I belabor this because some claim that this can’t be Jesus. Rather it must be an angel. Their rationale is in *Verse 15, Another angel calls out to the One on the cloud. “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come.* So they say, since the angel commands the One like Son of Man on the cloud then this can’t be Jesus. Christ is Lord, superior to angels. He doesn’t take orders from angels. Agreed. But why assume that the angel is commanding Jesus? What does the word *angel* mean? Messenger. Furthermore, from where does the messenger come? The temple (v. 15). The temple is the dwelling place of God, from which comes this messenger with a message from God the Father to the Son. The angel is not ordering Jesus. He is simply relaying a message to Jesus about the timing of the harvest, that is, the hour has come.

Why the urgent message about the hour? Because in Jesus’ earthly ministry He taught *about that day or hour no one knows but the Father, not even the Son.* Now the hour has arrived. So the angel delivers to the Son a message from the Father to commence the judgment. I stress this because once we recognize the identity of the One on the cloud then we can clearly see who is in charge of the judgment. Jesus is the One who executes the judgment. Gentle Jesus meek and mild is in the Grim Reaper with sickle in hand (v.14). The effeminate metro Messiah of American Christianity is the sovereign grim Reaper of the harvest.

The reason for which He comes. To execute judgment. What we have are two harvest scenes portraying the judgment. Joel 3:13 is the model for both. Two scenes providing two perspectives of the same judgment. Grain harvest (vv. 14-16), grape harvest (vv. 17-20). The grain harvest focuses on the completion. In verse 16 the Son of Man reaper swings his sickle over the earth, humanity is harvested. Mission accomplished. Completed. The second scene of the grape harvest focuses not on the completion, but the carnage from God’s judgment. The earth is harvested of its grapes which are thrown in the great winepress of God’s wrath. In the ancient world, to get the grape juice needed to make wine, grapes are thrown into a winepress to squeeze out the juice. A massive vat, trough that has holes in the bottom allowing the juice to pass through and collect into a lower basin. The children take off their shoes, climb into the vat and tread on the grapes until the juice stops flowing. “Treading the winepress.” A familiar image portraying the judgment of God. What aspect? The violence. The vintage tastes of violence.

A faint aroma of plum, pepper? Blood. *Verse 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.* As the winepress yields the red blood of the grape, so the judgment of God yields a red flood of blood that rises as high as the bridle of a horse, deep enough for a horse to swim in. How far? 1,600 stadia, 184 miles. Point of the picture is not the literal geographical distance, but the symbolism. 1,600. 16 multiplied by 1,000. 16 is the square of what number? 4. In the

Revelation, with respect to geography, what does the number 4 relate to? Ch. 7:1, four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds. Here 4 squared then multiplied by 1,000. Double emphasis. 1,000 symbolizes perfection. *One day with the Lord is like 1,000 years*. 1,600 stadia symbolize perfection, completion. The totality of the earth. Not a mere 184-mile radius, but the entire earth. The judgment of God extends to the four points of the compass, every place on the planet. To all people from every tongue tribe and nation. Every city, every village, every crossroads. There is nowhere to hide from the judgment of God. It is inescapable. Leaving in its wake, the carnage of humanity, evidence of the violence of God's fury. Human carnage leaving a global flood of blood as high as a horse's bridles. Gruesome carnage.

Why is this in here? It is so offensive to human autonomy. Why here? To push you over the edge of indecision. To compel you to make a decision for Christ. Remember the context. John banished from Ephesus, exiled to the prison island of Patmos. Antipas slain in Pergamum. Others wasting away in dark dungeons. Burned at the stake. Fed to wild beasts in the coliseum. This relentless persecution confronts these early believers with a crisis of faith. It makes no sense. Some wondering if it is worth the cost to follow Christ. They are tempted to give up and take the mark of the beast. Verse 12, *Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus*. This is the question. How will they endure? How will they keep the faith in the face of the beast? What will persuade them? What will convince them? The answer: The judgment reserved for those who follow the beast. O that we would ever keep the faith out of pure love for God. His breathtaking majesty and the splendor of His holiness. O that I would ever desire Christ just for His incomparable worth. The pearl of great price. The merchant man seeking goodly pearl forsook everything to possess the pearl. O that we would ever cling to Christ because of the delight of His presence alone. But in the event that in a moment of wavering faith, faith assailed by doubt, if we are tempted give up on God and give in to the world, then here is the most compelling reason to never forsake Christ. The judgment reserved for the rebellious unbelieving world. Look at it very closely. Behold the blood. Then flee to the Lamb in order to be saved from the wrath of the Lamb. Amen.