



Part 31 – The Messages of the Three Angels

Revelation 14:6-13

In this particular section of chapter 14, John hears three proclamations from three different angels. Their words point to the final judgment which will be poured out at the return of Jesus. These pronouncements, therefore, are understandably frightening. May the love we have for our neighbors be such that our urgency to see them freed from sin's slavery mimics the Lord's own urgency.

The Message of the First Angel

Vs. 6 – “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead...” – Before he is given visions of the last judgment, John at first sees an angel calling the world to repentance while there is still time. The message is “to those who dwell on earth,” (*kathemai*) which is a reference to the general population of the world. This differs from John's use of “inhabitants of the earth” (*katoikeo*) which is his phrase for the unbelieving.¹ The angel flies in midair and speaks loudly so that all might see and hear.

“An eternal gospel” – The word translated “gospel” means “announce” and carries with it the idea of good news. It was a word often used in military applications as the good news of battles won and territory gained. Biblically, the gospel is the good news that Jesus died for sinners and rose again in victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The gospel of Jesus is “eternal” in that it is the fulfillment of an “everlasting covenant” (Genesis 17:7, 13, 19). The gospel announces an eternal salvation for all who believe (John 3:16).

Vs. 7 – “Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come...” – There is some debate over how to understand the angel's announcement of good news and judgment. How is it, some wonder, that a pronouncement of judgment can be part of the gospel? One solution is that the gospel being announced is confined to the call for sinners to believe while there is still time. Another solution is that God's judgment is an expression of his justice and goodness and therefore belongs to the good news. Whatever the case, the coming judgment of God is not a negation of the gospel, nor does it impugn the goodness of God. Indeed, the perfect justice embodied in the final judgment belongs to God's eternal goodness.

“...worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.” – In this verse, “those who dwell on earth,” are commanded to “Fear God,” “give him glory,” and “worship him.” To the Philippians, the Apostle Paul anticipated that day when “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (2:10).

The Message of the Second Angel

Vs. 8 – “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great...” – This angel announces the fall of “Babylon the great” as though it has already happened. This is a clue that what John is seeing here coincides with the final judgment. That said, the announcement may also be applied to Christ's victory on the cross and resurrection in which the verdict against Satan and his kingdom was secured. This is John's first use of the phrase “Babylon the great.” For Jews, the ancient kingdom of Babylon became symbolic of wickedness, idolatry, and tyranny. Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 587/586 BC. Little wonder then why it became a metaphor for the kingdom of Satan which stands opposed to God and his people. For John's original readers, Rome was Babylon. Indeed, Rome was the only other kingdom to destroy Jerusalem (AD 70). Much more will be said about the ultimate destruction of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18. This is an announcement of the final destruction of the kingdom of the beast in all its varied expressions throughout human history.

“...she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” – The picture here is of a harlot influencing the nations to join her in her idolatry and immorality (Revelation 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9).

The Message of the Third Angel

Now the focus of judgment shifts from the beast to those who bear his mark; his followers.

Vs. 9 – “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark...” – Once again we are reminded that the goal of the beast is to coerce the world into idolatry. The first beast is symbolic of the wicked corruption of human government while the second beast is its religious handmaid, corrupting faith and worship.

¹ Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) p. 249

Vs. 10 – “...he will also drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger...” – In contrast with the wine of Babylon’s immorality, the angel refers to the unmixed wine of God’s wrath. In John’s day, wine (which was often concentrated) was typically mixed with water or spices to render it more palatable. God’s wrath, however, will be drunk full-strength. This is a reference to the final judgment. So far, the world has only experienced God’s judgment in a form that is mixed with mercy (we see this in the seals and trumpets). So here, John is telling of the coming final judgment when God’s restraining mercy will be lifted and the world will face his holy wrath.

“...he will be tormented with fire and sulfur...” – God’s wrath is depicted in terrifying images which call to mind the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. This judgment takes place “in the presence of many angels and of the Lamb.” The Lord does not turn away from the exercise of his judgment. God is not passive in judgment, nor does he delegate to another the final working of his justice.

Vs. 11 – “And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest...” – The image of smoke rising forever is meant to indicate the eternal state of God’s judgment. The two words used to describe God’s judgment here – anger (*orgay*) and wrath (*thumos*) – refer to His just anger over sin. The Lord’s anger is holy and wise, perfectly consistent with his justice, goodness, and love. What John sees is not an outburst of temper or loss of control but, as elsewhere in the Bible, the inevitable expression of God’s justice and holiness against Satan and those who have spurned his grace.

“This judgment is verified by the heavenly court consisting of the holy angels and the Lamb, affirming the justice of God’s judgments. Despite attempts to dilute the severity of duration of this judgment, the evidence points toward eternal conscious suffering rather than annihilation of personal existence (9:5; 11:10; 12:2; 18:7, 10, 15; 20:10).”²

There is nothing random or arbitrary about God’s judgment. It is exercised under the strictest and most pure standard of justice. It should also be noted that God’s patience has literally lasted for many thousands of years. He does not rush to judgment, much less the final judgment. Rather he takes thousands of years to display the evidence of his being and his law both in creation and upon the consciences of mankind (Romans 1-2). Even here as John’s vision begins to encompass the final judgment, the first message is another proclamation of the good news of salvation for all who believe. The first angel’s “summons to fear and worship means that it is almost but not quite too late to heed the warnings of the restrained trumpet judgments that have fallen as fire on earth, sea, springs, and sky (8:7-12).”³

A Call for Endurance

Vs. 12 – “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints...” – As we have seen, the need for endurance in the faith is a recurring theme in Revelation. Living as she does in a world under God’s judgment, the church must endure not only the hardships that are common to all people but the additional burden of persecution at the hands of wicked powers. The saints’ endurance involves both loyalty to the Lord and “active resistance to the idolatry and immorality promoted by a pagan empire.”⁴

The saints (another way the Scriptures refer to God’s people) are “...those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” This mention of obedience in connection to the destiny of the saints is not a contradiction to the gospel of justification by faith alone. Rather it’s the Scriptures’ way of qualifying the sort of faith which justifies, that is, a living faith.

A Beatitude

Vs. 13 – “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...” – Along with a call for the saints to endure, this section closes with the second of seven beatitudes or words of blessing that are found in Revelation. It is a promise of eternal rest (another way of referring to the eternal life of joy in the new creation – the eternal Sabbath) for those who “die in the Lord.” We are reminded of the resurrection to come when Christ returns and raises up all those who have died in Christ unto eternal life (1 Corinthians 15). “Deceased saints have already entered the eternal Sabbath of undistracted enjoyment and glorification of God.”⁵

“That they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” – Our good works are by God’s grace transformed into offerings that we may lay at his feet in glory. Our labor here is not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

² Scott Duvall, *A Theology of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025) p. 226

³ Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 205

⁴ Scott Duvall, p. 227

⁵ Dennis Johnson, p. 208