

Last week we considered the trio of angels that gave a last warning to all who were living. The first one proclaimed the gospel, the good news that there was a way to escape from the coming wrath through what Jesus has done for us, and of the urgency to worship our Creator.

The second angel announced the fall of Babylon, the source of all the pleasures of this world as substitutes for God. It is fallen because God has decreed it, and it will be so. It is as if it has already fallen because seven angels with the bowls of wrath are about to pour out those bowls on the earth.

The third angel warned of the consequences of taking the mark of the beast, the eternal suffering that those who worship the beast will endure. They will be tormented in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. Hell is not a subject that I enjoy preaching. It is hard to hear. We wish that no one would ever be sent to such a place. That is God's heart as well. Hell was made for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

However, we also wish that everyone would love goodness, be generous, humble, and do no harm to others. The issue is our freedom to choose our own destiny. The book of Revelation makes it clear that those who choose to worship the beast, who reject what Jesus has done for them, and insist on going their own way, which includes using others for their benefit and being their own god, will know the consequences and yet insist on continuing down that path. **The justice of God is letting them have their way.** I believe the torment of hell is being with people who are of like mind in embracing selfishness and evil. Heaven would be hellish for them because the focus of heaven is Jesus and all that He stands for, which is what they have chosen to reject. God will not force people to accept what Jesus has done for them. He will do everything necessary to help us make the right choice, convicting us of sin, drawing us with His love, putting people on our path who we can see have the peace and joy we seek. But He will not force our hand.

The time will come when everyone will have made their decision. That is the effect of the seals, the trumpets, witness of Christians, and these three angels. Then the harvest will come. Jesus spoke of the gathering of believers to Himself as in a harvest.
²⁶ *And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground.
²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how.
²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.
²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."* Mark 4:26-29 The seed is the Word of God. God prepares our hearts to receive it and we grow in sanctification. The day will come when every last stalk of grain will have matured, and then Jesus will call us home. Many people refer to this as the rapture. I believe that is what is being referred to in our passage for today. I believe our first three verses for today are the fulfillment of Jesus' words in Mark 4.

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.* ¹⁵ *And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."* ¹⁶ *So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.* Revelation 14:14-16 Some interpreters consider the two harvests in our passage as both being harvests of the wicked. I think the reason they do so is to avoid seeing the

rapture in the middle of the final seven years. Believers are referred to as firstfruits (2 Thessalonians 2:13ⁱⁱ; James 1:18ⁱⁱⁱ), which were harvested before the rest of the crop. The firstfruits of the harvests were to be an offering to God in faith that the rest of the harvest would come. We also see those in the book of life in 20:12^{iv} being judged first, followed by those not in the book of life being judged (20:13-15^v). The ripeness of the first harvest is the full number of believers brought into the kingdom (Romans 11:25^{vi}; Revelation 5:9^{vii}). The whole world will have heard the gospel (Matthew 24:14^{viii}). In Matthew 3:12^{ix} Jesus spoke of gathering the grain and then burning the chaff. In Luke 10:2^x He asks us to pray for laborers to be sent into the plentiful harvest of souls. In Matthew 13:30^{xi} He told a parable of weeds sown among the grain and that when the grain matured the weeds would be thrown in the fire and the grain harvested.

I believe the angel refers to Jesus. The expression “like a son of man” is used in Daniel 7:13,14^{xii} and is clearly the Messiah Jesus for the world worships Him. It is also used of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:3^{xiii}). The golden crown may represent Him being King of kings. Jesus said to His accusers, *“from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven”* (Matthew 26:64^{xiv}). In verse 14 we have the same words “seated,” “clouds,” and “Son of Man.”

Yet, some argue that Jesus would not need to be commanded by an angel. The counter argument is that the angel comes out of the temple conveying the Father’s will. Remember that Jesus said He did not know the hour of His coming, only the Father knows (Matthew 24:36^{xv}).

The Apostle Paul wrote of this in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 *16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.* Notice that it is the Lord Himself who descends with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel. Paul’s description and Daniel’s use of “like a son of man” along with Jesus’ own description of His return are the reasons why I believe our passage is referring to Jesus.

Why is that important? Daniel tells us that the Antichrist makes a covenant with many for one week (seven years). That is the seventieth week about which Daniel prophesied (Daniel 9:24^{xvi}). Currently the popular teaching is a pretribulation rapture. However, this makes a case for our gathering together to Jesus somewhere around the midpoint, after the Antichrist has been revealed. Paul taught our gathering to Christ would not happen until after the Antichrist is revealed.

1 Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 The Antichrist is revealed by taking a seat in the temple of God and proclaiming Himself to be God. Revelation tells us that he reigns for 42 months, which I believe to be half of the final seven years (13:5,6^{xvii}). The description in Revelation 13 is

followed in verse 7^{xviii} by him making war on the saints and overcoming them. Then the whole world is under his authority and worships him. Exactly when in that midpoint the grain harvest takes place, no one can say. But believers will not yet be gathered/harvested until he is revealed as the Apostle made clear.

How important is it to you that your relatives, neighbors, and friends are a part of that glorious harvest? Is the fruit of your life ripe (John 17:4^{xix})? Are you enriching your soil with the Word of God and fellowship? Are you connected to the vine, Christ Jesus (John 15:4^{xx})? Or are you feeding on what the world has to offer, its entertainment and pleasures as your priority in life? When the sickle swings through the earth will your heart be broken for loved ones you never told of Jesus' love for them?

There is a verse in Daniel 12 that has always been mysterious to me. Daniel 12:6-12 ⁶ *And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, "How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?"* ⁷ *And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.* ⁸ *I heard, but I did not understand. Then I said, "O my lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?"* ⁹ *He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.* ¹⁰ *Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.* ¹¹ *And from the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the abomination that makes desolate is set up, there shall be 1,290 days.* ¹² *Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.*

The shattering of the holy people sounds very similar to the Antichrist making war on the saints and overcoming them, which we saw in 13:7^{xviii}. How long till the end of these wonders? Three and a half times, which is half of those seven years. Daniel asks what the outcome is. He is basically told this is information for the end-time. I take "many will purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined" to mean salvation and the process of sanctification. Yet, the wicked will act wickedly. I think that means that even though the gospel is proclaimed, many will choose to go on in wickedness. We see that in our following passages.

The burnt offering is a sacrifice according to the Mosaic Law (Exodus 29:18^{xxi}). That is why many people believe the Jews will restore their temple. Apparently, the Antichrist stops the temple sacrifice and sets up the abomination. I think that the abomination is what John referred to in the last half of chapter 13^{xxii} as the image of the beast that talks.

Another interpretation would be to see the church as the temple of today, and burnt offerings as being wholly dedicated to God. The burnt offering was completely consumed. Nothing was set aside for the priests or the one who brought the offering. Romans 12:2^{xxiii} uses this analogy of placing ourselves on the altar as a living sacrifice. Since Jew and Gentile are now one in Christ (Galatians 3:28^{xxiv}), it could be argued that what is meant here is that a destructive doctrine of compromise is the abomination, and it so fills the church organizations that people are no longer living sacrifices to God. Or possibly the end of the war on the saints means there are no more living sacrifices.

Then there are two time periods given. One is 1290 days or 30 days more than three and half years. Remember that the Antichrist reigns for 42 months. Does this mean his reign overlaps with the first three and a half years, or is this extra 30 and 75 day time periods after the Second Coming when those who have not taken the mark and come to faith during the wrath and survived will see the kingdom of God set up on the earth? I have more questions than answers. But then Daniel was told to shut and seal the book until the time of the end, and then the wise will understand. The important thing for believers in that day is that we are home with Jesus before the wrath is poured out on the earth, which we will read about in the following chapters.

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." 19 So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 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. Revelation 14:17-20

Another angel comes out of the temple. This angel is different from "one like a son of man." He is also prepared with a sickle to reap a harvest. Unlike the first messenger angel who came from the temple to send out the harvester, this messenger angel who is has authority over fire comes from the altar (8:3-5^{xxv}). I assume that means the altar of incense where the martyrs were asking how long until their blood was avenged (6:10^{xxvi}). Fire in Scripture is a means of purification, removing impurities or bringing justice such as the fire that fell on Sodom (Genesis 19:24^{xxvii}). This gives us a clue as to the mission of this angel. It is part of the justice from God for all the bloodshed and evil that has been committed. We refer to him as the grim reaper.

This harvest is not gathered unto the Christ, but rather gathered and thrown into the winepress of the wrath of God! Isaiah prophesied along the same lines. *2 Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel. 4 For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come.* Isaiah 63:2-4 Why is God angry? The people who make up the grape harvest will have helped the Antichrist kill God's people. They will not only have rejected the witness of those who shared the love of Christ with them, they will have rejected the message of the three angels, the conviction and wooing of God's Holy Spirit. They will curse God, though He has given them life, breath, and sustenance. God's wrath that is poured out in the following chapters is taking away all the things that they live for so that their eyes can be opened to see all that God has given them and how they have turned perishable things into idols. This is what is meant by this harvest being ripe. Their hearts are hardened.

It is not the first time this has happened. It happened in Noah's day, which is why Jesus warned us. *37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* Matthew 24:37-39 This tells us that even though the trumpets have caused

devastation to a one third of the earth in round after round, people will still go on with their lives as if it would never affect them. We can see it today when there are “natural” disasters. We rarely take it to heart as previous generations did. When there were droughts or floods or catastrophic fires in previous generations, we would call for a day of prayer and fasting. Communities would gather in their local churches and seek God’s forgiveness. Suggest that in our day and people look at you like you are in a cult. It has changed that much in just a generation or two. While the trumpets are taking away the very things people worship, they will go on living like all is normal. I do not know how they will ignore the angels flying directly overhead. Maybe they will say they are creative drones made by those crazy Christians.

Like God, we take no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23^{xxviii}), though we will be grateful that justice is served. The blood is said to flow 1600 stadia which is 4 squared times 100. Probably implying four winds and the four corners of the earth, meaning the whole earth. If we took it literally the blood is 5 feet deep for 184 miles. Like much of the language in Revelation, this is a metaphor telling us how tragic it will be. Hamilton states, *The number is the multiple of the squares of four and ten, both of which are figurative for completeness elsewhere in the Apocalypse. It could therefore be figurative for complete, worldwide judgment. The number also could well have been thought of as the square of forty, a traditional number of punishment.*^{xxix} We should grieve over their fate.

A minister told the famous Scottish minister R.M. M’Cheyne that he preached on hell. M’Cheyne replied, "Didst the Lord enable thee to deliver the message with tears?" Certainly, we should never speak on hell with a light heart. We would never wish anyone to be in this later harvest. And that is why we must be ready to share with those who are willing to hear. That is why we must stay in the Word, prayer, and fellowship so that we might endure!

When the sickle is swung all sin's allurements will be gone. All the damage done by sin will stop. Think for a moment of the horrors you have seen in your own life: rage, abuse, belittling, violence, and so much more. It will all be confined to hell! Hallelujah! The pleasures of sin that were but for a moment will cease (Hebrews 11:24,25^{xxx}). Taking advantage of others will cease. Pride that slanders and humiliates others will be no more. Are you ready for that day? **When the sickle comes down, do you know which harvest you will be in?** Nothing in this life could be more important. Receive the conviction of sin, repent, and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Questions:

- 1 How did the three angels precede these harvests?
- 2 What does God do to save us?
- 3 Why may the first harvest be the harvest of believers?
- 4 Who is the harvester and why?
- 5 How does Daniel 12 relate to this section in Revelation?
- 6 What is an alternative interpretation of the abomination in the temple?
- 7 Where does each harvest end up?
- 8 What does “the harvest is ripe” mean?
- 9 What did Jesus say about that day?
- 10 How should this motivate us?

ⁱ **Matthew 25:41 (ESV)**

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

ⁱⁱ **2 Thessalonians 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

ⁱⁱⁱ **James 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

^{iv} **Revelation 20:12 (ESV)**

¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

^v **Revelation 20:13-15 (ESV)**

¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

^{vi} **Romans 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

^{vii} **Revelation 5:9 (ESV)**

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,

^{viii} **Matthew 24:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

^{ix} **Matthew 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

^x **Luke 10:2 (ESV)**

² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.

^{xi} **Matthew 13:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”

^{xii} **Daniel 7:13-14 (ESV)**

¹³ “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

^{xiii} **Hebrews 7:3 (KJV)**

³ Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

^{xiv} **Matthew 26:64 (ESV)**

⁶⁴ Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

^{xv} **Matthew 24:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

^{xvi} **Daniel 9:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

^{xvii} **Revelation 13:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶ It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

^{xviii} **Revelation 13:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,

^{xix} **John 17:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

^{xx} **John 15:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

^{xxi} **Exodus 29:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.

^{xxii} **Revelation 13:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

¹⁵ And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

^{xxiii} **Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

^{xxiv} **Galatians 3:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

^{xxv} **Revelation 8:3-5 (ESV)**

³ And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, ⁴ and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. ⁵ Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

^{xxvi} **Revelation 6:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

^{xxvii} **Genesis 19:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.

^{xxviii} **Ezekiel 18:23 (ESV)**

²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

^{xxix} G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 782.

^{xxx} **Hebrews 11:24-25 (ESV)**

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.