

Proportional Response

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- [0 : 0 0] So, in international politics, there's this concept called proportional response. And proportional response, the idea that when your nation, your country is attacked, you'll respond in kind.
- You will offer enough force to prevent future attacks. That's what proportional response means. Response to an attack that is sufficient to prevent it from happening again. Evil has attacked God's world.
- And in Revelation 14, we read about God's proportional response. So, firstly, if we're going to understand Revelation 14 and what's going on here, we need to understand what God is responding to.
- And that's what we've just read in the last few chapters. And so, just a little bit of a recap of what we've covered so far from Revelation 12 to 13. You'll remember that the ancient opponent to God and his good plans for this world, Satan, the devil, represented by this dragon, has been cast out of heaven.
- He has lost his power in heaven. And ever since then, he has been mustering his forces on earth, represented by these beasts that we read about in Revelation 13.
- [1 : 2 0] These power structures in every age that he uses to work against God and against God's plans for this world. And these power structures, these beasts in every age are the governments and the cultures that make divine claims in place of God.
- And they set their own agenda. And they have their own priorities. And they use media and propaganda, we saw in Revelation 13, to forward what people should be thinking, how people should be speaking and interacting.
- They make these claims of being God. And then they demand divine allegiance, which is represented by the mark of the beast. You know, at the end of Revelation 13, everybody had to take this mark.
- And they wouldn't be able to operate well in society unless they aligned to the beast and his values and the culture of the day. And you can see that, of course, in today's world and how that plays out.
- We looked at last week. But all of that, what the dragon is using through these beasts to undermine God and his plans, all of that is a blatant challenge to God's authority in God's world.
- [2 : 3 6] And so the question is, now that we come to Revelation 14, what is God going to do about that blatant challenge? Well, I'll tell you, he's not going to take it.
- He's not going to take it lying down, but he's going to respond in kind. And that's what we're going to see here. So let's look at Revelation 14. Have it open in front of you.
- And the first way we see God's response is God gathering his forces. God mustering his army. And we see that in verse 1 to 5.
- Have a look at what it says. Then I looked, and there was the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. With him were 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads.

I heard a sound from heaven like the sound of cascading waters and like the rumbling of loud thunder. The sound I heard was like harpists playing on their harps. They sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.

[3 : 40] But no one could learn their song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women since they remain pure. These are the ones who followed the Lamb wherever he goes.

They were redeemed from humanity as the first fruits for God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths, for they are blameless. Okay, so this is the description of God's army.

So just like in Revelation 13 we read of the dragon mustering his forces, here we read of God responding and gathering his forces.

The 144,000. Now if you've been with us in Revelation, you'll know they were already mentioned in chapter 7. And it's a symbolic number that represents God's people, God's redeemed people who are loyal to him.

And verse 3, look what they're doing. They sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. But no one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

[4 : 42] So these are the people who have been redeemed from the earth and they're singing a song that only they know. What I think that means is they are singing the song of salvation. They are people who have come to faith in Christ.

They know their salvation. They know the assurance that they are truly saved from God's wrath. And they're singing that out, but only they know that because they've had their eyes open. People who have been converted.

People who have gone from darkness to light. People who have been born again and come into the realization of the salvation available through Jesus Christ. And that is what they're singing.

That's the song that only the redeemed of God can sing because only they know it. But these are the same people that just a chapter ago are under attack on earth from the beast.

And from his forces. And yet here, this very next chapter, they're safe in Zion, in the heavenly city. And that is the dual reality of the people of God.

[5 : 43] They're under attack by the forces of evil and by the forces of the world. Yet at the same time, they're safe in God's city. They're safe in Zion. We see this concept in Ephesians as well, where it talks about Christians in a very important way already being in heaven.

So I'm going to read from Ephesians 2, verse 6. It says, He also raised us, past tense, raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavens in Christ Jesus.

So those who are in Christ, in a very real way, are where Christ is. They're safe in Christ, in the city of God already, even though they suffer and struggle on earth.

And that's the concept that we're getting here in Revelation 14. And so, because they are safe, because they know the song of salvation, they can stand against the beast and his attacks.

No matter what he throws at them. And the way they fight the beast, the way they stand against the beast, is not only with singing the song of salvation and the assurance of their salvation, but it's through declaring what is true and not backing down from it.

[6 : 58] No matter what the beast tells them to think and to say, and no matter what the world's narratives are at the moment, God's army are the ones who continue to declare the truth.

Look at verse 5. It says, No lie was found in their mouths. That's a characteristic of the people of God. They say what is true, and they're not going to back down from it.

And they're not going to be intimidated into talking rubbish and to believing false ideas and to, you know, agreeing to those false ideas. They stand by truth.

That's how they fight the beast. No matter what he does against them, they follow the lamb. They continue to follow the lamb. Look at verse 4. It says, the second part of verse 4, These are the ones who follow the lamb wherever he goes.

That's a characteristic of God's people. They follow Jesus Christ. They follow the lamb who was slain, who willingly gave himself up for sacrifice and willingly continued to declare the truth, no matter what people felt about that.

[8 : 03] We just prayed, didn't we, in that collect earlier, that we would daily endeavor to follow in the blessed steps of his most holy life. Those are the words we just prayed. You know what that also means?

If you follow in the steps of Jesus, you follow him to the cross. You follow him to willingness to sacrifice because of truth. And that is what God's holy army does.

And that is how they fight the beast. By not backing down from truth. By declaring what is true, even when they're intimidated, even when the beast attacks them, because that's the one thing the beast can't do.

It can't shut them up. And that's how they win. That's how they eventually beat the beast. We're also told in verse 4 that they haven't defiled themselves with women.

They were pure or they remained virgins. Now, this might be a worry for any of us who are married. But I want to tell you not to worry because, again, it's revelation and it's symbolic.

[9 : 01] And we have to put that through our Old Testament decoder. Remember, if we come across things in Revelation, we've always got to filter it through the Old Testament decoder to understand what the symbolism means.

And in the Old Testament, virginity was used as a symbol of Israel not mixing with the surrounding nations. And it's also used to describe Christians today, even in the New Testament.

So let me read, for example, from 2 Corinthians 11. Paul says these words. He says, So it's this idea of the great marriage when God's people are finally united with their Lord in the new creation.

They will be pure. They will be holy. That's what this idea of not being defiled, using the symbol of virginity, means. But there's another aspect to it that we get from the Old Testament.

This not being defiled by women reminds us of David's soldiers. You know King David? He had this group of soldiers who were loyal to him. And what they did was, when they went out on military campaign, they vowed not to sleep with their wives.

[10 : 12] They vowed to be celibate for the time of their war that they were fighting. So they were basically saying that they're focused only on that. And they're going to put away all other pleasures and just focus on following their king and fighting for him.

And so it's consecration for battle. That's this idea that comes through. God's army are set apart, wholly focused on following their Lord and consecrated for battle.

So in summary, God's army that he musters to fight the beast on earth is made up of people on earth who have true saving faith in Christ.

And they know that faith and they celebrate that faith and they are not ashamed to declare that faith. And therefore they are safe from the beast's attacks and they are committed to follow and live for their Savior.

Living holy lives so they don't get caught up in the surrounding culture. Seeing the surrounding culture for what it is and unashamed to sing out what is true, even if that means suffering for it, because that's how they defeat the beast.

[11 : 20] And then as they do that, it's through them that God does the second thing we read in this passage. He makes his announcement to earth. So just as the dragon in chapter 13, you'll remember the dragon sent the second beast to deceive the nations with false propaganda.

Remember that? And today that comes through the media and culture and social media and all that. We see this just these false, ungodly sentiments and views and values coming through.

That's all what Revelation describes would happen. And the dragon is at work deceiving people, deceiving the nations. And yet God counters that with truth, by announcing truth.

Look at verse 6 of Revelation 14. Then I saw another angel flying high overhead with the eternal gospel to announce to the inhabitants of the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people.

It's a picture of this supernatural messenger in the sky that no one can ignore. He would just blow those mavericks planes out of the sky.

[12 : 38] And nobody would be able to ignore him. And that's the symbol, right? The symbol is this angel. But what's happening is it's God's people, God's army on earth declaring truth and not backing down for that. And it's symbolized by an angel announcing truth over all the world.

Because as God's people open their mouths, heavenly truth is made known on earth. And then we read on and it's represented by two more angels coming. And each of these angels has something to say to the earth through God's people.

Let's see what they say. The first heavenly truth that is made known on earth through the church, through the people of God, is who the real God really is.

Verse 7. He spoke with a loud voice. Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship the one who made heaven and earth and the sea and the springs of water.

Fear God and give Him glory because the Lord is the creator of this world. He made everything. And He is the judge of this world.

[13 : 42] And He will judge. And He is knowable. You can know Him. Because He has made Himself knowable, He has revealed Himself. So the true God, you don't have to wonder, you can know who the true God is.

He has made it clear. And therefore, our responsibility as His creatures is to glorify Him and to recognize Him as our creator. And that's the first heavenly truth that is made known through the people of God as they announce truth from His word, as they reveal God in His word.

But the second heavenly truth that is declared on earth by these angels is not just who God is, but who our world actually is, the very nature of who our world currently is.

Look at verse 8. And another second angel followed saying, It is fallen. Babylon the great has fallen. She made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality which brings wrath.

So the world is depicted here and later on in Revelation as this attractive prostitute.

[14 : 53] She's beautiful, but she's going to destroy you. That's the world. The world and its culture is attractive very often, but it's corrupting.

It's like getting drunk. That's the imagery that's used here. You know, people find it nice and comforting to drink a lot of alcohol, don't they?

You can see that. Just come here outside the church any Friday night at around 10 or 11 and you'll see that. It's attractive because people feel good when they drink a lot of alcohol and get drunk.

But we know that it destroys their relationships. It destroys their marriages. It destroys their families and destroys communities.

And in the same way, people are getting drunk on the culture of the world. It's so attractive. Sexual liberation. Freedom to love. Who you want.

[15 : 50] How you want. Isn't that amazing? Isn't it beautiful? That's the lie that's being fed today in the culture. Free love. It's beautiful. But you know what it does? It destroys.

It destroys marriages. It destroys families. And it destroys people. They just don't want to admit the kind of destruction that does. And that's just one example of how people are drinking and getting drunk on Babylon, the world that we live in today.

But they will be destroyed because Babylon will be destroyed. And that's the truth that is said here by this angel. Babylon is fallen. Babylon, this world and its cultures and its values are under God's judgment.

And we need to realize that. And then the third piece of news that comes from heaven is the fate of those who continue to follow the beast and reject God.

And it's not pretty. Verse 9 to 11. And another, a third angel, followed them and spoke with a loud voice.

[16 : 55] If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or his hand, he will also drink the wine of God's wrath which is poured full strength into the cup of his anger.

He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the sight of the holy angels and in the sight of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image or anyone who receives the mark of its name.

Now these verses are very important to understand properly. They've led to many sensational pictures over the ages.

Medieval pictures of Dante's Inferno. People having their flesh burnt off and then getting regenerated and then continuing to burn like this eternal torture chamber forever and ever.

And they get that from reading these verses literally. But it's in Revelation and we need to understand that Revelation must be read symbolically. It's talking about real things.

[18 : 00] Serious things. But it's talking in symbols and so we need to decode the symbol to understand what it's really talking about. And we need to put it through our Old Testament decoder.

Now when we do that, let's see what we understand. And what we realize when we put it through the Old Testament decoder, these words of the smoke rising forever, of the torment of not resting day and night, is that we discover that's exactly how the judgment of a nation called Edom was described in Isaiah 34.

The exact same terms. Now before we read that, let me give you a little bit of a background as to who Edom was. It wasn't just any nation. They were related to Israel.

They were the descendants of Esau, in fact. And they betrayed their brothers, Israel. When Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar attacked Israel, instead of coming to the aid of Israel, they decided to join Babylon.

They were turncoats. They were traitors. And they helped Babylon sack Jerusalem. And when people were trying to escape, as these Babylonians, this vicious army, were coming, and mothers were gathering their children, gathering whatever possessions they could, and fleeing the city.

[19 : 20] And they were hoping that the Edomites, their distant relatives, would help them, would gather them up and would hide them away. But you know what they did? They stood on the street crossroads, and they caught the Israelites, and they took them back to the Babylonians as slaves to be tortured.

And that was Edom. And what's God going to do about Edom, who did that to his people? Well, let's read Isaiah 34 and find out.

For the Lord has a day of vengeance. This is Isaiah 34 from verse 8. A time of paying back Edom for its hostility against Zion. Edom's streams will be turned into pitch.

Her soil into sulfur. Her land will become burning pitch. It will never go out day or night. Its smoke will go up forever. It will be desolate from generation to generation.

No one will pass through it forever and ever. God's response to the nation of Edom was to put out a kill order on them.

[20 : 28] And when God puts out a kill order on you, there's no hope. You're finished. Just like Sodom. He did it again. To Sodom and Gomorrah. Remember in Genesis?

God issued a kill order, and that was also burning with sulfur. That's what happens. God does it well. God. And that's what the smoke rising forever and ever depicts.

It's symbolic language of being destroyed with no hope of coming back. Eternal destruction being wiped off the map. That's what the smoke rising forever and ever means.

That's what this language of Edom means. I mean, if you went to the Middle East now, you wouldn't be able to find a pit of continuing smoke. So when it says the smoke rises forever and ever, it's symbolic that their destruction will last forever and ever.

They will never come back. Most nations who were destroyed through politics and through invasions and stuff, they still survived. They still had to move maybe, and their military was taken up.

[21 : 27] But they, as nations and people, still kind of survived and went on. Edom, you know what? If you ask any archaeologists today, they'll tell you there is no sure evidence archaeologically that Edom ever existed.

All we have is what the Bible says about it. And as recently as 2019, two Israeli archaeologists found some clues only to the existence of Edom.

But there's no sure evidence we have today that Edom ever existed, just like Sodom. Why? Because God wiped them off the map. That's what this language means.

And that, turning back to Revelation 14, is what God will do to those who align with the beast. As He did to Edom, who aligned with Babylon and who were traitors to God's people, God will do for all who align to the culture that is against God.

And to who line their lives up with the beast, He will bring about their terrifying and total removal from His world. And until then, they will have no rest day or night.

[22 : 43] One commentator puts it like this. When God's judgment is in operation, it is quenchless, unrelenting, and overwhelming. In modern warfare terms, it's the equivalent of intense day and night bombing.

There is no break until it obliterates the enemy. And that is God's proportional response to the evil in this world.

To those who reject Him and side with His enemy. And it is utterly terrifying. I've spent, in my time as a pastor, I've spent a bit of time with people about to die.

And I can tell you, the only thing that keeps them sane when they're facing death, the only thing that prevents them from going absolutely crazy when they consider their impending death, they're lying there in their hospital bed.

The only thing is this idea that a part of them will go on. That's what they cling to as they're dying. Either the idea that their soul will continue to exist somewhere, or even that the memory of them will go on in the minds of their descendants, that their legacy will remain, that photos will be in the scrapbook.

[24 : 12] They cling to something which tells them that they will be remembered, that they will go on, and maybe they will continue to exist in another dimension.

And everybody about to die wants that, clings to that. So imagine the horror of coming to realize, not only that the God of this universe has finally turned His face against you for good, and that there's nothing you can do to change that, but that His destruction of you will be so total that when it's done, not even the faintest memory of you will remain.

That is terror. That is terrifying. Don't let your friends and family face that without warning, Christians.

God's punishment is utterly terrifying. But it is not unfair. It is proportional. He has given ample warning of this.

We've been seeing in Revelation so far, these cycles of judgment. And the reason the cycles continue and keep on cycling, you know, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and yet people still don't repent.

[25 : 32] God is merciful in showing that He is angry, and that His response is coming, and He's given warning after warning in history of that.

And then He sent His Son into the world to warn people of that. And then He sends His church into the world, even though they are martyred for it to warn people.

And through creation itself, He warns and He testifies to Himself over and over again. Romans 1. 20 to 21 says, For His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what has been made.

And as a result, people are without excuse. See, God has given ample reason and testimony to His glory, the Creator of the world.

We can't deny it. He's revealed Himself through His Word, and through His prophets, and through His apostles, and through His own Son. People are without excuse. He has allowed people to reject Him and mess up His world, but He won't forever.

[26 : 47] And what is announced by these angels certainly will come to pass when Jesus comes back? When Jesus comes back, look at verse 14 of Revelation 14.

Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and one like the Son of Man was seated on the cloud with a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.

This is when Jesus comes, and as we continue to read, we read about Him gathering His people and then destroying the rest with this terrifying judgment.

Later on in this passage, it's depicted as being crushed as grapes in a wine press. It's an interesting symbol because just as people have become drunk on the wine of Babylon earlier, they will become what consumed them in the end.

And nobody will escape except the army of God who are safe in His city. Look at the end of this passage.

[27 : 54] Verse 20. Then the press was trampled. This is the judgment of the earth, but look where it was trampled. Outside the city.

See that? It's a very important detail because what it means is there is safety in the city of Zion. There is safety in the people of God, in Christ. So as I close, I want to ask you, where are you?

Are you safe in God's city, knowing and singing the song of salvation and set apart as holy, following the Lamb? Well, if that is you, then take your holiness seriously because that is what a citizen of the city does.

That is what God's army does. They live holy, set apart, consecrated lives for their Lord. They follow Him wherever He goes and they keep declaring the truth even if they suffer for it.

Look at verse 12. This calls for endurance from the saints who keep God's commands and their faith in Jesus. If you are in the city, you need to endure.

[29 : 02] But maybe you're not. Maybe if you look at your life, you realize you are more aligned with the world and its values than you are aligned with God and His values.

You are outside the city. Well, then I must tell you, you must know, God wants you to know this morning, the fate of this world that you're in outside the city is sealed and it is dreadful.

And so get into the city before it's too late. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your salvation that you have made a city for us to flee to from this world and its values.

And in that city we are forgiven. We are washed clean. We are purified. We are given new clothes to wear through Jesus Christ and what He did for us.

Lord, I pray for anyone here who is not sure whether they are in the city or not or they know they are not in the city. Lord, would you cause them to come to Christ to put their faith in Him to receive His free offer of salvation that He earned by dying on the cross.

[30 : 18] And I pray for those of us who are your people that you would help us to endure and help us to never back down from truth in the face of the world's lies and use us, Lord, to defeat the beast in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.