

INTRODUCTION

I can remember there were many farmers in South Alabama when I was growing up. One of the more popular brands of farming equipment was "International Harvester." Well there is a harvest coming in the future that indeed is going to be a true international harvest. As we start talking about this passage of scripture, we are going to read the first five verses, because they speak about the vision of the 144,000.

Let's begin reading in Revelation 14:1. John writes, "Then I looked and there before me was the Lamb," If you were to go back to chapter 13, John writes, "He looked and he saw a beast" and of course that's the Antichrist. The good news is that after the beast or the Antichrist has been seen, the Lamb is also seen. So let's look at the text again. John says, "There before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless."

I. THE VISION OF THE 144,000

Earlier in our study of Revelation we were introduced to these 144,000 individuals. Who are they? Throughout history there have been many groups who have claimed to be this 144,000. Most notably are the Jehovah's Witnesses. When Russell founded them, he claimed there would be 144,000 true Christians or true believers and when that 144,000 number had been attained, then God's kingdom would come. The only problem is that number came and passed and they had to change their entire theology because it did not prove to be so. If you will remember when we studied about them before, I told you they are 144,000 Jewish evangelists who go about during the time of Tribulation preaching the gospel of the kingdom. We studied that 12,000 of them come from each of the 12 twelve Jewish tribes, and while the Antichrist and the false prophet are spreading their doctrine around this world, these 144,000 Jewish evangelists are spreading all over planet earth the gospel of the kingdom of God.

A. The time

As we read in chapter 14, all 144,000 of them are seen standing in heaven on Mt. Zion. This is a passage in Revelation is written proleptically. "Proleptic" means "something that is written in the past tense but which pictures something that will be happening in the future." So at this part in chapter 14 of Revelation it is really picturing something that's going to take place after the time of Tribulation is over after Jesus Christ has come back, because all 144,000 are seen in heaven. So that's the time of the involvement of this 144,000.

B. Their traits

What about the traits? How can you describe this special group of believers? We learn three characteristics of them in verse 4. Number one we learn they were celibate that is they did not marry any women. They were sexually pure. That reminds me of the apostle, Paul, who although he had the right to be married, he chose instead to be single so he could be more effective preaching the gospel. Of course, there is nothing wrong with being married. I, myself, am a minister and I am married and I believe God intended for me to be married and to have a family. However throughout history there have been special saints who have chosen not to marry so they could devote all their time to God's work. These 144,000 men will not be married.

We also read in verse 4 that "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes." This means that they are totally committed to Jesus Christ. They are not involved in anything else except the spreading of the gospel. In verse 5 we learn the third thing characteristic of this 144,000. It says, "No lie was found in their mouths." What that means is they were totally and brutally honest. They could not nor would they ever tell a falsehood. They were truthful in their preaching. We are going to see later on that these 144,000 indeed became a thorn in the side of the Antichrist because they opposed everything he did.

If you will look in verse 1 it says, "the name of the Lamb was written on their foreheads" This stands in contradistinction to the Antichrist and all of his followers because the Bible says his name or blasphemies were written upon their foreheads but for these Jewish evangelists had the name of the Lamb and his Father on their foreheads.

Now they are in heaven in verses 1-5. What are they doing in heaven? The Bible says in verse 2 they are around the throne of God singing praises to the Lamb. It says, "He heard the sound of harpists." There are some good Christians who do not believe musical instruments are appropriate in the church. The Bible says there will be the sound of music with the harpists in heaven. It says in verse 3 that they sang a new song before the throne. Isn't it interesting to read through the Bible and find that God desires for us to sing a new song to him? In fact he even commands us to "sing unto the Lord a new song." Think with me about that for just a moment. We all have familiar songs we have sung all our lives that mean much to us because of their familiarity. One of my favorite hymns is, "Amazing Grace." I think it is special to me because throughout my life I have been able to associate some very fond and pleasant memories with, "Amazing Grace." I can testify that the song, "The Old Rugged Cross," means a lot to me. Every time I sing that song or I hear it sung my heart is tremendously blessed. By the same token there are some people who really don't like to sing any kind of new song. They always want to sing the old, familiar songs. We have to ask ourselves, "Why do we only like the old songs when God tells us to sing a new song to the Lord?" It could be because they are so familiar they make us feel comfortable. But you see the whole purpose of worship and praise is not to make us feel good. The whole purpose of worship and praise is to honor and bless the Lord. The Lord is oftentimes blessed much more when we sing a new song to him. Let me illustrate this. Awhile back I turned 41, the people in church sang a song to me on Sunday evening. They sang, "Happy Birthday To You." I was pleased and I was blessed by this and I was even honored because they sang that very familiar song to celebrate my birthday. However, what if someone had taken the time to compose a new song a special song that had never been sung before and they learned the song and then they sang that new song to me. Don't you know I would be much more blessed much more honored by this new song? The Lord is the same way. I know the Lord loves the old

songs too, but he is blessed and honored when we sing new songs of praise to him. Why don't you try that? Why don't you try just composing a song of praise to the Lord a new song and sing it to him.

You'll notice it says in verse 3 that they sang a new song to the Lamb. They sang it in front of the 24 elders, but they sang the song to the Lamb. That's what makes praise so special. When we gather in church, we tend to sing two different kinds of songs and only two. We sing songs of testimony and we sing songs of praise. A song of testimony is a song we sing about God and it serves as a testimony to those around us but a song of praise is one we sing directly to the Lord. That's what the Bible says in Colossians, 3:16 it says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

Let's take a very familiar song of testimony, "He Is Lord," and then change it into a song of praise: He is Lord, He is Lord / He is risen from the dead and he is Lord. / Every knee shall bow / Every tongue confess / That Jesus Christ is Lord.

Now that's a song of testimony. We are testifying that he is Lord. You can make just about any song into a song of praise by changing it to the second person and you sing it not about the Lord, but you sing it TO the Lord. For instance let's take that same song and change the words around a little bit so it says, You Are Lord / You are Lord / You are risen from the dead and you are Lord. / Every knee shall bow / Every tongue confess / That Jesus you are Lord.

And so we ought to often sing to the Lord a new song. The vision of the 144,000 pictures these special evangelists singing to the Lord.

II. THE VOICES OF THE ANGELS

Let's go to chapter 14, and read verses 6 and 7 because the second part of this message is about the voices of the angels. Let's see what these angels are saying. Beginning in verse 6. "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'

Angel One: Judgement is come!

We're going to hear from four angels and each one of these angels has a specific message. The voice of the first angel gives this message. "Judgement is come." Notice it says in verse 7, "Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgement has come." Throughout the scriptures we read that judgement is coming, that one day God is going to pour out his righteous judgement upon the wickedness and sin of mankind. But now the angel announces that, "the judgement *has* come." Notice what this message is. It's a message for people to fear God. It says in verse 7, "He cried out in a loud voice." There are a lot of preachers today who preach in a very soft voice, "Love God". There is nothing wrong with that message, but it must always be tempered with the dynamic loud message that we are to, "Fear God." Why? Because there will be a time of

judgement. It says in verse 6 that this first angel had the "everlasting gospel to proclaim." What is the gospel? Sometimes you'll hear a preacher who just preaches hellfire and brimstone. He walks up and down the congregation's back and he'll pour salt in the wounds walk up and down like he has on hobnail boots in his preaching and after somebody hears him preach, they say, "Man! He really preached the gospel!" Well, not necessarily! He might have just gotten people ready for the gospel because the gospel is the "good news!" That's what the word gospel means the good news! The backdrop of the good news must always be the bad news. What is the bad news? That man is sinful. That God is just—that judgement is coming but what is the good news? That God has offered us a way to escape this judgement and it is through his son, Jesus Christ. The good news is not good without the bad news.

Imagine for a moment that I came up to you and I said, "Your house is not on fire." You'd look at me like I was crazy, because you wouldn't understand what I was saying. But what if I said something before that which was bad news then it would make all the difference in the world. What if I came up to you and said, "I just saw two fire trucks racing down the street heading towards your neighborhood." That would probably cause you to fear for a moment and then what if I said "but your house is not on fire!" It would make all the difference in the world. Then that would be good news because of the bad news that somebody's house is on fire. Well you see the bad news is man is sinful judgement is coming but the good news is God has prepared a way for us to escape his judgement. So the first angel says, "Judgement is come."

Angel Two: Babylon is fallen!

Let's read verse 8 and see what this second angel has to say. Revelation, 14:8 "A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'" The message of the first angel was, "Judgement is come" but the message of the second angel is, "Babylon is fallen." I'm not going to say a whole lot about Babylon now, because there is more about Babylon when we get to chapters 17 and 18. At this point Babylon represents the ungodly world system. It is man's attempt to be God. The word "Babylon" comes from the Old Testament, the city of Babel and the tower of Babel. That was when man tried to prove he was smart enough to build a tower that would reach up to God. It represents man's attempt to be God. Babylon represents man's accomplishments, man's attainments and it represents the political, the economic and the religious system of the Antichrist. This angel announces that Babylon is fallen and he says it again, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon." Why does he say it twice? It is because we're going to see that both religious Babylon and economic Babylon are going to fall. This is going to happen just before Jesus returns. Let's leave this one now because we will be talking more about Babylon later.

Angel Three: Escape God's wrath!

Let's read verses 9-13 and hear from the third angel. "A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.' This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's

commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'"

What is the third angel's message? Escape God's wrath! It says in verse 10 that "God's fury is going to be poured out full strength." That's a pretty awesome statement there. The Bible speaks about God's wrath throughout its pages. All through history God's wrath, his fury has been diluted; it has been mixed with his mercy and with his love. We could not survive God's wrath if it were not mixed with his mercy. Let me try to illustrate this. If you gave me a glass of arsenic and told me to drink it, I'd be a fool to because it would kill me, but if you gave me a glass of water, and you told me there was one drop of arsenic in it, I might be willing to drink it, because that arsenic is mixed or diluted with water. That's the way God's wrath is right now and has been throughout history. It has been mixed or diluted with mercy but the time is going to come in the future where as it says in verse 10 that, "his fury and his wrath will be poured full strength." What's going to be the result of that? It says all those who have refused to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior will suffer torment. Look at verse 10; it says that kind of person is going to be "tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb."

What is Hell? Well you've often heard that Hell is fire and brimstone. I believe Hell is tormenting and yes, I believe it is at least as bad as fire but I happen to believe it is even worse than that, because you see in the Bible the writers of the Bible were forced to take human, or material, or physical concepts and use them to describe spiritual realities and so the worst thing they could imagine would be being burned by fire tormented in an intense heat and so when the writers of the Bible and Jesus, himself, started talking about Hell, they described it as "Hell fire." It's going to be at *least* that bad, but I believe it will be even worse than that! God never intended a person to go to Hell! The Bible says in Matthew 25, that Hell was prepared for the devil and his angels, but because of man's sin, every person who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ, who rejects the love of God, who rejects the mercy of God, they, themselves, will be sending themselves to this place the Bible calls Hell.

Some think Hell is going to be one great party and they go to nightclubs and strip clubs and casinos and they think that's what Hell is going to be—a good time partying forever and ever. The Bible says in verse 11 there is going to be "no rest day and night." That means there is going to be a constant sense of tension and unsettlement: No rest no peace no tranquility. Others think, "Well, if there is a Hell, at least I'll go and it will be over with quickly! I'm afraid not. The Bible says here in verse 11, "the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever." This angel is preaching a message everybody needs to hear! "Escape God's wrath!" And the Bible asks the question, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? The Bible says, "The only way to escape God's wrath is by accepting Jesus Christ.

Verse 11 says, "There's no rest day or night for those who worship the beast," but there is a beautiful contrast in verse 13. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor." Isn't that good to know? The Bible says those who love the Lord, who know the Lord when they die heaven will be a time of rest for them and their works will follow them. Your good works do not send you to heaven, but they do *follow* you to heaven.

Angel Four: Reap the harvest!

We have looked at the voices of three of these angels. Look at the last one in verses 14-20.

John writes, "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one 'like a son of man' with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, 'Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia." (about 180 miles)

You say, "What in the world is this all about? Well the message of the fourth angel is actually a message to the other angels and it is this message "Reap the harvest!" That's why I called this section, "The International Harvest," because the time is going to come when God's angels will be sent forth to gather from the four corners of the earth all of those who are unrighteous.

In Matthew 13, Jesus told the story of a man who went out into his field and he planted wheat but at night the enemy slipped in and planted weeds among the wheat. Then as the wheat began to grow, the weeds began to grow and it was very noticeable there were weeds among the wheat. The servants of the good farmer said, "Why don't we go out there and pull up all the weeds?" but the farmer very wisely said, "No don't do that. Instead, let both of them grow together but at the time of harvest I will send my laborers and they will go into the harvest. They will reap the harvest and they will separate the weeds from the wheat. Then I'll take the weeds and I'll burn them in a fire." We don't have to wonder what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 13, because he, himself, gives the interpretation. He says the son of man is planting good seed and the wheat are the children of the Lord but the devil has slipped in and planted weeds. Then, Jesus said, "At the end of the age," this is what we are talking about in Revelation 14. "He will send forth his angels and they will reap the harvest All of those who have not accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior will experience the fire of his judgement."

God's judgement is going to come. There's going to be an international harvest. If you are not a Christian, the most important question you should be answering is "How can I escape God's wrath God's judgement?" The only way to escape God's wrath and God's judgement is to stand where God's wrath and judgement have already fallen.

CONCLUSION

Years ago when they were settling the plains of the United States, settlers were often devastated by prairie fires. It was not unusual to look and see the horizon filled with smoke and fire as it was rushed toward a homestead by prairie winds. Many families lost their farms and their homes until they learned how to overcome the fire. They learned that whenever they saw a wildfire coming toward them, the best thing to do was to go outside their house and light a fire themselves all around their house and let it burn the area around their house. Then, after the fire was out, when the wild prairie fire swept in on their property, they and their families could stand in the burned out area and the fire would not hurt them. There is a great lesson here.

The only place to safely escape the torment the wrath the punishment of God's judgement is to stand where his judgement has already fallen. Do you know where that is? When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God placed upon him the iniquities of us all his judgement his wrath fell upon his son on the cross. That's why Jesus cried out, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?" Jesus experienced Hell—separation from his Father—and the only place where you and I can stand to escape his judgement is at the foot of the cross where his judgement has already fallen.

OUTLINE

I. THE VISION OF THE 144,000

- A. The time: After the tribulation
- B. Their traits: Unmarried male Jews, without fault

- 1. Celibate
- 2. Evangelistic
- 3. Truthful

II. THE VOICES OF THE ANGELS

- Angel One: Judgment is come! (vs. 6-7)
- Angel Two: Babylon is fallen! (vs. 8)
- Angel Three: Escape God's wrath! (vs. 9-13)
- Angel Four: Reap the harvest! (vs. 14-20)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes