

UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part sixteen

Sunday, February 11th, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2030

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ASSURANCE FOR CHRISTIANS WHEN THE WORLD FACES THE FIRE OF GOD'S COMING END-TIME JUDGMENT

Revelation 14:1-20 - "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [2] And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, [3] and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. [4] It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. [6] Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. [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." [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." [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 with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. [11] And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." [12] Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. [13] And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" [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. [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."

It's important to be reminded again of where we are in the flow of the book of Revelation. We are continuing our study of the interlude between the sounding of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath. Remember, each of the "sevens" (seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls) takes us right up to the very end of time. These three "sevens" pile up on top of each other, both in speed and in intensity.

But in this interlude of the *visions* (not an actual interlude in the *events*) John is being given a picture of the *meaning* of the things that are about to be revealed about the pouring out of God's wrath and the end of the age. *First*, John has been shown that this is a *spiritual* conflict that has been unfolding. This is the importance of chapter 12. This is not just a *military* conflict, or an *economic* conflict, or a *political* conflict. *Satan* (that Dragon) is determined to crush the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. John is only seeing the *outward* manifestation of an age-long struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

Second, John has been shown that while the real nature of the struggle is spiritual and invisible, Satan will manifest himself *visibly*, particularly in the end-time efforts of the antichrist and the false prophet. The antichrist will stand on a political structure much like those kingdoms Daniel wrote about in Daniel 9. The false prophet will

work in a religious system that will prompt worship of the antichrist and his power. Hence the importance of Revelation chapter 13. We begin to see the kinds of **agencies** or **outward means** Satan will use as this battle intensifies.

Now, just before the unfolding of the very end, John is once again given a vision designed to assure him and the church of God's ultimate control and victory over the affairs of the end-times events. History is all still in God's sovereign hand.

This is the purpose behind chapter 14. We get to see the curtain pulled back (as has been granted a few times already in Revelation) to see future events **as though they had already taken place**. The actual end is still to come. But John sees it as already accomplished. Such is the confidence we are to have in the power and faithfulness of God through Jesus Christ. As we saw in **Revelation 12:10-11**, our victory is already an accomplished fact. Indeed, this is what so infuriates Satan and spurs him on in his frantic end-time rampage. Remember, John has already had revealed to him that Satan knows his time is short.

Chapter fourteen is an amazing piece of prophetic summary. It is actually a series of brief, loosely connected visions doing two things at once: **First**, it looks back to **recap** some of the earlier themes of the Revelation. And **second**, it looks ahead to themes that will be developed in the remaining chapters of the book:

1) THE VISION OF THE LAMB AND THE SEALED SAINTS ON MOUNT ZION

Revelation 14:1-5 - "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. [2] And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, [3] and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. [4] It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."

Immediately, when we see that number - 144,000 - we realize we're being taken back by John to a theme from **Revelation chapter 7**. This is another picture of those who have been sealed by God - who have come through the great tribulation:

Revelation 7:14-17 - "I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [15] "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. [16] They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.[17] For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is the same multitude. They won't actually **experience** this final triumph until the unfolding of the events of **Revelation 20-22**. But there's a reason John brings them back to our attention right here, after the unfolding of the horrific events of chapter 13.

The thirteenth chapter closes with this picture and warning about the mark of the beast. That thirteenth chapter makes the future look nothing but bleak and hopeless for those who refuse his mark. They seem to lose the battle in the end - **Revelation 13:15b** - "...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."

That is, all looks hopeless **until** we see this multitude again in chapter fourteen! And here's the amazing contrast John intends us to see and marvel at. This crowd of people - these people who **refused** the mark of the beast - who paid the ultimate price for their devotion to Jesus - have not been annihilated or wiped

out. And guess what - these people who *refused* the mark are *marked* after all - **Revelation 14:1** - "Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads."

And not only have these divinely marked people *survived* the persecution, and yes, even martyrdom, they are now pictured as a *singing* people - **Revelation 14:3** - "....and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth."

We've seen singing and praising pictured in Revelation before, but this singing is specifically said to be very different. This is a song *specifically sung by the redeemed* (those who, in John's words, have been "*redeemed from the earth*" 3b).

Also highly significant is the fact that John says this song isn't a song that can be "*learned*" - "*....no one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth*"(3b). Redemption can't be learned like history can be learned, or like one can learn to drive a car. Redemption isn't an *acquired skill*. It invades from the *outside*. It's a work of God. You can't get it from a church or from your parents. It must be *experienced* to be known.

They sing this song "*before the four living creatures and before the elders.*" Notice again some of the clues we pick up in these verses about earlier issues. John pretty much tells us who these 144,000 are. We said they were the whole people of God - the church comprised of Gentiles and Jews who will yet be brought into the kingdom in mass. This is exactly the way Paul described the people of God in Romans 9 through 11. Also, notice that these purchased people are treated as distinct from the elders around the throne (as we discussed in our study of Revelation 5:8-10).

The redeemed are marked by *purity of life* - **Revelation 14:4-5** - "It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, [5] and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless."

They are sexually pure. They are absolutely truthful in their speech. And, most importantly, they are so dedicated to Jesus Christ that they "*follow the Lamb wherever He goes*" (4). This is particularly significant when we remember John is thinking primarily about those who, out of loyalty to following the Lamb, will not bow to the beast or receive his mark. As they follow the Lamb they will meet the same end as the Lamb who was slain as He obeyed the will of His heavenly Father.

2) THE ANGELIC CALL TO REPENTANCE

Revelation 14:6-7 - "Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. [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."

In view of the coming end, once again there is a call for "*those who dwell on the earth*" to repent and respond to the gospel. Notice, there is only *one* gospel for every "*nation and tribe and language and people*" (6). "*Those who dwell on the earth*" is consistently John's way of describing those who are *of* the earth - that is, who follow the way of antichrist and the false prophet.

That the final end is still to come and not quite here yet is again made clear. The message of repentance was sounded when God's judgements first began to be poured, *though only in measure*, in **Revelation chapter 9**. The call to repentance was refused even after God's measured judgement began to strike with the repeated emphasis on *one third* of the inhabitants of the earth - **Revelation 9:20-21** - "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor

give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, [21] nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts."

Here, in chapter 14, John by the Holy Spirit, sees the people still are being called by the gospel to be redeemed. They have been impressed by the signs and wonders of the antichrist and his false prophet. They are being urged now to repent, turn from the worship of the beast, and bow and **"...worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water"(14:7).**