

Heaven Or Hell: Which Will It Be?

Revelation 14:1-13

Introduction

- The Psalmist raised a question thousands of years ago that still plagues and baffles many of us today, “How long will the wicked triumph?” (Psalm 94:3) Sometimes it really does seem like “the good guys finish last.” It will certainly appear that way during the Great Tribulation.
- Chapter 13 records the rise to power of the Antichrist (the Sea Beast) and the False Prophet (the Land Beast).
 - They make war with the saints and overcome them (13:7).
 - They have authority over all the earth (13:7).
 - They kill those who will not worship the beast or his image (13:15).
- However, chapter 13 is not the end of the book or the “rest of the story.” Chapter 14 stands in stark contrast to chapter 13 and is intended to 1) show us how things will end and 2) encourage all “who follow the lamb” (14:4). Those who follow Christ have the promise of heaven. Those who follow the beast have the prospect of hell. The one who marks you is crucial. The one you worship is decisive.

Transition

Those who go to heaven:

I. Will follow the Lord. 14:1-5

Then I looked and behold introduces a new and awesome vision. The Lamb who was standing (W.A.R.) in the midst of the throne in chapter 5 is now standing (W.A.R.) on Mt. Zion. Some Bible teachers believe Mt. Zion is a reference to heaven, based upon Hebrews 12:22-24. However, a better view is to see this verse as a reflection of Psalm 2, a beautiful messianic psalm. Psalm 2:6 states, “Yet I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion.” Psalm 48:2 builds on this by saying, “Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mt. Zion on the side to the north, the city of the great King.” And Isaiah 24:23 adds to this, “For the Lord of Hosts will reign on Mt. Zion and in Jerusalem and before His elders, gloriously.” In contrast to the false lamb coming up out of the earth (13:11) the true Lamb stands on the holy mountain of Zion. However, he does not stand alone. With him is a wonderful group that teaches us four important lessons concerning our relationship to the Lord.

1. We are His possession. 14:1

- The 144,000 is the same group as that in 7:1-8.
- Having His name and His Father’s name written on their forehead symbolizes they are under God’s protection and that they are also God’s possession. Being marked by the Lamb and the Father is a symbol of ownership, loyalty, security, dependence, safety, and in this context particularly, allegiance.
- The time of this vision is not specified, though most likely it looks to the millennial reign of Christ noted in chapter 20. This chapter is a preview of coming attractions. At this point we are simply provided a glimpse of what the future will entail.

2. We sing His praises. 14:2-3

John again hears a voice from heaven (cf. 4:1; 10:4, 8; 11:12; 12:10, 13; 18:4; 19:1).

- The voice from heaven is not specified, though Ezekiel 43:2 likens the voice of God to the sound of many waters and Revelation 1:15 describes the voice of the Lord Jesus in the same way. However, 19:6 uses the same description in reference to the heavenly multitude and that may be the best understanding here.
- That the voice is like many waters and the voice of loud thunders notes its powerful and impressive sound.
- The sound of harpists harping (lit. translation) emphasizes the joy and celebration experienced in heaven from seeing the Lamb stand upon Mt. Zion.
- The heavenly multitudes sing a new song 1) before the throne, 2) before the four living creatures (see ch. 4) and 3) before the elders (see ch. 4). The new song of chapter 14 may be related to the new song of 5:9. Therefore it is the new song of redemption that is being sung by those who recognize the wonderful salvation that has been provided for sinners by the Lamb.
- No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who were redeemed from the earth. Being the song of redemption this is a song that unbelievers and the unregenerate cannot sing. Only those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb are capable of singing this song. Why the song is restricted to the 144,000 is not clear. The restriction may be only that they are the ones immediately in view in the context. Also, it may be that they sing this song in a particular way because of the particular assignment and ministry during the Tribulation. This is made clear in verse 4.

3. We honor His preeminence. 14:4

Three things are said about the 144,000 in verse 4. A fourth characteristic is identified in verse 5.

- These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. This symbolizes their moral purity in a world that will be rampant with immorality. While it is possible to understand the word virgin in a literal sense, it is more likely that the phrase is simply noting that they are wholly devoted to and committed to the Lamb. The word virgin then is used in a spiritual sense (see James 4:4).
- They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The word “follow” is in the present tense noting continuous action. They allow no rival in their allegiance to the Lamb.
- They were redeemed from men and are first fruits to God and the Lamb. The word “redeem” means to buy or to purchase, as from the market place. We know that the price paid was not gold, silver or precious stone, but it was the blood of the Lamb that purchased men to God. First fruits indicate that they are the beginning of a greater harvest that will follow. They are an offering to God separated and wholly sanctified unto Him. However, they are not all that will come. They are simply the initial blessing of a much greater ingathering that will follow. The 144,000 are a choice offering to the Father and the Lamb and they honor His Lordship both in character and service.

4. **We exhibit His purity. 14:5**

John also notes of the 144,000 that no deceit or falsehood is found in their mouth. This notes how they act toward men. Further, they are without fault before the throne of God. This notes how they appear before the Lord. Unlike the lost world which “exchanged the truth about God for a lie” (Romans 1:25), the 144,000 make no compromise with Antichrist or the False Prophet. Purity of life and truthfulness of speech characterize these devoted followers of the Lamb. What an incredible example they provide for you and for me in the day in which we live, in the day in which we follow the Lamb.

Transition

Those who go to heaven:

II. **Will fear the Lord. 14:6-7**

Beginning with verse 6 we will see no less than six angelic messengers appear in the remainder of this chapter (verses 6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18). The first three angels do not necessarily appear in chronological order. Rather, they will address issues that span the entire tribulation period. The first angel will proclaim good news. The second angel will pronounce judgement. The third angel will pronounce damnation.

1. **Preach the gospel to all creation. 14:6**

- Flying in the midst of heaven is actually mid-heaven. It refers to that point in the sky where the sun reaches its apex or highest point. This angel will be at the highest point and verse 7 informs us that he will speak with the loudest voice. All will see him and all will hear him.
- He preaches the everlasting gospel. The everlasting gospel is the same gospel proclaimed throughout all of history. It is the good news of forgiveness and eternal life made possible through the death of Jesus Christ for sinners. Old Testament saints looked forward to this day. All New Testament believers and we look back to what Christ actually accomplished. It is interesting to note that the gospel is called in the Bible “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23), “the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1), “the gospel of God” (Mark 1:14), “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4), “the gospel of salvation” (Eph. 1:13), “the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15), and “the glorious gospel” (1 Tim. 1:11).
- Jesus promised that this gospel would be preached throughout the whole world before the end (Matt. 24:14). The preaching of this angel will in some sense assure that this promise is indeed fulfilled.
- The audience of this message is said to be “those who dwell on the earth.” This is the phrase used throughout Revelation which refers to unbelievers. Furthermore, they are described as “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” The nature of this angel’s ministry is comprehensive and worldwide in the truest sense. He will indeed preach the gospel to all creation. That which he will do then is also our assignment now. To preach the gospel to all creation was the last command our

Lord gave to His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). We are never more faithful to the heart and will of our Lord than when we, like this faithful angel, preach the gospel to all creation.

2. **Glorify God who is our Creator. 14:7**

This particular verse is steeped both in imperatives and in natural revelation. The words “fear,” “give,” and “worship” are all imperatives of command.

- God is the sovereign Lord, therefore we should fear Him.
- God is the awesome judge, therefore we should give Him glory. Note that the text says, “the hour of His judgement has come.” The time for salvation is almost gone. The opportunity to receive Christ is fading quickly. The bowl judgements are fast approaching. Armageddon is just around the corner. The second coming could happen at any moment.
- God is the marvelous Creator, therefore we should worship Him. Our text emphasizes the magnitude of God’s creative work. He is the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water. God has revealed Himself both in nature and in Scripture. Romans 1 reminds us that no one is without excuse, for God has made himself known to all persons both in creation and in conscience.

Application

When Paul evangelized Jews he almost always started with the Old Testament Scriptures, a common starting point with them. However, when he evangelized Greeks and Pagan Gentiles, his starting point was almost always creation (see Acts 14 & 17). In paganized America today, creation is often the best, even a necessary, starting point for us when it comes to evangelizing those who need to know Jesus. Before you introduce someone to the Redeemer, you must first get them to understand there is a Creator. As Creator God made everything. That means as Creator, God made you and God made me. Understanding such a truth is a starting point for my understanding that I have a responsibility to rightly relate to that one who made me. This is the heart of Paul’s theology in Romans 1. This is the heart of John’s argument here in Revelation 14:7.

Transition

Those who go to heaven:

III. **Will be faithful to the Lord. 14:8-13**

The final verses of this paragraph paint a stark contrast between those who die without Christ and those who die with Him. John provides a quick glance at future events on earth as well as future events in eternity. The end for those who do not know Christ can only be described as the most tragic and sorrowful destiny imaginable.

1. **We will escape God’s judgment. 14:8-11**

- Babylon is introduced here for the 1st time, though a more full description will be provided in chapters 17 and 18. Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq, was a political, commercial and religious center. It was once a great empire and was noted for its moral decadence as well as its gross immorality and idolatry.

In Revelation, Babylon stands for that system religiously, politically and economically which stands in opposition to all that is of God. It is Antichrist's worldwide political, economic, and religious empire. Founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10:9) it was the sight of the first organized system of idolatrous and false worship (Genesis 11:1-4). The tower of Babel was its most pronounced expression. So certain is its demise that the word fallen is repeated.

- All nations have been intoxicated, deceived, and seduced by this false system headed by Antichrist. Like a seductive prostitute, the Babylonian system leads men into passionate maddening adultery with a god who is no god at all.
- Those who drink her wine and experience her passion will also drink another wine and experience another passion. Tragically it will be the wine of the wrath of God. As the 144,000 follow the Lamb, so those on the earth follow Babylon and the Beast (verse 9). The result is that they will now drink of the wine of the wrath of God in full strength or in full measure.
- In the Old Testament God's wrath is often pictured as a cup of wine to be drunk (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Such wrath is the personal and proper response of a holy and righteous God to those who have said no to His love and grace revealed in Jesus Christ.
- Verse 10 and 11 provide a terrifying picture of hell and eternal damnation. It is impossible to read these verses and come up with any kind of doctrine of annihilationism or conditional immortality. The picture is one of conscious, eternal and everlasting torment before the angels and the Lamb. This would seem to indicate that those who are saved and are in heaven will have no knowledge of those who are in hell. However, those in hell will have a constant awareness and knowledge of both good angels and the Lord Jesus whom they rejected. This will only enhance the horror and torment that they will experience. Fire and brimstone are often used in Scripture with respect to divine judgement. It was this that God used to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25; Luke 17:29). Our Lord spoke of hell as a place of "eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8; 25:41), "unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43) and the place where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). In Matthew 25:41 Jesus taught that the everlasting fire or hell was "prepared for the devil and his angels." God does not desire that anyone would go to hell, but that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Those who go to hell choose their destiny, saying "no" to the grace of God made available to all through His Son, Jesus Christ.

2. We will experience God's joy. 14:12-13

The destiny of those who know Christ is radically different than those who die without Him. In verse 12 we are called to patience, steadfastness, or perseverance. While our salvation is a signed, sealed and settled issue rooted in the keeping power of God, we are indeed challenged to persevere and the means of our perseverance is noted here in verse 12: those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Jesus reminded us in John 8:31, "If you abide in My Word then you are truly disciples of Mine." John also wrote in his first epistle, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). Those who follow the Lamb have faith in Jesus and those who have faith in Jesus follow the Lamb. The two concepts cannot be separated from one another. In the midst of horrible tribulation and great wickedness, is our

devotion to the Lamb truly worth it? Verse 13 provides a resounding “yes” to that question. John again hears a voice from heaven telling him to write and write words that will be permanent and lasting. Here we encounter the second of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord” is a remarkable statement. It can only be understood when taken as a whole. If we were to say blessed are the dead, that would certainly make no sense and seem blatantly absurd. However, when you add the phrase “who die in the Lord” everything takes on a new perspective. Paul taught us that, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). He also said in Philippians 1:21, “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” Psalm 116:15 teaches us that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” So certain is this truth that the Holy Spirit gives His hearty affirmation. This is the only time that the Holy Spirit is quoted in all of the Revelation except in 22:17. His emphatic “yes” reveals his absolute agreement with the voice from heaven that states that those who die in the Lord are indeed blessed.

- Those who die in the Lord have their final rest.
- Those who die in the Lord find their works following them. In other words, rest and reward is the promise of eternity for those who have followed the Lamb and have kept the faith of Jesus.

Conclusion

Heaven will be an incredible place of blessing for those who follow the Lamb. Hell will be a horrible place of torment for those who follow the beast. John wants his readers to see the remarkable contrast of those in verse 11 with those in verse 13. There is no rest for the wicked, but there is eternal rest for the believer. It has been well said, “better to reign with Christ forever, than to reign with Antichrist for a few years!” (Weirsbe, p. 112). This life is not all that there is. There is an eternity to follow. What we do now will determine where we will be then. It is difficult to comprehend all that is at stake. Of this one thing, however, we can be certain. Those who follow the beast are destined to be disappointed. Those who follow the Lamb are destined to be blessed. Make certain that you know who you are following. Nothing less than your eternal destiny is riding on the choice that you make.