

A FRIGHTENING REMINDER OF HELL

Revelation 14

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A man described a sign outside a church in Atlanta. The sign had the name of the church, and under that was the name of the pastor, and under that the title of the sermon. The title of the sermon was, "Do You Know What Hell Is?" Underneath that, in capital letters, it read, "Come Hear Our Organist Sunday Morning." I'm sure that's not what they meant to say, but it does bring up a good question. What is hell like?
2. In Revelation 7 we were given a description of heaven. In Revelation 14 we are given a description of hell.

II. REVELATION RECAP

1. The book of Revelation is about God's judgment on first-century Israel for rejecting Christ and persecuting His followers. All of this was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Roman empire completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.
2. So far the bulk of Revelation has been a series of visions of Jerusalem's impending destruction.
3. In Revelation 12-13 John takes a break to introduce us to the three great enemies of the early – the unholy trinity. They are the dragon (Satan), who works through the land beast (the Roman Empire) and the land beast (the Jewish religious leaders) to persecute the church.
4. In Revelation 14 we are given a four-fold assurance that Satan will lose, and ultimately the Christians will win. The purpose of this chapter, and of the entire book of Revelation, is to encourage those first century Christians who were undergoing severe persecution.
5. In this chapter, we are going to see a frightening reminder of hell.

III. FOUR ASSURANCES THAT SATAN WILL LOSE

1. Christians will go to heaven.

- i. **Revelation 14:1-5** Then I looked, and there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him were 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 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. 3 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 These are the ones who have not defiled themselves with women, since they remained virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were redeemed from humanity as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.
- ii. In this section we see the Lamb (Jesus) standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 people who are singing a new song.
- iii. Who are the 144,000?
 1. They are Christians. How do we know?
 - a. They have the name of God on their forehead (v. 1).

- b. They are redeemed (v. 3, 4).
 - c. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes (v. 4).
- 2. We were first introduced to the 144,000 in Revelation 7. Four angels were about to unleash God's wrath on the Jerusalem, but a fifth angel tells them to wait until 144,000 Christians are sealed on their foreheads. This was a symbolic way of saying that when God destroyed Jerusalem through the Romans, He was going to spare the Christians. And that is what happened. Before His death, Jesus warned His followers to flee Jerusalem when they saw the city surrounded by armies. Early in the Jewish War, in AD 66, Cestius, the Roman governor of Syria surrounded Jerusalem and attacked it. Just as he was about to conquer the city, his army retreated back to Syria. The Christians saw this a fulfillment of Christ's prophecy, and fled Jerusalem to live in Pella, a city about sixty miles north of Jerusalem. So the 144,000 were the Christians living in Jerusalem at the beginning of the Jewish War. We know that the 144,000 in Rev 14 is the same group because they were redeemed (rescued) from the earth (land; v. 3).
- 3. They sang a new song.
 - a. They 144,000 are singing a new song to God, and no one could learn it except for them (v. 3).
 - b. In the Bible, Christians are commanded to sing a new song when they experience a new blessing. This group is singing a new song because they were rescued from the destruction, and because they were now in heaven.
 - c. They were the only ones who could sing the song because they had a unique experience with God. Every Christian has experienced God's blessings in unique ways.
- 4. They were holy.
 - a. They did not defile themselves with women; they remained virgins (v. 4). Every commentator that I've read sees this as a symbol for spiritual purity. They were not literal virgins, but spiritual virgins, in that they were loyal to Jesus. In fact, the second half of the verse explains the meaning, when it says "they are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes." In 2 Cor 2:2 Paul also uses virginity as a symbol for spiritual purity.
 - i. **2 Corinthians 11:2** "For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, because I have promised you in marriage to one husband—to present a pure virgin to Christ."
 - b. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (v. 5). This is to show that they are not children of Satan, who is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).
- 5. They were the firstfruits.
 - a. Verse 4 says "they were redeemed from humanity as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb."

- b. These Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were the first Christians and the first church in the world.
- iv. Where is this scene taking place?
 - 1. In Revelation 7, the 144,000 were on earth. In this vision they are in heaven.
 - 2. Why do I say they are in heaven?
 - a. They are with Jesus (v. 1). Jesus is in heaven.
 - b. They are standing on Mount Zion (v. 1). Mount Zion is another word for Jerusalem, but the New Testament talk about a new Mount Zion, a new Jerusalem in heaven.
 - i. Hebrews 12:22 “Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God (the heavenly Jerusalem), to myriads of angels, a festive gathering,”
 - c. John heard a sound from heave (v.2). It was like cascading waters, loud thunder, and harpists playing on their harps (v. 3).
 - d. They sang a song before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders (v. 3). This is same description of heaven in Revelation 4, in which God was on his throne, surrounded by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders.
- v. At the time of this vision, the 144,000 were still on earth. But this is a prophecy. John sees a vision of the 144,000 no longer on earth, but in heaven. Not only will God rescue them from the destruction of Jerusalem, but he will take them home to heaven. The purpose is to encourage the early Christians. Satan and his beasts may be fierce. Christians all over the world may be losing their lives. But in the end, you will go to heaven. In the end, you win. In the end, Jesus wins.

2. The gospel is spreading around the world.

- i. **Revelation 14:6-7** 6 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. 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, the sea and the springs of water.”
- ii. This is the second assurance that Satan will lose.
- iii. Here we have an angel preaching the gospel all over the world. The angel is symbolic of the Christians who were spreading the gospel in the first century.
- iv. Before Jesus died, He prophesied that the gospel would be preached around the world before the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - 1. **Matthew 24:14** “This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”
 - 2. This passage is often misinterpreted to mean that the gospel must be preached all over the world before the end of the world and the return of Christ. But in this passage Jesus was not talking about the end of the world, He was prophesying the destruction of Jerusalem. And He said just a few verses later that this would be fulfilled in that generation (Mt 24:34).

3. The word “world” in Matthew 24:14 is the Greek word *oikoumene*. The CSB has a footnote that says it can also be translated “in all the inhabited earth.” It doesn’t necessarily mean every corner of the globe, or every single people group on earth, including American Indians and Australian Aborigines. In Luke 2:1, it is translated “the whole empire.” In Acts 11:28 “the Roman world.” So, the word can simply mean the Roman empire.
4. And this prophecy was fulfilled. From the time of Christ’s death in A.D. 33 to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the gospel had spread all over the Roman empire. All you have to do is read the book of Acts.
5. **Colossians 1:5-6** “... You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world...”
6. **Colossians 1:23** “This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it.”
- v. The point here is to assure the Christians in the first century of victory. Even though the unholy trinity is wreaking havoc, the gospel has spread and will continue to spread like wildfire.
- vi. And we are witnesses of this. Here we are, 2,000 years later, on the other side of the world from Christianity’s birthplace, and we are worshipping Jesus. Christianity is now the largest religion in the entire world.

3. Jerusalem will be destroyed.

- i. **Revelation 14:8** “And another, a second angel, followed, saying, “It has fallen, Babylon the Great has fallen. She made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality, which brings wrath.”
- ii. According to Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew 24, after the gospel spreads around the Roman empire, the end will come for Jerusalem. That is what this verse is about. Babylon is metaphor for Jerusalem. In Revelation 11:8, Jerusalem was called Sodom and Egypt; now she is called Babylon. This is another assurance given to the early church that Jerusalem will be destroyed.
- iii. Why is Jerusalem called Babylon?
 1. In the OT Babylon was the nation that destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and carried the Jews away to captivity for 70 years.
 2. **Milton Terry** “Babylon is depicted in the OT prophets as the proud oppressor, the insolent persecutor, full of abominable idolatries and of all manner of wickedness.”
 3. The reason John calls Jerusalem Babylon is because by the first century Jerusalem had become Babylon.
 4. **David Chilton** “St. John's reason for applying the word to Jerusalem is that Jerusalem has become a Babylon, a replica of the proud, idolatrous, persecuting oppressor of God's people.”
- iv. Notice that “she made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality.” Remember that in the OT Israel is God’s bride, and her unfaithfulness is called sexual immorality, or adultery, or harlotry. The point here is that Israel’s divine commission was to be a light, pointing the world to the one true God. But instead,

they rejected Christ and worshiped Rome instead, thereby leading the rest of the world astray.

- v. Do you remember the story of Jesus going into the temple and overturning tables and driving out the moneychangers and sellers? The Jews had turned the temple into a marketplace. The area they were using for the temple marketplace was called the Court of Gentiles. It was especially created so Gentiles could have a place to come from all over the world to worship God. But instead of leading the Gentiles to God, the Jews took over their space in the temple for the purpose of making money.
- vi. **David Chilton** "Israel has abused her privileged position as the divinely ordained "guide to the blind" and "light to those in darkness" (Rem. 2: 19). The nations looked to her for instruction, yet ended up blaspheming the name of God because of her wickedness (Rem. 2: 24). God had intended her to be Lady Wisdom, summoning all men to eat of her food, to drink of her wine, and to live in the way of understanding (Prov. 9: 1-6). Instead, she had become Madam Folly, using stolen goods to tempt men into the depths of hell (Prov. 9: 13-18)."
- vii. Once again, the point is the encourage first century Christians who were being persecuted that Jerusalem, the base of operations for their Jewish persecutors, would indeed be destroyed.

4. Unbelievers will suffer in hell.

- i. **Revelation 14:9-13** 9 And another, a third angel, followed them and spoke 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 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, 11 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. 12 This calls for endurance from the saints, who keep God's commands and their faith in Jesus." 13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "so they will rest from their labors, since their works follow them."
- ii. In this passage an angel pronounces judgment on anyone who worships the beast.
- iii. What is the beast? From Revelation 13 we learned that the beast is the Roman empire in general, and the emperor Nero Caesar in particular.
- iv. This warning comes right after the fall of Jerusalem (Babylon) is announced, because the sin of the Jewish leadership was to choose Rome over Jesus (Jn 19:15). Then the text says that anyone else who chooses to worship the Roman emperor rather than Jesus will face judgment.
- v. If you remember from Revelation 13, the mark of the beast was 666, which was the number of Nero's name. The mark is not literal, but symbolic, just the 144,000 did not literally have the name of Jesus marked on their foreheads. The mark is symbolic of worship. Those who worship the beast, the Roman emperor, have the symbolic mark of the beast on them. Only they aren't marked for protection and salvation like the 144,000, but for punishment.

- vi. Notice the description of hell.
 1. Hell is for those who worship other gods instead of Jesus (v. 9).
 - a. **Revelation 14:9** “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand”
 - b. In this case hell was assigned to those who worshiped Rome rather than Jesus. But the universal application is that hell is for people who worship anything other than Jesus – false religion, money, pleasure, power, position, a relationship, reputation, career, etc.
 - c. Jesus is the only way to be saved. You must turn from sin, and put your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of your life. To reject Christ is to reject heaven embrace hell.
 - d. Hell is for people who reject Christ for other things.
 2. Hell is experiencing the full force of God’s wrath.
 - a. **Revelation 14:10** “He will also drink the wine of God’s wrath, which is poured full strength into the cup of his anger.”
 - b. God’s wrath is His extreme anger against sin.
 - c. Webster’s 1828 defines wrath as “violent anger; vehement exasperation; indignation.”
 - d. The phrase “poured full strength” an interesting one. It literally means mixed unmixed.
 - e. In that time, they would dilute the wine with water to make it last longer, but then they would add spices to increase the kick. The Greek text in this verse means that God would add spices to his wrath, and would not dilute it with water. In other words, His wrath is going to be a hard drink.
 - f. God hates sin, more than we can imagine. But He doesn’t fully unleash His wrath in this life. When Jesus died on the cross, God poured out His wrath on Jesus so that we could be forgiven and have eternal life. But Christ’s atoning death only applies to those who accept Christ. Those who reject Christ in this life must face the full force of God’s wrath in the next life. That’s what hell is. It is God’s wrath poured full strength.
 3. Hell is a place of intense physical pain.
 - a. **Revelation 14:10** “He will be tormented with fire and sulfur”
 - b. The Greek word for “tormented” is *basanizo*. It means an examination by torture, torment. To torture, afflict with pain, vex, harass.
 - c. Some translations say “fire and brimstone.”
 - d. This is the same materials used in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the same materials in the Lake of Fire (Gen 19:24; Rev 20:10).
 4. Hell is a place of unending pain.
 - a. **Revelation 14:11** “and the smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever.”

- b. This is one of the most hated doctrines in the Bible, the idea not only of a hell, but of an eternal hell. Yet over and over again the Bible reiterates this fact. Unbelievers will experience unending pain for all eternity.
- 5. Hell is a place of unceasing pain.
 - a. **Revelation 14:11** “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.”
 - b. What’s the difference between unending and unceasing? Unending means you stay in hell forever. Unceasing means the pain is non-stop; there is no break; no sleep; not time to catch your breath; it is constant.
- 6. Hell is the loss of heaven.
 - a. **Revelation 14:13** Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “so they will rest from their labors, since their works follow them.”
 - b. The worst thing about hell is the loss of heaven.
 - c. Note three observations about heaven:
 - i. It is a state of blessedness.
 - 1. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”
 - 2. To the Jew, being blessed meant receiving supreme favor from the hand of God. And according to the Jews, the ultimate blessing was the Beatific Vision, the vision of God. It was the hope of one day going to heaven to see God face to face; to be close to God. To the Jew, the closer you were to God in intimacy and proximity, the more blessed you were.
 - 3. Heaven is being in the presence of God. Hell is being separated from God for all eternity.
 - 4. “From now on.”
 - a. Why does it say that those who die in the Lord are blessed “from now on”? Haven’t they always been blessed? I believe this is referring to the martyrs in Revelation 6 who, even though they died, were still crying out for vengeance against the Jews. But Revelation 14 is talking about the early Christians who died after the destruction of Jerusalem. They are blessed because vengeance has already been poured out.
 - ii. It is a state of rest.
 - 1. V. 13 “they will rest from their labors”

- 2. Heaven is rest. Rest from the battle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Rest from pain. Rest from persecution.
 - 3. But again, in hell there is no rest (14:11).
 - iii. It is a state of reward.
 - 1. V. 13 “their works will follow them”
 - 2. In heaven you will be rewarded for all the things you’ve done for Christ on earth.
- vii. This is to be an encouragement to believers that one day they will go to heaven, and those who reject Christ for a life of comfort on earth will go to hell. One day the scales of justice will be balanced.
- viii. Let’s look at the rest of the passage.
- ix. **Revelation 14:14-20** 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. 15 Another angel came out of the temple, crying out in a loud voice to the one who was seated on the cloud, “Use your sickle and reap, for the time to reap has come, since the harvest of the earth is ripe.” 16 So the one seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 17 Then another angel who also had a sharp sickle came out of the temple in heaven. 18 Yet another angel, who had authority over fire, came from the altar, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Use your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the vineyard of the earth, because its grapes have ripened.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle at the earth and gathered the grapes from the vineyard of the earth, and he threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. 20 Then the press was trampled outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press up to the horses’ bridles for about 180 miles.
- x. What is happening here? In verses 6-13, three angels made pronouncements. The gospel will be preached. Jerusalem will fall. Unbelievers will go to hell. In verses 14-20, three more angels act out those pronouncements. Let me make three observations.
 - 1. The Son of Man harvests the souls of believers.
 - a. The Son of Man is seated on a cloud holding a sickle.
 - b. This refers to Jesus. “The Son of Man” was His favorite title for Himself.
 - c. He is holding a sickle. A sickle is a tool used for harvesting.
 - d. An angel delivers a message from the Father to the Son to reap the harvest.
 - e. I believe this harvest refers simply to the souls being saved from the preaching of the gospel around the world in verse 6 during the first century.
 - 2. An angel carries out God’s punishment against Israel.
 - a. Another angel came out of heaven with a sickle.
 - b. Remember that the word “earth” can also be translated land, as in the land of Israel. This angel is instructed by a third angel to gather

the grapes from the vineyard of the land and throw them into the winepress of God's wrath.

- c. In the Old Testament, Israel is symbolized by a vine.
 - d. This angel is acting out the destruction against Israel in the Jewish War.
3. The destruction of Israel began outside the city.
 - a. Verse 20 says that the press was trampled outside the city.
 - b. The Jewish War lasted from AD 66-70. It didn't start in Jerusalem. It started outside of Jerusalem, in the north in the cities in Galilee. Then the Romans worked their way down. The final six months of the war involved the Romans surrounding the city, until they finally broke in and destroyed it.
 4. There was a lot of bloodshed in Israel.
 - a. Verse 20 says that blood flowed for 180 miles, or 1,600 stadia, as deep as the horses' bridles. Interestingly, the land of Israel as a Roman province was 1,664 stadia. This verse is obviously symbolic of the great bloodshed throughout Israel inflicted by the Romans.
 - b. **Josephus** (describing the final devastation in Jerusalem) "Blood ran down over all the lower parts of the city, from the upper city... The outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood... The blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts... The whole city ran down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood."
Gentry, *Revelation Made Easy*, 101-102

IV. CONCLUSION

1. In this chapter we are given a frightening reminder of hell. What's the point? Don't go there! Become a Christian. Repent of your sins and have faith in Jesus Christ.
2. God doesn't want you to go to hell. He sent His Son to save you from hell. But you must decide to accept His gift of forgiveness by turning to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.