

Intro. Recently I read through a couple of books by Bill O'Reilly, *Killing Kennedy & Killing Lincoln*. Those subjects fascinate me. One thing I noticed was how much protection was given the President of the US from the 1860s until the 1960s. Lincoln had one bodyguard assigned to him & he was off drinking the night Lincoln was shot. Kennedy had an entire entourage of secret service men & other protectors, but they couldn't talk JFK out of appearing in Dallas on that fateful day. Even though we live in a great country, some leaders have protection surrounding them, including some preachers. If we value the lives of a few key individuals to protect them, how much more does God value His people to protect them? As we continue our series from Revelation 12-14 on “When All of Hell Breaks Loose on Earth,” today we look at the first few verses of chapter 14 on “The Protection of Israel.”

Theme: Worship in heaven

Background: Chapters 12-14 form a unit in Revelation & though chapters 12 & 13 deal with Satan's work on the earth through the Antichrist & false prophet, chapter 14 focuses primarily on God's protection of His people through the Great Tribulation & gospel proclamation before the Lord's return.

➤ Let me walk through this brief text & identify a few issues for you & then provide a few areas of application.

Explanation of the Text:

I. The 144,000 are the redeemed of Israel (14:1, 3-4; cf. 7:4-8; Romans 11:25-26)

Illus: Numbers are not always important. Think, for example, about the question the great philosopher Yogi Berra was asked after ordering a pizza. “Do you want it cut into 4 or 8 slices?” Berra thought, “You better make it 4, I'm not sure I can eat 8.”—numbers like that aren't important but they are usually important in Revelation

- 144,000 represent $12^2 \times 10^3$ which are numbers of fulfillment, completion & perfection—this represents the perfect & complete people of God
- I also believe this number represents Israel, because when we see it in chapter 7, it deals with Israel
- I think the perfected & completed people of Israel seen here is what Paul foresaw after the fullness of the Gentiles were redeemed, so all Israel would be saved (not every single Jew, but all those whom God foreknew, as mentioned in Romans 11:2)

II. Israel will come to trust in Jesus the Lamb as their Messiah (14:1, 4)

- Notice how this group has both God the Father's name & the name of the Lamb on their foreheads (marked off, set aside)—if this is talking about the Jews, and it seems to be, then the Jews will have their eyes opened to the work of Jesus as the Lamb & their Messiah

Illus: Recently, I was given this word carving by Steve Bell & it's a beautiful picture of the sufferings of Christ as one of His own, Judas, betrayed Him for 30 pieces of silver; He was stripped of His clothing & beaten with a whip (with bits of bone & broken glass & pottery woven into the end); He had a crown of thorns placed on His head & was nailed to a cruel cross with the sign, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews;” soldiers even gambled over His clothes & Jesus suffered for your sins & mine

- The fact these are listed as “the firstfruits for God and the Lamb” (14:4) is further support for this being Israel, because the gospel went to them first (Acts 2; Romans 1:16)

III. The new song is about Christ's redemption (14:2-3; cf. 5:9-14)

- The last time we saw people in heaven singing with the four living creatures (possibly a representation of God's creative species) & the elders (representing the 12 tribes of Israel & 12 apostles—OT & NT saints) was in chapters 4-5 as they sing to God the Father & then a new song to God the Son, Jesus Christ the Lamb—a song of how worthy Christ is to take & open the scroll because of His work of redemption by His death

Illus: Jim Ailor use to say, “More than any other religion or faith, Christianity is a singing faith” & he's right

IV. These Jewish believers will be sanctified by God's grace (14:4-5)

- These believers are described according to their sexual purity, words of integrity & lives of blamelessness—we know all are sinners except for God's sanctifying grace & He aids these believers so they stand out from the world

Illus: One of the problems with the Christian faith in America is so few stand out from the world in the way they live, dress, talk & act but the Lord wants us to be set apart for Him. Parents need to help give their children &

teenagers discernment in what they wear & parents need to stop cussing so junior can stop cussing so that Christ's followers look & sound different than the world

Application of the Text:

I. Trust in the Person & work of Jesus Christ the Lamb (14:1, 3-4)

- If the Jews, whose eyes have been closed & whose hearts have been hardened, will come to see Jesus Christ for who He is, then so should you. Surrender your life to Jesus immediately & begin serving Him.

Illus: We trust in a lot of different things—you trust in your seat to hold you up right now; men & women trust each other in making marital vows; children trust their parents to care for them; we trust our money to be secure in the bank—all those things could fail, but Jesus has never once failed, so trust Him

II. Sing of the Lord's redemptive work (14:2-3)

Illus: It was Christmas Eve 1875 and Ira Sankey was traveling on a Delaware River steamboat when he was recognized by some of the passengers. His picture had been in the newspaper because he was the song leader for the famous evangelist D.L. Moody. They asked him to sing one of his own hymns, but Sankey demurred, saying that he preferred to sing William B. Bradbury's hymn, "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." As he sang, one of the stanzas began, "We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way." When he finished, a man stepped from the shadows and asked, "Did you ever serve in the Union Army?" "Yes," Mr. Sankey answered, "in the spring of 1860." "Can you remember if you were doing picket duty on a bright, moonlit night in 1862?" "Yes," Mr. Sankey answered, very much surprised. "So did I, but I was serving in the Confederate army. When I saw you standing at your post, I thought to myself, 'That fellow will never get away alive.' I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow, completely concealed, while the full light of the moon was falling upon you. At that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing...'Let him sing his song to the end,' I said to myself, 'I can shot him afterwards. He's my victim at all events, and my bullet cannot miss him.' But the song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly: 'We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way.' Those words stirred up many memories. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother. She had many times sung that song to me. When you had finished your song, it was impossible for me to take aim again. I thought, 'The Lord who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty.' And my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side." (K. Hughes, *Liberating Ministry From The Success Syndrome*, 69)—sing of your redemption, because it just may save your life or the lives of those listening

III. Live out your faith in your everyday life (14:4-5)

Illus: I talk to lots of people from all different walks of life & at different stages of life. Older generations often tell me, "I wish I would have started living for the Lord when I was a young person, because it would have saved me a lot of heartache from bad decisions I made." I've never had someone say to me, "I wish I wouldn't have taken the Christian faith so seriously so I could have lived it up more as a teenager or young adult"—learn from the wisdom of the living patriarchs of the faith & trust Jesus today

Conc. The early American Indians had a unique practice of training young braves. On the night of a boy's thirteenth birthday, after learning hunting, scouting, and fishing skills, he was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone. Until then, he had never been away from the security of the family and the tribe. But on this night, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he was in the middle of a thick woods and he was terrified! Every time a twig snapped, he visualized a wild animal ready to pounce. After what seemed like an eternity, dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight entered the interior of the forest. Looking around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he beheld the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father. He had been there all night long (Our Daily Bread at sermonillustrations.com). Just as the American Indian teen had his father watching over him, so our heavenly Father watches over us & protects His children, sealing them for redemption. To be His child, you must repent & believe in Jesus, surrendering your life to Him.