

65. The Book of Revelation—14:15-20

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(1-5-22)

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We haven't met in three weeks due to the holidays—so let's recap a little bit before we move forward in our study.

Last time we met, we got as far as verse 14 of Revelation 14—but let's back up and pick up our study tonight starting with verse 9—

Revelation 14:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

As we have said already, this language is talking about the final judgments of God poured out in the final months of the Great Tribulation (possibly the last 18 to 24 months).

As we have pointed out, they are called "**the cup of His indignation**" and likened to **wine** that is undiluted and unstrained (containing the dregs) which represents judgments that will be full-strength—i.e., "*without being mixed with any mercy*".

So, what's in view is '*full strength*' judgment starting on the earth but resulting in everlasting judgment in the Lake of Fire (Hell).

Revelation 14:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Here is the patience of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. ¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

God considers the death of His saints on the earth a 'blessed' thing—

Psalms 116:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord *is* the death of His saints.

Because all their tears are done, all hardships, heartaches, trials and persecutions are over and they shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever—and in His presence is fullness of joy forevermore.

Revelation 14:13 (NKJV)

¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' " "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

The Holy Spirit pronounces the Tribulation martyrs **blessed** because—“**their works follow them**”—The Greek word is ‘Erga’ (**deeds**) refers to their “service to the Lord.”

When these believers go to heaven, the record of their diligent labor will ‘**follow** (along) **with them.**’

The Bible teaches that God will reward believers in heaven for their earthly service to Him.

Hebrews 6:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, *in that* you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Let me stop and recap quickly what we have seen so far in Chapter 14:

- *The 144,000 standing on the heavenly Mt. Zion after having completed their ministry*
- *An angel preaching the everlasting gospel to all the people of the earth*
- *Another angel warning that if anyone receives the mark of the Beast, they will spend eternity in hell.*

Verses 12 and 13 form a brief interlude to encourage the Tribulation saints living on the earth at that time—and then in verses 14-20 the theme of God’s wrath resumes.

This will literally be the “*beginning of the end*” for those left on the earth who have refused to repent and receive Jesus Christ as Savior and King.

This passage (verses 14-20) pictures the final harvest of God’s wrath using two agricultural motifs: the *grain* harvest (verses 14–16) and the *grape* harvest (verses 17–20).

Why did John record two visions of the same event using similar but different agricultural imagery?

Some have suggested that as the Tribulation nears its climax and conclusion, two main aspects of God’s eschatological wrath remain to be poured out on the sinful world of the earth-dwellers:

1. The first aspect involves the Seven Bowl Judgments (16:1–21), a rapid-fire sequence of frightening and deadly worldwide judgments that will destroy the final Babylon—the Antichrist’s empire.
2. The second aspect is the judgment that will occur at the Battle of Armageddon, where Jesus Christ returns to judge and destroy His enemies (19:11–21).

So, the *grain* harvest symbolizes the Seven Bowl Judgments; the *grape* harvest symbolizes the judgment of the Battle of Armageddon.

Revelation 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.

The One sitting on the white cloud is obviously a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ (the same “*like the Son of Man*” was used by John in Chapter 1 verse 13 as a definite reference to Jesus Christ—so don’t let this throw you here in Revelation 14:14).

The cloud is a mark of identification:

Matthew 24:30 (NKJV)

³⁰ Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

I think that the “clouds” are the *Shekinah Glory* cloud(s), which is “*the sign*” in heaven.

“...having on His head a golden crown...”

This **crown** is not the *diadēma* worn by a king but the *stephanos* worn by victors in war or in athletic competition—it is the crown of triumph and pictures the Son of Man not in His identity as the Sovereign Ruler, but as the triumphant Conqueror victorious over all His enemies.

Revelation 19:12 tells us when Jesus returns to the earth He will also be wearing many diadems (crowns of a king) because He is the king of Kings!

Also, Jesus is pictured as having “**a sharp sickle in His hand.**”

A **sickle** was a long, curved, razor-sharp iron blade attached to a long, broomstick-like wooden handle. Sickles were used to harvest grain; as they were held with both hands spread apart and swept back and forth, their sharp blades would cut off the grain stalks at ground level.

The picture is that of the Lord Jesus Christ coming back to the earth “*mowing down His enemies*” in judgment like a harvester cutting down grain.

Revelation 14:15-16 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The reference to “**another angel**”—is the fourth one mentioned in this Chapter (cf. verses 6, 8, 9) to appear on the scene. The first *three* angels proclaimed that judgment was coming—the *fourth* brings the command to execute it.

This angel **came out of the [heavenly] temple**, from before the throne of God, **crying with a loud voice**, [communicating the Father’s will to His Son]—“**Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.**” (verse 15)

John 5:26-27 (NKJV)

²⁶ For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself,²⁷ and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. [and here we see in Revelation 14:14-16 the fulfillment of what Jesus said here]

God’s anger has reached its limit, the time for grace is over, and there will be no more delaying the harvest because—the earth is ripe for judgment.

In fact, the verb translated “**is ripe**” actually means—“*dried up*,” “*withered*,” “*overripe*,” or “*rotten*.”

First of all, God has destroyed ‘Gia’ (the earth goddess), the idol so many have worshipped over the centuries.

The “**grain**” (a reference to the ‘earth-dwellers’) pictured here have passed the point of any usefulness or hope (in essence the ‘earth-dwellers’ have passed the spiritual point of no return)—also known as ‘Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit’). So now, the rotten moral and spiritual condition of the world is dealt with, with the sharp sickle of judgment!

According to this passage—there comes a point in the Tribulation when salvation is no longer possible.

Remember that in Matthew 13 Jesus gave the disciples a parable of ‘*wheat and weeds (tares)*’ growing in a single field. In the parable the servants asked their master, “*Do you want us to go and pull them [the tares] up?*”

But the master replied, “... *No, let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.*”

Then Jesus interpreted that parable to His disciples, saying,

Matthew 13:37-39 (NKJV)

³⁷ ... “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. ³⁹ The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age [*i.e. the end of the seven-year Tribulation period*], and the reapers are the angels.

Here is how Jesus describes that end-time harvest in Matthew 13:40-43—

Matthew 13:40-43 (NKJV)

⁴⁰ Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.
⁴¹ The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, ⁴² and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

Today a ‘tare’ (an unbeliever) can become ‘wheat’ (a child of God)—but when the ‘*day of harvest*’ comes the tares will forever remain tares and will be burned with unquenchable, eternal fire.

We are still in the age of grace—today is still the day of salvation...

The vision of the “**grain harvest**” is followed by the vision of the “**grape harvest**”—which does not speak of the Bowl Judgments but of the judgment that takes place when Jesus returns to the earth at the Battle of Armageddon.

Revelation 14:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Then another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. ¹⁸ And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.”

As John watched, two more angels appeared (the fifth and sixth ones) in the vision.

The first one has **another sickle for judgment** and the second angel has **power over fire**. That reference to the angel who has ‘**power over fire**’ is closely connected with the fact that he **came out from the altar**.

This heavenly **altar** has already been mentioned in 6:9–11:

Revelation 6:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. ¹⁰And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both *the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were*, was completed.

Those martyred saints are praying for God to take vengeance on their enemies and send His wrath upon them.

This altar is also described in 8:3–5:

Revelation 8:3-5 (NKJV)

³Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand. ⁵Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw *it* to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.

Now, to fully understand what's going on here you need to be familiar with the layout of the tabernacle/temple and that it contained 2 altars—the brazen and the golden. But you also need to understand the responsibilities of the priests of Israel in the Old Testament period.

Every morning and evening the priests would take hot coals from the *brazen altar* (upon which sacrifices were offered) and bring them to the '*altar of incense*'.

There they would ignite the incense (Exodus 30:7–8; 2 Chronicles 29:11), which would rise toward heaven, symbolizing the prayers of God's people (Revelation 5:8).

Unlike the angel in verse 17, this angel does not come from the *throne of God*—but from the **altar** before the throne which is telling us this is associated with the prayers of the saints (the altar of incense).

His appearance means that the time had come for those prayers to be answered (Revelation 6:9–11; 8:3–5)—in other words, the time had come for God to take *fire* associated with *intercession* and use it for the destruction of *His enemies and the enemies of His people*.

Revelation 14:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "**Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.**"

Here the unrepentant, rebellious 'earth-dwellers' are depicted as '**clusters of grapes**', to be cut off by the reaper's **sharp sickle** from the **vine of the earth**—which speaks of those who have joined themselves to the false political and religious system of the Antichrist.

This in contrast to those who have joined themselves to Jesus Christ who said of His followers— "*I am the True Vine, and you are the branches...*" which speaks to the reality that there are '*other vines*' out there in the earth—false vines.

The word ‘ripe’ is not the same Greek word used in verse 15 but rather is a word which refers to something fully ripe—grapes so ripe that they are almost bursting with juice.

It pictures earth’s wicked, unregenerate people as bursting with the ‘*juice of wickedness*’ and ready for the harvest of judgment.

Revelation 14:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

What resulted when the angel swung his sickle to the earth was that all the enemies of God who survive the 7-Bowl Judgments will be gathered like grape clusters from the vine of the earth and flung into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

A wine press consisted of two stone basins connected by a trough—one sitting higher than the other.

Grapes would be trampled in the upper basin, and the juice would collect in the lower one. The splattering of the juice as the grapes are stomped vividly pictures the splattered blood of those who will be destroyed by Jesus in the wine press of the wrath of Almighty God.

How will these people be gathered by God for this judgment—probably they will be directed to the Valley of Judgment of their own free, deceived by the Antichrist and False Prophet that they can fight against Jesus and defeat Him when He returns to the earth to establish His Kingdom.

Joel 3:11-14 (NKJV)

¹¹ Assemble and come, all you nations, And gather together all around. Cause Your mighty ones to go down there, O LORD. ¹² "Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow-- For their wickedness *is* great." ¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision.

Isaiah 63:1-6 (NKJV)

¹ Who *is* this who comes from Edom, With dyed garments from Bozrah, This *One who is* glorious in His apparel, Traveling in the greatness of His strength?— "I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save." ² Why *is* Your apparel red, And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one *was* with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes. ⁴ For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come. ⁵ I looked, but *there was* no one to help, And I wondered That *there was* no one to uphold; Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; And My own fury, it sustained Me. ⁶ I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, Made them drunk in My fury, And brought down their strength to the earth."

This prophecy is actually fulfilled in Rev 19:15, where the same figure of speech is used—

Revelation 19:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Revelation 14:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

The **wine press** will be **trodden outside the city**, as the Lord protects Jerusalem from the carnage of the Battle of Armageddon so it can be Jesus' capital during the Kingdom. That battle will take place in the north of Israel on the Plain of Esdraelon near Mount Megiddo (about sixty miles north of Jerusalem).

It will rage the entire length of Israel from *Megiddo* in the north to *Bozrah* (Edom) in the south (Isaiah 63:1)—which is about 20 miles southeast of the southern tip of the Dead Sea.

Bozrah will be the final judgment before Jesus and His armies ascend from the area of the Dead Sea (1200 ft. below sea level) to Jerusalem (2500 ft. above sea level) stepping on the Mount of Olives which cleaves in two.

And then blowing the sealed gates of the Golden Gates wide open, entering the city, and leading a procession to the Temple where He takes His rightful place on the throne to reign over all the earth!

Revelation 14:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

By this time there is roughly only 2 billion people left on the earth—if 10 % of them gather in Israel for the Battle of Armageddon that would mean 200 million people.

That many people, if slaughtered would produce a lot of blood—but not enough to run 4 ft. deep for 200 miles!

A better interpretation, whether there are actual horses involved or not, sees this to mean that the slaughter will be so great and the ground so saturated that the blood, when walked upon by the horses, will splatter into the air along the whole length of the battle field up to the horse's bridles.

When the slaughter reaches its peak, blood could flow deeply in troughs, gullies and streambeds.

J. Vernon McGee—

"What a picture this is! The precious blood of the Lamb having been rejected, the blood of those who defied God and followed and worshiped the Beast bathes the earth. It is frightful. As a ripe grape is mashed and the juice flies in every direction, so will little man fall into the vat of God's judgment. This is Armageddon—the [valley]...of slaughter."

This vivid picture of judgment was the inspiration for *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*:

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; He is trampling out the vineyard where the grapes of wrath are stored. He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword, His truth is marching on!"

God's Word is truth and that truth will always march on and be victorious over His enemies!

The lies of the devil will never defeat the truth of God—

John 8:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

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