

The Final Reaping of the Earth

Revelation 14:14-20

66-53

Tonight we come in our study of the apocalypse, the revelation of Jesus Christ, to chapter 14...Revelation chapter 14. And we are looking at a text of Scripture that deals with the final harvest of the earth, the final reaping when the Lord Jesus Christ reaps the earth in judgment. The first time Jesus came to earth, He came as a servant. The next time He will come as the sovereign King. The first time Jesus came, He came as one obeying. The next time He will come as one commanding. The first time Jesus came, He came alone to live with a Jewish couple in a small obscure town. The next time He will come with all His holy angels to take over the whole earth. The first time Jesus came He came in humility. The next time He will come in glorious majesty and splendor. The first time Jesus came, He came to seek and to save the lost. And the next time He will come to judge and sentence the lost. Or, to put the contrast in the terms of our text, the first time Jesus came He came as the sower. Next time He will come as the reaper. He came in grace, He comes in wrath.

The book of Revelation is written to give us a clear understanding of that coming of Christ that yet awaits human history. And no one need be confused. The revelation of Jesus Christ is near, Christ is coming. He will appear in sovereign glory, the very same Jesus the world crucified and rejects. He will come no longer like the first time, but to judge the ungodly.

Let's read this text because it gives us a preview of the final judgment at the coming of Christ. Let's begin in chapter 14 with verse 14. "And I looked and behold a white cloud and sitting on the cloud was one like a Son of Man having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap because the hour to reap has come because the harvest of the earth is ripe.' And He who sat on the clouds swung His sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is heaven and he also had a sharp sickle, and another angel, the one who has power over fire came out from the altar and he called with a loud voice to those who had the sharp sickle saying...to him who had the sharp sickle saying, 'Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth because her grapes are ripe.' The angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth and threw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God, and the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood came out from the winepress up to the horses' bridles for a distance of two hundred miles."

This is a description of the imagery related to the last judgment, God's final wrath. The theme of final wrath has already been discussed in chapter 14, you'll remember it from back in verse 8 and following. In fact, even verse 7 talks about the hour of judgment has come. So back in verse 7, judgment was introduced into this chapter...ran all the way through verse 11 and then there was a brief respite in verses 12 and 13 as we heard an encouraging word of the perseverance of the saints. After that brief rest to encourage the faithful, the theme again is wrath.

Now you know where we are in the book of Revelation so you kind of get a feel for the flow of truth. The seven seals have been opened. The seven trumpets have blown. The abomination of desolations by the Antichrist in the temple of Jerusalem has taken place. The persecution of Israel has escalated to a fever pitch. The execution and martyrdom of Christians all over the earth is going on. The whole earth and sky is devastated by divine judgment, divine vengeance. Satan is ruling the earth with the iron fist of Antichrist, aided by the false prophet, the whole remaining world is deceived into worshiping the Antichrist as if he were God and blaspheming the true God and Jesus Christ.

It is the worst time in the world's history. We have been seeing the details of that period to come known as the Tribulation in the latter half of that seven-year period known as the Great Tribulation. We are now toward the end of the Great Tribulation and people all across the earth are hoping things are going to get better. It seems as if they couldn't get worse, but they will. Times will become worse, rapidly so and finally so.

The judgment that ultimately sweeps away Satan and sweeps away Antichrist and sweeps away the false prophet and sweeps away the demons and sweeps away all ungodly people is about to hit. And here it is depicted under the final reaping of the earth. Here is the unprecedented final holocaust that gives the world its greatest bloodbath ever, the fury of Christ released in final and devastating judgment.

Now such a promise of judgment is not new in Scripture. In fact, in the New Testament at the very outset of the work of Jesus Christ, His forerunner John the Baptist came along and John the Baptist said to those who listened to him in Matthew 3:7 it is recorded, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" From the very beginning, before the Messiah even began to preach the gospel, here was one talking about future wrath. And of the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, John said He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. In fact, He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, said John.

Now the Apostle Paul also gave a number of warnings about the coming of wrath, as did Peter, of course. We will remember the words of Peter in 2 Peter as he speaks very explicitly about the earth melting with fervent heat, the elements being burned up in the terrible judgment of the day of the Lord that is going to fall. We remember that Paul wrote in Romans 1:18 about the wrath of God. In chapter 2 verses 5 and 6 he talked about the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgement of God who will render to every man according to his works. And we remember those extremely graphic terms that Paul used in describing the return of Christ to the Thessalonians. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1 he said God is going to repay and He's going to give relief. When? When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. All of this when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day.

And so whether it was John the Baptist or whether it was Peter or whether it was Paul, or even the Lord Jesus Himself who clearly predicted the coming judgment on a number of occasions, in Matthew 13 it's recorded, Matthew 24, 25. So there are a number of New Testament passages that speak of God's coming wrath, not just the book of Revelation. Even the book of Acts has the apostles preaching about a day in which the Lord will judge the earth by the One whom He has ordained, namely Jesus Christ.

Now those are general warnings, for the most part, about the coming final reaping of the earth, the final harvest of the earth. There are some very specific ones, however, and for those we need to go back to the Old Testament. And it's very important that we do that. Turn to Isaiah chapter 13 verse 13, we get a look at God's punishment of the world for its evil as he says in verse 11. "And the wicked for their iniquity." And he describes it in verse 13 with these words, Isaiah 13:13, "Therefore I shall make the heavens tremble and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger."

Now go toward the end of Isaiah to chapter 63, and I want to read you a little bit of a longer passage here because it's so obviously fits the text of Revelation 14. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 63 receives this word from the Lord, "Who is this who comes from Edom with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah. This One who is majestic in His apparel, marching in the greatness of His strength." And he's talking really there about the majesty of the returning Messiah. "It is I who speak to you in righteousness, mighty to save. Why is Your apparel red and Your garments like the one who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the wine troth alone and from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath and their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I stained all My raiment. For the day of vengeance was in My heart and My hear of redemption has come, and I looked and there was no one to help. And I was astonished and there was no one to uphold. So My own arm brought salvation to Me and My wrath upheld Me and I trod down the peoples in My anger and made them drink in My wrath and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth." There is a fascinating soliloquy on the part of the Messiah as He speaks about coming into the world for final devastating blood-letting judgment that splatters blood all over His garments and trampling out the grapes of wrath is also a parallel to chapter 14.

There's one other Old Testament prophecy that I want to give you just as a background. And you'll see the parallels as we look more closely at Revelation 14. And that's in Joel chapter 3...Joel chapter 3. You remember that after the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, you have the minor prophets, Hosea and then comes Joel right before the book of Amos. Joel only has three chapters but it's a very important brief prophecy because it is often quoted in the New Testament. It has a special place in the intent and the purpose of God.

It's a powerful book, Joel. It was written in a time when the land of Israel was being devastated by locusts. We aren't exactly able to be positive about the date of the writing of Joel, but we know it was a time of devastation. Locusts, draught and fire had come. And the prophet uses those devastating temporal judgments to warn of a greater more extensive and more severe judgment to come. You think it's been bad with the locusts and the draught and the fire, you haven't seen anything yet. And the prophet moves from that temporal judgment to the doom of the nations when the Lord unfolds His wrath and treads the winepress of His furious anger.

Prophecy is also at the same time an appeal from God to the people to seek Him through repentance so He can bless them before this judgment comes. Let's look at chapter 3 and get a little feeling for what Joel says, starting in verse 9. "Proclaim this among the nations. Prepare a war, arouse the mighty men, let all the soldiers draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say I am a mighty man, hasten and come all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there, bring down, O Lord, Thy mighty ones. Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations." And here you're seeing the gathering of the nations all into the land of Palestine for the judgment Messiah will render upon them. "Put in the sickle," verse 13, "for the

harvest is ripe. Come tread for the winepress is full. The vats overflow for their wickedness is great, multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness and the Lord roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem and the heavens and the earth tremble. But the Lord is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain, so Jerusalem will be holy and strangers will pass through it no more."

So the prophecies of Isaiah as well as this prophecy in the book of Joel provide a very similar imagery to prophetic understanding, as does Revelation chapter 14. The image of wrath, the image of vengeance, and the image of the stamping out of grapes in a winepress as symbolic of God crushing out the life of the ungodly.

Now as I said earlier, the Lord Jesus Himself spoke directly of this harvest of wrath, and let me at least have you look at Matthew chapter 13 and just note a couple of verses there. We won't beg the issue, but in Matthew 13, for example, verse 30, "Allow both to grow together," that's the wheat and the tares, "until the harvest and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up. But gather the wheat into My barn.'" That uses that same harvest kind of picture for judgment.

Then down in verse 39 of Matthew 13. Jesus speaking says regarding the enemy who sowed them, being the devil. "The harvest...He says...is the end of the age and the reapers are angels, therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness and will cast them into the furnace of fire, in that place there shall weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then down in verse 49, "So it will be at the end of the age the angel shall come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous and will cast them into the furnace of fire and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So our Lord talked about a harvest of wrath. Joel and Isaiah talked about God coming in the form of Messiah as the judge and stamping out the grapes of wrath in final judgment. That is precisely what we see described in Revelation chapter 14. To borrow the language of Psalm 2, it is the time for the King to come. It is the time, as verse 6 of Psalm 2 says, for the Lord to install His King on Zion, His holy mountain. It is a time for God to laugh at the nations who scoffed and laughed at Him. It is a time for God to give the nations as the inheritance of Christ and for Him to break them with a rod of iron, to crush them like an earthen pot.

So whether you're talking about the Old testament prophets, or the New Testament writers, or John the Baptist or Jesus Himself, they looked ahead to a great judgment harvest.

Now the harvest here is pictured in two different motifs. First the grain harvest in verses 14 to 16. And then the grape harvest. The grain harvest, and then the grape harvest, and you'll see the difference very clearly. In both of them there is a sickle and a reaping.

Now the question immediately comes, why two visions of the same event? Well one simple answer is there are lots of different visions of this same event. I just pointed out a number of them to you, one in Isaiah, one in Joel, a number of them in the words of Jesus and then Peter and Paul and John the

Baptist. It's not uncommon nor is it unnecessary to give repeated views of the same event. But, as you approach this particular juncture in the book of Revelation, there's something more here than just a repetition. There are two great aspects of judgment yet to come. And that's why I believe the Holy Spirit has ordained two visions. There are two significant final judgments to come. First we are going to see in chapter 16 the seven-bowl judgments. They come at the very end of the time of Tribulation, a rapid-fire sequence of frightening, worldwide judgments that destroy the whole world system of Babylon, destroying the Antichrist's empire. Then there is a second aspect of final judgment, and that is the battle of Armageddon when Jesus Christ actually returns to the earth.

So in looking at the end, we still are going to see two phases of this final wrath. One will take the form of seven bowls, and the other will be the very direct intervention of Jesus Christ when He returns. One then is described in chapter 16 and the second is described in chapter 19. And I believe that the reason you have two images here is to accommodate those two distinct aspects of final judgment.

Let's look, first of all, at the grain harvest...the grain harvest. In each case you have three simple points...the reaper, the ripeness, and the reaping. First of all, the reaper, verse 14. "And I looked and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud was one like a Son of Man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand." Now in this vision, John sees the reaper. He says, "And I looked," that's a familiar phrase for students of Revelation because it's used a number of times. And he adds that exclamation, "And behold," and wow, and startlingly I saw a white cloud.

Now the imagery of the white cloud is also associated with the Old Testament. Back in the book of Daniel in chapter 7, there are a couple of verses that are very important. Daniel says in verses 13 and 14, "I kept looking in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man." That's almost a direct parallel passage. And so we can be sure that the image that John sees there is drawn from that depicted in the book of Daniel. And it shows the Son of Man surrounded by clouds, which demonstrate His magnificent majesty. The Son of Man then is coming in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy. To Him was given a dominion, wrote Daniel, and glory and a Kingdom that all the peoples and nations and men of every language might serve Him, His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away and His Kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. And so here He is depicted sitting on the white cloud ready to take the dominion that Daniel promised.

And the New Testament does not hesitate to speak of Christ in His Second Coming glory as being associated with clouds. Matthew 24:30, "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." Jesus said in Matthew 26:64, "You have said it yourself, nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven." You remember in Acts 1 He was taken up by a cloud, and the angel said, "In the same...this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as you've seen Him go." And so here is One sitting on a cloud and here we have the Lord, as it were, poised to return in judgment.

By the way, as point of contrast, the beast sits on something very different than a white cloud. Chapter 17 shows the beast sitting but sitting on many waters. Chapter 17 verse 1, verse 15, and the waters are the...where the harlot sits are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues. But Christ is not earthly, He is heavenly and He is here associated with a white cloud.

And I believe the posture there depicts the reaper waiting for final orders to begin the reaping. The

reaper is then identified very clearly here, look at it in verse 14, one like a Son of Man. That phrase is directly, as I said, from Daniel 7:13 and there it refers to none other than the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it does as well here.

Someone might wonder why does it say one like a Son of Man? Why doesn't it use the definite article and say was the Son of Man? One like a Son of Man...well, the answer is, I don't know why God chooses to do what He does, but He uses the identical phrase back in chapter 1 and verse 13, and we know it's there referring to Christ where He is moving in the church in the majestic vision of chapter 1 and He is called one like a Son of Man. Christ in His incarnation takes on the form of man. That's the intent of that text. And so it does refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, that's who it refers to, the very same phrase in chapter 1 and verse 13, and that's certainly what Daniel intended.

By the way, this is the last time the Lord is ever called Son of Man. This is the last time. The first time, you remember it? Matthew 8:20, "The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." What a contrast. The first time He was called Son of Man He had nothing, the last time He is called Son of Man He comes to take everything.

Now the reaper is further described in verse 14 as having a golden crown on His head, this is stephanos, this is not diadema, the diadem, this is not the crown of the king, this is the crown of the victor, this is the runner's crown, not the royal crown. This pictures the Son of Man coming to conquer, coming to prevail over His enemies. This was a crown that was made out of like a laurel wreath, leafed in gold, worn on festive occasions, worn for wars and great athletic events by the victors, the triumphers. This is the crown of triumph that is referred to a number of times in the New Testament. The word stephanosis a very popular word, particularly with the Apostle Paul. It's different than the diadem or the royal crown which you see over in chapter 19 as being worn by the Lord Jesus Christ. Here He is seen not in His sovereign ruling position, but coming to conquer. His victorious posture, riding out of heaven, as it were, on a cloud to come conquering.

And in His hand a sharp sickle. A sickle was a long curved blade you may not understand a sickle unless you've looked at an old encyclopedia or seen some agricultural film somewhere or seen it in a book. We don't deal with that anymore in our modern world. But a long wooden handle had on the end of it a long curved sharpened blade, sharpened to the razor edge. In ancient Israel sickles were made out of iron or steel. They were sharpened like a razor to sweep through the grain and they would just sweep the sickle and it would just cut the grain right at ground level. And so you see depicted then the Lord Jesus Christ, as it were, sitting on a cloud waiting for final orders to come and take His sickle and begin the grain harvest, the final judgment.

From the reaper we come to the ripeness, look at verse 15. "And another angel came out of the temple crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'Put in your sickle and reap because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.'" The ripeness indicates the time is now.

Just a couple of details that are very interesting here. And another angel came out of the temple. The temple refers to the dwelling place of God, the place where God dwells. Verse 17 marks the same thought, "Another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven," and that tells us that this is not the earthly temple, this is not the temple of the Tribulation in Jerusalem, this is heaven, the dwelling place of God, the sanctuary, the place of holy presence.

Here comes an angel from God. Remember now, angels are instruments of judgment. You see that in Matthew 13, you see it all through the book of Revelation. Here is the fourth active angel in this chapter. We've already met three of them earlier in the chapter. In fact, even clearly given specific tasks to do precisely from verse 6 down through 11. And here comes the fourth angel with a very specific task, he comes right out of the throne room, right out of the sanctuary, right out of the temple where God dwells, for very obvious reasons he is coming to tell the Son of Man that God wants Him now to move in judgment.

Now remember that the Son of Man has been given all given all judgment according to John 5:27, all judgment is committed unto the Son, but the Father is the one who passes the judgment passed to the Son at the appropriate moment. It is a delegated authority and the Son, as it were, sits on the battlements of heaven waiting to have His right to judge delegated to Him so that He can act. The Son can now exercise His right and judge and execute. Wrath has come. God's anger has reached its limit. He is sending vengeance by the man with whom He will judge the world, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. So this angel comes out of the temple, the temple that is in heaven, the dwelling place of God, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud.

The idea of the loud voice is to demonstrate authority from God, urgency, power. And he tells Him, "Put in Your sickle and reap because the hour to reap has come." No more delay, no more grace, it is time for the harvest. The swift sharp sickle shows the completeness of this judgment and its speed, and its severity.

Just another interesting note. You see the word "ripe." It's time to reap because the harvest of the earth is ripe. The word actually means to be overripe, to have passed the point of any usefulness, to become actually dry, withered, overripe, or rotten. In other words, the grain, the earth has passed the point of any use at all. No purpose for it at all, it's overripe. It's very late. That may be a hint that God has been merciful and He has been so merciful and so gracious that He has waited until the world is even past ripeness for judgment. What grace.

The other implication is that the world is absolutely useless. It might as well be hacked down, bundled, and to borrow the imagery of our Lord, thrown into the fire. The gospel has been being preached, we remember that, don't we, from the first part of chapter 14 by the four..the hundred and forty-four thousand and also by the two witnesses and by the everlasting angel in chapter 14 verses 6 and 7. But the rotten world is going to be dealt with now because of its overripeness.

And then thirdly, the reaping. Verse 16, "And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth and the earth was reaped." Boy, that's a tragic verse. I wish we could live in the light of the reality of that. It is done. It is done. The goats are destroyed, according to the terms of Matthew 25. The tares are destroyed, according to the terms of Matthew 13. The good are kept, the sheep, the wheat. The bad destroyed. This judgment, this devastating judgment is going to fall. And I believe certainly includes the seven bowls.

If you go over to chapter 16 for a moment, I'll give you a little preview. What happens in this judgment is just frightening. Verse 2, loathsome and malignant sores upon men. Verse 3, the sea becomes blood like that of a dead man and every living thing in the sea died. Verse 4, the rivers and springs of waters became blood. Verse 8, the sun was made to scorch men with fire, they were

scorched with fierce heat. Verse 10, the kingdom of the beast became darkened and men gnaw their tongues because of pain, blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. Verse 12 talks about kings from the east. "And I saw coming out of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs, they are spirits of demons performing signs which go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty." That's Armageddon.

Verse 17, "The seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne saying, 'It is done.' Flashes of lightning, sounds and peals of thunder, a great earthquake, the city is split into three parts, the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath. Every island fled away, the mountains were not found, huge hailstones a hundred pounds come down from heaven and men blaspheme God." All of that is rapid fire at the end and all of that speaks of the details of the harvest.

Without even a break, another vision comes immediately. Let's go back to verse 17. Not the grain harvest this time but the grape harvest. And while this certainly could encompass the bowls or a portion of those bowls since even the gathering to Armageddon is a part of those bowl judgments, I think this looks specifically not at the judgments described in the seven bowls, but at the actual coming of Christ, the very last judgment that ends Armageddon.

Let's meet the reaper here, verse 17. "And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also had a sharp sickle." This is the fifth angel in the visions of chapter 14 and he also is an agent for God's judgment. And he has a sharp sickle. Both the Lord Jesus Christ in the first vision and this angel in the second vision have instruments of judgment. Angels, you know, have played very prominent roles already in Revelation. The four horsemen that we saw in chapter 6 were called by angels, the seven trumpets were blown by angels, Satan and demons were defeated by angels, the seven bowls will be poured out by angels, Armageddon is announced by an angel, Satan and demons are bound by an angel, and here is another angel. And this angel comes out of the temple in heaven and he also has a sharp sickle.

Now remember, this is a visionary image of judgment. And from the reapers of the ripeness again, verse 18, "And another angel...yet another one, number six, this one is identified...the one who has power over fire came out from the altar." Now this is more interesting. This is a little different. This is somewhat unique. Here comes another angel and this angel is the one who has power over fire. And he comes out from the altar.

Now the altar has already been mentioned in the book of Revelation. Let's go back to chapter 6, this is a fascinating picture. Back in chapter 6 verse 9, when the fifth seal was broken describing the judgment of God in the time of the Tribulation, John says, "I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' And there was given to them a white robe and they were told they should rest for a little while longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren were to be killed, even as they had been, should be completed also."

What you have here is the altar of prayer. it is the altar of incense, if you will, which was emblematic of prayer. There is a symbolic altar in heaven, there are saints gathered there and their prayers or

petitions are rising to God. They are praying for God to send His wrath. They have been martyred and they are praying to God to stop this martyrdom, to send His wrath, to crush the ungodly, to give victory to the saints, to vindicate the saints, to send Christ triumphantly to establish His Kingdom. So you see them praying there in chapter 6 verses 9 to 11.

Now go to chapter 8 and we'll go a little further into this picture. Chapter 8 verse 3, "And another angel came and stood at the altar holding a golden censer and much incense was given to him that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints went up before God out of the angel's hand. The angel took the censer and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake."

Now let me give you a little Jewish background. Twice a day whether at the tabernacle or later on in the temple, at the time of morning sacrifice and the time of evening sacrifice, the priest would go into the brazen altar and he would get fire. Fire was always going there symbolizing the ascending prayers. But the priest would go and he would get some fire and he would put it in the censer. And then he would go into the holy place, and he would wave the censer, as it were, in the holy place which was like the presence of God, not the Holy of Holies but still a place where God would be present, and the incense would rise symbolizing the prayers of the people. Actually at that very moment, outside the people would be praying. So he was symbolizing at the time of morning prayer and evening prayer exactly what the people were doing. And he would stand right in front of the veil to the Holy of Holies and he would wave the censer. He would then ignite the altar of incense to its fullest flame.

Brazen altar and then the altar of incense. The incense arose and it symbolized the prayers of the people. So the fire on the altar symbolizes prayer rising to God. It represents all the prayers of all the true saints who pleaded for God to send Christ, who pleaded for God to judge, all the saints whoever said, "Thy kingdom come," whoever said, "Even so, come Lord Jesus."

Now all of that background, take you back to chapter 14 and have you note again that in verse 18 another angel, the one who has power over fire came out from the altar. Here comes an angel who's been dealing with the heavenly counterpart to the altar of incense, the fire angel. And he's coming out and he called with a loud voice to Him who had the sharp sickle saying, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth because her grapes are ripe."

The picture here is that this angel is not so much coming from the throne of God as the first angel did, representing the will of God, but this is an angel coming from the altar because he is coming to see that the prayers of the saints are answered. He comes from a place where the saints have been praying and praying and praying and it's now time to answer their prayers. It's time for the grape harvest, just as it was time for the grain harvest.

And again, these two different pictures of the same great scene, as I said, can focus and I think do on two great events that overlap...the bowl judgments and then the final great cataclysmic return of Jesus Christ. And you can see how this one emphasizes the winepress and thus the splattering of blood and the gushing of blood and the deadliness that is characteristic of the return of Christ. Verse 18 says, "Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth." Cut them off, sever them from the earth vine, sever them from earthly existence. Why? Because her grapes are ripe. A different word for ripe is used here, it means fully ripe, they're in their prime, they're bursting

with juice, the juice of wickedness.

So the reaper and the ripeness and then you see lastly the reaping, verse 19, "And the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth and threw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God and the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood came out from the winepress up to the horses' bridles for a distance of two hundred miles."

A winepress was an interesting thing. There would be a large carved out piece of stone, then below it would be another one that would catch the juice. There would be a trough running from the upper to the lower one. The grapes would be thrown into this press and then trampled under the feet of those who did the work. And as they would stamp and crush those grapes so full of juice would burst and the juice would then flow downward to the trough and run down into that second basin which would catch it. To watch that happen with the brightness of the grapes and their color would be almost like you were looking at a bloodbath, and so there is a cross over in the imagery here. The splattering of the grapes becomes the splattering of those destroyed. All the enemies of God who are still alive when the final return of Christ comes, all the enemies of God who have survived the seven seals up to now, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, all of them who are still there who are still left will be engaged in the great final battle of Armageddon. It will be an Armageddon in the north, Har Magedo, plain of Esdraelon up in the north, it will stretch all the way down through the middle through the valley of Jehoshaphat, all the way as Isaiah pointed it out to Bozrah in Eden, to the south down even below the Dead Sea. That great stretch of land that runs from the southernmost part to the northernmost part of the land of Israel, all the way, if you will, from beyond Dan to beyond Beersheba, from Esdraelon to Eden, this great conflagration of nations of the world will be gathered in that land of Palestine.

The very moment is described by Isaiah, as I read you in chapter 63 and by Joel in chapter 3. And at that point God's powerful angel puts the sickle in and the grapes are harvested and thrown into the great winepress of the wrath of God to be crushed. The crushing is just amazing. It says in verse 20, "The winepress was trodden outside the city," it's best to see that as a reference to Jerusalem, it's like the Lord sort of protects the city of Jerusalem itself at this moment. The prophets, Zechariah in chapter 14, Daniel in chapter 11, Joel in chapter 3 says the battle will be around Jerusalem. But apparently the city will be spared without the bloody carnage that will go on all over the land. And blood will come out from the winepress, the juice now, the imagery turns to blood, up to the horses' bridles.

There are two possibilities here. If that's just running blood, it's four feet deep. Now you say, "How many people are going to be engaged in the battle of Armageddon?" Well there will be many. It's not unrealistic to assume there will be millions. And when all those millions that still remain and have survived up to this last moment are fighting their battle against God and against His Christ, and Jesus comes in the great final act of judgment, it's not beyond assumption that there could be millions. We don't know how many millions who would be caught in this bloodbath. But even millions of people in a bloodbath would make it very difficult to understand how that the blood could be four feet deep for two hundred miles. So I don't think that we are intended to assume that there is this two hundred mile long lake of four feet deep blood. But I do think what we can assume is one of two things...the implication here is that the blood will splatter to the height of the horses' bridles, which would be four feet, blood-splattered horses or blood splattered to that height, or better yet, there may well be a trough running right down the central valley of Israel that is four-feet deep in blood. If the battle takes place in those areas that are near the central valley, it's possible that at some points that

blood could run that deep as it troughs its way down the center of the land of Palestine.

But certainly the idea here is that blood is going to splatter to the horses' bridles all over a two hundred mile area. By the way, in the Greek you have sixteen hundred stadion here which roughly translates into a hundred and eighty to two hundred miles. If you stretch this thing all the way from Armageddon in the north, all the way down to Edom in the south, and go say forty miles beyond, you would have ample space to fill up that hundred and eighty to two hundred miles. And I think that's the intent. The battle will rage from...from beyond the borders of one end of that land to beyond the borders of the other end of that land because of the millions of people that will be flooding in there to engage themselves in this final great Armageddon. And at that point the Lord will come.

That description of the Lord's return is given in chapter 19. Let's look at it because here you have, I think, the description of...of the treading of the winepress, the bloody slaughter. Verse 11 of chapter 19, "I saw heaven opened, behold a white horse and He who sat upon it called Faithful and True and in righteousness He judges and wages war. And His eyes are a flame of fire and upon His head are many diadems and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Him. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called the Word of God and the armies which are in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses and from His mouth comes a sharp sword so that with it He may smite the nations and He will rule them with a rod of iron and He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty."

The angel cuts the grapes, if we can put these two scenes together, but the Lord Christ crushes out their life. It's an incredible scene. The land is literally filled with blood and it's splattered all over the garment of the returning Christ. And it says, "On His robe...verse 16...and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords, and I saw an angel standing in the sun and he cried out with a loud voice saying to all the birds which fly in mid-heaven, 'Come, assemble for the great supper of God in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men both freemen and slaves and small and great.' I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone and the rest were killed with a sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse and all the birds were filled with their flesh."

That's it, that's the final note on the grape harvest. The grain harvest I think is describing those final bowls that lead up the grape harvest, when the Lord Himself comes and treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty.

Some people feel that in Ezekiel chapter 39, it's a debatable point, we'll talk more about it when we get to chapter 19, but for those of you who, I know, who will ask me the question, some people feel that Ezekiel chapter 39 verses 8 to 16 describes the cleanup that has to take place going into the Kingdom because of all this carnage that's left in the land of Palestine. The King doesn't want to set up His Kingdom in that land with all of that carnage. And Ezekiel 39 some feel relates to the cleanup at this particular time, and we'll say more about that later.

No wonder the Bible says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God." No wonder the

Bible says, "Kiss the Son lest He be angry." What a frightening future the world has. They don't know it, do they? We know it. Can you understand that, my friend? Can you understand that you know where the world is going? You know that, it's not a guess. It's here. We have information that we must give. We know the house is on fire, and hell awaits. We know what's coming. What a responsibility. We've got a nation full of people trying to figure out the future, right? We know the future.

Father, we thank You for giving us this truth, at the same time we feel responsible to pass it on, to warn men of the wrath to come, just like John the Baptist did, just like Jesus and Paul and Peter and every other faithful believer. Help us to be faithful, to warn of the terror to come. The world isn't going to get better, it's going to get worse. And as bad as it is now, they don't have any idea what it's going to be like. Lord, help us to have a passion in our hearts to tell men the truth, tell women the truth, to warn. It's not enough just to talk about the positive things and the happy life, we need to warn men, to warn them of what's coming and coming soon, surely. Help us to be faithful, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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