

Lesson # 46 Death / the Last 3 Angels

Revelation 14: 14-20

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Revelation 14: 14-20 (ESV)

¹⁴Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. ¹⁵And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." ¹⁶So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. ¹⁷Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. ¹⁸And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." ¹⁹So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. ²⁰And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

I. Reaping the Earth vv. 14-16

John is still supplying background information before the 7 Bowl Judgments are described, and this part of the vision begins with what, by now, we've seen as a sort of formulaic phrase to introduce a new vision; "Then I looked..." and v. 14 describes the scene before John – a white cloud, One seated on the cloud "like a Son of Man", a golden crown on His head and with a sharp sickle in His hands. This is the last time Christ (for this surely is Christ being depicted) is called "Son of Man" in the Scriptures. ①

As in past visions, we immediately have some interpretive work to do. The 1st element of the vision is the white cloud. Clouds are mentioned in **Dan. 7:13-14** associated with "one like the Son of Man" (same language as here in Revelation) coming to the Father to receive His everlasting kingdom. There is no question that Daniel is referring to Christ and it seems clear, based on this allusion to Daniel's prophecy that this is Christ that John is seeing on this cloud as well. Other passages also support this idea – cf. **MT. 24:30; 26:64; Acts 1:9-11 & MT. 17:5.**

Some though, do not see this as Christ, but as an angel – mostly based on the command given to this person in v. 15 by "another angel". The gist of the argument is that 'how could an angel give a command to Christ?'. However, if we recognize that the scene depicts an announcement that the time has arrived, rather than a command to do something, "for the hour to reap has come", there is no impropriety here. Angels are being utilized throughout the Revelation for all sorts of communications between God and John, God and man, etc. so for an angel to communicate this news to Christ is not really out of the ordinary.

This One like a Son of Man also has a golden crown on His head, a “*stephanos*” (victor’s crown) rather than a “*diadema*” (royal crown). He will wear a royal crown when He returns to earth to take over His kingdom in Rev. 19.

He holds a sharp sickle – an instrument used to harvest wheat, the tool that graphic portrayals of the Grim Reaper carries (a cultural concept that came from this passage). Seven out of 8 times the word ‘sickle’ is used in the Bible, are found in this chapter, and we are told 3 times that the harvest is ripe – the time has arrived for the harvest. **Mark 4:29** echoes the idea of the ripeness of time.

Obviously, we are now encountering symbolic language here, and literal interpretation directs us to recognize this as exactly that sort of literature. To interpret this in a wooden, literal way would make the imagery ridiculous rather than ominous. This is an apocalyptic image. There is no literal gigantic sickle that will swing through the skies to cut men down on the ground like grass. Furthermore, people will not be tossed into a winepress and squeezed until their juices run out of them either. This is metaphoric.

This passage is referring to intense physical, deadly judgment on earth. This reaping of the earth is done by this ‘sickle’ which describes a time of sweeping death of the wicked. Judgment passages are found throughout the prophetic passages in the Bible, and they contain similar imagery: cf. **Isa. 63:1-6; Joel 3:9-17; Zephaniah 3:8; Zechariah 14:2; MT. 13:39-42**. The sickle and winepress are really 2 depictions of connected events. John MacArthur believes that the first sickle depicts the 7 Bowl Judgments while the winepress refers to the Battle of Armageddon¹ in Rev. 19:11-21, and I believe he is correct in that assessment. ②

The Greek word for “fully ripe” actually means “overripe”, good for nothing but to be tossed into the fire (cf. Matt. 13:40). As the sickle is swept over the earth below, judgment comes, and the blood flows. The details are found in Rev. 16 – the Bowls – malignant sores on those who took the “Mark”; death in the world’s oceans; rivers and springs turned to blood; the sun’s heat intensifies and scorches (true global warming); Antichrist’s kingdom is plunged into painful darkness; the Euphrates River dries up to allow passage of the huge invasion army of the Kings of the east; and the world experiences the most powerful global earthquake in history.

II. The ‘Grape’ Harvest

vv. 17-19

The apocalyptic language continues and a vision of Armageddon is presented to the reader, and it is made even more dramatic as a result of the description of the flowing blood. Another angel comes out of the heavenly temple and has a sickle too, but does not use it until the 6th angel announces that the ‘grapes’ are now ripe. Angels have assisted God throughout Revelation and here we see an

angel even assisting Christ with the reaping of the earth – of judging those on earth with physical death. Notice these passages: **Matt. 13:37-43; 14:47-50; 24:31.**

Notice the description of the 6th angel in v. 18 – he came from the altar in the temple and has authority over the fire. This is likely the angel depicted earlier in Rev. 8:3-5, and perhaps the same one as in Rev. 6:9-11. The martyred saints were calling out to God from beneath the altar for vengeance and now we see that the time has finally arrived and that vengeance will no longer be delayed. It is fitting that the angel attending the altar, who has been hearing the voices of the martyred saints crying out is now the one to joyfully announce, “it is time – take vengeance!” In **Rev. 19:15**, notice that it is Christ who treads the winepress.

All those (v. 9) who survive the Bowl Judgments will be gathered like clusters of grapes and flung into the “winepress of the wrath of God”. As you can imagine, when grapes are squeezed in a winepress in order to get the juice out them, leaving the skins and seeds behind, the juice splatters and flows into the basins put there to capture the juice. This is horrific imagery and depicts death on a huge scale with intensive bloodshed.

III. The Location of the Winepress v. 20

This winepress is outside of the city. What city? It has to be Jerusalem, because God is protecting His own people and city, and the gathering place for the ‘grapes’ and the winepress is at the Battle of Armageddon. This will take place in the northern part of Israel on the Plain of Esdraelon near Mt. Megiddo – 60 miles north of Jerusalem. The battleground will encompass the length of Israel as far south as Bozrah in Edom (cf. Isa. 63:1) but Jerusalem will be spared.ⁱⁱ Some say that this is the battle depicted in Ezek. 38-39, but as we’ve already seen, this is possible but unlikely. ③

The depiction here of the flow of blood has always been a point of contention among bible scholars. 1,600 stadia is 200 miles. This is hyperbolic language though, not to be taken as a literal image. Blood flowing up to the bridles of a horse would be about 4 feet deep. Now, splatter from a violent battle could certainly reach that height, but blood shed in great quantities will soak into the ground and flow in rivulets, ditches and furrow along the length of the battlefield. This is simply saying that this shedding of blood in this battle will be an extremely horrific loss of life in violent death.

It will really be more of a slaughter than an actual battle however. As is shown in Rev. 19: 11-21, the army, led by the Antichrist & False Prophet & gathered at Armageddon to confront Christ & His people will be summarily destroyed by Christ’s return. He is the sickle – cf. **Rev. 19:11-21** – as the angel cuts the grapes from the vine & gathers them at Armageddon, when they willingly advance on Jerusalem, then Christ stomps on these ‘grapes’, crushing out their lives with the “sword in His mouth” – IOW – His word. This is a terrifying vision of the end of the Tribulation period.

Next lesson – Lesson # 47 ---- Rev. 15:1-8 – Preparation for the Bowl Judgments

ⁱ John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22; Moody, p. 111

ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 117