

Revelation

*Part Forty-Three
The Grapes of Wrath
(Revelation 14:14-20)*

With Study Questions

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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. 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. 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." 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. 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 (Revelation 14:14-20).

Introduction

If asked what the greatest divisive moments were in human history, how would you respond? We might think of world wars or earthquakes or various coup d'états over time which demonstrably changed the political or economic landscape.

But at the very top, even of the biggest skeptics list, had to be that moment when history itself was renamed. We look back upon history as either BC (before Christ) or AD (anno domini or year of the Lord). Our very date (and by 'our' I mean the entire world) acknowledge the division from BC to AD, even though we seek to diminish the historic significant of why we have done this with the abbreviations BCE and CE. Of course, if you ask the tour guide what the event was which marked BCE from CE, expect a dirty look.

Jesus Christ, no doubt, is the most divisive figure in human history. The world would call it BC and AD, but the Scriptures would refer to this shift as Old Covenant to New Covenant. And this would be no easy transition. John the Baptist referred to this transition in very extreme terms. **“The ax is laid to the root of the trees” (Matthew 3:10). “His winnowing fan is in His hand” (Matthew 3:12).** This language informs us of the imminent nature of this judgment.

...and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12).

Revelation (especially the verses before us today) speaks in greater detail of what John had earlier preached.

Jesus Himself did not shrink back from announcing His own divisiveness. Speaking of our most intimate relationships (a man against his father, a daughter against her mother), He taught,

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34).

This division is not inconsistent with the worship of the heavenly host when they said,

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men (Luke 2:14).

Any analysis of that which is worthwhile will reveal that true peace often requires division. And a lack of willingness to be divisive (not for the sake of division, but for the sake of truth) yields ground to that which is false and destructive. Paul put it this way,

**For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.
19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you (1 Corinthians 11:18, 19).**

Machen put it this way,

In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.

This division of which we read in Christ was anticipated throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps most notably in the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah. Many look at that chapter as referring to the end of the world, but the context does not lean toward that understanding. Zechariah speaks of a day when **“living waters shall flow from Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:8)**. This is clearly a reference to Christ Himself (John 7:38).

Zechariah writes of **“His feet”** standing on the **“Mount of Olives”** and splitting that mountain **“in two” (Zechariah 14:4)**. This is not a matter of geological alterations. It would be the beginning of that great division. All three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record Jesus giving a discourse on the **“Mount of Olives” (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3; Luke 21)**.

It is generally recognized that the Olivet Discourse is a sort of abbreviated Revelation. In our passage today, we read of the work of Christ in that great division, the end of which would be reflected in the words,

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be “The Lord is one,” And His name one (Zechariah 14:9).

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 (Revelation 14:14).

A Coming of Christ

It is almost universally agreed that the **“Son of Man”** in this passage speaks of Christ. It is about there that all the agreement ends, we shake hands and return to our corners. As discussed earlier, the **“cloud”** in Scripture indicates some type of judgment. That judgment might be the final judgment or judgments throughout history (Isaiah 19:1).

The coming(s) of Christ can be the Second Coming (Acts 1:11) or coming by His Spirit (John 14:18) or coming in historical judgments (Isaiah 19:1) or coming to fellowship (Revelation 3:20) or coming to remove a lampstand (Revelation 2:5), etc.

I'll not revisit here the many arguments already given as to why this reference to the coming on a "**cloud**" is referring to the judgment which would end the Old Covenant and begin the New. But it's worth mentioning just a couple:

In Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, we see Jesus referring to Himself as "**coming in a cloud**" (Luke 21:27). A mere five verses later, during the same sermon, we read,

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place (Luke 21:32).

In His trial, Jesus is put under oath to testify if He is the Christ. Responding to the high priest in this cross-examination, Jesus says,

You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven (Matthew 26:64).

All this to say, at least for now, that though there will be a Second Coming and a universal day of judgment, the context here speaks of Jesus coming soon (Revelation 1:1, 3). Of course, this is not to say that we have nothing to learn about the final judgment from these verses. When we saw Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, that wasn't the final resurrection. But it certainly does tell me a bit about the power of Christ in the final resurrection.

On Christ's head is a "**golden crown.**" Not to dig too deeply here, but in Scripture there are two types of crowns. One is a *diadem*, which is generally associated with a kingly or imperial dignity. The devil uses this type of crown in his usurping of the authority of Christ (the "**seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems**" in Revelation 12:3; 13:1). Although later in Revelation, it is Christ having the full force of this with His, "**many diadems**" (Revelation 19:12).

The other crown is a *stephanos*. This type of crown is associated with victory or triumph (1 Corinthians 9:25). This is the crown in our current

passage. It is the victory of the cross and resurrection in its bursting magnitude. Let us bear in mind that before Christ bore this victorious crown in this manner, He bore another crown.

So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him*.² And the soldiers twisted a crown (*stephanos*) of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe.³ Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands (John 19:1-3-parenthesis mine).

Let us take to heart the call of the Christian when we ponder a passage such as this. As the Gospel goes forward in its soul-redeeming and earth-renovating power, we are ever called to imitate Christ in His humility. Peter instructs us that Christ left "**us an example**" that we "**should follow His steps**" (1 Peter 2:21).

...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).

It would appear in our very passage, we have an example of "**Him who judges righteously**" about to exercise that very judgment. Jesus has a "**sickle**." It is an implement of harvest.

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 (Revelation 14:15, 16).

Harvesting His Own

It would not be entirely unnatural to read these words as if this is the final day of judgment. And, no doubt, we can learn of God's final judgment from a passage like this. Yet, the context, both in Revelation and in all four Gospels (Matthew 9:37, 38; Mark 4:29; Luke 10:2), reads of the imminent reaping of the harvest.

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37, 38).

Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together (John 4:35, 36).

Keep in mind that this portion of the passage directly follows the benediction of verse thirteen.

Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on (Revelation 14:13).

It should not be surprising that Revelation speaks of great, horrible, terrible and era-shifting devastations. It was a tumultuous time in human history, and many would die—both the oppressors and the oppressed as we see God’s judgment ending of the Old Covenant and beginning of the New.

But the harvesting of those who belong to Christ (which I believe these two verses speak of), though outwardly looking very similar to those who had taken the mark, would be significantly and eternally different. God’s judgments in history are ever followed by His judgments in eternity.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

But the eternal judgment for those in Christ is one of peace and rest.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9).

The reaping of the faithful, as we should understand verses fourteen through sixteen, is truly a glorious event. Those who trust in Christ will know the unvarnished depths of the words of Solomon.

And the day of death than the day of one's birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

The same cannot be said of those who continue in their rebellion.

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." 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. 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 (Revelation 14:17-20).

The Grapes of Wrath

After the harvest comes the vintage (which was, agriculturally speaking, the case in Israel). The vintage here is the judgment of the wicked. It is a judgment against those who take rank of Christ's church; against the message of redemption; against the truth.

The angel "**who had the power over fire**" is likely the angel mentioned in chapter eight who takes the "**smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints...filled...with the fire from the altar**" as an answer to the prayers of the martyrs (Revelation 6:9, 10).

Once again, we read of God's keeping of His promise to Abraham regarding His own covenant people.

I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

The "**stone...cut without hands**" (Daniel 2:34) who is Christ, would fall upon the image during the era of Rome and that ungodly kingdom would become "**like chaff from the threshing floors**" while the kingdom of Christ would become "**a great mountain and fill(ed) the whole earth**" (Daniel 2:35).

That this judgment (winepress) **“was trampled outside the city,”** it has been suggested, indicates that they would bear their own reproach, rather than trusting in Christ who **“suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify people through his own blood”** (Hebrews 13:12).

There are many guesses when it comes to the **“one thousand six hundred furlongs”** which is about 184 miles. Some say it’s the length of Palestine. Others say it is the square of four (which is the number of the earth) times the square of ten (which is the number of completeness). Suffice it to say, this is no small event in history.

One might wonder what the application is in a passage of this magnitude. God may be doing wondrous things, but what does this have to do with me? What do I learn of God, that my praise may be richer? To what duty am I called, that my life might be more fruitful?

The application most certainly, and primarily, includes our praise of a God who, at the great expense of His only beloved Son, assures the victory and keeps His promises of overcoming the darkness. It also includes our perseverance, that we might be on the right side of history and, more importantly, eternity. This perseverance is enlivened and strengthened through, what is called, the **“ordinary means”** of word, sacraments, prayer, and others disciplines as well, that we might be equipped for this battle.

Revelation is not a book designed for mere amusement. It is a call to persevere in the midst of what might not always be an accommodating environment. May God grant us the courage and faithfulness to run the race well.

Questions for Study

1. What are some of the most divisive moments in history? How was Christ divisive? Is this good or bad? Explain (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. How would this be tumultuous (pages 3, 4)?
3. Compare Zechariah 14 to the Olivet Discourse. In what ways do they speak of the same thing (page 4)?
4. What are some of the ways we can understand the “coming” of Christ or the metaphor of a “cloud” (page 5)?
5. Why is the type of crown Jesus wears significant? What can we learn from this in our own lives (pages 5, 6)?
6. How can the day of one’s death be better than the day of one’s birth (pages 7, 8)?
7. What do we learn regarding God’s faithfulness in His judgment of wickedness (pages 8, 9)?
8. What is the message in Revelation and what is its call in our lives (page 9)?