

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

The passage before us in vv14-20 of Chapter Fourteen describes two “reapings” of the earth, the second drawing upon some of the same imagery of “the wine of the wrath of God” that was found in the previous. But two verses separate those passages.

Read Revelation 14:12-13.

VV12-13

Very often the differences in translation of a passage between our common versions leads to confusion, even frustration. I found, however, that in this instance the difference in how our versions treat this almost parenthetical passage of the two verses lying between the doom of the worshipers of the beast (vv9-11) and the reaping of the earth (vv14-20), actually *facilitated* my understanding of these enigmatic two verses. At first reading, in the NASB, v12 seemed to refer back to something just said: “Here is the perseverance of the saints...,” as in *Here we have just seen the perseverance of the saints*. Yet the previous passage is not about the saints at all, but about what will happen to those bearing the mark of the beast.

By contrast, a number of our other versions have it, “*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints...*,” which is not a reference to something else, but is an injunction *for* the saints to actively persevere in their faith and obedience. Well, which is it? Answer: Yes.

Perseverance is guaranteed to those who are in Christ; anyone who has placed not just their belief in, but their complete trust in the risen Christ Jesus *will* endure to the end—even through the hideous trials, the worst the world has ever seen ([Matthew 24:21](#)), of the Great Tribulation. Yet, perseverance is a two-way street; we are indeed called to actively endure. One way to look at it is that while our faith guarantees we *will* persevere, our faith also gives us the desire to obey “the commandments of God,” and the strength and will *to* endure.

As important as it is, this is not the time or place to launch into a discourse on “the perseverance of the saints.” Hence our handout for those who wish to trace what God’s word has to say about this.

Read Revelation 14:14-16.

During His earthly ministry Jesus spoke of a ripe harvest awaiting reaping:
Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.
Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”
(Matthew 9:37-38)

There the harvest was of souls ready to be “reaped into the kingdom” (Carson).
Later on, however, Jesus spoke of the harvest to take place at “the end of the age.”

Read Matthew 13:47-50.

Now in our passage we have two harvests portrayed: the first using the imagery of a grain harvest, the second using the imagery of a harvest of grapes. As always, there is disagreement. Some take the position that the first (vv14-16) is of the saints, while the second (vv17-20) is of the wicked. This position is based in part on the fact that God’s wrath and punishment are mentioned only in the second. As Seiss mentions, some see the first harvest even as “the final gathering home of the people of God.” Others, probably in the majority, see both of these harvests as two *aspects* of the reaping of the wicked, the first being the imminent seven bowls of judgment, the second being the battle of Armageddon. One point that seems to substantiate this position: *Would Christ use a “sharp sickle” to bring His children home?* A case can be made for either; we will go with the latter, that this passage speaks only of the reaping of the wicked.

And in a sense we can see this of a piece with vv12-13; there we are told what will happen to those who have persevered—specifically, those who have come to Christ during the Tribulation and suffered for their faith through far more than any of us can even imagine. They will be “blessed,” they will have “rest from their labors,” welcomed into glory to dwell forever with their Lord, for whom they have suffered. Then the passage that follows portrays the flip-side, what will happen to those who rejected Christ.

v14

Then 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.

Among our common versions, only the KJVs (and the CSB) have “*the* Son of Man,” while the rest have “*a* son of man.” It is true that the text has “like” (*homios*; resembling, the same as), but the vast majority of commentators take the position that this is indeed Christ Jesus, the Son of Man, glorified, complete with His crown of gold.

Thus here we see, first, the Son of Man ([Daniel 7:13](#); [Revelation 1:13](#); [Matthew 25:31](#)) in His glory and authority (the cloud), but also the crown of victory (*stephanos*); He is victorious over evil and unbelief, and about to exert His judgment and punishment on all the wicked on earth. Second, we see Him in His righteous wrath—“...and a sharp sickle in His hand”—ready do justice on all who have rejected His Lordship.

v15

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, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

I must be fair and balanced here, and express my disappointment in the NASB for its inconsistency. In v13 the NASB’s first choice is to make it “a son of man” (lowercase; admittedly, to its credit, including a margin note for the alternate rendering). But here, in v15, and in v16 the NASB refers to the same individual as “Him,” “He,” and “His”—all uppercase. Well, which is it?

Some are bothered by the picture of a mere angel commanding Christ to do something. I don’t see it that way. Yes, the angel speaks “to Him who sat on the cloud,” but its not for His benefit—or at least the *tone* of the shout is not meant to be a command. The word translated “crying out” (*krazon*) is a bit of an *onomatopoeia*—a word formed by the sound it describes. This word is used for the croak of a raven, and can mean even inarticulate screaming. So this is a rather unpleasant, harsh shout from the angel whose audience is less the Son of Man than the soon recipients of the impending harvest. One also might see this shout being for the ages, a shock-wave announcement for the end of all things on earth.

It is also possible that the angel’s cry really is an official notification from God the Father to God the Son. In His eschatological discourse to His disciples, Jesus said about the timing of all this,

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Matthew 24:35-36)

Perhaps this is a vision of that moment when the Father will inform the Son: “Now!” In all events, I would still conclude that the *tone* of the message is for the earth and the ages.

“...*the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.*”

Our typical use of the word “ripe” is to describe something that is at its peak, as in a ripe apple that is ready to be plucked from the tree, no longer green but now delicious and sweet. But here the word “ripe” (*exeranthe*), means, instead, something that is dried up, shriveled, withering away; that is, desiccated. That delicious apple is now a withered, rotten, revolting piece of garbage. The implication of the verse is that the promised judgment is overdue. “The rotten moral condition of the world [must be] dealt with now with a sharp sickle” (Walvoord). “The grain (the earth) pictured here has passed the point of usefulness and is fit only to be ‘gathered up and burned with fire’ (Matthew 13:40)” (MacArthur).

v16

Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Once again God in His word is offering us a different *aspect* of a portion of the Last Things—indeed, the climax to all the Seal judgments, the Trumpet judgments, and now, here, the Bowl judgments. In Chapter Sixteen we will see John’s vision of the actual dispensing of these horrible plagues, but here we have a dark, metaphorical—almost, in a perverse way, poetical—interpretation of the events. We commonly think of a sickle, or scythe, as a tool to reap what was sown, to gather up for our consumption the life-sustaining stalks of wheat that will become bread for our table. Here and in the passage below, however, the sickle becomes an instrument of death: a horizontal guillotine lopping off the heads of the wicked left on earth.

This, of course, is a metaphor for the suffering and death poured out from the bowls of wrath: loathsome and malignant sores; all remaining water turned to blood; scorching heat from the sun; darkness, pain, and sores poured out directly upon the throne of the beast. Next we turn to a similar aspect of a second “reaping,” this time, to quote the title of a famous book, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Read Revelation 14:17-20.

Verses 14-16 paint a fantastical picture of the Bowls judgments; now vv17-20 do the same for the “battle” of Armageddon.

v17

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.

Sidebar: Frankly, I would *like* to dwell for a while on this business of “the temple which is in heaven”—the word “temple” (*naou*) just means either the whole or part of a place where God dwells—I would *like* to, but I am not yet prepared for such a discussion, for it is related (at least in my mind) to Ezekiel’s temple—the last temple, the temple of the Millennial end times (if literal) or a figurative view of God ultimately dwelling with His people. I still have on my desk my handwritten note to myself: “*I have lots of questions about Ezekiel’s temple.*” For that discussion I await the opportunity of a longer prep time than my normal seven days. [Stay tuned.](#)

Here we have another angel, not the Son of Man, who will be the one wielding the sickle. Angels, especially during the Last Things, serve as more than just supernatural *Western Union* men delivering messages. They will be getting into the dirty work. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 1, writes,

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will 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. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8)

Jesus explained to His disciples in Matthew 13 that,

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.” (Matthew 13:37–40)

“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:49–50)

v18

Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; 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.”

This second angel is the one with power, authority over the fire of the altar in heaven. And shame, again, on the NASB (and CSB) for not including the definite article “*the* fire,” which is in the Greek text. This is not an angel in charge of *all* fire, but specifically the fire of the altar—probably the same altar mentioned in Revelation 6:9 ([martyrs](#)), and 8:3 ([incense and prayers](#)). This connection seems to indicate that this scene is a response to the many prayers of the saints for retribution, for God’s judgment on earthly wickedness.

This second angel “calls with a loud,” commanding voice to the angel with the sickle to start swinging it and harvesting “the clusters from the vine of the earth.” Why? Because “her grapes are ripe.”

MacArthur: The word “ripe” [*ekmasan*] is not the same Greek word used in v15. This word refers to something fully ripe and in its prime. It pictures earth’s wicked, unregenerate people as bursting with the juice of wickedness and ready for the harvest of righteousness.

v19

So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

Turn please to [Revelation 19](#). I have stated that I choose to place the word “battle” in scare quotes when it refers to the battle of Armageddon because there really is no combat to speak of. Armageddon is mentioned in a number of places in the Revelation—not always by that name. There are a number of passages about its preparation, but here in Chapter Nineteen is where it actually takes place, immediately after Christ returns. As to its duration, note this:

Read Revelation 19:19.

This verse states clearly that the “battle” has not yet occurred, because it speaks of the beast and his army standing in readiness. Now look at the very next verse:

Read Revelation 19:20.

So the first thing that occurs is that the commanding general and his sidekick are taken captive alive, and thrown into the lake of fire. What about their army?

Read Revelation 19:21.

Once again, Christ speaks—and an entire army is slaughtered, their flesh lying about for the carnivorous birds to have their fill. Now back up to v15, which foreshadows the action of v21 and ties into our passage in Chapter Fourteen.

Read Revelation 19:15.

[Back to Chapter Fourteen, v19.](#)

Who is it that works this “wine press of the wrath of God”? Who is it that presses it down to squeeze out the blood of the enemy? Verse 19:15: “and **He** [Christ] treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”

Note: The imagery is, of course, metaphorical. There will not be a huge wine press set up on the plain of Megiddo into which the bodies of the slain will be fed for Christ to literally stomp to extract their blood.

When does this occur? Where does it fall in the narrative sequence? Upon Christ’s return to earth. The prophet Joel speaks of this moment employing the same imagery.

Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations,
And gather yourselves there.
Bring down, O LORD, Your 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.
Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;
The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. (Joel 3:11-13)

v20

And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

Some expositors cast a wary eye at this idea of “blood [coming] out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles”—especially if they imagine this describing *flowing* blood, an ocean of blood rising to such a height. But a more sensible reading of this is that for the length and breadth of the “battle” (which, as we will see, we can easily imagine it covering such a distance) blood from the carnage is liberally *spattered* to such a height.

Most of us, probably, have imagined this “Battle” of Armageddon being staged as most wars in ancient times: two armies meeting upon a plain or wide valley—that is, fairly well contained in one spot. But the evidence from our prophets reveals that this will be a wide-spread conflict, localized in Israel but perhaps covering its length and breadth, and more.

For example, many (but not all) see the name of the battle being associated with the Plain of Esdraelon near Mount Megiddo, which is about sixty miles north of Jerusalem. Yet Isaiah prophecies seeing Messiah coming *up* from the battle, with His garments stained with blood, from Bozrah in Edom, about 70 miles south and east of Jerusalem—and not even in present-day Israel ([presently in Jordan](#)).

Read Isaiah 63:1-6.

Again, we cannot think of this as a typical confrontation of two armies battling away at each other for days or weeks or months. There will indeed be two armies—one from the earth and one from heaven. But the righteous king astride His white horse at the head of the heavenly host will be the only one who casts a fatal blow—only one blow, that will fell every last warrior in the opposition. There will be no fighting; only the bloody carnage, the slaughter of millions, by the word spoken from the arriving Messiah: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

“The phrase ‘the perseverance of the saints’ introduces one of the most important and most comforting doctrines in Scripture. It expresses the truth that all those whom God has elected, called, and justified will never lose their faith, but will persevere in it until death. Some refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security; others dub it the ‘once saved, always saved’ teaching. While those definitions are accurate, they do not express this truth as clearly as the biblical phrase ‘the perseverance of the saints.’ That statement emphasizes the reality that God keeps His own saints by sustaining their faith to the very end, no matter what occurs. True saving faith in its very nature is eternal and cannot be lost or destroyed.”

John MacArthur

Old Testament

Psalms 37:23-34

The steps of a man are established by the LORD,
And He delights in his way.
When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.
I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread.
All day long he is gracious and lends,
And his descendants are a blessing.
Depart from evil and do good,
So you will abide forever.
For the LORD loves justice
And does not forsake His godly ones;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.
The righteous will inherit the land
And dwell in it forever.
The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom,
And his tongue speaks justice.
The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps do not slip.
The wicked spies upon the righteous
And seeks to kill him.

The LORD will not leave him in his hand
Or let him be condemned when he is judged.
Wait for the LORD and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

Isaiah 49:14-16

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
And the Lord has forgotten me.”
“Can a woman forget her nursing child
And have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me.”

Isaiah 51:6

“Lift up your eyes to the sky,
Then look to the earth beneath;
For the sky will vanish like smoke,
And the earth will wear out like a garment
And its inhabitants will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not wane.
Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
A people in whose heart is My law;
Do not fear the reproach of man,
Nor be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them like a garment,
And the grub will eat them like wool.
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation to all generations.”



New Testament

John 5:24

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

John 6:37-40

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

John 10:27-30

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 8:31

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”

“The perseverance of the Tribulation saints will be evident because they will ‘keep the commandments of God.’ That genuine saving faith will result in such obedience is the clear teaching of Scripture.”

MacArthur

