

## Lesson #33-Blessed are the dead

### Revelation 14:12-13

#### I. Introduction

- a. Read
- b. The Bible has much to say about happiness.
- c. The familiar New Testament word *makarios* (“blessed”) refers to spiritual joy, bliss, fulfillment, and satisfaction.
- d. It describes an inner joy that is the fulfillment of every longing, a serene, untouchable, unassailable contentment and peace.
- e. The Old and New Testaments reveal much about such blessedness:
- f. But the most startling pronouncement of blessing in all of Scripture is found in verse 13.
- g. Amazingly, this second of seven beatitudes in Revelation (cf. 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) pronounces blessing on the dead.
  - i. Such a thought is incomprehensible to most people, who view death as something to be avoided.
  - ii. “Blessed are the living” would seem a more appropriate motto for most people.
- h. The obvious question that the text provokes is “Why are these dead blessed?”
- i. The answer it presents is twofold:
  - i. The dead in view here are blessed because of how they lived
  - ii. and because of how they died.

#### II. **How They Lived.**

- a. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (14:12)
- b. The phrase the endurance of the saints introduces one of the most important and most comforting doctrines in Scripture.

- c. 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.
- d. That reality provides assurance, hope, and joy to every true believer in Jesus Christ and brings an end to fear and doubt.
  - i. It also reveals that believers' deaths are blessed because death ushers them into the glories of heaven.
- e. Some refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security; others dub it the "once saved, always saved" teaching.
- f. While those definitions are accurate, they do not express this truth as clearly as the biblical phrase endurance of the saints.
  - i. That statement emphasizes the reality that God keeps His own saints by sustaining their faith to the very end, no matter what occurs.
  - ii. True saving faith in its very nature is eternal and cannot be lost or destroyed.
- g. The persevering character of saving faith is never more clearly and powerfully seen than in this passage.
  - i. No group of believers ever has faced or ever will face stronger assaults on their faith than the Tribulation saints.
  - ii. This large group of believers (7:9, 13–14) will include both Gentiles (7:9) and Jews (12:17).
  - iii. They will be saved through the ministries of the two witnesses (11:3–13) and the 144,000 (7:1–8; 14:1–5).
  - iv. The Tribulation believers will endure the most intense persecution in human history.
  - v. In Matthew 24:21 Jesus described this period as a time of "great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will."
  - vi. So terrible will the conditions be that "unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short" (Matt. 24:22).

- vii. God will set a limit on the Tribulation so that the elect will not suffer more than they can bear (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13).
- h. There is no stronger evidence that saving faith perseveres than the reality that the most tested believers in history will maintain their saving faith until the end.
- i. The encouraging message of verses 12 and 13 forms a brief interval in the revelation of God's judgment against unbelievers.
  - i. Verses 9–11 painted a terrifying picture of the damnation of the unrepentant worshipers of Antichrist. The narrative of God's judgment resumes in verse 14 and continues through the rest of the chapter.
  - ii. In the midst of all that carnage, with unprecedented disasters taking place all around them, the Tribulation saints will remain faithful and loyal to Christ.
  - iii. Even the prospect of martyrdom will not persuade them to abandon their faith.
  - iv. Their persevering loyalty to Jesus Christ forms the bright spot in the darkness of the Tribulation.
  - v. It also answers the question of the unbelieving world, "The great day of [God the Father's and Christ's] wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (6:17). The Tribulation believers will stand firm until the end.
- j. The biblical doctrine of the perseverance of the saints rests on four solid, unshakable pillars.
  - i. The first proof of the truthfulness of that doctrine is that **God's promise** established it.
    - 1. In Psalm 37:23–34, David expressed the truth that God holds on to His own:
    - 2. God also promises in the New Testament that salvation is eternal: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

3. “He who believes in the Son has eternal life.”  
(John 3:36)
- ii. A second truth upon which the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints rests is that **God’s purpose** assures it. Jesus declared:
  1. “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.” (John 6:37–40)
  2. God’s promise rests upon His sovereign purpose or plan; here it is plainly stated that His will is that none of those whom He gives to His Son should be lost.
  3. All who come to saving faith in Jesus will be part of the “resurrection of life” (John 5:29); none will be lost.
  4. Romans 8:28–30 also teaches that there are no breaks in the process of salvation: 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.

5. All those whom God foreknew are predestined, called, justified, and glorified.
  6. From its beginning in eternity past to its conclusion in eternity future, the salvation process is an uninterrupted continuity; there is no possibility of anyone dropping out along the way.
  7. What God purposes, He will carry out.
- iii. A third proof of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is that **God's power** guarantees it.
1. God's power that transforms believers into new creations (2 Cor. 5:17) will sustain them, so that they can never be lost.
  2. In John 10:27–29 Jesus stated emphatically that God's power keeps believers secure: "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."
  3. Neither Satan, nor all the forces of hell can take a believer away from God, "because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).
- iv. The saints will also persevere because salvation is wholly by **God's grace** (Eph. 2:8–9).
1. Since we did nothing to earn it, so we can do nothing to keep it.
  2. To argue that saving faith can die, or be lost, contradicts God's promise, purpose, power, and grace.
  3. Believers have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade

away, reserved in heaven for [them], who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:3–5). God guarantees that believers will persevere.

- k. The repeated biblical exhortations to perseverance make it clear, however, that believers have a responsibility to persevere. “You will be hated by all because of My name,” warned Jesus, “but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved” (Matt. 10:22).
  - i. Colossians 1:21–23 clearly reveals God’s part in salvation and man’s responsibility to persevere. Christians are redeemed, “although [they] were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds” because God “has now reconciled [them] in [Christ’s] fleshly body through death, in order to present [them] before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.”
  - ii. But that does not obviate believers’ responsibility to “continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that [they] have heard.”
  - iii. In a similar vein the author of Hebrews wrote, “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end” (Heb. 3:14).
  - iv. The apostle John described Christians as overcomers (2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21; 1 John 5:4–5).
- l. Believers persevere by faith (1 Pet. 1:5; 1 John 5:4–5), fear (Jer. 32:40), love (Eph. 6:24), obedience (John 8:31), and by turning away from sin (2 Cor. 7:1; cf. Rom. 6:12–14).
  - i. All those means are granted by God—who then exhorts believers to manifest them in their lives.

- ii. The doctrine of perseverance must not be misconstrued as teaching that believers will be eternally saved regardless of their belief or behavior.
  - iii. What it does teach is that, as noted above, true believers will continue in the faith.
- m. Justification will be followed by sanctification that leads to glorification.
- n. That raises the question about those who once professed faith in Christ, but then fell away.
  - i. The Bible teaches that such people were never saved in the first place.
  - ii. Explaining the parable of the soils to His disciples, Jesus said of the rocky soil, “These are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away” (Mark 4:16–17).
  - iii. Jesus warned in John 15:6: “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.”
  - iv. The author of Hebrews noted that “in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (Heb. 6:4–6).
  - v. In Hebrews 10:29 he asked rhetorically, “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which

he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?”  
 “They went out from us,” declared the apostle John,  
 “but they were not really of us; for if they had been of  
 us, they would have remained with us; but they went  
 out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of  
 us” (1 John 2:19).

- o. The perseverance of the Tribulation **saints** will be evident because they will **keep the commandments of God**.
  - i. That genuine saving faith will result in such obedience is the clear teaching of Scripture.
  - ii. In John 8:31 Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.”
  - iii. In John 14:21 Jesus defined those who truly love Him as those who obey Him: “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.” In John 15:14 He added, “You are My friends if you do what I command you.”
  - iv. In Luke 6:46 Jesus asked, “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” The apostle John wrote, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” (1 John 5:3).
- p. A second way the Tribulation saints will manifest perseverance will be through **their faith in Jesus**.
  - i. They will remain loyal, even under the tyrannical reign of Antichrist.
  - ii. Even the threat of execution (13:15) will not cause them to abandon their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - iii. Like the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11, they will maintain their testimony until the end—even if that end is a horrifying martyrdom.
- q. Why are these faithful dead believers blessed?
  - i. Because they lived pure, noble, purposeful, obedient, rich, joyous, exemplary lives.



- ii. They lived life to the fullest in faith and obedience to God.
  - r. Even if there were no heaven, that would still be the best way to live. But there is heaven to follow this life for God's people; therefore the deaths of the Tribulation saints will also be eternally blessed.
- III. **How They Died.**
- a. And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" (14:13)
  - b. Having lived with perseverance, the Tribulation saints will die with promise.
  - c. This is the sixth time in Revelation that John **heard a voice from heaven** (cf. 10:4, 8; 11:12; 12:10; 14:2); he will hear such a voice three more times (18:4; 19:5; 21:3).
  - d. The **voice** (probably that of God, not an angel) commanded John to write. Twelve times in Revelation John is told to **write** (cf. 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 19:9; 21:5); the apostle was under a divine mandate to record the visions he saw.
  - e. The heavenly **voice** ordered John to write, "**Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.**"
    - i. That includes martyrs such as Antipas (2:13), those seen underneath the heavenly altar (6:9–11), and the "great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes ... the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 14).
    - ii. These martyrs are blessed not only because they lived life to the fullest in obedience and trust, but also because they **died in the Lord.**

- iii. They will experience in death the fullest reward, because “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones” (Ps. 116:15).
- f. With Paul, they will be able to cry out triumphantly, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).
- g. The **voice** informed John that not only those already dead, but also those who die **from now on** are blessed.
  - i. The martyred believers from that point until the end of the Tribulation will have nothing to fear. Their deaths, too, will be blessed.
- h. The Holy **Spirit** is quoted directly in Revelation only here and in 22:17.
  - i. His emphatic “**Yes**” (the Greek particle *nai* indicates strong affirmation) shows that He agrees with the heavenly voice that the dead are blessed.
  - ii. As their sustainer and comforter, who loves them and is grieved by their pain, the Holy Spirit longs to see that suffering end.
- i. He adds two further reasons for the Tribulation martyrs’ blessedness.
  - i. First, the Spirit declares them blessed because they may rest from their labors.
    - 1. *Kopos* describes hard, difficult, exhausting toil. It can also refer to bother, annoyance, or trouble. Certainly the Tribulation saints will experience the whole gamut of the word’s meanings.
    - 2. They will be filled with deep sorrow as they watch those they love—children, parents, spouses, and friends—suffer torment and death.
    - 3. Their lives will be a hard, difficult, dangerous struggle for survival.
    - 4. Not having the mark of the beast, they will be excluded from society, be unable to buy or sell, and live lives on the run as hunted fugitives.

5. Death, granting rest from all the difficulties and sorrows of their lives, will come as a welcome relief. In stark contrast are the damned, who will know not a moment's rest throughout all eternity (14:11).
- ii. The Holy Spirit also pronounces the Tribulation martyrs blessed because their deeds follow with them.
  1. Erga (deeds) refers to their service to the Lord.
  2. When these believers go to heaven, the record of their diligent labor will follow along with them.
  3. The Bible teaches that God will reward believers in heaven for their earthly service to Him.
  4. Hebrews 6:10 reads, "For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints."
  5. Facing imminent execution, Paul triumphantly declared, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7–8).
- j. The dead who have lived in obedience and trust will be blessed with rest and reward after they die.
  - i. Those who live now for wanton pleasure are dead even while they live (1 Tim. 5:6).
  - ii. Being "dead in [their] trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), they face the horror of eternal damnation in hell.
- k. The sobering truth is that the choices people make in this life will irreversibly chart the course of their eternal destinies.
1. A Christless eternity of unrelieved torment or the blissful rest and reward of heaven: that is the choice faced by every person.

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Revelation 12–22*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 104–105.

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## Lesson #33.2-The **Final** Reaping of the Earth

### Revelation 14:14-20

#### I. Introduction

- a. Jesus' first coming was one of humiliation, a time when He, "although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6–8).
- b. Jesus came the first time as a servant; He will return as the sovereign King.
- c. In His first coming, He came in humility; in His second coming, He will come in majesty and splendor.
- d. The first time He came to earth, "the Son of Man [came] to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10); when He returns, it will be to "judge the living and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1).
- e. Jesus came the first time as the sower; He will come again as the reaper.
- f. God's final judgment on the earth is the theme of 14:6–11.
  - i. Verses 12 and 13 form a brief respite, presenting the encouraging, comforting truth of the perseverance of the saints.

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- ii. After that brief rest to encourage the faithful, the theme of divine wrath resumes in verses 14–20. The judgment introduced in these verses will take place at the worst time in human history, the Great Tribulation 24:21–22).
  - iii. After years of enduring Antichrist’s oppressive rule, demonic assaults, and the terrifying, devastating, staccato judgments of God, people will wearily hope that things are about to get better.
  - iv. It will seem as if life couldn’t possibly get any worse, but it will.
  - g. Cataclysmic “Day of the Lord” judgment is about to fall on Satan, his demon hordes, Antichrist, and all the wicked, unrepentant people of the world.
  - h. That judgment is depicted in this passage as the final reaping of the earth.
  - i. In an unprecedented holocaust, the full fury of the Lord Jesus Christ will be released in devastating judgment.
  - j. This passage, like Revelation 14:19–20, uses the metaphor of trampling grapes in a winepress to depict the devastation of God’s final judgment.
  - k. The prophet Joel recorded the devastation caused in Israel by drought, fire, and a massive invasion of locusts (Joel 1:1–2:11).

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- l. Then the prophet used those temporal judgments to warn of the even more devastating judgment of the Day of the Lord (2:18–3:21).
    - i. In Joel 3:12–13 that judgment is described using the same imagery found in Revelation 14:
  - m. The Lord Jesus Christ also used the harvest analogy for judgment.
    - i. In the parable of the tares He said, “Allow both to grow together 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’ ” (Matt. 13:30).
    - ii. Asked by His disciples to explain that parable Jesus said, “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. 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 throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 13:39–42)
  - n. So Joel, Isaiah, and the Lord Jesus Christ all spoke of a coming harvest of divine wrath when the Messiah will execute final judgment.

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- o. That final outpouring of the judgmental fury of the Lamb is the theme of this chapter's text.
  - p. This passage pictures the final harvest of divine wrath in two agricultural themes: the grain harvest (vv. 14–16) and the grape harvest (vv. 17–20), raising the question as to why John recorded two visions of the same event.
  - q. There are many depictions of this event by the prophets, including those I mentioned, so it is not unusual for John to record two visions of it.
  - r. But there is also a specific situation at this point in the book of Revelation that suggests a purpose behind the repetition.
  - s. As the Tribulation nears its climax, two main aspects of God's eschatological wrath remain to be poured out on the sinful world.
    - i. 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.
    - ii. The second aspect is the Battle of Armageddon, at which point Jesus Christ returns to judge and destroy His enemies (19:11–21).
- II. The Grain Harvest
- a. 14:14–16



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- b. The grain harvest symbolizes the seven bowl judgments, the grape harvest the judgment of Armageddon.
  - c. Both harvests involve a sickle and reaping, and both can be described by the same three points: the reaper, the ripeness, and the reaping.
  - d. **The reaper.**
    - i. 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. (14:14)
    - ii. The familiar phrase I looked, and behold often introduces a new and important subject in Revelation.
    - iii. What caught John's attention was a white cloud, an image drawn from Daniel 7:13–14:
    - iv. John saw sitting on the cloud one like a son of man—the Lord Jesus Christ, coming to establish His kingdom in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.
    - v. The brilliant, white cloud symbolizes His glory and majesty.
    - vi. He is ready to take the dominion of which Daniel prophesied; the reaper is sitting as He waits for the proper time to stand and begin the reaping.
    - vii. That reaping (the seven bowl judgments) will be followed by Christ's return to establish His kingdom.

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- viii. The description of Christ as one like a son of man also derives from Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 7:13).
  - ix. It was the Lord's favorite title for Himself during His incarnation, when He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and [was] made in the likeness of men ... [and was] found in appearance as a man" (Phil. 2:7–8).
  - x. This is the last time Scripture refers to Him by that title, and it presents a marked contrast with the first time the New Testament calls Him the son of man.
  - xi. Then He had nothing, not even a place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20); now He is about to take possession of the entire earth.
  - xii. The reaper is further described as having a golden crown on His head.
    - 1. This crown is not the diadēma worn by a king, but the stephanos worn by victors in war or athletic events; it is the crown of triumph. It pictures the Son of Man not in His identity as the sovereign ruler, but as the triumphant conqueror victorious over all His enemies (cf. Matt. 24:30).
  - xiii. The reaper also had a sharp sickle in His hand.
    - 1. A sickle was a long, curved, razor-sharp iron blade attached to a long, broomsticklike wooden handle.

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2. 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.
  3. The picture is of the Lord Jesus Christ mowing down His enemies like a harvester cutting grain.

e. **The ripeness.**

- i. 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.” (14:15)
- ii. Another angel, the fourth one mentioned in this chapter (cf. vv. 6, 8, 9), appears on the scene.
- iii. The first three angels proclaimed that judgment was coming; the fourth brings the command to execute it.
- iv. This angel came out of the heavenly (cf. v. 17) temple, from before the throne of God.
- v. In a loud voice conveying urgency, power, and the authority delegated to him from God, the angel cried out 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.”

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- vi. He delivers the message from God the Father to the Son of Man that it is time for Him to move in judgment.
  - vii. God's anger has reached its limit, and His wrath is poured out.
  - viii. The time for grace is over, and there will be no more delaying the harvest of judgment.
  - ix. The Son can now exercise the right to judge that the Father has delegated to Him (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31) because the earth is ripe for judgment.
  - x. In fact, the verb translated is ripe actually means "dried up," "withered," "overripe," or "rotten."
  - xi. The grain (the earth) pictured here has passed the point of any usefulness and is fit only to be "gathered up and burned with fire" (Matt. 13:40).
- f. **The reaping**
- i. Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. (14:16)
  - ii. Here is one of the most tragic and sobering statements in all of Scripture.
  - iii. Simply, and without fanfare, it records the executing of divine judgment.
  - iv. The frightening details of that judgment are unfolded in chapter 16: loathsome and malignant sores on the worshipers of Antichrist (v. 2), the death of all life in the world's oceans (v. 3), the turning of the world's rivers and springs of water

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into blood (v. 4), the intensifying of the sun's heat until it scorches people (v. 8), painful darkness over all of Antichrist's kingdom (v. 10), the drying up of the Euphrates River in preparation for a massive invasion by the kings of the east (v. 12), and the most powerful and destructive earthquake in history (v. 18).

- v. Those seven rapid-fire bowl judgments mark the first phase of the final reaping of the earth.

### III. The Grape Harvest

- a. (14:17–20)
- b. 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 at the battle of Armageddon.
- c. The vintage judgment is more dramatic because of the imagery of the winepress.
- d. Like the vision of the grain harvest, the grape harvest can be described in three points: the reaper, the ripeness, and the reaping.
- e. **The reaper.**
  - i. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.  
(14:17)
  - ii. The reaper in this vision is not the Son of Man, as in the grain harvest, but an angel, the fifth one mentioned in chapter 14.

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- iii. Like the fourth angel (v. 15), he came out of the temple which is in heaven.
    - 1. Like Christ in the previous vision, he also had a sharp sickle.
    - 2. Angels have played a prominent role in Revelation up to this point, summoning the four horsemen, sounding the seven trumpets, and defeating Satan and his demon hosts.
    - 3. Angels will also pour out the seven bowl judgments in chapter 16, announce the Battle of Armageddon (19:17), and bind Satan (20:1–3).
    - 4. That an angel is pictured in this vision as the reaper, then, is not surprising.
    - 5. The Son of Man will be assisted by holy angels in His final judgment (cf. Matt. 13:39, 49; 2 Thess. 1:7).

f. **The ripeness.**

- i. 14:18
- ii. As John watched, another angel appeared, the sixth one in the vision.
- iii. He is given the interesting designation of the one who has power over fire.
- iv. That title is closely connected with the fact that he came out from the altar.
- v. This heavenly altar has already been mentioned in 6:9–11:

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- vi. It most likely is emblematic of the Old Testament brass incense altar (Ex. 40:5), where twice daily priests burned incense to be offered in the Holy Place as a picture of the people's prayers, since the martyrs underneath it are viewed praying and prayer is associated with incense (5:8; Ps. 141:2; Luke 1:10).
  - vii. Those martyred saints are praying for God to take vengeance on their tormenters and send His wrath.
  - viii. This altar is also described in 8:3–5:
    - ix. Every morning and evening the Old Testament priests would take hot coals from the brazen altar (upon which sacrifices were offered) and bring them to the incense altar. There they would ignite the incense (Ex. 30:7–8; 2 Chron. 29:11), which would rise toward heaven, symbolizing the prayers of God's people (5:8).
    - x. At that same time, the people outside would be praying (Luke 1:10).
    - xi. That the angel had power over the altar's fire (the definite article is present in the Greek text, which literally reads "the fire") indicates that he had been ministering at the heavenly counterpart to the earthly incense altar.
    - xii. Unlike the angel in verse 17, this angel does not come from the throne of God, but from the altar associated with the prayers of the saints.

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- xiii. His appearance means that the time had come for those prayers to be answered.
  - xiv. 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.
  - xv. Leaving the altar, he called with a loud, urgent, commanding 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.” In answer to the saints’ prayers, the time for the reaping of judgment comes.
  - xvi. Unrepentant sinners are depicted as clusters of grapes, to be cut off by the reaper’s sharp sickle from the vine of the earth; that is, from earthly existence.
  - xvii. The word ripe is not the same Greek word used in verse 15.
    - 1. This word refers to something fully ripe and in its prime.
    - 2. It pictures earth’s wicked, unregenerate people as bursting with the juice of wickedness and ready for the harvest of righteousness.
- g. **The reaping.**
- i. 14:19–20



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- ii. What resulted when the angel swung his sickle to the earth was catastrophic.
  - iii. All the enemies of God who survive the seven 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.
  - iv. A wine press consisted of two stone basins connected by a trough.
  - v. Grapes would be trampled in the upper basin, and the juice would collect in the lower one.
  - vi. The splattering of the juice as the grapes are stomped vividly pictures the splattered blood of those who will be destroyed (cf. Isa. 63:3; Lam. 1:15; Joel 3:13).
  - vii. The wine press will be trodden outside the city, as the Lord protects Jerusalem from the carnage of the Battle of Armageddon.
  - viii. That battle will take place in the north of Israel on the Plain of Esdraelon near Mount Megiddo (about sixty miles north of Jerusalem).
  - ix. It will rage the entire length of Israel as far south as Bozrah in Edom (cf. Isa. 63:1).
  - x. Jerusalem will be spared to become the capital of Christ's kingdom.
  - xi. The staggering, horrifying bloodbath of the Battle of Armageddon will be so widespread that blood will come out from the wine press, up to the

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horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

- xii. There will be millions of people engaged in the Battle of Armageddon, as all the nations gather together to fight against the Lord Jesus Christ.
- xiii. Still, it is difficult to imagine that they could produce a flow of blood up to the horses' bridles (about four feet deep) for a distance of two hundred miles (lit. "1,600 stadia").
- xiv. A better interpretation, whether there are actual horses involved or not, sees this as hyperbole to suggest the slaughter in which blood will splatter into the air profusely along the whole length of the battle.
- xv. When the slaughter reaches its peak, blood could flow deeply in troughs and streambeds.
- xvi. Armageddon, as this passage indicates, will actually be a slaughter rather than a battle.
- xvii. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, Antichrist, the false prophet, and all their human and demonic forces will be immediately destroyed.
- xviii. Revelation 19:11–21 describes the scene in detail:
  - h. Putting the scene in this chapter together with that of chapter 19, while the angel cuts the grapes, it is the Lord Jesus Christ who crushes out their lives.
  - i. Unregenerate humanity faces a frightening future, as this incredible scene indicates.

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- j. Those who refuse to repent, even after repeated warnings, will learn firsthand the sobering truth that “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). 1