**THE GRAPES OF WRATH**

Episode Fourteen: Revelation 14-16

In the Battle Hymn of the Republic, the awful carnage of the Civil War is seen as a foretaste of the final wrath of God: “Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; he is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; He has loosed the fateful lightening of his terrible swift sword; His truth is marching on.” For the world, this will be terrifying. For the Bride it will be “Glory, glory, hallelujah!”

1. **The Harvest is Long Overdue** [Revelation 14:14-16] We are reminded of the cries of the martyrs under the altar before God’s throne after the fifth seal in the scroll of history is torn off: *“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”*  [Rev. 6:10] But God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish.

Now, the seventh seal has been torn off, and the **coming wrath** is about to explode with God’s full fury. It is God’s answer to the earlier prayers of the martyrs. The third angel cries out, *“If anyone worships the beast and its image receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they too will drink the wrath of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.”*  [Rev. 14:9&10].

* **The Harvester Angel** [Rev. 14:14-16] *“On the cloud sat one like the Son of Man.”* This is not Jesus. Jesus **is** the Son of Man; this one is “**like** the Son of Man.” Later we read, *“Then* ***another*** *angel came out of the temple in heaven, and* ***he too*** *had a sharp sickle.”* [Rev. 14:7} It is clear that both the one who looked like a Son of Man [perhaps this is Michael] and the second sickle-wielder are angels.

*“…having on his head a golden crown…”* The Greek word for crown does not refer to a diadem of power worn by a king, but that worn by a general leading his king’s armies into battle. Only Jesus deserves a crown, not his angels nor any earthly kings. Even saints will one day cast their crowns before the throne of God!

*“…and in his hand a large sickle…”* Not a sword, but an instrument for harvesting. When he is done, the earth will be laid bare. This is more than the Grim Reaper; this is one of the final two reapers.

* **The Harvest.** *“…for the harvest of the earth is ripe…”* [Rev. 14:16] The Greek word for harvest means “over ripe” or “withered on the stalk.” This harvest is long past due, but God’s mercy is patient. He is slow to anger. [Ex. 34:6] It is, because of that mercy, that he allows us to sin beyond what is reasonable or even just. But, *“He will not harbor his anger forever.”* [Psalm 103:9] As St. Paul said, *“Do not be deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a person sows, that will he reap.”* [Gal. 6:7]
1. **The winepress of God’s fury** [Rev. 14:17-20] A second angel comes forth bearing a sharp sickle, like the first. Only this sickle is not a scythe to cut wheat, but a smaller one used by grape harvesters. The metaphor of judgment is about to get horrifically bloody.
* **A third angel with a bowl of fire.** [Rev. 14:8] Notice again how, throughout St. John’s Apocalypse, the angels repeatedly come in threes—the number of our Triune God. This wrath may be executed by his angelic servants, but it is unleashed straight from the heart of God’s stored-up fury. His bowl of fire reminds us of the images in Revelation 6, as the martyrs under the altar of heaven plead with God to avenge their suffering. *“How long, Sovereign Lord,* ***holy and true****, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”* [Rev. 6:10]

People struggle with the idea of a God of wrath, especially as they see the carnage about to occur at the end of time. Remember what the martyrs appeal to in God’s character, for the wrath to come: 1) **God is holy**. He cannot allow evil to go unpunished. 2) **He is true**. He must keep his word to punish evildoers, and to repay the evil that is done to his beloved sons and daughters.

* ***“…the great winepress of the wrath of God…”***[Rev. 4:19] This vivid picture inspired the words of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* realized in the awful carnage of the Civil War, which the writer, like Abraham Lincoln, felt was a judgment on America for the evil of slavery.

 *“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
 He is trampling out the vineyard where the grapes of wrath are stored,
 He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,
 His truth is marching on!”*

Surely, the bloody battlefields of the Civil War were God’s judgment on America. How much worse for the world at the end of time.

***“…because her grapes are ripe****.”* [Rev. 14: 18] The Greek word means “fully ripe, ready to burst.” Trampled underfoot, they pop and burst like bodies spewing out blood. This is the metaphor of carnage and gore on the battlefield. In this case, the hell of Omnipotent God is upon them, and they become bloody pulp, like wine in a winepress.

***“…and blood flowed out of the press, up to the horses’ bridle up for a distance of two hundred miles.”*** [Rev. 14:20] This is the **Battle of Armageddon** in Revelation 16:16 & 19:11-19.

**The Size of the Battlefield**: Isaiah 34:6-8 speaks of a place of slaughter that begins in Bozrah, a place in Jordan, just below the Dead Sea and close to the border with Israel. Many reputable scholars think he is speaking in context of the Battle of Armageddon. If you go in a wide circle around Jerusalem, from Megiddo in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (the Greek is Armageddon) to Bozrah in Jordan to the Valley of Kidron that passes before Jerusalem, this interconnected network of valleys is about 184 miles. **This is the fighting ground of the battle to end all wars**.

**The Scope of the Bloodshed**: Now consider that a horse’s bit is about 4 feet off the ground. If you calculate the amount of blood to fill a river four feet deep and 184 miles long, and then figured that the average person has six quarts of blood, you have whatever you need to calculate approximately how many people die in this battle. What you don’t have is the width of this river of blood. However, it would take a **billion people**, spilling all their blood, to fill up a river that long and deep, averaging fifty-three feet wide. Let’s say only half their blood was spilled, that would be 500 million. A quarter of their blood, 250 million. By any measure, this one battle will be a monstrous carnage! But, even then, it wouldn’t begin to equal the numbers killed in world history by the monstrous evil of depraved humankind!

**NOTE: Having looked forward to God’s wrath at Armageddon, the Revelation given to John and us, now takes us back to the three-and -a-half years of wrath that precedes that awesome and terrible battle.**

1. **Wrath Completed.** [Rev. 15-16] *“Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous*…” [Rev. 15:1] In the original language it has the sense of “taking one’s breath away.” We live in an age when we have lost our sense of the majesty of God that leaves us awestruck. This is another reason why the Revelation of John blesses those who read it.
* ***“...seven last plagues—last, because with them, God’s wrath is completed.”***[Rev. 15:1] The ancient Greek word is *etelesthe* which means, “to reach the end of a predetermined aim.” This hot wrath of God fulfills an eternal purpose. Our God is not just blowing off steam. He is not like us, or the pagan gods, who respond in self-serving rage that ultimately serves no good purpose.
* ***“And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name.”***[Rev. 15:2] The crystal sea before the throne is now glows with the fire of God’s wrath. **Standing before it are the those who have come out of the Great Tribulation.** Again, the Tribulation and Wrath are separate things. This is after the Rapture that separates 3 ½ years of the Great Tribulation from 3 ½ years of the Coming Wrath.
* ***“They held harps given them by God 3and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb…”***[Rev. 15:2&3] The song they sing [vv. 4&5] is a compilation of Old Testament verses that capture the song sung by the Israelites after God redeemed them from Egypt [the Beast of their day; Pharaoh the Antichrist of that day; and his magicians, the false prophets of their day] after he poured out his wrath in ten plagues, and then destroyed Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea. The Passover and deliverance from Egypt foreshadows the redemptive work of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The seven end-time plagues to be poured out foretell the end of the Beast, as surely as the ten ancient plagues foretold the destruction of Egypt, just as the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of the Antichrist is foretold in what happened at the Red Sea. **Hence *the song of Moses and the Lamb***.
* ***“Out of the Temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues…”*** [Rev. 15:6] The scene described in verses 5-8 remind us of the old temple rituals which revolved around the sacrificial system—the lamb taking the wrath of God upon himself (the burnt offerings). They prefigure the death of Christ, and his enduring the full punishment for our sins, including an eternity of hell distilled in six hours. Those of us who have trusted in Christ’s saving work on our behalf, escape this hell.

But, for those who do not hide themselves in Christ, there is no hope. They must face the full wrath of God. Now, those who are outside Christ, are about to receive its awful beginnings. As terrible as it is, it is only a foretaste of the eternal hell yet to come beyond the *Coming Wrath*.

1. **The Seven Plagues.** *“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.”* [Rev. 15:1]
* **First Plague: Foul and Loathsome Boils.** [vs.2] A parallel to the sixth plague on Egypt, in which all Egyptians were covered with hideous boils.
* **Second Plague: The Sea turns to Blood, and all in it dies.** [vs. 3] Earlier in Revelation 8:8&9, only a third of the sea was contaminated. This time all the seas of the world die completely, as well as all the sea life in them. This is parallel to the first plague in Egypt in which the Nile River turned to blood and the fish died.
* **Third Plague: All Sources of Fresh Water turn to Blood.** [vv. 3-5] As with the seas, earlier in Revelation 8:11, only a third of earth’s fresh water was contaminated. Now, all fresh water turns to blood. This is poetic justice of God [vs. 5] **as the enemies of God have thirsted for the blood of his people now have nothing but blood to slack their thirst**. Again, this is a parallel to the main source of drinking water in Egypt, the Nile, turning to blood for the Egyptians who thirsted for the blood of God’s people, the Israelites.
* **Fourth Plague: The Sun Scorches all People.** [vv. 8&9] The sky which gives warmth, now gives excruciating pain. This is a foretaste of the hell yet to come. The ozone layer is completely gone. And yet, *“…they blasphemed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.”* [vs. 9] Like Pharaoh, the plagues only harden their hearts against God. This is proof of the total depravity of the sinner for all who believe that, if people only had enough evidence, they would turn to God. There are some Evangelicals who even teach that after a time in hell, people will come to their senses, repent, and be let out into heaven. Yet, only the grace of God can break through the sinful heart. Without supernatural regeneration, all people are doomed. No amount of evidence will suffice.
* **Fifth Plague: Total Darkness on the Kingdom of the Beast & Throne of the Antichrist.** [vv. 10&11] This parallels the ninth plague of darkness that descended on Egypt. At first, people must be relieved to have the scorching heat of the sun blotted out. But the boils, scorched skin, polluted drink causes people to groan. Misery is made all the worse by darkness. This too is a foretaste of the hell yet to come—that which Jesus called, “outer darkness.” And yet, they don’t repent at this time, any more than they will in hell.
* **Sixth Plague: The Coming of the Battle of Armageddon.** [vv. 12-16] The Euphrates river dries up. In ancient times, the Roman Empire looked at the Euphrates as the Eastern boundaries of their Empire. Beyond that were the unconquered powers of Asia. St. Augustine used to say, “The West should always look to the East. The enemy always comes from the East, along with destruction.” For St. John and his generation, a dried-up Euphrates was a warning of catastrophic destruction on its way.

Spirits come out of the mouth of **the unholy trinity**—Dragon, Beast, and False Prophet—like frogs. This is a reminder of the second plague in Egypt. These evil spirits go to summon the leaders of the nations of the earth to Armageddon. Whether these spirits stir them up to fight each other or not, they will ultimately be gathered to do battle with the Returning Jesus Christ and his heavenly armies. This reminds us that, ultimately, the great antichrist of Moses’ day, and the Beast that was the Egyptian empire, could not stand against God at the Red Sea. Nor has any Beast, antichrist, or false prophet been able to stand against God. Put them all together in the millions, at a place called Armageddon, and the results will be the same!

* **Seventh Plague: On the Eve of Armageddon, Earthquakes and Hundred-Pound Hailstones.** [vv. 17-31] Cities are toppled and people are crushed by hailstones. Hailstones parallel the hail in the seventh Egyptian plague. This isn’t the death of the firstborn as in the tenth Egyptian plague. This will be the deaths of billions of people. **Again, these are fitting judgments on people who worshipped creation, creatures, and their creations rather than the Creator.** Creation, creatures, cities, states, nations, empires, and rulers will all fall before the awful wrath of a spurned Creator.

**Every knee shall bend before King Jesus. Every saint and angel in heaven. Every person on earth. Every demon, fallen angel, and even the devil himself. You can do it now or later—but you will do it. Which makes more sense. Now or later?**