Introduction and Chapter 14 Organization:

In chapter 12 and 13 we looked at the uncovering or unveiling of the true nature of the church’s conflict at the hand of Satan, and the beasts who deceived the entire world into worshipping them, and the call for the church to persevere and endure in the midst of this by refusing to compromise. Now, in chapters 14 and 15, we approach a series of images that describe both the victory of saints and the reward of the saints who were faithful and who persevered through chapters 12 and 13. But there is also then the judgment that comes upon the unbelieving world, and the beast and his followers-those who followed the beast and gave him allegiance. Now we find their judgment. So we find reward in chapter 14 and into 15, which appears to be rather disjointed. We find the reward of the saints and the punishment of the wicked and unbelievers alternate throughout this section.

This section once more explores the meaning of final judgment and the meaning of salvation as the author will alternate in his vision between judgment and salvation. This section, chapter 14 all the way through the first four verses of chapter 15, can be divided into a series of sections that are introduced by John saying “I looked” or “I saw.” That little phrase “I looked” or “I saw” in your English translations often functions to mark off distinct units or sections. “I looked” or “I saw” marks off at least four different sections in chapter 14 and into 15.

First of all, the first section is found in chapter 14 and verses 1-5 where we see a vision of the lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion celebrating their victory. The second section is found in chapter 14 and verse 6-13 and this is the image of three angels who proclaim a gospel and end time salvation or end time judgment. Then third is we find a vision in chapter 14 verses 14-20 of the Son of Man coming to harvest the earth. We actually find there two images of harvest; one a grain harvest and one a harvest of
grapes. Then finally, in chapter 15 verses 1-4 we find the saints standing victorious by the sea and singing a song of victory demonstrating they have overcome.

Reading through Chapter 14

So those are the four main sections that we’ll sort of follow, but let me read chapter 14 and I want you to note those three sections divided by, “Then I looked” or “then I saw.”

Chapter 14, **Then I looked**, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. [In direct contrast to chapter 13] And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. 4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

6 **Then I saw** another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” 8 A second angel also followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great,’ which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on their forehead or on their hand, 10 He, too, will drink the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured out full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest for them day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.’ 12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the
saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’

14 Then I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to the one seated on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ 19 The angel swung his sickle on earth; he gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

Parallels between Chapter 13 and Chapter 14

This sections begins, to back up, what is going on in chapter 14. As we’ve noted it’s a series of alternating scenes between salvations and judgment. What it does it portrays the salvation and reward of the faithful who endured in chapters 12 and 13. But now, it portrays the judgment of those who worshipped the beast and his image, who received the mark of the beast, and those who compromised and refused to resist and instead engaged in the entire ideology of Rome and its claims. So, chapter 14 now will portray scenes of salvation and judgment depicting the two different responses of the people in chapters 12 and 13.

So chapter 14 begins with a picture of the lamb, which is to be an intentional contrast to the beast in chapter 13. Beast number one, who like the lamb, was slain now appears to have risen. Jesus is portrayed as the one who died and who was slain but now is alive. Now the beast also imitates that by appearing to have died and he in fact did die
because of the death and resurrection of Christ, but now appears to be alive. So the first beast is a parody of Jesus Christ, but the second beast also, is described in chapter 13 and verse 11 is described as having two horns like a lamb. So the lamb here is meant to be in direct contrast to the two beasts from chapter 13.

Now, what we find in chapter 14 then is Jesus Christ and his followers. In other words, in chapter 13 we found the two beasts and their followers, and then those who refused to follow were persecuted. But now those who refused to follow in chapter 13, who have followed the lamb, now stand with the lamb victorious on Zion. The 144,000 we’ve already been introduced to in chapter 7. We said there they represented a mighty army, that is, the church in fulfillment of Old Testament images of Israel as an army. Now the church, as an army, went out to do battle, yet they did so through their suffering witness. In chapters 12 and 13 we see that the beast did battle. It waged war with the saints, but the saints emerged victorious because of their suffering witness. Now they stand with their leader Jesus Christ they are celebrating their victory on Mount Zion.

The 144,000

We already noted that the fact that they are called virgins, or those who did not defile themselves with women probably have a two-fold emphasis. Number one, it probably reflects from Deuteronomy, for example, the stipulation in the Old Testament, that during times of battle, the male warriors would abstain sexual relationships, but also it’s probably simply a symbol of purity that they have not defiled themselves with the idolatrous practices of Rome in chapter 12 and especially chapter 13. Instead, now they stand victorious because they resisted. They refused to defile themselves. So this may not be a literal reference to sexual purity; although that could be included, but I think it’s more reference to the idolatrous practices and the allegiance and worship of Rome back in chapter 13 that was being enforced, that they refused to participate in and suffered the consequences of. Now, they stand victorious because they resisted and refused to compromise.

I also want you to notice in these verses in chapter 14, further confirmation that this 144,000 probably represent the people of God more broadly. They’re not just ethnic
Israelites. They’re not just a segment of the broader people of God, but note how they’re described. They’re described as purchased from among men, as redeemed from the earth. That is language that comes out of Revelation 1 and 5 of Jesus redeeming people from the earth people from every tribe and language and nation purchasing them to make them a kingdom of priests. So I take it the 144,000, again is an image for those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, the lamb, who have been redeemed from all the earth to now constitute his people, and those are the people of the Lamb. So this is the international people of God both Jew and Gentile. The true people of God now portrayed as an army. The 144,000, stand victorious with the Lamb, their leader, on Mount Zion and this probably contrasts too with chapter 11, 12, and 13 from the standpoint there, although in chapter 11 the two witnesses end up vindicated at the end. In chapter 11 the two witnesses appeared to suffer defeat and in chapters 12 and 13 they also appear to suffer defeat, and that the dragon and his two offspring the beasts are allowed to wage war on the people of God. They have apparently suffered defeat at the hands of the beasts-the two beasts and the dragon himself. But now, they are shown in chapter 14 to be a mighty army that stands victorious. They have won the victory of the war in chapters 12 and 13, and now they stand victorious with their leader Jesus Christ.

Verse 4 of chapter 14 is probably my favorite verse in the entirety of the book of Revelation, and I think it encapsulates the most important theme, in Revelation and that is the 144,000 are described as those who “follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” The main theme of the book is that God’s people are those “who follow the lamb wherever he goes” even if it means following him to the point of death. God’s people are those who refuse to compromise. They refuse to conform to this world; instead, they follow the Lamb wherever he goes; and here they follow him to victory. Here they are portrayed as remaining unpolluted from the world. Notice this verse, “they follow the Lamb wherever they go,” occurs right at the end of the description of them as those who did not defile themselves through idolatrous practices. So “following the Lamb wherever he goes” means following by being pure, by refusing to compromise with the idolatrous evil world, but also clearly in the broader context of Revelation means to do so even in the
face of suffering and death, just as Jesus Christ did.

Mount Zion Imagery

Two further important images in this section to draw your attention to is note the image of Mount Zion. Without going into a lot of detail Mount Zion also has an Old Testament background. Mount Zion is the image for the place where God rules—a place of protection and security. We find in the Old Testament prophetic texts Zion is the place where God would deliver his people. Psalm chapter 2, Isaiah chapter 2, verse 2, Psalm chapter 48 all texts that refer to God’s deliverance of his people and them coming to Mount Zion. For example, and I’ll just read one of those in Isaiah chapter 2 at the very beginning of the book in a scene that anticipates the final judgment of God and his people, the final salvation of God that he will bring, the judgment of God and his enemies. Now the final salvation that God will bring to his people, that interestingly will also include the nations. Isaiah says this:

“This is what Isaiah the son of Amos saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the last days. The mountain of the Lord’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains. It will be raised among the hills and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, ‘come let us go up to the mountain of Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.’”

So Zion here seems to signify the entire city of Jerusalem, the place where God’s throne is, the place where the temple is, the place where God rules, the place of protection, and the place where now God brings salvation to his people. Probably Zion here is to be identified with end time New Jerusalem in Revelation chapter 21 and 22. So in one sense this scene is another scene that is simply preparing for a further exposition, and further unpacking, and further divulging that occurs in Revelation 21 and 22. So now God’s people stand on Zion the place of God’s presence, the place of protection, and the place of salvation.

Meaning of 144,000 Described as First Fruits

The other interesting piece of terminology here is in verse 4; they are also
described as offered as first fruits. Now the first fruit was in the Old Testament although, we also find it used this way in the New Testament. “First fruits” was literally an agricultural term or a term of harvest referring to the first part of a harvest that was a guarantee of more to come. In fact, it wasn’t just separate from everything else to come, it was actually part of the harvest itself. It was the initial part of the fuller harvest that had yet to come, and we find this in the New Testament usage. Paul, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15 and elsewhere. In Colossians chapter 1, Paul refers to Jesus’ resurrection as a first fruit. That is, Christ’s resurrection is first installment of the more resurrections to come. That is, it’s not that Christ’s resurrection is one thing, and it provides a model for more. Christ’s resurrection is actually the inauguration of the end time resurrection that his people will also experience. Jesus’ own physical resurrection is the first fruits of or, that is, the first installment of the rest of the resurrections that are yet to come.

Now here the understanding should possibly be that the 144,000 are a group that anticipate more to come. That would certainly be consistent with the imagery the first fruit. So some have understood the 144,000 here as a special group, but they are the first fruits of a larger group that is yet to come. The difficulty with that is when you look at the text here it seems that here, as back in chapter 7, the 144,000 sort of morph into, in symbolic language, an innumerable multitude that stood in God’s presence before the throne and enjoying their inheritance. It appears to me that here in chapter 14, standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb victorious especially anticipates Revelations 21 and 22.

Here you have not an anticipatory scene of more to come. You have the final salvation, the final outcome, of the battle and the final salvation of the people. The complete number of God’s people at the end of the age following the battle. So here you have the final people at the end of history. Not a group indicating more to come. Yet intriguingly in the Old Testament, we do find first fruits utilized in terms of the entire nation of Israel being the first fruit, not in terms of more to come, but the entire nation themselves being viewed as an offering or as first fruits. For example, we find this language of harvest or first fruits in Jeremiah chapter 2, verses 2 and 3 where Israel is called the first of the harvest. The entire nation of Israel is called the first of the harvest.
So, Jeremiah chapter 2 and at the very beginning of the book, in verses 2 and 3 Jeremiah uses first fruits language to refer to the entire nation of Israel not part of them. You see similar language in Ezekiel chapter 20 verses 40 through 41 of Israel, interestingly on the mount, being associated with first fruits. In the New testament in James chapter 1 verse 18 you find the people of God, the entirety of the people of God, described as first fruits not of more to come, but the entire people of God in Revelation 14 along with the Old Testament, in a couple of these Old Testament uses of the first fruits.

The “first fruits” here present the 144,000 not as a group anticipating more to come, but the word “first fruit” here is portraying the entire end time people of God at the end of history. It is now being portrayed as a first fruit as an offering to God. So in contrast to chapter 13 then, and by the way I want to return to that, I think that concept of these 144,000 here emblematic of the entire end time people of God as a first fruit. This will be important for helping us understand another image that comes later on in chapter 14, but at this point it is in contrast to chapter 13 where the beast deceives the entire world. Here he deludes them into giving him allegiance. Giving the beast the allegiance that he demands and requires and also he makes war with the people of God. Now you find God’s faithful people standing victorious having engaged in battle with the dragon and with the beast of chapter 12 and 13. Now they stand with their leader, the lamb, and with the mark of God on their forehead, not the mark of the beast from chapter 13. Now they stand as pure having abstained from the world, they sing a song celebrating their victory with the lamb on Mount Zion.

The Three Angels

The first part of the vision is clearly meant to be an interpretation or a demonstration of the outcome of the conflict narrated in chapters 12 and 13. But now in the next section verses 6-13 demonstrate what happens to those who side with the beast. What happens to those who were bought into the deceptive activity of the beast who took upon themselves the mark of the beast, that is, the symbol identifying with, showing their allegiance, showing their worship of the beast. Perhaps it was to avoid persecution or to avoid economic sanctions at the end of chapter 13. What happened to those that took
upon themselves the mark of the beast, identified with the beast, gave him lordship and allegiance? Chapter 6 and 13 narrate the failure of those who resist, those who refused to resist, and those who compromised. It’s structured around the speech of three different angels.

Angel number one comes to proclaim an eternal gospel. Now it’s interesting the content that he proclaims is: “Fear God and give him glory.” Interestingly, this is the same language we saw back in chapter 11 and 13 and 14-where some of the survivors of the judgment feared God and gave him glory. That suggests that both here and there in chapter 11, you may have a reference to repentance, so what you have here then is this angel calls for repentance. The implication is not for those who refuse but instead for those who choose to follow the beast, now they will receive judgment. This would include also those in the church who were compromising, and chose to throw their lot in with Rome and its idolatrous, godless system of worship. So angel number one proclaims a gospel and those who refuse will find themselves facing final judgment in the speech of the first angel.

Second Angel

The next the two, and probably we should not see these three separate, maybe the next two describe more clearly what’s going to happen to those who refuse the message of angel number one. Those who refuse to fear God and give glory will face judgment. Now here’s exactly what it is they face: in verses 8 and following in the form of the next two angels. Angel number two declares judgment upon Babylon. This probably has its background again in the Old Testament, Daniel chapter 4 and verse 30 and other Old Testament texts that portray the judgment of Babylon itself, but what we have here is the first anticipation in 14:8, “Fallen! Fallen! is Babylon the great, which make all the nations drink the maddening of wine of her adulteries.” Here we see the first anticipation of something that will get developed in more detail in chapter 17 and 18 where we find a description of Babylon and then a detailed description of its downfall and of its judgment and destruction.

Probably here we’re to take Babylon as a code for Rome. That is Babylon going
all the way back to the Old Testament, Babylon is almost becoming—we’ll talk more about this in chapters 17 and 18, but Babylon is almost becoming an image or a symbol for an antigodly, arrogant, idolatrous, oppressive nation or empire. Babylon almost becomes a symbol for that. Now that label applies appropriately to the Roman Empire, who is now another godless, arrogant, violent, oppressive, an idolatrous empire. So Babylon is a fitting designation. So you have the same speeches embodied in ancient Babylon now surfaced and emerging again and are embodied in the first century city of Rome in the first century Roman Empire that John is addressing. We’ll find this repeated in a moment in chapter 16 in verse 19, a couple chapters later, and then as we said it gets narrated in more detail in chapters 17 and 18. So the idea here if Babylon is to fall, then those who belong to her and compromise with her will fall also. So it’s not just a destruction of a physical city, but those who belong to her will suffer the same fate if they do not fear God and repent which was the message of angel in chapter 1. If they refuse to resist and if they compromise, they will suffer the fate of Babylon, which now the angel pronounces is about to fall in judgment.

The Third Angel

The third angel also proclaims a message and this message clearly indicates the consequences for allegiance to the beast back in chapter 13. Here the judgment is proclaimed on those from chapter 13, notice those in verse 10 who worshipped his image, those who received verse 9, “Those who received the mark on the forehead or on their hand.” Those two descriptions go right back to chapter 13. So those in chapter 13 that received the mark of the beast, that worshipped that image, that gave their allegiance to idolatrous godless Rome, now this is the judgment that will befall him. What we find in this description is actually language that anticipates the final judgment that one will find in chapters 18 through 20. So already this is a kind of a fast forward glimpse and anticipation of the final judgment that will get more fully developed in latter chapters though much of that language already occurs here in describing the fate of those who have thrown their lot with Babylon Rome, who have given their allegiance and worship to the beast, to the idolatrous godless oppressive empire.
Notice the language that is used first of all it’s described as drinking the cup of God’s wrath. In the Old Testament God’s wrath as a cup of wine was a common metaphor for God’s judgment as was mixing that wine in a way that was undulated with water but instead was of full strength. So God’s wrath then will be given in full strength. In Jeremiah chapter 25, which may provide the backdrop for this language, among other Old Testament texts, but this one seems to be an important one in Jeremiah chapter five in verses 15 through 18. We read this,

“This is what the LORD the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.’ So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today, Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants,” et cetera.

So Jeremiah chapter 25 is one of the most important texts that provides the background for the notion of a cup of unmixed wine and of wine of full strength, undiluted wine, signifying God’s wrath and causing the nations to drink of it and become drunk and become symbolic of God pouring out his judgment on wicked humanity. So the nations are portrayed as intoxicated with, interestingly, the wrath of God. Later on we’ll see this back up in verse 8 again that shows these messages are connected in verse 8 to Babylon has fallen. Why? Because it has made all the nations drink the wine of her adulteries.

So all the nations are drunk because of the immorality because of the idolatry, because of the oppressive nation and the evil and wickedness of the Roman Empire that’s why it’s going to be destroyed because it has made the nations drink of that. The nations have become intoxicated with Rome’s rule. Now, the author seems to invoke the notion of the punishment will fit the crime. That is, Babylon/Rome, has made the nations drunk with its wine; now God is going to make them drunk with his wine, that is, the wine of God’s wrath. So the punishment will fit the crime not only Babylon but for all those who
associate with Babylon. All those who participate in Babylon, Rome’s, idolatrous evil practices, will now become drunk on the wrath of God, on the wine of his wrath.

The second thing is to note the language of eternal judgment where you have this language of smoke and sulfur going up forever and ever. This language of smoke and sulfur is another image or symbolism that comes of Old Testament and also apocalyptic language. It simply represents intense and severe suffering from the divine judgment that now comes upon the people, and the smoke is described as going up forever and ever. Interestingly, when you get to chapter 17 or chapter 18 of Revelation that is how Babylon’s destruction is described: as smoke going up forever and ever. So already this text is giving you a glimpse of a fuller picture of judgment, not a separate or different judgment. It’s the same judgment, but it will be developed more fully and in more detail in later chapters. This language again appears to reflect, for example, Isaiah chapter 34. If you go back to Isaiah chapter 34 and verses 9 and 10, I think you will find this similar language in the context of judgment. 34 and 8 through 10.

“For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of retribution to uphold Zion’s cause [interestingly notice the name Zion in connection with Zion mentioned at the beginning of 14] Edom’s streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become blazing pitch. It will not be quenched day and night; its smoke will rise forever. From generation to generation it will lie desolate; no one will ever pass through it again.”

So note that language of fire and the language of sulfur in the context of judgment. Notice the language of smoke going up forever and ever as a sign of God’s judgment that John seems draw on here. But again interestingly in Isaiah 34, it is in the context of the protection of Zion, which you also find in the beginning of Revelation chapter 14.

So John is simply gathering language from the Old Testament scenes of judgment, to describe God’s judgment on another wicked, evil, oppressive, idolatrous empire and those who belong to it. So that once more we should not take this language literally as describing some literal physical torment the people suffer because they are inhaling the smoke or because of the sulfur and certainly we should not take this as some reference to
some end time nuclear war or anything like that, but John is drawing on rather stock symbolism from the Old Testament to portray the meaning and the certainty of God’s judgment in the same way he judged wicked empires in the past. So God’s people in the first century can be certain that he will judge Rome as well, and any other evil empire that would play that same role.

So the angelic proclamation in these three sections, in the entirety of these three sections, are meant probably to go together. It’s a call for repentance to fear God and give him glory. A refusal to do so will involve them in the fate of Babylon, which is to fall. And also will make them recipients of God’s wrath in terms of an eternal smoke or burning sulfur using Old Testament imagery, but also using imagery of being drunk with wine, the symbol or imagery of a bowl full of undiluted wine being a symbol of God’s wrath.

So these verses that are meant to be the opposite of chapter 14:1-5. They indicate what happens to God’s people who faithfully endure and resist in their conflict with Satan and the beast in chapter 12 and 13. Now the messages of these three angels indicate what happens to Rome and the beast and those who collude with them. Those who are deceived and render worship and allegiance take upon themselves the mark of the beast and worship the beast and his image in chapter 13. Verses 12 and 13 then of chapter 14 are meant to demonstrate that this judgment, verse 12, this calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints. In other words, this judgment is meant to motivate God’s people to persevere. The confidence that God is indeed going to come back and judge and vindicate his people should encourage God’s people to persevere.

Furthermore, it should also be a warning for them, for those who want to compromise, for those who have become complacent in the context of Roman rule, for those who want to compromise and think it’s alright to worship the beast, to worship Rome, and be involved in its idolatrous practices perhaps to avoid persecution or whatever. These texts remind us that if they fail to persevere they will find themselves as the recipients of the judgments spelled out in the message of these three angels.

So it’s meant to motivate Christians to persevere, if God going to come and judge
due to the gravity of that judgment and situation. Those who are tempted to compromise must realize that refusal to compromise or refusal to resist will involve them as recipients of these judgments, but also those who are being persecuted can now have a motivation to continue because as the souls cried out under the altar, “How long, O LORD until you avenge our blood?” Now we see in the messages of the first of the three angels God avenging the blood of his saints; God vindicating the faithful witness and suffering and death of his saints.

Introduction to the Grain and Grape Harvests

The next section in chapter 14 is an interesting one. Beginning with the “I looked” or “I saw” the author is marking off another segment, to make an initial comment. The way we should treat this section, the rest of chapter 14, these are not portraying events that take place after chapter 14:1-13. I think as we’re going to see these events in chapter 14 verses 14 to the end, these two further scenes, one scene in the form of a grain harvest and the other scene in the form of a grape harvest. These further describe the events taking place in the earlier part of the chapter. So these are not two separate events. It’s another set of images, another way of depicting or describing, what has happened in the first part of chapter 14. We’ve seen that all through Revelation. John is not primarily giving us chronological sequences of events leading up to the end. He’s describing the present and future of his readers, but he explores the meaning of that by using different images and different language most of it drawn from Old Testament. Now John is going to draw language from Old Testament and from Jesus’ teaching as well and apocalyptic literature to further describe the nature of God’s judgment that he has already described in different language in chapter 14 verses 1 through 13.

Now the question about these two scenes, as we’ve said, the two scenes are apparently judgment scenes. They’re different though in that the first scene is a harvest grain. It is a grain harvest scene where you have the picture of the Son of Man with the sickle and he goes out and harvests the earth. The second scene is a scene of an angel who also holds a sickle, but this angel swings his sickle and gathers a grape harvest. He gathers the vine of grapes where he will tread them to make wine, is basically the literal
depiction behind this. So you have two scenes a grain harvest and grape harvest.

The question in relationship to that is what are these two scenes specifically depicting and how do they relate to each other? How do they relate to back to chapter 14 verses 1-13? Unless you want to say this is just an indiscriminate collection of images. Might we be able to suggest how they relate back to the first 13 verses of chapter 14, and to emphasize again these are not to be seen as chronologically happening after the events of chapter 14:1-13. These are just further ways of depicting those events using the language of a grain and grape harvest.

So what does John see in the two scenes? What I want to do is take each of them and try to describe the background of what’s happening and then raise the question of the relationship to each other, which I think will become clear as we begin to describe them.

Grain Harvest: Believers

The first scene is found in chapter 14 verses 14-17 and that is the grain harvest scene. It begins by recalling Daniel chapter 7 and verse 13. It begins with the Son of Man seated on the cloud, and by the way John seems here, perhaps intentionally but it is certainly consistent with other New Testament depictions of Christ coming on the clouds as in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 and verses 13 and following, Jesus own teaching in Matthew 24 and elsewhere, but all perhaps going back to Daniel chapter 7 and this language of the Son of Man seated, or coming on the clouds. Daniel 7 provides, the background for the language here of the Son of Man seated on a white cloud that John sees. What is interesting is unlike the vision of chapter 1 where John sees the Son of Man also in the language drawn from Daniel chapter 7 in the well-known Son of Man vision, unlike Revelation 1, where John sees the Son of Man but having a sword preceding from his mouth, now John sees the Son of Man coming on the clouds, but now he has a sharp sickle in his hand. The sickle probably suggests the theme of judgment, and so we have this picture of the Son of Man now coming to judge.

It’s intriguing that Son of Man, if this is to be identified with Christ, which I think it clearly is in light of chapter 1 and elsewhere. If this is the Son of Man, it’s intriguing that an angel comes and commands him to swing his sickle and harvest the earth. Some
have for that reason have suggested that the Son of Man here is not Jesus Christ but must be some other angelic being. How could you have another angel have authority over the Son of Man, over Jesus, and telling him what to do? But I think the key is to know where the angel comes from. The angel comes from the temple, the very dwelling of God. So I think the picture here is not that the angel has the authority to tell the Son of Man what to do, but the angel is bringing a message from the temple or angel is bringing a message from God telling the Son of Man it’s time to reap the harvest. The harvest is ripe and it’s time to reap the harvest.

There are two possible New Testament backgrounds. First of all, in Matthew chapter 13 and verses 24-30 we see Jesus using the image of a grain harvest to depict the final judgment and harvest that will happen at the end of history where the weeds are burned. The world is seen as a field of weeds and wheat grown together. The weeds are taken out and they’re burned. The wheat is taken out and put in the storeroom for safe keeping because it’s good. It’s the positive crop that Jesus sees harvested in Matthew chapter 13.

Later on also in John chapter 4 verses 34-38 Jesus refers to a ripe harvest and calls on his disciples to reap a harvest for eternal life. So this maybe one example or one place where John seems to be in contact with the teaching of Jesus and the image of the grain harvest. But what I want you to note is if John is drawing on the teaching of Jesus it’s interesting that in the first example in Matthew 13, it’s the weeds that are burned up and destroyed, but the grain is preserved. In John 4 there is the language of the harvest being ripe, and time to reap because the harvest of the earth is ripe. Here in verse 15 of Revelation 14, in John chapter four where we find the harvest being ripe, like the harvest they’re told to reap is for eternal life. Now add to that, I think this scene of harvesting grain takes up the image of the 144,000 as first fruits. Language of the grain harvest is first fruits for God. So that what I think is going on here verses 14-16 is a positive harvest. It’s not one of judgment of unbelievers. It’s not the judgment of the wicked, this is a positive harvest. This is the harvest of the first fruits, the 144,000 symbolizing the people of God. Now the harvest on earth is ripe, that is God’s people. So now the Son of
Man comes to harvest people for their eternal reward to be a first fruit for God. So in my opinion verses 14-16 corresponds to chapter 14 1-5 with the 144,000, the first fruits to God, who stand victorious because they’ve refused to compromise.

**Grape Harvest: Unbelievers**

Now the second image, scene number two, is the grape harvest, and here you have another angel coming to be involved in the harvest, and this one I take is meant to be the language of the harvest of unbelievers. In other words, verses 17 through the end of the chapter correspond to verses 8 through 11. It is the command to God’s people to persevere and to resist, but through verse 11. So 8-11, the message of the angels is judgment on unbelieving Babylon and unbelieving world. Now this corresponds to that.

So to put it together the grain harvest in 14-16 corresponds to the first part of chapter 14 the image of 144,000 as first fruits to God. Now they’re being pictured as harvested at the end time judgment, and now 17 to the end of the chapter, through verse 20, will correspond to 8-11, that is the judgment of unbelievers. Now the judgment of unbelievers in 8 and following is depicted as a grape harvest in this second judgment in verses 14-20.

Intriguingly what might further suggest this, in the first section is it is the Son of Man who comes to harvest. Now it’s another angel who comes to harvest, and in the same way an angel summoned the Son of Man to reap his harvest now another angel summons the first angel. The one that comes with a sickle, he also has a sickle. Another angel comes out of the temple from the altar and also calls on him to now swing his sickle and this time it will be for a grape harvest. Probably the fact too, that the angel comes from the altar may suggest he was sent just like in chapter 8:1-5 where the saints are mingled, this prayer, the saints are mingled with the incense of the altar. So we should understand this as the response to the prayer of the saints. This is the vindication of the martyrs who cry out, “How long, O Lord.” But now the harvest happens and the angel gathers vines with grapes because they are now to be trampled in the winepress.

The image here is probably, you would have a vat full of grapes and the grapes would literally be trampled so that the juice is squeezed from them. The juice flows out
into another vat and that vat will be used for the wine. The background for this imagery is probably Joel chapter 3 and verse 13 for example. Also, elsewhere we find grape harvest as a symbol for God’s end time judgment. For example, in Isaiah chapter 63 and verses 2 and 3 we find the language of trampling the grapes with the language of grapes as a symbol for harvest. Chapter 63 and the first couple verses, “Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered on my garments, and I stained all my clothing.” Notice the interesting connection with Zion again that you found that at the beginning at chapter 14. Isaiah 63:6 parallels Revelation saying, “I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”

Lamentations 1 verse 15 is the other one that uses the image of grapes as trampled upon as an image of end time harvest. So the picture is outside of the city of Zion, and it’s interesting that in the prophets you find and here you find the language of outside of the city. The judgment is taking place outside of the city, which probably refers back to Zion at the beginning of chapter 14. So now you find judgment portrayed in terms, Old Testament, terms taken from Joel, taken from Isaiah, taken from a book like Lamentations and elsewhere God’s final judgment is being pictured as God trampling a winepress, trampling grapes in a winepress.

But what is interesting in the judgment scene is the juice that comes out of the wine ends up being blood. That is, it ends up being the blood of the victims of the final judgment and of the final battle, and in the next segment I want to look a little bit at concluding this section. I want to look at the image that the author uses of blood going up to the horses bridal and extending over a length of section consisting of 600 stadia. I want to look at little bit at where John’s image comes from and also what that image signifies.