

“Blood to the Horse Bridles!”

A most Astounding Visual Picture is Presented in Revelation 14:20 of a Flow of Blood, as Deep as Horses’ Bridles, extending out for 1600 Furlongs. What Extraordinary Event is being Described Here, and is it a Reality?

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It’s an historically unprecedented situation to see a huge stream of blood flowing out from a battle location. On rare occasion, such as during the Revolutionary War, a pond was stained red by the blood of British soldiers, or on assault beaches during WWII where the sands and surf were stained red, has anything like that been reported. But to have an event where an actual river of blood flows out from a wide valley for a considerable distance, suggests an event on a scale well beyond anything mankind has ever experienced or even imagined! Our question is, Is this a real prophetic event, or is it merely exaggerated figurative language?

High reputation commentaries and various churches regularly associate this event with the great battle of “the Day of the Lord.” That being, the defeat of the Beast Power’s armies at or near Jerusalem at Christ’s return. Our challenge is to settle in our minds if this event is real or not, and if it is an actual event, when is it destined to happen? After all, the scale of the carnage is mind boggling!

Now, many regard the Battle of Armageddon, as it most often is called, to be the final battle with the enemies of the returning Christ. With that in mind, it is somewhat logical to associate this event described in the 20th verse of Revelation 14 as being that very event. However, the narrative in this chapter doesn’t specifically describe a **battle** scenario, per se. Rather, it seems to describe the **harvest** of a ‘fully ripened vintage’ of humanity. To envision this scene as being a battle, with armies coming to war against the returned Christ, we must draw upon other cross-referenced passages, as the language for a battle just isn’t found in this particular place. That seems to have escaped the notice of many a theologian!

The particular passage that presents this picture is found in the last seven verses of chapter 14:

14: “*And I looked, and behold a **white cloud**, and upon the cloud one sat like unto **the Son of man**, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.*

15: *And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for **the harvest of the earth is ripe.***

16: *And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and **the earth was reaped.**”*

What is noteworthy at this point in the narrative is that there are **two** separate and distinct reapings: One by ‘the Son of man’, (isn’t that Christ?) seated on a white cloud, followed by another reaping, conducted by two angels, one wielding a sickle, the other controlling fire. Of the second reaping, we see: 17: “*And **another angel** came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.*

18: *And **another angel** came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and **gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.***

19: *And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.*

20: *And the winepress was trodden without the city, and **blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.**” (200 miles!)*

The general consensus with regard to this passage is that the battle of the Day of the LORD is being described, or at least the result of it. But the picture represented may not be one so simple as that!

A Commentary's Observation

Regarding this passage, verses 17 to 20, a JF&B Commentary ¹ makes reference to Joel 3, another passage having similar sounding language and from this, deducing that the event describes the obliteration of the antichrist's armies. However, these commenters do very insightfully note that the event described in the preceding three verses, 14 to 16, present the harvest of **the righteous!** *"(Mark iv. 29, where also He sendeth the sickle') The Son sends His sickle-bearing angel ² to reap the righteous. By the harvest-reaping the elect righteous are gathered;"* So says JF&B! A more pertinent cross-reference would be that in Matthew 25:31-46, where the righteous are set apart and awarded Life before the confirmed wicked are then sentenced to a just and everlasting punishment.

This observation of there being **two** quite separate groups at this event leaves us with a problem. Who are these righteous who are harvested at this event? And why, if this is a scene of battle against the antichrist, are they in any way a part of this action?

It might also be relevant to point out that to assign the winepress of God's Wrath to this scene breaks the internal time sequence of this inset chapter! (It should be noted that the subject of this inset is to describe all of the harvests of humanity: The first resurrection of the 'firstfruits' is in verses 1 to 5, and the final harvests at the end in verses 14 to 20. Also, verse 10 gives insight to the verse 19 event.)

More Than One Event

A couple of questions we need to ask ourselves, at this point is this: Will there be **only one** great battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat? (Note: It is presumed, from language in another prophecy, that this is the location being referred to in Revelation 14, despite the fact that no such reference is contained in this chapter!) Second, if all of the righteous are made alive and given Spirit bodies at the Last Trump, at the moment of the Second Coming, then who are these 'righteous' we see harvested by Christ at this just weeks-later event?

Could it be that we have diverted our focus as to the true meaning of this revealing passage by associating it with another earlier, though conceivably similar, event?

Battle or Harvest?

Also, we need to consider more of the imagery. Why describe a great battle by repeatedly calling it a harvest and using a harvest instrument rather than a war instrument, such as a bow or a sword? After all, in many other battle scene descriptions, the LORD is portrayed wielding a great sword! What is the picture here, a military defeat or the final reaping of all of humanity? To be dealing with the military, it still would leave the majority of the general population back at home, un-included!

If we were instead to associate Revelation 14:14-20 with Matthew 25:31-32, a very different explanation of the passage emerges. What we need to resolve in our minds is whether or not the words of Christ, here and in other places such as Matthew 13:41-43, Matthew 13:47-50 and Luke 19:27, are literal events. These others are 'final sentencing' events, not specifically battle scenes!

¹ Jamieson - Faucet – Brown Bible Commentary, volume 3, page 704, by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., Peabody, MA, March, 1997.

² For some reason the JF&B commentators chose to ignore the clear statement in verse 16 that indicates it was the seated Christ who Himself thrust in His sickle!

Places such as Luke 19:27 reveal that these who experience the wrath of their Lord have **had** their opportunity for salvation already. In order for them to have made such a decision as “*we will not have this man to rule over us*” it shows that they were aware of who He is and then made a conscious, even determined, decision! This certainly isn’t a non-cognitive situation on their part.

But there are other details contained within the chapter that we should also consider. What **is** the ‘white cloud’ and what does that picture represent? What means, “*The harvest of the earth is ripe*” (v. 15) and again, “*is fully ripe*” (v. 18)? Should we be expecting, after seeing this statement, that there will be **yet another** significant harvest at some future date? Or, is this describing that final one?

Not only are we introduced to the scene of the harvest of the earth, (and in it we see more than one group identified!) but apparently and ultimately the final one, beyond which no further ripening of humanity is anticipated! If we’re seeing an event that’s just at the time of the battle of Armageddon, then other questions are apparent, as there clearly **IS** a continuing ‘ripening toward harvest’ to occur after Christ’s return. For example, those generations that live during the millennial age will to a greater degree become converted. Beyond them, vast multitudes, who are to be raised in the second resurrection, after the 1000 years are finished, will then also enter into ‘judgment’, and, as we understand it, will then have their first and true opportunity for salvation which their first life didn’t provide them. (Rev. 20:5, 11-12) Logically, any ‘fully ripened **final** harvest’ would include them as well.

Another Great Battle

We’re introduced to another major rebellion against the long-ruling Christ in Revelation 20:7-10. This is clearly after the Kingdom of God on earth has been in existence for 1000 years. In that event, an antichrist is not part of the scene, but rather **Satan** himself works to deceive the nations, specifically those nations to the far north, Gog and Magog. At times, verses that refer to this event are associated with the battle of Armageddon also, though it is actually a separate invasion force in a later age.

Ezekiel 38 & 39 describes an invasion by the forces of Gog and Magog, but in it we see a very different occasion than we read of in Revelation 14. In this one, the dead bodies will be scattered abroad throughout the land, eaten by scavengers, and it will take seven months to locate and bury all the dead and seven years and collect and burn all their weaponry. Also, Gog and Magog and their allies invade a peaceful land without defenses! This invasion is set in the pre-restoration years, as we can see in verses 21 to 29 of chapter 39. **THIS** is a better description of how the battle of Armageddon will play out, rather than what we read is to happen in Revelation chapter 14.

The book of Joel is another factor in this matter. Noting the similarity of language in Joel 3, verses 9 to 17, the latter four verses of Revelation 14 are commonly represented as describing the same exact event. Now the Joel 3 battle scene is clearly **pre**-millennial, as we can see from the re-gathering of all the Israelitish peoples and the inhabitation of Jerusalem as a pure city thereafter. But it’s when we assign Joel 3 and Revelation 14 as having a co-incident time-frame, that we cause ourselves to miss the real point of Revelation 14:14-20.

A Careful Look at Revelation 14


If we are to accept this chapter as being topically whole and internally sequential, (though an inset into the running narrative of the overall book), we find some interesting details. The chapter begins with a description of ‘the firstfruits’ (the first resurrected Saints) and then it presents a three-stage announcement to all surviving humanity, explaining that Babylon has now fallen (again) and prohibits any further worship in its former antichrist system, pronouncing a dire warning against any who defy the prohibition. That warning of what will happen, in verses 10 & 11, is generally what we see being brought upon the second group in this white cloud harvest scene. Does that indicate that this event in Revelation 14:20 is in fact **post**-millennial?

Finally, in chapter 14, we see the great harvest of **all** of humanity (not just combatants) at the very end of time. Two distinct groups are represented: the righteous and then the wicked. These are separated and harvested to differing destinies.

We need to ask ourselves, is the Day of the Lord a single point in time? Is there **just one** occasion referred to in Scripture using this name? Another study paper with that title considers the multiple uses of the term “Day of the Lord” in biblical prophecy. (for example, consider 2nd Peter 3:10-12, where it’s used in reference to a different day and even a different member of the Godhead!)

We also need to be clear in our minds, exactly who are the 144,000? Who are the innumerable multitude described in Revelation 7?

So, if we are to identify Revelation 14:17-20 with that Day of the LORD, **just after** the Second Coming, we must disregard the white cloud, with its harvest of the righteous and the emphasized fact of the earth being ‘fully ripe’. Not only that, but that there’s no internal reference in this chapter to any battle situation, no mention of the Day of the Lord, of Armageddon or the armies of the Beast, just a mass assembly of humanity to a ‘harvesting’.

It seems that when we mis-assign placement of a passage of Scripture, we effectively lose its relevance to the issue at hand and the information it was intended to convey. That being, the **final sentencing** of all of humanity at the End! 

■ A Postnote on the Winepress location:

The Kidron Valley, IF it actually IS the same as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, presents certain problems with the narrative of Revelation 14:20, at least as it has traditionally been understood.

We are given a distance of the flow of the blood ‘pressed’ from this ‘fully ripened’ vintage of wicked humanity. That stated distance being 1600 furlongs (a furlong being some 600 feet, or nominally an eighth of a mile). Thus, 1600 furlongs would be **200 miles!**

Our problem arises in the fact that the Brook Kidron, in the valley of the same name IF this is the same location as the Valley of Jehoshaphat, (and that association seems to be dated to the fourth century) the Brook Kidron flows southward and then eastward through the Judean Desert. In its flow distance it drops 4,000 feet in elevation, and empties into the Dead Sea. It’s total distance from the city to the sea being a mere twenty miles.

What this information poses to us is that it may prove that the association between the location and the event that is traditionally made, that the event in Revelation 14:20 is the battle scene with the armies of the antichrist who have come up to Jerusalem to oppose the recently returned Christ, has in some way been mis-identified. Either the location is elsewhere OR the event is mis-dated when being identified as being **at Jerusalem in** the year of Christ’s Second Coming.

The current natural topography does not in any way provide for a possible flow of that great distance, by a factor of ten!

Now, if somehow the flow could be conveyed into another valley, one that originates to the southwest of Jerusalem, that stream’s flow is to the west and then northwest, and empties into the Mediterranean Sea, but with a flow distance of only about fifty miles from Jerusalem.

When and Where?

What we need to consider is that there might be proof in these topographical facts that the scene we read


of in Revelation 14:20 is **not** one for the present day, (the end of this present age) but of some later time, when the topography of the area has been altered either geologically or by human engineering. (See Zech. 14:10) This would strongly pose the likelihood that it is in fact, as the preceding article suggests, that the event we read of is a much later time, not in the twenty-first century, but more than 1000 years into the future.

(It is logical that the fresh water drainage within the land, rather than ‘wasting it’ by dumping it into the Dead Sea, in the millennium might be rerouted to flow thru the land southward to Elath (Ezion-geber) on the Gulf of Aquaba (the Red Sea). Such a diversion would make fresh water available to the southern interior, (the Negev) and co-incidentally, create a flow distance of 200 miles! Then again, where is all that sparkling fresh water that continually drains from under the threshold of the Temple to go, that we read of in Ezekiel 47?)

If it’s a fact that this event in Revelation 14:17-20 is the full harvest of all of humanity (in this case the wicked of all time, raised up for final sentencing) **after** the millennium, then the flow dimensions, its depth and distance, would have a far greater plausibility.

Death and Opportunity

Now, on the ‘punishment’ issue, we recognize that the warriors of the antichrist’s army are not ‘lost’ for all time, but they, being blinded and deceived, will have opportunity for understanding and salvation in the second resurrection. Not so of that other contingent who come against world headquarters, Jerusalem, in the post-millennial release of Satan to gather his army. (Rev. 20:7-10) These from that era are within their opportunity period, and will die to await sentencing in the third resurrection.

We shouldn’t overlook the fact that there will be more than one great battle in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. (There will be two great battles, 1000 years apart, and one immense slaughter.) Nor should we be casual in our assignment of Revelation 14:20 to a day other than when the great and final sentencing event will actually come to pass. 

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▣ Further Comments on Revelation 14:20

It is a common perception in the scholarly religious world that Revelation 14:20 is referring specifically to the great Battle of Armageddon, which is to marshal on the plains of Megiddo but will engage up in the Jerusalem area some 50-miles south, an event prophesied to occur just after Christ’s return. But what is noteworthy is the detailed account of that very battle that we find in another place.

Armies Engaged

Revelation 19:14-16 *“And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth **a sharp sword**, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierce-ness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, **KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.**”*

This particular account of what we would have to conclude is that same battle, is given in the chapter just before. But what we need to allow is that a very different scene is presented. In Chapter 19, we see God’s army from Heaven being involved, we see the combatants slain with **a sword**, the sword of His mouth, not a sickle! Though we have some similar wording, such as *“treading the winepress...”* we also see the slain lying dead on the ground unburied to be eaten by raptors (birds of prey). This is nothing like the fate of those we see described in chapter 14, verse 20.

Continuing in Chapter 19, resuming with verse 17: “*And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather your-selves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may **eat the flesh of kings**, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that **sat on the horse**, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were **slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.**”*

Not only here, but in Zechariah 14, we read of another battle description, this one conclusively at the time of Christ’s return: 1 “*Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. 2 For I will gather **all nations against Jerusalem to battle**; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. 3 Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.*”

Contrasting Descriptions!

Does this sound anything like the scene we read of in Revelation 14:17-20? There the death instrument is a **harvest** tool: a **sickle**, not a sword, the dead are first pressed of their blood and then burned-up. In the battle of Armageddon, the combatants are opposed by Christ’s army, not just two ‘reaping angels’, with Him mounted upon a white horse, not seated on a white cloud. The Revelation 14 scene is not the same at all as the accounts we read of the battle of Armageddon!

Some may regard Ezekiel 38 & 39 as describing the same battle scene, based in large part on the reference to Gog (and Magog). But this battle is more correctly identified with the battle that we read of in Revelation 20:7-10. Gog and Magog are the major players in the battle resulting from Satan’s release and his attack against the Holy City of God and His Saints **after the millennium**, not the battle of Armageddon at the Second Coming. In Ezekiel 39:11 we see all those dead are to be buried. But in Revelation 14, they are burned up in fire (presumably eternal fire / the Lake of Fire!).

After the Revelation 20:7-10 battle, there is yet one more generation until the Revelation 14:20 event!

Passages that belong with one event have been crossed-over and identified with another! We need to look at these various accounts more critically to be sure they are considered in their proper context!