

The Reaping
A Series on Divine Judgment: Part 13

By comparing the apostle John's account of Jesus reaping with Jesus' own prophecy of His coming in the clouds, one can gain a better understanding of what the apostle saw as Jesus reaped.

Apostle John (Rev 14:14-16)	Jesus (Matt 24:29-31)
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. 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." Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.	But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Observations:

1. Both accounts describe the rider of the white cloud as the Son of Man. Throughout the gospels, the expression "the Son of Man" is used solely by Jesus Himself as a self designation, not as Messiah, but as an indication of a role He will play in eschatology (Dan 7:13).

The apostle Paul also identifies this person as "the Lord" in his letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 4:16).

2. Both accounts present the appearance of Jesus in different dramatic fashion.

The apostle's account, from a heavenly perspective, observes Jesus arriving with a golden crown on His head signifying power and great glory.

Jesus' account, from an earthly perspective, presents a dark backdrop without any light from the sun, moon, or stars, from which He emerges on very visible clouds with "the powers of heaven shaken" and great glory.

3. Both accounts present the reaping as occurring after a trumpet sounds and with a seemingly different chronology.

In the apostle's account, the only trumpet that sounds is the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15), and several events take place (great praise in heaven [Rev 11:15-18], heavenly temple of God opens [Rev 11:19], three angels fly in midheaven and make three pronouncements for all on earth to hear and understand [Rev 14:6-13]) before Jesus reaps.

In Jesus' prophecy, it is not apparent that the trumpet is the seventh trumpet; however, the apostle Paul implies that the last trumpet is the seventh trumpet when he associates "the trumpet call of God" with the "voice of the archangel" (1 Thes 4:16-18) which is consistent with the apostle John's account. With this in mind, Jesus' account of sending "forth His angels" includes the three angels that fly in midheaven making their respective pronouncements (Rev 14:6-13).

4. Both accounts seem to indicate that all Believers are dead.

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In the apostle's account, this conclusion was developed with the demise of the 144,000 sealed bond servants (Rev 14:1), the demise of the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:7), and the observation that no survivor of the sixth trumpet "repented of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their theft" (Rev 9:20-21).

In Jesus' account, the reaping occurs after the tribulation. In all of His uses of the term "tribulation," Jesus was describing the persecution that occurs as the result of one's faith in God. In this context, the tribulation ends with the death of the last Believer who would have died for their faith on earth.

This is further evidenced in the reactions of human beings to the dispensation of the bowls in which they blasphemed the name of God (Rev 16:9, 11, 21). If there were any Believers present who would have been persecuted for their faith, the tribulation would have certainly continued.

5. It is apparent that the verb "reap" is in the figurative sense. While John sees Jesus solely doing the reaping, in reality, Jesus is sending out His angels to gather Believers from around the heavens (Matt 24:31) and the earth (Rev 14:15). Paul sees this as the start of the process of resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-54).

The apostle Paul, writing to the church of Corinth and Thessalonica, provides additional information of this reaping but with a view towards Believers.

1 Corinthians 15:51-54	1 Thessalonians 4:16-18
Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."	For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Observations:

1. The effect of the reaping will be immediate.
2. "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable" may refer to the white robes, which martyrs received earlier (Rev 6:11), in preparation for the Wedding Feast (Rev 19:7-8).
3. If there are any Believers left alive, they will change in a similar manner and meet with the dead in the clouds with Jesus Christ and be with Him forever.

The English term "rapture" has often been associated with the arrival of Jesus Christ in the clouds. "Rapture" is from the Latin term "rapio," which is a translation of the Greek term "harpazō." In this passage, Paul is speaking about resurrection starting at the sound of the "last trumpet." In contrast, the apostle John speaks of resurrection on two occasions, just before Jesus Christ's one thousand year reign (Rev 20:4-6) and just before judgment before the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11-13); thus, resurrection appears to be a process taking place over time.

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The Latin “rapio” and the Greek “harpazō” means to “seize” or “carry off;” however it does not appear that the Son of Man’s gathering is limited to the souls of saints who died during the tribulation.

The gathering is for “His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other” (Matt 24:29-31) and on earth itself (Rev 14:16).

When Paul speaks of all Believers who are alive up until the “trumpet of God” (1 Thess 4:17), he avoids any mention of death and instead explains that they will be “caught up” (**harpazō**), and in this context, he is speaking of tribulation saints.

Likewise, with careful observation of the heavenly Temple of God, the only human souls that the apostle John sees are a) saints who died for their faith (Rev 6:9-11), b) tribulation saints (Rev 7:13-15), and c) the 144,000 bond servants (Rev 14:1-3). Where are the souls of Believers who did not die from persecution for their faith??

Elsewhere in the Bible, third heaven is described as having, in addition to the Temple of God, “the city of the living God / heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22-24), which could reasonably be where other saints reside (see the article “Which heaven do Christians go to?” at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/7Humans/DeathWhichHeaven.aspx).

Because the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:7-10) occurs in the Temple of God (Rev 19:4-5) where saints are clothed in a white robe (Rev 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:8), the gathering of the elect is bringing all other Believers to the Temple of God to receive their white robe of righteousness and attend the marriage supper of the Lamb.

A special note and observation must be made here. When Paul speaks of the last trumpet, “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Cor 15:52-54), he is speaking in the context of immortality and being clothed. The process of resurrection includes this robe of righteousness that defines “immortality” and fulfills the saying that “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”

The second reaping by an angel from the heavenly temple of God is very different from Jesus’.

The angel is figuratively reaping clusters of ripe grapes (Rev 14:18).

The grapes are thrown into the great wine press of the wrath of God (Rev 14:19).

The wine press was trodden outside of Jerusalem and produced an enormous amount of blood (Rev 14:20). Without knowing its full dimensions, it is difficult to understand this volume, but only that it’s huge.

When Jesus Christ comes to Armageddon (Rev 16:13-16; 19:11-19), the apostle John records an interesting observation:

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and **He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.** (Rev 19:14-15)

Just as Jesus’ reaping was a figure of speech, so too was this angel’s reaping. Because it is Jesus treading in the wine press (Rev 19:15) that produces the vast amount of blood (Rev 14:20), this angel’s reaping event encompasses a period that includes the final dispensation of God’s wrath – specifically all of the bowls and the battle of Armageddon.

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The imagery of the reaping angel can be understood in the following manner:

The angel from the altar announces that the grapes from the vine of the earth are “ripe” (Rev 14:18). This “ripeness” represents the fullness of sin which God allows before He judges as exemplified when God tells Abraham that his descendants will leave their land, be oppressed for 400 years, and later return to the land (Gen 15:16).

Despite the fact that there are no longer any Believers on earth to evangelize, an angel pronounces the gospel around the world and in all languages (Rev 14:7), and another calls people to come out from the deception of the world (Rev 14:7). However people preferred to follow the “great men of earth” and the world will no longer hear the gospel (Rev 18:23).

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians, makes an indirect reference to this reaping by angels:

This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thes 1:5-10)

The grapes that are thrown into the great wine press of the wrath of God (Rev 14:19) represent evil human beings just before being crushed in judgment.

The plague wielding angels and the bowls of God’s wrath are the last of God’s wrath (Rev 15:1), and it serves to enrage the world (Rev 16:2, 9, 11).

Of particular note is the sixth bowl which was intended to dry out the Euphrates River so that the kings from the east can make war at Armageddon (Rev 16:12-14; 17:9-14).

When the seventh bowl is dispensed, the seventh angel announces, “it is done,” to express the end of God’s judgment and wrath (Rev 16:17).

When Jesus treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God (Rev 14:20; 19:15), the wine press metaphor represents divine judgment.

A similar metaphor was expressed by the prophet Isaiah who was speaking of God’s judgment against Edom.

“I have trodden the wine trough alone,
And from the peoples there was no man with Me.
I also trod them in My anger
And trampled them in My wrath;
And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments,
And I stained all My raiment.
For the day of vengeance was in My heart,
And My year of redemption has come.” (Isa 63:3-4)

With God’s wrath complete, it is Jesus Christ who exacts judgment at Armageddon (Rev 19:11-16).

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For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and **He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.** (John 5:22-27)

While the apostle John's account presents a sequence of Jesus reaping first followed by the angel reaping, Jesus' parables about the Kingdom of God, such as the Parable of the Tares and Dragnet, present the separation of Believers from non-Believers as occurring simultaneously. And as this occurs before the Millennial Kingdom, final judgment takes place after the millennium (Rev 20:11-15).

This table may help with the visualization of the reaping by Jesus and His angels:

Seventh Trumpet (Rev 11:15-19)	Jesus Reaps (Rev 14:14-16)	Angels Reap (Rev 14:18-20)
	<p>Jesus' reaping appears to be the start of the resurrection process which concludes later (Rev 20:4-6).</p> <p>Jesus' reaping occurs concurrently with the reaping of His angels. It is the gathering of all the souls of Believers of all time to the Temple of God so that they may receive their white robe and attend the Marriage Feast (Rev 18:1-20; Rev 19:1-10) just before Armageddon commences (Rev 19:11).</p>	<p>Angels reap by gathering the wicked whose sins are now ripe for judgment.</p> <p>The mention of the third woe (Rev 11:14) attempts to describe the enormity of the reaping by the angels. The reaping includes the dispensation of bowls (Rev 16:1-21) and ends at the conclusion of Armageddon when Jesus figuratively trends the wine press of God's great wrath (Rev 19:15) and produces the vast amount of blood (Rev 14:20).</p>

References:

1. Brand C, Draper C, England A, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, (2003).