

CHAPTER 7

In the Winepress

In this chapter, I would like us to consider two passages from the Book of Revelation. You will need to read 14:14-20 and 19:11-16. I want to suggest that these two passages concern the same act seen from two different angles. In one, we have the Lord seated on a white cloud. In the other, He is seated on His heavenly white stallion. Both of them are white with the purity of God's purpose. In the one, He wears a crown on His head because He is the King of Heaven. In the other, as he rides forth on his horse, he has many crowns because He is king of all the kings of the earth. He takes the crowns of the nations as He rides victoriously through His world and puts them upon His own head. As the reaper He has a sickle, and as the warrior He has a sword, but each represents the same idea and concept. In one He is going out to subdue

the nations, and in the other He is reaping the harvest of the world. The same themes and concepts, though, are presented to us in both, and in both we see the winepress of God's wrath and the trampling of the grape harvest of our world.

The Vineyard

This grape or vine image is of incredible importance in Scripture. In the earlier chapter about the heavenly woman we saw that the Shulammite maiden, the loved one of the Book of Song of Solomon, was related to the sun, the moon, and the stars. If you read it carefully, you will discover that the whole Book of Song of Songs is about a vineyard. In fact, it begins by her saying, "*My own vineyard I have neglected*" (Song of Sol. 1:6): she initially was negligent. But then it ends with her saying that she will bring the produce of her fruitful vineyard to the king. The book progresses from a vineyard that is neglected to a vineyard that is fruitful and profitable. This picture of the vineyard is one repeated right through Scripture, and it is one by which God communicates important truths to us.

When Noah came out of the ark into a new earth and under a new Heaven, the first thing he did was to plant a vineyard (see Gen. 9:20). In fact, not only was it the first thing he did, Scripture actually tells us he was the first to ever plant a vineyard. He was the creator, if you like, of the vineyard culture. And it is interesting that it was the first thing God wanted him to do when he resettled the planet, when he was to reinhabit the earth. The vineyard was to be the symbol of this new earth, of a new people who would fill this earth.

When God brought His people into Canaan, He spoke of them as those planted in the land like a vineyard (see Isa. 5:1-7). God's people were His vineyard. Interestingly, when God first wanted them to go in and take the land, when they were at Kadesh Barnea, He had them send out spies to see what the land was like. God's desire for them was that they would respond in faith and go in and take the land, but there were giants there, and it filled them with fear and trepidation. However, they did fulfill their task of spying out the land, and they came back with a single cluster of grapes so huge that took two of them to carry it. It was the time of the first ripe grapes, and it was God's intention that Israel would take the land at grape harvest. They were to move into the land when the grapes were ripe.

Now this helps us to understand the imagery of the winepress, because for Israel it meant victory, while for Canaan it meant that they were going to be vanquished. Consistently throughout Scripture, we see that a single act can mean both life and death to different people. For one, it is coming into their inheritance; for the other it is being dispossessed. God planned for that to happen. His original intention was that at the time that the grapes were harvested and the wine was being produced in the winepress, His people would possess their promised land.

Let me take you to a Scripture in Isaiah that speaks of how God viewed His people in Canaan:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside (Isaiah 5:1).

It is significant that it is like a garden and it is on a hillside. The Garden of Eden was on a mountain. It certainly had to be on an elevated for rivers to flow out of it. So the garden where God displayed His glory was on a hill; and from there His life was to flow out to the ends of the earth. By the way, when Elijah had a confrontation with the prophets of Baal and called down the manifestation of the power of God on Mount Carmel, the name Carmel actually means orchard: the confrontation was actually in an orchard on a mountain.

Jesus told his disciples, "*My Father is the gardener. . . I am the vine; you are the branches*" (John 15:1-5). God is concerned to reproduce His garden. It has always been His purpose. It is interesting to note that when Jesus died, He died in a garden; when Jesus was buried, He was buried in a garden (see John 19:41). This is not chance or coincidence. It is the plan and purpose of God. He wants us to know that He is concerned about the garden. When Jesus rose from the dead and Mary saw Him, she thought He was the gardener. Well, she was actually quite close—He is the gardener's Son! The Father is the great gardener. He plants gardens. We are called "*oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord*" (Isa. 61:3). God has got what we Brits call green fingers! He is always planting His people. Although He created the world with a word, when He wanted somewhere for Adam to live, He planted a garden. He got His hands down in the dirt, and He planted a garden. And then He planted the man in the garden. In Isaiah we see that He has His people planted on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good

grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of His delight. And He looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (Isaiah 5:2-7).

Consider this wayward nation and rebellious people: they had been cared for, planted, and cultivated by the very hand of God, but they produced only bad fruit—just like the fig tree that Jesus cursed when it bore no fruit, only leaves. This vineyard, then, is the house of Israel—God's choice vine, the garden of His delight—but it is spoiled. And so God says, "I will remove its protection, and briers and thorns will grow." Briers and thorns are the very sign of the curse, the sign of de-creation. Good things being turned into a desert is what happens when men rebel against God. The cursed ground produced thorns and thistles, and God's vineyard was turned into a wilderness.

The Blood of Grapes

In the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis we read how Jacob blessed his sons. He goes through the tribes, pronouncing the

blessing of God upon them. He comes to Judah, and to Judah (whose name means “praise”) he says:

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk (Genesis 49:8-12).

Now this first mention of anyone having his or her robes stained with blood is spoken of as a blessing upon Judah. And, of course, all things that are spoken to Judah find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, for He is the one who holds the scepter, who rules over the nations with a rod of iron, and it is to Him their obedience is due. But it is spoken of here as a prophetic picture of someone who washes His robes in wine, in the blood of grapes. There is no concept or idea of punishment here. There is no suggestion of wrath. It is just a statement, and I believe that the statement is communicating this: Judah is going to be such a fruitful vine, overflowing with such abundance, that wine will be as common as water. There will be so much wine that it will be as if he could wash his garments in the wine. Where other people would use water, he would use wine.

Remember Jesus' first miracle. At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, there were six stone water pots that were used for the

Jewish custom of purification, for washing. The Jews were obsessive washers. They washed their hands, their feet, and their faces. They washed every new pot and utensil that they bought. There was an obsession with washing, and it was all to do with outward religion, with outward cleanliness. And Jesus used these stone water pots that held between 20 and 30 gallons each. They were not little jugs; these were huge oil-drum sized things filled with water. He had them filled to the brim. This point is very carefully recorded. They are filled to the brim because it is out of His fullness that we receive from Him. Out of the fullness of water comes the wine of the Kingdom.

Jesus made wine as plentiful as water, and that is what is prophesied about Judah. He is going to have so much wine that he is going to do his laundry in it! Wine will be as common as water. But the picture is dramatic because washing one's clothes in wine would stain them. This is a picture that the prophets will build on. What we need to see at this point is that there is no concept of wrath or judgment yet. It is just speaking of the bounty and the overflowing blessing that belongs to Judah.

However, let us look at another passage where garments are described as being washed in the blood of the grape.

Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with His garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of His strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." 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

My garments, and I stained all My clothing. For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so My own arm worked salvation for Me, and My own wrath sustained Me. I trampled the nations in My anger; in My wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground” (Isaiah 63:1-6).

Now there are some apparent contradictions here, for the Lord is coming in glory and splendor, and He is coming in wrath and anger. He is coming to judge and trample the nations, but He is the Lord who is mighty to save. Not only is He mighty to save, but He has come because the day of vengeance had arrived. Now we are back into a scenario that tells us that what for one is bloodshed, horror, and death, for another is redemption and salvation. In other words, the winepress is the place where your destiny is decided.

The Winepress

Let me pursue this a little further. I have stated that the sign of the new world into which Noah emerged was a vineyard. The sign of the new land that God brought His people into was a vineyard. And the sign of the church, of course, is a vineyard. Jesus said, “*I am the vine; you are the branches*” (John 15:5). So God uses this vineyard image to portray His purposes at different times throughout history. But His purpose has always been the same: to have a vineyard over which He cares and that produces the new wine of the Kingdom so that it will flow and satisfy the hearts of men and women (see Joel 3:18). Yet in the two passages that we read in the Book of

Revelation, we see in it something of a context of judgment. The idea comes from the third chapter of Joel, as so much does in the Book of Revelation. Here it says:

Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness! (Joel 3:13)

God is going to trample a rebellious world, and yet the trampling of the winepress, which is death to the rebellious, is going to be life for us, because there is a sense in which Jesus not only trampled the grapes in the winepress, but Jesus Himself was trampled in the winepress. If we acknowledge that Jesus was trampled on our behalf, then we are redeemed. If we refuse to respond to His vicarious suffering, then we will be lost, and we ourselves will be those who are trampled. By the way, trampling in Scripture is always a demonstration of God's utter rejection. Remember we saw that the outer court of the temple would be trampled because God was rejecting it. Jesus said that if salt loses its flavor—if the covenant people do not live like covenant people, if they do not pervade their society with the preserving influence of the Kingdom of God, if they forsake Him—it is good for nothing but to be cast out and trampled under the feet of men (see Matt. 5:13). It is utterly rejected and useless.

Let me take you back to chapter 14 of Revelation, where we see Jesus treading the grapes of wrath, and we are told,

The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 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 (Revelation 14:19-20).

There are three things that are important for us to notice here.

Outside the City

First, the winepress is outside the city. This immediately reminds us that this is not just where God's wrath was poured out on the nations, but it is where God's wrath fell on His Son. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "*Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through His own blood. Let us, then, go to Him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace He bore*" (Heb. 13:12-13). He is saying, "Jesus suffered, He was crushed and trampled in the winepress, to make His people holy by His blood." This blood is not just the blood of vengeance, nor is it the blood of those who have been destroyed through their rebellion. It is also the blood of Jesus, because He suffered outside the gate, outside the city.

1,600 Stadia

Christ was crushed in God's winepress of judgment, and He released His blood as a healing and cleansing flow for the whole world. For this blood, Scripture tells us, flowed out for a vast distance—1,600 stadia, which is about 200 miles. But the main point of this figure is that 1,600 is 40 times 40, which is the period of probation, the period of waiting. There was a waiting of 40 years in the wilderness. There were 40 days of rain during the flood and 40 days of waiting before Noah disembarked. For 40 days Jesus was tempted by the devil. Forty represents the days of probation or days of

testing. God gives 40 times 40 periods for men to come to repentance and faith.

Not only does 1,600 represent time, but it also represents place: it is $4 \times 4 \times 100$. The number four has to do with the earth, the whole earth. In a similar way in which we have seen $12 \times 12 \times 1000$ describes the entire redeemed community, we now find that $4 \times 4 \times 100$ (100 being another full and rounded number) signifying the whole world. This figure is expanding our understanding that God is concerned about the whole world and that the blood is effective for every nation under Heaven.

The Bridles of the Horses

We also need to notice the strange remark about the blood: it came up to the bridle of the horses. What is the significance of this odd detail? It is telling us not only that it must be fairly deep, but that the blood of Jesus has produced a new Red Sea in which the horses of the rebellious are overflowed and destroyed. In fact, when you go into the next chapter of Revelation, to the verses that immediately follow this image, you find the scene that we looked at in a previous chapter, in which the great redeemed community is standing around the sea of glass that has fire mixed in it and that looks like another Red Sea. So we are looking again at the Exodus paradigm, the crossing of the Red Sea, the redemption of God's people.

The prophet Zechariah speaks of a time when all the nations will flow to Jerusalem to worship God. There will be such a move of redemption that the good news will affect every nation under Heaven, and there will be an incredible response as they come and worship God. What is more, he says, they will come and worship God at a specific time. It will be at the Feast of

Tabernacles (see Zech. 14:16). Now of the three feasts that God gave Israel to commemorate the Exodus every year, the Feast of Tabernacles is the only one that has not yet been fulfilled in terms of its prophetic significance. Passover has been fulfilled by Christ our Lamb, who has been sacrificed. The Day of Pentecost has been fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit. But Tabernacles began when the final stage of harvest—the gathering of the grapes—was completed. It was for Israel the ultimate harvest, the ingathering. It has not yet come, but the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah is a picture of the ultimate harvest, the harvest festival and celebration of the great ingathering from the earth of all men and tribes and nations and peoples.

Zechariah says that the world is going to come up and worship God at the Feast of Tabernacles. At this festival they commemorated many things, but the main thing was God's care for them in the wilderness where they lived in tents, or tabernacles. So what they had to do was to gather the green, leafy, and fruitful boughs of many trees, make themselves little huts, and then live in them for a week. They came to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival, so in Jerusalem, on every street and in every courtyard, in every empty space, and on every roof there would be little green boughs, little cabins or huts, little refuges of green and leafy boughs, full of fruit and fragrance, where the people would come and live. Approaching Jerusalem from a distance, it would look as if the mountain of the Lord had been turned into a garden. Paradise had been restored.

One of the conflicts throughout Scripture is that between Zion and Babylon. And Babylon actually was one of the wonders of the world because of its hanging gardens. Babylon was not only a false city and a false mountain, it was also

a false garden. It was the place of ultimate falsehood and unrighteousness

And, says Zechariah, when the nations come to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, righteousness will be so abounding that "holiness to the Lord," that seal that is over the forehead of the priest of God, will be written on the bells of the horses (see Zech. 14:20). So this Red Sea of blood that covers the world not only destroys the horses of Pharaoh's army, but it sanctifies everything else so that even horses, when the blood comes up to their bridles where their bells dangle, will have "holy to the Lord" written on them. This sea of blood is therefore a sanctifying stream.

It is a destroying flood, but it is also a sanctifying stream. How we enter and come out of the river, or of the sea, depends on our relationship to Jesus. It is a time of judgment but also a time of deliverance. It is death to Pharaoh's horse but "holy to the Lord" for your horse. It is the end of nations that rebel, but it is the birth of the nation that will obey. This is God's plan and God's purpose, and we do not need to fear the vengeance of God in the winepress, for one in the winepress has already carried the vengeance of God in His own body. We do not have to fear the judgment of God to break upon us, for one who was completely pure and holy has borne that judgment for us. We do not have to fear the stripes of God, for one has borne the stripes in the winepress. Why are His robes stained with blood? Because Jesus trod the winepress for us. There is a time coming when judgment will break on our earth; but we have been judged already; judged and found not guilty because our faith is in Jesus Christ.