



# CHAPTER 14

## PHYSICAL/SPIRITUAL PARALLELS

Once again the great parallel between physical Israel and the church can be used in this chapter to determine the meaning of the symbols. This chapter deals with the parallel between Mount Sinai and Mount Zion. Please notice this parallel in the drawing. Moses received the Law of Moses as he stood on Mount Sinai and Christ gave his law, the gospel, on spiritual Mount Zion. The people of Israel gathered around Mt. Sinai as Moses received the law.

### A Parallel Comparison of Israel and the Church

Israel	R E D S E A	Moses 	Nourished on Manna	J O R D A N	Promised Land
Bondage in Egypt		Israel in Wilderness			Canaan
All Mankind	B L O O D	Christ 	Nourished on Word	2nd C O M I N G	Promised Land
Bondage in Sin		Church in Spiritual Wilderness			Heaven

Those who stand around spiritual Mt. Zion today are Christians. They are symbolized in this chapter as the 144,000. This is in total agreement with the definition of the 144,00 in chapter 7. (Please refer back to that chapter for more information on the 144,000.)

A perfect example of this parallel is found in the New Testament in Hebrews 12:18 and 22. Hebrews 12:18 states that Christians “are not come unto the mount that might be touched...” They are not come unto the physical Mt. Sinai. This means that Christians are not subject to the Law of Moses. Only the nation of Israel followed that law. Hebrews 12:22 says, “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God...” This statement was written to Christians. They are the people who are come unto spiritual Mt. Zion.

This was also prophesied in the Old Testament. Mic 4:1a states, “But in the last days it shall come to pass, *that* the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established...” The “last days” are a reference to the Christian dispensation. That mountain was called Mt. Zion in verse 2 which says, “...for the law shall go forth of Zion.” Then in verse 7b, we read, “and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever.” The Lord is reigning over his people (Christians) in spiritual Mount Zion today. He gave his law on Mt. Zion, and those who are obedient to that law (Christians) stand with him around Mt. Zion.

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter should be viewed as a continuation of chapter 13, which described two great beasts that control the people of the world. Verses 1 through 5 of this chapter describe those who do not worship these beasts. They are the ones who follow the Lamb – Christians. They are the 144,000. (See chapter 7.) Verses 8 through 11 show that this beast, or as it is referred to in this chapter, Babylon, will eventually fall. Its powers will cease, and this beast, along with those who have followed it, will be destroyed.

The last section of this chapter (v. 14-20) provides

another look at Judgment. This section can also be divided into two parts. Verses 14 through 16 picture Christ harvesting the earth or taking the faithful home to heaven. This will be the final gathering of the 144,000 who were described in verses 1 through 5 as following Christ instead of the beast. Verses 17 through 20 picture the “reaping,” or gathering, of those who have opposed God. This will be the final gathering of those who worshiped the beast or were a part of Babylon (v. 8-11). Chapter 14 once again takes us through the Christian dispensation and into eternity. (In order to fully understand the meaning of Babylon as a description of the beast, chapters 17 and 18 must be studied.)

## **THE LAMB AND THE 144,000**

**Verse 1. And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.**

In the first five verses, additional information concerning the 144,000 is given. Rev. 7:3-4 identifies the 144,000 as the servants of God who are sealed in their foreheads. Here they are described as having the Father’s name written in their foreheads. Both descriptions show that they are followers of Christ and have given their allegiance unto him. To have the Father’s name written in one’s forehead means that they belong to God. This is in direct contrast to those in 13:16 who had the mark of the beast in their hands or foreheads. Those people worshiped or



served something other than the true God. This enables us to conclude that everyone in the world today wears a mark in their foreheads. Christians have their Father's name written in their foreheads, and everyone else wears the mark of the beast. Of course, this is not a literal mark. It is symbolic and defines whom we serve. Mt. 6:24 says, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Everyone upon this earth must decide whom he will serve, or whose mark he will wear – God's or the devil's.

The Lamb (Christ) is pictured as standing on Mount Zion and the 144,000 are standing with him. This shows that the 144,000 are those who are obedient to the law of Christ. Mic. 4:2 says, "For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." The law that was to go forth from Zion was the same as the word of the Lord that went forth from Jerusalem. This took place on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when the Apostles first preached the gospel message of God to men gathered from every nation. From that point forward, all people who were to be acceptable to Christ had to follow the teachings of the gospel. They were no longer subject to the Law of Moses. In this passage in Revelation, we have a figurative description of Christ reigning over those who choose to follow him. Christ gave his law on spiritual Mt. Zion and is reigning there today. Since Heb. 12:22 says, we are "come unto Mt. Sion," it is evident that those who are gathered around Mt. Zion are Christians. This shows that the number 144,000 is a figurative number that represents all Christians. It does not represent some particular group or segment of individuals. It represents all those who follow Christ. Therefore, when one obeys the gospel, he comes to Mt. Zion and becomes a part of the 144,000. (For more about the use of the number "144,000," see comments on 7:4.)

Therefore, by using the parallel of Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion we are able to determine exactly who the 144,000

represent. They are Christians who follow Christ all during the Christian dispensation. This in turn allows us to identify the subject of this chapter. Since the 144,000 represent Christians, then the message of this chapter is written to all Christians who live throughout the Christian dispensation.

**Verse 2. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:**

A voice from heaven is described as the voice of many waters and of great thunder. This must have been either the voice of God or Christ, but it may be impossible to know for certain which. It actually makes little or no difference because they are one in purpose. The voice of great thunder indicates that this message is of tremendous importance. The voice of many waters shows that this message was a life-sustaining message. Just as water is a necessary life-sustaining substance, this message is one that is necessary to sustain spiritual life. The 144,000 are those who have heeded this message and are the redeemed from the earth (v. 3). Therefore, this voice from heaven was from God who sounds the gospel message, which man must obey in order to become a part of the 144,000.

The other voice that John heard was the voice of harpers harping with their harps. This must have been the voices of the 144,000 because verse 3 says they were singing a song that no man could learn, except the 144,000.

Many would have us believe that this verse authorizes the use of instrumental music in our worship to God. The common reasoning behind this belief states that if there are harps in heaven, then surely we are permitted to use them in worship here on earth. There are two major reasons why this belief is incorrect. First, we are dealing with symbolic language that uses a symbol to represent or describe another item. In this case the harp is the symbol, and it is used to represent and describe the voices of Christians. It shows how God views the voices of Christians as they sing praises unto him. Just as we consider the harp to be a

beautiful and pleasing musical instrument, the voices of Christians are beautiful and pleasing to God. The second reason why this passage does not authorize the use of instrumental music in worship is that these harps are not actually in our eternal heavenly abode. John is describing a vision he saw in heaven, which in turn describes events that take place on earth. This passage is describing the actions of Christians as they worship God in his church. When one obeys the gospel, he becomes part of the 144,000. He then uses his “harp,” or voice, to sing the new song of redemption. He follows the Lamb wherever he goes (v.4) and stands without fault in the sight of God (v. 5).

Once we understand this passage, we recognize that it not only fails to authorize the use of instrumental music in worship, but it once again points out that singing is the only acceptable form of musical worship to God. John heard “voices” (v. 2), and they were “singing” (v. 3). Christians are authorized to sing praises to God, and anything other than that is an addition to God’s Word. (See 22:19.)

**Verse 3. And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.**

The 144,000 were singing a new song before the throne that no one else could learn. Since the 144,000 are the “redeemed from the earth,” then this song is the song of the redeemed or Christians. There is no literal song that Christians can learn but non-Christians cannot learn. Therefore, this song must be a representation of some spiritual difference between Christians and non-Christians. This, of course, is spiritual life or salvation. That Christians would sing this song is prophesied in Isa. Isa 26:1, which states, “In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will *God* appoint *for* walls and bulwarks.” This prophecy says that Christians would sing a song of salvation. Therefore, the song that the 144,000 were singing was a song of salvation. Then why is

it called a “new” song? Before Christ figuratively stood on Mt. Zion by giving his life as an atonement for man’s sins and bringing in the new law, the gospel, there was no salvation. Man could not sing the song of salvation before Christ died on the cross. When he died, he redeemed man to God and gave Christians a new song to sing – a song of salvation. It is also a “new” song in the sense that when a sinner becomes a Christian, he has a new song to sing. As the gospel is taught throughout the world today and sinners render obedience to it, they learn the new song of salvation. They become a part of the 144,000 and have the name of the Father written in their foreheads.

The ASV translates the last phrase as, “even they that had been purchased out of the earth.” Acts 20:28 admonishes elders to “feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” When Christ died, he purchased salvation for all those who are obedient to his will and become members of his church. The 144,000 are those whom he has purchased. They are Christians.

**Verse 4. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.**

Several more characteristics of the 144,000 are listed in this verse. Each gives further proof that the multitude of 144,000 refers to Christians who live on this earth during this present Christian dispensation.

First, the 144,000 are virgins because they have not been defiled with women. This must refer to spiritual virginity because we know that God has sanctioned the marriage relationship, which would eliminate the possibility of this meaning physical virginity. To be a spiritual virgin would mean that one has remained true to God. He has not committed spiritual adultery by forsaking the true God to follow other gods. In Jas. 4:4, James calls those Christians who would be a “friend of the world” adulterers and adulteresses. He says, ‘Whosoever therefore will be a

friend of the world is the enemy of God.” To forsake God to become a friend of the world is to commit spiritual adultery. This symbolism is also used in Revelation in 14:8, 17:2, and 18:3. The image of the beast in 13:14-15 is referred to as the “great harlot” in 17:1 (ASV). Those who worshiped the image of the beast were said to be committing fornication with this “great harlot.” To worship anything other than God is to commit spiritual fornication. The 144,000 are spiritual virgins, or Christians, who remain faithful to God.

The 144,000 are also those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” Those who follow the Lamb (Christ) are, obviously, Christians. This is further proof that the 144,000 represents those who follow Christ throughout the Christian dispensation. Jn. 12:26 says, “If any man serves me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.”

The 144,000 are further described as being the “redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.” Jas. 1:18 says, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” When we obey his “word of truth,” we become children of God. We are redeemed. Under the law of Moses, the people were required to honor the Lord with the firstfruits of their increase. (See Prov. 3:9.) In other words, that was the portion given to the Lord. Today, if we are the firstfruits of his creatures, we have given ourselves unto the Lord. We are Christians. We are the 144,000.

**Verse 5. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.**

1Pe 2:1 states, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings.” These things are to have no place in the lives of Christians.

The 144,000 are without fault. The ASV translates this as being without blemish. This symbolism is similar to that of 3:4, which says that there were some in the church at Sardis



“which have not defiled their garments.” To be without blemish means to keep our garments white by remaining faithful to Christ and being continually cleansed from our sins by his blood. The 144,000 are Christians who are continually faithful to Christ; thereby, keeping their garments white. They are without spot or blemish. When we overcome this world of sin by washing our robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), we become part of the 144,000. We stand without fault before the throne of God.

## **THE PROCLAMATIONS OF THREE ANGELS**

**Verse 6. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,**

We should not think of this as an angel actually preaching the gospel in heaven. Instead, this shows that the gospel is to be preached unto all men of all nations. It is the Christian's responsibility to see that the gospel is preached throughout the entire earth. Obedience to this gospel redeems us to God and makes us a part of the 144,000. It is available to anyone who will accept it.

**Verse 7. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.**

We are admonished to worship God and give him glory because he made all things. We are to do this because the hour of his judgment is come. There is a problem with this statement because when the Judgment Day “is come,” there will be no further opportunities to be obedient to the gospel. Why did this angel have the gospel to preach to all nations at the time of judgment? This must be the preaching of the gospel all through the gospel age, which began with Pentecost and will end with Christ's second coming. With this in mind, it becomes a real possibility that the

“judgment” being referred to here is not the final Judgment but the giving of God’s law, which he will use to judge all men. Similar wording is used in 15:4 which states that “all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.” Before Christ died on the cross, only one nation (Israel) was subject to the old law that God gave through Moses. After Christ died, all nations were subject to his new law (gospel). All nations came to worship before him. The words which Jesus spoke will be used to judge men (Jn. 12:48-49). Therefore, when Jesus gave the gospel to all nations, he made his judgment known to all men. The gospel is to be preached to all men of all nations, and they will be judged by that same gospel.

Verses 1 through 7 describe the 144,000. They are the redeemed of the earth. They are the ones who are obedient to that gospel, which is being preached to all nations. The way we distinguish the 144,000 from those who follow the devil today is by the Word of God. If we desire to know the judgment of God, all we have to do is open the pages of the New Testament. In Mt. 19:28, Jesus says, “Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The twelve apostles spoke the law of Christ as he revealed it to them through the Holy Spirit. The law that they spoke will be used to judge mankind. In that sense the twelve apostles are sitting on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes (the church) today. Christ is also judging men by that same law as he sits on his throne in heaven.

**Verse 8. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.**

This angel announces the fall of the great city (Babylon), which caused all nations to commit fornication. The “fornication” must refer to spiritual fornication because of the following comparison. Chapter 17 describes a great harlot who committed fornication with the kings of the

earth (v. 1-2). The “kings of the earth” are the same as “all nations” because they represent the leaders of all nations on this earth. Part of the name written upon the forehead of this woman is “Babylon the great” (17:5). According to 17:18, this woman is a representation of the “great city.” In 18:2, this woman is also referred to as “Babylon the great.” Therefore, “Babylon” and the “woman” of chapter 17 are both symbolic of the same forces that operate upon this earth. This great harlot (Babylon), which commits fornication and causes all nations to participate with her in spiritual fornication, must be symbolic of all types of false religious organizations which cause nations to forsake God by worshiping according to the ways of man. This would be spiritual fornication. Therefore, “Babylon” represents all those who seek to worship God by following man’s laws instead of God’s. (For a more complete understanding of Babylon, chapter 17 must be studied thoroughly.)

This announcement is proclaimed as if we are past the end of time, looking back on events that took place on the earth. The point of verse 8 is that Babylon will fall and those who become residents of Babylon by committing spiritual fornication will have no hope. The only people who will have hope at the end of time will be the 144,000 who have followed the Lamb (v. 4). They are virgins; they have not committed spiritual fornication.

**Verses 9, 10. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:**

This angel warns that those who worship the beast and his image will receive the wrath of God. Worshiping the beast and his image is the subject of chapter 13, which must be studied thoroughly in order to fully understand the meaning of this symbolism. To keep the interpretation of

verse 9 brief, worshipping the beast means to worship anything other than the true God. Rev. 13:8 says that all who dwell upon the earth, except Christians, will worship the beast. Therefore, the overall meaning in this verse is that anyone who worships anything other than the true God will be subject to the wrath of God. Many people in the world today would have us believe that because God is a God of love, he could not possibly send anyone to a devil's hell for all eternity. Verse 10 completely disputes that idea. God is a God of love, but he is also a just God. Those who become his children by being obedient to his law will inherit all things (1Pet. 1:3-4), and those who worship anything else will receive the wrath of God.

Those who worship the beast shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God and be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb. This same punishment is spoken of in 18:1-7, which describes Babylon as receiving the torment of God. We should not understand the fire and brimstone literally. This is a figurative description of a torment that will be so severe it would be impossible for man to completely comprehend. For that reason, it is described in terms that would cause severe pain to our physical bodies. This warning should be sufficient to cause man to desire to avoid the wrath of God in the only way possible – by being obedient to his will.

To receive this punishment in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb means that they give approval of the punishment that is to take place.

**Verse 11. And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.**

The punishment that awaits those who worship the beast and his image is eternal torment. This torment will be constant. There will be no periods of rest or relief. It will be a punishment so horrible that we cannot possibly begin to comprehend it now. It is described as eternal fire because that would be one of the most painful physical torments we

could imagine.

The very knowledge of this eternal torment should be enough to cause us to strive to worship the true God in the way he has designated, not according to man's designs.

## **THE BLESSED DEAD**

**Verse 12. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.**

A child of God should have patience because, eventually, those who oppose God and persecute Christians will be punished by God. In 6:10, the question was asked, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" They were instructed to rest for a time, or until all those "that should be killed as they were" was fulfilled. In other words, they were to be patient. All through the Christian dispensation, Christians will be persecuted by many people in many different ways. Yet, we are commanded to be patient; keep the commandments of God, and remain faithful. If we do this, we shall "inherit all things" (21:7), and those who have persecuted us will be punished eternally by God. (In 13:10, there is a similar statement. The context of both passages are similar and should be studied together to better understand the meaning of this passage.)

**Verse 13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.**

A blessing is pronounced upon those who die in the Lord, which must refer to Christians. They are promised rest from their labors. This is in direct contrast to those who worship the beast and his image. They will be tormented forever with no rest (v. 11). This again points to the patience of the saints. Times may be hard for us now; however, eventually, we will have eternal rest if we remain

faithful.

There has been much discussion about the meaning of “their works do follow them.” One thing may be determined for certain; works are necessary to be pleasing to God. For Christians to be pleasing in the sight of God, they must do his works. At least two of the churches in chapters 2 and 3 were condemned because they were not doing the “works” that were expected of them. (See 3:1,15-16.)

The work of a Christian is to lead others to Christ. Those who are converted to Christ are the “fruits” of someone’s labor. When Christians die, they rest from their labor, and those who have been converted because of those labors will also be blessed when they die in the Lord. The works of Christians will follow them.

## **THE VISION OF THE HARVEST JUDGMENT**

**Verse 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.**

This must have been Jesus sitting upon the cloud, even though the phrase “like unto” is used. This same language is used in 1:13 as John saw “one like unto the Son of man.” From the description given in that verse, we know that Jesus was the one being described. Therefore, the one being described in verse 14 must also be Jesus. He is described as having a golden crown on his head, which denotes his authority as a king. The sickle that he has in his hand indicates that he has the power and authority to execute the judgment that is about to take place.

He is also sitting upon a white cloud, which again points to the fact that this verse is speaking of Jesus. Jesus was taken up in a cloud and the apostles were told that he would return in the same manner (Acts 1:9-11). This cloud that Jesus was sitting upon was white to represent the holiness and righteousness of Jesus.

Verses 14 through 16 picture the gathering of the

righteous to be taken home to heaven. The second picture of the Judgment scene (v. 17-20) is a description of the gathering of the unrighteous. They will be punished with everlasting punishment, which is described in verse 20. We should not make the mistake of viewing these two events as happening at separate times. They will take place at the same time. The righteous will go home to dwell with Jesus, and the unrighteous will be cast into eternal punishment. Jn. 5:28-29 says that “the” hour is coming in which “all” who are in the grave will come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. There will be one resurrection in which all people will come forth to receive their final judgment.

**Verse 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.**

Mt. 24:36 says that no one, except the Father in heaven, knows when the second coming will take place. This angel comes out of the temple, the dwelling place of God, and brings Christ the message that the time to harvest the earth has arrived. We know that Christ dwells with God in heaven, and that they are not separated to the extent of needing angels to carry messages. This is simply a figurative representation of the second coming, showing that Christ will come when God says the time is right. Verse 14 describes the one who will harvest the earth; verse 15 tells who will make the decision that the time has arrived, and verse 16 shows that Christ will carry out the will of God by reaping the harvest of the earth – the saved.

The harvest of the earth being ripe indicates that the time is right for Jesus to claim the redeemed. Just as grain is harvested when it has matured, the redeemed of this earth will be harvested when it is fully matured. Exactly what this means or when this will happen, man has no way of knowing, but it is possible that verse 15 means that Jesus will come the moment this earth has yielded all the

righteous saints it will ever produce. At that time, the harvest will be ripe.

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

This is a figurative description of the second coming of Christ when he will take the righteous home to dwell with him forever. The sickle is a tool that was used during John's time to harvest grain and is used here to show that Jesus possesses the authority and power necessary to harvest the earth. When the time comes for this earth to yield its harvest, Jesus will carry out the reaping.

In order to keep the interpretation of chapter 14 in its proper perspective, we must point out that verse 16 concludes the description of Christ's Second Coming as it relates to the collection of the saints. Verse 17 begins a description of the end of time as it concerns the gathering and punishing of the wicked.

**Verse 17. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.**

Verses 17 through 20 describe the gathering of the wicked to be punished for their deeds. Like the angel in verse 14, this angel comes out of the temple, which indicates that he is also sent from God. This angel also possesses a sharp sickle, which shows that he has the power to carry out the will of God.

There might be some question concerning why an angel harvests the wicked but Jesus harvests the righteous. We do not know the exact order of events of the second coming of Christ, but this seems to indicate that Jesus will take the righteous from this earth to their eternal home in heaven and the angels of God will deliver the wicked to be punished in hell. In 1Thess. 4:16-17, we read that the righteous will meet the Lord "in the air" to remain with him eternally, and 2Thess. 1:7-9 says that Jesus will come with his "mighty angels" to take vengeance on those who have not obeyed him. These verses are at least in agreement with this type of interpretation. Regardless of exactly how it will



be accomplished, we do know that when God says the time has come for the earth to be harvested, the righteous will go home with Jesus to dwell forever and the wicked will be cast into eternal punishment. We must not make the mistake of believing that these two events will occur at different times. This vision gives us two pictures of two different events that will occur at Christ's second coming. (See Jn. 5:28-29.)

**Verse 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.**

This angel comes from the altar and has power over fire. This is similar to the conclusion of the seventh seal in 8:5-6, which pictures the final destruction of those who oppose God. The altar is symbolic of man's ability to make atonement for his sins and commune directly with God through prayer. (See comments on 8:3-4.) In the fifth seal (6:9-11), Christians under the altar are asking the Lord how long it will be before he will avenge their blood on those who persecuted them. Verse 18 is the beginning of the answer to that prayer. At the end of time, the unjust will be gathered together to receive their punishment. This is emphasized by the fact that the angel, who has control over the fire, is the one who gives the command to gather the clusters of the vine. Again, in 8:5, during the time of the seventh seal (Judgment), an angel takes fire from the altar and casts it into the earth. This represents the fiery punishment that awaits those who disobey God. When these clusters of the vine are gathered by the angel with the sharp sickle, they will be punished for their evil deeds (v. 19). Therefore, the clusters of grapes must refer to sinners because they are the ones who will be punished. At Christ's second coming, as an answer to the prayers of Christians who have been persecuted, all ungodly people will be gathered together to receive their sentence of an eternal fiery hell.

**Verse 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.**

The vine of the earth, or all sinners, will be gathered together on that last day. They will then find themselves committed to a place of eternal punishment because the wrath of God will wax strong against them. This eternal punishment is pictured as being like a great winepress. Just as the grapes are trodden underfoot in order to remove the juice, all sinners will be trodden underfoot by God. This punishment will be extremely severe because verse 20 says that the blood of those people will reach the depth of horses' bridles.

We must keep in mind that we are dealing with symbolic language. These people will not be placed in a literal winepress. This figuratively shows the severity of their punishment. When Judgment comes, those who have persecuted Christians will be punished, but those who have followed Christ will be rewarded. (See comments on v. 12 and 13:10.)

**Verse 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.**

This is a description of the severe torment those who are disobedient to God will suffer. It is likened unto a lake of blood measuring 1,600 furlongs. This indicates the vastness and severity of the punishment. It is probably pictured as coming up to the bridles of horses because the horse is used in the series of seven seals to describe the many types of physical persecutions that Christians will have to suffer upon this earth. After judgment, those who have ridden these horses of persecution against Christians will find themselves in extreme torment.

Verse 20 also states that this winepress of God will be trodden "without the city." Most likely, this is a reference to the fact that Jesus was crucified "without the gate" (Heb.

13:12). Just as Jesus suffered outside the city of God under the Law of Moses, these people will suffer outside the spiritual city of God, which is the church. The church will spend eternity in heaven while those outside it will be punished forever.