

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 173

THE FIRSTFRUITS, THE HARVEST, AND THE VINTAGE (continued)

“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*. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Rev. 14:15-16).

The fall of the year is harvest time, when the fruits of the summer’s labors are reaped, and the husbandman enjoys the fruits of his labors. The harvest time of this present age, the church age, is upon us, and the harvest of the earth is moving speedily toward ripeness, and the time of reaping. The harvest time is the time of ingathering of the precious fruit of the earth. “Ingathering” does not speak of a rapture of the elect away to some far-off heaven somewhere; rather it signifies the gathering of the grain (the Lord’s people) into the great Husbandman’s garner — *the kingdom of God*. God’s people have been long growing in the “field” of the church-world, but they have not yet been matured, reaped, and gathered into the kingdom!

Harvest is also a time of discarding that which has fulfilled its purpose. In our Lord’s wonderful parable of the wheat and the tares, both the wheat and the tares were to grow together in the same field, but at the time of maturity the tares would be separated from the wheat and burned, and the wheat gathered into the garner. There are also two other items, which actually belong to the wheat plant, that are discarded at this time, and these are the straw and the chaff. Only the fruit of the plant is what the husbandman keeps and gathers into his garner. The straw and the chaff were necessary in order to bring the wheat to its fullness, but when the fruit is fully matured the *life settles* in the fruit or kernels, and the straw and the chaff having fulfilled their purpose, are separated and discarded.

Before the wheat can be garnered there has to be a threshing time by which the kernels of wheat are separated from the straw of the plant. First the wheat was cut, or reaped, and tied into bundles or sheaves, but that was not the end of the harvest; it was, in fact, only the beginning! The wheat is cut off from its roots which are buried in the earth, and then the wheat is beaten out of the straw, and this is the real rough part, but it is all necessary for the husbandman to get the fruits of his year’s labor. The work of harvest was not completed until the threshing was done, the wheat separated from the straw, and brought into the storehouse. There was a jointed stick wherewith the wheat was beaten until the kernels were separated from the straw. Sometimes they spread the wheat on the ground in the area called the *threshing floor*, and caused the oxen to walk over it until the same results were achieved. Isaiah spoke of this saying, ***“O my threshing, and the corn of my floor: that which I have heard of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have I declared unto you”*** (Isa. 21:10). There is always something good to be gleaned from the threshings of the Lord! It results in *“the corn of my floor,”* and when the Lord “threshes” us, as every son of God is experiencing, the husk or the outer shell of our earth-man is removed, leaving the pure “grain” of our redeemed spirit, which is to be clothed upon with our new heavenly body that is like unto His glorious body of Life and Immortality! So, I pray, “Lord, continue to thresh us until there is nothing left of us but the pure ‘grain’ of Thy divine life, from which a pure son of God in your glorious image and likeness shall shine forth!”

John the Baptist, speaking of Jesus, said this: “*Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into His garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*” (Mat. 3:12). This is a spiritual work which the Lord Jesus carries forth in and upon His people in the time of harvest. In some measure the firstfruits of the harvest have already begun to experience the process. This is the harvest of the “earth,” and though the wheat is the Lord’s and is the growth and development of His very own life, for He is Himself the *seed* that has been planted, yet who can deny that as the Lord’s people we all had our roots sunk deep in the earth, in earthly things; in worldly methods and means; in the ways and systems of men. We were well rooted deeply in denominationalism, in the programs and promotions of carnally minded men, and then the Lord of the harvest began to cut us off from our earthly roots. Of these firstfruits John bears witness: “*These were redeemed from among men*” (Rev. 14:4). The sickle is being used and the reaping has begun! It is sometimes hard, and many have had a real struggle in leaving their old friends, and the comfort and security of the system they have so long depended upon; but the Lord is seeing to it that all of His firstfruits are reaped, and if any cannot make up their minds to leave the old earthly field and follow the Lamb to mount Zion, He sees to it that they are thrown out by the lords of the old systems, and there is no way to return! Then the hand of the Lord is laid heavily upon them and they are conscripted by the power of the Holy Spirit for the army of God, and truly “resistance is futile!”

No one has commented with deeper spiritual insight on this subject than dear sister Dora Van Assen. Many years ago she wrote, “What is the **chaff** to the **wheat**? ‘*Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*’ (Mat. 3:12). ‘*Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn*’ (Mat. 13:30).

“For years I read **eternal torment** into the foregoing scriptures. I had the wheat as all the saved people taken to heaven, the chaff and tares as all the unsaved people put in hell to be burned with a literal unquenchable fire; until God spoke to my heart saying: ‘You cannot have wheat without chaff, for it takes the chaff to hold the wheat until it is fully matured, and only then can it be threshed, removing the chaff without damaging the seed of life. So this is done at the end of the harvest when the seed is fully grown.’ Thus God gradually began to open my eyes to see that the chaff and the wheat were both in my own self; that my natural Adam nature or human identity was the chaff encasing the wheat, the very *life-seed of Christ*; that I was being born of an incorruptible seed, and that seed is Christ in me, the hope of glory. These scriptural concepts began to take on new meaning in a most wonderful way!

“I then began to see that it is first the natural and then the spiritual (I Cor. 15:44-46); that without the natural we could not contain the spiritual. We are an earthen vessel holding a ‘treasure’ which is the very excellency of God (II Cor. 4:7). Be glad, therefore, for this natural creation because out of it God brings forth a NEW CREATION! If the chaff is removed before the wheat is mature, it will do damage to the wheat. It is needed to hold the wheat as it passes from the milk stage into the fully hardened and mature stage, where it can be removed from the chaff without harming the wheat in any way. Then the wheat is placed in the barn and the chaff is burned. Today in this enlightened age, even the chaff has many useful purposes, but in ancient times it was simply disposed of by fire. There is absolutely no waste in the economy of God! The prophet inquired, ‘*What is the chaff to the wheat?*’ (Jer. 23:28). Praise God, it is the super-structure, scaffolding, or encasement which covers and holds the wheat intact as it grows into the very likeness of the One who planted it within. All seed brings forth after its own kind. So, Christ shall see His seed and be satisfied when it comes into His own image and likeness!

“Looking again at Matthew 3:11-12. ‘*He that cometh after me is mightier than I...He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire: whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*’ We find that this baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire is accomplished AT THE END OF THE HARVEST. The phrase, ‘*and He will thoroughly purge His floor,*’ speaks of the threshing floor where the chaff is removed from the wheat. Furthermore, it should be clear to all that the ‘unquenchable fire’ is not the fire of hell, for nothing is said here about hell, but it is the *baptism of fire* which attends the *baptism with the Holy Spirit*. The fire is the Holy Ghost fire! This represents the fullness of the Spirit for which Paul prayed (Eph. 3:19), not just the firstfruits of the Spirit, at our initial filling with the Spirit, spoken of as Pentecostal, but the

full measure of the Spirit which brings the full redemption of our spirit, soul, and body (Rom. 8:23) into the sonship dimension of full responsibility. This is the redemption for which all creation is groaning, called by Paul *'the manifestation of the sons of God.'*

"The Holy Spirit baptism of fire is burning away all our natural Adamic nature. Our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29), consuming the sin but not the sinner; cleansing and purging away the tin and the dross (Isa. 1:25). Thank God! This fiery cleansing will not be quenched until all our carnality is completely removed. The Father will not spare the scourging of any son whom He receiveth until they also be partakers of His divine nature and holiness (Heb. 12). Jesus came to purify a peculiar people unto Himself (Tit. 2:14). So we hear Him saying, *'I am come to **send fire in the earth (not in hell!); and how I wish it were already kindled***' (Lk. 12:49). He was looking forward to the time when He would return in the form of the Spirit to do a great purifying work within His own sons and within His people, transforming them into His own image. *'Everyone shall be salted with fire'* (Mk. 9:49). Salt has a preservative and purifying quality, while fire purifies and transforms into other elements and gases. So we see every living sacrifice presented to Him being purified and changed into a *'sweet smelling savor unto God.'* So we hear Jeremiah say concerning the chaff and the wheat, *'He that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath **my word**, let him speak **my word** faithfully. Is not **my word like a fire**? saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.'* Much of our dreams and visions are a mixture of ourselves, as they pass through our own mind and personality. But ***His word is as a fire*** burning the chaff in the right measure and time, exposing the pure wheat of the word!

"Let us also consider the wheat and the tares. Their true meaning is found in the parable Jesus recorded in Matthew 13:24-30. Because the chaff had taken on such a totally different meaning as I was taught by the Holy Spirit, I was sure my first understanding of the tares could be wrong also. And as I was thinking on these things, suddenly it stood out so plainly: THE WHEAT AND THE TARES DID NOT CONVERT ONE ANOTHER! Wheat was wheat, the tares were tares, both growing up together just like the wheat and the chaff, until the time of harvest.

"In that moment I saw that this was not a parable on soul-saving, nor was it an exhortation to scare the heathen or sinning Christians in the church into a conversion, but it was a parable dealing with the ***inner thought life*** of the believer himself. In the context around this parable we find that Jesus was uttering *'things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world'* (Mat. 13:35). In other words, by this parable, He was explaining in parabolic form something which had taken place *from the beginning!* I believe He was referring to what had happened in the garden of Eden when sin entered into the plan of God. There we find God fellowshiping with Adam in the cool of the day. Certainly God was not standing there in bodily form any more than He comes in bodily form when we commune with Him and hear His voice. By the Spirit God was planting His ***good thoughts and spiritual understanding*** in the mind of Adam. But while Adam was not aware of it, the adversary also came into the garden and whispered and planted ***evil thoughts and carnal understanding***, causing a duality within, which led him to fall into a carnal mind. This dual mind of both good and evil was as a split personality within man, each capable of bringing forth a harvest of a certain kind of man (Rom., 8:6). The battlefield is *in the mind!*

"Some may object to this interpretation of the tares, because Jesus in His explanation of the parable used the words, *'the good seed are the **children** of the kingdom; but the tares are the **children** of the wicked one'* (Mat. 13:38). That does sound as if they are two different kinds of *people*. And indeed they are! If we will just stop for a moment and think this through, we must admit that God is an invisible spirit, and Satan is likewise invisible spirit. Neither of these produce flesh and blood ***children*** of their own! The new creation is formed in a people who are *'renewed in the **spirit** of their **mind**.'* So the term 'children' must be taken as a metaphor. The Holy Spirit deals with men in their minds and thoughts, and Satan can only attack man in his mind, giving false ideas and imaginations. These thought-pictures are often called ***'brain children.'*** And these determine *what manner of man* a man is!

"These *thought-pictures* can be either good or bad, spiritual or carnal. Paul exhorts us to *'cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every **thought** to the obedience of Christ'* (II Cor. 10:5). Bringing this parable down to us personally, we find that our own mind is the field in which are planted both good and evil. The children or offspring of the

kingdom, and the children or offspring of the wicked one, are a mixture of both good and evil, flesh and spirit, growing up together within us until the harvest, which is the time of separation. The tares are somewhat different from the chaff in that the chaff is *part of the wheat*; however the tares are not part of the wheat, but a foreign implantation made to appear as wheat. The harvest reveals what sort of seed was planted in our earth, and how they have matured in areas of our lives. Only the mature know the difference! And only by harvest conditions can the Lord bring the separation!" — end quote.

When the Son of man as the crowned Reaper sends His sickle into the earth, all things will have come to full maturity. The age has witnessed the sowing and growth and development of the Son of man, and also the sowing of the adversary, and there has been no conclusive divine dealing on earth to make manifest the judgment of God as to what has resulted. But the harvest is the end of the age! It does not take place individually or collectively until all things have fully developed and ripened even to the point of being "dried." Then the age closes by the gathering out of the kingdom of the Son of man "all offences and those that practice lawlessness," while the wheat will be brought together into the granary of His kingdom. Everything that is worthless to God will be baptized in His all-consuming fire, whereas all that is of value to Him will be anointed with the seven-fold intensified Spirit of the Lord to bring blessing to creation in the age and the ages to come! "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost *and* with fire!" The harvest is the time when everything will be perfectly discriminated, and dealt with according to its true character. The harvest will finally close the present order of things. All the religiousness of man will go up in smoke and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day!

The "binding into bundles" seems to speak of companies and combinations. It is not a literal binding as grain is bound, but like water finding its own level. Truly the Lord is bringing separation after separation in our lives, within and without. How careful we should be not to be tied up in any bundle that is going to be burned! It does not appear to me strange to suppose that the work of the harvest is an unseen work at times, and those conscious of its working become so by the dealing and revelation of the Lord.

THE THREE ANGELS

"And *another angel came out of the temple*, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud...and *another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven*, he also having a sharp sickle. 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" (Rev. 14:15-18).

The scene opens with John announcing that "*another angel came out of the temple.*" The Greek word for temple is *naos* indicating the *inner sanctuary* or *most holy place*. Throughout the book of Revelation there are seven angels out of the temple and there are the seven spirits of God, or the seven-fold intensified spirit of the Lord, or the fullness of the Holy Spirit. At various times one or more of these seven angels out of the temple move into action upon the stage of God's unfolding revelation to accomplish some aspect of His purposes. Each of these angels signifies a *message*, an *activity*, or a *ministry* out of the fullness of God's Spirit.

Before this, in the same chapter, John saw three angels. The first had the everlasting gospel, or the gospel of the ages to proclaim to the rulers and leaders of the earth-dwellers; the second proclaimed the sober message that Babylon was in a fallen condition; and the third angel revealed the fiery processes of divine judgment upon all who persist in worshipping the beast and his image, or bearing his mark. Now John again sees three angels, which exactly match the first three angels. As the first of the previous three angels called with a loud voice to the rulers of the earth-realm to "*fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him,*" even so this angel calls with a loud voice. However, his voice is directed to the One who sits on the cloud, and his voice is crying for the great purpose of God in His people to be consummated, for the *grain harvest* of the earth to be reaped. The second angel comes out of the temple in heaven bearing a sharp sickle, signifying the moving of the Spirit and the activity of God's Christ to reap the harvest of the *vine* of the earth.

The third angel is described as coming from the altar, and he has power and authority over fire. To understand these mysteries is of eternal importance, for until we do understand them we will be ineffectual in

our ministry as the priesthood of God. I would draw your attention to three specific items in connection with this third scene. There is an altar, an angel, and fire. We must be very certain about the identity of these three items! The setting is the “holy place,” the location of the golden altar within the typical tabernacle of Moses, or later the temple in Jerusalem. It was stationed just before the veil of entrance into the “most holy place” of the throne of God over the ark of the covenant from whence proceeded God’s mercy — the throne of the mercy seat.

The golden altar of incense was made of wood, overlaid with pure gold. It was three feet high and one and one-half feet square. It was the tallest piece of furniture in the holy place and speaks of the highest act of worship possible, that of praise and prayer and priestly intercession. On the top of it rests a pan-shaped vessel, called the golden censer, on which coals (pieces of burning wood taken from the brazen altar in the outer court) are burning. There is no chimney for the smoke to escape by, so the room is full of it; but the smoke is so pleasant that every priest of God ministering in that holy place would not like to be without it; the fragrance is sweeter than anything ever smelt before! But it is not the wood which gives forth such a sweet odor when under the action of fire; it is the incense which the high priest has put on those burning coals that smells so pleasant, and which feels so refreshing to the spirits of those who minister there. The incense was made of four sweet spices, which gave forth their fragrance by burning. Their sweetness is not known till they are submitted to the action of fire, when the odor is sent forth in the smoke.

The high priest would fill his censer with fresh coals, and put on incense every morning and every evening, so that day and night there would be the sweet odor going up to God. It was called “a perpetual incense before the Lord” (Ex. 30:8), because night and day it was ever burning, and the smoke was ever ascending before the veil, and penetrating through the veil, and passing under it, and wafting its way by the sides of it, into the Holy of holies before the Lord, who dwelt there on the mercy seat. And on the tenth day of the seventh month, when the high priest went into the Holy of holies to make atonement for all the people of Israel, he carried the golden censer in his hand, and placed it on the floor of the Holiest of all; and as he stood in the presence of God and before the majesty of His power, and sprinkled the blood seven times on the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat, he would be enveloped in smoke; his garments would smell of sweet incense, and every part of the room would be filled with it, and the glory of the Lord would be softened by it (Lev. 16:11-14).

Obviously this angel from out of the altar signifies the priestly ministry of the sons of God on behalf of the “vine” and the “vintage” of the earth. He had power over fire, and care of the fire was part of the priest’s duties under the Old Covenant. *‘And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire’* (Lev. 1:7). *“And the fire upon the altar shall be burning in it; it shall not be put out; and the priest shall burn wood on it every morning...”* (Lev. 6:12). Remember, the fire upon the golden altar is the same fire as the fire of the brazen altar, for it is taken from thence. And it is carried into the holy place by the priesthood that has the authority over fire. But there is evidence throughout the book of Revelation that “the altar” refers to the golden altar in the holy place, not the brazen altar of the outer court.

The **fire** upon the altar, over which the angel has authority, is the energizing, quickening, transforming presence, word, and power of God Himself who “is a consuming fire.” The purpose of the fire was to consume and transform every sacrifice placed upon the brazen altar, and to change the incense upon the golden altar from a solid, hard, material substance into a spiritual fragrance empowered to waft its way through the veil into the presence of the majesty of God in the Holiest of all. The fire was the energizing of God Himself by the Spirit! This fire is the fire burning the incense upon the golden altar, the sweet-smelling smoke of which goes up before God with the prayers of the saints. This signifies a powerful ministry, an efficacious moving of God on behalf of His people who have been dwelling in the “earth-realm” and are called “the vine of the earth.” The two angels, then, who act together in the matter of the vintage, are of one spirit; both are charged with a kind of reaping or gathering. The angel of the altar calls with loud voice to his companion. And the burden of their mission is that the clusters of the vine of the earth be gathered, for her grapes are fully ripe.

The fire of the altar which the high priest carried in the censer was put there to reveal the great truth that it is the fire of God that brings change in any realm. The fire of God brings the spirit of purification and transformation into the lives of men. This is not an action of judgment, as we normally think of it, but rather

an action of purification! It recalls the action of the seraphim in Isaiah's inaugural vision, taking burning coal from the altar and touching Isaiah's lips (Isa. 6:6-7). Beholding the manifest glory of the Lord the prophet cried, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." But the coal placed on Isaiah's lips does not mean Isaiah's judgment or destruction; instead it is good news, for the messenger says, "Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is *taken away*, and thy sin *purged*." Purification does not come easy! Hot coal *burns*, as does the cauterization of an infected wound. Surgery might take away part of us in order to make us well; we may not want to lose anything, but pain and loss may be necessary in order for us to experience actual healing. The fire of the altar is the fire of God's *love, holiness, glory, and majesty*! It is the fire that *purifies, transforms, and glorifies God*! What fire is in the natural world, the Holy Ghost fire of God is in the spiritual world of men. Fire warms, beautifies, protects, glorifies, refines, purifies, and consumes, effecting change. Purification is neither punishment nor destruction — purification brings deliverance, salvation, and transformation! Ah, when the Lord sends a ministry to deal with His people dwelling in the earth-realm, to gather them out of the earth and into the garner of His kingdom, He sends the messenger from the altar who has *authority over fire*! Do you, for one minute, doubt God's ability to deliver His entire church out of Babylon, establish in them His great and eternal truth, and conform them into the image of His Son? If you doubt it then you just don't know the power of this messenger from the altar with *authority over fire*!

THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE

Harvest and **vintage** are variations on a single theme; and, since the Son of man sends out His harvester messengers to gather the harvest of the earth, it follows that the vintager messengers must have the same function. This is precisely the truth presented when we understand the scene in the light of the "firstfruits." For Israel was required to offer firstfruits of *wine* as well as of *grain* (Ex. 22:29). The harvest season which opened with the offering of the firstfruits of the barley harvest at Passover ended not with the wheat harvest at Pentecost, but with the grape harvest at Tabernacles. Can we not see by this that the gathering of the vintage is associated with the feast of Tabernacles; in fact, the vintage must be gathered *before the great feast of Tabernacles can begin*! Many today believe that they have already entered into the feast of Tabernacles, and the Holy Spirit has indeed been revealing to the saints great and wonderful truths concerning this glorious feast, and some may have experienced a foretaste, yet the feast cannot be experienced in its fullness until *all* the firstfruits, *all* the harvest, and *all* the vintage have been gathered into the kingdom realm of God! The *fullness* thus entered into by the masses of the Lord's people is exactly what *makes* this such an exceptional and glorious feast — THE FEAST OF THE INGATHERING! "*Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil...and ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed*" (Joel 2:23-26).

THE VINTAGE AND THE WINEPRESS

"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 passion of God. 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*" (Rev. 14:18-19).

Those who look for the literal fulfillment of this portion of the prophetic vision are most certainly in error. That a river or lake of actual blood, two hundred miles in extent, deep as the bridle of a horse, all coming from a literal winepress in which grapes are being trodden by human feet is incompatible with either natural law or spiritual sense, and not in accord with the *purpose* and *teaching* of this part of the vision. The record tells us in the first verse of the first chapter that the things that were to come to pass were "signified," or communicated in *sign* language or symbols.

Now in vision John sees the process of fruitage begin. Clusters of grapes from the vine are gathered. In the eastern countries even today, and more so in ancient times, where grapes are grown, the rich clusters are thrown into a huge winepress outside the city walls. There the juice is released by the men who trample the grapes in bare feet to the rhythm of the vintage songs (see Psalm 81) sung by the women. Each

winepress has a spout, and the grape juice, or *life* of the fruitage, flows out into jars, as a stream of water might flow. In verse twenty we read that as a result of the harvest and its exceeding bountifulness, the mighty stream of the *life* of the fruitage is as *blood*. In other words, the life is released from the clusters in the same way the grain is separated from the chaff — the juice by treading, and the grain by threshing. It all bespeaks the heavy and powerful dealing of God in the lives of His people in the time of harvest!

The great purpose of the harvest now under consideration is so that the husbandman may gather that final harvest of the age, for the harvest *is* the end of the age, not specifically to plant more seed and extend his fields, but for the purpose of *gathering* the wheat into the garner, and creating a *new kind of bread* for the new order to come forth. Thus the bread is a *word* and a *people* created to satisfy the hunger of the groaning creation! In like manner, the grapes are for the purpose of yielding *wine*, and wine is the *life-blood* of the grape. As the grain is made into bread, that is, a word and a people, so the husbandman oversees the treading of the grapes that there might be also a new and abundant *out-flow* of the *spirit of life* unto creation. The winepress is not evil but good. The Son of man did not come to destroy grapes, but to obtain grape juice. He did not come to squash men and destroy them in a winepress so that their blood will be squeezed out of them in some horrible judgment and execution. He came instead to bring forth a *life-flow* from them so that the new wine of the kingdom can be poured out as a drink offering and a transforming, life-giving power to all men everywhere!

As we mentioned previously, in the Mediterranean countries it is still a common sight in some places, at the time of the grape harvest, to see the grapes cast into a large vat in order that the juice should be pressed by the naked feet of the vintners. Macaulay, in his famous poem, “Horatius at the Bridge,” describes the countryside from which all the men have departed as soldiers so that the work has to be done by the women.

*This year the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls
Whose sires have marched to Rome.*

This poem reveals the fact that the time of harvest, and treading of the winepress, was a time of JOY! There was great merriment, rejoicing, and satisfaction with the gathering of the vintage and the flowing of the juice! Most commentators see only wrath and vindictive savagery in the mention of the winepress and the blood flowing to the horse bridles — but when understood by the spirit we see a *positive* picture of joy and blessing upon all! It is the time of the feast of Tabernacles, the feast of Ingathering, and the feast of Joy! It is indeed incongruous how the carnal mind insists on seeing judgment and viciousness where there is only blessing and abundance! In fact, it is the *absence* of the treading of grapes that is the sign of judgment and cause for concern and consternation! Isaiah points out that the time of treading the winepresses is a time of shouting. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea all, speaking of Israel say that because of Israel’s sin, “*Israel is an empty vine*” (Hosea 10:1). “*I have caused the wine to fail from the winepresses: none shall tread **with shouting***” (Jer. 48:33). “*In the vineyards there shall be **no singing**, neither shall there be **shouting**: the treaders shall tread out no wine in their presses; I have made their **vintage shouting to cease***” (Isa. 16:10).

The overcomers are the firstfruits of the bread and the wine — the *communion* of the new age of the kingdom! They are the first ones coming forth from God’s winepress in the living power and fullness of the seven-fold spirit of God, just as they also are the first ones appearing with the new, living word of God for the new age. They have submitted to His disciplines upon the threshing floor and in the winepress, and their flesh has been trodden under His feet, separated, and overcome. The flesh of the grape stays in the winepress, but the life of the grape flows out! When God finishes His harvest work — testing, processing, judging His people — His life will be brought forth in them and their flesh separated from them! The overcomers are the first company to be poured upon the earth, not in condemnation, judgment, and curse, but as blessing, empowerment, and life!

Wine is a biblical symbol of joy, revelation, and life. Wine represents the *inner essence* of the fruit from which it comes. Grapes are the principle fruit which produces wine, but grapes are not wine themselves. There are grapes that never fulfill their true destiny! Grapes that remain on the vine harden, and after a time they are pulpy and dry. They will keep for months, dry all the time, and will still be nourishing,

but the wine is gone, and the raisins excite a thirst for the juice that is not there. Such grapes are better than nothing, but they are not substitutes for wine! Today we know that both grape juice and wine contain healthy, life-giving properties above almost any fruit on earth. The fact is, the only way to preserve the essence of the grapes is to extract it from them in the form of wine!

Are you satisfied with grapes? Then you understand not the principle of the winepress! Be sure the grapes will dry up in your storehouse and will never flow out to quicken, nourish, and bless humanity! Wine brings lasting joy and strength and life, not grapes. And surely you can see that it is not possible to have wine unless the grapes are *crushed*! Oh, may God help all who read these lines to truly *understand*! Then you will comprehend the vision John gives us, and you will thank God for the winepress, and you will rejoice at the sight of the blood up to the horses' bridles! Even the finest fruit will not yield its essence without this process. Indeed, the finer the fruit the firmer the skin, and the heavier the pressure must be upon it to burst its surface that the juices may flow!

To have wine you must have grapes. The natural man cannot bring forth the life of Christ or the ministry of sonship, because he has no fruit from which they can be produced. The world is filled with all kinds of vegetation and growth, but the harvest of the Lord is *wheat* and *grapes*. All the other "good" things represent something other than the Lord's crop! Religion is the product of the natural man, but religion has no life! Only the new creation man of the spirit has within him the life of God. If you are walking after the fleshly mind you can bring forth no quickening life because you have nothing but thorns and thistles. Crush them and you get thorn juice and thistle milk which never made the heart of any man rejoice! The natural man can observe rituals and ceremonies, obey rules and regulations, and do many good religious works, but he can never be conformed to the image of Christ and he can never reveal out of himself the life of God that sets creation free. Imagine, if you can, should God cast some of these spiritually dead, dried up, thorny, sour old religious people into His winepress — imagine what would flow out! The true life-flow comes only from God's wine; and this, in turn, is pressed from *God's grapes*!

Most believers today are content with the knowledge that they have grapes in the garden of their life. They take a certain pride in the fact that the Lord has visited them and has dug the earth and pruned the vines; He has also sent seasons of refreshing and watered them with care and even gathered a little fruit. They consider themselves a fruitful vine in a fertile garden. And the fruit of their lives certainly does become a blessing on some level to many! But when the harvest-call comes to a man he is then made aware that God is after something more than that. He is after grain that has been reaped and threshed and garnered, and grapes that have been gathered and crushed and made into wine! He is after the inner kernel, and the wine where the essence and power of the inner life is brought forth. The presence of fruit alone does not satisfy the heart of the Father. Nor can it be preserved to meet the need of creation! God has caused a people in these days to become dissatisfied with the mere appearance of grapes. If you are satisfied with grain in the head, or with grapes in the vineyard of your life, you will never flow out to creation in grace, love, and power!

The grapes must be crushed! There must be a journey to the winepress! "We *must* through *much tribulation* (pressure) enter into the kingdom of God." For this the Lord has many different processes. In all vintage countries proprietors of great vineyards have their own secrets for making wines. Connoisseurs tell the difference between the products of one vineyard and another by their tastes. Soil, sun, method of preparation, all enter into the final product. So the Lord works in each of us to bring forth a particular brand, expression, or dimension of His life that we may impart. The Lord knows just who He will send us to and what their specific need will be. To that end the Lord is now working in the lives of all His elect sons, first growing grapes (fruit of the spirit) in the vineyard of our life, and then pressing them out so that there may be wine to bless creation. We cannot know the quality of the work of God in us except when the pressure comes! What flows out of our lives when we are pressured? Ah, have there not been those times when there was nothing but the thorns and thistles of anger, bitterness, complaining, unbelief, and ungodliness flowing out when we were crushed. But what a mighty work the Lord has been doing in us! Yet — we can never know the true quality of the Christ-life formed within us until the pressures come and the essence is literally squeezed, beat, or stomped out of us!

Yes, my beloved, the Lord is cultivating His grapes in the vineyards of our lives, and He will press out His wine! He will give us such an expression of the out-flowing of the nature, love, wisdom, glory, and power of Christ that nothing else in the world will charm us like the knowledge that we are the sons of HIS LIFE. It is evident that this kind of living is miraculous, for it is not in the capacity of the natural man or even the religious man to give forth wine. He doesn't want to go to the winepress! It is natural to whine and sigh and cry in adversity! The worldling often lives such a life of failure, and, alas, many Christians settle down to the same low level. But our Father has called His firstfruits for better things and higher realities! And the wonder of it all is that God has a marvelous plan to bring His whole church to maturity! And they will all come to the harvest! They will everyone feel the thrust of the sickle and they will everyone be cast into the great winepress of God — and what a FLOWING THERE WILL BE! Isn't it wonderful! And isn't that better than a gory war in the Middle East?

John also tells us that *"the winepress was trodden without the city."* That is a significant picture, and it is interesting that the ancient winepresses were generally located in the vineyards outside the walls of the cities. It was there, without the city, that Jesus, physically, passed through His "winepress" experience when by crucifixion the life was squeezed out of Him, His blood flowing forth for the redemption and life of all mankind. And thus we read, *"Wherefore, Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach"* (Heb. 13:12-13). John, in his Gospel, tells us, *"Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid"* (Jn. 19:41). When one visits present day Jerusalem, it is possible to go to that Garden Tomb which is right by mount Calvary, the "place of a skull." This is the place where Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. **Not many feet from the tomb is a winepress.** Nearly thirty years ago Lorain and I stood by that winepress meditating upon the scene, and the Lord spoke a word to Lorain. That is another subject, but the presence of that winepress by the place of the cross and the tomb shows the association with the truth the Holy Spirit is speaking in the vision John saw on Patmos and within our own hearts today.

When John identifies the "winepress of the passion of God" as being trodden "without the city," he can only mean *"the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified"* (Rev. 11:8). This is the city which is also given the name "Babylon the Great" in more than one place in the book of Revelation. But if this were a scene of *judgment*, as so many Bible teachers proclaim, it would make no sense at all to say that the inhabitants of this city are subjected to a final divine judgment *outside the city*. For in chapter eighteen we read of this great city of religious Babylon, *"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye RECEIVE NOT OF HER PLAGUES"* (Rev. 18:4). The divine judgment is *on the city* and the safety from the judgment is *outside the city!* Those who remain within the city share its sins and its doom. To come outside the city is to escape to that place of security provided by the Lord for those who come unto Christ "without the camp." A vintage of *judgment* would be celebrated in the very heart of the city. At the winepress *outside the city* is where Jesus is and where we encounter Him in identification with His death and the out-flowing of His life! Therefore, the crude notion that our text is portraying a scene of divine judgment on sin and sinners is far afield from the truth!

The following words by Ray Prinzing are so meaningful here. "God said to Moses, *'Let them make me a sanctuary: that I may dwell among them'* (Ex. 125:8). But there was so much controversy in Israel, so much carnality of man, that God finally said, *'I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people: lest I consume thee in the way. So Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp...and it came to pass that everyone that sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp'* (Ex. 33:3,7).

"God's presence was there, but not in closeness to the people, because they were too stiff-necked and rebellious, and HE who is a CONSUMING FIRE would have moved to purge and purify, and consumed them in the way. So they had to prepare a little plot of ground for Him — afar off from the camp. All this prefigured the greater, spoken of in Hebrews, where Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate, and we are admonished to *go forth unto Him without the camp*. Afar off from the camp, on a little plot of ground SET APART FOR HIM, He met with those who came out and sought after Him. Then Jesus came, that He might sanctify the people — and every one that GOES FORTH

UNTO HIM without the camp, when sanctified by Him, ultimately is destined to become one in whom He shall dwell in fullness” — end quote.

Christ, the Spirit, is completely without the camp! He is outside the camp of the systems of this world, including the political, economic, and religious systems of man; He is outside the camp of the denominations, churches, and fellowships; He is outside the camp of those who continue in the old ways of the dead, church order of the past; He is also outside the camp of anything that is of man, or that man's works have created. No longer is He dealing with the apostate systems of man, but is calling all men to ***come forth unto Him without the camp***. Without the camp is where you will experience the true dealings of God, where the crop grows, matures, is harvested, and where the grain is gathered into the garner and the grapes are cast into the winepress. It is without the city that the winepress is trodden and the life of God pours forth for every man! THE GREAT HARVEST WORK IS WITHOUT THE CITY! And that is why Babylon will fall and be burned with fire — God will by a sovereign work of His grace and power call ***all His people out of Babylon — NOT JUST THE FIRSTFRUITS!*** ONLY THAT IS HARVEST! Aren't you glad!

It is significant to note that Jesus, as part of His death experience, passed through Gethsemane. *Gethsemane* means “winepress.” He knew the process that was beginning for Him, so it was not by chance that He made His way to this particular garden. The Chaldean root is *gath*. That is a vat used in the treading down of the grapes to bring out the juice. The second root word is *shemen*, meaning any kind of liquid. In the Old Testament it is also used in certain places for the *anointing*. From this same term is derived the English word *semen*, the fluid of reproductive life. What we see in this word, then, is the release of the inner power of life whether it be the incorruptible seed of the word of God, the Holy Spirit oil of anointing, or the grape (fruit of the spirit) that is put in a vat and pressed until the unhindered flow of the pure juice comes forth. We are the habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:22), and the true forces of life are locked up in the spirit man. God is performing a work to bring it forth! We think of the breaking that comes only because of the pressure, the force from without — but God is also beginning a work of brokenness within us — there is a brokenness that God wants to come into our lives which is an inward reality in our state of being. The purpose of brokenness is for the release of the precious issues from the spirit man. And how much more meaningful when it comes from a brokenness inworked within ourselves rather than an uninvited, irresistible force from without!

BLOOD TO THE HORSE BRIDLES

“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*” (Rev. 14:20).

This brings us to a statement over which multitudes have stumbled: concerning the blood flowing out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, for a distance of a thousand and six hundred furlongs. This is a scary scene for those who think this is literal or that there is a literal battle of Armageddon with hundreds of thousands of soldiers, horses, and rivers of blood flowing. Men who persist in teaching that this is a literal scene should stop to consider all the facts involved in what the prophet saw. We have a description of the harvest and vintage of the earth. No man can maintain other than that these are a figurative harvest and vintage of the earth, to be followed by the great spiritual feast of Tabernacles. Even the so-called “literalists” are not literal in this respect, for they don't view it as a natural harvest or vintage of grain and grapes! We also find the reapers with sickles, gathering the clusters of the vine, whose grapes are fully ripe. No man can maintain that these are literal sickles, literal vines, and literal grapes! The grapes were cast into the winepress of the passion of God. However one interprets the scene, that winepress is not a literal winepress. No sane man can dispute these statements. Neither is the treading a literal treading. And yet in view of all these facts unspiritual men maintain that the balance of the prophecy has to be fulfilled literally, they doggedly persist in alleging, against all reason, that the predictions concerning blood, and horses, and bridles, and the sixteen hundred furlongs, must be fulfilled literally! In their folly they refuse to believe that this scripture is fulfilled unless it can be shown that such an impossible event has actually been seen by man!

The statement concerning blood reaching to the horse bridles is most certainly not to be interpreted literally. It is used as a figure of speech, a hyperbolic statement denoting the shedding of blood, even as

Jesus shed His blood — the out-flowing of divine life! The Spirit often uses such figures of speech, conveying in them a deeper meaning than appears on the surface. *“Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you”* (Jn. 6:53). So we will do well to look into this statement more exactly. The question follows — What kind of blood is it? In the vision it is grapes that are being crushed — that’s grape juice! But then the grape juice becomes blood. What kind of blood? Not horse blood, certainly, and not human blood, absolutely, for the blood flows from a *winepress*, not a *battlefield*! Ah, someone says, but this is the battle of Armageddon, so it *is* a battle! By whose authority? I ask. Armageddon is not even mentioned in this passage! Neither is the number of horses. Nor are any soldiers mentioned. Nor any valley of Megiddo. Nor is warfare even hinted at. To superimpose this scene upon the so-called “Battle of Armageddon” is totally without foundation. It’s not about a war, my friend, it’s about THE HARVEST!

The blood flows to the horse bridles for a distance of sixteen hundred furlongs. Now sixteen hundred furlongs are equal to about one hundred and eighty five miles, which is approximately the distance from Dan to Beersheba — the length of the land of Israel. So in type it represents a life-flow that reaches not just to mount Zion, nor to the temple on mount Moriah, nor to the capital city of Jerusalem, nor to the land of Judah, but unto *all the Lord’s people* from one end of His “land” unto the other! Ah, yes — the HARVEST!

Now, let’s suppose for one moment that this is literal blood up to the bridles of literal horses. My son did the following computation for me on his computer. Using an area of two hundred square miles for our base, and assuming that a horse’s bridle is about four feet high, it would take *one hundred sixty-six trillion, eight hundred thirty-five million, nine hundred twenty thousand, seven hundred (166,835,920,700) GALLONS* of blood to cover two hundred square miles, four feet deep. Every normal human being has approximately six quarts of blood flowing through his body. To get the quantity of blood enumerated above would require the blood of *one hundred eleven trillion, two hundred twenty-three million, nine hundred forty-seven thousand, one hundred (111,223,947,100) PEOPLE!* There are currently between six and seven billion people alive on planet earth, so to get this quantity of blood every living person on earth would have to be slain in the valley of Megiddo plus more than one hundred and eleven *trillion MORE!* I think we can all see the ludicrousness of such an interpretation! *Think, brethren, think!*

And now, in closing, we mention the horses’ bridles. The only Old Testament passage which speaks of the bridles of horses is in the prophecies of Zechariah, and the Hebrew text reads: *“On that day shall there be upon the bridles of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD...”* (Zech. 14:20). Bridles that proclaim the *holiness* of the Lord! Those familiar with horses will recognize the allusion to the stream coming up to the bridles as a reference to the fact that a horse always holds his head high in the water. But when the stream is powerful enough to come to his bridle, he loses his hold and is swept away by the current. Horses are often a figure in prophecy denoting speed and strength in battle, and typify the strength of man, the strength of the flesh. Ah, when the life-flow reaches the bridles, the horses lose their hold, that is, the strength of the flesh is swept away, replaced by HIS LIFE, truly producing within God’s harvest people the nature and power HIS HOLINESS! Isn’t it wonderful!

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY