

Dr. David L. Mathewson, Revelation, Session 21, Revelation 14-16--Grain/Grapes; Seven Bowls 6-Min. Video Overview

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All right, let's dive in. Today, we are tackling one of the Bible's most notorious books, Revelation. Specifically, we're looking at chapters 14 through 16, which have some of the wildest and, honestly, most misunderstood imagery in the entire text.

So, the author, John, paints this absolutely shocking picture in chapter 14. He describes a river of blood so deep it comes up to a horse's bridle, and it stretches for nearly 200 miles. I mean, can you even picture that? So, is this a literal prediction of some future event, or is there something else going on here? To figure this out, we've got to crack the symbolic code that John is using.

So, here's the key, and this insight comes from scholar Dr. Dave Mathewson. He argues that John isn't just inventing new prophecies out of thin air. You can think of him more like a master DJ, sampling and remixing these incredibly powerful images from older Jewish texts—images his audience would have recognized immediately.

Yeah, this idea is called stock imagery. Think of it like this. When a modern movie references Star Wars, we all get the joke because we know the original film.

Well, John is doing the exact same thing. He's pulling from this whole library of divine, apocalyptic imagery that his audience already knew inside and out. So, to really get his message, we have to know his sources.

Okay, so let's dig into this. Chapter 14 doesn't just give us one vision of judgment. It actually gives us two, structured as a kind of double harvest.

And this contrast? Well, it's everything. It's the key to understanding what John was trying to say to his audience, who are facing some serious oppression. So, here on the screen, you can see the two possible destinies laid out.

On one hand, you've got the grain harvest. This symbolizes God's people, the faithful ones who endure, and they're being gathered in safely, called the firstfruits. But on the other hand, you have the grape harvest.

And this is a terrifying image of judgment, where grapes are thrown into the winepress of God's wrath, a powerful symbol for the fate of those who compromise with the oppressive empire. But again, where does this winepress of wrath idea even come from? Well, you guessed it. John didn't just make it up.

This image of God treading a winepress as an act of judgment was a very well-known piece of stock imagery. His audience would have known it right away from the Old Testament prophets. I mean, just look at this direct quote from the prophet Isaiah.

John is pulling this language almost word for word. He's using this familiar, really violent imagery to show how severe God's judgment is. It's not a literal prediction about a winemaking disaster.

It's a symbol his readers would have instantly understood. And this pattern of remixing old texts just keeps going as we move into chapters 15 and 16. Here, John switches to another massive piece of source material, the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt.

He basically reframes the final judgments as a brand new cosmic-level exodus. But check out how John structures this. It's actually really clever.

Before he even gets to describing the final seven plagues, the scary stuff, he shows the audience the end result. He gives them a vision where the people of God are already victorious. This is all about giving them hope, showing them that getting through the trials to come will absolutely be worth it.

The parallels here are just, wow, they're so direct and intentional. Instead of the chaotic Red Sea, there's a calm sea of glass. Just like the Israelites sang the song of Moses after their victory, the faithful here sing the song of Moses and the lamb.

And of course, the 10 plagues on Egypt become the blueprint for the seven bull plagues that poured out on the Roman Empire. The connections are impossible to miss, right? A bull of sores mirrors the plague of sores. Turning water to blood is pulled straight from Exodus 7. Darkness, frogs, hail- it's all there.

John is basically screaming, hey, just like God judged the oppressive Egyptian empire back then, he's going to judge this new oppressive empire now. Okay, let's talk about the big one, the word that everyone knows from these chapters: Armageddon. Is it a real place on a map where some future world war is going to be fought? Well, when you look at the source material, it's not quite that simple.

The word Armageddon is a symbolic name, not a literal place. It's a combination of Har, which is the Hebrew word for mountain, and Megiddo, a famous plain in Israel where a ton of decisive battles happened. It's kind of like how we might say a political defeat was someone's Waterloo.

It's not about the location; it signifies the type of conflict: a final, decisive one. It's not a GPS coordinate. And here is a super important detail that almost everyone misses.

Revelation 16 doesn't actually describe a battle at Armageddon. It only describes demonic spirits gathering the kings of the world for battle there. The narration of the actual fight is saved for later chapters.

This is the setup, not the main event. So you might be thinking, if these visions aren't a literal roadmap to the future, then what was the point for the people John was actually writing to? I mean, what was he trying to get them to do with all this crazy imagery? Then, bam, right in the middle of describing Armageddon and all this epic cosmic stuff, John hits pause and inserts this direct warning from Jesus. It's a sudden jump from a huge battle to a very personal responsibility.

He's speaking right to his readers, telling them, hey, pay attention, be prepared, be vigilant. This reveals what the book is really all about. Its purpose isn't just to satisfy our curiosity about the end times.

It's hortatory. Now that's just a fancy word for a sermon or a speech that gives urgent advice and encouragement. The visions are the dramatic backdrop for a really powerful call to action.

So the core message for that original audience was pretty simple but urgent. Stay awake. Don't compromise your values just to get along with the pagan Roman Empire.

Keep your witness pure and faithful no matter what it costs, because judgment is coming and you do not want to be caught on the wrong side. And all of this leaves us with a really big question, doesn't it? If John was using these incredibly powerful symbols to call first-century believers to resist an idolatrous empire, what might that timeless message of vigilance and faithful resistance mean for us in our own time?