

# Blood Up to the Horses' Bridles

Revelation 14:17-20

## Blood Up to the Horses' Bridles

Revelation 14:17-20

Text 17 Then another angel came out of the temple (the one in heaven), he too having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar (having authority over the fire) and he called out with a loud cry to the one having the sharp sickle saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the grape clusters of the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." 19 So the angel swung his sickle at the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of God's fury. 20 And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress up to the horses' bridles, for a thousand six hundred stadia.

### Introduction

The passage we just read is pretty scary and I will admit it is pretty gross. But it is inspired and it was written for our edification. And I want to briefly comment on the passage as a whole because it has definitely been used by atheists to vilify God and to say that this illustrates that Christianity is contradictory. They say that Christianity claims that God is kind, good, loving, patient, gentle, and generous, yet here is a passage that shows the opposite.

But hopefully you can recognize that there is no contradiction. The apostle John holds all God's attributes together as a coherent whole. He never presents love in isolation from His other attributes. It is a holy love, a patient love, etc. The same is true of wrath. Wrath and patience imply each other. For example, has He shown patience in this chapter? Yes. Absolutely yes. This chapter illustrates how God is incredibly slow to wrath. And by the way, the concept of patience is meaningless in the absence of His attribute of wrath. So there is no contradiction.

Has He shown love? Yes He has - a love that forgave persecuting enemies and adopted them into His family. It's an incredible love. In fact, the 144,000 missionaries that this chapter begins with were themselves enemies of Christ who became at some point trophies of His conquering love, grace and mercy. We previously saw that during the whole time that the Jews were killing Christians Christ's amazing love was still converting His enemies and forgiving them - and it continued to do so after this time. Verses 14-16 showed an ongoing harvest of souls from the land of Israel for an indefinite period of time after the war. For God to continue to save this rebellious people over the next 50 years is an astounding tribute to His patience, mercy,

and love.

But here is the point - when Israel persisted in fighting against Christ between the years AD 70 and AD 132, God dropped the hammer on them once again. It is my conviction that verses 17-20 have nothing whatsoever to do with the war against Israel in AD 67-74. It is Rome's war with Israel in the Bar Kockba rebellion of AD 132-136. And hopefully you will see that the historical sequence and the historical details are an absolutely perfect fit.

In any case, this chapter shows that mercy does not preclude God's right to judge, and judgments never preclude God's right to save. There could have been no mercy to us unless Christ had borne the Father's wrath. And those who reject God's offers of forgiveness, mercy, love have only themselves to blame when they experienced this wrath. So with that objection out of the way, let's look at this passage phrase by phrase. It really is an amazing prophecy.

### **I. This is a judgment ordered by the Father (v. 17a)**

The first phrase highlights the fact that this nasty death-harvest was a harvest ordered by God the Father - the same Father who lovingly ordered a harvest of souls to be saved in the previous verses. Verse 17 begins, "Then another angel came out of the temple (the one in heaven), he too having a sharp sickle." Just as the previous angel had been sent by the Father to order a harvest of life for heaven, another angel came from that same temple-throne to order a harvest of death for hell.

The point is that we can never presume upon God's patience and love. No one could deny that God had been unbelievably patient with Israel in the 58 years after the war. In fact, times were so good that Jews in Israel assumed that God must be for them. But we should not confuse God's patience with His approval.

And in the same way, God has been unbelievably patient with America, but I can guarantee you that God does not approve of America. America has cast God's laws out of the schools, the courts, and basically out of the public arena. America has become a land filled with the bloodshed of abortion, euthanasia, unbiblical wars, and other forms of murder. America is filled with the indecency of pornography, and other sexual sins. It is filled with theft; for example, government approved theft in the form of asset forfeiture laws, ungodly taxes, and theft from orphans and widows in the form of inheritance taxes. Yes, the inheritance tax is by definition gross theft from orphans and widows, and God holds a nation accountable when they steal

from orphans and widows. I think you get the point - God's patience with America has nothing to do with approval of America. We are ripe for judgment, and all it would take is a word from His temple and carnage could begin to happen.

Some question whether God would ever order America to face similar carnage. But this phrase is just one of many in Revelation that shows that He does exactly that to both Jewish and Gentile nations.

## **II. This is a judgment carried out by angels (v. 17a; 18a)**

Second, notice that this judgment was carried out by angels. The angel in verse 17 carries a sickle and is ready to use it. A second angel of fire commands the first angel to begin the death toll. Just as angels were used in the Old Testament to kill off millions of people, angels were used in AD 132-136 to kill off millions of Jews. How the angels do it, we are not told. But once again this highlights the fact that there are spiritual battles that accompany the human ones. We do not properly interpret history if we ignore the role of angels.

## **III. This judgment harvest came after the salvation harvest of verses 14-16**

And when did this calamity happen? Most preterists claim that it happened during the war of AD 66-70 - because they are fixated on that little window of time. For example, Chilton quotes Josephus, who said that "Galilee was all over filled with fire and blood..." But the specific event that Josephus cites happened long before Nero's death; in other words, long before chapter 13:3. He is putting things out of order; he's mixing up the order of these chapters. Ralph Bass quotes numerous other historical situations in that war that might seem on the surface as if they fit this prophecy, but they also are way too early. Certainly I would agree with him that the Jordan River was choked with bodies and filled with blood for its whole course much earlier in the war. I've got numerous quotes that show the seas and lakes filled with blood.<sup>1</sup> But they are all too early. In AD 70 there were so many bodies inside

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Josephus speaks of the slaughter: "... insomuch that the sea was bloody a long way, and the maritime parts were full of dead bodies; for the Romans came upon those that were carried to shore, and destroyed them..." (Wars 3:9:3). "...one might then see the lake all bloody, and full of dead bodies, for not one of them escaped." (Wars 3:10:9) "... the whole of the country through which they had fled was filled with slaughter, and Jordan could not be passed over, by reason of the dead bodies that were in it, but because the lake of Asphaltis was also full of dead bodies, they were carried down into by the river." (Wars 4:7:6) "And now the outer temple was all of it overflowed with blood..." (4:5:1) "... the

Jerusalem that they started stacking them up as high as the horses' bridles along both sides of the roads of Jerusalem, and when the roads filled up, they started to fling them outside the city.<sup>2</sup> But here is the problem: none of those references fit the historical sequence of chapters 13-14. And for me, exegesis has to trump secular history.

### **A. *Seen by the words of sequence:***

#### **Verse 8 shows that Jerusalem's fall was already past**

I won't go through every word that proves a historical sequence in chapters 13-14, but look at verse 8 of chapter 14. It says of Jerusalem, "And another, a second, angel followed, saying, 'It fell, it fell, Babylon the great!—she made all the nations drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication.'" It uses the past tense to indicate that the fall of Jerusalem had already happened earlier in AD 70, and now this angel is rubbing that in. What seemed unthinkable has already happened.

#### **Verse 13 shows ongoing history - "from now on."**

But there are also indications of ongoing sequence of time. For example, verse 13 uses the phrase, "from now on." That is a hint that there will be some progress of time.

#### **Verses 14-16 show a positive harvest of missions from Israel over a period of time**

When we looked at verses 14-16 we saw that God willed for a harvest of souls to be taken from the land of Israel after AD 70. And of course, from history we know that there were many Jews who were saved in the next 58 years. It would technically be possible to see verses 14-16 as being only AD 70-74 rather than the beginning of an ongoing harvest of Jews. But hopefully last time I proved that this was a harvest of the whole next generation.

#### **Verses 17-20 show language that indicates these things happen after verses 14-16: "Then," "another angel came," "he also having a sharp sickle," "And... and... So"**

But even if you took verses 14-16 as only referring to AD 70-74, in verses 17-20 we see hints that these verses happen after the events of verses 14-16.

---

bodies of strangers were mingled together with those of their own country, and those of profane persons with those of the priests, and the blood of all sorts of dead carcasses stood in lakes in the holy courts themselves." (Wars 5:1:3)

2 See Wars 6:8:5, etc.

So to me there is no way of avoiding a post AD 74 fulfillment. For example, when it says, "Then another angel came," both the words "then" and "another" show that this angel came after the first angel had come and done his work. To say that "he also" had a sharp sickle logically implies that the first one had already come with a sickle, right? The words "And... and... So" also hint at sequence.

***B. Seen by the nature of the two harvests - the wheat harvest comes months before the grape harvest***

But the most obvious hint is the nature of the two harvests in this chapter. Verses 14-16 are the wheat harvest and verses 17-20 are the grape harvest, which in literal history are separated by a period of time. Kendall Easley's commentary says,

In the world of the first century, the grape harvest, otherwise called the "vintage," was as distinct from the grain harvest as, say, Easter is from Thanksgiving. They occurred at two different times of year. The grain harvest was done by mid-June. Grapes were gathered in September and October. Thus, the judgment scene pictured in these verses must be distinctly later than the grain harvest. How much later?...<sup>3</sup>

He does not know because he is looking to the future for a fulfillment. His exegesis is right; he just doesn't have the period right. But if verses 17-20 have to come after the harvest of verses 14-16, and if verses 14-16 have to come after the events of verses 6-13, then it is crystal clear when these verses happened. There was only one time in Jewish history when this could have happened - the war of Bar Kochba.

***C. This means that even though there was similar bloodshed in AD 66-70, this event has to refer to bloodshed that came long afterwards - toward the end of the next generation (the Bar Kochba rebellion of 132-136 AD). As we will see, each of the descriptions fits Bar Kochba perfectly.***

So the historical flow of this chapter is this: The 144,000 of verses 1-5 come out of hiding in AD 70 after Jerusalem has completely fallen. They are the missionaries who lead numerous Jews to Christ in Israel during the next 58 years, and they are the ones who begin a harvest of Gentiles around the globe as well. But the next generation sees the final judgment of Israel in which virtually every Jew is scattered to the winds. From 136 AD and on, Jews were forbidden to enter the city of Jerusalem. It took centuries before they were allowed back in.

---

<sup>3</sup> Kendall H. Easley, Revelation, HNTC 12; ed. Max Anders; Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1998), 255.

## **IV. Answering potential objections**

One potential objection to this being AD 132-136 is from Matthew 24. Verse 34 says that the first 34 verses of that chapter would be fulfilled before that generation had passed away, so it is clearly a first century context. Yet verse 21 says,

Matt. 24:21 For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.

If as many Jews died in the second century as Jewish historians claim, then the second century holocaust was greater than the first century holocaust. The claim is that this would contradict verse 21 - the second holocaust didn't happen within that generation. While I think it could be successfully argued that far more died in the first century, the simple answer is that Jesus was talking about a tribulation of true believers in that verse, not a tribulation of unbelievers. The verse before it tells true believers to flee. The verse after it says that unless the tribulation was shortened no one would be saved, but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. It was the elect who were in danger. In fact, Christ makes clear that it would be the Jews who would instigate the tribulation of Christians. And the next four verses give warnings to believers to not fall away during that tribulation. So while the Great Wrath was against Israel, the Great Tribulation was against the church. There is no contradiction.

But another potential objection to my interpretation is brought up by Full Preterists. They quote Luke 21:22, which says, "For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled." And they emphasize, "all things which are written..." And they say that this clearly involves Israel, so it has to have taken place in AD 70.

But the word "For" points us back to the specific subject matter He has been discussing, which is the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem in the first century. And I agree that 100% of the prophecies that deal with that subject were fulfilled in the first century. Interestingly, we will see that this text says that the devastation for this war has nothing to do with Jerusalem. It will occur outside Jerusalem, not inside Jerusalem, and history bears that out. We'll look at it in a moment. But I don't see any contradiction in seeing this as applying to second Judaism.

## **V. Note the urgency of this commanded judgment ("cried with a loud voice" - v. 18)**

Well, let's move on. Note the urgency of this commanded judgment. Verse

18 says, "he called out with a loud cry..." Just as we saw that the loud cry of verse 15 showed the urgency of missions, this loud cry shows the urgency of judgment. Why is judgment urgent? We all understand the critical urgency of missions, but why is judgment placed on the same level of urgency? I believe it is because the Old Testament prophesied over and over again that Christ's kingdom would guarantee the success of missions or the success of judgment. The integrity of Christ's New Covenant kingdom rises or falls on the advancement of either missions or judgment. It's almost as if angels realize that there is no kingdom without one or the other being successful. For example, Psalm 2 says that once Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father, God guarantees the success of either missions or judgment.<sup>4</sup> Either nations kiss the Son in friendship or they are broken into pieces by His rod of iron. It says that God exercises some patience in between, but that Psalm guarantees one or the other. In the Old Testament there was no such urgency of judgment. For example, Egypt continued for many centuries in their rebellion. But Acts 17:30 says that now that Jesus has been set on His throne, God will no longer overlook the rebellion of nations, "but now commands all men everywhere to repent." It is Christ's kingdom that necessitates such urgency.

Why do I emphasize such an obvious point? Because very few Evangelicals seem to take America's judgment seriously. They do not plan for judgment. In fact, their longterm plans assume that there can be no judgment. They base their plans for the future on what has happened in the past, but that fails to take into account that we live in a cause and effect universe, and rebellion always produces certain effects. Apart from repentance I don't see how judgment is avoidable. If you think America will continue indefinitely to experience God's patience, then you deny the urgency in this chapter. If

---

4 The first three verses show the natural state of nations apart from grace: > Psa. 2:1 ¶ Why do the nations rage, > And the people plot a vain thing? > Psa. 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, > And the rulers take counsel together, > Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, > Psa. 2:3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces > And cast away Their cords from us."

The next verses shows the futility of such opposition:

Psa. 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.

The next verse shows that patience must give way to wrath:

Psa. 2:5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure:

But Christ comes to convert the nations:

Psa. 2:6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." Psa. 2:7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Psa. 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. Psa. 2:9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

So verse 8 speaks of missions and verse 9 speaks of judgment. And based on how rejected missions must lead to judgment, God says,

Psa. 2:10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Psa. 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Psa. 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

Christ is king, then missions is urgent. And if Christ's kingship is persistently disobeyed, then judgment is urgent. Psalm 2 guarantees that one of two things will happen - nations will Kiss the Son or nations will perish in His ire.

You might object, "But America has been in rebellion for a long time, and we haven't seen any judgments." That is not true. America has had several periods of judgment and repentance. We had the Great Depression and were judged with tyrannical presidents. Then in the 1940's to 1950's there was a movement back to God, declaring Christ to be Lord of this nation. Congress produced a fantastic paper on why we are a Christian nation and made our national motto include one nation under God and put "In God we Trust" on our money. So America has had judgment and repentance a number of times. And given the moral state of our nation today, we need to be preparing in some ways for judgment, or start working like crazy on bringing our nation to repentance. You can't ignore it.

## **VI. God's continued judgments are never premature ("fully ripe" - v. 18)**

Of course, there is a timing issue that only God is aware of. And that timing issue can be seen in the word "ripe," or as the New King James translates the Greek word ἀκμάζω, "fully ripe." Verse 18 says, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the grape clusters of the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe." It's sort of like some of the nations that Israel was not allowed to conquer in Deuteronomy because their cup of iniquity was not yet full. They were not fully ripe for judgment.

So that brings up an interesting question: What makes nations ripe for judgment? How can you tell? Though only God can know when we are fully ripe for judgment, Leviticus 18 gives one fairly sure-fire way of knowing that it is near - when perverse sexual sins are widespread and defended in society. When I was at Covenant College, Dr. James Hurley gave a fascinating summary of his doctoral work that showed how the sexual degeneration of a nation is an almost infallible barometer of that nation's ensuing judgment. He traced this in nation after nation and empire after empire in the past 3000 years. Almost always the nation or empire degenerated into sexual perversity just before being annihilated or at least severely hammered. It was their sexual attitudes that showed their ripeness for judgment.

Well, let me read Leviticus 18 because it almost exclusively lists sexual sins

as the immediate precursor to Canaan's bloody judgments. After listing voyeurism (which is equivalent to pornography), incest, sexual abuse of women, pedophilia, sacrificing children to Molech for sexual reasons, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, and bestiality, God says,

Lev. 18:24 "Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. Lev. 18:25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

And He goes on to guarantee that this is the way that He deals with nations. Anyway, you could summarize all of the sins in Leviticus 18 that led to judgment in two modern words - sex and abortion. This is what made other nations ripe for judgment and God says that this was what made Israel ripe for judgment. I won't go into the rabbinic justifications for gross sexual immorality that became rife in the time between the destruction of the temple and the Bar Kochba rebellion, but it wouldn't take a lot of reading in the Talmud to find out. It's gross. I cannot even speak of it from the pulpit. But the Palestinian Talmud (which tends to be the more conservative of the two Talmuds) summarizes why over 1000 villages were destroyed in Israel. It says, "because of contention... because of witchcraft... because of fornication."<sup>5</sup> Those rabbis admitted that witchcraft and fornication were pervasive. The sexual slide into the sewers that happened in Israel is a pretty sure indicator that a nation may be teetering on the edge of destruction.

And it wouldn't be right for me to move on without making some application to America. Are we ripe for a carnage-type-harvest? You judge for yourself: every one of the perversions in Leviticus 18 is present in America. And it is not just present, it is being practiced and defended at the highest levels of government. Pornography is pervasive in society and in church. Premarital sex is common in society and in the church. So is adultery, divorce, ungodly forms of birth control which lead to abortion. These forms of lawlessness are pervasive in society and in the church. Homosexuality and lesbianism has started to be defended from even so-called Evangelical pulpits. In fact, it is the Christians who preach against such sins who are now seen as the heretics

---

5 "[C] [From] Simeon's Gate they would put forth 300 barrels of thin cakes among the poor every Sabbath eve. [D] Then why was it destroyed? [E] There is he who says, "It was because of fornication." [F] There is he who says, "It was because they would play ball [waste their time, instead of studying Torah]." [G] There were ten thousand villages in the Royal Mountains. [H] R. Eleazar b. Harsom owned a thousand of them all, and, for them, a thousand ships in the sea. And all of them were destroyed. [I] For three villages the census covering them had to be brought up to Jerusalem in a wagon. These were Kabul, Shihin, and Migdol Sebayya. [J] All three of them were destroyed. [K] Kabul, because of contention. [L] Shihin, because of witchcraft. [M] Migdol Sebayya, because of fornication." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions*, Accordance Electronic ed. 22 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 69a. <https://accordance.bible/link/read/T-YERU-E#42575>

who need to be persecuted. Psalm 12:8 says, "The wicked prowl on every side, when vileness is exalted among the sons of men." Has vileness been exalted in America? Yes it has. The GLBT cause is not only protected in virtually every state, but it is exalted, glorified, and promoted. They are getting more and more bold. I just saw some mainstream news articles saying that some experts want to legalize children marrying their grandparents and other forms of incest. There are so-called ethical experts and more than one congressman who want to legalize polyamory and other so-called orientations. And of course, abortion continues to be a holocaust.

Are we ripe for judgment? If we measure by the measuring stick of Leviticus 18, we may well be. We must learn to apply the Scripture to our current events. Brothers and sisters, I plead with you not to ignore the high potential for devastation in America. There are any number of ways that God could bring it, from taking down the electrical grid, to international war, to a failing dollar, to China's bubble blowing, and on and on. And the potential for this to be far worse than anything we have seen to date in America is definitely there. God could have mercy and continued patience, but this chapter tells us not to presume upon it when we see a nation that is ripe for harvest.

## **VII. The judgment took place in the land of Israel (τῆς γῆς in vv. 18,19; "the vine" in v. 19; "the city" of verse 20)**

I'll just briefly mention a point that I have harped on many times before - the term τῆς γῆς that is translated as "the earth" by Pickering is a reference to the land of Israel, and should be translated as "the land." This is not a worldwide judgment, but a judgment for a certain number of miles within a certain country, Israel. It is not universal; it is only 1600 stadia, which is 184 miles. Likewise, every other time that "the city" is used elsewhere in this book of a wicked city, it is pointing to Jerusalem. Likewise, Israel was symbolized by a vine in the Bible, so verse 19 also refers to Israel when it says, "So the angel swung his sickle at the land and gathered the vine of the land and threw it into the great winepress of God's fury."

We have already mentioned that there was good basis for God being furious with Israel. They had continued to persecute Christians all the way up through the second century, and Bar Kochba forced Christians to renounce their faith on pain of death.<sup>6</sup> He was an incredible persecutor of Christians

---

<sup>6</sup> Justyn Martyr says, "For in the Jewish war which now occurred, Bar Kokhba, the leader of the revolt of the Jews, ordered that Christians alone should be led to terrible punishments unless they would deny

according early church fathers like Justyn Martyr. The Jewish nation had become more and more hardened in their rebellion and perversity and had repeatedly rejected God's offers of clemency. So all that was left was wrath and fury. They had no one but themselves to blame.

### **VIII. This massive genocide did not take place inside Jerusalem, but "outside the city" (v. 20)**

And I want you to notice that the blood-flow takes place outside of Jerusalem, not inside the city. Because so much of this book has been focused on the destruction of Jerusalem, the author makes this point crystal clear; this is something new. Verse 20 says, "And the winepress was trampled outside the city." Both the trampling of the grapes and the flow of the blood happen some place other than Jerusalem. And of course, that fits the situation of the Bar Kochba Rebellion perfectly. That Messianic pretender didn't possess Jerusalem; Rome did. All the killing happened outside Jerusalem, but it was widespread outside Jerusalem. This is why I am amazed that so many preterist commentaries look inside Jerusalem for a fulfillment. We are looking for a fulfillment in a place other than in Jerusalem. And I want to show you now how this was all perfectly fulfilled in AD 132-136.

### **IX. The literal historical reality of these symbols:**

Let me give a brief introduction to that war - a war that is well known to all Jews to this day. Jews chaffed under the restrictions that the Romans had brought on their nation. A minor rebellion happened in AD 110 under the leadership of Pappus and Lulianus. Their main headquarters was in the city of Lod. The Romans massacred all the inhabitants of Lod, and Trajan thought that this would pacify the Jews. However, it only strengthened the resolve of the Jews to resist Trajan and later Hadrian.

At some point, Shimon bar Kosiba claimed to be the promised Messiah predicted in Numbers 24:17, which says, "A star will shoot forth from Jacob." All by itself this was a horrible blasphemy against Jesus. He claimed to be the Messiah and the rabbis accepted him as the Messiah. He was a very charismatic and intelligent leader that the Jews flocked to. The chief rabbi, Akiva ben Joseph, in effect crowned him as Messiah, giving him the name, Kochba, which means star. Virtually all the rabbis then rallied around him and he generated great excitement and enthusiasm in the population. The Talmud claims that he initially had an army of 200,000 men so dedicated

---

Jesus, the Christ, and blaspheme." (1Apol. 31.6):

that their price of admission to bar Kochba's army (which was considered an incredible honor) was to cut off one of their fingers.<sup>7</sup> Every soldier in that army had a missing finger. That was the test of their loyalty.

His rebellion was initially very successful and lasted six years. He successfully destroyed at least one Roman legion and created such losses among other legions that the emperor Hadrian was forced to conscript boys into his army. They had run out of men to fight. So again you can see that God is judging both Israel and Rome. He is an equal-opportunity judge.

Eventually bar Kochba's army grew to 400,000 soldiers<sup>8</sup> and presented a formidable force against the Romans. Hadrian was so hard pressed by bar Kochba's massive army that he had to bring most of his legions and auxiliary armies to Israel and accompanied the armies personally. This became total war. Hadrian was determined to annihilate all resistance from the Jews once and for all time, and it appears that he attempted to exterminate the Jews.

However, that was easier said than done. For somewhere between four to five years, bar Kochba had an almost unbroken series of successful wars, leading even non-Jews to join his army. Other nations thought he might be the best chance of throwing off the shackles of Rome. He really did seem unbeatable. Keep that in mind when things seem to go well for America.

Anyway, reversals eventually started to happen, and he had to retreat to Betar. But even at Betar, he was so well fortified and supplied that he might have won the war had he not been betrayed. But he did get betrayed. Betar was overrun, massacres happened throughout Israel, rabbis were tortured publicly, reading the Torah became a crime, it became a crime for any Jew to come into Jerusalem. It was also a crime to circumcise your children. This started an eight to ten year holocaust of suspected Jews unmatched by anything in Jewish history - as any Jewish history itself will attest.

---

7 "Said R. Yohanan, "There were 80,000 pairs of trumpeters that surrounded Betar. Each one was in charge of a number of troops. Ben Kozabah was there, and he had 200,000 troops who, [as a sign of loyalty, had cut off their little finger." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions*, Accordance Electronic ed. 22 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 68b.

8 Some sources state 350,000. The Jerusalem Talmud says 400,000. > "Ben Kozabah was there, and he had 200,000 troops who, [as a sign of loyalty, had cut off their little finger. > [L] "Sages sent word to him, 'How long are you going to turn Israel into a maimed people?' > [M] "He said to them, 'How otherwise is it possible to test them?' > [N] "They replied to him, 'Whoever cannot uproot a cedar of Lebanon while riding on his horse will not be registered in your army.' > [O] "So there were 200,000 who qualified in one way, and another 200,000 who qualified in the other way.'"

**A. A winepress not inside Jerusalem = Betar, plus 50 fortresses, 985 villages, and ten years of continued killing**

But this bloody harvest of souls for death took place entirely outside of Jerusalem, just as verse 20 says: "And the winepress was trampled outside the city..." During that whole war Jews did not have access to Jerusalem. 100% of the massacres happened outside that city. For example, the fortress of Betar saw hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women, and children slaughtered, with the infuriated Romans bashing out the brains of babies on rocks until the rocks could no longer be seen and then moving on to other rocks. According to the Palestinian Talmud, there were 500 synagogues in the region, each of which had a school of at least 500 children in the school.<sup>9</sup> When Bar Kochba retreated to the region of Betar, these schools were caught up in the massacre with 250,000 school-children being killed.<sup>10</sup> Many more adults were killed at the same fortress.

One historical record says that the emperor Hadrian had a vineyard in Israel that was 18 Roman miles long by 18 miles wide.<sup>11</sup> 18 Roman miles is about 17 American miles. All four sides of that vineyard were surrounded by a massive wall of bodies stacked arms length wide and about the height of a man, which based on measurements of bones of that period was around 5 feet tall. That is 68 miles of wall composed of bodies in that one vineyard. It's fascinating that a literal vineyard and literal wine presses would occupy the site of one of the major holocausts of that time. It fits the symbolism of this verse so well. And Hadrian would not allow anyone to take down the bodies and bury them.

But Betar was not the only place where Jews were massacred in a grisly holocaust. There were other massacres at 49 more fortresses and (according to a Roman historian) at 985 more villages. The Jews say it was way more villages. And the killings continued outside of Israel for seven years. Ancient

---

9 Rabban [Shimon] Gamliel said: "There were 500 schoolhouses in Betar. The smallest of them had no fewer than 500 children." Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations 2.2.4 says that it was 500 schools with the least of the schools not having less than 300 students. See <http://www.livius.org/sources/content/rabbinical-literature/midrash-rabbah-lamentations-2.2.4/>

10 Three reports say that the children were wrapped in their personal Torah scrolls and burned alive (Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 57a-58b; Lamentations Rabbah 2.2 §4; Seder Elijah Rabbah 151). Here is one quote: "On account of the sins [that caused the tragedy], they wrapped each one [of the children] in his scroll and burned him, and out of them all. I alone have survived." Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

11 "[UU] The evil Hadrian had a large vineyard, eighteen mil by eighteen mil. It was of the dimension of the distance from Tiberias to Sepphoris. They surrounded it by a wall made of [the bones of] those who were slain in Betar, as tall as the height of a man, and as broad as the extent of the breadth of the hands." Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

rabbinic writings claim that the Gentiles harvested their vineyards throughout Israel without having to fertilize the vineyards with manure because they used the blood of the Jews for fertilizer for those seven years.<sup>12</sup> Almost everyone agrees that multiplied millions of Jews were killed during that ten year period of time, though few think it possible that the numbers are as high as the various Jewish sources claim. Though scholars think these Jewish histories are wildly exaggerated, they at least give an idea of the significance of this event in the Jewish mind.

The Palestinian Talmud in Gittin 57b claims that 80,000,000 Jews were killed by the Romans.<sup>13</sup> Assuming he was calculating everyone killed from Vespasian to Hadrian, I still doubt that there were 80,000,000 Jews in existence at that time. But that is what rabbi Yohannan claims happened. He claims that 80,000,000 Jews were killed. Gittin 58a claims that only one child out of 250,000 at Betar survived<sup>14</sup> and that elsewhere Hadrian was merciless in his killing of even children. According to a recent research article in Britain, Hadrian went mad because of the loss of his homosexual lover and his holocaust illustrated his insanity. The one thing that the Jewish writings are consistent on is that the numbers killed in the first two centuries makes even the most inflated numbers of the modern holocaust pale by comparison. So even if you were to take the tribulation as only referring to Jews, there still has not been anything greater. But let's consider more of the evidence because it does show that something catastrophic happened.

### ***B. Blood came out of this winepress up to the horses' bridles***

Verse 20 says that the killing was so extensive that the "blood came out of the winepress up to the horses' bridles." If this inspired text says that blood came up to the horses' bridles, I believe there was that much blood. Most commentators claim that this is an exaggeration. They say that it has to be an exaggeration. But then they also claim that the histories that report the same thing are an exaggeration. Others try to take the text seriously by saying that the horses were merely splattered with blood, or that the bodies were stacked

---

12 "For seven years the gentiles fertilized their vineyards with Israelite blood, rather than manure." Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 11b (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 248.

13 "Said R. Yohanan, "Upon orders ['voice'] of Caesar Hadrian in Betar they killed 80,000 myriads."" Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008). A myriad is a thousand;  $80,000 \times 1000 = 80,000,000$

14 "There were 500 schoolhouses in Betar. The smallest of them had no fewer than 500 children... On account of the sins [that caused the tragedy], they wrapped each one [of the children] in his scroll and burned him, and out of them all, I alone have survived." Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

as high as the horses bridles, or that the rivers were colored by blood and that the rivers were up to the horses' bridles.

But I find it interesting that early Jewish sources claim that the blood was actually that deep. Almost no one believes these Jewish sources, but these sources claim to quote rabbis who were there and claim to reflect real history. The Jerusalem Talmud says, the number of Jewish men, women, and children slain at Betar was so enormous that the Romans “went on killing until their horses were submerged in blood to their nostrils” (Ta’anit 4:5 [24a-b]).<sup>15</sup> That is almost word-for-word identical to what this prophecy says would happen. Midrash Rabbah 2:4-5 says, "They slew the inhabitants until the horses waded in blood up to the nostrils." One place simply says, "The [Romans] went on killing [Jews] until a horse was sunk in blood up to its nose." (Ta'anit 4:6 [see more in 68d-69a]).<sup>16</sup> That's a lot of blood. The Jerusalem Talmud goes on to say that the blood flowed for miles to the Mediteranean.<sup>17</sup> And another place says that the ocean was stained with the blood as far northwest as the island of Cyprus.<sup>18</sup> Cyprus is almost 200 miles away. How that is possible, I don't know. Perhaps it was raining, and the rain kept the blood in liquid form. And maybe there was blood rain like happened at the first war and that I documented has happened even in recent history. But the records of that second century period claim that the blood itself was that deep.

One Jewish author summarizes the ancient testimonies this way:

With virtually no survivors, rivers of Jewish blood flowed for miles to the sea, and the

---

15 As translated by some modern Jews. See for example,

<http://www.jewishpress.com/indepth/opinions/the-eternal-jewish-flame/2016/02/05/>

16 "[NN] Now they kept slaughtering [the Jews] until a horse sunk into blood up to his nose, and the blood would roll boulders weighing forty seahs until the blood flowed four mils into the sea. [OO] Now if you might want to suppose that Betar was near the sea, in fact it was forty mils from the sea." Jacob Neusner, *The Jerusalem Talmud: A Translation and Commentary* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008).

17 The Babylonian Talmud says, “This refers to the eighty thousand battle trumpets that assembled in the city of Betar when they took it, and men, women, and children did they kill in it, until their blood flowed and fell into the Great Sea.” Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*, vol. 11b (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 473. "...the blood flowed four mils into the sea. [OO] Now if you might want to suppose that Betar was near the sea, in fact it was forty mils from the sea." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions*, Accordance Electronic ed. 22 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 69a.

18 "His legions surrounded them and killed them. He said to the women, “Obey my legions, and I shall not kill you.” They said to him, “What you did to the ones who have fallen do also to us who are yet standing.” He mingled their blood with the blood of their men, until the blood flowed into the ocean as far as Cyprus. At that moment the horn of Israel was cut off, and it is not destined to return to its place until the son of David will come." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions*, Accordance Electronic ed. 22 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 55b. <https://accordance.bible/link/read/T-YERU-E#39099>

Romans were able to fertilize their fields for seven years using their victims' blood. Jewish bodies were not buried, but were used as fences for fields, in a chilling premonition of Nazi practice. Bar Kochba also died, either executed by the sages for making false Messianic claims, or during the final battle for Betar.<sup>19</sup>

Yet another quote by a Jewish scholar:

[they] slaughtered the men, women and children until blood flowed from the doorways and sewers. Horses sank up until their nostrils, and the rivers of blood lifted up rocks weighing forty se'ah [approximately 700 lb.], and flowed into the sea, where its stain was noticeable for a distance ...<sup>20</sup>

Well, if they are right that rocks were lifted up by the flood, it indicates to me that a flash flood may have accompanied the blood flow. This seems to be hinted at by Rabbi Eliezer the Great, who said that the two streams near Betar flowed in two directions, and both streams were running with one part blood and two parts water.<sup>21</sup> That seems to contradict other testimonies that make the flow pure blood, but the histories are sparse. And they are not infallible anyway.

But here is the point - for people to claim that there is no historical evidence of the fulfillment of these verses, I would say that the only historical evidence (however much you may doubt those histories) shows that it was fulfilled to a "t." Was it all human blood, or is it possible that God did a miracle of blood rain? I don't know, but there had to be enough blood present in the fluid for God to call it blood. Maybe the Jordan and other rivers were so full of blood that this water was all bloody like happened during the first war. This is the way Alexander Zephyr interprets the evidence. He is so skeptical of the amount of blood that the histories talk about that he doesn't see how it could be any other way. After all, blood coagulates. He says, "When the Roman Cavalry crossed the river of the city on horseback during the assault, their horses waded up to their nostrils in the blood-red water."<sup>22</sup>

Again, I'm not sure we have to speculate on the exact mechanics of the blood flow. Blood coagulates pretty quickly, so God must have provided something to keep it flowing; perhaps rain. But the point is that almost identical language to what was prophesied by the apostle John is recorded as

19 [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/2713668/jewish/Bar-Kochba-Revolt.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2713668/jewish/Bar-Kochba-Revolt.htm)

20 [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/144572/jewish/The-Fall-of-Betar.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/144572/jewish/The-Fall-of-Betar.htm)

21 The Talmud of the Land of Israel says, "It has been taught: R. Eleazar the Great said: There are two streams in the valley of Yadaim, one running in one direction and one in another, and the Sages estimated that [at that time] they ran with two parts water to one of blood." Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: An Academic Commentary to the Second, Third, and Fourth Divisions*, Accordance Electronic ed. 22 vols.; (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 55b. The Babylonia Talmud uses the image of "wine," saying, "It has been taught on Tannaite authority: R. Eliezer the Great says, 'There are two streams in the Valley of Hands, one of them flows in this direction, the other in that direction, and sages made the estimate that they ran with two parts of water to one of wine.'" Jacob Neusner, *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation*

22 <http://hebrewnations.com/articles/akiva/kokhba.html>

having happened, and the words are by rabbis who hated Christianity and did everything they could to exterminate Christianity. And since they were hostile to Christianity, it is highly unlikely that they would have been influenced by the wording of this text since that would have given credence to this prophecy and would have supported Christianity. So I think the evidence is extremely strong for a literal interpretation.

### ***C. Blood continued for 1600 stadia (184 miles)***

And the obvious objection is, "Yeah, right! It flowed for 1600 stadia?" And my response is, "If that is what God says would happen, then it did." I'm not sure it had to be up to the horses' bridles for the whole distance that it flowed, but if it did, here would be my measurements and some possible scenarios of the mechanics of it.

We only have hints from the ancient histories of the actual distances involved. We have a record of two blood streams flowing in different directions from Betar, one of which went all the way to the Mediterranean and the other of which would have flowed to the Jordan basin. I looked on the map and it would be 30 miles one way and about 19 miles the other direction. That's still 124 miles short of 1600 stadia, which is 184 miles.<sup>23</sup> But if all the streams and rivers of Israel were filled with blood in the same way these two were, which seems very likely, that would add up to 184 miles. There you go.

But there is another possibility. I already mentioned one ancient rabbi who claimed that the blood stain could be seen in the ocean all the way to Cyprus. If his estimate was even remotely correct, that is 190 miles and completely fulfills the prophecy. But I think the rivers and streams of Israel all by themselves would fulfill the prophecy quite literally, if you account for one rabbi's estimate of diluted blood - two to one ratio.

Yet another possibility is that this prophecy is showing how many miles the bodies stacked that deep would go. There were certainly enough bodies stacked up around fields to constitute blood up to the horses' bridles for 184 miles. We already saw that the vineyard right near Betar had enough bodies stacked five feet high to constitute a wall 68 miles long. That was just at one of the 50 fortresses and 1000 villages that were massacred. When the other regions where bodies were stacked are add in, and the massive numbers of bodies are accounted for, then you have bloody bodies stacked 5 feet high

---

<sup>23</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 782.

for even more than 184 miles. I favor the literal one of flowing blood, but I am open to this possible interpretation as well. And nobody questions the stacking of bodies.

The most frequent interpretation you find in commentaries is figurative. Since 1600 stadia is the length of Israel,<sup>24</sup> some take it to mean that all of Israel was stained with blood. Certainly that was true. But you know me - I tend to take the text at face value rather than treating it too hurriedly as having used hyperbole.

So this verse ends the central section of this book which shows the victory of Christ in missions and the victory of Christ in judgment. It gives us a hint as to why this world will end up being a converted world by the end of the book, and why there will be numerous judgments of nations along the way. It is a marvelous summary of the trajectory of this book.

## **X. Conclusions**

We have already made some applications of this passage. Let me end with five more. First, I hope this illustrates why we should not be too quick to toss verses under the bus if we don't at first understand them. There is this tendency to view what is possible based upon our own experience and then to dismiss passages like this as hyperbole. While hyperbole is a legitimate figure of speech, I always try to see if a straightforward reading is possible, and it usually is. But even there, I think it is dangerous to interpret what is possible based on our experience or based on science.

Second, I hope you are beginning to see that my interpretation of the text of Revelation is more literal and straightforward than that of the Dispensationalists. Partial Preterism does not need to explain away anything in the text. If the text says something will be soon, we take it as soon. We don't try to make soon mean 2000 years. If the text distinguishes unbelieving Jews and Gentiles then we distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. If the text speaks of swords, horses, and chariots, we don't try to reinterpret them as tanks and airplanes. If beings come up out of the abyss

---

<sup>24</sup> Charles represents several when he says, "A nearer approach to the number in our text is to be found in the Itinerarium of Antoninus, according to which Palestine was said to be 1664 stades from Tyre to El-Arish." R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St John*, vol. 2, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1920), 26. Likewise Beale: "The spreading of blood as far as "1600 stadia" (approximately 184 miles or 300 kilometers) from the city may be an incidental number, though it corresponds with the approximate length of Palestine measured from Tyre to the border of Egypt (1664 stadia)" G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 782.

that look like demons, we don't try to interpret them as cobra helicopters. Etc. etc. Even if you (as Bereans) don't end up believing every point that I teach (and I expect that), I at least hope that this teaching is giving you more and more appreciation for eschatology and confidence in the inerrancy of Scripture.

Third, it is my hope that this chapter has given you more of a sense of urgency about both the imperative of missions as well as the danger of judgment. We should be prepared for both.

Fourth, while I have talked to people who reject the God of the Bible as unloving and harsh, I hope you can see that the persecutors of the church deserved such retribution and that the church should not be shy about asking God for such retribution. It is Biblical. It is consistent with His nature. We cannot make a God in our own image. God is who He is, and we should conform our opinions to His and not vice versa. And it should be our response to be willing to loyally serve Him and love Him rather than criticizing Him for His actions. But certainly it is appropriate to pray the imprecatory Psalms against the persecutors of the church.

Fifth, never forget that God's judgments presuppose His mercies. Praise God! This chapter shows both. It's not just the victory of judgment; it is also the victory of missions. And often one produces the other and vice versa. But in terms of God's mercies, Psalm 2 doesn't guarantee judgment irrespective of a nation's repentance. If our nation will once again Kiss the Son and declare its allegiance to Christ, destruction can be averted. Jeremiah 18 guarantees that the instant a nation repents of its rebellion, God will relent of the judgment pronounced upon it. So glory in the fact that our God of judgment is also a God of mercy and grace, and that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. God is sufficient to reverse things in America if the church will only have faith. So on that note, let's close in prayer.