

THE BARLEY HARVEST

THE 144,000

Introduction

In the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:2-9) the worship unto salvation that exhibited faith in a promised Savior required the shedding of blood.

- Cain, a farmer, brought *produce*, which could have been used for a thank offering – but it wasn't.¹ In his rebellious heart he was actually trying to “force” God to accept his bloodless gift. “Here, take what I produced!”
- As a shepherd, Abel took a select **firstborn** from his flock. With its sacrifice, God's requirements were met.

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4).

In anticipation, the world preceding Christ's first advent looked forward to the atoning, cleansing sacrifice of a Savior by that symbolic shedding of **His** blood. Since the Cross, the acceptance by **faith** of Christ's provisions for salvation and our copying Him through His grace, **activate** those wonderful salvic gifts.

Could this have been the **first time** both brothers had reached a point of success in their agrarian pursuits that they could make those “worship” gifts to God? Perhaps – but without any excuse they knew God's requirements and the consequences of disobedience.²

God's favor was not only on Abel's sacrifice but on Abel himself.

Firstborn

The earliest story of the meaning of the **firstborn** of mankind relates to Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:25-34). The honor of being the first male child meant that he could have many privileges, including receiving a double portion of the father's inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:15-17).

The importance of this designation appears even in ancient secular history with the death of the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:12, 29-30).

- Pharaoh had **also** been informed: *“Thus saith the LORD, **Israel is my son, even my firstborn**”* (Exodus 4:22).

¹ White, Ellen G.; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 71.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

- Therefore, the first male child and, in God's eyes, all of Israel, had special status (even to priestly religious functions).

The word "*first*" honors the family, reverences God by giving Him preference, foreshadows unique issues in salvation and even explains segments of end-time prophecy. The latter is the focus of this narrative.

First Harvest

John was in vision and heard a voice from heaven regarding the blessings of those who die in the Lord (Revelation 14:13). While still looking upward he noted:

- "*I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle*" (Revelation 14:14).
- The sickle represents the ripened harvest. It is further defined by its sharpness. The task will be completed with exactness and precision.

It is end-timed because one like the "*Son of man*" is on a "*cloud*" (Daniel 7:13). The cloud is the sign of His coming (Matthew 24:30).³

The Israelites depended on manna for food while in the wilderness. Once in the Promised Land, that divine miracle ceased. Their lives then became centered on an agrarian culture for survival. Much of Israel's religious rites and symbols then became associated with animals and various crops.

There were two crops that these individuals had that were grain "*sickle*" related.

1. Barley harvest in the early spring at the time of Passover – the "first."
2. Wheat harvest in early summer at the time of the Feast of Weeks, later called Pentecost.

Both represent the final harvest of the saved on which the "*Son of man*" uses a sharp sickle. Grapes and other non-grain fruit that were harvested later symbolized wicked individuals who receive the wrath of God (Revelation 14:18-20).

The Barley Harvest

Before this crop could be harvested God required a sheaf to be waved before the Lord "*on the day after the Sabbath*" (Leviticus 23:10-14). That was known as a "*wave sheaf*." That Sunday was sometimes called the "*Feast of the First Fruits*."

- This occurred in the month of Abib, which meant "**green ears**" – the kernels were near the stage of maturity (Leviticus 2:14). That green-ear stage lasted approximately three weeks.⁴

³ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 640-641.

- Because of the great distances many men had to travel to this required feast, this dedication ceremony occurred while the grain was still “in the green.” **The barley, however, had to be “eared out” or have a full head.**⁵ If they waited for the full ripening, they wouldn’t get to the feast on time and their crops would need harvesting, which would be delayed!

Passover, which had just occurred, represented the shed blood of the Lamb of God. The wave sheaf signified the resurrection or newness of life. That sheaf dedicated the whole new grain harvest to God.⁶

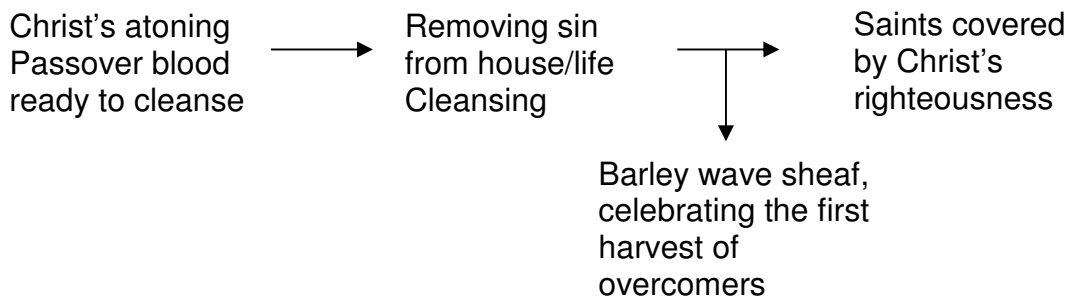
- Barley could not be harvested until fully ripe – and only after the “wave sheaf” task.
- This all happened during the solemn period called Unleavened Bread.
- The sacrificial lamb and the elimination of sin were on their minds as they dedicated this first harvest bundle!

This crop was first planted in the fall, ripened by the early rains and was mature enough to be fully dedicated to God at the time of Passover and Unleavened Bread. It had grown and matured during the winter months.

- It is interesting that flax (grown in Palestine and Egypt) ripened at the same time as barley (Exodus 9:31).
- Flax was used to make **fine linen** called *bad* (H). This was worn by priests when officiating the blood of sacrificial animals and the High Priests on the Day of Atonement. In Daniel 12 the Being above the waters is fully dressed in this fine linen. It is an Atonement picture.

That white linen symbolized purity and Christ’s righteousness (Leviticus 16:4). When the wave sheaf ceremony occurred, that Feast of Unleavened Bread was underway, inviting the cleansing His righteousness offered.

- It was then that all leaven (representing sin) was removed, even from the house.
- A beautiful picture now emerges:



⁴ http://artscalendararticles.mysite.com/blank_17.html

⁵ <https://www.gods-kingdom-ministries.net/teachings/books/the-barley-overcomers/chapter-2-the-barley-harvest/>

⁶ Aune, David E.; *52B World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 6–16* (World Books; Dallas, Texas), 1997, p. 815.

Each **harvest**, again, represents a **different group of living people at the end.**⁷

- The barley ripens first – the 144,000 – as will be shown
 - The wheat next – the great multitude
 - The grapes and other fruit last – the wicked
- } Both saved

Who might this “first crop” of overcomers further represent? By the sheaf being made up of barley still in the green, they appear to still be maturing – but their harvest is anticipated. That whole harvest then represented the **firstfruits** of all the grain harvest. The dedication sheaf suggests that they are fully committed to God.

- “*Firstfruits*” implies that a greater harvest is to come.
- The next would be the wheat, the greater group or multitude.

Paul notes: “*For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches*” (Romans 11:16). If the wave sheaf is made holy, the rest of the barley crop is blessed.⁸ If the whole barley harvest is blessed as the firstfruits, that holiness extends to the later whole.

Firstfruits – Those Resurrected

Another rich meaning of the firstfruits comes from Paul:

- “*But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*” (I Corinthians 15:20).

“This very scene, the resurrection of Christ from the dead, was observed in type by the Jews at one of their sacred feasts, called the feast of the Jews. They came up to the temple when the firstfruits had been gathered in, and held a feast of thanksgiving. The firstfruits of the harvest crop was sacredly dedicated to the Lord.”⁹ It typified a new life, Christ’s resurrection, just like the wave sheaf did!

- If Christ is the firstfruit, who is the greater harvest of those resurrected?

“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Matthew 27:52, 53.

“During His ministry Jesus raised the dead to life. He raised the son of the widow of Nain and Jairus’ daughter and Lazarus. But these were not clothed with immortality. After they were raised they continued to be subject to death and decay. But **those who came forth from the grave at Christ’s resurrection were raised to everlasting life.** They were the multitude of captives who ascended with Him as trophies of His victory over death and the grave....

⁷ <https://www.gods-kingdom-ministries.net/teachings/books/the-barley-overcomers/chapter-2-the-barley-harvest/>

⁸ Moo, Douglas J.; *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI (1996), pp. 698-699.

⁹ White, Ellen G.; *Christ Triumphant*, p. 286.

“These went into the city, and appeared unto many, declaring, ‘Christ has risen from the dead, and we be risen with him.’ Some were terrified at the sight. They bore the most undeniable evidence not only of their own resurrection, but of the resurrection of the crucified Redeemer. After His resurrection, Christ did not show Himself to any save His followers, but testimony in regard to His resurrection was not wanting. It came from various sources, [including] from the five hundred who assembled in Galilee to see their risen Lord. This testimony could not be quenched. The sacred facts of Christ’s resurrection were immortalized.

“Those who had been raised were presented as trophies to the heavenly universe—samples of the resurrection of all who receive and believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. They were a symbol of the final resurrection of the righteous. That same power that has raised Christ from the dead will raise His church—as His bride—and glorify it, with Christ, above all principalities, above all powers, above every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the heavenly courts, the world above....

“As Christ ascends while in the act of blessing His disciples, an army of angels encircles Him as a cloud. **Christ takes with Him the multitude of captives as His trophy.** He will Himself bring to the Father **the firstfruits of them that slept**, to present [them] to God as an assurance that He is conqueror over death and the grave.—Manuscript 115, 1897.¹⁰

Christ was the Firstfruit of those that slept. This resurrected group became the greater harvest of that resurrection and called also the firstfruits of those who would be resurrected at the Second Coming.

This is a small illustration that looks forward to the final resurrection at the end, when the One who holds the keys of the grave returns.

- *“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Revelation 1:18).
- *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice”* (John 5:28).

On resurrection day Christ presented Himself to the Father. His salvic/redemptive mission was accepted. All those, therefore, who have died in the faith are assured to be part of the resurrection harvest. Christ, as its firstfruit, implies that His resurrection sets in motion a series of events that will culminate at His Second Coming (*parousia*).¹¹

Firstfruits unto God – Concepts

In the wave sheaf ceremony, He told the Israelites something special. This rite was also *“that you [Israel] may find acceptance”* (Leviticus 23:10-11 – RSV) or *“on your behalf”* (NET). That’s interesting. This meant that this gesture not only brought blessing to the whole crop, but for the individuals bringing the sheaf!

¹⁰ White, Ellen G.; *Christ Triumphant*, p. 286.

¹¹ Garland, David E.; *I Corinthians* (Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, Michigan), p. 707-708.

- It was a gesture of praise to God for His blessings in the field¹²
- In turn, they would be blessed individually, and further, as a nation that was also labeled as firstfruits unto God.

*“Israel was holy to the Lord, **the firstfruits of his harvest**”* (Jeremiah 2:3 – RSV).

- The barley was a firstfruit crop.
- Israel was a firstfruit harvest called of God – seen as holy to the Lord!
- Israel, as a harvest, is also seen as a barley harvest, the first of His special people.

The wave sheaf represented the whole. Christ’s resurrection represented the “whole” of those who rose with Him and who will rise at the final resurrection. Abraham was called to become a great nation, representing the whole. Israel represented the firstfruits as a people, representing all those on planet earth who will accept Jesus Christ. Expositor White picked up on this concept:

“God had chosen Israel. He had called them to preserve among men the knowledge of His law, and of the symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Saviour. He desired them to be as wells of **salvation to the world**. What Abraham was in the land of his sojourn, what Joseph was in Egypt, and Daniel in the courts of Babylon, the Hebrew people were to be **among the nations**. They were to reveal God to men.

“In the call of Abraham the Lord had said, ‘I will bless thee; ... and thou shalt be a blessing: ... and in thee shall **all families of the earth be blessed.**’ *[that larger harvest]* Genesis 12:2, 3. The same teaching was repeated through the prophets. Even after Israel had been wasted by war and captivity, the promise was theirs, ‘The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.’ Micah 5:7. Concerning the temple at Jerusalem, the Lord declared through Isaiah, ‘Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for **all peoples.**’ Isaiah 56:7, R. V.”¹³

- The barley harvest is the first early “fruit.”
- The world, larger harvest, all earthly families, all peoples are represented later by the **wheat harvest**, the great multitude that will come in from the influence of the “smaller group,” “spiritual Israel,” or the 144,000 made up of those ten tribes (Revelation 7:4).

Firstfruits of the Spirit – A Rain Experience

Paul interestingly notes: *“And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”* (Romans 8:23).

¹² Hartley, John E.; *Word Biblical Commentary, Leviticus*, vol. 4 (Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN; 1992), p. 385.

¹³ White, Ellen G.; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 27.

The apostles and those gifted in the upper room were uniquely endowed with the “firstfruits of the Spirit.” They were the ones who then experienced the harvest firstfruits from the outpouring of God’s Spirit! Paul anticipated the completion of that salvation from their labors.¹⁴

- The first wave of this harvest was realized in Paul’s day:

*“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and **which was preached to every creature** which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Colossians 1:23).*

- The outpouring of the Spirit at that time was a “down payment” of what would occur later (Ephesians 1:4-14).
- Those saints were the “firstfruits” of the Christian church:

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (II Thessalonians 2:13).

*“By his sovereign plan he gave us birth through the message of truth, that we would be a kind of **firstfruits** of all he created” (James 1:18 – NET). In Romans 11:16 the conversion of the Gentiles is seen as another example of the first great harvest.¹⁵*

As the end nears, the work commenced at that time will be consummated with the **convicting power** of the latter rain – a springtime gift.

“The work will be similar to that of the day of Pentecost. As the ‘former rain’ was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the ‘latter rain’ will be given at its close, for the ripening of the harvest. ‘Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord; his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.’ [Hosea 6:3.] ‘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.’ [Joel 2:23.] ‘In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.’ ‘And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ [Acts 2:17, 21.] The great work of the gospel is not to close with less manifestation of the power of God than marked its opening. The prophecies which were fulfilled in the outpouring of the former rain at the opening of the gospel, are again to be fulfilled in the latter rain at its close. Here are ‘the times of refreshing’ to which the apostle Peter looked forward when he said, ‘Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out [in the investigative Judgment], when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus.’ [Acts 3:19, 20.]”¹⁶

¹⁴ Moo, *op. cit.*, pp. 520-521.

¹⁵ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 531.

¹⁶ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

Firstfruits and the Final Gospel Call

The barley harvest has a significant application to the period just prior to the Second Coming. Using the representations previously discussed, we look at that group of people who are set aside, dedicated to God's work and are a special priesthood of servants.

- “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads” (Revelation 14:1). “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being **the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb**” (Revelation 14:4b).
- These were translated at Christ's Second Coming, having gone through the fearful ordeal of the great tribulation.¹⁷
- They were redeemed “from among men,” meaning that they no longer belong to this world.¹⁸

The expression of this 144,000 “firstfruits” suggests that they are the “first portion” of a greater harvest. This symbolically not only includes the wave sheaf and the **first harvest apropos to the barley grain, but the greater** “harvest” at Christ's coming.¹⁹

Since they are redeemed to God and the Lamb, they have been specially consecrated for a divine mission! They are “an elite group of people who have a ‘prestige all their own.’”²⁰

- Interestingly, Jeremiah called Israel a devoted “bride” of the Lord, “the firstfruits of his harvest” (Jeremiah 2:3).
- Similarly, the 144,000, “spiritual Israelites,” are counted as firstfruits of the harvest of humanity at the end of the age.²¹

The 144,000, the barley grain, retain loyalty to Jesus through the final trials (Revelation 14:4-5, 7:14). They grow and mature through winter months. They are “products” of the **early rain**. They are sealed for eternity (Revelation 7:1-4). **They symbolize the beginning of earth's final harvest.**

- Though barley might be dedicated “in the green,” when committed to the Lord, spiritual maturity would continue. The whole mature crop was made sacred by this early dedication.
- Additionally, the offering to God of the first grains, the first fruit, metaphorically sets aside the whole harvest – the wheat multitude.

¹⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Maranatha*, p. 328; cf. Revelation 7:14).

¹⁸ Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Andrews University Press, Berrien Springs, MI; 2002), p. 439.

¹⁹ Johnson, Alan F.; *Revelation*, p. 514, from Gaebelin, Frank E. (gen. ed.); *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. II (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 49530; 1981), p. 539. Aune, *op. cit.*, p. 818.

²⁰ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1995), p. 198.

²¹ LaRondelle, Hans, Th.D.; *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (First Impressions; Sarasota, FL 34243 – 1997), p.

Two Groups of Saved – A Concept

The Bible elevates the word “*saints*” (Revelation 14:12), the “*remnant*” (Revelation 12:17) and the “*saved*” (Romans 10:13). These represent the final group of those fully committed to God. There are other markers that symbolize this collective group: the “*sheep*” at Christ’s coming (Matthew 25:32-33), the group that “*washed their robes*” in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14) and “*thy people*” who are written in the book of life (Daniel 12:1).

- There is another fascinating dimension within God’s Word.
- Certain stories and illustrations cite **two** distinct categories of the saved!

These groups are further understood as one being small and the other large, as we previously alluded to. Examples:

1. Moses and Aaron, a small group; then the vast Hebrew multitude they led.
2. Once in Canaan that multitude, a small group, was to invite the world.

“Through the Jewish nation it was God’s purpose to impart rich blessings to all peoples. Through Israel the way was to be prepared for the diffusion of His light **to the whole world**. The nations of the world, through following corrupt practices, had lost the knowledge of God. Yet in His mercy God did not blot them out of existence. He purposed to give them opportunity for becoming acquainted with Him through His church. He designed that the principles revealed through His people should be the means of restoring the moral image of God in man.”²²

3. Joshua the High Priest and governor Zerubbabel led 50,000 people back to Canaan after the Babylonian captivity.
4. The twelve apostles became the catalyst for the birth of the Christian church.

“The commission that Christ gave to the disciples, they fulfilled. As these messengers of the cross went forth to proclaim the gospel, there was such a revelation of the glory of God as had never before been witnessed by mortal man. By the co-operation of the divine Spirit, the apostles did **a work that shook the world. To every nation** was the gospel carried in a single generation.”²³

Notice that there is a sequence to these illustrations. The small group comes first, the larger follows. This is further illustrated by:

- The small and large horn on the ram (Daniel 8:3), representing the 144,000 and the great multitude at the time of the end (8:17, 19).
- The Ulai River in Shushan (Daniel 8:2-3) and the Hiddekel River to the east of the Euphrates (Daniel 10:4), the 144,000 and the great multitude at the end.

²² White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 286.

²³ White, Ellen G.; *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 593.

A similar parallel can be seen in the harvest imagery. A collective picture is seen in John's Revelation:

- “*And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. **After this** I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Revelation 7:4, 9).*

The barley, the 144,000, is followed by the wheat harvest, the great multitude.

Conclusion

The **grain harvest** represents those who will be saved. It was during the **winter months** that the seed for the grain harvests was sown. The **early rain** came during that time.

- It is when difficulties come to people who are under conviction that God's Spirit begins to bring strength and courage.
- The “winter experience” toughens the plant; the rains help to mature heads of the “grain.”

The **dedication wave sheaf** can even be presented to the Lord while the kernel is still in the green. By that early commitment, however, the whole crop is blessed as it continues to mature.

- The 144,000, those barley grains, are planted in soil enriched with divine nutrients in the fall of the year.
- During the chill of winter the growth begins and continues.
- In the spring this grain is ready for harvest – a new life has emerged to bring “spiritual nutrition” and life to others. The 144,000 are ready at Passover to step out on earth's final mission! Christ comes three and a half years later, in the fall.²⁴

The “barley people” will then help bring the “wheat” people to maturity – all then under the latter rain. By early summer the sharp sickle can be put to that final grain “crop.”

During which fall might that barley/early rain experience **begin** to occur for God's final witnesses to the world? Could it be this coming fall?

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EndTime Issues..., Number 214, June 7, 2018

²⁴ White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 399-400.