

The Grapes of Wrath

Did you ever wonder about the title of John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*? The book focuses on the hardships of tenant farmers during the Great Depression, but what exactly are "grapes of wrath"?

The book's title was inspired by a line from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," composed by abolitionist Julia Ward Howe in 1861:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord: He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.

But that line in itself makes little sense unless one realizes that it is an allusion to Revelation 14:19:

The angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.

The biblical verse describes divine judgment meted out on those who have oppressed and exploited others: they will themselves be oppressed by God's avenging angel. The vision of judgment day as an awful, final harvest also recalls the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43.