

The Book of Revelation

Week #18 – Rejoicing in Heaven

I. REVIEW - THE FALL OF BABYLON

The whole of Chapter 18 is a series of laments over the death of the harlot-city Babylon.

The lament proclaims the fall of Jerusalem – the new Babylon - and celebrates God's judgments for her crimes.

Ancient Babylon destroyed the earthly temple; Jerusalem destroyed the true temple, Jesus Christ [cf John 2]. She will now fall as original Babylon fell.

A. *Babylon Has Fallen*

The reason for the fall of Babylon [Rome/Jerusalem] is not merely her persecution of Christians, but her immorality [verses 2-3]. She has become the "*haunt of every foul spirit.*"

Like the drug and pornography lords of today, the merchants of the city have let their lust for money draw them into her dissolute and unrestrained life-style, abandoning all social responsibility.

B. *Leave the City*

After the announcement of the imminent destruction of the city, the Christians are urged by a voice from heaven to leave the city, "*Come out of her,*" before it is destroyed, lest, sharing in her sins, they also share in her punishment.

C. *Vengeance Belongs to God Alone*

The instruction to execute God's judgment on the Evil City is an instruction to the angel, the divine instrument of justice, not to human beings:

- Because vengeance belongs to God, and to God alone.

But the judgment of the city is a "punishment that fits the crime."

- Just as the harlot-city sought to kill the saints, now she herself will be destroyed.
- Just as Babylon prided herself as unbreakable, so now she will be broken.
- And just as she indulged herself in illicit pleasures, so now she will face painful judgment.

All pride will one day be humiliated. The harlot-city's supreme sin has been pride.

D. The Lament of the Kings, Merchants, and Sailors

Three groups mourn the destruction of the city:

1. The kings [18:9];
2. The merchants [18:11]; and
3. The sailors [18:17].

Although each group mourns at the sight of the city's judgment, they mourn not so much for the city itself, but for the loss of the hedonistic pleasures, luxury, and financial gain it provided them.

E. Rejoicing amid Lamenting

On the other hand, the prophets and saints rejoice at the destruction of the evil city that killed them. God has avenged their blood as he promised in Revelation 6.

Jesus' promise that Jerusalem would finally be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets killed there is finally fulfilled [Luke 11:49-51]

F. The Final Desolation

The image of the city being cast as a giant millstone into the sea vividly recalls Christ's warning:

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea [Matt 18:6].

Because the city seduced the nations, and led them into sin by its scandalous conduct, it is cast into the sea like a millstone.

G. Reasons for Jerusalem's Destruction

In Rev. 18:24 the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem, and, indeed, any evil city, are given:

- She is being punished not only the blood of prophets and the holy ones, but for all the innocent who have been slain on the earth.
- The shedding of innocent blood, no matter to whom it belongs, cries out to God for vengeance [Gen 4:10].

And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground."

H. Application

In the great cities of North America and Europe, the innocent blood of millions of preborn children has been crying out to God for a generation, just as Abel's blood cried out to God.

Woe to the great cities of North America and Europe. Just as we have shed the blood of innocent children, so too, will our blood be shed.

II. VICTORY SONG AND WEDDING FEAST

A. Overview

In the description of the total destruction of Babylon, we hear the words,

*"Rejoice over her, O heaven,
O saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!"*

Now begins the rejoicing which was called for. The righteous rejoice to see their enemy overwhelmed.

The praises they sing of God end in three loud "Hallelujahs." In verse 6-8, they welcome the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the imminent marriage of the Lamb.

B. Hallelujah

This is the first and only time that the word "Hallelujah" [Hebrew] or "Alleluia" [Greek] appears in the New Testament.

It is a Hebrew term meaning “Praise the LORD” or Praise Yahweh – *hallel* meaning “to praise,” and *jah*, short for *Yahweh*. It is used especially in the Psalms.

Psalms 111-118 are called the Hallel Psalms, because they function as praise for the coming and triumph of the Messiah.

The Hallel psalms were used during the Passover meal and were prayed [or sung] by Jesus and the apostles in the Upper Room before entering the garden of Gethsemane.

The Church uses the *Alleluia* usually to express to God its joy and praise at the resurrection of Christ.

It is used particularly during the Easter season.

Read: Revelation 19:1-5

[1] After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying,

"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

[2] for his judgments are true and just;

he has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication,

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

[3] Once more they cried, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

[4] And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"

[5] And from the throne came a voice crying, "Praise our God, all you his servants,

you who fear him, small and great."

C. First Hallelujah - The Angels Praise God

The praise begins with a shout of a vast multitude of angels in heaven singing “Hallelujah.”

God is first praised first because *salvation*, *glory*, and *power* belong to him.

- The *salvation* of God should awaken the *gratitude* of man;
- the *glory* of God should awaken the *reverence* of man;
- the *power* of God, always exercised in love, should awaken the *trust* of man.

- *Gratitude, reverence, and trust* are the foundational, basic elements of real praise.

God is then praised because he has exercised his *true and just* judgment on the great harlot. He has avenged the blood of his servants in answer to the pleas and petitions of the martyrs made in Rev 6:6-10.

Judgment is the inescapable consequence of sin, and God's judgments are *true and just* for three reasons:

- He alone can see the inmost thoughts and desires of any person;
- He alone has that purity that can judge without prejudice;
- He alone has the wisdom to find the right judgment and the power to apply it.

D. Second Hallelujah – The Church and Nature Praise God

The angelic host sings a second Hallelujah. They rejoice that the smoke of Babylon rises for ever and ever - never again shall she rise from her ruins.

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures add their praise. The twenty-four elders represent the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, and therefore stand for the whole Church.

The four living creatures, representing a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle respectively, stand for two things: for all that is bravest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in nature – and for the cherubim.

Hence a song of praise from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures is a *Te Deum* from the whole of the Church and the whole of nature.

III. THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Read: Revelation 19:6-9

[6] Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

[7] Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
[8] it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and
pure" -- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.
[9] And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to
the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words
of God."*

A. A Wedding Feast

All this celebration and rejoicing takes place in the context of a “supper,” – the marriage supper of the Lamb. It is a wedding feast celebrating the final union of the bride with her Spouse in glory.

God is praised not only for the destruction and defeat of evil, but also for the definitive establishment of the Kingdom of God; a kingdom of love symbolized by a marriage feast.

The Lamb is the groom and the Church is the bride! Christ and the Church are forever united in a covenant of marital love.

This image of the relationship of God and his people as a marriage goes far back into the Old Testament. Again and again God, through the prophets, declares that Israel is his bride.

In one sense, this is a present reality for the Church, who is joined to the Bridegroom by the grace of Baptism [Eph 5:22-32], but it is also a future hope, in as much as that union will reach perfection in the glory of heaven.

B. Basis of Marriage

In Ephesians 5:21-33 Paul speaks of the relationship of Christ to his Church, which is symbolized by the relationship of husband and wife.

A real marriage must consist of the following four things: *love, intimate communion, joy, and fidelity*, which must also characterize the relationship between the Christian and Christ.

1. *Love.* A loveless marriage is a contradiction in terms.
2. *Intimate Communion.* A communion so intimate that husband and wife become one flesh and bring forth new life. The relationship between the Christian and Christ must be the closest in all life and bring forth new life.
3. *Joy.* There is nothing like the joy of loving and of being loved. If Christianity does not bring joy, it brings nothing.
4. *Fidelity.* No marriage can last without fidelity, and the Christian must be as faithful to Jesus Christ as Jesus Christ is to him.

C. The Bride Makes Herself Ready

It was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" -- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

The bride has made herself ready by the blood of the martyrs and the righteous deeds of all the saints.

There is a profound contrast between the “spotless” Bride, who wears her “righteous deeds” as garments, and the harlot who was “the mother . . . of the earth’s abominations” [17:5].

The righteous deeds of the saints represent a priestly offering, which, in turn, makes the Church ready for her marriage to the Lamb.

In this passage of Revelation we see part of the Scriptural basis for the Catholic understanding of salvation.

- Contrary to Luther, Scripture teaches us that we are not saved by faith alone.
- The Church’s glory is revealed when she is clothed with her “righteous deeds” [Rev 19:8].

D. Then Comes Marriage

The intimate communion in marriage, which occurs when the two become “one flesh,” is a picture of Christ and the Church.

- *Christ unites himself to the Church so that His life is reproduced in her.*
- *The Church, therefore, becomes “Mother Church.”*

Furthermore, just as husband and wife are united in an intimate communion of one flesh, so too the Church is wedded to Christ at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, which is the Eucharist, where she enters into Holy Communion with the Flesh of our Lord” [Coming Soon, pg. 230].

E. Blessed Are Those . . .

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

As instructed by the angel, John tells those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb to count themselves blessed. They are blessed indeed and God guarantees the truth of this assurance.

At Mass the priest makes a similar proclamation before distributing Holy Communion: *“This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Happy [blessed] are those who are called to his [the Lord’s] supper.”*

- The Mass on earth is the presentation of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In his book *The Lamb’s Supper*, Scott Hahn says:

“The climax of the Apocalypse, then, is the communion of the Church and Christ: the marriage supper of the Lamb [Rev 19:9]. From that moment, man rises up from the earth to worship in heaven.”

And the very next thing Revelation speaks about is worship – the worship of God.

F. Worship God

[10] Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The worship of any created thing is, of course, idolatry.

John falls down at the feet of the angel to worship him. John is not an idolater, but he is overcome by the heavenly glory radiating from the angel. However, the angel rebukes him for falling at his feet, saying, “Worship God.”

In Rev 1:17, John fell down at the feet of Jesus and was not rebuked. You can't worship an angel – he is not God. But you can worship Jesus – He is.

G. Prophetic Mission

John then reminds Christians that they have a prophetic mission: to bear witness to Jesus by spreading his teaching by word and deed.

IV. THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

[11] Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

[12] His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed which no one knows but himself.

[13] He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

[14] And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses.

[15] From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

[16] On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of kings and Lord of lords.

A. The Conquering Christ

The phrase “then I saw heaven opened” introduces a new section. John now turns to see the final effects of the judgment on the harlot-city.

Christ appears as a warrior Messiah, riding into battle on a white horse with a full cavalry of angels trailing behind him. His mission is to execute judgment on the beast and the false prophet who allied themselves against him and his followers.

This is the battle of Armageddon, for which preparations were made in Rev 16:14-16.

The white horse is a symbol of the conqueror, because it was on a white horse that a Roman general rode when he celebrated a military victory.

B. Faithful and True

John does not tell us directly who the rider is; instead he calls him “faithful and true.”

This is a reference to the inaugural vision of Rev 1:5, where Jesus was called the “faithful witness” and to Rev 3:14 where he is called “the faithful and true witness.”

- Christ is *Faithful*: This means that He is absolutely to be trusted;
- Christ is *True*: “True” here means more than truthful. It means reliable, loyal, and faithful to the covenant promises with his people.

C. The Word of God

[13] He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

Here are two further pictures of the conquering Christ.

The blood on the Victor’s robe is not his own, but that of his enemies, whom he treads as in a wine press.

The sword coming out of his mouth is a reference to the Word of God [cf Heb 4:12]. God’s word is powerful, alive, and active.

It was by his word that God created the earth and the heavens and everything in them.

The word of God, said Jeremiah, is like a hammer that shatters the rock in pieces [Jer 23:29].

Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?

V. THE BEAST AND ITS ARMIES DEFEATED

After describing Christ and his army, the text deals with preparations for the last battle, and its outcome. Jesus condemns his enemies to a dreadful destiny. The judgment in question is spiritual, leading to the eternal lake of fire.

Read: Revelation 19:17-21

[17] Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, "Come, gather for the great supper of

God,

[18] to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

[19] And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army.

[20] And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.

[21] And the rest were slain by the sword of him who sits upon the horse, the sword that issues from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh

A. The Supper of God

This is a grim picture of birds of prey being summoned to come from all over the sky to glut themselves on the corpses of the slain, in anticipation of the final battle. The gruesome imagery has its origin in Ezekiel 39:17-22.

The invitation to the birds [vultures] to come to the supper of God, in which the wicked will be devoured, is a parody of the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

B. The Vanquished

The vultures are summoned to:

...eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great."

The wicked are divided into seven categories, recalling the seven-fold judgments of God throughout the book. They include people of every type and description who followed the beast and the false prophet, that is, who served the forces of evil they represent.

C. The Final Battle

[19] And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who sits upon the horse and against his army.

All the forces hostile to God assemble together led by the beast and the "kings of the earth."

In Rev 17-18 the battle is fought between earthly powers resulting in earthly consequences, e.g., the earthly city is burned down when the “ten horns” and the beast destroy the harlot-city.

D. The Beast and False Prophet Defeated

[20] And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet . . . These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur.

Here, the judgment is described in much more spiritual terms, except for the birds. The battle is fought by God’s armies from heaven [19:14, 19]; the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire [19:20]; the wicked are slain by the sword that comes out of Christ’s mouth.

Although this battle is more spiritual, it is possible that historical events of the first century lie in the background.

For instance the overthrow of the beast may be linked to the suicide of Nero in AD 68. Not only was Nero’s name the number of the beast, but he had waged a violent war against the Church.

Likewise the judgment of the false prophet may be linked to the massacre of Judea’s religious leadership in the first Jewish revolt against Rome [AD 67-70].

Understood in this way, this is a vision of divine punishment on the persecutors of Christianity. The alliance that was made between the representative of the beast [Pilate, the Roman Governor], and the false prophet [the rulers of the Jews] to kill Jesus — is now judged.

Ultimately, however, it foreshadows the final battle of history, when Christ returns and destroys the powers of evil once and for all.

E. The Lake of Fire

The lake of fire and brimstone, which will appear again in Rev 20:10 and 14 as the final destination of the powers of evil, is hell, called *Gehenna* elsewhere in the New Testament.

Eventually the devil himself will be hurled into its flames for all eternity [Rev. 20:10; CCC 1033-37].

IV. HELL - Catechism of the Catholic Church

1033 We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him.

But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbour or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death.

Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."⁶¹² Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren.⁶¹³

To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."

1034 Jesus often speaks of "Gehenna" of "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost.⁶¹⁴

Jesus solemnly proclaims that he "will send his angels, and they will gather . . . all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire,"⁶¹⁵ and that he will pronounce the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!"⁶¹⁶

1035 The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity.

Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire."⁶¹⁷

The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

1036 The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."⁶¹⁸

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth."⁶¹⁹

1037 God predestines no one to go to hell;⁶²⁰ for this, a wilful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end.

In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance":⁶²¹

Father, accept this offering
from your whole family.
Grant us your peace in this life,
save us from final damnation,
and count us among those you have chosen.⁶²²