

# The Book of Revelation

## Week #19 – The Thousand Years

### I. REVIEW – WEEK 18

#### A. Victory Song and Wedding Feast

The righteous rejoice to see Babylon, the Evil City [Jerusalem/Rome] finally crushed.

The angels praise God with loud “Hallelujahs” because the Kingdom of God has come, and the marriage feast of the Lamb is about to begin.

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

- The *salvation* of God should fill us with *gratitude*;
- the *glory* of God should awaken *reverence* in us;
- the *power* of God, always exercised in love, should enable us to *trust* God unconditionally.
- *Gratitude, reverence, and trust* are the foundational, basic elements of real praise.

God is then praised because his judgment on the great harlot is *true and just*.

- He has avenged the blood of his servants in answer to the pleas and petitions of the martyrs made in Rev 6:6-10.

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.

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.

### ***B. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb***

#### **Revelation 19:6-9**

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.
- 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.

### ***C. 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 four things: *love, intimate communion, joy, and fidelity.*
- These things 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.

**D. The Bride Makes Herself Ready**

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

- 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].

**E. 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].*

**F. Blessed Are Those . . .**

John says that those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb are blessed indeed.

- At Mass the priest makes a similar proclamation before distributing Holy Communion: "*Happy [blessed] are those who are called to his supper.*"
- How blessed do you feel when invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and partake of Holy Communion?

**G. The Beast and Its Armies defeated**

After describing Christ and his heavenly army we now come to the preparations for the last battle, and its outcome.

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

The battle is fought by God's armies from heaven. The beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown into the lake of fire [hell] - the final destination of the powers of evil.

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

## **II. THE THOUSAND YEARS**

The description of the "thousand year reign" in chapter 20 of Revelation traditionally has been one of the most difficult parts of the Apocalypse to understand.

### **A. Millenarianism or Chiliasm**

This passage has given rise to Millenarianism [or *Chiliasm*] from the Greek word for one thousand. It speaks of Satan as being bound and Christ reigning with His saints for a thousand years (a millennium).

Millennialism maintains that Christ will return to the earth in order to establish an earthly kingdom that will last for one thousand years [understood literally].

At his coming the martyrs and all the faithful will come to life in a first resurrection. For one thousand years they will share Jesus' royal priesthood in a messianic kingdom on earth.

Toward the end of that time and after a bitter struggle, Satan will be defeated by Christ in the last judgment. Sinners will then rise from the grave to be plunged into the pool of fire ["the second death"].

Meanwhile the elect enter the eternal happiness of heaven.

Many Protestants understand this 1,000-year reign literally and believe that it will occur on earth in the future.

They also cite 1 Thess. 4:17 and try to make an historical connection between the rapture - when Christians are taken up - and this millennium.

There are three basic interpretations regarding Rev. 20 and the millennium – pre-millennialism, post-millennialism, and amillennialism.

What does the Catholic Church teach regarding millennialism?

**B. Catholic Position**

The Church has traditionally followed and taught the interpretation commonly known as *amillennialism*, which means that the reign of God began with Christ's death and resurrection and the thousand years is a figurative number to describe the reign of His Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 664, 668-682).

**C. Amillennialism**

*The Church of today, of the present, is the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven [St. Augustine]*

Amillennialism interprets the thousand year reign of Christ in Rev. 20 symbolically. (When John refers to binding a spirit like Satan with chains, the language can only be figurative).

According to this view, the millennium is not an earthly golden age of total Christianization, but rather the present period of Christ's rule through His Church:

*“Behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Lk. 17:21).*

Christ reigns right now with His saints in Heaven, and the Church on earth participates in that reign in a way that will be fulfilled, fully realized, or completed at the Second Coming.

The Church, the Kingdom, the Israel of God, and the millennium all refer to the same thing. Until the fulfillment of the Kingdom already planted (Lk.13:18-19), the righteous and the evildoers will remain on earth.

It has clearly been more than a thousand years since Jesus' reign through the Church began. The number 1,000 is often used figuratively in scriptural writings to show a vast number conveying completeness.

In the words of St. Peter:

*With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day (cf. 2 Pt. 3:8-10).*

To God in eternity all time is present, and we must understand 1,000 figuratively, remembering the popular phrase “God works in His Own time.”

But what of Satan being bound during this period? Amillennialists believe that Satan is already bound in a sense because he cannot prevent the spread of the Gospel, which liberates people from his control throughout the world.

Although Satan can tempt us as individuals, he is unable to force anyone's will away from God (Rom 8:38-39), which means he is already hindered in deceiving the nations.

Jesus says that the strong man (Satan) must be bound before his house can be plundered, i.e., before Jesus can rescue souls from Satan's grip. He further says,

*“If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you”* (Mt. 12:28-29, Lk. 11:20).

So the binding of Satan and the coming of God's Kingdom must have already taken place in some sense.

The Kingdom's full inauguration came through Christ's death and resurrection, and that reality became more manifest to the world on Pentecost through the Church (CCC 1076).

Although Catholics do not generally call their eschatological view “amillennialism,” this is the Church's teaching regarding Rev. 20, a teaching, as always, in harmony with the scriptural data (CCC 668-682).

#### **D. Summary**

Traditionally, Catholics have understood the “one thousand year reign” as referring to the age of the Church. In this interpretation the “thousand” years are understood symbolically.

The thousand years stands for the time Christ would reign through the Church – from the time of his first coming to the time of his Second Coming.

Satan is restrained by Christ acting through the Church and the sacraments.

### **III. THE BINDING OF SATAN**

#### **Read: Revelation 20:1-3**

*[1] Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain.*

*[2] And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,*

*[3] and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years were ended. After that he must be loosed for a little while.*

#### **A. Overview**

The victory of the Lamb is manifested by the fact that Jerusalem, the great harlot, has been destroyed [chap 18], and the beast and its prophet are overcome [chap 19].

There remains the dragon whom we saw in chapter 12, and whose defeat marks the final outcome of the war referred to in that chapter where he had gone off to make war on the woman's children – the Christians.

#### **B. Battle between Satan and God**

The battle between Satan and God is described in two scenes.

- 1) The first tells of how Satan is brought under control and deprived of his power for a time – the binding of Satan [vv. 1-3].
- 2) The second describes his last assault on the Church and what happens to him in the end [vv. 7-10].

Between these two scenes comes the reign of Christ and his followers for a “thousand” years.

#### **C. Satan is Bound**

The fifth trumpet involved the descent of an angel from heaven to open the abyss, so that the angel of the abyss and his demons could torture the inhabitants of the earth [9:1-11].

Here, after the victory of the glorified Christ over the beast and the false prophet, another angel descends in order to confine the beast's patron, Satan [the dragon], in the abyss for a thousand years.

The period during which Satan is held captive coincides with the reign of Christ and his saints. This contrasts with the “little while” during which he is given freedom to make a final assault on the Church at the end of the “thousand” years.

During the thousand years, the devil is like a big vicious dog on a chain. He can snarl and growl and make a lot of noise, but he can only bite you if you get too close.

#### **IV. THE FIRST RESURRECTION**

##### **Read: Revelation 20:4-6**

*[4] Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgment was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*

*[5] The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection.*

*[6] Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and they shall reign with him a thousand years.*

##### **A. Thrones for Judgment**

The power to judge belongs to Jesus Christ in his own right because he has been given it by the Father [Jn 5:22; 9:39; Acts 10:42].

However, Jesus gives a share in his power to the Apostles, whom he promised would sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel [Mt. 19:28]. All other Christians will also share in Christ's power [1 Cor 6:2-3].

Those seated on the thrones, then, are probably the Apostles [see Mt. 19:12, Lk 22:29-30], the martyrs, and all those who have suffered for the sake of Christ and have not worshipped the beast.

Those who have been faithful to Christ will receive the authority to judge. This is the first judgment; the second, general judgment is described in 20:11-15.

### **B. The First Resurrection**

*They came to life, and reigned with Christ a thousand years*

The meaning of the two resurrections is uncertain. There are differing interpretations as to what the “first resurrection” means.

The first may refer to a spiritual resurrection to new life through faith and Baptism [Jn 5:25; Rom 6:3-4], followed by a bodily resurrection after the return of Christ.

Or perhaps both resurrections are bodily, the first being that of Christ and the saints of the Old Testament [Mt 27:52-53], and the second involving the rest of humanity [Rev 20:12-13; 1 Cor 15:22].

Michael Barber in *Coming Soon* pg 249 says:

“The first resurrection is not, therefore, the bodily resurrection of the saints at the end of time. The first resurrection is the ascent of the righteous souls to God at death. This is clear from the fact that the “first resurrection” is linked with the “first death” (that is), physical death” [Rev 2:10-11].

“The first resurrection is a special reward for those who were faithful unto death. They especially share the rule of Christ” [JBC 63-60].

Only those who have died and suffered for the faith are to be raised from the dead at the first resurrection. The general resurrection takes place after the thousand years are over.

### **C. Second Death**

The second death is the spiritual death of hell [20:14]. The first death is physical or bodily death [20:5].

## **V. SATAN IS LOOSED**

**Read: Revelation 20:7-8**

*[7] And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be loosed from his prison*

*[8] and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea.*

God will give the devil particularly free reign during the last days, and the Church will pass through a great tribulation similar to that predicted by Jesus before the destruction of Jerusalem [Mt. 24:21-22].

At the end of the thousand years there will be a final but brief outbreak of consummate evil [see 2 Thess 2:6-10], again in the form of deception and seduction [20:8]

The devil will assemble the nations for a final attack on God.

### **A. Gog and Magog**

John draws on Ezekiel [chaps 38-39] to describe the final eschatological battle.

Gog and Magog are names that symbolize the coalition of evil nations summoned by Satan to besiege the Church in the last days.

In Ezekiel, Gog and Magog symbolize those who fight against the Davidic messiah and destroy Jerusalem. Gog and Magog later became symbols in the Jewish tradition for the enemies of the Messiah.

These two symbols, then, represent those who persecute Jesus and God's people. They set out to destroy both Christ and the restored Israel [the Church] just as Gog and Magog did.

## **VI. THE LAKE OF FIRE**

### **Read: Revelation 20:9-10**

*[9] And they marched up over the broad earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city; but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,*

*[10] and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

### **A. The Camp of the Saints**

The pilgrim Church is here described as the “camp of the saints” calling to mind the camps of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness to the Promised land.

The beloved city is also another image for the Church, the New Jerusalem, although some commentators read this literally as an attack against the city of Jerusalem.

***B. Fire from Heaven***

As the Church, the saints, [and Jerusalem] are about to be annihilated by the forces of evil [Gog and Magog], a final heavenly intervention in the form of fire from heaven comes down and destroys the political powers.

The devil is then cast into the lake of fire [hell] to join the beast and the false prophet, where they will be tormented for all eternity.