

# **The Book of Revelation**

## **Week #20 – The New Heaven and the New Earth**

### **I. REVIEW – WEEK 19 – THE THOUSAND YEARS**

#### ***A. Millenarianism***

Chapter 20 of Revelation has given rise to Millenarianism. It speaks of Satan as being bound and Christ reigning with His saints for a thousand years (a millennium).

Millenarianism [or Millennialism] teaches 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.

What does the Catholic Church teach regarding millennialism?

#### ***B. Catholic Position***

The Church has traditionally interpreted the thousand year reign spiritually.

- The reign of God began with Christ's death and resurrection and the thousand years is a symbolic number to describe the reign of His Church (CCC 664, 668-682).

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

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

- 1) In the first Satan is brought under control and deprived of his power for a time – the binding of Satan.
- 2) The second describes his last assault on the Church and what happens to him in the end.

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

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

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.

### **D. The First Resurrection**

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

There are differing interpretations as to what the “first resurrection” means.

It may refer to a spiritual resurrection to new life through faith and Baptism, followed by a bodily resurrection after the return of Christ.

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. It is the ascent of the righteous souls to God at death.

“The first resurrection is a special reward for those who were faithful unto death.”

### **E. Satan is Loosed**

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].

***F. Gog and Magog***

The devil will assemble the nations, Gog and Magog, for a final attack on God.

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

***G. Intervention from Heaven***

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

***H. The Last Judgment***

Then comes the Last Judgment and the resurrection of the dead when the souls of the dead are rejoined to their bodies [the second resurrection] to stand before Christ the Judge.

Their secrets will be revealed, and every thought, word, and deed catalogued in the heavenly books will be reviewed.

***I. The Book of Life***

All men will be judged according to their works. John describes this by using the metaphor of two books.

- One of these records the actions of men;
- The other contains the names of the saints destined for glory [the book of life].

The book of life will be opened for the final roll call of the righteous at the Last Judgment.

***J. Death and Hades***

Finally, *Death* and *Hades*, who personify the satanic forces that bring death and destruction into the world, are thrown into the fire.

- These evil monsters who have themselves destroyed so many are in the end themselves destroyed.

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**II. THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH**

***A. Overview***

Now that all the forces of evil, including death, have been defeated, John now turns to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

The theme is the new heaven, the new earth, and the heavenly city of God, the New Jerusalem. Nine elements of the old order disappear: the sea [21:1], tears, death, mourning, weeping, pain [21:4], the unclean [21:27], all that is under God's curse [22:3], and night [22:5].

Of these, the sea and the night symbolized in Jewish tradition the primeval chaos out of which God created.

Thus the climax of the book shows a new world inhabited by a new race – the New Jerusalem; a world guaranteed by the Word of God to last forever [21:5-8].

The final vision of the book unveils the Bride of the Lamb, the heavenly city of Jerusalem, which awaits the saints. It depicts the state of glory in terms of:

- a marital union [21:2],
- a holy city [21:10],
- a divine temple [21:22], and
- a garden of paradise [22:2].

The New Jerusalem is a wonderful city of great beauty ruled over by God the Father and Christ.

**Read: Revelation 21:1-3**

*[1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

*[2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;*

*[3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them;"*

**III. THE NEW CREATION**

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.*

The new creation does not necessarily involve the physical destruction of the universe. It does imply a total remaking of it according to God's perfect plan.

The dream of a new heaven and a new earth permeated Jewish thought. In Isaiah 65:17 God says:

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.*

The new heavens and the new earth [the future Kingdom of God] are not entirely new, but they have been entirely renewed.

- John sees all creation transformed and made radiant with the glory of God.

It is no longer a world subject to death and decay, suffering from the ravishing effects of human sin. Sorrow will be no more; sin will be vanquished; darkness will come to an end.

- Perfect peace reigns in the new heaven and the new earth.

Scripture nowhere indicates what form the new heaven and the new earth will take.

However, what is clear is that there will be a radical "renewal" of the present cosmos, contaminated as it is by human sin and the powers of evil.

This renewal of the cosmos is described in *Gaudium et Spes* and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

**A. Vatican II - Gaudium et Spes**

39. We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed.

As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart.

Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.

**B. Catechism of the Catholic Church**

**VI. THE HOPE OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH**

**1042** At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ, glorified in body and soul. The universe itself will be renewed:

*The Church . . . will receive her perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things. At that time, together with the human race, the universe itself, which is so closely related to man and which attains its destiny through him, will be perfectly re-established in Christ.<sup>631</sup>*

**1043** Sacred Scripture calls this mysterious renewal, which will transform humanity and the world, "new heaven and a new earth."<sup>632</sup> It will be the definitive realization of God's plan to bring under a single head "all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth."<sup>633</sup>

**1044** In this new universe, the heavenly Jerusalem, God will have his dwelling among men.<sup>634</sup> "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."<sup>635</sup>

**1045** *For man*, this consummation will be the final realization of the unity of the human race, which God willed from creation and of which the pilgrim Church has been "in the nature of sacrament."<sup>636</sup> Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, "the holy city" of God, "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."<sup>637</sup> She will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community.<sup>638</sup> The beatific vision, in which God opens himself in an inexhaustible way to the elect, will be the ever-flowing well-spring of happiness, peace, and mutual communion.

**1046** *For the cosmos*, Revelation affirms the profound common destiny of the material world and man:

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God . . . in hope because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>639</sup>*

**1047** The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, "so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just," sharing their glorification in the risen Jesus Christ.<sup>640</sup>

**1048** *"We know neither the moment of the consummation of the earth and of man, nor the way in which the universe will be transformed. The form of this world, distorted by sin, is passing away, and we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, in which happiness will fill and surpass all the desires of peace arising in the hearts of men."*<sup>641</sup>

### **C. And The Sea Was No More**

The "sea" was a symbol for evil – it was the abode of death and evil. Its passing away describes God's final victory over Satan.

## **IV. THE NEW JERUSALEM**

*[2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband;*

The Holy City, the *New Jerusalem*, describes both heaven and Christ's Bride, the Church. Its builder and maker is God. John sees the heavenly city as a bride dressed for her wedding.

### **A. The Inhabitants of the City**

The new creation, symbolized by the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, is inhabited by the entire assembly of the saved, the entire people of God.

*Those who are united with Christ will form the community of the redeemed, "the holy city" of God, "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."<sup>637</sup> She will not be wounded any longer by sin, stains, self-love, that destroy or wound the earthly community [CCC 1045].*

### **B. Comes Down from Heaven**

The *New Jerusalem* comes down from heaven to be with the saints. Why does it come down from heaven? Would it not be sufficient for the city to remain in heaven and the saints to be taken up there?

It touches down to earth so that the worshipping Church can join in the heavenly liturgy of the angels.

The new creation is a wedding of heaven and earth.

Though the church the people of God on earth already share in heavenly realities. God crowns his creation at the end by bringing heaven and earth together.

### **C. God Dwells among Men**

*"Behold, the dwelling of God is with men.*

We have a foretaste of this in the Eucharistic banquet, where our heavenly High Priest is present under signs and symbols. The Mass is heaven on earth, where the heavenly Jerusalem descends into our Churches and God dwells with his people.

### **D. Death and Mourning Pass Away**

*[4] he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."*

Fellowship with God in the New Jerusalem means that there will be no suffering – physical, emotional, or spiritual [21:4]. The “former things, the “old order,” the “former world” the disordered world of sin and chaos, has passed away.

### **E. All Things New**

#### **Read: Revelation 21:5-6**

*[5] And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

*[6] And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment."*

For the first and only time in the entire book God himself speaks. He is the God who is able to make all things new. These words are to be written down and remembered for they are absolutely true and trustworthy.

*Alpha* is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and *omega* the last. God is the beginning and the end of all things. He is the source and the goal.

Life begins in God and ends in God. The end is not a thing or an event, but a person.

### **F. The Fountain of the Water of Life**

*To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment.*

This is an image of the living water Jesus uses in the Gospel of John to describe the Holy Spirit who will be given to those who thirst for God and the good things of the Kingdom.

*"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'[John 7:37-38].*

Jesus says, in effect, that those who are thirsty will come to him, and then living waters will flow not only from himself, but also from them.

In Revelation 22 this river is an image of the Holy Spirit.

Those who drink, then, from the *fountain of life* are those who have received the Holy Spirit and enter into communion with the Triune God.

*"Behold, I make all things new"* begins with the rebirth [re-creation] in the waters of Baptism.

**CCC 1213** Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."

So Jesus says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God [John 3:5].*

## **V. THE GLORY AND THE SHAME**

### **Read: Revelation 21:7-8**

*[7] He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son.*

*[8] But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death."*

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

The glory and happiness of entry into the Kingdom – into the family of God - is not for everyone. It is only for those who remain faithful to Christ despite all that seeks to seduce them from loyalty to Him.

To the faithful one God makes the greatest promise, *“I will be his God and he shall be my son.*

Inheritance is given not to strangers but only to one's children.

*When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children,*

*then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him [Rom 8:16-17].*

### **B. Taking the Easy Way**

On the other hand, among those destined for the lake of fire and the second death, the cowards are listed first. John probably has in mind those who under persecution became apostates.

But in general, the cowards are those who loved ease and comfort more than they loved Christ. They denied Christ for safety's sake. They kept quiet rather than profess Christ - the Way, the Truth, and the Life

## **VI. VISION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM**

### **Read: Revelation 21:9-11**

*[9] Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb."*

*[10] And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,*

*[11] having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

### **A. The Angel**

This angel is the same one who brought the vision of the destruction of Babylon, the great harlot.

- In Revelation 17:1 the angel says, *“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot.”*

- In Revelation 21:9 the angel says, *“Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.*

John wants to draw a contrast between the two women: the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem; the unfaithful harlot and the faithful Bride.

- The City is given the names of Bride and Wife (Spouse), which are normally used to designate the Church.

The New Jerusalem has the glory of God, the luminous cloud of the Spirit's presence, called the *Shekinah*, which once dwelled in the temple.

The New Jerusalem is where God and humanity meet.

## **VII. THE HOLY CITY**

### **Read: Revelation 21:12-14**

*[12] It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed;*

*[13] on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.*

*[14] And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

#### **A. Twelve Gates – Twelve Tribes of Israel**

The protecting wall of the city has twelve gates, three on each of the four sides. On the gates are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

[Israel may be described as a gate, since through God's promises to them, the whole world enters into his covenant family].

The foundations for the walls of the city have the names of the twelve apostles on them, signifying that the Church is built on them.

The close connection between the twelve apostles and the twelve tribes underscores the continuity of God's plan.

- ***The Church does not replace Israel.***

Rather, she is the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises to the chosen people.

## **VIII. THE CITY IS MEASURED**

### **Read: Revelation 21:15-16**

*[15] And he who talked to me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.*

*[16] The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its breadth; and he measured the city with his rod, twelve thousand stadia; its length and breadth and height are equal.*

*[17] He also measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits by a man's measure, that is, an angel's.*

*[18] The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass.*

*[19] The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every jewel; the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald,*

*[20] the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.*

*[21] And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass.*

### **A. One Giant Temple**

The measuring indicates that the city is built as a perfect cube, like the Holy of Holies, the all-gold sacred inner room of the earthly temple which was also a perfect cube.

The New Jerusalem, therefore, is one giant temple, and all who dwell in it live in the most sacred presence of God.

## **IX. THE TEMPLE IN HEAVEN**

### **Read: Revelation 21:22-26**

*[22] And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

*[23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

*[24] By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it,*

*[25] and its gates shall never be shut by day -- and there shall be no night there;*

*[26] they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.*

*[27] But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices*

*abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

**A. The Temple is the Lord God Almighty**

The temple and other physical symbols of God's presence among his people on earth now give way to the heavenly realities.

In ancient Jewish thought, we would expect to find a heavenly temple, a counterpart of the earthly one. But there is none. Its temple is the Lord.