

The King And His Kingdom (Revelation 19—20)

“How will it all end?” has been mankind’s major question for centuries. Historians have studied the past, hoping to find a clue to understanding the future. Philosophers have tried to penetrate the meaning of things, but they have yet to find the key. No wonder perplexed people have turned in desperation to astrology and spiritism!

The prophetic Word of God shines like a “light... in a dark place” (**2 Peter 1:19**), and on that we can depend. Here in **Revelation 19—20**, John has recorded five key events that will take place before God “wraps up” human history and ushers in His new heaven and earth.

1. Heaven Will Rejoice (19:1-10)

When Babylon fell on the earth, the command was given in heaven, “Rejoice over her!” (**Rev. 18:20**), and what we read in this section is heaven’s response to that command. The word *alleluia* is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *Hallelujah*, which means “praise the Lord.” This is heaven’s “Hallelujah Chorus” and it will be sung for three reasons.

- a. **God has judged His enemies (vv. 1-4).** Since the “great whore [harlot]” of **Revelation 17** was destroyed by “the beast” and his fellow rulers (**Rev. 17:16**) in the middle of the tribulation, the “great whore” referred to here must be Babylon the Great. Comparing **Revelation 17:2** with **18:3** and **9**, the connection is obvious. Both the apostate religious system and the satanic economic-political system led the world astray and polluted mankind. Both were guilty of persecuting God’s people and martyring many of them.

The song emphasizes God’s attributes, which is the proper way to honor Him. We do not rejoice at the sinfulness of Babylon, or even the greatness of Babylon’s fall. We rejoice that God is “true and righteous” (**Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 17:6**) and that He is glorified by His holy judgments.

- b. **God is reigning (vv. 5-6).** The literal translation is, “The Lord God omnipotent has begun to reign.” This does not suggest that heaven’s throne has been empty or inactive, because that is not the case. The book of Revelation is the “book of the throne,” and the omnipotent God has indeed been accomplishing His purposes on earth. This burst of praise is an echo of **Psalms 97:1**—“The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice!”

God has been reigning on the throne of heaven, but He is now about to conquer the thrones of earth as well as the kingdom of Satan and “the beast.” In His sovereignty, He has permitted evil men and evil angels to do their worst, but now the time has come for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

- c. **The bride is ready (vv. 7-10).** The bride, of course, is the church (**2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-33**), and Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is the Bridegroom (**John 3:29**). At a wedding, it is

customary to focus attention on the bride, but in this case, it is the *Bridegroom* who receives the honor! “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him.”

“What did the bride wear?” is the usual question asked after a wedding. The Lamb’s bride is dressed “in the righteous acts of the saint” (literal translation). When the bride arrives in heaven at the judgment seat of Christ, she was not at all beautiful (in fact, she was covered with spots, wrinkles, and blemishes according to Paul in **Eph. 5:27**), but now she is radiant in her glory. She has “made herself ready” for the public ceremony.

Jewish weddings in that day were quite unlike weddings in the Western world. First, there was an engagement, usually made by the parents when the perspective bride and groom were quite young. This engagement was binding and could be broken only by a form of divorce. Any unfaithfulness during the engagement was considered adultery.

When the public ceremony was to be enacted, the groom would go to the bride’s house and claim her for himself. He would take her to his home for the wedding supper, and all the guests would join the happy couple. This feast could last as long as a week.

Today, the church is “engaged” to Jesus Christ, and we love Him even though we have not seen Him (**1 Peter 1:8**). One day, He will return and take His bride to heaven (**John 14:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:13-18**). At the judgment seat of Christ, her works will be judged and all her spots and blemishes removed. This being completed, the church will be ready to reign with Him in glory (see **Luke 13:29; Matt 8:11**). Some students believe that the entire kingdom age will be the “marriage supper.”

Revelation 19:9 contains the fourth of the seven “beatitudes “ found in the book (see **Rev. 1:3**). Certainly, the bride is not invited to her own wedding! This invitation goes out to the guests, believers from the Old Testament era and the tribulation. During the eternal state, no distinction will be made among people of God, but in the kingdom age, difference will still exist as the church reigns with Christ and as Israel enjoys the promised messianic blessing.

John was so overwhelmed by all this that he fell down to worship the angel who was guiding him, an act that he later repeats (**Rev. 22:8-9**)! Of course, worshipping angels is wrong (**Col. 2:18**), and John knew this. Like John himself, this angel was only a servant of God (**Heb. 1:14**), and we do not worship servants (see **Acts 10:25-26**).

2. Christ Will Return (19:11—20:3)

First, John described the Conqueror (**Rev. 19:11-16**) and then His conquests (**Rev. 19:17—20:3**). The rider on the white horse (**Rev. 6:2**) is the false Christ, but this Rider is the true Christ. He is not coming in the air to take His people home (**1 Thess. 4:13-18**), but to the earth with His people to conquer His enemies and establish His kingdom.

Note the emphasis on Jesus's names (**Rev. 19:11-13, 16**):

- a. He is "Faithful and True" (see **Rev. 3:14**), in contrast to "the beast" who was unfaithful (he broke the covenant with Israel) and false (he ruled by means of deception and idolatry).
- b. Perhaps the "secret name" (**Rev. 19:12**) is the same as the "new name" (**Rev. 3:12**). Not knowing what this name is, we cannot comment on it, but it is exciting to know that, even in heaven, we shall learn new things about our Lord Jesus!
- c. "The Word of God" is one of the familiar names of our Lord in Scripture (**John 1:1-14**). Just as we reveal our minds and hearts to others by our words, so the Father reveals Himself to us through His Son, the incarnate Word (**Rev. 14:7-11**). A word is made up of letters, and Jesus Christ is "Alpha and Omega." He is the "divine alphabet" of God's revelation to us.
 - i. The Word of God is "living and powerful" (**Heb. 4:12**); what's more, it fulfills His purposes on earth (**Rev. 17:17**). Jehovah Himself says, "I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled" (**Jer. 1:12 NIV**).
- d. Christ's most important name is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (**Rev. 19:16**). This is His victorious name (**Rev. 17:14**), and it brings to mind references such as **Daniel 2:47** and **Deuteronomy 10:17**. Paul used this same title for our Lord Jesus Christ in **1 Timothy 6:15**. The title speaks of Christ's sovereignty, for all kings and lords must submit to Him. No matter who was on the throne of the Roman Empire, Jesus Christ was his King and Lord!

The sharp sword is a symbol of God's Word. This is in keeping with the fact that Christ will consume the enemy "with the spirit of His mouth." We have met with the "rod of iron" before (**Rev. 2:27; 12:5**), a symbol of His justice as he rules over the earth. The image of the winepress must be associated with the judgment at Armageddon.

Jesus is not alone in His conquest, for the armies of heaven ride with Him. Who are they? Certainly, the angels are a part of this army, but so are the saints. Jude describes the same scene. The word *saints* means "holy ones" and could refer to believers or angels.

It will be unnecessary for the army to fight, for Christ Himself will defeat the enemy through three great victories.

- a. **He will defeat the armies of the kings of the earth (vv. 17-19, 21).** These warriors have assembled to fight "against the Lord and against His anointed" (**Ps. 2:1-3**), but their weapons prove futile. The battle turns out to be a slaughter—a "supper" for the scavenger birds! The first half of **Revelation 19** describes the marriage supper of the

Lamb; the last half describes the “supper of the great God” (see **Matt. 24:28; Luke 17:37**).

The word *flesh* occurs six times in this paragraph. While John’s immediate reference is to the human body, eaten by the vultures, there is certainly a deeper meaning here: Man fails because he is flesh and relies on flesh. The Bible has nothing good to say about fallen human nature. Recall the Lord’s words before the flood: “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh” (**Gen. 6:3**). “All flesh is as grass” (**1 Peter 1:24**) and must be judged.

This is the account of the well-known “battle of Armageddon” which was anticipated earlier. All our Lord has to do is speak the word, and “the sword of His mouth” will devour His enemies.

b. He will defeat “the beast” and false prophet (v. 20). Since Satan’s “henchmen” are the leaders of the revolt, it is only right that they be captured and confined. They are cast into the lake of fire (see **Rev. 20:10, 14-15**), the final and permanent place of punishment for all who refuse to submit to Jesus Christ. “The beast” and false prophet are the first persons to be cast into hell. Satan will follow 1,000 years later (**Rev. 20:10**) to be joined by those whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life (**Rev. 20:15**).

Today, when an unbeliever dies, his spirit goes to a place called *hades*, which means “the unseen world”—that is, the realm of the dead. When believers die, they go immediately into the presence of the Lord (**2 Cor. 5:6-8; Phil. 1:19-23**). Hades will one day be emptied of its dead (**Rev. 20:13**), who will then be cast into hell to join Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

c. Satan will be defeated (vv. 1-3). The “bottomless pit” spoken of in **Revelation 20:1** is not the same as hell; it is the “abyss” that we have met before in our studies (**Rev. 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 17:8**). Satan is not cast into hell immediately, because God still has one more task for him to perform. Rather, Satan is confined in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years. First, Satan was cast out of *heaven* (**Rev. 12:9**), and now he is cast out of *earth!*

- i. Some Bible students feel that the “chaining” of Satan took place when Jesus died on the cross and arose from the dead to ascend to heaven. While it is true that Jesus won His decisive victory over Satan at the cross, the sentence against the Devil has not yet been effected.
- ii. He is a defeated foe, but he is still free to attack God’s people and oppose God’s work (**1 Peter 5:8**).
- iii. Paul was sure that Satan was loose (**Eph. 6:10ff.**), and John agreed with him (**Rev. 2:13; 3:9**).

Having taken care of His enemies, the Lord is now free to establish His righteous kingdom on the earth.

3. Saints Will Reign (20:4-6)

The phrase “thousand years” occurs six times in **Revelation 20:1-7**. This period in history is known as “the millennium,” from two Latin words, *mille* (“thousand”) and *annum* (“year”)—the 1,000-year kingdom of Christ on earth. At last, Christ and His church will reign over the nations of the earth, and Israel will enjoy blessings promised by the prophets (see **Isa. 2:1-5; 4:1-6; 11:1-9; 12:1-6**).

- a. Is this a literal kingdom on earth, or should these verses be “spiritualized” and applied to the church today? Some interpreters say that the term “a thousand years” is simply a number meaning “ultimate perfection” (10 x 10 x 10 = 1,000). They assert that it is a symbol of Christ’s victory and the church’s wonderful blessings now that Satan has been defeated and bound. This view is known as *amillennialism*, which means “no millennium”—that is, no literal kingdom.
- b. The problem with this view is that it does not explain why John introduced the period with a resurrection of the dead. He was certainly not writing about a “spiritual” resurrection, because he even told how these people died! And in **Revelation 20:5**, John wrote of another literal resurrection. If we are now in the 1,000-year kingdom of victory, when did this resurrection take place? It seems reasonable to assume that John wrote about a literal physical resurrection of the dead, and a literal kingdom on earth.
- c. What is the purpose of the millennial kingdom? For one thing, it will be the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel *and to Christ* (**Psalms 2; Luke 1:30-33**). Our Lord reaffirmed them to His own apostles (**Luke 22:29-30**).
- d. This kingdom will be a worldwide display of Christ’s glory, when all nature will be set free from the bondage of sin (**Rom. 8:19-22**). It will be the answer to the prayers of the saints, “Thy kingdom come!” It will also be God’s final demonstration of the sinfulness of sin and the wickedness of the human heart apart from God’s grace, but more on this later.
- e. The tribulation martyrs will be raised from the dead and given glorious thrones and rewards. The church will share in this reign, as symbolized by the twenty-four elders (**Rev. 5:10**; see also **2:26-28; 3:12, 21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Tim. 2:12**). Some Bible students believe that the Old testament saints will also be a part of this “first resurrection” (**Dan. 12:1-4**).
- f. The phrase “general resurrection” is not found in the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible teaches two resurrections: the first is of the saved and leads to blessing; the second is of

all the lost and leads to judgment (note especially **John 5:28-29**; **Dan 12:2**). These two resurrections will be separated by 1,000 years.

- g. Revelation 20:6** describes the special blessings of those who share in the first resurrection. They did not *earn* these blessings; they are part of the believer's inheritance in Jesus Christ. This is the sixth of the seven "beatitudes" in Revelation; the final one is in **Revelation 22:7**. These resurrected believers will share Christ's glorious life, reigning as kings and priests with Him, and never experience the "second death," the lake of fire (hell, **Rev. 20:14**).

During the millennium, the inhabitants of the earth will include not only glorified saints, but also citizens of the nations who bow in submission to Jesus Christ (see **Matt. 25:31-40**). Because of the earth's perfect conditions, people will live long lives (**Isa. 65:17-25**, especially **v. 20**). They will marry and have children who will outwardly conform to our Lord's righteous rule. But not all of them will be truly born again as the millennium progresses, and this explains why Satan will be able to gather a great army of rebels at the close of the kingdom age (**Rev. 20:8**).

For many centuries, man has dreamed of a "golden age," a "Utopia" in which the human race will be free from war, sickness, and even death. Men have tried to achieve this goal on their own and have failed. It is only when Jesus Christ reigns on David's throne that the kingdom will come and the earth be delivered from the oppression of Satan and sin.

4. Satan Will Revolt (20:7-10)

At the close of the millennium, Satan will be released from the pit and permitted to lead one last revolt against the Lord. Why? As final proof that the heart of man is desperately wicked and can be changed only by God's grace. Imagine the tragedy of this revolt: People who have been living in a perfect environment, under the perfect government of God's Son, will finally admit the truth and rebel against the King! Their obedience will be seen as mere *feigned* submission, and not true faith in Christ at all.

- a.** The naming of "Gog and Magog" (**Rev. 20:8**) does not equate this battle with the one described in **Ezekiel 38—39**, for that army invades from the north, while this one comes from the four corners of the earth. These two events are related, however, inasmuch as in both battles, Israel is the focal point. In this case Jerusalem will be the target ("beloved city," **Ps. 78:68**; **87:2**). God will deal with this revolt very quickly and efficiently, and Satan will be cast into hell. Note that "the beast" and false prophet will still be suffering in the lake of fire after 1,000 years (see **Matt. 25:41**)!
- b.** In one sense, the millennial kingdom will "sum up" all that God has said about the heart of man during the various periods of history. It will be a reign of law, and yet law will not change man's sinful heart. Man will still revolt against god.

- c. The millennium will be a period of peace and perfect environment, a time when disobedience will be judged swiftly and with justice, and yet in the end the subjects of the King will follow Satan and rebel against the Lord. A perfect environment cannot produce a perfect heart.

God is now about to “wrap up” human history. One great event remains.

5. Sinners Are Recompensed (20:11–15)

There shall be a second resurrection, and the unsaved will be raised and will stand before God’s judgment. Do not confuse this judgment at the White Throne with the judgment seat of Christ, where believer’s will have their works judged and rewarded. At this judgment, there will only be unbelievers, and there will be no rewards. John described here an awesome scene. Heaven and earth will flee away and no place will be left for sinners to hide! All must face the Judge!

- a. The Judge is Jesus Christ, for the Father has committed all judgment to Him (**Matt. 19:28; John 5:22-30; Acts 17:31**). These lost sinners rejected Christ in life; now they must be judged by Him and face eternal death.
- b. From where do these “dead” come? Death will give up the bodies, and hades (the realm of the spirits of the dead) will give up the spirits. There will even be a resurrection of bodies from the sea. No sinner will escape.
- c. Jesus Christ will judge these unsaved people on the basis of what is written “in the books.” What books? For one thing, God’s Word will be there. “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (**John 12:48**). Every sinner will be held accountable for the truth he or she has heard in this life.
- d. There will also be a book containing the works of the sinners being judged, though this does not suggest that a person can do good works sufficient to enter heaven (**Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5**). Why, then, will Jesus Christ consider the works, good and bad, of the people before the White Throne? To determine the degree of punishment they will endure in hell. All of these people will be cast into hell. Their personal rejection of Jesus Christ has already determined their destiny. But Jesus Christ is a righteous Judge, and He will assign each sinner the place that he deserves.
- e. There are degrees of punishment in hell (**Matt. 11:20-24**). Each lost sinner will receive just what is due him, and none will be able to argue with the Lord or question His decision. God knows what sinners are doing, and His books will reveal the truth.
- f. “The Book of Life” will be there, containing the names of God’s redeemed people (**Phil. 4:3; Rev. 21:27; note 13:8; 17:8**). No unsaved person will have his or her name in the Lamb’s book of Life; only true believers are recorded there (**Luke 10:20**).

When the judgment is finished, all of the lost will be cast into hell, the lake of fire, the second death. Many people reject the biblical doctrine of hell as being “unchristian,” and yet Jesus clearly taught its reality (**Matt.18:8; 23:15, 33; 25:46; Mark 9:46**). A sentimental kind of humanistic religion will not face the reality of judgment, but teaches a God who loves everyone into heaven and sends no one to hell.

- a. Hell is witness to the righteous character of God. He must judge sin. Hell is also a witness to man’s responsibility, the fact that he is not a robot or a helpless victim, but a creature able to make choices. God does not “send people to hell”; they send themselves by rejecting the Savior (**Matt. 25:41; John 3:16-21**). Hell is also a witness to the awfulness of sin. If we once saw sin as God sees it, we would understand why a place such as hell exists.
- b. In light of Calvary, no lost sinner can condemn God for casting him into hell. God has provided a way of escape, patiently waiting for sinners to repent. He will not lower His standards or alter His requirements. He has ordained that faith in His Son is the only way of salvation.

The White Throne judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. What an awesome scene it will be!

Before God can usher in His new heaven and earth, He must finally deal with sin, and this He will do at the Great White Throne.

You can escape this terrible judgment by trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. By so doing, you will never be a part of the second resurrection or experience the terrors of the second death, the lake of fire.

“He that heareth my word,” said Jesus, “and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment]; but is passed from death unto life” (**John 5:24**).

Have you trusted Him and passed from death unto life?

Homework: Read Revelation 21—22, All Things New!