

Revelation, Part 25

Rev 19:1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” 3 Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5 And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.

The scene shifts from Armageddon, Babylon, and the awful judgments and circumstances on Earth to Heaven. The end of the Tribulation is near. “After these things” in verse 1 indicates what we see in chapter 19 takes place after the judgments of Babylon seen in the previous chapters. While there is much confusion concerning the order of events depicted in chapters 19 and 20, we should note that this praise follows the judgment of Babylon in chapter 18.

The word “voice” or “roar,” the Greek *phōnēn*, in verse 1 is literally a “sound,” modified by the adjective “great” (*megalēn*). This loud noise is from “a great multitude in heaven”. This “great multitude” is the same phrase used back in Revelation 7:9 and is surely the same bunch.

Rev 7:9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

One of the elders rhetorically asked John who these people are.

Rev 7:13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out

of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For these martyrs from the Tribulation, in particular, the judgment of Babylon is a tremendous triumph. Verses 1 and 2 go on to tell us, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God because his judgments are true and just for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality, and has avenged the blood of his servants poured out by her own hands!” At last, they are avenged for their persecutions and murders.

Maybe I am making more of this than I should, but I was struck by this phrase in verse 2 “...because his judgments are true and just”. It could be easily argued the phrase carries no meaning beyond this passage and simply re-enforces the righteousness of the judgments of God on the prostitute, Antichrist, and other evil during the Tribulation. But I wonder if it doesn’t carry subliminal meaning beyond the obvious, in that it implies that God’s judgment of Satan in eternity past is vindicated by the events of the Tribulation and his failure as ruler of the earth? I think it can also mean that even though Satan appealed his judgment, it is being proven that God’s original judgment was true and just.

Rev 19:3 Then a second time the crowd shouted, “Hallelujah!” The smoke rises from her forever and ever.

The group shouts a second time, “Hallelujah!” “Smoke rising from her forever and ever” refers to the destruction of the harlot and its system of persecution. It does not burn forever in a literal sense of it taking place on Earth, but it does burn forever in the sense the judgment is forever, and in a quite literal sense, those associated with the prostitute and Babylonian system and those not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life do also “burn forever and ever” in the Lake of Fire.

Some believe there is no eternal damnation in the sense of any awareness by those condemned. They believe, at some point, God simply eliminates the lost, and they cease to exist including ceasing to experience their judgment. If so, then “forever” does not really mean forever...

Rev 19:4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures threw themselves to the ground and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne, saying: “Amen! Hallelujah!”

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures also sing a hallelujah chorus. This is another reminder that the twenty-four elders, representing the believers of the Church Age, are distinguished from the Tribulation saints described in verse 1 as “a great multitude.” The four living creatures, previously introduced in Revelation 4:6-8, seem to refer to angels who praise God.

Rev 19:5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God all you his servants, and all you who fear Him, both the small and the great!”

Still another voice of praise, apparently coming from an angel, also praised God and exhorted “all you His servants” to join in this praise.

We have three groups represented in these passages:

1. The “great multitude in heaven” are Tribulation saints martyred during the Tribulation.
2. The twenty-four elders represent the raptured Church.
3. The four living creatures and the voice from the throne room represent elect angels

The Wedding Celebration of the Lamb

Rev 19:6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “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 clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

We have the fourth and final hallelujah of this chapter. According to John they “sounded like a multitude of people, rushing waters, and loud thunder.” Here the rejoicing is prophetic and looks forward to what is soon to happen rather than to the judgment just executed. The reason for rejoicing is seen in the next verse.

Rev 19:7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 She was permitted to be dressed in bright, clean, fine linen” (for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).

Let's deal with the obvious and easy then get into the more complicated portion of this passage. “The bride has made herself ready.” Who is the bride? This is the Church. Israel, on the other hand, is seen in Hosea as the wife of the Lord who has been unfaithful.

Hosea 2:1 Say to your brothers, “You are my people,” and to your sisters, “You have received mercy.” 2 “Plead with your mother, plead— for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband—that she put away her whoring from her face, and her adultery from between her breasts; 3 lest I strip her naked and make her as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst.

Hosea speaks of the unfaithfulness of Israel by their whoring — chasing after other gods, idolatry. Hosea 2:4 through 2:13 speaks of what the Lord will do to Israel as discipline for her idolatrous behavior. Israel will be disciplined and cast off, but the Lord’s discipline will bring Israel back.

Hosea 2:14 “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. 16 “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’

Israel is seen as an adulterous wife who eventually comes back to her husband. The motivation is discipline, which is seen ultimately as the events of the Tribulation where Israel finally sees the failures of the idols she chased. Verses 17-23 go on to picture Israel experiencing the blessings of the Kingdom. But that restoration as the wife of God does not happen until the Kingdom after Israel has experienced all the discipline due her for her idolatry and rejection of Messiah. Meanwhile, the Church is the Bride of Christ.

Rev 19:7 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 clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

Note the statement refers to an action accomplished by the bride, “His Bride has made herself ready” and “It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints”. This seems to suggest salvation by works, but it does not. The key is the word translated “righteous deeds” which is *dikaïoma* in the Greek and refers to “righteousness”. “Deeds” is not in the original text, though some translators supply it when translating *dikaïoma*. Some argue this refers to the righteousness of Christ impute to the believer at salvation, but the Greek is in the plural and suggests “righteous deeds” or “acts” might be the better translation. This refers to the “righteous deeds,” or what we have been calling “divine good” done by Christians under the guidance and empowerment of the Spirit as proof of their salvation and manifested as “fine linen, bright and pure”.

The words “has come” (v. 7) may be translated as “has been completed.” The bride is now the wife (v. 7), and the marriage supper is now to be served. It is interesting that this is the marriage supper of the Lamb, and not of “the King” or “the Lord.” The one title that Christ wants emphasized for all eternity is “the Lamb,” for it speaks of His love for the church and the price He paid to purchase it. Of course, the church has to “make herself ready” for this supper. This cleansing was done at the judgment seat of Christ when all the “spots and wrinkles” were taken away (Eph. 5:25–27). The bride goes to Heaven by God’s grace, and not by good works. But once in heaven, believers will be judged at Christ’s judgment seat for their faithfulness in life and service. Verse 8 states that the wife will wear “the righteousness of the saints”; that is, “the righteous deeds of the saints.” Christ will reward us according to our faithfulness, and the rewards we receive will make up the “wedding gown.” Dr. Lehman Strauss writes, “Has it ever occurred to you ... that at the marriage of the Bride to the Lamb, each of us will be wearing the wedding garment of our own making?” What a solemn thought!

Let’s explore the wedding in more detail to help understand what has happened and what will happen.

First-Century Wedding Traditions

To understand these events pictured here in Revelation, we need to understand the traditional wedding process associated with a Middle-Eastern wedding during the first century as generally practiced among the Jews. I have taught this before but some review is always helpful.

The Middle-Eastern wedding of the first century was conducted in three parts or steps: First, there was the betrothal, which sometimes can take place while those to be married were yet children. Whether for children or adults, the marriage was arranged by their parents. An appropriate dowry for the bride was negotiated and the marriage was agreed upon. Once that contract (*ketubah*) was signed, the couple was in a legally binding marriage, but no acts of intimacy between the bride and groom take place at this time. The contract could only be severed with a writ of divorce, and that had to be on some very strong grounds like adultery. This is exactly the position Joseph was in when he became aware Mary was pregnant. She would normally have been seen as having been unfaithful to her intended husband and even subject to being stoned to death. The fact that she was pregnant before the next phase of the marriage gave rise to rumors that Jesus was a bastard.

With the wedding arrangements finalized and the contract agreed upon, the groom then departed with his father to their home, but not before he assured his bride with the promises of building a home for her and returning to complete the marriage ceremony. This is exactly what Jesus promised His bride, the Church, in John 14:1-3. It could take a year or more to prepare a new home for his bride, which usually consisted of an addition built onto his own father's house. The father of the groom determined when all preparations had been properly made and would then give permission to his son to go and retrieve his bride. Jesus stated that only His Father knew when He would return (for His bride) in Matthew 24:36.

The second phase of the marriage was the “stealing away” of the bride by the groom and taking her to the home he had prepared for her. The bride was expected to remain true to her groom, as she prepared herself and her trousseau. She lived for the day of his return for her. The impending return of her groom was to influence the bride's behavior during this interim espousal period.

The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia tells us, "Mirth and gladness announced their approach to townspeople waiting in houses along the route to the bride's house."

Upon hearing of the approach of her groom, the excited bride would drop everything to slip into her wedding dress and complete her final personal preparations for marriage. Rather than the groom entering the bride's house, he remained outside and cried out to his bride to come out and meet him (1 Thess 4:16). The two, accompanied by their wedding party, returned together to the groom's home for the marriage ceremony. Following the public ceremony, the newlyweds entered their bridal chamber to be intimate with each other for the first time. After this union, the groom or His groomsman came out and announced to the wedding guests, "The marriage is consummated."

The third phase of the wedding was the marriage supper. Upon receiving the glad news of the consummation of the marriage, the wedding party began a "festive" seven-day celebration. The celebration lasted seven days only if this was the first marriage of a virgin girl. During this time, the bride and the groom remained with each other in seclusion. At the end of this time of privacy, the groom would present his unveiled bride to everyone in attendance (Second Advent). The newlyweds then joined in the wedding feast with the guests.

Let's put this in the context of the Church as the bride and Christ as the bridegroom. When we answer "yes" to Jesus' offer of marriage, we become His betrothed. This arrangement is secured by the Holy Spirit, who protects the purchased bride until the return of Jesus. God says, "Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Our "engagement ring" of promise is none other than the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Imagine, too, that just as the Jewish bride of long ago held the written promise of the marriage commitment, the *ketubah*, in her hand, so the prospective bride of Christ today holds the Bible in her hands. These written promises from Jesus describe His everlasting love and commitment.

On the night before His Crucifixion, Jesus drank a glass of wine with His followers. Lifting the cup He declared, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." Paul reminds us that Jesus

commanded, "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Just as the groom in a Jewish marriage toasted his espoused bride, so we, by the communion cup, remember our betrothal to Jesus and the supreme price He paid for us.

Jesus said He must leave us to go back to His Father's house and prepare our new home.

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be distressed. You believe in God; believe also in me. 14:2 There are many dwelling places in my Father's house. Otherwise, I would have told you, because I am going away to make ready a place for you. 14:3 And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that where I am you may be too. 14:4 And you know the way where I am going."

He promised to return and gather all those who constitute His Bride (the Church) and transport them to this new home. This parallels exactly the ancient marriage customs! For nearly two thousand years, Jesus has been in Heaven "preparing a place for us". In God's time, Jesus will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God... We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes 4:16-17).

This catching away, called "the Rapture," is pictured in the Jewish marriage custom. The groom comes to the bride's home but does not enter, calls her to come out, and brings her back to the wedding ceremony which is held at his father's house. This is the same house where he has also prepared a home for her. Although we, the bride of Christ, have known for nearly two thousand years that Jesus would return for us, we have only been able to say, "He's coming back—maybe in my lifetime." However, just as the first-century bride reacted excitedly when she heard the shout announcing the arrival of her groom, so we as the listening bride of Christ should react when we hear the call, ahead of Jesus' arrival, "The bridegroom is coming."

At the end of the seven days, the groom brings his bride out and her veil is removed for the first time so all the guests can see her beauty. Some see this as a picture of the seven-year celebration in Heaven which occurs

simultaneously with the seven-year time of Tribulation transpiring on earth. The culmination of this time is described in the Bible.

Rev 19:7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 She was permitted to be dressed in bright, clean, fine linen (for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).

John Walvoord writes, "The marriage symbolism is beautifully fulfilled in the relationship of Christ to His Church. Revelation 19:6-9 is a prophetic hymn anticipating the marriage of the Lamb and His bride after He has begun His reign, and He will not begin His reign on Earth until He has conquered the kings of the Earth led by Antichrist."

Note verse 7 and following, "His wife has made herself ready. 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." She is "granted to be arrayed...". "Granted" means to bestow a gift — grace. The Church was raptured at the beginning of the Tribulation and spent those seven years with her Bridegroom in Heaven. There she was being evaluated for rewards or not. This is the Bema judgment.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

1 Cor 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. 10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care of how he builds upon it. 11 For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

All believers must give an account of their spiritual lives. Sin is not the issue. That was judged at the Cross, and Jesus was judged for our sins in our place so that we will not be judged. The issue at the Bema judgment is what did you do with the life you were called to live for God? You were given spiritual and physical assets to accomplish whatever He was calling you to do. What did you do with them? Did you use them for the Glory of God? Or did you waste them and even ignore your callings? Your “works” will be tested by fire. For those who do live the life for which God is calling each of us, their divine good works will pass the fire test as “gold, silver, and precious stones”. Those with a failed spiritual life, their human good works will burn up as “wood, hay, and straw” in the fire test as worthless. Will those with burned wood, hay, and straw go to hell? No!

1 Cor 3:14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

All believers, whether those whose works are gold, silver, and precious stones or those whose works burn up will be in Heaven because they trusted in God for their salvation. The bride “has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure” — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

Mat 22:1 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4 Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.” ’ 5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

11 “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12 And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. 13 Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ 14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

These words were spoken to Israel, as a parable, and not the Church, thus, they have direct application to Israel. Israel was invited to the banquet. God’s servants were sent to invite them. That would be the prophets and ultimately the Messiah they rejected.

Mat 22:5 But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

The destruction came upon Jerusalem in AD70 after Israel’s long rejecting of the prophets and their Messiah.

Mat 22:8 Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’

Israel was invited to the Wedding Feast but because of her spiritual adultery, she is “not worthy” to attend. God turned to the Gentiles and invited them to the wedding feast. But some of them were not worthy (improper clothing, lacking the white robes of righteousness) and were tossed out. These are the unbelievers who survive the tribulation?

Mat 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5 As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. 6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the wise answered, saying, ‘Since there will not be enough for us and you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’

10 And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. 11 Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' 12 But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Jesus is talking in parables here and is warning apostate Israel to be watchful for the Second Advent, "but at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.'" This is obviously the Rapture. Five wise virgins have oil for their lamps — believers. The oil for the lamps is the Holy Spirit. And some of the guests (apostate Israel) don't have oil, so the five "unwise virgins" go to buy oil, "buy" implying works rather than faith. Meanwhile, the bridegroom arrives and they miss him.

The timing jumps from the rapture to the wedding feast. And they missed the bridegroom "and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut". They were excluded from the feast because they had not listened to the prophets and their Messiah.

It is clear from these passages that only believers will be allowed to attend the wedding feast of the Lamb. Only believers will enter the Kingdom and they will do so in their human bodies with their sin natures fully functional, but that is a story for another day.

Back to Revelation 19.

Rev 19:9 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 the true words of 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 brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

While this invitation goes out to the guests — believers from the Old Testament era and the Tribulation — it is possible that the surviving remnant of believers coming out of the Tribulation may be the main focus of this statement, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb". Blessed because they survived that horrible period. Blessed because they get to enter the Kingdom.

During the eternal state after the Millennium, no distinctions will be made among the people of God; but in the Kingdom Age, differences will still exist, as the church reigns with Christ and Israel enjoys the promised messianic blessings.

One of the false interpretations that have plagued the church is the concept that God treats all saints exactly alike. Instead, a literal interpretation of the Bible distinguishes different groups of saints, and here the bride is distinguished from those who are invited to the wedding supper. Instead of treating all alike, God indeed has a program for Israel as a nation and also for those in Israel who are saved. He also has a program for Gentiles in the Old Testament who come to faith in God. And in the New Testament, He has a program for the Church as yet a different group of saints. Again in the Book of Revelation, the Tribulation saints are distinguished from other previous groups. It is not so much a question of difference in blessings as it is that God has a program designed for each group of saints which corresponds to their particular relationship to His overall program.

Expositors have debated whether the wedding will be in Heaven or on Earth. While the difference is not that important, the interpretive problem can be resolved by comparing the wedding described here to weddings in the first century. We have already seen that the wedding and seven days of intimate isolation by the bride and her Groom occur during the Tribulation. The revealing of His new bride is the second Advent, and that is followed by the wedding feast. All this suggests it is an earthly feast, which also corresponds to the illustrations of weddings in the Bible (Matt. 22:1–14; 25:1–13), and thus, will take place on Earth during the Millennium. The importance of the announcement and invitation to the wedding supper, repeated in Revelation 22:17, is seen in the angel's remarks, These are the true words of God.