

## **HEAVEN'S HALLELUJAH CHORUS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SEVEN "LAST THINGS" (REV. 19:1-10)\***

David J. MacLeod

In his play entitled *Saint Joan*, George Bernard Shaw tells the story of Joan of Arc and how she left her home to inspire her fellow citizens in France to battle against the British conquerors. In the second scene the young heir to the throne, Prince Charles, age twenty-six, is whining and complaining because Joan, obedient to her heavenly vision, is rebuking him for his softness and cowardice. As she rebukes the prince he responds, "I want to be just what I am. Why can't you mind your own business, and let me mind mine?" The peasant girl, filled with the urgency of the situation, speaks: "Minding my own business is like minding your own body: it's the shortest way to make yourself sick. What is my business? Helping mother at home. What is thine? Petting lap-dogs and sucking sugarsticks [i.e., lollipops] . . . I tell [you] it is God's business we are here to do: not our own. I have a message to you from God; and you must listen to it, though your heart break with the terror of it."<sup>1</sup>

These words of Joan of Arc reflect, in a way, the urgency of apostolic Christianity. This urgency grew out of the apostles' belief in the return of the Lord. Belief in the Lord's return, they taught, should produce purity in life (1 John 3:1-3), forbearance and patience toward brethren (Rom. 14:10), comfort in sorrow (1 Thess. 4:13-18), urgency in service (1 Cor. 3:10-14; 2 Cor. 5:10), and vitality or vibrancy in worship (Rev. 19:1-5).

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue* (New York: Brentano's, 1924), 43-44.

Revelation 19:11-22:5 is the New Testament's classic passage on Christ's return. These chapters set forth seven major motifs of biblical eschatology,<sup>2</sup> "the Last Things," as Austin Farrer calls them:<sup>3</sup> the second coming of Christ (19:11-16), the defeat of the Antichrist (19:17-21), the binding of Satan (20:1-3), the millennial kingdom of Christ (20:4-6), the loosing of Satan and his final defeat (20:7-10), the last judgment at the great white throne (20:11-15), and the new heavens and new earth (21:1-22:5).

The first ten verses of chapter 19 are an introduction to these great subjects. Besides introducing the seven last things, this passage focuses on worship and awe before God and gives Christians reason for looking eagerly for the coming of the Lord. God is to be praised for His judgment on this world because that judgment is both deserved and fair, and He is to be praised for His benefits because of the glorious destiny of the people of God.

#### GOD IS PRAISED FOR HIS RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF BABYLON (19:1—5)

In Revelation 17-18 John described the destruction of Babylon, the last great empire to dominate the earth before the second coming of Christ. It will be a vast commercial, political, and religious system that will serve as the capital of the Antichrist.<sup>4</sup> Like Babylon of old, it will be the source of collective rebellion against the Lord. It will be overthrown just before the Lord returns, and the whole earth will mourn its loss. The world's business leaders will all lament, " 'Woe, woe,' . . . and they were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning" (Rev. 18:16-18).

#### THE VOICE OF THE MULTITUDE (vv. 1-3)

The response of heaven is different from that of the merchant class of the earth: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:573.

<sup>3</sup> Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 196.

<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals hold at least five interpretations of the identity of Babylon: pagan Rome, papal Rome, eschatological Rome, apostate Jerusalem, eschatological Babylon. For a defense of the view adopted here, see Harry Goehring, "The Fall of Babylon—Historical or Future?" *Grace Journal* 2 (winter 1961): 23-34; Kenneth W. Allen, "The Rebuilding and Destruction of Babylon," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133 (1976): 19-27; and Charles H. Dyer, "The Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17-18, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144 (1987): 433-49.

for you against her" (18:20). And so, in chapter 19, the atmosphere is one of exultant worship, and not lamentation, over Babylon's fall. "Shadow yields to light," Kiddie has written, "above the smoke clouds from the ruined Babylon, a scene of ineffable brightness opens out. The silence of the ruined city gives way to the shout and thunder of eager rejoicing."<sup>5</sup>

"After these things," that is, after the fall of Babylon, John's attention turned to heaven, where he heard "the voice of a great multitude." Some understand this to be a throng of angels.<sup>6</sup> The same expression is used, however, in 7:9 to describe the martyred Gentiles of the Tribulation, so it is more likely that the great multitude here is that group of martyrs.<sup>7</sup>

They shout, "Hallelujah" (ἁλληλουϊά). This expression is a word taken from Hebrew (הַלְלוּ יְהוָה), which means "Praise Yah," that is, "Praise the Lord." This term appears only here in the New Testament, where it occurs four times. In the Old Testament the two Hebrew words introduce ten of the psalms, where the words are translated "Praise the LORD!" (Pss. 106, 111-113, 135, 146-150).

Psalms 113-118 are called the "Hallel psalms" or "the Hallel of Egypt" because of the reference in them (114:1) to the Exodus. They were regularly sung by the Jews at the Passover to celebrate the deliverance of Israel and the destruction of the wicked. Jesus and His disciples most likely sang the Hallel after Passover on the night in which He was betrayed. Because of the close connection of the Hallel with Passover and the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God, the early church incorporated it in their Easter celebration of the triumph of Christ, "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7), over sin, Satan, and death.<sup>8</sup> So in a yet future day the Tribulation martyrs

<sup>5</sup> Martin Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper, 1940), 375.

<sup>6</sup> For example H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 238; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1920), 2:118; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 224; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 244; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 355-56. It is argued that they must be angels because most earlier songs of thanks in Revelation involve angels (4:8-11; 5:11-14), and human believers are called to add their hallelujah in 19-.5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Harper New Testament Commentary (New York: Harper, 1966), 232; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 268; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 341.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, "Revelation," 12:570.

will sing the Hallel to God for His deliverance from the Antichrist, the tyrant of Babylon.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the occurrence of the word "Hallelujah" here in Revelation 19, this passage has been called "Heaven's Hallelujah Chorus."<sup>10</sup> It has also been called a "*Te Deum*" ("You God") by a number of commentators,<sup>11</sup> for it is a hymn of worship. The multitude will worship God for both His attributes and His actions. He is praised for His attributes, which include (a) "salvation," that is, He is a God who safeguards His people and delivers them into the kingdom; (b) "glory," that is, His moral excellence, which is seen in His judgment of sinful Babylon; and (c) "power," His might, which is seen in the overthrow of wicked civilization.<sup>12</sup> These things should awaken worship on the part of believers today too. His salvation should awaken gratitude; His glory should awaken reverence; His power should awaken trust.<sup>13</sup>

Also God is praised for His actions. The word "because" in verse 2 introduces the reason for the great outburst of praise. God has executed a fitting ("true") and deserved ("righteous") judgment on "the great harlot," that is, Babylon. Babylon will be a literal city in the end times. In the Bible it also stands as a metaphor for the world and its opposition to the things of God. The world was corrupted by Babylon's secular, humanistic, and hedonistic ideologies, her false religions that adulterated and opposed God's Word, her pagan doctrines, and her deceitful practices that harm the human race.<sup>14</sup>

The gospel will be preached to all the nations during the Tribulation. Many, however, will worship the Antichrist, and will rejoice over the death of the witnesses for Christ (Rev. 11, 13). Babylon will stand as an obstacle to the inauguration of the kingdom of God on the earth.<sup>15</sup> Fraud, immorality, and violence will

<sup>9</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 271.

<sup>10</sup> Ford C. Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1905), 402.

<sup>11</sup> This title is taken from the description by Arethas of the passage in his commentary on Revelation. Arethas was bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia (ca. A.D. 900). See Swete, *Apocalypse*, cxcv, 238.

<sup>12</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 2:169; and Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 4th. ed., (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 375.

<sup>13</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:169.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today* (London: Clarke, 1960), 154.

<sup>15</sup> Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John*, 377.

be obliterated, and those in heaven will cry, "Praise the Lord!"<sup>16</sup>

The reason for the praise in heaven should be noted. The multitude in heaven will praise God for His destruction of wickedness. People like to think of praise in the sense of George Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus," in which "hallelujah" is the triumphant worship of the reigning King. Such a chorus will be seen in Revelation 19:6, but first there will be the equally triumphant rejoicing over the downfall of evil at the hand of God.<sup>17</sup> Many Christians do not want to hear of God's judgment and wrath. They want to hear only of His love and kindness. But Babylon's "smoke rises up forever," that is, she will be totally destroyed (v. 3). Heaven's estimate of things differs from this world's. The things the world loves most fondly are the objects of God's most intense wrath.<sup>18</sup>

Believers should be struck by the reverence and awe of heaven. Unfortunately many have lost that sense of wonder, says Warren Wiersbe, and wonder is the basis of worship. Wonder means amazement, surprise, astonishment, bewilderment, admiration, awe, and fascination.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE WORSHIP OF THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS AND THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES (v. 4)

In verse 4 the twenty-four elders, that is, the glorified church,<sup>20</sup> and the four living creatures, probably cherubs who serve before God's throne (cf. Rev. 4:6-7),<sup>21</sup> reappear. In 5:6–10 they fall down and worship the lamb and sing of His worthiness to break the seals of the scroll He had taken from the right hand of God. Here they perform the same act of worship, this time honoring God for His righteous judgment.

<sup>16</sup> Significantly the first occurrence of "Hallelujah" in the Bible is in Psalm 104:35, where the context is also judgment (E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse*, 3d ed., [London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984], 584).

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Love, *1 John—Revelation*, Layman's Bible Commentary (Atlanta: Knox, 1960), 104.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 9th ed. (New York: Cook, 1906), 3:199.

<sup>19</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1990), 4:3-44.

<sup>20</sup> The identity of the twenty-four elders is one of the great interpretive problems of the Book of Revelation. Most modern commentators identify them as either an exalted angelic order or as a redeemed company of people. For a helpful summary of seven views on the identity of the twenty-four elders, see David Anne, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1997), 288–92.

<sup>21</sup> C. R. G. Hall, "Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne: Another Look at Revelation 4:6," *New Testament Studies* 36 (1990): 609–13.

## THE EXHORTATION OF THE CHERUBS FROM THE THRONE (v. 5)

At this point John heard a voice from the throne, encouraging all to "Give praise to our God." Some say this voice was that of Christ.<sup>22</sup> However, it is very unlikely that Christ would say, "our God." It is more likely that the voice is that of the four living creatures.

## GOD IS PRAISED FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB (19:6-8)

Verses 6-8 have been called "the wedding march of the Church."<sup>23</sup> Here John heard the "great multitude" of martyrs again. Their praise turns from celebrating the judgment of Babylon to rejoicing over the marriage of the Lamb. The sound of the praise in John's ears was like the din of a vast, thunderous waterfall and the sharp cracks of thunder.

## PRAISE FOR THE IMPENDING KINGDOM (v. 6)

"Hallelujah [Praise the Lord]! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns." The martyrs in heaven know that the fall of Babylon means that the age-long prayer of God's people, "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10), is being realized, and the time of reward is about to begin.

Domitian, the Caesar who ruled at the time Revelation was written, conferred on himself the title "Our Lord and God" (*Dominus et deus noster*).<sup>24</sup> But the praise recorded in 19:6 points out that God, not Caesar, is "the Almighty" (ὁ παντοκράτωρ), the One who holds all things in His control.<sup>25</sup>

## JOY OVER THE LAMB'S WEDDING (vv. 7-8)

No aspect of the Christian's hope is more radiant and reassuring than the disclosure made here by John concerning the marriage of the Lamb and the feast that follows.<sup>26</sup> In Ephesians 5, Paul counseled husbands and wives about marriage. Having emphasized oneness in marriage, he concluded, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (v. 32). Revelation 19:7-8 also speaks of the relationship between Christ and His church as that of husband and wife.

<sup>22</sup> For example, G. H. Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Paternoster, 1948), 312.

<sup>23</sup> Torrance, *The Apocalypse Today*, 153.

<sup>24</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, Book 8: *Domitian* 13, trans. J. C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 2:367.

<sup>25</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 346.

<sup>26</sup> A. Skevington Wood, *Prophecy in the Space Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 95.

In marriage a man and a woman are united in a relationship for companionship, fellowship, intimacy—the sharing of thoughts, purposes, and life. When the Bible pictures the relationship of Christ and His people as that of a husband and wife, it is expressing the truth that there is a covenant or bond between them,<sup>27</sup> an everlasting union.<sup>28</sup> As Charles put it, marriage "denotes the intimate and indissoluble communion of Christ with the [believing] community, which He has purchased with His own blood."<sup>29</sup> It also contains the notions of love, joy, and fidelity.<sup>30</sup>

*The Bridegroom.* The bridegroom is identified as "the Lamb." It is significant that the heavenly wedding is not called "the marriage of the Creator," "the marriage of the Lord," or "the marriage of the King."<sup>31</sup> The title "Lamb," more than any other, draws attention to the fact that "Christ . . . loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). He is "Christ our Passover," celebrated by the singing of the Hallel psalms.

*The bride.* The bride,<sup>32</sup> as most commentators agree, is the church, the company of the redeemed.<sup>33</sup> Dispensational commentators specifically identify the bride as all saints between Pentecost and the rapture of the church.<sup>34</sup> Revelation 19:7 actually says "wife" (ἡ γυνή) and not "bride" (ἡ νύμφη).

In the New Testament the bride/wife metaphor is used of the church in two kinds of passages. In some (Rom. 7:1–4; 1 Cor. 6:17) the church is seen as the wife married to Christ. In others (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:2) she is seen as a virgin and the marriage is future.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 273.

<sup>28</sup> Kiddie, *The Revelation of St. John*, 379.

<sup>29</sup> Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:126.

<sup>30</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:173.

<sup>31</sup> Robert T. Ketcham, "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," in *Understanding the Times*, ed. W. Culbertson and H. B. Centz (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 171-79.

<sup>32</sup> In the Old Testament, Israel is viewed as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh, who was put away (Hos. 2:2) but one day will be reunited to Him (2:19-20; cf. Isa. 62:1-5).

<sup>33</sup> Not all agree, however. Those who hold to a partial pretribulational rapture say the bride is made up of a select group of believers whose Lives have been characterized by dedicated discipleship and watchful preparedness (Robert Govett, *The Apocalypse: Expounded by Scripture* [London, 1861; reprint, Miami Springs, FL: Conley & Schoettle, 1981], 4:167; Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 3:213-19; Lang, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 315-16). Ultradispensational writers argue that the wife of Revelation 19 is Israel and the bride of Revelation 21 is the church (Bullinger, *Apocalypse*, 589-91).

<sup>34</sup> For example Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ*; 380.

<sup>35</sup> The choice of term (i.e., "wife" instead of "bride") is probably not significant (cf. Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 227).

*The preparations.* "His bride," John said, "has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). This is no reluctant bride. Her making herself ready suggests the repentance and faith that each person must exercise to become one of God's people." Her wedding gown of fine linen is described as "the righteous acts [lit., 'righteousnesses'] of the saints." That her wedding garment was given to her pictures the fact that faith is the gift of God.

Scholars have debated the expression "the righteousnesses of the saints" (τὰ δικαιώματα τῶν ἁγίων, v. 8). Some say it refers to the doctrine of justification, whereby a person is acquitted or declared righteous in God's courtroom.<sup>37</sup> It speaks, they say, of the church's holy state before God.

Others say John referred to two kinds of righteousness, justification and sanctification. One is the righteousness believers have the moment they exercise faith in Christ. The other is the righteousness believers acquire as they respond in daily obedience to the heavenly Bridegroom.<sup>38</sup> This view has been illustrated by the custom in the Roman world of wearing two robes. The inner garment was a tunic, and the outer, loose-fitting garment was a toga. "Both of these garments, the inner garment that Christ gives us, and the outer garment, the weaving of our own works, we shall wear in the beautiful, consummating day of our Lord. . . . There is a positional righteousness [and] a practical righteousness."<sup>39</sup>

Still others say the "righteousnesses" should be viewed in the context of rewards. They point out that the rapture of the church and the judgment seat of Christ will have taken place. They see the bride clothed in her rewards or awards.<sup>40</sup>

Other expositors say the "righteousnesses" refer to the innumerable acts of faithful obedience that characterize the bride. In other words it speaks of the good works ("righteous deeds of the saints")<sup>41</sup> performed after salvation, good works enabled by the

<sup>36</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 274.

<sup>37</sup> For example Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (reprint, Chicago: Moody, 1958), 725. Alford says the plural is distributive, implying not many righteousnesses for each believer, but one state of righteousness for each of the saints.

<sup>38</sup> Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 3:223–24; cf. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 274.

<sup>39</sup> W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 5:29.

<sup>40</sup> Bullinger, *The Apocalypse*, 593.

<sup>41</sup> G. Schrenk, "δικαίωμα," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2 (1964), 222; Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 272; and Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary*, 370–71.



indwelling Spirit of God.<sup>42</sup> The fact that the same noun (*δικαιώματα*) is used of God's righteous acts in 15:4 favors this fourth view. The bride receives the garment as a gift, but she must put it on.<sup>43</sup> A transformed life is the proper response to the call of the heavenly Bridegroom.<sup>44</sup>

*The marriage.* Jewish marriage customs in Bible times involved three stages.<sup>45</sup> The first was the negotiation or betrothal stage. Parents would contract to marry their children, and a dowry would be paid to the father of the bride. The couple was then considered husband and wife (cf. Matt. 1:18-19), and only a divorce could sever the contract. Between the betrothal and the wedding there was an interval or waiting period to demonstrate chastity. The second stage involved a procession and the wedding. The groom would go to his bride's parents' home and take her to the home of his parents, where the marriage would be consummated. The third stage was the wedding feast, in which the festivities could last up to seven days.

These three stages can be seen in Christ's relationship to the church. The first stage (negotiation or betrothal) answers to the Cross where the price—the dowry—was paid. Samuel Stone expressed this truth in his hymn "The Church's One Foundation":

From heaven He came and sought her  
To be His holy bride  
With His own blood He bought her,  
And for her life He died.<sup>46</sup>

On another level it refers to the work of evangelism and the moment of faith when a sinner embraces Christ as Savior. While the actual union of believers with Christ is yet future (they are living in the interval between betrothal and wedding), it is their present hope.

<sup>42</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 348.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Wall, *Revelation*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 222-23.

<sup>44</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 348.

<sup>45</sup> On Jewish marriage customs see Marcus Cohn, "Marriage," in *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, 7:372; Raphael Posner, "Marriage," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 11:1032-34; Joachim Jeremias, "νύμφη," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4 (1967), 1099-1101; Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 64-69; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1939), 215-17; and Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 271.

<sup>46</sup> Samuel J. Stone, "The Church's One Foundation," in *Hymns of Truth and Praise* (Fort Dodge, KS: Gospel Perpetuating, 1971), 226.

The second stage (procession and wedding) will take place at the rapture of the church, when the Lamb will take His bride to His Father's home, where she will be united to Him forever. Paul wanted the church to be prepared for this event. He was concerned lest the bride be defiled on earth by false doctrine or immoral behavior (Eph. 5:27).

Bible teachers differ widely over the symbolism of the third stage (the wedding feast, or "marriage supper of the Lamb").<sup>47</sup> Several factors suggest this will occur in the millennial kingdom. This is the feast of which the Savior spoke when He said, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). He said of the Passover Feast, "I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). Jesus also spoke of the day when "many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). That the feast will be millennial is also suggested by Luke's parable of a wedding feast (12:35-37) in which the Lord serves supper when He returns from the wedding.

#### ASSURANCE OF THE CERTAINTY OF THESE THINGS (vv. 9-10) THE INVITATION TO THE WEDDING

In verse 9 an angel (probably the angel of 17:1) told John to write of the blessedness of those who are invited to the marriage supper. Some commentators say the word "wife" looks at the church collectively, while the invited guests describe the church as individuals.<sup>48</sup> "The guests and the Bride are one and the same."<sup>49</sup> Proponents of this view note the fluidity of metaphorical language. For example, in Revelation 7:17 the "Lamb" and the "shepherd" are one and the same.<sup>50</sup> Others distinguish between the bride and the invited guests. They argue that the guests are the saints converted

<sup>47</sup> There are at least three views: (1) The marriage supper is millennial (Seiss, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, 3:230-31; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 275). (2) The marriage supper will take place after the millennium in the eternal state (Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:126-29; and Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 348). (3) The marriage supper will take place in heaven before the return of the Lord to the earth (Renald E. Showers, "The Marriage and Marriage Supper of the Lamb," *Israel My Glory*, June 1991, 9-12). Texts such as Isaiah 25:6-8 and Luke 12:36-37 seem to support the first view.

<sup>48</sup> Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 234.

<sup>49</sup> Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:129.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:234; and Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 250.

during the tribulation and possibly also Old Testament saints.<sup>51</sup> In any case it is a blessed thing to be invited<sup>52</sup> to this wonderful meeting with Jesus Christ. The very word "invited" implies that access to the wedding feast is not gained on one's own merits. The initiative in salvation always lies with God (Matt. 22:3).<sup>53</sup>

#### THE BASIS OF THE BELIEVERS' CONFIDENCE

Is this invitation to participate in Christ's glorious kingdom a delusion? No, for the angel assured John, "These are the true words of God." The Lamb, who was slain that sins may be forgiven, is in heaven today preparing a place for His people. He will return someday for His people, and there is in store for them a banquet with Jesus Christ in the kingdom of heaven. There is no room for doubting.

#### THE DIGNITY OF THE BELIEVERS' MESSAGE

John was so awed by the message he heard from the angel that he bowed down to worship him. John did this again (Rev. 22:8-9), and in both instances the angel rebuked him and asserted that God alone must be worshiped. Why did John record these failings

<sup>51</sup> Cf. William Kelly, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (London: Morrish, 1874), 392-98; and Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 273. Proponents make the following observations: (1) Psalm 45:13-14 and the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) distinguish between the bride and her companions. (2) In Hebrews 12:23 the church is distinguished from "the spirits of righteous men made perfect," that is, the Old Testament saints in the eschatological city to come. (3) In Revelation 21:24 the nations are distinguished from the bride (Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 3:232). Classic dispensationalists make a sharp distinction between Israel and the church. They argue, for example, that the Bible distinguishes between two husbands (Father and Son) and two wives (Israel and the church). They say this double-marriage idea solves the dilemma of two distinct peoples both being married to the Lord. "The company that constitutes the bride of the one marriage would constitute the guests at the other. When [God] shall take Israel into eternal union with Himself, the Church shall be there as 'the called.' When Christ shall take the Church into a like eternal union, Israel shall be there as 'the guests'" (Ottman, *The Unfolding of the Ages*, 411; cf. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Revelation: An Expository Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], 353; and Showers, "The Marriage," 11).

A modified dispensationalism recognizes more continuity than discontinuity between the people of God in each age and concludes that the New Covenant people of God as a whole (including both redeemed Israel in the millennium and the church) is the bride of Christ. The marriage supper in the millennium will celebrate the union between Christ and His people, that is, the church and Israel (Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 184-85; and Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 248-49).

<sup>52</sup> The verb *καλέω* is also used of the effectual call to salvation, that is, election (Rom. 8:30; 2 Thess. 2:14). Here, however, it seems to have the idea of "invited" without suggesting election. In the parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:14) *καλέω* is clearly used of a general call or invitation (Johnson, "Revelation," 572).

<sup>53</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 250.

on his part? The lesson is twofold: He wanted to show his readers how idolatry can infiltrate one's life through even innocent means. John was about to turn a messenger of the truth into an idol. Idolatry is more than burning incense before a man-made statue. It is giving absolute worth and devotion to anything or anyone other than God, even a good cause.<sup>54</sup>

In Revelation 19, however, the lesson is not so much that John was demeaning God's glory. Rather, he was demeaning his own prophetic office.<sup>55</sup> The "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The phrase "of Jesus" is an objective genitive, meaning that the message is about Him. The message about Jesus—His death, resurrection, and soon return—is at the heart of all prophecy.<sup>56</sup> The angel is not the object of the prophetic word. On the contrary, angels, together with John and other prophets, bear witness to Jesus. They are no more than fellow servants with the saints in their relationship to Christ. By bowing to the angels John was ignoring the fact that he had an office equal in dignity to that of any angel. He was a prophet who proclaimed the truth about Jesus.

### CONCLUSION

A number of important lessons for Christians may be seen in Revelation 19:1–10. First, the passage teaches the inescapable consequences of sin. Will God allow the world to persist in its unrighteousness? No. A day is coming when God will make right all the world's wrongs. The punishment of Babylon (vv. 1–3) and the punishment of all sinners will demonstrate God's justice.

Second, God's judgment is true and righteous. His punishment will fit the crime. God is perfect in His judgment for He alone can see the inmost thoughts and desires of any person, He alone has the purity that can judge without prejudice, and He alone has the wisdom to choose the appropriate judgment and the power to execute it.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 237.

<sup>55</sup> Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2:130.

<sup>56</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 228. "A situation, then, in which . . . opponents of Christianity are trying to make its adherents deny that Jesus is the Messiah, curse Christ, say that Caesar is Lord, and swear by the  $\tau\acute{\upsilon}\chi\eta$ ? [Fortune] of Caesar . . . is the setting for the angel's assurance that it is the prophetic Spirit which inspires every confession of Jesus, and, conversely that the form which inspired prophecy takes in this struggle is testimony to Jesus" (G. W. H. Lampe, "The Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy [Rev. 19:10]," in *The New Testament Age*, ed. William C. Weinrich [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1984], 1:257-58).

<sup>57</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:169.

Third, some people will escape the judgment of God. They will be blessed by participating in the marriage supper of the Lamb ("Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb," v. 9).

Fourth, this passage points up some important lessons about the nature of worship and its relevance to the Christian life. Worship in heaven has great dignity; it will include every believer (no one can say, "Well, I can't sing"); and heaven's songs are theocentric. Everyone will be offering praise to the Lord for His glory,<sup>58</sup> not for their own entertainment.

Several observations can also be made about the worshipers in heaven. First, true worshipers accept the will of God. When the twenty-four elders say, "Amen" (i.e., "So be it, Lord") they are applauding the judgment of God. Second, true worshipers are committed to God's purposes. Those in heaven are delighted at the prospect of Christ's kingdom ("the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns," v. 6). Third, true worshipers will discover joy in fellowship with God. They will rejoice (v. 7) because they are betrothed to Him now and soon will be united to Him at "the marriage of the Lamb." Fourth, true worshipers will rest in the assurance of God's victory, knowing that He is "the Almighty," the One who holds all things in His control.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Bill Wymond, "The Music of Heaven's Worship," *Table Talk*, December 1991, 10-11.

<sup>59</sup> James Stewart, *The Wind of the Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 47-55.

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