

A decorative L-shaped frame composed of thick black lines. It starts with a vertical line on the left side, extends horizontally to the right at the top, and then continues vertically down the right side, ending with a horizontal line extending to the left at the bottom.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Chapter 19-20

Opening Prayer

Let us pray.

Direct, O Lord, we beseech you,
all our actions by your holy inspirations,
and carry them on by your gracious assistance,
that every prayer and work of ours
may begin always from you,
and by you be happily ended.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Source Material

- *Revelation*, Peter S. Williamson
- *Revelation, Sacra Pagina*, Wilfrid J. Harrington, OP
- *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Ratzinger
- *The Antichrist*, Vincent P. Miceli, SJ
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- *New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE)*
- *Douay-Rheims Bible*

Summary of Chapter 18-19

- As we are reaching the conclusion of Revelation, John is painting a picture for us of the end of history as he saw it
- In chapter 18, we saw the destruction of Babylon, represented corporately as a harlot
 - *The harlot Babylon was an image of the corrupt and godless cultures, governments or movements of the world that not only rejected God and his holy laws, but also actively worked against the Kingdom and the Church*
 - *Rome fit the image of the harlot Babylon in the 1st century, but as we've said, every time and place can validly see the 'family resemblance' of the harlot at work in its own culture*
 - *The victory of God was utterly complete at the end and effortless on his part, taking only "one hour" to bring destruction upon her*

Summary of Chapter 18-19

- The destruction of Babylon and the victory of God served both as a warning to the “inhabitants of the earth” to repent and turn from their wickedness and corruption,
 - *But also as an encouragement to the faithful to remain steadfast despite the persecutions and hardship their faith brought them*
 - *In the end, God will prevail totally, and evil will be destroyed.*
- Chapter 18 concludes with a preview of that victory, this time from the perspective of the heavenly court and all the faithful who are now enjoying the rewards of their steadfastness
- The celebration continues in chapter 19
 - *We saw again the great multitude of the faithful with their white garments of holiness and their palm branches of victory*
 - *They cried out “alleluia!” in praise of God for his victory*

Summary of Chapter 18-19

- Chapter 19 also saw a new theme in Revelation – Jesus as a bridegroom preparing to wed his bride, who is the Church
 - *Recall the common image of a nuptial union from Scripture (Ps 45, Hos 2, Ezk 16, Mt 9, Jn 3, etc.) to describe God’s union with his people*
 - *The bride is “made ready” for marriage to the bridegroom through his death and resurrection and through her steadfast faith.*
- We left off in chapter 19 with the appearance of the resurrected Christ, coming on a white horse of victory and in glorious splendor
 - *He is preparing for the final battle, bringing behind him all the heavenly “armies” (“Lord God of Hosts...”)*

The Final Battle (19:17-21)

- We will see the final battle play out in two steps...
 - *First, the defeat of the Beast and the False Prophet*
 - *Then, in chapter 20, the defeat of Satan*
 - *Thus, the entire “unholy trinity” is destroyed*
- The imagery in chapter 19 is similar to a prophetic vision glimpsed by Ezekiel (ch 38-39)
 - *Note that since the outcome of the battle is utterly certain, the angel focuses on the cleanup afterwards*
 - *The graphic details of the birds feasting on the flesh of the fallen evildoers are given to leave no doubt as to the horror of their defeat and the fate of those who oppose God*

The Final Battle (19:17-21)

- The image is of an actual battle with opposing forces facing each other, as we might see in a historical drama
 - *This will not be what it is like of course – it is only an image*
 - *So what will it be like?*
 - *As we have seen before in chapter 12, the only way to attack Christ is to attack his followers on earth, the faithful of the Church*
 - *The “final battle” appears to be some type of worldwide, satanically inspired attack (persecution) on Christians at the end of history.*

- But the battle is basically over before it begins
 - *Why? Because Christ was already victorious through his death and resurrection.*
 - *There really is no battle in the sense that there is no chance for evil to win*
 - *From the perspective of the Church at the time, it will be a time of great tribulation*
 - *But from the perspective of heaven, the battle is simply a “mopping up” operation.*

The Final Battle (19:17-21)

- Again, the “battle” will be some type of great and horrible persecution against the faithful, but the victory is already assured
 - *It will culminate in an instant, in the blow of the seventh trumpet, with the pouring of the seventh bowl, at the word of command from the Father*
- The fate of the Beast and the False Prophet
 - *Simply put, they are banished to hell, symbolized by a ‘fiery pool burning with sulphur,’ also translated as a pool of fire or brimstone (similar to the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen 19)*
 - *The pool of fire is the image of hell and is the final destiny of the Beast and the False Prophet, and as we’ll see, also the devil (ch 20) and the wicked.*
 - *All the human allies of the Beast are killed*
 - *The victory of Christ crucified and risen is instantaneous and effortless. There is simply no power that can in the slightest way oppose or prevent his victory.*

The binding of Satan (20:1-3)

- The account of the final defeat of Satan is told in an unusual way
 - *Instead of just telling us that he is defeated, as we heard with the Beast and the False Prophet, we will hear a recap of the history of his defeat in three stages:*
 - *His initial “binding” and “imprisonment”*
 - *The 1000-year reign of the Church*
 - *Satan’s release and final assault before the end*
- Our time period has shifted for the moment. We’re no longer at the end but have moved earlier to the time of Christ.
- The ‘event’ of Christ – his incarnation and birth, his life and teaching, his passion and especially his death and resurrection marks the beginning of the end for Satan
 - *His ultimate defeat is certain from this moment*
 - *Recall the scene from the “Passion of the Christ”*

The binding of Satan (20:1-3)

- In the imagery of Revelation 20, at the death of Christ, Satan is bound and cast into the abyss
 - *His power is restrained (but not eliminated). He can still tempt people astray, and as we saw in chapter 12-13, he sends his emissaries – the Beast and the False Prophet – out from the abyss to work against the Kingdom*
- With Satan's power to "deceive the nations" restrained (bound), the truth of the Gospel can now shine forth. There is a change in the spiritual outlook of humanity at the death and resurrection of Christ
 - *History shows nation after nation hearing and believing the Good News as the faith spread around the world, though not without opposition.*
 - *Just as Christ bound the "strong man" (Mk 3:27) in order to exorcise and free the possessed man, so now does he bind Satan to allow the Gospel to flourish – to free people from their sins through faith and baptism.*

The binding of Satan (20:1-3)

- The binding/restraint of Satan will last 1000 years
 - *As we have seen many times, numbers in Revelation are symbolic, not to be taken literally*
 - *We recall the number 10 symbolizes totality or fullness*
 - *10x10x10 = 1000*
 - *We might think of the 1000 years of Satan's restraint as a "long time," the time of the Church, the fullness of years until the end times approach.*
 - *We'll see what happens when those years are completed...*
- From the time period of the binding of Satan at the death and resurrection of Christ, we now move forward in the next paragraph to the 1000-year reign of the Church

Excursus: The three states of the Church

- In faith formation, we talk about the three states of the Church and how the Church is more than simply those on earth as part of the “physical” or visible community of believers
- The Church militant
 - *The baptized living on earth are the Church Militant, “fighting” the battle of faith against the enemies of our souls – the world, the flesh and the devil*
 - *The Church Militant struggles to remain faithful, with God’s help and through perseverance, while in the world that is largely opposed to God and that often actively persecutes them.*
- The Church Triumphant or Church Reigning
 - *The faithful in heaven who even now are sharing in the victory of Christ and enjoying the reward and rest in eternal splendor and glory.*

Excursus: The three states of the Church

■ The Church Penitent or Suffering

- *The faithful departed who died in God's friendship and grace but who still have worldly attachments or earthly encumbrances such that they are not prepared to see God face to face in his awesome holiness and glory*
- *These souls are assured of the glory of heaven but must first be purified or purged of their worldliness and sinful attachments to anything that is not of Christ*
- *Our Mass intentions are for these souls, as are funeral Masses, novenas for the dead, etc. Our prayers help them!*

- ## ■ In the end, there will be only one state of the Church – the Church Triumphant in heaven. All people will either be in or out.

The 1000-year reign (20:4-6)

- John is seeing the Church Triumphant, those already enjoying the glory of heaven
- They are entrusted with judgment and sit on thrones
 - *Exercising judgment is an act of sharing in the reign of Christ. This is why they sit on thrones*
- Those who had been beheaded
 - *These are the martyrs who died for their faith in Christ. We know that beheading was the common method of execution for citizens of the Roman Empire (Paul was a citizen. Jesus was not.)*
 - *This is not exclusively the martyrs but includes all those faithful who, upon their deaths, enter the Church Triumphant,*
 - *all those who conformed themselves fully to the Gospel and rejected the evil of the world, symbolized by rejecting the mark of the Beast.*

The 1000-year reign (20:4-6)

- *The message to the original audience (and to us!): these faithful ones are not dead. They are alive and gloriously sharing in the reign of Christ through their faith*
- *Entry into the Kingdom is described as the “first resurrection,” not in a bodily way as will happen at the end (ch21) but alive fully in heaven.*

■ The first resurrection

- *The simplest explanation of this term is that it refers to life with Christ in heaven immediately after death – No purgatory!*
- *This is what the martyrs and the most steadfast of the faithful will experience*
- *This first resurrection anticipates what all the faithful will experience in the end, and the angel calls those who “come to life” in the first resurrection “blessed.”*

The 1000-year reign (20:4-6)

- The second death
 - *Described a bit later as the pool of fire reserved for Satan, the Beast, the False Prophet as well as for the ungodly and evildoers*
 - *Plainly speaking, the second death is hell*
 - *All people will experience the first death – the death of their bodies*
 - *This is not necessarily bad, at least for the faithful who will (either immediately or eventually) come alive in Christ*
 - *The second death is reserved for those condemned to hell*
- How important for us not only to strive to avoid the second death but also to seek to be in the first resurrection!

Excursus: The Millennium

- There have been many interpretations of the millennium through the ages, especially by certain fundamentalist groups
 - *Mille – 1000; annum – year*
- The Church rejects the notion of the “rapture,” popularized in the 19th century, in which Christ will return before the final tribulation and the faithful departed and all true believers will be snatched up to heaven to reign with Christ for 1000 years
- The Church also does not proclaim the idea of a visible reign of the Church on earth for 1000 years before the final judgment
- The fullness of the Kingdom will not come about solely through human programs but comes through the victory of Christ over evil and a new heaven and a new earth, which we’ll see in chapter 21

The Judgment of the Devil (20:7-10)

- Much of this has already been told in previous chapters
 - *Satan was “bound” through the death and resurrection of Christ. His power is limited, but not destroyed, allowing for the growth of the Church and spread of the Gospel.*
 - *But he will continue to oppose God and the work of the Church*
- After the 1000 years, he will be released
 - *Note the passive voice – God allows it in his providence*
 - *The devil will deceive many and gather them for some type of worldwide attack on the Church (remember, the only way to attack Christ is through his faithful)*
 - *The attack will be massive, with those enlisting in his “army” like the “sand of the sea”*
 - *Gog and Magog – a reference to Ezk 38-39, which prophesied a similar assault upon the faithful by the ungodly*
 - *This is another view or retelling of the final battle of Armageddon that we saw in ch16. Note that this is a spiritual battle primarily, but will involve persecution and active attacks against the faithful*

The Judgment of the Devil (20:7-10)

- Why is the devil released?
 - *Perhaps as we have discussed, the battle lines will be clearly drawn before the end, with people having to make a definitive choice*
 - *The identity of those with the mark of God and the mark of the Beast will be clear*
 - *The judgment and justice of God's victory and the defeat and punishment of evil will be manifest.*
- In the end, the defeat of Satan is definitive and effortless, just like for the Beast and the False Prophet
 - *He is cast into the pool of fire with them and with the evildoers for eternity*

The Judgment of the Dead (20:11-15)

- With the “unholy trinity” destroyed and cast into hell, the final judgment of all the dead from all the ages begins
- So great is the holiness, grandeur and majesty of God, preparing for this ultimate moment of history, that creation itself reacts with awe – “earth and sky fled from his presence...”
- From his white throne, symbolizing his victory, purity and absolute holiness, God summons all the dead – the great and the lowly
 - *Everyone who has ever lived stands before the throne*
- The scrolls were opened, symbolizing the “written record” of everyone’s deeds, according to which God will judge them
 - *St. Paul: “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10)*

The Judgment of the Dead (20:11-15)

- Among the scrolls was the “book of life,” which we have seen earlier
 - *Those whose names are written in it are those who have accepted God’s offer of eternal salvation through the death of Christ*
 - *These blessed ones are also judged, but their judgment affirms their election, as all their good deeds and their faith will be made known*
 - *Simply put, those not written in the Book of Life are cast into the pool of fire with Satan and the ungodly, and those whose names are inscribed are welcomed to eternal life in Christ.*
- As St. Paul said: after Christ “has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power...the last enemy to be destroyed is death.” (1 Cor 15:24-26)
 - *Death itself, defeated by the resurrection of Christ, is cast into the pool of fire.*
 - *Death itself will be no more, either bodily or spiritually, such that life without end may be enjoyed by the faithful in a new heaven and a new earth.*

Next week...the last class!

- Next class Wednesday, April 21
- The conclusion of the Book of Revelation
 - *The new Heaven and the new Earth*
 - *The Bridegroom weds his Bride*
 - *The eternal bliss of the faithful*
 - *John's farewell and epilogue*

- Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.