

LESSON 11

**THE “MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB”
IN REV 19:6-10
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST****INTRODUCTION**

One of the marvelous contributions of the Bible is to inform us of the truly significant realities of life. One such significant reality that ought to be of paramount importance to all of us is the fact that we must one day stand before the presence of the living God and hear Him evaluate us. That is, we must face the judgment of God. The New Testament is quite clear that even those of us *in Christ* must face judgment. For believers, however, our sin has already been judged in Christ, and we need not be in dread of being judged for our sin (Jn 5:24; Col 2:13-14). Nevertheless, we who are Christians do face a judgment, as the Apostle Paul has clearly stated in 2 Cor 5:10. Writing to Christians and urging them to live lives pleasing to the Lord, he hastens to add: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” This judgment seems to be for the purpose of evaluating our faithfulness to the Lord and the dispensing of appropriate rewards (cf. 1 Cor 4:4-5).

Evangelicals are agreed that a judgment awaits believers, but they have not been in agreement upon the time and situation at which this occurs. Some hold that there is only one general judgment for all people (saved and lost) following the return of the Lord, while others hold that there are several judgments to take place with the saved being judged on separate occasion from the lost. The main purpose of this article is to clarify the time and circumstances in which believers will experience the “judgment seat of Christ.” Though I presume a premillennial perspective in this article, my conclusion (and the arguments by which I arrived there) should be of interest even to those holding a different conviction. After a brief historical introduction to the debate, I will focus attention on the passage in Rev 19:6-10 and examine the contribution this makes to the discussion of the judgment seat of Christ and rewarding of believers.

THE HISTORICAL BACKDROP

Throughout most of church history, there has been an expectation of a single judgment that would follow Christ’s return. This is reflected, for instance, in that part of the Apostles’ Creed which states that Christ “. . . ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, whence he will come to judge the living and the dead.” The Reformers seem to have affirmed this expectation without sensing a need to elaborate multiple and distinctive judgments. John Calvin, applauding the integrity and reliability of the Apostles’ Creed, understood this statement to imply a single judgment following Christ’s return. In his *Institutes* he stated,

No one—living or dead—shall escape his judgment. The sound of the trumpet will be heard from the ends of the earth, and by it all will be summoned before his judgment seat, both those still alive at that day and those whom death had previously taken from the company of the living [I Thess. 4:16-17].¹

In light of the scriptural passage he cites, it seems that he understood the “rapture passages” to apply to the Second Coming of Christ.

¹ John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:525. Though Calvin was well aware of the authorship discussion of the Apostles’ Creed, he still viewed it as a product of the apostolic age and a scriptural summation of the faith.

This position of a single judgment following the Second Coming continued to be espoused in Reformed circles in the following centuries, and was affirmed yet again in Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology*.²

The rise of premillennial theology (especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) resulted in a more elaborate model of the future judgment. Observing the reference in Rev 20 to two resurrections separated by a thousand years in which Satan will be bound, premillennialists have consequently come to the conclusion that the resurrection of the righteous is distinct from the resurrection of the lost. Correspondingly, they have understood the judgment of the lost to be distinct from that of believers (the second resurrection to appear at the "great white throne" judgment pertains only to the lost). Yet, even premillennialists have differed among themselves as to the timing of the judgment for believers. George Ladd, representing posttribulation premillennialism, has suggested that the judgment seat of Christ occurs after the Second Coming.³ In dispensational premillennialism, on the other hand, there has been a consensus of opinion that the judgment seat of Christ will occur after the rapture of the church but prior to the Second Coming.⁴

One of the arguments that has been used for the dispensational position has been the reference in Rev 19:7-8 to the "marriage supper of the Lamb." Taking notice that the reference to the "marriage supper" and "the bride" (assumed to be the *church*) being clothed in fine linen are mentioned prior to the scene depicting the Second Coming (i.e., Rev 19:11-16), the conclusion has been drawn that the church must have already undergone the judgment seat of Christ. Pentecost used this argument in his classic work *Things to Come*:

When the Lord returns to the earth with His bride to reign, the bride is seen to be already rewarded. This is observed in Revelation 19:8, where it must be observed that the "righteousness of the saints" is plural and can not refer to the imparted righteousness of Christ, which is the believer's portion, but the righteousnesses which have survived examination and have become the basis of reward.⁵

In my studies of the Book of Revelation, however, I have come to rather different conclusions about the significance of these verses in chapter 19. Rather than being an argument for the judgment seat of Christ prior to the Second Coming, I feel that a closer study warrants the conclusion that the "marriage supper" and the judgment seat of Christ take place after the Second Coming. Furthermore, I feel that such a position is not inconsistent with dispensational premillennialism (which I myself generally adhere to).

² Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1941), 730, 733. A similar position is offered by Fred H. Klooster: "The last judgment will be absolutely universal and worldwide. All men, women, and children will be judged; the angels, both good and fallen, and also Satan will be judged. The (resurrected) dead and the living, the just and the unjust—all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give account of what they have done in life. The books will be opened (Rev. 20:12) and everyone will be judged by what he has done, including every idle word and secret thought (Eccl. 12:14; Mt. 12:36; Rom. 2:16; 1 Cor. 3:13; Rev. 20:12f.)" (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988], s.v. "Judgment, Last," by Fred H. Klooster).

³ George E. Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1956), 102-103.

⁴ For a recent reaffirmation of this position, see John Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books [SP Publications, Inc.], 1990), 446, 459, 467. Robert Lightner, in his helpful work *The Last Days Handbook* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990) has even suggested that one of the matters concerning which premillennial pretribulationists are in general agreement about is the belief in the judgment seat of Christ following the rapture of the church. He goes on to state, "The judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor 3:12-15) and the marriage of the Lamb take place (Rev 19:7) while the tribulation judgments are poured out on earth" (p 61).

⁵ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1958), 220-21.

THE STRUCTURAL COMPOSITION OF REV 19:1-10

At the onset of my argumentation, I would like to identify the structural relation of Rev 19:6-10 to both its immediate context and the preceding material in 16:17–18:24. I would suggest that Rev 19:1-10 forms the conclusion to the 7th bowl judgment upon Babylon that was first introduced in 16:17.⁶ Thus Rev 16:17–19:10 should be viewed as a unit, with Rev 19:1-10 being the conclusion to that whole unit (namely, the rejoicing over Babylon's destruction).

Rev 19:1 begins with the words "After these things" (Μετὰ ταῦτα). Although this phrase was used to mark a major structural break at Rev 4:1, it need not be taken that way at Rev 19:1 for several reasons. First, the same phrase is used in other parts of Revelation without indicating a major structural break (e.g., 7:9; 9:12; and 15:5). Second, there is a clear continuity of subject matter with the preceding material. Note the emphasis in Rev 19:2-3 upon Babylon's destruction (especially the phrase "He has judged the great harlot"). In Rev 18:20, there was a call to rejoice over Babylon's downfall: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." The fulfillment of this rejoicing is then depicted in 19:1ff. with a four-fold *Hallelujah*. Third, the phrase in Rev 19:9 "And he said to me" reiterates what has already been encountered before in Rev 17:15, and which draws us back in turn to 17:1 ("And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me"). Thus, the angelic guide introduced in 17:1 seems to continue speaking as far as 19:9-10. In contrast, Rev 19:11 opens with the words "And I saw heaven opened" which introduces a distinctively different unit.

From these observations, it seems most reasonable to understand Rev 19:1-10 as the culmination of the Babylon cycle. There are internal factors, however, that seem to suggest a minor break within this unit at verse six, though certain consistencies of vv 6-10 in relation to vv 1-5 suggest that vv 1-10 stand as one complete unit.⁷ The emphasis upon "Hallelujah" is found in both parts. Yet there is a shift in subject matter from the first part (vv 1-5) to the second (6-10). The rejoicing over Babylon's downfall does not continue into the second part. That the minor break should be placed at verse 6 is suggested by the appearance of the phrase "I heard, as it were, a voice" (ἤκουσα ὡς φωνήν) at both 19:1 and 19:6 (though the similarity is more easily seen in the Greek text than the English).

Thus, Rev 19:1-10 is one complete unit, which culminates the longer section concerning Babylon that began at 16:17 with the release of the final bowl judgment. Within Rev 19:1-10, there is a minor break at verse six. Both 19:1-5 and 19:6-10 are "rejoicing" sections, but with different emphases. The first concerns the rejoicing over Babylon's downfall, while the latter concerns the rejoicing over things to come (in connection with the Second Coming). The rationale for juxtaposing these two "rejoicing" sections in this manner will become apparent when we explain the nature of the bride in 19:7.

THE "REJOICING" OVER THE FALL OF BABYLON (REV 19:1-5)

As mentioned previously, this section answers the call to rejoice over the judgment on Babylon that was uttered in Rev 18:20. The initial rejoicing in vv 1-2 comes from "a great multitude in heaven." Despite Thomas's suggestion that this represents an angelic chorus, it seems more appropriate to view the "singers" as the martyred saints of the Tribulation.⁸ Notice how the same phrase was used in 7:9-

⁶ The 7th bowl judgment involves the destruction of Babylon (note 16:19!). Because of the important role that Babylon plays for the Beast's (i.e., the Antichrist's) rule, her significance and destruction are elaborated in chapters 17 and 18. Rev 19:1-10, with the praise for her destruction, forms the finale to this whole section.

⁷ This is in contrast to the decision of Robert Mounce to place a major break at Rev 19:6, with 19:6–20:15 being the next major unit (*The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977], 338).

⁸ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22; An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1995), 355.

10,14-15 in this way. It is very appropriate that they should *lead the rejoicing*, as it were, since they had been the ones to suffer at the hands of the harlot. Notice also that the martyrdom issue is made explicit in v 2 - "and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her." This stands in contrast to Rev 17:6, "And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus."

In v 3, we hear another *Hallelujah*: "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever." This recalls the burning of Babylon mentioned in 17:16; 18:8,9,18. Since Babylon's destruction will not pass over into the New Creation, there is probably a play on the word smoke mentioned here. At first, there is a literal smoke from Babylon's destruction. In the course of time, however, it is not the smoke of the city, but those who had inhabited her and/or embraced her cause. The words recall those of 14:9-11 concerning those who worshipped the Beast and his image: "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever."

THE "REJOICING" OVER THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB (REV 19:6-10)

As v 6 opens, the rejoicing over Babylon recedes, and is replaced by rejoicing over the Bride of the Lamb. The identity of the Bride, the time of the scene, and the significance of her being clothed are crucial interpretative matters which have a bearing upon the Kingdom theme as well as the judgment seat of Christ.

A. Who is the "Bride"?

It is rather interesting that both the *NASB* and *NIV* translations use the term "bride" in Rev 19:7, because this is not a word normally translated "bride." The Greek word is $\gamma\upsilon\nu\eta$ which is normally translated "woman" or "wife."⁹ For a word that occurs close to 200 times in the New Testament, it seems odd that this is the only time it is translated "bride."¹⁰

In addition to being a common New Testament word, $\gamma\upsilon\nu\eta$ is a frequently used word in the book of Revelation, occurring 19 times. Three times it is used of a "woman" in a very general sense (2:20; 9:8; and 14:4). Eight times it is translated "woman" but used figuratively for Israel.¹¹ Six times it is translated "woman" but used figuratively of the harlot Babylon (the great city).¹² Finally, it is used twice in the final section of the book in what appears to be a parallel reference:

Rev 19:7 ". . . the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride ($\gamma\upsilon\nu\eta$) has made herself ready."

Rev 21:9 "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, 'Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife ($\gamma\upsilon\nu\alpha\iota\kappa\alpha$) of the Lamb.'"

In both cases, the Lamb and His $\gamma\upsilon\nu\eta$ are mentioned. The "wife" is introduced in a rather sudden and cursory way in Rev 19:7, but given further elaboration in Rev 21:9. What is surprising, however, is the explanation that John is given in the very next verse:

⁹This is a very common term in the New Testament, and is translated by the *NASB* as "wife" 72 times and as "woman" 95 times. When translated "wife," it always means a literal wife of a man except for Rev 21:9.

¹⁰ See Gen 29:21 and Deut 22:24 (LXX) for possible uses of $\gamma\upsilon\nu\eta$ as "bride."

¹¹Rev 12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17.

¹²Rev 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18.

Rev 21:10 "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

According to Rev 21:9-10, the γυνή is the "holy city, Jerusalem." One's first reaction might be to question if these verses should even be correlated: is the γυνή of Rev 19:7 the same as that of 21:9-10? I think there are other factors that would confirm that indeed they are the same. Rev 21:2, for instance, should be considered:

Rev 21:2 "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."

In this case, the "New Jerusalem" is called a *bride*, which in the Greek is νύμφη (the common New Testament word for "bride"). By now we should see that it does not matter whether we call her the "bride" or "wife" (in Rev 21:9 both γυνή and νύμφη are used). She is both, but she is the "New Jerusalem," not simply the "church." There is an indisputable link between Rev 21:2 and 21:9-10, but there is also a link between Rev 19:7 and 21:2 which serves to tie all three passages together.

Rev 19:7 "His bride has *made herself ready*" (ἠτοιμάσεν ἑαυτήν)

Rev 21:2 "*made ready* (ἠτοιμασμένην) as a bride adorned for her husband"

The very same verb (ἔτοιμαζω) is used in both verses. The play on the terms "lamb" (ἀρνίον), "wife" (γυνή), "bride" (νύμφη) and "made ready" (ἔτοιμαζω) leads to the conclusion that the wife/bride of Rev 19:7 is the "New Jerusalem." This is a *city*, though certainly different from any city the world has ever known. According to Rev 21:27, this is a city in which only the redeemed can enter: "and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."¹³

The preceding discussion has sought to demonstrate the connection of Rev 19:7 with Rev 21 in order to demonstrate that the bride/wife is not the *church* (i.e., the church in a restrictive sense, distinct from the saints of the Old Testament and the Tribulation). I would add that the term "bride" (though applicable to the *church*) is not a metaphor in the New Testament reserved solely for the *church*.¹⁴ The dominant metaphor for the *church* is the "body of Christ" (Eph

¹³Comparison should be made with Hebrews 12:22-24 and the various categories of inhabitants of the "heavenly Jerusalem."

¹⁴Surprising as it may seem, the *church* is never directly called the "bride of Christ" in the New Testament. The New Testament word for "bride" is νύμφη, which is translated either as "daughter-in-law" (e.g., Lk 12:53) or as "bride". The Greek word is only used eight times in the New Testament, being translated five times as "bride" by the *NASB*. [If νύμφη in the text critical problem of Matt 25:1 is accepted, then the word is used nine times. But this reading is doubtful. Both \aleph and B, as well as the *Byz* mss stand against this]. In these five instances, the term "bride" is not explicitly used of the "church." In Eph 5, there is a comparison drawn of Christ's love for the church which serves as a model for the way husbands are to love their wives, but even here the *church* is not called His wife or bride (though I would agree that the *implication* of the church constituting Christ's bride exists from the Eph 5 passage). Yet, I do not feel we can draw the conclusion from this that the church (and the church alone) is the bride of Christ. At best, this is an illustration of Christ's love for His church, an illustration which could apply to other redeemed saints as well. In 2 Cor 11:2, Paul does speak of presenting believers as a *pure virgin* (παρθένον ἀγνήν) to Christ, but this analogy is used of individual believers in regard to their moral purity, not the church *collectively*. Furthermore, the concept of "bride" is applicable to Israel, though the Old Testament word for "bride" (קַדְוָה) is never used of Israel in the Old Testament (קַדְוָה is translated "bride" fifteen times by the *NASB*). Though Israel is not called God's *bride*, the Lord does say that He will rejoice over Jerusalem in the way that a bridegroom rejoices over a bride (Isa 62:5).

1:23; 3:6; 4:4; 5:30; Col 1:24; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:27), of which Christ is the *head* (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18). Therefore, any preconceived theological assignment of the term "bride" to the church need not (and should not) dictate our interpretation of "bride" in Rev 19:7. Context should be the determining factor.

Contextually, it is best to understand "bride" in Rev 19:7 in regard to the New Jerusalem. In this case, her inhabitants are the redeemed of all ages (note the 12 gates with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the 12 foundation stones with the names of the twelve apostles). Even though the "bride" is the New Jerusalem in chapter 21, it is probably *her people* who are in view in Rev 19:7, as Thomas has pointed out:

At this point the bride is the people of God, but 21:9–22:5 reapplies the figure to the new Jerusalem. The people and their city are so close to each other that the figure for one is applicable to the other.¹⁵

The idea that Rev 19:7 has the bride's people in view is supported by the fact that the next verse discusses her being clothed in fine linen. Being clothed in fine linen has been a metaphor used of believers elsewhere in Revelation (we would not think of the *city itself* as so clothed).

Having concluded that the "bride" in Rev 19:7 is a metaphor for those who will inhabit the New Jerusalem, is this really any different than saying the bride in Rev 19:7 represents the *church*? I think it does make a difference. Thomas, however, despite acknowledging the connection of the bride in Rev 19:7 with that in chapter 21, nevertheless wants to restrict the people to those of the *church* (which for him means specifically those from Pentecost to the pretribulational rapture). He would not include Old Testament saints or even the saints of the Tribulation.¹⁶ His primary arguments for this conclusion are (1) the use of "bride" for the church in the NT; and (2) the accompaniment of Christ in Rev 19:14 by the heavenly armies "clothed in fine linen."¹⁷ As for the first argument, I have already demonstrated that the term "bride" is not an exclusive metaphor for the church, and anyway, the near context of how "bride" is used in Revelation takes precedent over any other NT allusion to this term. His second argument needs some explanation. Thomas assumes that those who return with Christ in 19:14 are the same as the bride of 19:7-8, since both are clothed in fine linen. According to him, they have already put on their "wedding apparel." He would then argue that Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints are not resurrected yet to return with Christ:

The difficulty of including Israel along with the church as part of the bride is a chronological one. OT saints and dead saints from the period of Daniel's seventieth week will rise in time for the Millennium (Dan. 12:1-2), but not in time to join Christ in His triumphal return (19:14). It is also impossible for saints who die during the Millennium to be a part of this company, because their resurrection will not come in time (20:5-6).¹⁸

Thus, he assumes that those "clothed in fine linen" in Rev 19:14 at the Second Coming are redeemed people. Since only the church could be in such a position to return with Christ, the bride in 19:7 must be limited to the church. By way of clarification, Thomas believes that

¹⁵ Thomas, 367.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 367ff.

¹⁷ Walvoord rejects the idea that the bride is the redeemed of all ages, and takes her as exclusively the church, yet for different reasons than Thomas (John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [SP Publications (Victor Books), 1983], 975). Walvoord attempts to argue that the bride cannot represent all the redeemed, because 19:9 calls attention to others who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This does not seem to be a satisfactory argument, however. Even Walvoord himself admits that the wedding supper is a millennial scene, not an event prior to the Second Coming. If that is the case, then, it hardly makes sense that saints of other ages would attend this wedding supper in the Millennium to witness the marriage of the Lamb and the church.

¹⁸ Thomas, 368.

ultimately the bride will consist of all the redeemed (by Rev 21), but at this point in Rev 19 it is only the church. He states,

So the bride of Christ will be a growing body of people, with the church functioning as Christ's bride during that phase of the wedding feast that comes during the Millennium, but with the integration of the new order (21:1ff.), the bride receives the enhancement of the redeemed of Israel and of all ages, including the Millennium.¹⁹

The problem I see with this reasoning is that it presumes a strict chronological sequence for Rev 19. The logic amounts to this: If those who return with Christ in Rev 19:14 are the *church* (i.e., the body of Christ exclusive of Old Testament saints and martyred Tribulation saints), then those in Rev 19:7-8 can only be that part of the bride at this point in time. Such reasoning, however, overlooks the fact that the marriage supper in Rev 19:7-9 is a millennial event (as I shall demonstrate in section "D"). Even if we admit that it is only the church who returns with Christ in Rev 19:14, the marriage supper in Rev 19:7-9 (because it is a millennial event) will also include the Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints.²⁰ Thus, Rev 19:7-9 should not be used to argue for the *church* judged and rewarded prior to the Second Coming, because these verses depict a broader group of saints who will attend a millennial event.

B. The Significance of the Bride's Apparel

Not only does the timing of the marriage supper present a problem for the traditional dispensational view of the judgment seat of Christ, but the nature of the apparel itself does not prove that the church has already been judged and rewarded. This is an important point, because those who come with Christ in 19:14 are wearing apparel appropriate for the marriage supper.

According to Rev 19:8, the "bride" has clothed herself in "fine linen, bright and clean," and then the text interprets this as depicting the "righteous acts of the saints." The Greek terms should be observed:

fine linen	=	βύσσινος	(occurs 5 times in the NT, all in Revelation)
bright	=	λαμπρός	
clean	=	καθαρόν	

There is an obvious similarity of this verse with Rev 19:14 in regard to the "armies of heaven" that accompany Christ at the time of the Second Coming:

Rev 19:14 "And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen (βύσσινον), white (λευκόν) and clean (καθαρόν), were following Him on white horses."

The similarity of these verses is important to the discussion of the "bride" as the church. It is assumed that because the "armies" are clothed in the same way (though λευκόν has replaced

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rev 19:14 only indicates that "the armies which are in heaven" accompany Christ upon His return to earth. This is not a clear statement of who is specifically involved. We would presume that the *church* is included, because (1) there is a similarity of attire with that of the bride mentioned just a few verses earlier (Rev 19:7-9); and (2) 1 Thess. 3:13 mentions "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" (though one could debate whether "saints" should be understood as believers or angels, as the Greek term [ἅγιος] can be used of either). Assuming that the *church* does return with Christ, "the armies" most certainly include the holy angels also, as there are numerous references to the angels accompanying Christ upon His return (Mt 16:27; 25:31; Mk 8:38; Lk 9:26; and 2 Thess 1:7). Most dispensationalists assume that Old Testament saints and martyred Tribulation saints do not participate in the return of Christ, since Rev 20:4 *mentions* the resurrection of the martyred Tribulation saints after the Second Coming (in regard to the resurrection of Old Testament saints, see Dan 12:1-3).

λαμπρός), this verse depicts the *church* coming with Christ in His return. If the fine linen signifies that they have already been rewarded, then the *church* must have experienced the judgment seat of Christ *before* the Second Coming. From this, it is assumed that the judgment seat of Christ occurred *at* or *following* the rapture of the church (i.e., a pretribulational rapture).

A closer study of the book, however, calls for a more cautious approach. For instance, in Rev 15:6, we have angels depicted in a similar way.

Rev 15:6 "and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen (λίνον), clean (καθαρόν) and bright (λαμπρόν), and girded around their breasts with golden girdles."

Since *angels* are depicted in Rev 15:6 in this kind of attire and since they will also accompany Christ at His return, do we want to conclude from this that the holy angels have already been judged and rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ?²¹ Even if the *church* is included in these "armies" (and I would agree that she is), this would not establish that she has already been rewarded at the judgment seat of Christ. Could the white attire serve some other purpose than depicting the results of the judgment seat of Christ? We might wish to inquire if there could be another purpose in depicting the *bride* clothed in fine linen in 19:6-10 before the Second Coming? I would suggest the significance is to be found in John's literary technique, as explained in the following section.

C. Similarities with Babylon of Revelation 18

The observations of the apparel worn by the "bride" in the preceding section should also be studied in relation to Babylon of Rev 18. The "New Jerusalem" is a γυνή (19:7; 21:9), but so is Babylon (17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18). Babylon is called the "great city," and the "bride" of Rev 19:7 is called "the holy city" (21:2,10). Just as the "bride" of Rev 19:7 was clothed in *fine linen* (βύσσινον), so is Babylon:

Rev 18:16 "Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen (βύσσινον) and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls."

This dual use of βύσσινον is interesting, seeing that it is only used five times in the New Testament, all of which are in the book of Revelation and specifically in chapters 18 and 19 (18:12, 16; 19:8 [2x], 14).

Furthermore, the descriptives that modify the *fine linen* are also used in various ways in regard to Babylon and the "New Jerusalem." The descriptive "bright" (λαμπρόν) in Rev 19:8 is used of Babylon's luxury in 18:14 (translated "splendid" by the *NASB*) and of the river of the "New Jerusalem" which is *clear* (λαμπρόν) *as crystal*. The descriptive "clean" (καθαρόν), though not used in regard to Babylon, is used of the "New Jerusalem" in 21:18 where we are told that the city is *pure* (καθαρόν) *gold* (cf. 21:21).

The author of Revelation seems to be making a deliberate play on these two cities, one against the other. The first city, Babylon, is Satanically inspired (note 17:3) and represents the luxury and splendor of this world to lure the greed of men. The second city, the "New Jerusalem," represents God's design for the blessing of the redeemed. Rather than being characterized by worldly riches and luxuries, the latter is adorned or characterized by "the righteous acts of the

²¹We could observe that the angels of Rev 15:6 are clothed with *linen* (λίνον) whereas the "bride" of Rev 19:8 is clothed in *fine linen* (βύσσινον), but I see no reason to think this represents any significant difference.

saints" (19:8). Whereas Babylon and her great wealth will be laid waste in one hour (18:17), the holy city "New Jerusalem" will endure forever. That the author intends for us to see them in contrast is further heightened by the way they are juxtaposed in the text of Rev 19.

<p>BABYLON – THE GREAT CITY</p> <p>Rev 19:1-5</p> <p><i>Call to rejoice because of Babylon's fall</i></p> <p>Rev 19:1 "I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah!'"</p>	<p>NEW JERUSALEM – THE HOLY CITY</p> <p>Rev 19:6-10</p> <p><i>Call to rejoice because the Lord's reign and the "marriage feast" are near!</i></p> <p>Rev 19:6 "I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude . . . saying, 'Hallelujah!'"</p>
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Thus the fine linen motif is used to highlight the contrast between Babylon's people and the "bride" (the people of the Lamb). The mention of this detail in Rev 19:8 should not be used as a proof that the *church* has already experienced the judgment seat of Christ.

D. Implications of the Juxtaposition with Babylon's Fall

This juxtaposing of two contrasting "Hallelujahs" may suggest that the mention and placement of the "bride" of Rev 19:7 may have more to do with literary effect (for the purpose of heightening important themes) than with a concern for chronological order of events. A close look at the text seems to confirm this. Notice carefully the preceding verse in Rev 19:6, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns." Though this could theoretically refer to God's universal reign over the world throughout the ages, in the book of Revelation the *reign* looks forward to the reign of Christ after He returns in glory. For instance, in Rev 20:1-6, Satan is bound for 1000 years during which time the martyred saints of the Tribulation come to life and *reign* with Christ.

Despite the translation of both the *NASB* and *NIV* which might reflect a present tense, the verb for *reigns* in Rev 19:6 is actually an aorist verb (ἐβασίλευσεν). This is best understood as an *ingressive aorist* with the nuance "the Lord our God, the Almighty, has begun to reign." This reflects a literary technique of the book of Revelation, that as the judgments proceed and the end nears, the author writes as though the victory of Christ has already dawned and He has taken up His reign (even though this does not actually occur until Rev 20). In Rev 5:10, when the seven-sealed scroll is taken by the Lamb, we hear a song in the heavenly throne room that reflects that the unfolding of this scroll is going to lead to the inauguration of the kingdom: "And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Following the six trumpet judgments, the narrative is briefly interrupted before the final trumpet judgment (containing the seven bowls). The seventh trumpet has brought us right up to the end, and the victory is so close that the narrative is suspended to allow for a "victory shout" just before the final death blow to Satan's strategy:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and he will reign forever and ever. . . . We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign [ἐβασίλευσας, aorist tense]."

A similar technique is used in Rev 12:10 when Satan is thrown down from heaven,

"Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down"

In each of these cases (including Rev 19:6), the kingly reign has not technically commenced, but the actualization of the Lord's kingdom is so close and the victory so certain that a voice (either of the 24 elders, an angel, or the great multitude) breaks in to proclaim that it has come.²²

This observation has an important implication for the "marriage supper" mentioned in the following verse (i.e., Rev 19:7,9). If the announcement of the Lord's reign is *anticipatory*, then the "marriage supper" is most likely also a future event. With this, Dr. Walvoord concurs, for he states in regard to Rev 19:6-8, "Here the rejoicing is prophetic for what is about to happen rather than for the judgment just executed."²³ He goes on to say that the mention of His "reign" anticipates the Second Coming of Christ. Similarly, he extends this view to the "marriage supper" as well and places it at the beginning of the Millennium:

It would seem, therefore, that the wedding supper has not yet been observed. . . . Accordingly it would seem that the beginning of the Millennium itself will fulfill the symbolism of the wedding supper (*gamos*). . . .

All this suggests that the wedding feast is an earthly feast, . . . and thus will take place on earth at the beginning of the Millennium.²⁴

Even Thomas himself concurs that the "marriage supper" takes place in the Millennium: ". . . the bride of 19:7 is a figure for the church, the body of Christ, which having been joined to Christ following the Rapture, will return with Him for the marriage supper of the Lamb on earth during the Millennium."²⁵

INTERPRETATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "MARRIAGE/SUPPER"

In Rev 19:7, we are introduced to the "marriage of the Lamb" and in 19:9 to the "marriage supper of the Lamb." The Greek term used for the marriage (*NIV* = wedding) is γάμος. But what is the γάμος? Of seventeen occurrences in the New Testament, there is only one clear instance in which it has the

²²A similar literary technique was used in regard to Babylon itself. In Rev 14:8, we hear an angel proclaiming "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great," even though the bowl judgments have not even commenced (the destruction of Babylon occurs in the 7th bowl judgment; see Rev 16:17-21).

²³Walvoord, 974.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 975. This position seems to be more specific than what the author had written in his earlier commentary on Revelation (see *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1966], 270-71). Walvoord's position should be contrasted with that of Dr. Lewis S. Chafer, the founder and first president of Dallas Seminary. Chafer (*Systematic Theology*, 8 vols., vol. 7: *Doctrinal Summarization* [Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], 61) distinguished the wedding supper of Rev 19:7-9 (before the Second Coming) from the marriage feast that occurs after the Second Coming (the latter pictured in Mt 25:10). His argument, based on a difference of terms (τοὺς γάμους in Mt 25:10 vs. το δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου in Rev 19:9), is not sustainable, since the term in Matthew for "feast" (Gk γάμος) is also used in Rev 19:7. Chafer tried to support his point further, by arguing that the virgins in Mt 25:1 go out to meet the Bridegroom and the Bride. For this he relied upon a text critical reading which included both terms (found in mss D, θ, and the Vulgate). Yet his point is hardly convincing, since the reading having only "Bridegroom" is found not only in mss \aleph , B, C and 33, but in the Byzantine majority mss as well. In a final attempt to prove that the wedding supper (= judgment seat of Christ) will occur before the Second Coming, Chafer appealed to Lk 12:36: "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast." Chafer taught that this could only apply to Israel who, after the pretribulational rapture of the church, would be waiting for Christ to return from the wedding feast (*Sys. Theol.*, 7:61). I would point out two things in response: (1) this is a parable whose primary intention is to teach readiness (note Lk 12:40!), not to give an exact chronology of end-time events; and (2) Mt 25:10 (also a parable) puts the wedding feast (same term as in Luke) after the return.

²⁵Thomas, 368-69.

meaning of "marriage" (Heb 13:4). Ordinarily, this looks at the *celebration feast* which went along with Jewish marriage custom.

To appreciate this, we need to understand something about Jewish marriage procedure. The Jewish concept of marriage took place in several stages, with a distinction being made between betrothal and marriage. From the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married. However, the actual marriage union would not commence at the time of betrothal. Edersheim explains,

According to Rabbinical law certain formalities were requisite to make a betrothal legally valid. These consisted either in handing to a woman, directly or through messengers, a piece of money, however small, or else a letter, provided it were in each case expressly stated before witnesses, that the man thereby intended to espouse the woman as his wife. The marriage followed after a longer or shorter interval, the limits of which, however, were fixed by law. The ceremony itself consisted in leading the bride into the house of the bridegroom, with certain formalities, mostly dating from very ancient times."²⁶

Following the betrothal period, the consummation of the marriage by sexual union would be preceded by a festive celebration and escorting of the bride to the home of the bridegroom. Trutza explains,

Accompanied by his friends with tambourines and a band they went to the bride's house where the wedding ceremonies were to start. The bride richly dressed, adorned with jewels (Ps. 45:14, 15), usually wore a veil, which she took off only in the bridal chamber. Escorted by her companions, the bride was led to the home of the bridegroom. Love songs were sung in praise of the bridal pair. Speeches were made in their honor, exalting the graces of the newly wedded. Big feasts were prepared in the house of the bride and sometimes in the bridegroom's parents' house. At the close of the feast the bride was conducted by her parents to the nuptial chamber (Judg 15:1).²⁷

The γάμος refers to this festive celebration that was part of the marriage ceremony. A better translation in both Rev 19:7 and 19:9 might be "wedding feast." A study of γάμος in the gospels reveals several features:

- 1) This was a festive time of celebration, as depicted in the drinking of wine at the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-3).
- 2) This would be a time for the wearing of special garments (Mt 22:11-12).
- 3) Most importantly, this would involve a special festive meal with dinner guests (Mt 22:10).
- 4) Certain places at the dinner table would be reserved to *honor* special guests (Lk 14:7-11).
- 5) According to Lk 12:36, the couple would go to the bridegroom's home after the feast.

The highlight of the γάμος is the banquet meal and time of celebration. In chapter 19 of Revelation, with the destruction of Babylon such that all that remains to be done is for the Lord to personally confront the Beast and False Prophet (and bind Satan), the Lord's reign and the festive γάμος are about to get under way. This is a beautiful picture of what will happen in the early phase of the Millennium after Christ returns (or perhaps the festive *wedding supper* depicts the entire Millennium).

This has a parallel in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Isa 24 looks at worldwide judgment and destruction, whereas Isa 25 looks at kingdom blessing. Isa 24:21-23 closes the chapter by declaring,

"So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon,

²⁶Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (1876; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), 150-51.

²⁷Merrill C. Tenney, ed. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1975), s.v. "Marriage," by P. Trutza.

and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders."

Interestingly, in the following chapter depicting kingdom blessing, we are shown a lavish banquet for all peoples on this same mountain:

"And the LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine" (Isa 25:6).

The text goes on to say,

"And it will be said in that day, 'Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation' (25:9).

This "lavish banquet" of Isa 25:6 seems to look at the very same thing as the "wedding feast" (γάμος) of Rev 19:7-9, an occasion which probably finds its fulfilment after the Second Coming (i.e., in the Millennium). It is quite interesting that one of Christ's parables about the kingdom involved a γάμος. This is seen in Matt 22:1-14 (γάμος is used eight times in this passage). "And Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a *wedding feast* (γάμος) for his son' (22:1-2).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE TIME OF THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

Rev 19:6 looks forward to the reign of Christ that will begin at the Second Coming, whereas Rev 19:7-9 uses the figure of a "wedding feast" to depict the festive celebration that will take place at the inauguration of the Millennial kingdom. The "bride" (or wife) of the Lamb is the holy city, the "New Jerusalem" in which the redeemed of all the ages will dwell. There is no reason to interpret or restrict the "bride" to the *church* as a distinct company of saints, nor to use Rev 19:6-10 as a defense for the judgment seat of Christ occurring after the rapture and before the Second Coming. Even if the church is part of those who return with Christ "clothed in fine linen" (Rev 19:14), this does not prove that the church has already experienced the judgment seat of Christ. It may mean nothing more than the fact that we see God's people *adorned by their righteous acts* in contrast to those of Babylon whose "fine linen" was worldly splendor and luxury. The point is that the "bride" is properly adorned for the wedding feast.

Once this is acknowledged, there is no compelling argument in the New Testament for taking the judgment seat of Christ in conjunction with a pretribulational rapture of the *church*.²⁸ Furthermore, there are several verses related to rewards that give an impression that the rewards will be dispensed after the Second Coming:²⁹

²⁸Pentecost attempts to argue for the judgment seat of Christ immediately after the pretribulational rapture on the basis of Lk 14:14 which states, "and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Pentecost concludes,

"In the first place, according to Luke 14:14 reward is associated with the resurrection. Since, according to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, the resurrection is an integral part of the translation, reward must be a part of that program" (*Things to Come*, 220).

Pentecost has correctly pointed out that reward is associated with resurrection, but it may be too much to demand that reward be dispensed at the very first instance of resurrection. The verse could just as easily be translated "you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous" (note the Greek preposition ἐν), referring to the whole period when the redeemed have resurrected bodies (cf. Mt 22:28 where the exact phrase is used in regard to the "period of resurrection"). Furthermore, Christ could have been speaking from an Old Testament perspective in which tribulation would be followed by resurrection and reward (see Dan 12:1-3).

²⁹Passages related to rewards and the judgment seat of Christ include Matt 16:27; Lk 9:26; 14:14; Rom 2:4-11; Rom 14:10-12; 1 Cor 3:10-17; 4:1-5; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:23-25; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 1:7 (note 1:13; 4:13; and compare Lk 17:30); Rev 2:23, 25; 3:11-12; 4:4, 10; and 22:12.

Mt 16:27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds."

Dr. Louis A. Barbieri, writing in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, concluded that this was a Second Coming event: "Jesus . . . spoke prophetically of His second coming when He, the Son of Man, would return in His Father's glory At that time the Lord will reward His servants for their faithfulness."³⁰

Lk 9:26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

1 Cor 4:5 "Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God."

There is nothing in the context to suggest that the time when the "Lord comes" refers to the rapture rather than the Second Coming.

Rev 22:12 "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

In the context of the book of Revelation, the reference to His "coming" almost certainly implies the Second Coming itself and not the rapture. It is the Second Coming of Rev 19 which is the grand climax of the book.

CONCLUSIONS

After the return of Christ, the Millennium will be inaugurated with a festive celebration which is depicted in Rev 19:7-9 as a "wedding feast" (γάμος). Notwithstanding the fact that the "armies" who accompany Christ at His return probably include the *church* along with the holy angels, the bride in the case of Rev 19:7-9 depicts the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem. This wedding feast, though recorded in Rev 19, is anticipatory of what will take place after the Second Coming (as the term "reigns" in 19:6 would imply). But by placing it in Rev 19, the author was able to juxtapose the unit of Rev 19:6-10 with 19:1-5, and thereby contrast the "great city" Babylon (Satan's city) with the "holy city" New Jerusalem (Christ's city). Satan has his counterfeit, but Christ's plan will ultimately triumph. The adornment of God's people is in the final analysis so much more excellent than those of Babylon. Attired in apparel depicting righteous acts (rather than worldly luxury), they are properly adorned to attend the wedding feast of the Lamb as the Millennial Kingdom begins.

Thus, Rev 19:6-10 is not a passage to be used in defense of the position that the judgment seat of Christ takes place following the pretribulational rapture of the *church*. Other New Testament verses confirm that the judgment seat of Christ and the dispensing of rewards follow the Second Coming of our Lord.

³⁰ Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (SP Publications [Victor Books], 1983), 59.