

A Peek Between the Covers of Revelation

Millennium!

Study Notes

Recap:

- The book is about Jesus. That means it's about grace.
- There's a war on. Sin began with the angel closest to God. Satan believes that he should be worshiped. He slanders God in order to win our worship.
- The only way to sterilize the universe from sin is to allow Satan an opportunity to prove his case. At the end of that demonstration, every being will be convicted of the righteousness of God. Then the wicked can be destroyed, and the righteous will love God with no possibility that they will ever rebel.
- God must deal with sin in an orderly way to defeat Satan's charges of corruption. This orderly framework is called the covenant. It was delivered in written form at Sinai, and is described in the messages to the churches.
- Revelation 4-5 describes the coronation of Jesus, the Worthy King who wants us with Him. In it, He receives the scroll of the covenant, which He alone is worthy to enforce.
- The Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls are a symbolic survey of how the Call of Grace, Warning of Judgment, and Judgment work in this sinful era.
- The Conflict Over Worship recaps the Cosmic Conflict as presented in the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls. The Three Angels' Messages are another recap of this.

Before discussing the millennium, we ought to look backward for a brief moment. The Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls all end in the Day of Atonement. The seventh Seal had the silence while the high priest served in the Holy of Holies. It also had the large amount of incense he burned to produce the cloud that protected him from the glory of God. The seventh Trumpet showed us the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple being opened on the Day of Atonement so that the Ark of the Covenant could be seen. Finally, the entire series of Bowls begins with the glory of God filling the Temple so no one could enter, as would be the case when the veil was opened.

All three also contain the Day of the Lord. There is lightning, thunder, and an earthquake in every one. These are well-known Day of the Lord signs. For good measure, all of them include hail, one of God's weapons against the wicked.

The Day of Atonement is the day on which God's saints are cleansed. The heavenly Day is when we "put on incorruption" in the words of Paul. We will be ready to be with God. At the same time, the Day of the Lord is when God destroys the wicked. There is nothing left to do on earth.

The literary structure of the apocalypse confirms this. In the middle of the seventh seal, there is a statement about the angels with seven Trumpets that looks ahead to that series. In the middle of the seventh Trumpet there is a praise session that declares the time has come to reward the saints and punish the wicked. This looks forward to the Bowls. But there is no "look-ahead" in the middle of the seventh Bowl. This tells us from a literary perspective that there is nothing left to look ahead to. And we will confirm this shortly. The seventh Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl are the same event. After them, God's work in this sinful age is done.

The Millennium

The clearest discussion of the millennium is in Revelation 20. In fact, while there are other passages that include information about this period, this is the only one that mentions the length of it. And none of the others are direct about identifying what period is being discussed. For that reason, we will skip chapters 17-19 for the moment.

One term of great importance shows up in the first verse: abyss. This term helps us to see what is going on. Genesis 1:2 says that the world before creation was “unformed and unfilled.” When the Greek translation of the Old Testament was done, about 200 years before Christ, this phrase was translated “abyss.” In other passages, it is a metaphor for the location under the earth, the region Satan is the king of in the fifth and sixth Trumpets.

Satan being “chained in the abyss” is a metaphor. There’s no physical chain. Instead, we need to look at the circumstances surrounding this act. First, in John 14, Jesus told the disciples that He would return for them to take them to heaven. This will happen, as Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, “at the last trump.” Next, Jesus told the disciples in Matthew 24 that when He returned, the wicked would all be killed, just like in Noah’s day. If the wicked are dead and the saints are all in heaven, there aren’t any humans left alive on earth! Given that the seventh Seal, Trumpet, and Bowl all describe great cataclysms on earth, the world will be pretty badly destroyed. In other words, it will become “abyss.” Now, if the world is “abyss” and there’s nobody left on the earth, if Satan is stuck here, he has been locked in the abyss by a great chain of circumstances. And he’ll be there for a thousand years.

At this point, we should be careful about this time period. Is it *exactly* one thousand years? Probably not. Rather, it’s probably *about* a thousand years. But it’s still most likely to be an ordinary span of time since the language is ordinary. During the millennium, the saints have a job to do. They are called priests, seated on thrones in heaven, and “judgment is given to them.” This time the divine passive is rich.

The task before the saints is monumental. Satan has slandered God. For thousands of years his accusations have gone unanswered in court. And now God gives the saints the power to clear His name or confirm Satan’s charges. God’s future is in human hands! Since this is a *big* assertion, let’s confirm it.

The word for judgment in verse 4 is *krima*. It can have three meanings. First, it can describe the act of passing laws. Of course, God did this before any of us existed, so that can’t be the meaning here. Next, it can mean deciding who is saved or lost. Of course, God did that, too, so that’s not an option.

The third definition fits the scene perfectly. *Krima* can describe a court sitting to deal with difficult cases. And God’s slander suit against Satan is the most difficult of all. God must be shown to be righteous in every single act, or Satan’s accusations will be true. Only when every question is completely answered will every righteous being be fully convicted of God’s perfect holiness. Then they will never again be tempted to sin.

This doesn’t mean that they will not have the ability to choose to sin. Rather, the option to rebel will be a “dead option.” We can truly love because we have the ability to choose not to love, but we will never exercise that option. God will be “justified” (Rom 3:4), and we will “know as we have been known” (1 Cor 13:12).

When the righteous have examined all the records, it’s time bring the wicked back. At the end of the millennium, they will be raised. God does this because He will not ultimately destroy anyone without them recognizing their own guilt.

When the wicked have been resurrected, Satan will no longer be restrained in the abyss. After all, his people are now alive all around him. He will make a last attempt to

overthrow God. He will deceive the wicked people into thinking they have a chance to win. As they assault the camp of the saints, God intervenes. The saints had “book knowledge” of the guilt of their lost friends, but now they see it with their own eyes.

When God ends the attack, he shows every wicked person his own guilt. This is presented as the Great White Throne Judgment, where every person is judged from the records of their deeds. This is God’s great covenant lawsuit against covenant breakers. Whether it is a literal proceeding or simply a symbolic expression of the fact that the wicked will all know their guilt we cannot determine. But once they all know it, they can be thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed.

Of particular importance here is the fact that the saints are not involved in the Great White Throne judgment. The Book of Life is in the scene, but judgment is from the books of deeds, and only involves the dead who have been raised in the second resurrection.

The lake of fire is another important symbol. We are called to be a kingdom of priests. Apostasy is commonly called adultery in the Old Testament. And in the Torah, the daughter of a priest who commits adultery is to be burned. So the lake of fire is a symbolic way of speaking of the penalty for sin. Is it literal? It’s hard to say. As we look at two parallel descriptions, we find that it may only be a symbol.

Revelation 17-18

A moment ago we saw that apostasy is commonly called adultery in scripture. Revelation 17 personifies this image with the symbol of the harlot. The beast she rides is again an image of human government. But this time, it has some new identifying features. First we should compare this beast with the one in chapter 13. Both beasts have the same physical components. The beast of Revelation 13 has blasphemous names on its heads. This signifies that blasphemy is a major part of apostate human government. When we get to chapter 17, the beast is “full of blasphemous names.” Its very nature is blasphemy. And this suggests that the beast is Satan himself.

The next key is a cryptic statement the angel makes to John. The beast “was, is not, and is to come.” This tells us that we are looking at a period where there is no human government. We already learned that during the millennium there will be no one alive on earth. Further, the wicked are to be resurrected at the end of the millennium. So, from the perspective of the millennium, human government “was, is not, and is to come.” This firmly identifies the setting of Revelation 17 as the millennium.

Now we can see parallels to Revelation 20. The beast has seven heads. “Five have fallen, one is, and one is yet to come.” And this is a classic case of something that cannot exist in physical reality, but works well in a vision. If the beast does not exist, neither does its heads. Yet one of them *does* exist. Let’s trace the sequence.

The imagery of the beast starts with Babylon. That’s head number 1. Next we have Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. These match the sequence in Daniel 2, down to the legs of iron. In Daniel 2, the legs of iron fragment, indicating the breakup of the Roman Empire. God told Daniel that there would not be a unified world after that. But there was a somewhat unifying force after that called the Papacy. Even though Europe was never truly unified, for over a millennium every crowned head of Europe looked to Rome for legitimacy. This is the fifth head.

With the end of this age, human government ends as God receives the saints into heaven. This leaves Satan alone as the king of the earth, but without a human kingdom. This is the sixth head. When the wicked are resurrected after the millennium, Satan will have a

human kingdom again. This is the seventh head. And since Satan is the power behind the throne on all of the kingdoms, he is also “an eighth.”

The situation after the resurrection of the wicked is described in chapter 20 where Satan leads an attack on the camp of the saints. In chapter 17, this is described as “ten kings” who exist to “give their power to the beast for an hour.” At the end of this sequence the kings revolt and “burn the harlot with fire.” This is again the imagery of burning the adulterous daughter of a priest outside the camp as a penalty for her adultery. It is the lake of fire.

Revelation 18 presents three dirges. These are mourning by various groups who have profited by their association with the harlot. Even at this time they do not mourn because they missed out on the Kingdom of God. Instead, they are so attached to their sinful lusts that those are all that they miss.

Revelation 19:11-21

The third of the millennium segments deals only with the end of the millennium. Here we see Jesus riding His white charger into battle. On His head is the diadem of a king, not the *stephanos* of the overcomer. He comes to judge the wicked and kill them with the sword out of His mouth. The hem of His robe is dipped in the blood of the wicked, recalling the winepress of God’s wrath in chapter 14. And with Him come the saints, dressed in white robes of righteousness.

All this imagery is a bit of a mixed metaphor. After all, if Jesus kills with the sword of His mouth, how can He kill with the winepress of His wrath? The answer is quite simple. Neither of these is intended to be literal, just as the dirges for the harlot are not intended to be literal. Each picture shows that God will fulfill His Old Testament prophecies to deliver Israel and punish the wicked.

After the wicked are killed, they are left as food for birds. This fulfills another Old Testament curse on the wicked, since to be left unburied is to be cursed. It is also the fulfillment of a part of Jesus’ Olivet Discourse.

The battle in the last verses is parallel to the attack on the camp of the saints in chapter 20. In fact, it is the same event. And the rest is the same. The beast and the false prophet are thrown in the lake of fire.

Note to leaders:

Very few commentators have realized that chapters 17-20 are all describing the millennium. Gregory Beale, author of the *NIGTC Revelation* commentary is one of the few. But that book is so long and involved that few will bother to read it. In that book he documents a number of parallels between Revelation 19 and 20. We have only noted a couple.

Beyond Beale’s work, no one to my knowledge has published analysis of Revelation 17 to show that it is also millennial. So students may reject this presentation. However, it is our firm conviction that a biblical analysis based on the essential elements we have covered will be conclusive.