



## REVELATION 15-19: BABYLON FALLS

### HOME GROUP NOTES

We're entering deep waters now in our exploration of Revelation with chapters that often we dare not read, seek to understand, nor preach — yet they answer the yearning of the world throughout the centuries, and the very cry of the martyrs: 'How long O Lord until you avenge our blood' (6:10-11).

Revelation 15-19 pictures a significant part of God's response to every deed of violence, abuse, domination, injustice, and immorality with His dramatic, final, and all-encompassing act of justice.

This must happen for the Kingdom of God, depicted in chapters 4 & 5 of creation set back in order in concentric circles of praise around the throne, to be realised on earth as it is in heaven.

Much of God's response to the injustice in the world and the establishing of His kingdom, however, must involve His removal of the evil forces that furiously seek to inflict chaos in this world, knowing their time is short. This is the cancer that riddles creation.

#### THE DRAGON, THE BEAST, THE FALSE PROPHET & BABYLON

Do you remember, last week we learnt that Satan, the dragon, attacks each generation through new strains of the beast and the false prophet.

#### **Q: What does the beast represent in Revelation?**

*The beast is the seemingly unconquerable power of the day.*

In John's time, it was the Roman Empire and its Emperors.

In ours, it has spawned, for example, in the entrenched system of human trafficking, the porn industry, secularism, and our unjust consumeristic society that profits us, the wealthy, yet is sustained by practices that harm the vulnerable and God's good creation. The list goes on.

#### **Q: What does the false prophet represent in Revelation?**

*Whereas the false prophet is the vast propaganda system that promotes surrender to that beastly power.*

Again, in John's day, it was the ever-present temples, games, plays, coins, trade guilds, and festivals that reinforced the Roman cultural script and promoted worship of the Emperor.

More recently in time, it can be in advertising, the state media or even the weaponization of social media that endeavours to keep people tethered to a destructive narrative and agenda.

Well, today we're introduced to another controlling force in the world that must be overthrown for God's kingdom to come: **Babylon**. This is what the last of the 7 cycles, the 7 bowls of God's judgement, seek to remove.

We'll consider what Babylon is shortly, but let's begin this exploration of God's justice as we open Revelation 15.

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### REVELATION 15:1-4

*I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup> and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:*

*"Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
 Lord God Almighty.  
 Just and true are your ways,  
 King of the nations.<sup>[a]</sup>  
<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, Lord,  
 and bring glory to your name?  
 For you alone are holy.  
 All nations will come  
 and worship before you,  
 for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

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Here, John's taken forward in time, past the moment of God's judgement we'll read shortly.

We see that God's victorious people, who have listened to Christ's word to remain faithful throughout life — such as he stated in Revelation 2-3 — have completed an exodus type journey following Jesus, the new Moses.

They've all come out of the chaos of the world in their respective times and, as it were, stand on the shores of heaven to sing an exodus freedom song, like the Israelites did when crossing the Red Sea.

But whereas Israel had rejoiced in the defeat of an opposing nation, here God's people throughout time welcome the vast assembly of the unbelieving nations to join them in God's Kingdom — a journey we'll witness next week.

This exodus like vision is striking, and would have challenged the seven churches, as they do us, in this:

**Q: Have you understood your faith as a kind of exodus walk/ pilgrimage?**

**Q: What steps are we taking to chart, as one writer terms it, a long obedience in the same direction?**

Having seen the end of God's justice wrought against evil, John is then flung back to witness its beginnings.

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<sup>5</sup> After this I looked, and I saw in heaven the temple...<sup>6</sup> Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. <sup>7</sup> Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

John sees priestly angels, who serve God, receiving a sevenfold payload by the four living creatures, who declare creation's praise on its behalf, to depict how this dramatic action is for creation's healing.

As God's heavenly temple fills with smoke, like it did for Isaiah in his vision, normal proceedings in heaven are suspended. There is no reversing God's action as evil's time is up!

**Q: How have you previously understood this vision of judgment?**

**Q: Have you seen it as a good thing or a bad thing?**

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## REVELATION 16

*<sup>1</sup>Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."*

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What follows is a cycle of seven plagues like the plagues of Egypt but on a massive scale to describe God's judgement against all beastly systems, just as Egypt once was.

Whereas the seven seals and trumpets previously had a momentary pause to show that evil and suffering do not roll on forever, here these seven bowls of wrath feature no such pause.

God will not relent from destroying evil and this brings sudden interjections from heaven, celebrating the Father's liberating work in the world!

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*<sup>7</sup>And I heard the altar respond:*

*"Yes, Lord God Almighty,  
true and just are your judgments."*

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We see in these passages, and later also, that tragically some people become beastly themselves, like Pharaoh. They so profit from evil, and want to hoard it at all costs, and are driven so deeply into evil that they never want to change nor know the Lord.

We also see the dragon, beast, and false prophet attempt to stage a countermeasure, like Pharaoh's magicians, to God's judgment.

They gather an alliance of the Roman Empire and their archenemies from the east, the Parthians, to 'Harmageddon' meaning the mount of Meggido, a frequent setting of battles in the Old Testament (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 9:27; 2 Chronicles 35:22).

This battle ground of Armageddon, its more popular name, is used symbolically to convey Satan's attempts to preserve his own reign.

But as we'll learn later in Revelation 19, no actual battle really happens because there is no stopping God's defeat of evil.

**Q: Where have you witnessed people profiting from evil?**

**Q: How have you previously understood 'Armageddon'?**

Thus, this section concludes with the statement in verse 19:

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*God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.*

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Through all these plagues of judgment God has been holding Babylon to account. But what is Babylon?

Well, the next two chapters deal with this very question.

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## REVELATION 17

<sup>1</sup> *"Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. <sup>2</sup> With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."*

<sup>3</sup> *Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup> The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. <sup>5</sup> The name written on her forehead was a mystery:*

BABYLON THE GREAT  
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES  
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

<sup>6</sup> *I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.*

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We see here, and indeed later, that Babylon is the demonic spirit that enchants the world and the church with the lust for power, pleasure, wealth, and fame.

This is the spirit of the world that draws all people away from faithfully loving the One on the throne and Lamb, and indeed one another.

This is the spirit that entices people to enslave others for profit or wage war, the spirit that seduces people to leave the faith, to break faithfulness with their spouse, or seek celebrity and the resulting adoration.

Babylon is what John was addressing in 1 John 4:15-17:

<sup>15</sup> Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. <sup>16</sup> For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. <sup>17</sup> And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

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In Revelation 17, “the world” or Babylon is depicted as the mother of all prostitutes, as a parody of Rome’s self-image as a goddess, queen, and the motherly supplier of all people’s needs.

**Q: Where else do we see Babylon today?**

**Q: What does she look like?**

**Q: And where have we fell under her spell?**

Following the defeat of this demonic power in our world, Revelation 18 is essentially Babylon’s funeral service.

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## REVELATION 18

<sup>1</sup>After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. <sup>2</sup>With a mighty voice he shouted:

“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!”

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What follows is a threefold lament from the rich and the powerful who profited from this demonic enchantment over the world: with eulogies from the kings of the earth, the merchants on the land, and traders on the seas:

The Angel introduces one such member to take the stage, and their qualifying connection in this way:

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<sup>11</sup> “The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore— <sup>12</sup> cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; <sup>13</sup> cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves.

<sup>15</sup> They will weep and mourn <sup>16</sup> and cry out:

“Woe! Woe to you, great city,  
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

<sup>17</sup> In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”

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This mourning at the loss of evil would be characterise the response of those who similarly profit from human trafficking, the sex slave industry, or sweat shops, crying because they aren’t allowed to maintain their destructive business.

Interestingly, we'll see next week that the first group mentioned, the kings of the earth, enter the New Jerusalem to show that even the worst of society may in the end find the love of God break through their hard hearts.

This funeral service ends with mighty angel's dismissal:

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<sup>22</sup> *"With such violence*

*the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,  
never to be found again.*

<sup>22</sup> *The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters,  
will never be heard in you again.*

*No worker of any trade  
will ever be found in you again...*

<sup>23</sup> *... Your merchants were the world's important people.*

*By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.*

<sup>24</sup> *In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."*

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**Q: As we read these sobering words, what evil in our world do we need to pray for its funeral to come?**

Following this funeral, a wedding now begins!

All of heaven erupts in celebration as the bride of Christ, the church, has resisted the allure of the harlot, pursuing holiness to make herself ready for the wedding of the Lamb.

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## **REVELATION 19**

<sup>6</sup> *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:*

*"Hallelujah!*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns.*

<sup>7</sup> *Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come,  
and his bride has made herself ready.*

<sup>8</sup> *Fine linen, bright and clean,  
was given her to wear."*

*(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)*

<sup>9</sup> *Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

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The contrasting images of a funeral and a wedding clearly show that is much more profitable for us as God's people to remain faithful to Christ than the world.

And it's far more profitable because we receive Jesus!

At the wedding of the Lamb we declare – as Song of Songs states – ‘I am yours, and you are mine.’ (2:16).

Jesus calls us now, whilst we make ourselves ready for that day, to forsake the allure of any other seduction, and find satisfaction alone in the lover of our souls!

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## Prayer Time

Let’s pray for one another that we would resist the charm of power, pleasure, wealth and fame and pursue holiness, making ourselves ready to meet our Lord.

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## Extra Resources

If you would like to continue your own exploration of Revelation through these weeks or in the future, here are some helpful resources worth looking into.

For an overview of the whole of Revelation check out these fantastic videos from the Bible Project.

Part 1: <https://youtu.be/5nvVVcYD-0w?feature=shared>

Part 2: <https://youtu.be/Qpnlrbq2bKo?feature=shared>

The Bible Project have also released a creative video on how to read Apocalyptic Literature:

<https://youtu.be/UNDX4tUdj1Y?feature=shared>

If you want to go in a bit deeper, a good place to start is NT Wright’s commentary, *Revelation for Everyone*, which explains the meaning of each chapter of Revelation in bitesize portions. A more devotional book, beautifully written, is from a hero of mine, Eugene Peterson, called *Reversed Thunder*.

A little more complex but great nonetheless are the books, *Reading Revelation Responsibly* by Michael J. Gorman which debunks a lot of unhelpful stuff we bring to this book and draws into sharper focus what the book is about. Then *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham is possibly the best book on Revelation I have read. It’s a small book covering the major themes of Revelation, it may keep you own your toes as it is quite academic, but it led me to worship more than any other book on the topic I have read! There is also a commentary called *Revelation and the End of All Things* by Craig Koester which is very helpful is exploring the meaning of each chapter in greater depth than say NT Wright’s book.

Lastly, if you want to explore the book word-by-word check out *Revelation (Anchor Yale Bible)* by Craig Koester or Ian Paul’s *Revelation (TNTC)*.

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### Revelation 1:3

*Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it...*