

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

LESSON 11

In our next lesson, we see the aftermath resulting from the great battle of the beast and his allies with the Lamb and His saints. In chapter 18, we see a great proclamation from heaven that Babylon has fallen, filled with details of her spiritual crimes. This is followed by a lengthy lament for her from all the nations who 'profited' from their relationship with her. Chapter 19 continues this theme in the first 10 verses, but from the perspective of the righteous saints. The scene then changes to a view of the great warrior king, who rides out to defeat the beast and his followers at the spiritual battle of Armageddon. After this, we see the binding of Satan and the sealed righteous ones who reign with Christ "for a thousand years" in chapter 20.

CHAPTER 18

As this scene unfolds, we see a powerful angel who illuminates the entire world with his splendor. He arrives to pronounce the sentence against the guilty beast and his followers, as well as unveil its execution. He loudly proclaims: "*Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.*" A litany of charges are then listed: she is a habitation of demons and a cage for every unclean and hateful bird, and has caused all nations to fall by committing spiritual fornication with them. Enticed by money and pleasure, the merchants of earth profited from her immorality and idolatry, growing very wealthy and powerful at the expense of the saints. They, too, will meet a terrible end. This is remindful of the words of God to Isaiah over 150 years before the fall of ancient Babylon about her destruction (Isa. 21:9). Ancient Babylon's fate was to also become a dwelling place for wild beasts and scavengers.

Another voice is heard from heaven, possibly that of God Himself. The saints are called out of the world of the beast so as not to have fellowship and be affected by her plagues. We can almost see Lot taking his family and hurrying out of Sodom before its great destruction. We also remember that there were teachers in Pergamos and Thyatira urging saints to compromise and "*commit fornication and to eat meat sacrificed to idols*" (2:14; 2:20-22). James warns us:

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“You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4). Verse 5 states *“her sins have piled up as high as heaven,”* something said before of ancient Babylon (Jer. 51:9) and even the Jews (Ezra 9:6). Further, we are reminded that *“God has remembered her iniquities”* (vs. 5), a terrifying thing given the serious nature of flaunting Jesus’ sacrifice (Heb. 10:26-31). The only thing left for the beast and the whore is for God to give them *“the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath”* (16:19). She will receive the wages of sin and will be paid back (with vengeance) as she paid the righteous saints, and she shall receive back double. As she has become drunk on the blood of the saints, the wine of God’s wrath will be given to her double-strength. This is not really a ‘double-measure’, but only just recompense for the degree of her sin and immorality. She has been weighed in the balance and will receive what she has meted out to the righteous. This prophecy is either speaking of the vassal kingdoms who once served Rome and then turn on her, or it is a rhetorical taunt meant to explain to Rome and the world the reason for her horrible fate. Like Babylon of old (Isa. 47:7-11), the arrogant and seemingly invincible Rome went from the queen of the world to a forgotten and destitute widow. In the end, she will be burned with fire.

Rome and the world are told that the plagues that will destroy her will come *“in one day”* (vs. 8) or suddenly – she will not be prepared and will not be able to resist them. This is so certain as to be mentioned as a momentary thing, as though it had already happened (18:2). Rome’s demise will also bring surprise to the nations who were immoral with her, who also believed she was invincible. They will not be able to fathom how quickly she is brought to ruin, and will stand at a distance in fear, likely also worried about their own future. They do not mourn the loss of Rome as a friend, but rather selfishly mourn their own losses of power, prestige, and wealth. We see three categories of mourners: 1). the kings of vassal nations (vs. 9) - although they also hated her, they become powerful and wealthy from their association; 2). the merchants (vs. 11 & 15) – Rome was the greatest buyer and seller of goods the world had ever seen, and no longer would the merchants have a limitless worldwide market in which to sell; 3). the shipmasters and seamen (vs. 17) – ships were the major form of worldwide transportation and were constantly in demand, growing wealthy from Rome’s

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great appetite – they would also no longer be afforded a marketplace and Rome’s worldwide protection on the seas and in the ports. Not only did the nations supply Rome with goods for payment, but they received much from Rome as well: markets, stable government and a central system of justice, military protection, well-built roads, and the important gift of empire-wide peace (the *Pax Romana*). All would be gone, and the world scene would deteriorate once again into greater isolation, poverty, technological decay, and frequent local wars and infighting. They all make a great show of their grief for Rome, but they are really worried about their own future and possible demise. Standing at a distance, as it were, to avoid the terrible destruction, they all do not realize their future has already been decided. They will all receive the due recompense for their violent and immoral behavior in due time.

There is a sudden change of mood in verse 20. We see a scene back in heaven, where the saints and apostles and prophets are told to rejoice over the destruction of Rome, as their blood is now righteously avenged. The souls under the altar had previously asked “*how long?*”, and now we see God’s righteous judgment completed. This rejoicing is not for the wicked souls who were lost, but rather for the defeat of evil and a victory for righteousness. We now see a strong angel who picks up a great stone like a millstone and throws it into the sea. The serves as an analogy for the fall and casting down of the emperor, the city of Rome, and the Roman Empire. Like this stone, the Roman empire will not be heard from any **longer** (*eti* – more, longer, still, further). This point escapes many futurists, as a belief in a restored Roman Empire is a central tenet to most premillennial thinking. This system of a “Caesar-god” kingdom (such as the false notion of a god-like “Anti-Christ” ruling nations or the world) is thus ever ended and not something for which we should look in the future.

Verses 22 and 23 give us a long list of the decays, deficiencies, and degradations that follow as Rome crumbles. There is no joy and gladness and laughter, so instruments of music are silenced. Business and the abundance of wealth have disappeared, so there is no need for crafts and craftsmen any longer. The grinding of grain in the mills cannot be heard, as people have left or been killed, and daily staples are gone. Lights are no longer seen for festivities or even in what few homes are left, as most streets and homes are deserted or destroyed. Even the joy of a wedding ceremony would no longer be seen. We see a literal

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picture of death, and Rome appears more like a tomb than the ‘great city.’ We must keep in mind that we are talking here about a spiritual death, as a physical death for the beast and great city will come later. Although many nations participated in and contributed to Rome’s atrocities, the ultimate instigator and controller of the evil in the world was Rome. By her violence and coercion and intoxicating pleasures, she deceived the nations to sin. The word used in the Greek for deception is *planao*, meaning to cause to wander. The word sorcery here is *pharmakeia*, properly being drug-related sorcery, or also sorcery using medicine and spells. Rome did not “medicate’ the nations, but her charms and wiles and power and coercion worked on their hearts like a “drug-related spell.” She was not the direct source of all who were slain in the world, but she was the source of world law and world authority and was thus ultimately responsible for all the deaths in the realm, especially the righteous. What was once written by the great poet William Cullen Bryant still and forever rings true:

*Truth though crushed to earth shall rise again.
The eternal years of God are hers.
But error wounded writhes in pain
And dies among the worshipers.*

CHAPTER 19

The lengthy discourse from God that was presented in chapter 18 is actually a somber eulogy for the funeral of the Roman Empire. Chapter 19 begins with the loud voice of a great heavenly multitude singing, “*Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.*” *Hallelujah* is Hebrew for “praise the Lord”, or “praise Yahweh.” Some would suggest that verses 1-10 of chapter 19 should be part of the discourse of chapter 18, but the focus in 19 is on God and not the harlot. This great song of praise to God is repeated four times, with the 24 elders and 4 living creatures falling before God in praise. The future of the spiritual kingdom is eternal life, but the future of the beast and its followers is eternal fire and punishment (14:9-11; 20:10; Matt. 25:46). This is not so much a rejoicing over the punishment of the unrighteous beast and her followers as it is rejoicing over the victory of God’s righteousness over evil. The saints are rejoicing, and there is no apprehension in the righteous as Armageddon approaches. They

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have complete confidence in their God, and already are “*more than conquerors*” (Rom. 8:37).

As the final hallelujah is spoken, the multitude is told to rejoice over the coming marriage of the Lamb and His bride. The scene now changes to that of a bride adorned for her husband. The followers of Jesus, the church, are often compared to that of a bride prepared for her husband (Eph. 5:22-30; Rom. 7:4). Even in the Old Testament, the relationship of Israel to God was compared to that of a husband and wife (Hos.2; Isa. 50:1; Jer. 2:32; Ezek. 16ff). As marriage is held sacred by God, so is the relationship of Christ to the church. There were three Hebrew wedding rituals that differ from our present customs: 1). the marriage supper, 2) the bridal relationship, and 3). the clothing worn by the bride. When two were to be married, a public betrothal was made by the groom which was considered completely binding for the coming marriage (Deut. 22:23-24), even requiring a writ of divorce to break this contract. This could be for a lengthy period, even upwards of a year before formal marriage. During this time the dowry is paid and preparations for a marriage feast are made. It was in this situation that Joseph found Mary to be pregnant (Matt. 1:18 & 20).

When the time for the marriage arrived, an elaborate feast or supper was prepared. The groom and his friends wore their best clothing and followed a procession to the home of the betrothed. He received his bride and then took her home to the feast. Following this event, the marriage could be consummated. Celebrations could often last for a week or longer, and the couple was excused from all work and civic duties. The bride was expected to be clothed in such a way as to symbolize purity and sanctity. This is the same expectation Paul sets for the church (Eph. 5:27). We also remember the parable of the man who came to the wedding feast without the proper dress (Matt. 22:11-14). Those who have not had their unclean robes washed by obeying the Lord in baptism, or the unfaithful, will be cast out of the wedding feast (Luke 14:15-24). We also remember the warning of Rev. 16:15: “*Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.*” Only those who truly are God’s people and remain faithful will be invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Curiously, John now falls down in homage to the speaker who is revealing these scenes to him. He is mildly chastised, being told that the speaker is also a fellow servant and should not be worshiped. Whether John is confused as to the

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identity of the speaker (the Lord Himself, an angel, a fellow saint) or just overwhelmed by the majesty presented to him is not certain. John receives valuable instruction: worship God, and ONLY God. In our modern society, we see a constant blurring of the lines by doing homage or revering those other than God, whether in religious circles or secular venues.

A new vision appears to John. Heaven opens and we see a white horse and majestic rider. The rider is called Faithful and True (1:5; 3:7 & 14) and also The Word of God (vs. 13), and even has a name written on Him that no one knows except Himself (2:17, the names only known to the righteous but hidden from the world). His eyes are like flaming fires (1:14), and He wears **many** crowns (this time the *diademata*, or crowns of authority). Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword (*rhomphaia*; 1:16; 2:12 & 16; Heb. 4:12). This is usually a reference to the gospel of truth, but here it is also the sword or word of righteous judgment. He wears a robe dipped in blood. The origin of this blood could be several things: the blood of Christ Himself from His sacrifice, the blood of the saints who continue to come out of the tribulation, or a metaphorical reference to God's wrath against His enemies (see Isa. 63:1-6 and Joel 3:9-13, where Jehovah treads the winepress of His wrath and is stained with His enemies' blood). On His robe and His thigh is written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS (vs.16; 17:14), which is a name that even the nations will come to acknowledge. This white rider judges the world and wages war with His righteousness. Given this description, there can be no doubt the identity of the rider is Jesus Christ. We can recall the vision of chapter 6, where the first seal is opened and a white rider appears. This rider had a victory crown and waged war with a bow, "*conquering and to conquer.*" Although some scholars believe this is a vision of generic world conquest and power (showing that God has ultimate control over all the affairs of men, even war), most believe this to be Jesus who is sent out to conquer the hearts and minds of men with the gospel. Now this same Rider will wage war with the sharp sword of His judgment to smite the nations and "*rule (shepherd) them with a rod of iron*" (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27). As with all His previous enemies, He is prepared to tread them in the winepress of His fierce wrath. As this scene closes, we see all the armies which are assembled in heaven, clothed in fine linen which is clean and white (spiritually pure). They are all mounted on white horses and completely prepared to battle and destroy the beast and his followers.

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John now sees an angel standing in the sun, crying out with a loud voice to all the birds that fly in mid-heaven (the sky). They are all called to assemble for the great supper of God, a feast on the flesh of the unrighteous. This symbolism was previously found in Ezekiel's vision of the destruction of Gog and Magog, old enemies of Israel who tried to foil God's purposes (Ezek. 38-39). Ezekiel was told to call every sort of bird and every beast of the field to feast on God's sacrifice of these wicked heathens. This feast on the unrighteous dead stands in stark contrast to the marriage supper of the Lamb, reserved for the righteous. This supper is of the flesh of captains (*chiliarchs*, Roman leaders over 1000 men), mighty men (powerful men and great warriors), and all other unrighteous people (great or small). As all walks of men have served the beast, so will they also be destroyed with the beast. In ancient thinking, to be left for dead unburied and eaten by carnivores was the worst disgrace and humiliation (Jer. 7:33 and 16:3-9). Jesus reminded us: "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth*" (Matt. 12:30). Although the Roman Empire was slowly torn apart and ruined physically, the feast here prepared follows a spiritual carnage and not a physical one.

The "battle of Armageddon" was hinted at in chapter 16, verse 16. Now, in 19:19, we see the armies arrayed for battle. This is the third time that we are told the armies are aligned with Satan to fight a great battle (16:16; 17:12-14; 19:19), yet no battle is described. We only see the inevitable results and consequences. All the visions between 16:16 and 19:19 discuss the aftermath of the great defeat of the beast, as the details of the actual battle are inconsequential. The beast (sea beast) and the false prophet (earth beast) are seized and both thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. The harlot has already suffered the same fate (17:16; 18:8). All the followers of the beast are killed by the sword (of righteous judgment), and they also will be "*tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb*" (previously noted in 14:10). The sword of truth, the gospel, becomes the sword of judgment and vengeance for the unrighteous (John 12:48; Heb. 4:12). The scene ends with a gruesome picture of birds of prey gorging themselves on the flesh and blood of the unrighteous dead. We are left with a vivid picture of the fate of any future unholy spiritual power or coalition which would attempt to usurp God's throne and power. Victory is always found with the Lamb.

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