

Revelation Bible Study

Remember, Revelation is a book of comfort to the Christian!!

Chapters 17-19

Camera angle Five

Remember – What happens in these verses has been going on since the beginning of time and will go on until the Judgment.

At this time view the picture labeled chapters 17-19. It describes the results of the Fall of Babylon.

The Woman on the Beast

Chapter 17

(Notes to help understanding)

17:1 Many Waters. A reminder that the apostate church may greatly outnumber the “little flock.” The harlot has dominion over the nations. Ancient Babylon was situated on the Euphrates River and was known as the city of many waters because of the system of canals which carried and distributed the waters of the Euphrates throughout the city and to the surrounding area.

17:2 Intoxicated, Wine, Adulteries. The kings of the earth as well as its inhabitants commune with her. They commit adultery and drink from her cup. They are under her influence. How often it happens that when the rulers of nations embrace immorality, their leadership encourages the people all the more in their godlessness, so that little hope remains to reclaim them from their drunken stupor. It is often true that as the rulers go, so go the people under their governance.

17:3 Scarlet Beast. Now this beast reappears as a symbol of civil government in its antichristian aspects. Sitting on the beast refers to an alliance between antichristian forces in secular governments and the apostate church.

17:3 Blasphemous Names. Here the “names of blasphemy” cover its entire body. The Roman Empire reeked with the blasphemous worship of the emperors; not its heads only but the whole body politic did this dishonor to the Living God.

17:4 Purple & Scarlet. The woman who sits astride the beast is dressed sumptuously; she is clothed in purple and scarlet and... gilded with gold and precious stones and pearls. In ancient Rome “purple and scarlet” demonstrated the luxury and splendor of the empire. In the OT purple was used for royalty and scarlet could signify royal splendor or luxury. The harlot’s pearls, costly jewels, and gold would exhibit the extravagant and profligate lifestyle into which she drew them.

17:4 Abominable Things. These are the unclean things of her immorality which symbolize all the immoral, evil, and corruptive attitudes, practices, and influences that she offers to the peoples and their rulers. She is quite successful in enticing the rulers and their peoples to drink of her cup, by which they themselves become inebriated in wealth, in luxurious and sensual and

immoral lives (cf. Rev. 18:3, 9, 11, 15). All who are under her spiritual influence, a false substitute for Christianity, justify such immorality as godly and righteous.

17:5 Mystery. Literally the word means “secret” and can refer to “secret rite” “secret teaching or knowledge,” or a “mystery” in the sense of something that can be known only by a special revelation or initiatory wisdom. The word implies that the identification of the harlot as “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots” is a “mystery” because no one can know or understand that that is who she is unless given special knowledge or revelation (until Christ’s return and the End, when everything will be revealed publicly). That is, the fact that the woman should be called “Babylon the great” tells believers something about who she is and what she represents. Babylon is called a “mystery” because to the world at large her identity as the false church and the great enemy of God’s saints on earth will not be fully disclosed until the End, when it will be revealed by her judgment by God (cf. 2 Thess. 2:1-8). Until that time, most people believe her lie that she is the true church and the true bride of Christ, and not the harlot.

17:8 Once was, Is not. This is an obvious imitation of the description of the Lamb (1:18; 2:8). Cf. the description of God in 1:4, 8; 4:8. Here the phrase seems to mean that the beast seeks to rival God (cf. 2Th 2:4) and to lay claim to divinity.

The beast and what it represents come and go in one form or another throughout the entire period from Christ’s ascension up to the End at Christ’s return. The beast disappears in one particular makeup or disguise – possibly because it has out lived its usefulness to the dragon and/or perhaps because God has brought it down – and then rises up in another form and entity to plague the church of Christ. Human institutions of every kind, and “isms” of all sorts, come and go. As symbolized by the beast they last for a while as terrifying threats to the saints of God, but then they disappear, only to be replaced by other entities under the control of the dragon.

17:11 Eighth King. The antichrist, who plays the role of a king (“belongs to the seven”) but is in reality part of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan.

17:12 Ten Horns. Clearly they symbolically represent all earthly ruling powers, during the entire time period from Christ’s ascension to his return at the resent world’s end.

17:14 Make War. In actuality, though, they “wage war with the Lamb”, for the conflict has always been between the dragon (Satan) and God. This war reached its climax at the cross on Calvary, for it was there that Jesus Christ, on behalf of God’s people, won the victory as the Lamb (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18-21; Rev. 5:5-10). As a result, “the great dragon...the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan,” was thrown out of God’s heavenly presence, never again to appear before him (12:9). But when the dragon realized that he could not continue his warfare against God in heaven and that he had failed to destroy the Christ Child (the male Child of the woman 12:3-5), and also knowing that he could no longer stand before God and mock God’s saints (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; Zech. 3:1-4), he took out his anger on the woman on earth and her seed. He set about to make war with the church of Christ on earth (Rev. 12:13-18).

17:14 Lord...King. But though the target of the battle is the church, actually the war is against the Lamb, for he is the champion and defender of God’s people on earth. In fighting against the church, the evil forces of the dragon (to their own astonishment) discover that they are really fighting against the Lord Christ himself. And in this contest the Lamb faces them not like a lamb that was led to slaughter in humility and weakness (Is. 53:7; Acts 8:32-33) but as the mighty God who is “the Lord of lords and the King of kings.” Because of this identification, the victory of the Lamb over the beast and its kings (17:14) could be viewed as taking place at the End (cf.

16:12-16; 20:7-7-10). Certainly the final conflict in which the evil forces will forever be destroyed lies in the future, when Christ returns and the final judgment takes place. But also now and throughout the time of the church's mission on earth, the Lamb will prevail over the beast so as to enable his church to carry out and complete her mission. (CC)

17:17 Fulfilled. Even the wicked plans of the church's enemies must help to carry out God's plan and to fulfill his promises.

Summary of Chapter 17

John sees in this putting an end of the two henchmen of the dragon: the beast and the harlot, which together are called Babylon.

(Meditation/Discussion)

1. What lessons did you learn from this section? How will they impact your life?
2. What comfort can you take from this section?
3. What is a favorite verse in this section?

The Fall of Babylon

Chapter 18

(Notes to help understanding)

18:2 Fallen is Babylon. This vision depicts God's final judgment against antichrist and the destruction of Satan's earthly agents. It is a dramatic portrayal of the fall of the enemies of the church.

18:2 Haunt for. So total and final will be the destruction of Babylon that only scavengers such as the "unclean bird" and the "unclean and hated beast" are left. This description can be taken either metaphorically or literally. They could be the actual demons of hell itself which—under the guidance of the dragon, the chief of demons—have been all along the companions of the harlot as they inspired her to carry out her anti-Christian activities. Now at her demise, having used her for their own devilish purposes, all that is left of the once proud city are the demons hovering over her corpse. (CC)

18:3 Wine...Adulteries. This describes how all the pagan nations and political and economic rulers and powers shared in her deceptive piety. Sanctioned by her perverted form of Christianity, they received from her license to indulge in and live by filthy lucre and sensual power and immorality.

Such excessive luxury as is incompatible with Christian stewardship; sinful self-indulgence in the lusts and desires of the flesh, whatever they may be; in short, the whole fertile soil which fosters the growth of wantonness, extravagance, and arrogance.

18:5 Piled up...Heaven. So great were the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah that they reached God in heaven (Gen. 18:21-22). Jeremiah cried out that ancient Babylon could not be rescued from destruction because her judgment had reached as high as the sky, as high as the clouds (Jer. 51:9). In like manner the sins of the harlot – apostate church, Babylon, the mother of harlots –

were so great and horrifying that God would no longer put up with her. She had to be destroyed and would forever suffer God's judgment in the pit of hell. (CC)

18:8 In one Day. This emphasizes the suddenness and completeness of the harlot's destruction.

18:9 Kings Weep. These kings are most likely not those (symbolized by the horns and the beasts in 17:8-17 who turned on the city to destroy her, but rather are those who lived and ruled under her license and prospered and felt secure under her spiritual patronage.

18:11 Merchants Weep. Their lament seems to be even more full of hopeless sorrow, for they weep and shed tears over the harlot, because no one any longer buys their merchandise. She through whom and by whose license they had become wealthy is now gone. And their own wealth disappears because their merchandise and goods are now worthless. James warned that this would happen: the wealthy will weep, endlessly wailing over the wretched state that is coming upon them, because their wealth will rot and their clothing will become moth-eaten and the poisonous ruin of all their wealth will be a witness against them as their ruin devours their flesh (James 5:1-3; cf. Luke 6:25) (CC)

18:13 Bodies & Souls. It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire. In the city of Rome itself in the first century before Christ, there were an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 slaves, a third of the city's population. So prevalent was slavery that the social structure and whole economy of the Roman Empire were dependent upon the pool of slave labor, skilled and unskilled. Slavery was not based on race, for slaves often came from the same ethnic groups (including Greek and Romans) as their owners. Slaves were taken from areas conquered by Rome and included large numbers of Greeks as well as barbarians (from Europe and the regions to the east). In 1 Chronicles 5:21 "souls of people" refers not to slaves but to captives taken in warfare. Such captives, ordinary citizens taken from a conquered land, were commonly sold as slaves. Pirates engaged in such slave trade by kidnapping civilians and then selling them into slavery. The Roman government closed its eye to such slave trafficking. Captives that were sold were considered less valuable (with exceptions, such as educated people) and were sold like so much livestock, like animals. (CC)

18:14 Fruit Longed for. Here it symbolically refers to the harlot's treasure, which she has stored up and saved and which is now ready to be tapped in leisure time or retirement for easy, comfortable, and luxurious living.

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

18:21 Large Millstone. Similar to the large millstone of Mk 9:42, which was actually a "donkey millstone" (one large enough to require a donkey to turn it). This and the concluding verses of the chapter portray the total destruction of "Babylon." – The millstone sinks into oblivion, never again to rise to the surface.

Summary of Chapter 18

God not only punishes the mistreatment of His saints and prophets, but indeed anyone who has shed innocent blood, since the willful taking of life is one of the sins so grievous

that it cries to heaven for vengeance. (Other abominations that cry to heaven for vengeance are sodomy [Gen. 18:20], oppression [Ex 3:7–10; 22:21–23], and defrauding wage-earners [James 5:4].) (TLSB)

(Meditation/Discussion)

1. What lessons did you learn from this section? How will they impact your life?
2. What comfort can you take from this section?
3. What is a favorite verse in this section?

Hallelujah

19:1-10

(Notes to help understanding)

19:1 Great Multitude. This is the Church Triumphant, the saints who have passed into glory.

19:5 Voice Came. Most likely it is an angel who is speaking, perhaps one of the angels of God's presence who stand before Him and wait on Him (e.g., see Luke 1:19).

19:5 Small & Great. This designation includes all people of whatever social, economic, or educational rank of status. A telling and dramatic illustration of people, both "small and great" worshipping the Lord God took place at the first advent of Jesus Christ, the beginning of God's establishing his reign over the human race, when shepherds came to worship the newborn Christ Child (Luke 2:8-20) and later Magi too came to adore the Child (Matthew 2:1-12).

19:7 Wedding...Lamb. The imagery of a wedding to express the intimate relationship between God and his people has its roots in the prophetic literature of the OT (e.g., Isa 54:5–7; Hos 2:19). Cf. the NT usage (Mt 22:2–14; Eph 5:32).

19:7 Made Herself Ready. It is not her own preparation to be received by her husband in marriage that made her the bride of Christ. The Lord Christ himself, when He chose her to be His wife, made her worthy of such an honor by paying the betrothal price.

Ephesians 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

19:10 Testimony of Jesus. The witness of Jesus is the Spirit of the prophecy, that is, the witness that the Spirit gave in the prophetic writings of the OT is the same witness that the apostles and John and the saints of God now hold concerning Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12), and it is the witness which they proclaim to the world. By this witness they worship God.

Summary of 19:1-10

This is a picture of the saints who have joined the whole heavenly host in singing songs of praise to God. It is the triumph that has come after great onslaught by the devil and all who are in cahoots with him here on earth.

(Meditation/Discussion)

1. What lessons did you learn from this section? How will they impact your life?
2. What comfort can you take from this section?
3. What is a favorite verse in this section?

The Rider on the White Horse

19:11-21

(Notes to help understanding)

19:12 Crowns. The crown signifies kingly royalty and authoritative sovereignty, and he who wears it exercises absolute and lordly power.

19:13 Word of God. The fact that John calls Jesus Christ “the Word of God” certainly implies that He is the prophetic spokesman for God. He is the complete and perfect and final revelation of God to mankind in His person and work and in His teachings.

19:14 Armies of Heaven. Although the heavenly host is elsewhere solely angelic (Dt 33:2; Ps 68:17), it is possible that the army being described here includes the saints, since both this assembly and the aforementioned “Bride” of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7) are attired in fine white linen. (TLSB)

19:15 Iron Scepter. This would be like a shepherd’s staff used as a rod to separate His sheep from the pagan nations before executing judgment.

19:16 On His Thigh. In Gen 32:25 Jacob’s thigh was touched by God when Jacob wrestled with him. The Israelites abstained from eating the muscle of the thigh (Gen. 32:32) out of respect, because it was a sign of what had happened between God and Jacob when his name was changed to Israel. The name Israel was a reminder that, while Jacob fought with God (in the form of an ordinary man; cf. Is 53:1-3) and conquered Him (Gen 32:28) and was thus blessed by God (Gen 32:29), God touched Israel’s thigh so that he limped (Gen 32:31). God did this to remind Jacob that, while he fought and overcame God, he did so because of God’s condescending love and mercy to him. Jesus Christ is the ultimate “Israel” who, in God’s condescension, love, and grace, suffered and thereby conquered the anger and judgment of God so that God would always favor humankind. The name on the thigh would then be the mark which identifies Jesus Christ, having once conquered sin and death by his own death and resurrection, as the true Israel. (CC)

19:16 King of Kings. It is a name which shouts out that the Lord Christ is the universal Ruler of the entire creation, the only King and Emperor of the human race, and the Lord before whom all

people of whatever race and nation and tongue will kneel and acknowledge as the only Lord and as the true God (Phil. 2:6-11).

19:18 May Eat. The supper consists of 10 (the number for completeness) terms: (1) kings, (2) generals, (3) mighty men, (4) horses, (5) riders, (6) all, (7) free, (8) slaves, (9) small, (10) great—indicating the total victory of the Lord over all his enemies. (CSB)

Summary of 19:11-21

In these verses Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is described as the “King of kings” (19:16) and the Lord of the hosts of heaven coming at the present world’s end. Though the rider on the horse is not designated as the Son of Man, “his eyes ... like a flame of fire” (19:12) together with the “sharp sword” (19:15) that issues from his mouth point out that he is the Son of Man (see 1:13–14, 16; 14:14; cf. 2:18). This is the second time in Revelation that the second coming of the Lord Christ is portrayed. In the vision of the harvest of the earth at the End in 14:14–20, the first view of his second coming, the Son of Man was pictured as the Lord of the harvest. Here in 19:11–16 he is described as the mighty warrior, the Lord of hosts, who comes at the End to execute the judgment of God and to carry out the sentence of that judgment (19:17–21). (CC)

(Meditation/Discussion)

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