

WEEK EIGHT

JUST ANOTHER DAY IN BABYLON: THE PROSTITUTE AND THE BEAST

You will have noticed that we have organized our study of Revelation so that in the middle of the book we are reading some of the sections in a slightly different order than you would if you read it straight through. There are some drawbacks to this - we can miss the flow of the book and how one chapter connects to another. But the advantage to this is that in reading it in this way we can better understand the themes and structure of the book.

That sense of structure and theme is what we hope you get from this week. Last week, we read about a struggle between a woman and a beast. This week, we see a very different woman in a very different relationship with a beast. Remember when we told you that apocalyptic literature presents stark contrasts? That's certainly the case when we compare the woman of chapter 12 with the prostitute of chapter 17... and also when we compare this prostitute to the Bride in chapter 19. In the same way, we will also read about a city in chapter 18- Babylon. That city is meant to be contrasted with the city we'll find in chapter 21. John is showing us how the path forks and we must choose one of two paths: Babylon or the New Jerusalem; the Great Prostitute or the Bride of Christ.

But as we'll see in these chapters below, this is all easier when it's theoretical. When we're living in the here and now, and the choice comes before us, John wants to show us what faithfulness and perseverance looks like and to equip us for it. Let's see together what he says.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 17:1-18 slowly three times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

REVELATION 17 (ESV)

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, 2 with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk." 3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. 5 And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." 6 And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. 7 But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. 8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. 9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; 10 they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. 11 As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. 12 And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. 13 These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

15 And the angel said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. 16 And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, 17 for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18 And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth."

PERSONAL STUDY PART I: THE GREAT PROSTITUTE & THE BEAST

Chapter 17 marks the beginning of a new “scene” in John’s vision. An angel who held one of the seven bowls from chapter 16 ushers him to see something new (“Come, I will show you...”). Just as in chapter 12, we join John in looking upon a woman and a beast. But here in Revelation 17, the woman is very different from the one we met five chapters ago. Thankfully, John helps us understand who it is that we are meeting here.

Read 17:1-6. What do you note about the description of the woman?

The first and main thing that John draws our attention to is the woman’s sexual immorality. Harlotry in the Bible is often a metaphor. This is seen most clearly in the book of Hosea, where God compares his love for his people to Hosea’s love for his wife, Gomer. Both Israel and Gomer turn away from their faithful husband and give themselves to someone else in unfaithfulness. In Hosea, as in the rest of the Bible, harlotry and idolatry - turning away from the Lord to find satisfaction in another - are synonymous. Read Hosea 4:11-12 below.

11 whoredom, wine, and new wine,
which take away the understanding.
12 My people inquire of a piece of wood,
and their walking staff gives them oracles.
For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray,
and they have left their God to play the whore.

How does the Great Prostitute of Revelation 17 reflect this same theme in Scripture?

Now let’s look at how the woman is described in Revelation 17:4. The images that are used here: purple and scarlet fabric; gold, jewels, and pearls; and a golden cup are all signs of wealth and opulence.

What do these specific images, emphasized to tell us about the woman and what makes her attractive to her suitors, tell us about the kind of idolatry that she invites?

There is a fundamental similarity between idolatry and adultery. Both take gifts from God, meant for good - worship and sexuality - and give them away in ways that they were not designed to be used. Both idolatry and adultery make false promises to us. Adultery tells us that we need this security, this relationship, this connection in order to survive, this pleasure to be happy, in order to be ourselves. Idolatry makes exactly the same promise.

How does idolatry, as described in Revelation 17:4, make the same false promise? What is the lie we are being told?

In Revelation 17 we don't just meet the Great Prostitute; we also meet another Beast. Read again the description of the beast found in 17:3. Thankfully, John gives us an answer key to what we're seeing here. Read verses 8-12 to hear the angel's description of what John sees.

What does the angel say that each of the aspects of the Beast mean - the heads (they actually mean two different things) and the horns?

The reference to "seven mountains" from verse 9 would have immediately been recognizable to the first audience. Everyone knew that Rome was the "city of seven hills." In describing the Beast in this way, John and his first audience would have immediately made a connection to the Roman Empire. And yet John wasn't just talking about Rome; by connecting the beast not only to that Empire but also to powers that had yet to come ("ten kings who have not yet received royal power") John invites us to see Rome and also to see through Rome to patterns that apply to every fallen earthly power.

We see in Revelation 17 that there is a mutual relationship between the Great Prostitute and the Beast. In verse 2 the kings use the woman to satisfy themselves. In verse 3 we see that the woman uses the Beast for her own purposes. And in verse 16, we read about how this relationship falls apart. What does this picture tell us about the complicated picture between wealth, worldly empires, and idolatry? Peek ahead to 18:3 if you need some help.

We see this picture from afar, and it can be easy for us to make detached judgments about the foolishness of those who fall into idolatry. But John would warn us otherwise. Notice how he responds in the second half of verse 6 when he sees the woman. In fact, the angel has to rebuke him to snap out of it in verse 7! When John “marvels” here, it means that he is full of admiration and awe. John reminds us by example: the question is not if we will fall into idolatry; it’s when and how will we fall into idolatry? We, too, so often “marvel” at the power of things that make false promises to us.

Take a few moments to reflect on how you are prone to “marvel” at things other than God and His goodness to you. Where in your life do you say to yourself, “If only I had this, I would be safe/secure/happy?” Where in your life do you find yourself bending God’s Law to get something you want for yourself? Take a few moments to name the promises those idols make to you... and then name how Jesus offers you a real promise, and real satisfaction.

PERSONAL STUDY PART II: THE FALL OF BABYLON

We learned in 17:5 that the Great Prostitute had been given a name: Babylon. Babylon had been the people of God's great national enemy in the Old Testament, a mighty imperial power that invaded Israel, overcame its defenses, sacked Jerusalem, and deported much of the population throughout the empire. While they were dispersed throughout the Babylonian Empire, the question for God's people was this: would they maintain their distinct identity as God's people as a minority within this colonizing power? Or would they give it up and become Babylonian rather than Israelite? As Babylon came to be understood in the minds of the people of God, it stood for a godless power that threatened to strip God's people of their identity through its might and power.

Chapter 17 ended with that amazing description of that power. Babylon has its heart set on making "war on the Lamb" (17:14). How will this conflict end? Will God's people be able to endure and remain faithful? Chapter 18 shows us the sure end of Babylon, and in so doing it gives us strength to persevere.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 18:1-19:5 slowly three times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

REVELATION 18-19:5 (ESV)

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk

the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her,
will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. 10 They will stand far
off, in fear of her torment, and say,

"Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come."

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, 12 cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, 13 cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 "The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!"

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 "Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off
18 and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

"What city was like the great city?"

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

"Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!
For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!"

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;
22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,
23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,
for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.
24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth."

Rejoicing in Heaven

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

"Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
2 for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

3 Once more they cried out,

"Hallelujah!
The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" 5 And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great."

In chapters 12 and 13 we saw the struggle between the woman and the beast, but we didn't really get to see that struggle come to an end. But here, having just met Babylon in all of her beauty and opulence (17:4), we see her fall.

When we met Babylon in chapter 17, John pointed out certain things about her appearance (17:4). Now here in chapter 18, that is mentioned again. What do you see mentioned again and again about the characteristics of Babylon and what makes it attractive to us? See in particular 18:3, 7, and 11-19.

We should be clear that what this scene warns us about is not so much the dangers of beauty. In just a couple of chapters we will be invited into a city that is opulent and beautiful, full of the finest materials and goods around. But what we are being warned about is how good things can be put to bad uses.

Look at 18:7 again. How does Babylon use what it has been given in a sinful way? What do the ways of Babylon promise us our wealth and our power will give us?

In verses 11-13, we are given a long list of all of Babylon's goods. As you arrive at the end of that list, what is most striking to you about all the things that Babylon has managed to put a price on?

In his commentary on Revelation, Joe Mangina writes this: "John places the human cargo in the emphatic final position. He wants to drive home the point that, in Babylon's system of exchange, humanity itself has been reduced to one more item on a list of things, goods, possessions. This was literally true, of course: slavery was a commonplace in the ancient world... But even beyond the specific evil of slavery, Revelation bears witness to an even more fundamental flaw at the heart of Babylon's economy. The list exposes the way in which human beings, made in the image of God, are treated as mere commodities, convertible in principle with other goods."

Does this book of the Bible, written almost 2000 years ago, tell us a true story about all of human history and how it unfolds? Where do we see the tendency - not just in our country's history but also around the world today in human trafficking and modern day slavery - continue to play out? What do Christians have to say in response?

There's a constant refrain about Babylon's fall - we see in 18:10, 18:17, and 18:19. What does this refrain remind us about all of the supposed security that idolatry offers us?

The dramatic description of Babylon begins in 18:4 with an exhortation to us: "Come out of her, my people." This is a word spoken in love to you and to me. What we see in Revelation 17 and 18 is how idols always let us down. They overpromise and undeliver. They offer us security, happiness, and joy... and we end up disappointed, let down, and downcast.

As you think about this exhortation to you and to me, what is the invitation that the Lord is making to us? What is God encouraging us to leave behind so that we can find a joy that will never let us down and a security that will never fail us?

As a way of answering that question, think back on the last few days. Where have you felt particularly disappointed, anxious, or fearful? Where did those feelings come from? Is it possible that you've sought peace in something that could never give you what you asked of it?

Let's drill down even more on that question. Chapter 18 shows us a number of different people who profit from Babylon. It's not so much that they support Babylon; instead they find her existence convenient to help them get what they want. John says to them, "Come out of her, my people."

Where in your life have you made an uneasy alliance with something that you know to be evil and wrong? It could be a person who is convenient to help you accomplish your purposes. It could be an economic arrangement that is unethical but helpful. In this election year, you might be willing to align yourself with a certain politician or political party while refusing to criticize them when they do things that you know are wrong. Where do you, too, need to “come out of Babylon”?

Our passage ends with singing. Once again God’s people rejoice that evil has been defeated. Read through the first song again (19:1-2). Why is it such a good thing that Babylon has fallen? What is an example of a contemporary “Babylon” that, when it falls, we should rejoice over?

The passage ends by reminding us where we’ve been this whole time that we’ve seen these visions. In verse 4, we shift our gaze from the horizon to the immediate foreground: we’re in the throne room.

Think back to chapters 4 and 5 and what we learned there. Why is the throne room of heaven such an important place to be in order to get perspective on reality?

Where in your life do you need to get “in the throne room” right now? Where do you need a heavenly perspective on all that is going on, so that you can truly see your presence and have a sure hope for the future? Take some time to name what you know is really true about who you are and who is in control of this world.

WEEK NINE

A TALE OF TWO SUPPERS

During the Christmas season, Handel's Messiah is often the centerpiece of various performances and celebrations. The famous "Hallelujah Chorus" finds its biblical reference here in Revelation 19. While we may be quite familiar with the singing of this chorus during the holidays, we may be less acquainted with when and why the hallelujahs of Scripture occur.

This week we are quickly approaching the magnificent culmination of redemption history. This celebration will be depicted in a meal. But as we have grown accustomed in our study of Revelation, the imagery is complex. First, we will see the rejoicing that comes from the marriage supper of the Lamb. Second, we will witness what happens at the great supper of God. In the end, all will end up at a meal.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 19 slowly three times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

REVELATION 19 (ESV)

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for his judgments are true and just;

for he has judged the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth with her immorality,

and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

3 Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5 And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

small and great.”

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

8 it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." 10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The Rider on a White Horse

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, "Come, gather for the great supper of God, 18 to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great." 19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. 20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. 21 And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

PERSONAL STUDY PART I: THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

The opening verses ring out a resounding chorus of "Hallelujah!" This is a compound Hebrew term meaning "praise Yah." In Hebrew, the word hallel is a joyous song of praise. The second part of this phrase is "Yah" which is a shortened form of YHWH. For the Jewish people, this is the unspeakable covenantal name of God. When pronounced it is spoken as Yahweh. So literally, Revelation 19 has a loud repeating chorus which declares "Praise the LORD" four times in just the first six verses. So why now is there so much rejoicing?

Hallel or praise songs to the Lord are quite common in the Old Testament. Hallel is the general term for Psalms 113-118. This grouping of psalms expresses thankfulness for God's redemption of His people from Egypt and is read before and after the celebration of the Passover meal.

The hallel or song of praise in these psalms refers to God's deliverance of His people from their oppression in Egypt. Looking at Revelation 19:1-2, why is the multitude singing their praises to God here?

John's audience would have been quite familiar with the singing of Yahweh's praise as they moved into the celebration of the Passover meal. As the people would begin to sing and hear these songs, an anticipation of a coming significant meal would begin to grow within them. The sounds would stir their hearts to remember their deliverance through the sacrifice of a lamb. The songs told them to get ready for the meal. Imagine the joy they would have felt as they began to connect these new songs of praise with a beautiful meal that celebrated the culmination of all of God's saving activity for his people. Just as God's redemptive work was repeatedly celebrated through song and a meal during Passover, now God's redemptive work through Jesus is celebrated through a song and a meal: the marriage supper of the Lamb! These hallelujah songs tell God's people to get ready for his meal with them. The Lord had promised His people that such a feast was coming (Isaiah 25:6) and now Jesus gives John a vision of this long-awaited supper.

Who is present at this meal?

This is quite interesting imagery. There is a Bride here at the feast and the groom is referred to as the Lamb. There is also some peculiar tension about how the Bride has arrived here.

According to verse 7, who got the Bride ready for the marriage feast?

According to verse 8, how did she get her clothes?

This tension can be found throughout the New Testament. There are continual calls for Christians, the Bride of Christ, to get ready for Jesus' coming. And then there are very definite passages that let us know that we can do nothing to save ourselves because salvation is a gift of grace from the Lord alone. Passages like this can leave us wondering, "Do we prepare ourselves for the coming day of the Lord or does He get us ready?"

Read Philippians 2:12-13. Using both Revelation 19 and Philippians 2, how might you understand who is doing the work of preparation? Is it God or us... or both?

Remember back to our study of Revelation 7. The servants of God are first sealed by God through the giving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies the redemptive work of Christ to the believers, thus enabling them to stand. So, we see an interworking of God's grace and Christians' deeds. Believers are given the righteousness of Christ to wear which enables them to live their lives faithfully, anticipating His return.

WHY A MARRIAGE FEAST?

We can now appreciate pairing a meal with a celebration, but why is this meal described as a wedding feast? The notion of God's relationship with Israel has often been described in marital terms.

For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called. (Isaiah 54:5)

Later, in the New Testament, the marriage relationship is applied to Jesus (Groom) and the Church (Bride).

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

Having a little understanding of Old Testament Jewish marriage can help us appreciate the richness of the imagery here in Revelation 19. First, there would be a covenant made between the father of the bride and the groom which would bind the couple together. After the covenant was made, the groom had to pay a determined price in order to secure the bride. Though they were considered "legally married" the couple was not yet physically together. There was often a long waiting period before the wedding was consummated. Therefore, the bride eagerly awaited the coming of her groom and would grow excited as she and her friends heard him arriving. Next the marriage would be consummated through a sexual union, whereby the bride would show herself to be pure by the presentation of blood. Finally,

the joy of their consummation was fully celebrated by all through the sharing of a meal. The meal signified the union was complete and all the benefits of the relationship could be fully enjoyed.

Now apply this beautiful imagery to what is being depicted in the relationship between Jesus (the Lamb) and the Church (the Bride):

<i>Aspect of Jewish Marriage</i>	<i>How This Is Seen Between Jesus and the Church</i>
<i>Covenant made between a father and a groom on behalf of his daughter.</i>	
<i>Price is paid to secure the bride</i>	
<i>Waiting period longing for the groom to arrive.</i>	
<i>The groom appears and all are excited!</i>	
<i>The marriage is consummated.</i>	
<i>Blood is required to show her purity.</i>	
<i>A grand feast marks the union and celebrates the beauty of the relationship.</i>	

Now we see why there is such cause for songs of praise and glorious feasting! The waiting is over. The groom has arrived and all the benefits of being in relationship to the Lamb can be fully enjoyed. Blessed indeed are all those who are invited to this supper (Revelation 19:9).

Conclude your time of study today with your own songs of praise to the Lord. Use the space below to write your words of thanksgiving for a groom who has sought you, secured you, and is surely coming soon to bless you with every benefit that comes from being unified with him. May we long to share in such a feast as this!

PERSONAL STUDY PART II: THE WARRIOR ON THE HORSE

Revelation 19:11 opens with a phrase that we have grown quite accustomed to in our study of this book, "Then I saw..." First, in chapter 4 we saw a door open. Then, in chapter 11 God's temple was opened. Next, chapter 15 gave us the opening of the sanctuary. And now in 19:11 heaven itself is opened! We should expect something new to be revealed to us as we gain a deeper understanding of earlier images.

When heaven opens, John sees someone sitting on a white horse. Immediately this would have conjured up war imagery for his audience. The description of the one seated on the horse, ready to make war, should be quite familiar to us by now.

Read the following attributes of the one seated on the horse. Write where in Revelation you have seen Jesus described like this before. (*hint: many can be found in the description of Jesus in the letters to the churches Revelation 1-3*)

<i>The Rider on the White Horse</i>	<i>Reference in Revelation of the Same Attribute</i>
<i>Faithful</i>	
<i>True</i>	
<i>Eyes Like Flames of Fire</i>	
<i>Word of God</i>	
<i>Mouth With a Sharp Sword</i>	
<i>Rule With a Rod of Iron</i>	
<i>King of Kings</i>	
<i>Lord of Lords</i>	

All that Jesus has promised to be for his Church, he now fully demonstrates. The fullness of this imagery lets us know the great victory that we have been longing for is about to begin. Let's take a closer look at some of the details of this battle scene that Jesus gives to John.

Read Revelation 19:13. What kind of garment is Jesus wearing as he shows up for the battle?

Did you notice that Jesus arrives already covered in blood? We would expect a battle scene to be gory, but usually blood gets on your clothes as a result of being in the battle. But here, the way Jesus rides in is by wearing a bloodied robe.

Whose blood is his robe dipped in?

What a picture! The way that Jesus heads into battle with the enemy is through his own blood, shed on the cross, for you and for me. His victory comes through his sacrificial offering of himself.

Jesus is not the only one dressed in a peculiar garment for battle. Look at Revelation 19:14. What are the armies of heaven dressed in?

This is not the type of clothing we would expect to find in battle. Instead, garments of fine, pure linen would have been indicative of the priesthood.

Consider the garments of these believers who stand as a part of the armies of God. Write what you think their garments indicate they won't need to do during the battle and also what their function will be.

This is not our battle to fight. Rather it is his victory that we are allowed to enjoy. And thus, we serve as priests to our God (Revelation 5:10). We are not called to fight and win this battle, however, we are called to serve as mediators between God and the world, declaring as his ambassadors, the victory that is obtained through Jesus.

Now it is time to see this battle played out. You'll remember from Revelation 16 that the kings of the whole world have been assembled to make war on the Lamb on the great day of God the Almighty. This gathered group stands in stark comparison to the pure, priestly group with Jesus.

Read Revelation 19:17-18. What word is repeated 5 times in these two verses?

The word "flesh" is the Greek word *sarka*. One cannot miss the grotesque imagery that is evoked. Birds circling overhead indicate the coming feeding off of something dead. This idea of flesh and death is not new in Scripture.

Read Romans 8:1-17. How is "life in the flesh" described?

The battle lines are drawn. On one side we see the Word of God and his bride clothed in the righteousness of Christ. On the other side is the beast and everyone from the least to the greatest who lives according to their own desires. And while all of Revelation has been building towards this climactic battle, it is decided rather simply.

What does Jesus do to the beast and the false prophet?

How does Jesus slay the rest of his enemies?

The King of kings and Lord of lords needs only to say the word and all of his enemies are powerless before him. Read these other New Testament passages and remind yourself of what and who he controls simply by his word.

Mark 4:39

Matthew 8:28-32

John 11:43-44

Every part of creation, including the fiercest of storms, are controlled by his voice. Raging demons are no match when he speaks. And even death has no power over those Jesus calls. Indeed, the Word of God assuredly wins the battle. And while the sword of his mouth has led to the certain defeat of his enemies, we must remember the sweetness it offers to those who believe in him.

"Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." (v.9)

Each of us will come face to face with Jesus and a meal will ensue that is just and right. For those who enter wearing their own fleshly deeds, the word will come as a sword and devour them. But for those who have seen their own deeds to be filthy rags and instead receive the gracious garment of Christ's righteousness, the Word will come as a blessed invitation to join him forever whereby we enjoy his victories as if they were our own! Oh that we might know the sweetness that comes through this invitation from the Lamb. And may we tell a dying world about the beauty of our Groom so that more and more people might join in the marriage supper of the Lamb!

Finish today by thinking of one person in your sphere of influence who hasn't yet received the blessed invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Write their name down below. Spend time in prayer for this person and ask that the Lord might provide an opportunity for you to share with that person about the Lord.

GROUP DISCUSSION

We spent this week studying the wedding imagery of Revelation 19:6-10. What part of the wedding and the feast stood out to you and why?

The rider on the white horse is a powerful victor indeed who wears many diadems. Diadems were crowning wreaths that encircled the head to signify a victory. Jesus is shown here to be wearing many victories. We are his victories and our lives tell story after story of where he has won the battle. If you feel comfortable, share with the group a victory that Christ has won in your life.

Revelation 19 makes it clear that everyone will end up at one meal or another. Either they will feast and celebrate with the Lamb or they will become the one devoured at the great supper of God. How does the certainty of a coming meal for every person affect the way we think about evangelism? How do the images of these meals energize us as believers right now?