

Revelation Bible Study #38

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 15:1-8

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. **3** And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!

4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, **6** and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. **7** And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, **8** and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Introduction

St. John has completed a cycle of prophecy which began in the twelfth chapter and ended at the end of the fourteenth. Now begins the final “cycle of seven” with the seven plagues unleashed by seven angels. Unlike the seals or trumpets or “beast” arcs though, here St. John is more explicit with the connections between his vision and the book of Exodus. As always, the Apostle expects his reader to be familiar with, even steeped in, the Old Testament in order to understand the full context of the vision.

Vs.1

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

St. John introduces the vision by giving the reader the same hermeneutic rule as the previous vision.¹ Whoever would understand the arc which starts here and continues into the nineteenth chapter must recognize that the language is *symbolic*. The seven plagues are full of metaphor, allegory and alluding to previous passages. For this reason, the seven angels are brought up *before* they arrive in the vision; St. John is summarizing the matter for us before going into detail on what he saw. The seven

¹ Revelation 12:1

plagues are the representation of God's actions before the final judgment is enacted.

We might ask why Revelation has these signs to begin with. The reader may ask, “why doesn't God simply tell us directly what shall happen?” This is a legitimate question. In the Old Testament, God often gives direct, concrete prophecies to His people, whether it be predicting the rise of the Babylonians to make Judah answer for their sins,² or even informing Abraham that his descendants will be afflicted for four hundred years but be granted a prosperous exit.³ Why then does St. John's vision include such obtuse language, symbolism and references? The answer is simple, but must be repeated: “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”⁴ The Apostle has been given only one single event with which we may rely on clear words for interpreting: the return of Christ. Everything else that he writes about concerns that which *has* happened, *is* happening, and *will* happen again. In other words, he writes a forward-looking typology for world history before Christ's Return.

David and Joseph and Adam and Joshua and Israel's judges and many others are presented as *types* of Christ. Certain events in their lives are meant to parallel (and thus prophesy) the Messiah's Incarnation (e.g., Samson and Isaac's miraculous births),⁵ life (e.g., David's prophetic and kingly ministry), death (Joseph suffering that many may live),⁶ and even Resurrection and ascent to Heaven (Elijah's ascent).⁷ This also applies to the Levitical Law in many ways. Each *type* is a foreshadowing of the *antitype*, Christ, who fulfilled all of the types' foreshadowing. There are too many to number from Scripture in this document. What Revelation is doing is providing the antitypes *first*, in the form of the vision, which are then fulfilled multiple times throughout history – albeit, like the types of Christ, nor fulfilling the antitype completely. Adam was a type of Christ, but he did not rise again from the dead on the third day; David was a type, but he did not forgive anyone's sins; the list goes on. The final battles of the first Jewish war from 70 A.D. is a *type* of the battle of Armageddon; so too was Antietam, as was Kursk. Various famines are expected from the black horse rider, and dozens of plagues fulfill the pale horse rider's mission.⁸ but none of those types which after-shadow the antitypes of the riders necessarily take out all of the food or destroy a quarter of all humanity.

Yet while St. John tells us how things will go in history through these antitypes, it is nonetheless still a prophecy which has a *terminating point*, namely the Return of our Lord Jesus. The Apostle notes “with them the wrath of God is finished.” When the seventh seal is opened, the seventh trumpet blown, the seventh bowl poured out, the text points to the End of all things⁹ as the cycles and types are finished. Judgment Day will be upon the world, and all things are made right as Christ takes His rightful place as Ruler over all things.

Vs.2-4

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,

2 Habakkuk 1:5-11

3 Genesis 15:13-14

4 Revelation 1:19

5 Genesis 17:15-19, 21:1, Judges 13

6 Genesis 50:19-20

7 2 Kings 2:1-12

8 Revelation 6:5-8

9 Revelation 8:1-5, 11:15, 16:17

O King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

The vision begins by the sea of glass, which comprises the floor of the Throne Room,¹⁰ changing its color to reflect the carnelian appearance of the One who is seated on the Throne.¹¹ This is likely a representation of God being “on the move” so to speak; the same way that noise symbolizes Him taking action, the Throne Room being saturated with a red hue tells the reader that He is about to exercise His authority with the seven angels and their plagues. The saints, “those who had conquered the beast,” are shown separate from this sea to demonstrate that though they stood firm in proclaiming the Word,¹² the ultimate judgment and defeat against the beast and those who worship it is accomplished by God alone.

The sea of glass is also turned red, or “mingled with fire,” because that makes it a *red sea*. It was at the Red Sea that God overthrew the Egyptian army by separating and then crashing the waters upon them.¹³ The saints being on the side of the sea of glass paints a mental picture which parallels the Israelites having freshly been delivered from Pharaoh and his chariots. Thus they sing what St. John calls the “Song of Moses,” though it is also called the song of the Lamb, suggesting that the specific words are Christ's modification of Moses' original poetry.¹⁴ The saints sing of God's deliverance as Moses did, but instead of Moses's proclamation of fear seizing Philistia and the Canaanites,¹⁵ now *all* nations worship God and sing the same song. Nonetheless the parallel is still striking; just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea and celebrated deliverance from Pharaoh, so too do all the saints stand by the Red Sea (of glass, made red by fire) and celebrate their deliverance from sin, death and the devil.

Vs.5-8

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

St. John has spoken of a Temple in Heaven.¹⁶ Here we witness that a tent – or more properly Tabernacle – is also present. The author of Hebrews wrote about such a Tabernacle as well,¹⁷ one in which Christ our High Priest ministers to His saints. While the ark of the covenant resides in the *Temple*,¹⁸ Christ Himself goes to the heavenly Tabernacle to *be* our New Covenant. He has spoken of His blood as the New Covenant;¹⁹ it is from this place that He ministers, likely also the place from which we receive His Body and Blood when taking the Sacrament.

The seven angels are dressed in the same kind of clothing that Christ was seen wearing when

10 Revelation 4:6

11 Revelation 4:3

12 Revelation 12:11

13 Exodus 14

14 Exodus 15:1-18

15 Exodus 15:14-16

16 Revelation 11:19, 14:15

17 Hebrews 8:1-7

18 Revelation 11:19

19 Luke 22:20

He met St. John at Patmos.²⁰ They come out of the heavenly Tabernacle, through which Christ fulfills His priestly office, wearing this as a sign of a priestly service. The bowls given are most likely then the heavenly bowls, the copies of which were used for drink offerings – wine to be poured upon the altar during sacrifice.²¹ Since martyrdom and the shedding of the blood of saints had already been compared to the drink offering, with St. Paul saying “I am already being poured out as a drink offering,”²² what is presented here is a *reversal*. The world engages in drink offerings of blood:²³ now it is time for the pain inflicted on the saints to be brought upon them, with exponential increase. It is for this reason that the angels are shown pouring a drink offerings, for in the Old Testament the children of Israel did so with *wine*, which St. John has already told us represents God's wrath against sin and sinner. This means the entirety of the seven bowl will be spent discussing God's direct action of wrath against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

20 Revelation 1:13

21 Exodus 25:29, Numbers 15:4-5

22 Philippians 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:6

23 Psalm 16:4

Revelation Bible Study #39

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 16:1-7

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

7 And I heard the altar saying,

“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”

Introduction

Seven angels have appeared from the Tabernacle in Heaven to pour out drink offerings of wrath for God. Since St. John has already told us that this is a *sign* vision like the previous one,¹ we must be careful to trace the meaning of the signs, especially in their clear references to the Exodus. With the plagues being poured out, the message is not one of Divine catharsis – or more simply put, anger for its own sake – but rather an outpouring of Divine wrath for the sake of deliverance. The Church, being the true Israel, has been simultaneously in a position of wilderness wandering *and* bondage to an oppressive world system. Now, as St. John has emphasized before in the vision of the trumpets,² it is time to afflict the new Egypt so as to bring God's people home.

Vs.1

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

The drink offering in ancient Israel consisted of wine,³ which in Revelation is presented as a symbol of God's wrath; this outpouring was predicted in the fourteenth chapter.⁴ Since it is a precursor to the damnation of the wicked under the final judgment, these bowls represent *earthly* plagues and devastation, not something in the hereafter. Much of the plagues resemble the destruction rained down on the earth during the seven trumpets, meaning this is a *recapitulation* of that same prophetic cycle. Thus, from the moment of Pentecost to the day Christ returns, these plagues are a recurring reality on

1 Revelation 15:1

2 The Trumpets (esp. Revelation 8:6-13) retain heavy imagery of the Exodus, albeit with less emphasis on the event itself.

3 Numbers 15:10

4 Revelation 14:10

the godless.

The angels come from the Tabernacle in Heaven,⁵ but the voice calls from the heavenly Temple. This interaction demonstrates the unique role of each edifice within the Heavenly realm. On earth, the Temple replaced the Tabernacle for means of sacerdotal labor, with God approving the transition by the appearance of a cloud of glory.⁶ In Heaven though, the Tabernacle serves a sacerdotal role for the sake of the saints, while the Temple which has the Ark of the Covenant appears to be the Throne Room proper of our Lord.

The bowls are poured out, as stated above, as a *drink* offering. But a drink offering was typically done as part of a larger offering with a specific purpose, namely “to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts.”⁷ The eternal destruction of the damned in the lake of fire constituted the *burnt offering* portion of the sacrifice. Since the vision of the bowls ends with Judgment Day, this means that their purpose is to represent the fulfillment of God's promises made to the Church – that He shall deliver us and bring us to the Resurrection, eternal life and blessedness. Note, however, that God is not making an offering in the sense that He would be making an offering to some other deity! Rather, since the angels are the ones making the offering, it is they who are bringing about this fulfillment of God's promise, thus making the offering *to* the One who promised.

Vs.2

2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

The sixth plague inflicted upon Egypt before the Exodus was boils. This applies to nonbelievers only, those who have accepted the mark – that is, continuous, stubborn, lifelong refusal to believe in Christ. Like the Israelites who were unaffected by this plague, Christians are not subject to it. Note the *effect* of the plague of boils, namely that “the magicians could not stand before Moses.”⁸ It is also the first time in which *God* hardens Pharaoh's heart instead of Pharaoh hardening his own heart. In other words, with the first bowl being poured out, those who take the mark are hardened, being given over to their debased desires; they have made their choice, and cannot turn back. Thus while there may not be physical boils inflicted on the nonbelievers, the vision portrays the way that Christianity comes to outshine the false religions of the world, such that they cannot stand against the faith when held up to scrutiny. St. John is not predicting a particular affliction (lest we assume that any man with a boil is damned), but rather he sees the representation of those who were given up to the lusts of their defiled hearts.⁹

Vs.3-7

3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

5 Revelation 15:5

6 1 Kings 8:1-11

7 Numbers 15:3

8 Exodus 9:8-12

9 Romans 1:24-32

and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

7 And I heard the altar saying,
“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”

The first plague inflicted upon Egypt was the waters turned into blood.¹⁰ Not only that, but the waters of *the Nile*, which formed a central part of religion for the Egyptians who relied on it for irrigation. For every plague with which our Lord afflicted the Egyptians, He was condemning one of their false gods – especially, but not restricted to, the Passover.¹¹ While they did not worship the Nile itself per se, they saw it as the source of all their good, making it *functionally* a deity. As Luther says, “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the whole heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.”¹²

If the false religions of the world are judged by the first bowl's pouring such that their leadership – or “magicians” cannot stand before Christ – the second and third represent the judgment against man's revealed preferences in worship, just as God condemned the waters of the Nile. That which men are shown to worship by their deeds, acquisitions, and habits shall fail them, in accordance with the second angel's warning in the fourteenth chapter – that Babylon would fall, and nothing man trusts in beside God shall stand.¹³

One might note that the ordering of the plagues is different between Exodus and Revelation. This is of course intentional. The plague of boils rendered the Egyptian magicians incapable of standing before Moses; prior to that, there were able to re-create some of the plagues, namely turning water into blood. The implication is that none of the false beliefs will be able to do what God accomplishes through the Church. This is why there are *two* bowls which turn water into blood. False religions and false teachers, being unable to do what God is doing, fall before the Church; this allows the faith (and the condemnation of false religion) to spread far beyond just “the sea” and into every river and spring of water.

The “angel in charge of the waters,” that is, the angel carrying the third bowl, notes in his praise the reversal which God is accomplishing in this moment of wrath. The entire world system is condemned as the Church's proclamation goes throughout all lands. This message mirrors that of Obadiah's oracle, which reads:

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations.
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
your deeds shall return on your own head.
For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,
so all the nations shall drink continually;
they shall drink and swallow,
and shall be as though they had never been.
But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape,
and it shall be holy,
and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.
The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
and the house of Joseph a flame,
and the house of Esau stubble;
they shall burn them and consume them,

¹⁰ Exodus 7:14-25

¹¹ Exodus 12:12

¹² Large Catechism: <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/#1c-i-0002>

¹³ Revelation 14:8

and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau,
for the LORD has spoken.¹⁴

The prophet mightily declares that the nations shall suffer the same as they did to God's people, with the exception of those who escape by going to Mount Zion. The result will be the house of Esau burning. Likewise, the world shall be judged; first by the condemnation of all its belief systems, then by the destruction of nonbelievers entirely. Only those who escape to the *heavenly* Mount Zion will be safe, having converted to the true faith. Those who do not shall burn. This running theme of reversal for the sake of justice, but with an exception made for those who repent, is perennial in Scripture. Ezekiel notes the same dynamic when giving an oracle from the Lord concerning the house of Israel, that they shall have a new heart – but those who do not shall have “their deeds upon their own heads.”¹⁵ In other words, as the angel says, “It is what they deserve!” The world has attacked Christianity by insulting its dogmas and killings its saints; now it is time for the world's belief systems to be destroyed and at the end for its largest adherents, those who take the mark, to be sent off to burn. They shall be “martyrs” in a sense, in that they witness to the horrors of their wicked, evil, ugly cause.

The altar itself (or perhaps the *true* and holy martyrs under it)¹⁶ proclaims that God's judgments are true and just. This is to say, the actions that God is commanding have their root in His being, but also in Christ who *is* the Truth.¹⁷ All of God's judgments are already righteous – but they add that His judgments are *true* and just, amounting to a proclamation that our Lord does this on behalf of Christ and His Church.

14 Obadiah 1:15-18

15 Ezekiel 11:14-21

16 Revelation 6:9

17 John 14:6

Revelation Bible Study #40

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 16:8-16

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. **13** And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. **14** For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. **15** ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Introduction

The first three bowls of wrath which were poured out had a clear connection with the Exodus, being identical with some of the plagues which were inflicted on the Egyptians. The next three take something of a departure from this theme so as to emphasize the stiff-necked nature of humanity and the dramatic turn which history takes upon itself. The Apostle's point is that the nonbelievers shall not repent, nor even *care* to repent, until it is too late. This central message, repeated in the preceding bowls before discussion of Armageddon, is the key to understanding the message.

Vs.8-9

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

The seventh plague on Egypt was hail and fire falling from the sky.¹ Since the damned are under a sentence of *burning* for their refusal to believe, no hail is provided with the fourth bowl's plague. Only fire remains as a precursor to their ultimate fate in the lake of fire. But when the hail and fire pelted Egypt, Pharaoh had a moment of clarity by which he granted the Israelites a departure; it was only short while before he changed his mind and hardened his heart once more. Unlike Pharaoh, the people scorched by this plague respond immediately by cursing the Name of God all the more, making them *worse* than Egypt's ruler.

We ought not be surprised by the ugly reaction of the world to this plague. There is a kind of earthly logic being portrayed here, understandable despite its illegitimacy. If a policeman warns a thief that he must stop stealing, even if the thief is not stealing anything of his the message is clear and true; nonetheless, if the policeman who warned the thief then strikes the thief with a baton, the thief will perceive the policeman to be an *enemy*. So it is with the nonbelievers. They hear the warnings from God that come from the Church and the angels, but do not perceive that this world belongs to God and

¹ Exodus 9: 13-35

has God's Law imposed on it. To them, the plagues and suffering which are inflicted on them do not mean that they are called to repentance; instead they simply perceive God to be a *bully* that hurts them for no discernible reason. A man might be caught in a prostitution sting, end up in jail, and in the end he is likely to curse the judge and the law because he “wasn't hurting anyone;” so it is with the nonbelieving world, which despises God because they disbelieve any sort of accountability to Him.

Vs.10-11

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

The ninth plague inflicted on Egypt was darkness, while the Israelites had light.² Here, the darkness is inflicted on the beast which comes from the water, the world system that is here presented as a “new Egypt” the way the Church is the new Israel. Thus it is the same people being inflicted who were inflicted with the boils – their religious leaders being unable to stand before the truth. Now they are inflicted with a kind of spiritual darkness that brings about great confusion, while the Church is spared from this affliction. After all, Solomon remarks that the wise man “has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness;”³ only now, on account of this plague, the nonbeliever is shown to be the fool – but not only shown, also *made* foolish since their illegitimate religions provide them with nothing!

Vs.12-16

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. **13** And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. **14** For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. **15** (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon is easily misunderstood, for it is easy to perceive it as a single future event just before Judgment Day. Let us not forget that St. John is still discussing a matter of *signs*,⁴ keeping us from seeing it in either a preterist or futurist view if we want to maintain hermeneutic consistency. This is especially important since the Apostle spends so little time discussing it that virtually no details are given regarding any such battle – because none is shown happening in the text!

The Euphrates is likely connected to an earlier prophecy which speaks of angels bound there until they are released to slaughter a third of mankind.⁵ There too it is referred to as the “great river Euphrates,” connecting it to the promises given to Abraham and the conquest of Canaan.⁶ This connects the passage typologically to the *conquest* of Canaan, which means that the kings from the east are gathered, possibly not for battle but for conversion. They come before the deceptive frogs are unleashed, suggesting many from the East convert (which historically has been the case at least in terms of the Near East).

The arrival of frogs recalls the second plague before the Exodus,⁷ only this time they are made

2 Exodus 10:21-29

3 Ecclesiastes 2:14

4 Revelation 15:1

5 Revelation 9:13-15

6 Genesis 15:18, Joshua 1:1-5

7 Exodus 8:1-15

to come from the devil, world, and false teachers. The spiritual landscape of the nonbelievers is depicted as being so decrepit that they produce their *own* plagues with which to further afflict themselves. This is seemingly in response to the way being made for the “kings of the east” to be brought to the land of conquest; a historicist reading of the text would point to the rise of arch-heresies like islam as an example of disbelief being shored up in the Near East. Nevertheless, such things have happened multiple times in history, especially in the East – as with the various ruinations of Christian movements in China and Japan. These deceptive spirits lead astray masses of people and turn them against God, hence being brought *together*.

One must be careful to note that these kings and nations are assembled for the *purpose* of battle. St. John is not saying that one *actually occurs*. While indeed there is a longstanding *conflict* between the hellbound and the saints, the Day of the Lord seems to interrupt what *would* be a true global total war as depicted in futurist literature. We can tell as much because Christ interjects that He comes *as a thief in the night*, which pre-empts any possibility of an event by which people can point and say “this is the definitive sign of the End.” Christ is concurring with St. Paul's characterization of the Parousia,⁸ which is in harmony with His own previous characterization of it as sudden and unexpected.⁹ If anything, the Armageddon narrative is best understood as the battle *that will not be*, since men will be proclaiming peace and safety before Christ returns for Judgment.

The Hebrew phrase translated “Armageddon” is pronounced (by virtue of the Koine apostrophe mark) “Har Megiddon.” With “har” meaning mountain¹⁰ and “megiddo” meaning a gathering,¹¹ quite literally translates to “Mount of Assembly.”¹² Since the only mountain mentioned in Revelation thus far is the Heavenly mount Zion, this suggests that all of humanity is gathered and prepared for what will become Judgment Day. The passages which follow describe it as such, with a final, glorious defeat of evil.

8 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

9 Matthew 24:36-44

10 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2022.htm>

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4023.htm>

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/717.htm>

Revelation Bible Study #41

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 16:17-21

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. **19** The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. **20** And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Introduction

The Four Cardinal Views

It is time for a bit of review. There are four cardinal interpretive viewpoints for understanding Revelation and its eschatology – the doctrine of Last Things. Futurism states that the events of the book which take place after the letters to the seven churches are mostly to take place in the future. Historicism takes the broad arc of history and finds various fulfillments of oracles from the book throughout history (e.g., the destruction of the harlot being the fall of Rome). Preterism holds that by 70 A.D. either most or all prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled; partial preterists generally hold that the only matter left is for Christ to return, while full preterists hold that there is no unfulfilled prophecy in Scripture. Idealists describe Revelation as a largely *thematic* work, holding that St. John's vision was recorded for the encouragement and admonition of the saints through description of cosmic battles between good and evil.

For this study series, the position taken is a “mix” between the historicist and idealist schools called the typological view; it is the belief that St. John's vision gave cosmic antitypes for later multiple fulfillments in historical types. Revelation is typological prophecy that looks *back* to the antitypes given in the text, whereas the Old Testament gives types which look *forward* to the arrival of Christ. In this way, the Christian is equipped to know how things will go throughout history as the Church waits for the *Return* of Christ to judge the living and the dead.

Two Hermeneutic Rules

In addition to these four cardinal views (and the fifth which this study series embraces), there are two main methods of understanding the flow of writing in Revelation. The first is, for lack of a better term, sequentialism: it is the belief that everything St. John writes down is a sequence of chronological events. Sequentialism posits that the effects of the seven seals come before the effects of the seven trumpets, and that all of these happen one event after the other on earth just as they do in Heaven. The second hermeneutic method is Recapitulation theory, which this series concurs with. Recapitulation theory is the belief that St. John repeats his vision – or *recapitulates* – the events he sees as told in prophetic cycles, each describing history from different points of view. Though they are sequential in Heaven, time in Heaven works differently than it does on Earth; thus, while the vision is shown to be chronological in terms of seals and trumpets and bowls, they are really describing the same

time frame of the Church era.

For the four cardinal interpretations, each adherent chooses one of those two methods. There are historicists who hold to sequentialism, there are historicists who hold to recapitulation, and the same could be said for the other viewpoints. Because this study series embraces the typological view, recapitulation is the sensible hermeneutic for understanding Revelation in a coherent way. The time frame, the Church era, is the arc of history between Christ's Ascension and Second Advent in which the typological fulfillments of the antitypes given in the vision may play out. For instance, when we speak of the “mark of the beast,” the dynamics given in the text are demonstrated in the ash markings necessary to buy and sell in the Roman agora, but they are *also* seen in the practice of “vaccine passes” which various governments demanded people have so they could shop. Neither of these is a *complete* fulfillment of the mark, but both of them point to its ultimate meaning as lifelong reprobate disbelief in the Gospel. Because it is partially fulfilled over multiple eras in history, a sequentialist understanding would rob Revelation and its fulfillments of meaning.

The final bowl's pouring recapitulates the moment when the final seal is opened on the great Scroll and when the final trumpet is blown; these are the same event described from different points of view. Then the seventh seal is opened, silence is observed in Heaven followed by “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”¹ When the seventh trumpet is blown, a cry of victory is sounded and the Ark of the Covenant is seen just before “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.”² In uniform description, the seventh bowl's pouring involves the same anomalous weather phenomena, hail, and noise. In each of these instances, a sense of *finality* is observed. All of them describe what things shall be like right before Christ's Return.

The distinction with *this* prophetic cycle is that the Apostle goes beyond the seventh matter to continue the narrative. After the seventh seal, a new prophetic cycle was begun; after the seventh trumpet, a description of cosmic history from the Incarnation to Judgment Day was given; now, it is time to show the major players and major events that happen after the events of the seventh bowl/trumpet/seal. After this passage, a discussion on “Mystery Babylon” and her fall ensues.

Vs.17-18

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.

“It is done” as a phrase cannot be separated from St. John's previous statement that with these seven bowls the wrath of God is “finished,” or completed in its purposes. Everything that occurs after this bowl is poured is a function of the final moment of wrath before the earth is reaped in the Final Judgment. One must note St. John's descriptive language; he *hears* the voice coming from the Throne, but does not see the One speaking the declaration. This tells us that unlike the previous prophetic cycles, he is speaking from the “ground level” of seeing matters on earth. It is *still* a sign vision,³ but is nonetheless one which appears to be pertinent or relatable to the human experience.

The phrase “It is done” appears reminiscent of Christ's words on the Cross, “It is finished.”⁴ This, accompanied by the weather phenomena of lightning and thunder, may lead some to draw a connection between this passage and the Crucifixion – which also saw a great deal of supernatural weather patterns.⁵ Such might *seem* to be the connection, tempting us toward a preterist interpretation

1 Revelation 8:1-5

2 Revelation 11:15-19

3 Revelation 15:1

4 John 19:30

5 Matthew 27:51-54

of all the prophetic cycles, but we must be careful. Indeed, lightning and thunder and loud noises are a sign in Revelation of God's activity, and at the Crucifixion there was certainly Divine activity occurring; nonetheless, care must be placed to examine the language being used lest we draw inferences that are not intended by the author. St. John recorded Christ saying Τετέλεσται,⁶⁷ which connotes *completion of a purpose*. The Divine pronouncement from the Throne, however, says Γέγονεν,⁸⁹ which fundamentally means *to occur*. In other words, at the Crucifixion the declaration was made that Christ had fulfilled His Messianic purpose, namely winning the redemption of all through His Blood; from the Throne, St. John hears that an event has finally come to pass. That there are weather anomalies to both events means they are *related* in that the same Savior who died on the Cross is about to *return* by the time this seventh bowl is fully poured.

Vs.19

19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Commentaries are split as to whether the “great city” is in reference to Babylon proper (that is, the actual city), Rome¹⁰ or Jerusalem. The first possible answer has its support in Babylon being mentioned directly in the latter half of this verse. It is also discussed in greater detail in the next chapter as “Mystery Babylon.” But such an interpretation is ultimately confused, as the “great city” is differentiated from the “cities of the nations” that are also falling: since “nations” is most often used regarding Gentile races, why would Babylon merely be split instead of falling with the rest of them? But the exegete may reply that the specific fate of Babylon is saved for the last – to which we reply “correct,” because Babylon is – for a time at least – Jerusalem.

The Apostle is not afraid to get specific regarding what he is speaking of: he does not mention this city as “code” so that only people who are “in the know” will understand it. In Revelation 11, St. John refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt.¹¹ Sodom is the symbolic home of degenerate sin, and Egypt is the symbolic home of paganism; Jerusalem had become both. Babylon is described throughout the Old Testament as being the home of both of these as well. By describing Jerusalem by the names of these three cities he is spending a great deal more time *condemning* them than trying to keep the nonbelievers from understanding.

The split into three parts is a reference to Zechariah's prophecy concerning Jerusalem.¹² Before Christ returns, the prophet says, there are three specific splits in the city; first, half of the population is separated off into exile, then when Christ stands on the Mount of Olives the city itself is split in twain. As Zechariah is speaking in symbolic terms, it is likely in reference first to the sequential destruction of the Old Covenant, leaving the Christians and the nonbelieving Jews to separate from each other. But here St. John writes about a separate threefold split in *contrast*, with the split in the city being for the purpose of its judgment. Babylon is to be destroyed, but first she must be divided out to separate the damned of the past, the who are damned on Judgment Day, and those who are Saints. Given how few are to be saved in the first place, one must imagine this “third slice” being small indeed.

Vs.20-21

6 Transliterated “Tetelestai,” Strong's #5055

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5055.htm>

8 Transliterated “Genonen,” Strong's #1096

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1096.htm>

10 We will address the notion of Babylon being a “code word” for Rome in the next lesson.

11 Revelation 11:8

12 Zechariah 14

20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Earlier, when describing the sixth seal's opening, St. John said that he saw “every mountain and island was removed from its place,” and hail coming from the sky.¹³ Since this has already occurred by the time we come to the seventh bowl, there are no mountains to be seen and the “drift” of islands is reverse to continue their disappearance. In other words, the changes which begin to happen in the cosmos are made so dire that they cannot be undone. Whether a physical set of hundred-pound hailstones falls or not is inconsequential. It is a second reference to the seventh plague on Egypt, hail mixed with fire.¹⁴ Unlike the first reference made to it (the fourth bowl), this hail is not a warning to people. Instead, the great weight of the hailstones means such destruction being inflicted on the earth that there is no possibility of mankind recovering. It is the final message that men should turn to the faith and repent; St. John informs us that, sadly, they refuse. Thus destruction comes.

¹³ Revelation 6:13-14

¹⁴ Exodus 9:13-35

Revelation Bible Study #42

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 17

1 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.”

Introduction

The seventeenth chapter of Revelation is so dense and interconnected that it makes little sense to break it down to smaller pieces. From the first verse to the eighteenth, the Apostle is given a fever-pitch prophecy concerning an entity that *would* arise after his day, one which he could not identify but assumes that his future readers would. Here one must be careful to identify the exact nature of the woman before giving a firm declaration as to what she *is*, lest the exegete be proven a fool. The clear witness of Scripture is that she is a *religious* figure, but one which exists as a mockery of the true Church. Accordingly, St. John is given an antitype which prefigures all successive false churches and heretical movements. It is correct for Luther to call the Papist church the whore of Babylon;¹ it is *also*

¹ https://godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_b5.htm

correct for Christians today to recognize *other* sects which fit the mold, such as the mormon “church,” the liberal bodies, and so forth.

Vs.1-2

1 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.”

Now that the wrath of God has been poured out with the bowl plagues, it is time to show St. John one of the main targets of said wrath. He shows him a prostitute, someone who fornicates for financial compensation; in other words, she is someone who makes a living by performing the *marital act* without actually being married. Though she acts like a bride for a night, she has no covenant nor blessing from God for what she does. She is mercenary and scheming in her function. Like any skilled or pretty prostitute, she has high-end customers (both political and among the Church), but here she is shown to be lucrative with “wine” as well. This is to say, the figure which St. John sees has ugly dealings with high ranking political figures, but at the same time is – with those same figures – passing something along to the common man, like a prostitute who sells wine.

The prostitute is seated on *many waters*. This, along with the beast she rides, is a clear indication that she engages in a relationship to the world. The thirteenth chapter of Revelation shows two beasts: one from the water and one from the earth. The waters represent the world, and the beast which arises from it the world system – the second enemy of the Church. The earth represents the Christians, and the beast which comes from it is a false prophet who represents *all* false teachers who attempt to subvert Christianity.² By saying that the “dwellers on earth” get drunk by this prostitute, St. John is telling us that the Church will be deeply corrupted even to her theologians and bishops – but still stand. It was not very different in his own day, as the “Jezebel” figure from the church in Thyatira was doing all of these things!³

Vs3-6a

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.

The woman is in the wilderness, which is the same place the Church (represented by Mary, but not identified *as* Mary) was taken to deliver her from the dragon. This leaves us with one of two possibilities. First, we may believe that this is more or less the same figure.⁴ Whereas she was placed in the wilderness for safety and sanctification, something has inspired the woman, the Church, to follow after earthly lusts and materialism, all the expensive clothing and riches that show an institution becoming opulent. Her cup full of abominations would mean being a distributor of false teachings and heretical practices, namely practices common among pagans. Though the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church,⁵ this does not mean that the gates of hell shall not be present with her. In this conception, the woman represents a Church that is under the authority of these gates but not defeated

2 Revelation 16:13

3 Revelation 2:18-23

4 Revelation 12:1-5

5 Matthew 16:16-18

by them.

Another perspective would be that this is a *false* figure, or a pretender. The prostitute wants people to *think* that she is the true Church and so resides in the wilderness. Perhaps she is a particular group of churches whose lampstands have been removed,⁶ yet still saw themselves as being in full communion with our Lord and thus continued on in growing their doctrines the way the Nicolaitans did. Such an imagination of this figure is plausible, though unlikely, so long as the origin point of the wilderness points to the *apostasy* of the prostitute being her state before dining on the blood of the saints.

The prostitute is called Babylon, denoting a relation to the city which was prophesied in the previous chapter to be split in three.⁷ Here, however, we are restricted from associating the woman with the pagan city of Rome, which most modern historicist exegetes believe to be the true meaning. They point to a false goddess called “Roma” whose statues adorned many Roman cities and provinces, even marking the cities of Asia Minor,⁸ but this does not comport with the description of Babylon being in the *wilderness*, along with the clear connection St. John makes to the Israelite wandering in the wilderness in the twelfth chapter.

The modern exegete may point to the pagan character of Rome which was in the forefront of many Christians' minds, but such a point is invalid. It is most certainly true that the Roman empire was full of idolatry, sorcery, fornication, greed, and persecution; but on the other hand, the same is true about *everywhere else* in St. John's day. St. Thomas was martyred in Tamil Nadu, India by militant hindus; St. Matthew was murdered by African pagans; Philip and Bartholomew were martyred by Greeks. Everywhere outside of Roman territory, and even outside of Roman influence had the same problems with sin, albeit perhaps with differing levels of openness. The typifying mark of the harlot is that she is drunk on the blood of saints, meaning that she gains profit and pleasure from their death; one must remember that when the true Church grows, so does the false and corrupted church.

Vs.6b-8

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.

St. John *marvels* at this figure. If the woman represented Rome, he would not be surprised in the slightest given the wickedness of Rome in his day. But to see a figure which *should be* holy dwelling in the wilderness and dining on the blood of saints – that is, joining in the persecution of believers – is the source of his consternation. The angel asks why he marvels, expecting that he should *know* about this dynamic. Indeed, if the Church is Israel, then the Church is expected to *act* like Israel, a nation described in terms of harlotry all over the Old Testament, with only a remnant that stay faithful.⁹¹⁰

The beast which St. John sees, the reconstituted world system, at one point existed and shall exist again, but does not currently in St. John's day. In a time when Rome was very much in power, this could not possibly apply to that empire; if it were, the angel would say that the beast was, is and shall be. It is rather a united nonbelieving humanity, which at one point was so under the rulership of nimrod

6 Revelation 2:4-5

7 Revelation 16:19

8 <https://www.bestephesustours.com/blog/the-temple-of-dea-roma-and-divus-julius-caesar-in-ephesus.html>

9 Ezekiel 16, Isaiah 1:21-23, Jeremiah 2:20-25

10 1 Kings 19:18

the founder of Babel;¹¹ once the Church is established, the devil calls forth a new dynamic in the world system so as to bring about violent persecution against the Church. But St. John already saw that in his previous vision, when he saw the beast arise from the sea; the implication here is that the harlot arises *with* the beast, having a symbiotic relationship of sorts. In the first century, the harlot was not though she was previously, and she would arise again. Before Christ's first Advent, the harlot was Israel; in the early years of the Church – the new Israel – believers did not have to contend with nearly as much corruption, especially as the current Babylon (Jerusalem) fell; but then, as the world “beast” system arises, so does the harlot nature of the Church.

Historically this has taken many forms. Christians hiding from persecution found themselves isolated in desert communities with gnostic cultists who slowly influenced orthodox doctrine – introducing asceticism, iconodulism,¹² and doctrines which forbade marriage. St. Paul warned believers against it,¹³ but the persecution of the beast against Christians led to all sorts of syncretistic additions to the faith. The influence of hermeticism added doctrines of theosis, the cult of the saints, the “treasury of merit,” and so forth. The pagan veneration of Caesar as Pontifex was transplanted onto the papacy. This is also to say nothing of the effect that later judaizers like the author of the Shepherd of Hermas had on the Church's soteriology. Simply put, the Church has never defeated false teachings so much as she has absorbed and accommodated them; as the beast rises, the harlot rises with it.

This means that unfortunately the harlot is well-represented by the Roman and Eastern churches – but lest any denomination get a large head over it, it does not *stop* there. Protestant churches are not immune to this matter, from the crass Enlightenment rationalism that took over much of the Church of England to the deism and judaizing influence which plague American churches, or the extreme leftism that besets Methodism today. All of these groups have sought favor with and “fornicated” with the ruling authorities, even as recently as the current year.¹⁴ A historicist is likely to see the harlot as a single institution which fulfills prophecy by virtue of existing: The Roman church is an easy target. But in the modern era, with as many denominations being taken over by non-Christian syncretism, it is plain to see that the fulfillment of the harlot prophecy is one of *typology*, with various corrupted bodies matching the harlot as antitype. It is for this reason she is called the mother of harlots, not the sole harlot to which the Christian may look for a vision of “bad church.” Those whose names are written in the Book of Life do better in regards to diligence than merely thinking “rome bad!”

Vs.9-14

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.”

“This calls for a mind with wisdom.” By this, the Apostle invites us to think deeply about what he is saying, for it is not obvious what his riddle means. It was well known by the time St. John wrote Revelation that the city of Rome stood amid seven hills, and had a series of emperors (or “kings”) replacing one another in rapid succession. The *easy* interpretation, which requires no wisdom whatsoever, would be that St. John was afraid to say the word “Rome” for some inexplicable reason,

¹¹ Genesis 10:6-14, 11:1-9

¹² Yes, the practice of venerating icons comes from gnosticism, per Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, 1.25.6

¹³ Colossians 2:18-25

¹⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/usaaid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>

and that he used a pitifully easily decoded description to avoid being executed....while in exile on Patmos. This cannot be correct, especially as the angel informs St. John that it “was and is not,” meaning that the beast is not a present reality for the Apostle.

While this passage is difficult to understand by design, it is not insurmountable. St. John has already told us this is a sign vision,¹⁵ so this is not a mere game of name-swapping or geographical reference. Rome had seven hills, but so does Jerusalem, so does New York, and a whole host of other locations.¹⁶ So many locales all over the world have “seven mountains” that the beast on which the harlot rides is *everywhere*. The number of kings as well is instructive: seven kings for seven heads, an eighth king representing the beast itself, and ten kings for ten horns; this adds up to eighteen, or 6+6+6, an oblique reference to the number of the beast. All eighteen receive authority for an hour to rule together, and they all have one mind, namely to oppose Christ.

The Lamb shall conquer all of these figures, hence their short rule, harlot and beast and kings alike. Despite their wars against Him and their near-endless attempts at snuffing out the light of the Gospel, Christ *shall* return, and all of these shall fall forevermore, never to rise again. Those who belong to Him, refusing to go along with the wicked doctrines of the world or to cooperate with the harlot who befriends the world, they are called and chosen and faithful, meaning that their endurance receives praise from our Lord, who chooses them on account of their faith.

Vs.15-18

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.”

The waters are the world from which the beast arises, a secular creation from a secular people. For this reason, and the expansive list of “seven hills” and 6/6/6 motif, the harlot as a city, or capitol, is a *shifting* reality. There may be an individual location on which the harlot rests – in St. John's day that was Jerusalem, discussed in the previous chapter – but it does not stay there on account of the destruction which inevitably follows. The harlot city Babylon is destroyed multiple times in history, and always shifts locations after each time this passage is typologically fulfilled. Wherever Christians congregate, there are rulers over them or “kings of the earth.” Most of them will be captive to the harlot and her political machinations, for the harlot is the apostate Church masquerading as a faithful one.

Constantinople was sacked and destroyed multiple times, despite being the ostensible head of eastern Christianity. So was the city of Rome. So was London, so was Washington D.C., and so many others. The reason for this is that the harlot fornicates with kings and spreads wine to normal believer (having dealings with corrupt political rulers and passing false teachings to the laity), but she suffers from the same thing that she wants: appearing Christian. The beast from the sea was designed by the devil to hate Christians and persecute them. Christ said that the world would always hate Christians after all,¹⁷ so the harlot looking Christian to deceive believers means that she deceives the world system as well – and ends up being persecuted and attacked over it. This is the cycle which has been observed over the centuries: a church body starts, expands, becomes corrupt, has dealings with the state, and gets persecuted. So it has been, so it shall be until Christ returns.

¹⁵ Revelation 15:1

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_claimed_to_be_built_on_seven_hills

¹⁷ John 15:18-25

Revelation Bible Study #43

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 18

1 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.”

Introduction

The identification of mystery Babylon is one of the most important tasks for understanding the book of Revelation as a unified whole. The preterist seeks to establish it as Jerusalem *only* or as Jerusalem and Rome in a kind of dual spiritual/political sense. The historicist seeks to establish babylon as either the Roman empire (RC view) or as the Catholic Church (historic Protestantism). Idealists look to the figure as a sort of bugaboo against corruption. Futurists look at the signs of a new Babylon entity arising in the near future. Some schools may mix and match their understanding of this figure or that, but the way in which one sees Babylon will have deep consequences for their reading of the rest of the book – and review of prior passages.

But having already identified Babylon as a sort of spiritual entity, a kind of “seat of power” in the last chapter, for apostate religious institutions. This is to say, mystery Babylon is the antitype for *any* fallen group or organization that is *supposed* to be faithful to God. The first type looking back to this antitype is Jerusalem, but then this goes out further into apostate Christian organizations which are seduced by heresies and worldliness. Although St. John points to an ultimate fulfillment in this chapter, one in which there shall be no more “babylons,” God gives the same exhortation for all believers for all times in which this apostate entity or phenomenon: *get out!*

Vs.1-3

1 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.”

St. John sees an angel whose image brings forth glory. In all likelihood this is that same angel whose face was “like the sun” in the tenth chapter, holding a small scroll for the Apostle to eat.¹ That angel's appearance, from his legs being pillars of fire to his body being wrapped in cloud, recalls the things Israelites saw during the time of the Exodus. This “Exodus Angel” has a sensible place in the passage, given the fourth verse's exhortation to “come out of” Babylon.

Note the present tense in the second verse. Babylon *has* fallen, a present reality in St. John's day; further, “fallen” is not an adjective but a *verb*, particularly in the aorist indicative active. This is to say, the event of falling has occurred. It is chiefly Jerusalem to which the angel refers: St. John wrote this *before* Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D., it might surprise later readers to hear that this was already the case. But one must understand though that the author is not speaking of a city being *destroyed* physically per sé.

The angel says that Babylon “has become” a place for demons, unclean spirits, and that which is detestable. In other words, it is a city full of evil: evil people, evil spirits, evil deeds. This is what the angel means by having fallen. Before Jerusalem fell *physically* to Roman swords, she fell *spiritually*. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem rejected Christ and had Him crucified, their religious observances became *false* overnight. The sacrifices were no longer valid offerings made according to the Mosaic system, but rather profane acts of idol worship; thus nothing offered there could be considered clean,

1 Revelation 10:1-8

and whatever spirit the priests were praying to was not God. We must recall that St. John had said previously, “No one who denies the Son has the Father;”² and so in Jerusalem *none of the prayers and offerings* were truly made unto our Lord. Whereas the city was home to the Temple and to the religious authorities (who once fought great battles on behalf of the true faith, e.g. the Maccabean Revolt), now it has departed from that status to become something abominable.

Before any Church body became an apostate Babylon figure like the Roman church, the Old Covenant (represented by Jerusalem with its temple and priest system) fulfilled the antitype of mystery Babylon. By having Christ crucified, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem committed a grave form of spiritual harlotry which had earlier been seen during the days of the Old Testament prophets.³ Just as the apostate Israelites of the Old Testament had established ties to pagan nations, so too did their descendants do so after the Resurrection of Christ – mostly for the purposes of persecuting believers. In fact, one can observe this behavior in Acts, wherein various Jewish groups followed St. Paul around, trying to get him killed.⁴

The “merchants” motif in this chapter is something which establishes the worldly nature of apostate bodies, starting with Jerusalem. It is starkly observed when Christ overturns the tables of money-changers in the Temple,⁵ and merchants were a constant presence on account of the sacrificial system. Since Jerusalem had a local economy based on religious pilgrimage,⁶ and relied on military protection by the Romans, it was truly a multicultural secular operation for victimizing believers. The angel, in bringing up a merchant motif, emphasizes the aspect of greed and soulless materialism present in the system.

Of course, it does not *stay* localized in Jerusalem. As discussed previously, Babylon is an antitype that is fulfilled multiple times in history, *starting* with Jerusalem but repeating with many church bodies that are (or were) ostensibly Christian; the political and merchant problem is common to all of them. The papacy sold indulgences; the eastern churches turned towards cesaro-papism, or the Church being ruled by the state; most modern denominational bodies have fed at the financial trough of the American government.⁸ This is not to say that *any* involvement with trade or the state is a sign of apostasy: it is rather the replacement of the Church's mission with these matters that makes it so deadly.

Vs.4-8

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,

2 1 John 2:23

3 Especially discussed in Ezekiel 16

4 This is keenly observed in Lystra, Acts 14:19-23

5 Mark 11:15-19

6 <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/commerce-and-the-temple-in-first-century-jerusalem/>

7 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305440313002410>

8 <https://apnews.com/article/usaaid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>

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.”

The voice coming from heaven is the voice of God, who beckons His people the Church to depart from Babylon. In the first century, this meant Christians departing Jerusalem for Pella (one of the cities of the Decapolis) before the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem.⁹¹⁰ During the Arian controversy, it meant departing from churches taken over by heretics. During the Reformation it meant departing the church of Rome. During any situation in which the Christian is faced with his church body departing the faith, he should rather depart the church body and seek another which has not apostatized. Such bodies are slated for judgment and destruction on account of their acts of betrayal against our Lord; to stay in them, even if one is a believer, is to sign up for suffering with them, to say nothing of being tempted to be like them. God's exhortation to faithful believers in these situations is clear: schism now and avoid the rush.

Note here that the harlot speaks in an arrogant manner. There is a *reason* why she would trust in something which makes her feel a false sense of security. For the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it was an idolatrous faith in heritage from Abraham.¹¹ For later types which fulfill the Babylon antitype, this is observed in various similar beliefs, typically the notion that something external to God forces God's hand; with Rome and Orthodoxy this is found in the absurd doctrines of ecclesial infallibility. Modern liberal denominations are oddly more honest, since their false confidence is predicated on state power and funding. All of these bodies share in common their addiction to luxury, money, and afflicting the saints.

God promises to inflict plague on the Babylon figure in a single day, not to destroy it in a single day. For Jerusalem, this would be the immediacy of dire conditions after the Roman siege of Jerusalem began. It is *after* the fall of the city in the spiritual sense that physical conditions begin to reflect the inner religious life. The institution abandoned God first, then found – too late – that God abandoned the institution in turn.

Vs.9-10

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.”

St. John has established a “beast from the earth” which he has called a false prophet.¹² For the Apostle, the waters represent the broader non-believing world while the earth represents the domain of God's people – the Church. The “kings of the earth” then are not royalty in the political sense, but religious figures. For the destruction of the city of Jerusalem this would certainly include those pharisaic and sadducitic leaders in the Sanhedrin, men who had not only participated in the rejection of Christ but also led others to this rejection. As the Church centralized ecclesiastical authority over time, fulfillment of this passage moved on to the popes, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops, and other rulers over the Church.

⁹ Related by Eusebius in his *Church History* III.5.3

¹⁰ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

¹¹ Matthew 3:7-10, John 8:39-41

¹² Revelation 13:11-18, 16:13

Vs.11-18

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?”

All that the merchants mourn over concerns ecclesiastical supplies and the trappings of royalty. Christ condemns the pharisees for their opulence, overemphasis on monetary matters, and habitual use of religious matters to enslave people.¹³ The vision St. John receives points out the other interested party, namely the merchant class that became rich off of the pharisaic system. Every tapestry bought by the authorities had a weaver to make it, a transporter to ship it, a sales contact to bring the sale to a close. Religion had become big business, and in order for it to continue on there must be enslaved believers to *fund* it by their offerings. St. John's vision portrays the religious landscape as one which is cynical, hollow and manipulative, and its destruction renders the merchants poorer.

The Roman church and the eastern churches are the greatest modern manifestation of this vision, with their massive cathedrals inlaid with countless amounts of gold, ivory, silver, and iron. Their monasteries keep and tend animals while their clergy are dressed in expensive vestments during the mass. Both of them, according to their soteriologies, enslave human souls to the endless hamster wheel of works based salvation while offering them no true assurance of Heaven. Yet the Protestant side of things is not guiltless either, as the “prosperity gospel” teachers have shown; they too have presented an enslavement to the people watching and funding them through their finance-based theologies. A poor widow feeling compelled to give Jim Baker a “seed offering,” thinking that she is purchasing blessing from God, is only barely different from a Catholic layman paying real money to avoid purgatory. Meanwhile, other Protestant branches have found *other* means of harming souls, especially in obeying the dicta of the state and “higher education” systems in exchange for funding; the Episcopalian, Wesleyan, and most Lutheran institutions have done this in a crassly secular move, adopting worldly doctrines for the sake of maintaining large cathedrals, expensive universities, and more. Their judgment is immanent.

¹³ Matthew 23

Vs.19-20

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!”

These two verses further solidify the nearly coterminous relationship between Babylon and Israel. The geographical location of Israel was ideal for trade, leading to frequent visits from merchants and foreign dignitaries. Whoever controlled the land of Canaan controlled critical routing for trade and military operations. Yet Israel (typified by Jerusalem) also had a history of killing the prophets, as Christ says.¹⁴ That the *apostles* and prophets are told to rejoice at this justice means that the same body which is responsible for slaying the prophets has also slain Apostles, one of whom was slain by Herod at the behest of the same authorities who had Christ crucified.¹⁵ There is no point by which this group may say they “used to” kill the messengers sent to them, for as Christ witnesses they built tombs for the men their fathers slayed.¹⁶ When St. Stephen accuses them of carrying on this ugly tradition, they stone him to death.¹⁷

We must be careful to make this distinction, that Babylon is not a singular geographical entity which is destroyed in the first century – or ever fully destroyed before Christ's return. One may notice that the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem did not stop the propagation of pharisaism: if anything, it *strengthened* it, since other competing denominations of judaism were extinguished in the act.. Similarly, the various times in which Rome was sacked by invading armies during the height of the papacy did not destroy Roman Catholicism, and nor did the destruction of Constantinople end Eastern Orthodoxy. These groups find greater entrenchment in their own defeat, for the persistence of their beliefs in spite of the burning of cities is counted as some sort of blessing. The next verses illustrate why this is the case.

Vs.21-24

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.

¹⁴ Matthew 23:37

¹⁵ Acts 12:1-3

¹⁶ Matthew 23:30

¹⁷ Acts 7:51-60

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Christ says that anyone who would harm one of the little children – that is, both believers and children – would be better off having a millstone tied around their neck and being thrown into the sea than what will ultimately happen to them.¹⁸ Earlier the angel proclaimed Babylon *is* fallen; now a mighty angel proclaims that Babylon *will* be thrown down. It is for this reason we can safely conclude that the event happens more than once; as we said, it is not a single place. If the preterists were correct, then there would only be one “fall” event in 70 A.D. that somehow compounds itself. On the other hand, if the futurists are correct, then a Babylon figure would have to arise, fall, recover, then be destroyed all over again. The historicist position ends up rephrasing our typological view anyway. But the greater point is that the angel's future prophecy is a promise that there will be a day in which the Babylon entity and phenomenon will never happen again – she will be “no more.” In other words, St. John gives us a crucial aspect to eschatology here: though the types refer back to their visionary antitypes *many* times before the Return of Christ, indeed there *is* an end-point promised here. The repetition of fulfilled prophecy in the Church era does not go on in perpetuity.

The twenty-third verse is a crucial reference for understanding spiritual divorce. Christ threatened the church in Ephesus with lampstand removal;¹⁹ Christ is also the Bridegroom and the Church is understood to be His Bride. Those church bodies who, like earthly Jerusalem, abandon loyalty to God and begin serving the world and devil will find themselves completely destroyed at the End. But first, on account of the Exodus that God is working among true believers, they will be hollowed out, leaving no true Christians dwelling among them. Thus, not one believer will be lost on that fateful Day, when Babylon is once and for all completely eradicated.

18 Matthew 18:6

19 Revelation 2:5

Revelation Bible Study #44

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 19:1-10

1 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.”

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.

Introduction

This passage represents a sort of transition between two distinct points of view. On the one hand St. John has described for us the fall of mystery babylon, an antitype which finds its first manifestation (or typological fulfillment) in the first century city of Jerusalem. But he also pointed out that there would be an *ultimate* fall of Babylon, after which there shall be no more of the corruption and apostasy dynamic that we observe throughout history. The language of the saints and elders in this passage is spoken from the perspective of those on the other side of that ultimate fulfillment, but with consequences which ring true for believers today. But for believers reading in this age, this passage marks the beginning of emphasis being placed on the “already but not yet” dynamic of the Kingdom of God. Believers are true beneficiaries of eternal life as promised in the Gospel, but awaiting the full expression which shall be a reality for them when Christ returns.

Vs.1-2

1 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.”

St. John hears a proclamation of praise which brings to mind the same praises sung by the living creatures, elders, and saints in the liturgical service of the Throne Room.¹ The praise offered tells us about the importance of the ultimate fall of babylon. The matters for which the saints and angels praise our Lord are found in Creation, Redemption, and the character of God entirely; the fall of babylon is placed in a similar vein of significance, meriting the same kind of organized praise.

The reason for this is self-evident and explained by the saints. The prostitute brought immorality and martyrdom into the world, perverting the institutions which were supposed to be *for* believers and comprised *of* believers. But the harlot, representing the sin and apostasy within the Body of Christ, has been such a persistent problem that the souls of millions were lost and the reputation of the Church was tarnished. Their cry of praise is simultaneously a cry of relief that this shall no longer happen. Justice has been served against the false church, beginning with the end of the false judaic temple system in Jerusalem, and continuing against other church bodies – eventually Rome and Constantinople and the cults joining it in the judgment.

Vs.3-5

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.”

To speak of smoke going up forever is to use the language which speaks of damnation. This

1 Revelation 4:9-11, 5:8-10, 5:11-13, 7:9-12

means the first entity to be damned in the lake of fire forever is the harlot. Before the dragon, false prophet, or beast from the sea, it is the spiritual corrupter who goes first into everlasting punishment. This might be surprising to some, but it is consistent with the course of judgment throughout Scripture. St. Peter says that judgment begins at the household of God, while the fate of those outside is decidedly worse.² We must not forget that Judah was judged by God and sent into Exile before the pagan Babylonian empire was destroyed; before that, the northern Israelites were taken into captivity long before the Assyrians who took them. Before even then, the children of Israel were assailed by non-believing pagan nations as punishment from God during the era of the Judges, also before any of those nations were destroyed during the Davidic reign. So too shall our Lord, both in the recurrence of typological fulfillment and the Final Judgment, destroy the false teachers, subversives, false churches, and more. *Then* judgment commences on the devil and those fully in league with him.

This of course has not happened yet, at least not in the sense of total destruction. Yet the elders and living creatures exhort all of God's servants, all *God fearers*, to praise our Lord. We are told here by the residents of Heaven to praise God for something that He *will* do, and is currently working at accomplishing. The believer is to take it as a present reality, or an already, that the harlot which would persecute him cannot harm his soul or bring him to perdition; the consequence of the “not yet” is something which affects the believer now and into eternity.

Vs.6-8

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.

The voice heard by the Apostle being like many waters is reminiscent of the 144,000 from the fourteenth chapter, but also that of Christ's voice when He first appears at Patmos.³ The connection is likely intentional, as the saints in heaven have undergone the final aspect of sanctification – that is, being completely reconstituted in the image of Jesus that their voices together sound like His. This connection between Christ and His people reinforces the celebratory liturgical declaration they make, for the saints are together considered the Bride of Christ.

The Bride stands in contrast to the harlot from the previous chapters. Both had their time in the wilderness,⁴ but ended up becoming markedly distinct in terms of what they did and became. The harlot, representing apostate churches and institutions, allies herself with the unbelieving world and participates in persecution against true saints. Meanwhile, the Bride has been enduring the wilderness and persecution, adorning herself with good deeds. The apostate church, like ancient Israel of old, becomes like the nations while claiming her identity has not changed; the true Church seeks validation from God alone, and thus serves our Lord in earnestness and faith. So the Bride is the invisible Church...and also a city. Later, in the twenty-first chapter, St. John will describe the New Jerusalem as

2 1 Peter 4:17-19

3 Revelation 14:1-2, 1:15

4 Revelation 12:1-5, 17:3-4

the Bride, a city which comes down from Heaven for all believers to dwell in; but here, we see the same “already but not yet” dynamic, in that the “already” Jerusalem is the congregation of believers here on earth, while the “not yet” Jerusalem is that ultimate dwelling place being prepared for the Resurrection. Amid the crop of scholars debating whether the new Jerusalem is a place or a people, the Biblical answer is “yes” in different ways.

Vs.9-10

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.

All of humanity has been invited to the marriage supper, but not all receive the invitation. Here St. John refers to the parable of the wedding feast which Christ spoke to the pharisees, and the parable of the banquet.⁵ In the parables, Christ speaks of a wedding feast or banquet wherein the initial guests have refused their invitations; in response, the poor and disabled are invited instead of those first guests; when this is shown not to be enough, the servants are instructed to invite everyone they come across. The message of the parable is such that whosoever hears the Gospel and its well-meant earnest offer of salvation is given the invitation, while those who rejected it (especially jews in the first century) are rejected for their refusal to attend. Thus, whosoever receives the invitation is counted as blessed. By implication, those who have not heard the Gospel have not received the invitation and are thus not blessed; there are some who have refused it entirely and are thus cursed. Those who never hear the Gospel would refuse it anyway.

St. John bows after hearing “These are the true words of God.” Perhaps he bowed because he mistook the angel as declaring himself to be divine. After all, he was the one speaking these “true words of God.” But the Apostle is also bowing because of the formulation presented in those words. “These are the true words of God” is equivalent to the Old Testament prophetic formula, “Thus Saith the Lord.” It appears that the Apostle believes now is the *time* to bow, having been given an oracle which would satisfy the readers of his books. But Revelation is not finished yet, having not yet completely shown the message from our Lord yet. In a word, it is not *about Jesus enough yet*.

The angel rightly tells him to worship God alone. But over the course of this, he explains that he is a fellow servant with St. John and all who believe in the Gospel. Here, St. John adds a clause which enlightens us concerning all hermeneutics: the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, meaning the entire Bible is *about Jesus*. To speak on behalf of God is to prophesy. Therefore, all of the inspired writings in the Old and New Testaments, are prophecy in the strictest sense; every last inspired word penned by prophet, Apostle and others shall therefore be centered on the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus on behalf of His salvific mission. The subsequent chapters demonstrate this message unfolding even further.

5 Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24