

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