

Babylon, Armageddon, and the Second Coming

Studies in the Book of Revelation No. 6

Please read Revelation chapters 17-19.

There are three major divisions in the last book of the Bible. Chapter 1 describes the things which John had seen (his vision of the glorified Christ). Chapters 2-3 describe the things which are (conditions existing in the churches during the present age). Chapters 4-22 describe the things which shall be hereafter (the end-time events which will soon come to pass).

We looked at the experiences of the saved just after the Church is caught away from the earth, and also at the account describing the terrible judgments which will fall upon those left here on earth after Jesus comes. The message in the chapters which will comprise our study today, tell about the judgment on Babylon, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the great Battle of Armageddon.

1. The Judgment On Babylon (Revelation 17:1—18:24)

The key to understanding Revelation 17 and 18 lies in verse 5 of chapter 17. That passage says, “And upon her head was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth.”

The word “mystery” (as used here) means “a secret” or “a symbol.” Babylon is not merely a city, but the word “Babylon” is a symbol for the religious, cultural, scientific, and educational realms of human achievement. It is practically the same thing as “the world” (this “present evil world”).

John describes Babylon in these chapters in two forms: (1) An ecclesiastical religious system (symbolized by a harlot in chapter 17); (2) A political commercial system (symbolized by a great city in chapter 18). These chapters tell us that this present world system (symbolized in the name “Babylon”)—with all its culture and religion and science and government and human achievement—will someday collapse. People sometimes say, “What’s the world coming to?” Or, “What will be the outcome of our present civilization?” The answer is “Judgment.” Some persons see the world-system around us as attractive and pleasant, but God says that it is transitory and that this world system (and all the achievements of men) will someday pass away.

The “harlot” in Revelation 17 pictures a religious system. Harlotry throughout the Scriptures is a symbol standing for religious apostasy. The “harlot” here pictures an apostate merger of the religions of the world. The description of purple and scarlet and deckings of gold, are familiar to those who are acquainted with the robes and vestments worn by officials of some of the world’s great religions. Verse 4 indicates that she is rich and influential. The wealth of the various churches adds up to many billions of dollars. Verse 6 describes her most horrible crime—her murder of the saints. When the Huguenots in France, for example, on August 24, 1572, were slaughtered by the state church of the time, more than thirty thousand Christian men and women were slain in just one night. All this was done by the church. Today many remember the occasion by observing St. Bartholomew’s Day.

Babylon is a symbol of false religious worship. The harlot is described as “the mother of abominations” (the Greek word more literally means “the mother of idolatries”). False idolatry got its start in ancient Babylon. Jeremiah described Babylon by saying, “It is a land of graven images; they are mad upon their idols” (Jeremiah 30:58).

Historical records tell how the wife of Nimrod established secret religious rites and developed the worship of idols in Babylon. She claimed to have miraculously conceived a son named Tammuz, and this child was considered a saviour of the people. When he was grown (according to religious tradition), a wild boar slew him but after his mother wept for him for forty days, he was raised from the dead. Ezekiel warned against the worship of Tammuz (Ezekiel 8:14). This story of Semiramis (the wife of Nimrod) and her son (Tammuz) gave rise over the centuries to the cult of the worship of the mother and child.

In Assyria she was called Ishtar and her son Tammuz; in Phoenicia she was called Ashtoreth and her son Baal; in Egypt she was called Isis and her son Osiris; in Greece she was called Aphrodite and her son Eros; in Rome she was called Venus and her son Cupid. If you go to most any museum, you will find statues that have been dug out of the earth from many countries (representing many nations), each one the image of a woman having a small child in her arms. This cult of worshipping a female deity and her son began in Babylon and later infiltrated Christianity (the worship of Mary and the child). Remember that this whole system is pure and simple Babylonian idolatry.

In the last days, the Revelation says that this harlot (mother of idolatries), the sum total of all professing Christianity (and perhaps other religions), will form an alliance with the political powers of the state. John the Revelator says “she will commit fornication with the kings of the earth.” But Revelation 17:16 indicates that as the Antichrist increases in power and becomes dictator over the earth, he no longer will need the help and power of the church, and will quickly destroy the whole apostate system.

In Revelation 18, John views Babylon with respect to its **political** and **economic** character, rather than from its religious aspect. Remember that “Babylon” is about the same as “kosmos” (the world system). Revelation 17 shows the religious aspect; Revelation 18 shows the business aspect.

Commercial Babylon is symbolized by a great city (Revelation 18:10) which will be destroyed by Christ at His second coming. Down through the centuries, men and women have worshipped at the shrine of material things. The “world” is characterized by greed and warfare and crime—and all this, mostly because people want things!

Revelation 18:12-13 describe wealth and luxury. The passage speaks of precious stones and costly metals and fine linens and silks of purple and scarlet; and of rich furnishings for houses; and of articles of expensive wood and brass and iron and marble. Mention is made too of expensive perfumes and spices, and of an abundance of foods (wines and oils, and wheat and cattle and sheep). The whole thing sounds like a description of the United States of America (and of similar nations) today.

The advertisements of our day reveal the philosophy of Babylon. If you buy this kind of automobile you’ll be in a higher social class; other items are advertised as necessary to “gracious living.” And on and on one could go.

To purchase and to exchange goods in itself is not wrong. Business is not essentially evil, but when commercialism becomes an end in itself, and selfish gain becomes the goal, then the whole system

comes under the condemnation of God. Jesus warned His followers against becoming gripped by the wealth of this world when He said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.”

Revelation 18:8 says that someday this whole commercial, materialistic system will be burned with fire and will utterly collapse. The verses that follow indicate that industry and trade will come to a standstill; the voice of the music-maker will become silent; the craftsman (who manufactured expensive furnishings) will no longer be found; the light of the candle will go out (the night-life of great cities will vanish away); the streets will no longer ring with the voices of laughing people (Revelation 18:16-18; 22-23).

It is difficult for us to visualize the extent of this judgment. We have grown up under commercialism. It is a sort of second nature to many in our country. If we want something we can go to the store and buy it. If it costs too much, we can save for several years and then get what we had in mind. Yet, when we analyze the whole thing, we know that the pursuit of gain has kept more men and women from true devotion to God than many other forces combined. Let us be reminded again—lest we set our hearts on the material things of this world—that the trinkets we buy, the cars we drive, the lands we own, will one of these days all suddenly collapse (Revelation 18:17). Revelation 18:9-11 tells how the merchants and kings will mourn because the source of their wealth is gone up in smoke. But verse 20 says that those in Heaven are called upon to rejoice at this judgment of God. Man’s achievements will fall and will give place to the city of God which shall stand forever.

2. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:1-10)

In the early verses of chapter 19, God is praised because He brought judgment on Babylon. And the Scripture says that the smoke of Babylon will continue to rise forever. This rejoicing over the fall of Babylon is not a feeling of personal bitterness toward those who are judged, but it is a deep sense of appreciation for the holiness and justice of God.

In the remainder of Revelation 19, John describes two great suppers—the one to take place in heaven, and the other to take place on earth. The one is the Marriage Supper of the Lamb; the other is the Great Supper of God. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb ushers in the fullness of glory for God’s people (verse 9); the Great Supper of God concludes the series of judgments that will fall upon the earth (verse 17).

In Revelation 19:6-10 we are given a brief description of the wedding supper which will follow the marriage of Christ (the Lamb) to His Church (the Bride). Jesus spoke of this great event when He said at the Last Supper, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” Every time we observe the Lovefeast meal together, we look forward to the time when believers will be eternally united with their Saviour. Paul expresses thanks (in Colossians 1:12) unto the Father “who has made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints.”

Verse 8 (of Revelation 19) gives us a beautiful picture of the holiness and righteousness of the Church in that hour. Our right-standing with God is credited to us on the basis of our faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith—but the word translated “righteousness” here, really refers to **the righteous acts** of the saints while here on earth. Even though our lives are poor and meager, and we think nothing is being accomplished for the Lord, God is going to reward everything that we do for His glory. And these acts of right-doing will form the wedding garment (on the bride) at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. Each of us will be wearing a wedding garment of his own making. Just as there are at least

five different crowns spoken of in the Scriptures, so there will likely be wedding garments of various qualities.

The thought in Revelation 19:9 is this: To be included in union with Jesus Christ throughout eternity, is the highest blessedness one can ever experience.

3. The Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 19:11-21)

The final verses of Revelation 19 tell how Jesus will return to the earth (riding on a white horse). He is going to come to judge the nations and to assume kingship over all the earth. Once before, Jesus rode into Jerusalem. That time He was riding on the colt of a lowly ass; now He is going to ride on a strong white horse. According to Zechariah 14, when Jesus Christ returns, He will come to the Mount of Olives (the very place from which He departed)—and the entire mountain will split in half as an evidence of His great power and authority.

History will not quietly and gradually come to a close. The end is going to come suddenly. There will be a mighty confrontation (called in the Bible, the Battle of Armageddon). The word “Armageddon” refers to the great plain located in the Valley of Jezreel at about the center of the Holy Land. It is here that man’s dominion over the earth will finally cease, and Christ’s dominion over the earth will become a reality.

The Battle of Armageddon is not going to be a struggle between two great earthly powers, but rather, the nations of the earth are going to send their armies to this great field of slaughter in a struggle to drive God off the earth! Verse 19 says that these armies are gathered to “make war against him that sat on the horse.” Verse 13 says He is “the Word of God.” And verse 19 describes Him as “the king of kings and lord of lords.” Men are going to fight with Jesus Christ himself.

An atheist newspaper a few years ago pictured a cartoon showing the churches all broken up, and beyond the rubble (in the background) there was a ladder leaning against the clouds. A workman with a big hammer was climbing up the ladder toward heaven. In heaven, there was pictured God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The workman was taking the hammer and getting ready to bash their brains out. The caption below the cartoon said, “Having destroyed this God-business down here on earth, we are also going to destroy it in heaven.”

The Psalmist says, “The kings of the earth shall take counsel against (the Lord’s) anointed, saying, Let us break his chains and free ourselves from all this slavery to God” (paraphrased). But the next verse (in Psalm 2) says, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh.” Revelation 16:14 says that the spirits of devils will “go forth unto the kings of the earth, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” The armies of the earth will assemble in Palestine. The king of the North will come down; the king of the West is coming over; the kings of the East will come. All these armies will converge on Palestine (Joel 3:2; Zechariah 12:3; Zechariah 14:12), undoubtedly to destroy the Jews. But just then, in the midst of that conflict, the heavens will burst open and the Son of God will appear. And the Antichrist and his armies will make war on the Lamb.

While this great conflict is often **called** the **Battle** of Armageddon, there apparently is not going to be any battle. The opposing armies are said to be slain by the sword of Him who sits upon the white horse. The army of saints that come with Christ will do no fighting; they won’t even carry weapons. There is no real battle—no tension. Our Lord’s enemies will be destroyed by **the word** of Him who sits on the white

horse—and the birds of the air will consume their flesh, leaving only the bones. Verses 17 and 18 are an awful picture, the climax of man's terrible resistance to God.

Great flocks of vultures (some from great distances), are going to come and feast on the flesh of men and horses—in a gruesome meal called “the great supper of God.” And then verse 20 says that the Beast and the False Prophet will be caught up and cast alive into Hell—into the place of punishment, and they will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire.

Finally, at long last, as a result of the judgment of God—the filthy condition of this earth will be wiped clean. Verse 15 says that the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Jesus Christ himself) will rule with “a rod of iron.” That is, Jesus will reign with an absolute government, under which men are **required** to conform to the righteous standards of God.

The Bible makes it plain that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son—and all who avail themselves of the grace of God, will be blessed in time and in eternity. On the other hand, the same Bible states clearly that those who spurn God's grace and reject His love, must experience His judgment **without** mercy. Each person reading this booklet might have a part in either one of the two suppers described in Revelation 19. If your hope is in Jesus and you are living for Him, you will have a place at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. If you refuse His grace, the birds of the air may very well someday devour your flesh.

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