

## **Session 5: The Allure of Sin and the Triumph of Justice**

Rev 17:1 - 19:8

(Scripture references based on NIV)

### **1. Key Learning Points**

- Pay attention to the allure of worldliness and its consequences
- Reflect on our attitude toward the things of the world and where we pledge our allegiance to
- See the confidence we can have in standing firm in our Christian identity and beliefs

### **2. Warm-up activity / Starter Question**

- If you were to identify the 3 most important aspects of your life, what would they be? (e.g. time, hobbies, a certain possession)
- Chart out how you would spend a typical week. Alternatively, open up your calendar app to see the past week / week ahead. Does the way you spend your time match up with your answers in the previous question? Why or why not?

### **3. Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the Lamb who is worthy to open the scrolls. In your Love, you have refused to leave us in our sinfulness and have revealed your Word to us, with warning to turn from sinful ways and to live set apart in and for You. Give us grace and wisdom to rightly read Your Word, that we may approach our study of Your revelation in humility, in love and in truth, and that our discussions may be edifying to one another. We thank you and pray all this in Jesus' name.

### **4. Context**

*The discussion in this session centers around the main character of the Prostitute. Here are some details that you may find helpful in understanding the character and what she represents.*

#### **The Prostitute & The Beast**

- The prostitute is identified as "Babylon the Great, The mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth" (Rev 17:5).
- The scarlet beast that she rides upon is described to have the same attributes as the Beast from the Sea (Rev 13:1-8) and is recognised as being the same entity.

## Historical Babylon

- Babylon was a mighty kingdom which was usually referenced in opposition to Jerusalem and God's people.
- Babylon is known for:
  - Being the location where the Tower of Babel had been attempted to be constructed (Genesis 11)
    - Man attempted to unite and reach God by their own efforts and hands. God confused their language, preventing them from being able to understand one another and working together.
    - This is where Babylon is believed to have received its name, "Babel" meaning "to confuse" in Hebrew.
    - In its Greek/Latin origins, Babylon means the "Gate of the gods".
  - Invading Judah, destroying Jerusalem and the temple, and carrying many Jews off as exiles.
    - These events are recorded in 2 Kings 17—25 and 2 Chronicles 32—36.
  - The book of Daniel
    - Daniel and his friends were captured and brought to Babylon.
    - Most of Daniel's story plays out in Babylon.

## Symbolic Babylon

- In Revelation, "Babylon" tends to not just refer to the historical kingdom of Babylon.
- Rather, it is a symbolic representation of the "Kingdom of Man" and "Sinfulness"
- In his description of the symbolic 'Babylon', the language that John uses also makes clear references to the kingdoms of Tyre and Edom, other great powers who persecuted God's people and had been brought to ruin.
- In John's time, symbolic Babylon was viewed as being the Roman Empire.
  - The 7 heads of the Scarlet Beast upon which the prostitute sits (Rev 17:3) was interpreted as being the Seven Hills, which is a well known and distinctive geological feature of the Roman Empire.
  - Hence, it would have been evident to the people of the time that John was making reference to Rome as the newest of the iterations of the symbolic "Babylon".

## 5. Scripture Reading

Ask 3 members of the group to each read one of the following passages:

- Rev 17:1-6
- Rev 18:1-10
- Rev 18:20-19:8

## 6. Discussion / Exploration

**1) From Rev 17:1-6, how has the Prostitute's appearance been described? How does this help inform our understanding of what the Prostitute represents? Supp: Does the Prostitute sound attractive to you?**

- The sinful and worldly ways of the Prostitute are very attractive.
- The Prostitute is adorned with attractive symbols of affluence, luxury and status.
  - Dressed in purple and scarlet, which are colors used to symbolise human royalty and nobility (v4)
  - Covered in gold, precious stones and pearls, which represent worldly wealth (v4)
  - Golden cup in hand symbolises her full indulgence in worldly pleasures (v4)
  - Titles written on head indicates the aking pride and identity in their sinfulness (v5)
- Might appear overly garish in showing off, similar to how the Dragon and Beasts overdo it in trying to emulate the authority and power of the Lamb

**2) What wrongdoing has the Prostitute been charged with?**

*Your group need not identify every point on this table if there is not enough time!*

Verse	Wrongdoing	Significance
Rev 17:2; 18:3	Adultery	Participation in sexual immorality  Symbolic of drawing people away from God, who is intended to be the Bridegroom.
Rev 17:2; 18:3	Intoxicated the inhabitants of the earth	Leading people into sinfulness and causing them to stumble and fall.  Matt 18:6 - "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in

		me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”
Rev 17:6; 18:24	Drunk with the blood of the saints	<p>Indulges in drunkenness and intoxication</p> <p>Also symbolic of her enjoyment of the persecution and murder of God’s people.</p>
Rev 18:2	Home for demons, impure spirits, unclean birds, and unclean and detestable animals	<p>Sanctuary for all that is unclean and detestable.</p> <p>Uncleanliness here, a reference to Levitical laws, is also symbolic for a state of separation from God, where Israelites who have engaged, interacted or touched anything unclean, had to be separated from the rest of the Tribe and go through a process of purification. Here, the Prostitute indulges in that separation from God.</p>
Rev 18:3	Excessive luxury	<p>Over-indulgence in worldly wealth and treasures.</p> <p>Matt 6:19-21 - “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”</p>

Rev 18:5	Sins piled up to heaven	Speaks to the extent to which the Prostitute has sinned and indulged in sin
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### 3) From Rev 18:1-10, what consequences does the Prostitute face for her sinfulness?

- The prostitute faces betrayal, destruction and isolation for eternity.
- She loses all she has and is cursed via the plagues and by God and men.
- It is made certain that there will never be any joy or liveliness found in her again.
  - Will be paid back a double portion of what she has done (v6)
  - Will be given torment and grief proportional to her glory and luxury (v7)
  - Will be overtaken by plagues of death, mourning, and famine (v8)
  - Will be consumed by fire (v8)

### 4) Referring to Rev 18:21-24, what recurring phrase is used in the description of Babylon's fate and what significance may it and the things it describes have?

- The phrase "never to be found in you again" is repeated many times.
  - No art - music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters
  - No commerce - worker of any trade
  - No produce and livelihood - sound of a millstone
  - No households and families - the light of a lamp
  - No celebrations and new beginnings - the voice of bridegroom and bride
- Significance
  - Everything of worth is promised to never be found within Babylon again.
  - It is the complete and absolute "death" to Babylon as any form of life is promised to never to be found in it again. It symbolizes God's final and complete victory over sin and worldliness.
  - What remains in Babylon are the blood of prophets and of God's holy people (v24), who had been slaughtered on the earth, which is a record and reminder of their sins.
- *Additional note*
  - *Jesus curses a fig tree similarly on His journey to Jerusalem.*
  - *The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it. In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" (Mark 11:12-14; 20-21)*

5) The language John uses in his descriptions of the downfall of Babylon are references made to the downfall of several historical nations that opposed God and His people.

- a) Fill in the blanks on which verses in today's passage parallel the OT references.
- b) How does the prophesied downfall of these nations inform us about the songs sung about Babylon here? Supp: Do you think we can trust the songs sung in Rev 18?

*Leaders should give the references in the left column, and your members should identify the verses in the right column for themselves.*

OT (Reference given)	Revelation (to be filled in)
<u>Isaiah 21:9</u> Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: <b>'Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'</b>	<u>Rev 18:2</u> With a mighty voice he shouted: <b>"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!"</b> She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal.
<u>Isaiah 52:11</u> <b>Depart, depart, go out from there!</b> Touch no unclean thing! <b>Come out from it and be pure</b> , you who carry the articles of the Lord's house.	<u>Rev 18:4</u> Then I heard another voice from heaven say: <b>"Come out of her, my people,' so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;</b>
<u>Jeremiah 16:18</u> <b>I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin</b> , because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols."	<u>Rev 18:6</u> Give back to her as she has given; <b>pay her back double for what she has done.</b> Pour her a double portion from her own cup.
<u>Jeremiah 25:10</u> <b>I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom</b> in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate. (Jeremiah 7:34)  For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days <b>I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place.</b> (Jeremiah 16:9)	<u>Rev 18:23</u> The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. <b>The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again.</b> Your merchants were the world's important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

<p><b>I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.</b></p>	
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- In its time, the historical kingdom of Babylon was a powerful kingdom perceived to be absolute in its power, and it would have been hard to imagine its downfall.
- These references give us assurance in the validity of God's power, as He has proven His word through the fall of these kingdoms.
- This iteration of "Babylon", believed to be Rome, was just another one in the series of manifestations of human authority and sinfulness that God would pass judgement upon, no matter how powerful or absolute it might appear.

**6) From Rev 18:20-19:8, how do the peoples of the earth respond to the destruction of the Prostitute? How do the responses of people of God differ from them?**

- Response of the peoples of earth
  - Weep and mourn over her ruin (Rev 18:9,11, 15, 19)
  - Terrified at her torment (Rev 18:10, 15)
  - Mourn that they are unable to receive any more from her affluence (Rev 18:11-15, 19)
- Response of the people of God
  - Instructed to come out of her sinfulness (Rev 18:4)
  - Worship of God for His justice (Rev 18:20; 19:1-2)
  - Worship of God for His identity and power (Rev 19:1; 6)
  - Rejoicing, being glad and giving God glory (Rev 19:7)
  - Preparing themselves to be received by God (Rev 19:7-8)
- Implications
  - To those who live by Earthly powers and treasures, God's judgement is a source of fear and mourning
  - But to those who find their identity in God, His judgement is instead a source of rejoicing and worship
  - This frames much of Revelation, where much of the Book is about God's judgement. The events of Revelation are not meant to be a source of fear for God's people, in fact it is a source of celebration, because God has already claimed His victory and we are assured that His rightful justice will come and set things right. It is also equally a warning for those who may have been indulging or led astray by sin, that there is an urgency to part from sin and sinful ways and right yourself before God.

## **6. Main Discipleship Takeaway**

Be mindful of and flee from the allure of sin and worldliness, remain firm in your pursuit of Christ and rejoice because in Christ, the victory is already won.

## **7. Application / Reflection questions**

- 1) Do you find worldliness attractive? Which aspects appeal the most to you personally?
- 2) What are some modern equivalents of the charges brought against the prostitute that we should be mindful of today?
- 3) There is an urgent call to “come out of” sinfulness and worldliness. How should we act in light of this call? What practical steps can we take as individuals and as a small group?
- 4) We can have confidence in God because He has proven Himself in the past. How has He proven Himself to you and how would you share it if you were to be asked?

## **8. Closing Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we give thanks that we can have confidence in our faith in You, because in You the victory is already won. If there be anything in our lives that is not right before You, we pray that You help reveal it to us and help us to confront it and make it right before You, because You have called us to flee from sin now. We pray that You help us to remain faithful in our pursuit of You and keep ourselves ready for the day You call us to be with You as Your remnant, Holy and set aside for You. We give thanks and ask that You watch over us as we try to live out Your calling for us through the coming week. We pray this in Jesus' name.