

October 22nd: Revelation 18-20

Chapter 18

Vs. 2-3 are a taunt song, they announce the enemies downfall in a mocking way. Now the great Babylon (Rome) has become a living graveyard. All the nations of the earth were parasites living off of the city's greatness, but now only scavengers are living off of the city, the animals that live off of decay. Beginning in verse 4, God offers the people who dwell in Babylon yet another chance for repentance, to come out of her, repent of complicity with her sins, and be spared from the devastating plagues that will afflict her. "God remembers" is a good thing if you're the one being oppressed (like those caught in the wheels of injustice in Egypt or Rome), but "God remembers" is also a warning to the oppressor. God will give to Babylon double punishment for her heinous idolatry and oppression. The punishments will fit the crimes (mixing a draught of wrath in the same cup out of which she became drunk on the blood of the saints). Queens and widows were opposite in social rank from one another. Instead of continuing to live as a queen, Babylon would see even more grief and devastation than a widow. The kings of the earth who participated in her unjust systems and her idolatry will weep and wail, as will the merchants and seafarers who became wealthy off of her excesses.

Vs. 13... The merchants wail that no one will buy any of Babylon's excessive list of luxury goods anymore... notice that this list includes slaves –human beings' bodies and souls.... This is precisely the point of God's wrath poured out on Babylon! This is not a lament, but a victory that no human beings will be sold as chattel any longer. A modest figure says that between the 1st-2nd century, up to 25% of the urban population of the empire were slaves. Well over 10 million. The slave economy was virtually destroyed in the year 70CE because at the end of the Jewish civil war, 1.5 million new Jewish slaves flooded the market. The empire depended completely and totally on slavery.

Babylon will be thrown down from her throne with the ease and drama of an angel throwing a giant millstone into the sea. That's the prophetic act of God's judgment against Rome. As the people are hearing this, they realize that Rome is still very much alive, but they realize that what God is promising God will enact. The stone is thrown into the sea because the sea lanes symbolize Rome's economic foundation.... Both will be destroyed. The sea lanes made Rome strong, those will be part of Rome's demise. Vs. 24 gives yet another concrete explanation for "why" all of this suffering and destruction is occurring –because Babylon spilled the blood of God's prophets and saints. The ones God sent to reform Babylon, to urge them to turn from their evil ways and turn to God, those are the ones she murdered. Now she will receive her just rewards.

Chapter 19

19:1-4... The hallelujahs now literally come booming down from heaven. The hallelujah is a transliteration of a Hebraic phrase that means “Praise Yaweh.” Here in Revelation is the only time that Hallelujah is used in the New Testament. This is the oldest existing evidence of it used in Christian liturgy. The hallelujahs start out in God’s time zone, because in God’s time zone Babylon has already been judged and destroyed, it’s a proleptic (anticipatory) reality in our time zone. God’s salvation, glory, and power has been exerted against Rome. In Roman life, “Salvation, glory, and power” are usually ascribed to the emperor alone. Vs 2, God has not avenged (that suggests wanton violence), but God has vindicated. God has answered the martyr’s question of “How long O God must we wait for justice?” Now God’s true justice has come.

19:5-8... The heavenly praise of God is celebrating God’s reign. Vs. 7 comes as a significant surprise: it’s a wedding invitation, the surprise is the itty bitty lamb is getting married. Most commentaries will say that the bride of the lamb is the church (drawing from Ephesians ch. 5). Here, it’s not clear who the bride is, but in ch. 21:2 & 9 we’ll be told explicitly that the bride is the New Jerusalem. The community is not the bride, the community are the guests invited to the wedding. The contrast is not the community and Rome, the contrast is the New Jerusalem and Rome. The appeal is in which city are you going to dwell? In Rome that has already been destroyed? Or in the New Jerusalem that has married the itty bitty lamb? Instead of a gaudy purple robe (like Babylon), the New Jerusalem is dressed in pure white (the color of purity and victory) like a bride for her wedding day. The beautiful wedding dress she wears is woven out of the righteous deeds of the saints. Congratulated are the ones who are called INTO the feast (as opposed to the call to come OUT of the prostitute).

Vs. 11-21, This is the grand finale of destruction of God’s enemies! This is like when Luke Skywalker blows up the death star at the last minute. In spite of the gory imagery, all of the people of God are to cheer in good’s ultimate triumph over evil. A new heavenly rider returns (the Word of God, Jesus). Here, victory means the end of all wars, not the one who starts them (like the first horseman of the apocalypse). “His eyes are like flame of fire.... From his mouth comes a sharp sword” these images harken back to our first depiction of Christ in chapter 1. The Word of God strikes down God’s enemies once and for all with the Word itself, the gospel. This is what wins the final victory for God! Gruesomely, the angel gathers all vultures together around a feast of the flesh of God’s enemies –everyone who was complicit, who benefitted from, who pledged allegiance to Rome. The earth and sea beasts returned for one final push... but were defeated and throne into a pit of sulfur and fire forever (this is modeled after the Greek understanding of “Hell”). Only the beasts are thrown in hell, everyone else is slain by the word of God.