



# REVELATION

## FOLLOWING THE WAY OF THE LAMB

### Study 15

#### *Waking up in Babylon*

#### Revelation 17-18

### Dwelling in the Word

Prayerfully read through Revelation 17-18 and ask: 1) What words, phrases, or images stood out to you? 2) What does this say about what God desires to accomplish in you? 3) How could you respond to God in this passage?

### Digging Deeper

1. How does satire or parody work? Like political cartoons or caricatures, satire describes something by exaggerating identifiable traits and perhaps even naming it (so its true identity is not in question), but then presenting it in a way that is shocking. This satirical portrayal of Babylon/Rome as a prostitute was designed to shock readers and reveal something about the seductive nature of the empire and the dangers of complacency and accommodation for those who follow the Lamb. As you read the portrait of Babylon, the great prostitute, how do you react?
2. How would you categorise the sins/crimes of Babylon/Rome/Empire noted in this passage (see 17:2-6, 13; 18:3-5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 19-20 23-24)? How can you imagine the early Christ followers being seduced to complacency and accommodation with some of the sins of “empire”, but also being victims of its oppression and violence?
3. If the true identity of the prostitute is more than just Babylon or Rome, but is in fact symbolic of humanity in rebellion against God as manifested in any political system, what are some of the ways our culture reflects “empire.” How can we respond to these elements in our culture as we seek to follow Christ faithfully? How can the Beatitudes in Matt 5 guide our faithful response?
4. Once again the motif of clothing appears in Revelation 17:4, and in contrast with the clean white robes of the righteous, Babylon (Rome) wears ill gotten luxury goods. Back in Ezekiel 16:9-19, God speaks through clothing metaphors about how he provided for his people Israel, and yet they chose to use their gifts instead to forge alliances and participate in idolatry. Read both passages and reflect on both their similarities and differences.

### For Groups

1. The theme of discernment occurs regularly in Revelation (e.g., 17:9). In this chapter, John’s portrait of the great prostitute is painted with extremes, not because the distinction between good and evil is obvious, but because it is precisely the opposite and distinguishing between good and evil, or between the true God and false gods, or between faithfulness and unfaithfulness is often difficult and requires discernment. In regards to following the Lamb faithfully, what has the process of discernment looked like in your life?
2. We are reminded in these chapters how easy it can be to get caught up with the things of the “empire”; things that pull us away from a walk with Jesus. One of the reasons we are encouraged to give up something/sacrifice during Lent, is to reorient our desires back to Jesus.
  - a. Is there something that you have committed to fasting from during Lent? Share with your group how that has been going. What have you been learning through it?
  - b. If you haven’t thought about giving something up for Lent, is there anything that you think may be distracting you from your walk with Jesus? If so, is there a way you could step back from it for the remainder of the Lenten season? What would you desire to achieve through doing that?

### Living it Out

The chances for repentance are plentiful throughout Revelation, and even in the midst of the judgement of Babylon, there is a call to “Come out of her, my people” (18:4-5). Recognize the mercy of God that is repeatedly communicated in Revelation, and remember Jesus’ words from Matt 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.” Reflect on how mercy is active in your own life; where you have received it, and also where you have (or can) extend it.



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

Revelation 17-18  
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## A CLOSE UP

Not a chronological continuation of the Bowls, but rather an expansion of the Seventh Bowl (16:17-21).



## RISE & FALL OF THE BEASTLY POWERS

- A. The Dragon pursues God's people (12).
- B. The Two Beasts conquer (13).
- C. Babylon's (the Great Prostitute) rise (17).
- C. Babylon's (the Great Prostitute) fall (18).
- B. The Two Beasts judged (19).
- A. The Dragon judged (20).

## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

A satirical portrait of Babylon/Rome as a great prostitute.

- Like a political cartoon.
- Unmasks something for what it truly is, so that it can be resisted.
- Task is not to decode the symbolism, but to understand its meaning.



## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

“Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. <sup>2</sup>With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries. <sup>3</sup>Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. <sup>4</sup>The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet,

## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. <sup>5</sup>The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

‘Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.’

<sup>6</sup>I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (17:1-6).

## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

A glamorous portrayal

- Wearing purple, scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones, and pearls, and drinking from a golden cup (17:4).
- Like depictions of the goddess Roma.



## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

But then descends into an offensive description of a common prostitute or whore (πορνή).

- She’s riding the evil seven-headed beast (17:3).
- Her cup is “filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries” (17:5).
- She is drunk with the blood of God’s holy people (17:6).



## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

“Revelation portrays Rome not as a beautiful courtesan, queen, or goddess, but as a drunk and blood-thirsty whore who is fully aligned with evil and who will be destroyed by God.... The challenge for the modern reader is to appreciate that there is a legitimate critique of empire and its injustice here, but it comes wrapped in ancient cultural norms relating to women’s bodies” (Robyn Whitaker, *Revelation for Normal People*, 89, 95).



## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

- Named “Babylon the great” (17:5; 14:8; 16:19), which is symbolic of Rome (1Peter 5:13).
- Sits on the 7-headed beast (17:3) = 7 hills (17:9), which is how Rome is portrayed.
- Sits by “many waters” (17:1) = “peoples, multitudes, nations” over which she has influence (17:15).
- She is “the great city that rules over the kings of the earth” (17:18).



## THE GREAT PROSTITUTE

The prostitute is Rome, but more than just Rome:

- Rooted in the prophetic critiques of Babylon (Jer 50-51, 13), Nineveh (Nahum 3:4), and Tyre (Isa 23-24, 27).
- Ancient Babel (Genesis 11), the archetype of a people who want to be like God.
- Symbolic of humanity in rebellion against God in any and all ages.



## BABYLON THE GREAT

“A system of domination that both seduces the powerful, partly with the promise of more power, and intoxicates common people with the false promise of security that supposedly comes from increasing prosperity and power” (Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 145-146).



## BABYLON THE GREAT

**Injustice** – exploits others (often with violence) for its own economic gain; pursues luxury and neglects the poor, and ultimately treats humans created in God’s image as goods to be traded (18:13). The kings, merchants, and sailors lament for Babylon, but only because they realize her demise will impact their prosperity (18:9-19).

**Idolatry** – arrogantly makes promises, demands, and claims that are appropriate only for God to make.



## THE FALL OF BABYLON

Chapter 18 is a celebratory dirge that shows above all that Babylon/Rome/Empire is judged and therefore doomed.

Despite its vast influence, Babylon’s demise will be swift (“one day”, 18:8; “one hour”, 18:10, 17, 19).



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

“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” (18:4).



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

We need to **RECOGNIZE** the marks of Babylon in our own culture.

- Most early Christ followers would have been served well enough by the Roman Empire (e.g., Rom 13:1-8; cf. 1Peter 2:11-25).
- But when it goes beyond its legitimate mandate by acting in “Beastly” ways... it becomes “Babylon” or “Empire.”



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

“Particularly in democratic societies, in which governments fulfill a range of productive and healthy roles, Christians cannot simply adopt John’s stance of categorical condemnation. Sectarian withdrawal from society is not a valid option if the church can actively ‘engage the powers’ so to speak or act for justice and truth. Yet John’s keen insight into spiritual dimensions of political power might help us see that even the...



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

... best of governments sometimes make choices or demands that followers of Jesus must challenge. Christians in economically and political powerful nations, in the terminology of Revelation, live more in Babylon than on Patmos. From our position of relative security and comfort it may be difficult to hear of accept John’s radical critique of imperial power, a critique that seems logical to many people in the two-thirds world” (Kraybill, *Imperial Cult & Commerce*).



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

The seductive allure of evil and ease at which we can become complicit in injustice and idolatry is alarming.

- Distinguishing between good and evil, or between the true God and surrogate gods, or between faithfulness and unfaithfulness is often difficult and requires discernment.
- Recall the seven churches (Sardis and Laodicea in 3:1-6, 14-22; and Pergamum and Thyatira in 2:14, 20-22).



## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

We need to **RESIST** accommodation and complacency, especially in regards to injustice and idolatry.

- Resistance may take many forms, but will always reflect the way of the Lamb.
- And it may be costly (2:13; 17:6; 18:24).

## WAKING UP IN BABYLON

We need to **REMEMBER** whose we are.

- Our primary allegiance is to Christ and to the trans-national Kingdom of God.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER

An act of **remembering** Christ's death on our behalf.

An act of **resistance**, recognizing that our faith *in* Jesus means our allegiance is *to* Jesus alone.

