

Rejoicing in Heaven

Bible Background • Revelation 19

Printed Text • Revelation 19:1-8 | Devotional Reading • Revelation 5:1-14

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will DISCUSS believers' understanding of the implications of God's judgment, BELIEVE that God's judgment is inclusive of God's justice and mercy, and ENJOY the love of Christ for all.

In Focus

Odetta fingered the prayer beads wrapped around her wrist as she looked at the charging documents one more time. She had read them numerous times over the past several months. Indeed, she had drafted them, meticulously, making certain that each charge was supported by more than enough facts, evidence, and testimony to prove the allegations of a criminal conspiracy. But she remembered something she learned in school about writing, something that had served her well even after she went to college, graduate school, and law school: Explain things well, because the reader can't ask you questions.

Odetta knew the defendant sitting across the courtroom was responsible for a multitude of bad acts. She knew it was her responsibility as state's attorney, representing the people, to bring him to account. Slowly, firmly, deliberately, day after day during this trial, she laid out the state's case, making sure all of the jurors could be as certain in their minds as she was in hers that this danger to the community needed to be removed, for the safety and betterment of all. And as she thumbed through the folder and scanned the charging documents one last time, she breathed a quick prayer, as she always did, for the Lord's justice to be served, quickly and fairly.

"The prosecution rests, your honor."

Can we trust God to propagate justice in the world? Or is His justice primarily to be served at the end of days?

Keep In Mind

"Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself." (Revelation 19:7, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Alleluia (Revelation 19:1) *halleluia* (Gk.)—The Greek spelling of Hallelujah, a Hebrew phrase meaning "Praise Yahweh!"

B. Avenged (v. 2) *ekdiako* (Gk.)—Meted out righteous justice

Say It Correctly

Debauched. deh-BOCH-t.

Curtailing. cur-TALE-ing.

KJV

Revelation 19:1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

3 And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

NLT

Revelation 19:1 After this, I heard what sounded like a vast crowd in heaven shouting, "Praise the LORD! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.

2 His judgments are true and just. He has punished the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the murder of his servants."

3 And again their voices rang out: "Praise the LORD! The smoke from that city ascends forever and ever!"

4 Then the twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshiped God, who was sitting on the throne. They cried out, "Amen! Praise the LORD!"

5 And from the throne came a voice that said, "Praise our God, all his servants, all who fear him, from the least to the greatest."

6 Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder: "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself.

8 She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear." For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people.

The People, Places, and Times

Bride. The imagery of the bride is used widely in the Bible as a description of the people of God. In the Old Testament, the prophets presented Israel (the Old Testament church) as a bride who had committed repeated adulteries (Jeremiah 3; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 3). The prophets also proclaimed that God was faithful to His unfaithful bride and would restore her (Jeremiah 33:10–11; Isaiah 61:10; 62:5). In the Book of Revelation, bride imagery is used often of the Church (the New Testament Israel) and her relationship to Christ. The bride belongs to Christ, who is the Bridegroom (John 3:29). In Revelation 21, the great wedding is portrayed with the Church prepared for her Bridegroom (vv. 2, 9).

Background

All of Revelation 18 is about the fall and destruction of Babylon. Throughout Revelation, John uses Babylon as emblematic of all evil empires, powers, and people. John's immediate audience in Revelation was the faithful Christ followers of his day, being persecuted and marginalized by the Roman Empire. Here in Revelation 19, John gives us a window into a future event in heaven where a "great multitude" is gathered in worship and praise of God for what He has done for them, and what He has done to those who have done evil.

What systems and empires today act against God's people as Babylon and Rome did?

At-A-Glance

1. The Demise of the Prostitute (Revelation 19:1–3)
2. The Beautiful Bride (vv. 4–8)

In Depth

1. The Demise of the Prostitute (Revelation 19:1–3)

God's people in heaven praise God and worship Him for having brought judgment and destruction on Babylon, "the great prostitute" (v. 2, NLT). God's justice can be viewed as a two sided coin. God's ultimate judgment of His enemies is one side of God's justice. His mercy and grace toward those who follow Him is the other. His love for all humanity is the common element of His justice.

God warns again and again that all sin must be punished (Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 6:23). Yet God loves all humanity (John 3:16) and desires that all would turn to Him and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Each time God declares sinners must die, He follows that with an offer of eternal life if the sinner will turn away from their sins and follow Him (Ezekiel 18:21–22; John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Those who choose evil, however, who willfully reject Him and choose to persist in their sin, on them He passes the ultimate judgment of eternal death.

Babylon symbolizes all such evil people. That is why the worshiping multitudes are able to say, "true and righteous are his judgments" (v. 2). They, and we, are comforted to know that God will eventually destroy all who oppress His people.

To what extent can human society exact godly judgments?

2. The Beautiful Bride (vv. 4–8)

The next verses describe those same people praising God in worship for what He has done for them, specifically bringing them into His presence for the wedding supper of the Lamb in which they are the bride, holy and spotless. This section shows the other side of the coin of God's justice, His mercy and grace, again because of His great love. John uses familiar imagery to portray the absolute joy of those present at this glorious time of worship. In all cultures, weddings are a time of great joy for all involved. Weddings are also a time of new beginnings, and a time when the couple commit to a permanent joint bond.

Here, the bride is emblematic of the Church, all faithful believers from all time (Ephesians 5:32). A bride who is preparing for her wedding will wash herself carefully and thoroughly and put on a

beautiful new white dress. Jesus has done this for His faithful. He has cleansed His Church by taking their sin on Himself. Jesus paid the price of our sin on the Cross, bearing our punishment, so that we could be made holy and blameless in His sight.

God shows mercy (not giving us what we rightly deserve) and grace (giving us what we don't deserve) when we declare our faith in and allegiance to Him. His righteousness is then given to us, and we can be presented to Him in a radiant new white linen gown. Is that not reason for joyful worship and loud hallelujah?

How do you react to the imagery of being a bride to Christ?

Search the Scriptures

1. Read Revelation 19:2–3. How does this affect your understanding of God's justice?
2. Read Revelation 19:7–8. It is important to remember that the bride (the Church) is not made ready by her own actions. How does this contribute to your understanding of the image of the bride in Revelation 19?

Discuss the Meaning

These verses show clearly that God's judgment includes two distinct elements. He will judge, condemn, and destroy all who reject Him and do evil. He also will show mercy and grace to all who follow Him. He is just and right in doing all this. How does knowing this affect your efforts to pray for and show the love of God to others who may not yet know Him?

Liberating Lesson

We often struggle with our desire to get even with those who oppress us. Sometimes it seems that there is no justice for marginalized communities. We must find comfort in the first three verses here where we learn that God will exact vengeance for us in the end. He will judge all the world's evil people and systems. He will deliver on His promise to effect judgment on those who oppress His people.

Application for Activation

It is so hard to turn the other cheek when we see injustice around us. God's Word and His love should guide our responses to injustice. Our actions should show the world the grace and mercy that have been shown to us. We can show our desire for justice through peaceful protest, not through violence and vengeance. Write a letter this week to an elected official about an injustice close to your heart. Pray for them to use their power to help the most people.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Revelation 19:1–8 1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God:

Having just heard the laments of the lords and merchants of sinful Babylon, John’s vision now shows how the people on God’s side react. God has won a resounding victory over the enemy. Like the final five psalms (see Lesson 9), the victory song in Revelation 19:1–8 is punctuated with cries of “Alleluia!” Both those psalms and this song celebrate the defeat of the world’s kingdoms and proclaim the Lord’s universal reign. Alleluia (Gk. *halleluia*, hah-lay-loo-ee-**AH**) is the Greek spelling of the Hebrew word hallelujah (*halelu-yah*, hah-lehloo-**YAH**), which means “Praise Yahweh!” It is used only in this special song in all the New Testament.

The listed praises of salvation, glory, honor, and power recall previous songs of the multitudes of heaven. John has previously heard similar songs from the twenty-four elders and four living creatures when the Lamb comes to open the scroll (Revelation 5:8–10) and when the saints come to heaven out from the great tribulation (7:11–12). Each of those songs proclaimed seven of God’s praiseworthy attributes, though this one only mentions four. This does not mean this praise is lesser than the previous songs. God enjoys His creatures’ praise, whether it is done with many words or a few.

Notably, each of these three songs contains one unique element. Even though this song does not mention wisdom, strength, or praise as the other two did, this song is the first to mention salvation. Even this close to the end of time, there is still a new song to sing for God.

2 For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

The kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God are both represented by women. The kingdom of this world is pictured as a great prostitute (Revelation 17–18), and the kingdom of Christ is pictured as a bride prepared for her husband (19:7–8). The image of being faithful to God as a pure bride, while being unfaithful is likened to prostitution is common in Scripture. The bond that God offers His people is holy, complete, exacting, and intimate. To willingly enter such a relationship with God is a joyous event (19:7), but to break that oath is a shocking, repugnant betrayal.

The character of the whore is seen earlier in John’s vision. She is extravagantly wealthy, and exerts influence over ten kingdoms, even though they hate her (17:12, 16). She is called Babylon (v. 5), commits adultery (v. 2) with the ten kings—likely a reference to idolatry—and is drunk with the blood of God’s prophets and holy ones (v. 6, 18:24).

John does not mean to shock his audience or heap extra shame on the unfaithful by using crass language, calling Babylon a “whore” (Gk. *porne*, **POOR**-nay). The Greek word is the term for a prostitute, with no additional crudeness about the word itself. As God is the very source of justice, He

alone has the right to exact vengeance against those who have wronged Him or His people. The word for “avenged” (Gk. *ekdikeo*, ek-dee-**KEH**-oh) is related to the word for “righteous” (Gk. *dikaio*s, **DEE**-keye-occe) from earlier in the verse. They both include the root dike (Gk. DEE-kay), which means just or righteous. The idea in the word *ekdikeo* is that of one meting out righteous justice.

3 And again they said, Alleluia And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

Babylon’s burning rubble gives off eternal smoke. The word “smoke” (Gk. *kapnos*, kop- **NOCE**) is the same used of the prayers of the saints rising like the smoke of burned incense. This word, used almost exclusively in Scripture by John, can be positive or negative. This is the same smoldering fate that awaits those who worship the Beast (Revelation 14:11). John has already seen the effect this continuous smoke trail will have: kings will see it and weep for Babylon (18:18). God will leave the smoking remains of Babylon as an example of what happens to those who set themselves against His righteousness.

4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

The twenty-four elders join in praise as celebration songs are sung throughout the three acts of Revelation (7:9–17; 11:15–19; 19:1–9). The twenty-four are thought to represent various groups, like the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (21:12–14). Here, they add their alleluia to those of the “great voice in heaven” (v. 1), praying, “amen,” that all the voice has said will happen to Babylon and affirming the wonderful traits of God that were just mentioned.

5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. 6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

John heard a voice come from the throne before, when an angel poured out the seventh bowl of wrath. That loud voice was also accompanied with thundering (16:17–18). Now the voice calls all of heaven to praise God. If you consider yourself God’s servant, or hold Him in reverence, whether you are important or not, praise God!

The answering alleluia to this call is extreme. John has heard many loud sounds in this vision so far. The sound of a “great multitude” recalls the crowd from every tribe, nation, and tongue who praised God when they come to heaven out from the great tribulation (Revelation 7:9). The sound of “many waters” recalls the sound of the voice of Jesus (1:15). Finally, the “mighty thunderings” recalls God’s presence on many occasions throughout Scripture, but recently a voice like seven thunders prophesied (10:3–4) and the revelation of God’s heavenly Temple caused thunderings (11:19). The singing of the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb was like both many waters and mighty thunderings (14:2), but this new shout is even louder than anything before. It requires a threefold description of its decibel level. The words they sing are familiar from the “Hallelujah Chorus.” No longer do we have to worry about our leaders being corrupt, debauched, stupid, cruel, or militant. God Himself reigns with all power.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

When tragedy occurred in a family in Israel, a kinsman redeemer could make things right again. A widow left childless would quickly fall into bankruptcy and possibly servitude. A kinsman redeemer

would clear the widow's debt (Leviticus 25:25; 47–49), remove the threat of a harassing enemy by being the avenger of blood (Deuteronomy 19:12), and finally marry the widow back into the family (25:5–6). Revelation shows Jesus as humankind's redeemer who pays our debt (Revelation 5:6), takes vengeance upon Satan (Revelation 6–18), and announces his intention to marry us back into God's family (19:7–8).

After much darkness and struggle, the story of God's revelation of Himself to His people approaches its end with a joyous wedding. The faithful believers are finally with their Lord, joined in a permanent relationship in His heavenly home!

We as the Church are not just waiting until that glorious day comes, and we can reap at least some of the benefits now. John's apocalypse, like most divine prophecy, is full of an already/not yet theology. For example, the kingdom of God is come even now, but not fully come until the end. Here, John calls the Church Christ's "wife," even though the marriage has not yet happened. The woman is just now getting ready for the wedding feast, and will be presented after the final judgment (Revelation 20:14–21:2). Even though John will later call the Church Christ's "bride" (Gk. *nymphos*, **NOOM**-foce, 21:9), in verse 7 she is already called His "wife" (Gk. *gune*, goo-**NAY**). Christ already cares for His Church as a man would care for his wife, faithfully sacrificing for her so that she can grow more wonderful.

8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

God's servants are often depicted as dressed in white, for example the angels at the tomb and Jesus during His transfiguration. John has also seen the 24 elders dressed in white (Revelation 4:4), and the martyrs of the tribulation as well (7:9). Fine linen was an expensive import from Egypt. Babylon had pridefully dressed herself in fine linen and other expensive clothes and jewelry (Revelation 18:16), contrasting with the simple purity of Christ's true Church. Few fibers, even linen, are naturally white. To get white linen, it must be bleached and processed. This purification process is not gentle to the fabric. Neither is the purification process to attain righteousness. Thankfully, Christ's bride has not had to undergo this harsh process. The righteousness, instead, "was granted" to her (Gk. *didomi*, **DEE**-doe-me, to give), the passive voice grammatically curtailing any involvement on her part toward earning this beautiful garment. Her betrothed, her avenger, her omnipotent judge has taken the process on Himself, and given His bride righteousness as a gift.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

A Vision of Praise
(Isaiah 6:1–8)

TUESDAY

Let the Heavens Be Glad
(1 Chronicles 16:23–34)

WEDNESDAY

Let All God's Angels Worship Him
(Hebrews 1:5–14)

THURSDAY

King of Kings, Lord of Lords
(Revelation 19:9–16)

FRIDAY

God Judges the Wicked
(Revelation 19:17–21)

SATURDAY

The Lord Rejoices Over You
(Zephaniah 3:14–20)

SUNDAY

The Lord Almighty Reigns
(Revelation 19:1–8)