1. **Revelation 17-19**

**Fall of Babylon**

1. **Questions throughout and at the end.**
2. Today we explore Revelation 17-19. A reminder that my contention is that The book of Revelation is a 1st Century Revelation of Jesus; against the Roman Empire; to the Church(es); for the purpose of worship, encouragement and hope.
3. A reminder about the structure of the book and how we best read it. Notice where we are up to.
4. **-9. Revelation 17**
5. 2 types of prostitutes – the poor women and children who are trafficked and forced into a life of slavery and servitude. Beaten, imprisoned, frightened into submission. Sold as a commodity over and over to uncaring men only interested in their own power and pleasure.

Then there is the hi class escort who makes a hard nose choice about quick and easy money. A transactional relationship that appears to offer all the pleasures of a committed relationship but without all the hard work.

The picture here in revelation 17 appears to be closer to the latter type. Playing the harlot a long symbol of Israel going after other gods. With Israel’s relationship to God being pictured as a marriage. No irony because almost always idol worship involved sexual orgies and sleeping with temple prostitutes.

The invitation of the prostitute is the fulfillment of fantasies, pleasure and luxury. Live it up. Eat, drink be merry. Indulge, no one else is going to look after you so look after yourself. Take what you need because everything is being offered.

But there is always a price to be paid. I was part of a conversation once where a male school teacher was expressing that he thought paying for a prostitute seemed like a good deal. The guidance officer, a Christian man, was also a part of the conversation. He offered, “The real price is that it hurts every time you pee for the rest of your life.”

The prostitute here is emblematic of the various dysfunctional pagan religious practices and sexual philosophies of the time. Using and abusing people, promising so much but delivering only slavery to sin itself.

She is blood thirsty, drinking the blood of the martyrs.

Her fornications are the wine in the cup she offers the kings of the world. When you go to indulge instead of endless pleasures and luxury, instead of delicate wine you find it is filled with urine and excrement and sexual fluids.

Dr Alan Myer speaking about our own time reflected that in the 1960’s and 70’s everyone spoke about freedom and choice and pleasure and sex. In the 1980’s and 90’s the conversation was about addictions. Whatever your vice it will end up enslaving you. When it becomes the imbibed philosophy of nations it enslaves the whole nation. And that’s the picture being drawn for us.

Kings mentioned here could be various Roman emperors.

But the number 7 might be symbolic as it so often is. The perfect number.

Just like the 666 was a parody of the 777 3x perfect number Yeshua = 888 the extra perfect.

11. In Chapter 16 he tells us that Babylon has fallen. The great abusive and controlling empire that demands loyalty, that gets its power from the dragon and is the beast.

Eventually evil collapses in on itself by its own corruption, ambition, envy, conceit, and backbiting it will eventually topple. Babylon has fallen. Rejoice! all you people. The beast has been cast down.

Rather than try to work out which Emperor is which – I read a couple of attempts. What matters is that the monster’s kingdom looks perfect and impregnable, but forces from within its own ranks will destroy it.[[1]](#footnote-1)

12. Eventually Rome the current Babylon that John is writing about does fall. It happens 400 odd years later by the Goths, Visigoths and the Vandals all take a turn. Probably, this is a prophesy about the fall of Rome. Possibly these are the 10 (barbarian) kings whose wealth and position and power has been promoted and propped up by Rome, in many cases for 250 years. But now they are faced with a declining empire to their south. They decided they no longer need a Roman overlord, rebel, sack Rome and the western Roman Empire came to an official end in 476AD.

Whoever the various kings are they oppose the followers of Jesus. This was true of the Barbian Kings for many years. And when many of them do convert it is to Arianism that denied the deity of Jesus. Jesus’ claim is that he and not Caesar is the true King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But John reminds his readers that the lamb will win the war. The lamb will conquer them, of course, by the same method by which he has always conquered: by his own blood, and by the blood of his own, the martyrs who remain faithful.[[2]](#footnote-2)

13. There are many people in our day, Christians who are desperately trying to use politics and power to gain the cultural and spiritual ascendancy. We see this in America but it has echoes in the culture wars here as well.

14. Jesus told his followers to resist without violence. Don’t take up the sword against Rome. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Instead, he encouraged them to creative non-violent resistance: turning the other check – thereby forcing your slave master to hit you as an equal; walking the extra mile – and getting the Roman soldier in trouble because he has in fact now broken Roman law; giving the cloak and shirt – thereby going naked as a way of shaming the corrupt and oppressive officials.

John is saying that it is by loving sacrifice in the way of Jesus that the victory is won.

I sense that the answer is not by fighting for Christian rights but by being willing to suffer in this generation for the sake of the next.

Overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony.

The brutal but seductive ‘civilizations’ and national empires, which ensnare the world by promising luxury and delivering slavery, gain their power from the monster, the System of Imperial Power. Some have called this ‘the domination system’, a system which transcends geographical and historical limitations and reappears again and again in every century. John’s readers already know that this system itself gains its power from the dragon, the **accuser**, the **satan**. Those who are caught up in the resultant battles need not feel that they are merely part of a dangerous confusion, of ignorant armies clashing by night. They are part of the lamb’s victorious army, who will conquer the monster in the usual way, by his blood and by the **word** of their faithful testimony. Thus it has been, and thus it will be.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**15. -25 Chapter 18**

26. In the ancient world cities were created as safe places. Safe from raiding neighbours; safe from wild animals, safe from the lawlessness that existed in the wilderness, from robbers and criminals of all sorts.

But nearly every city in the world has also developed an underbelly; become a place for demons and debauchery.

Over and over God’s judgment is to hand the people over to the consequences of their own sin; ambition; pride; cruelty and greed. Oh, you are blood thirsty. Here, drink your cup of blood.

One of the great cries of the righteous for justice is “Why do evil people prosper?” This chapter reminds us that they will not do so forever.

27. So come out of her. Come away from participating in the systematic racism; sexism; injustice; oppression; self grandising; self-interested luxury with its sex abuse and slavery and theft. Come out of it. Or be caught up in it and the resulting consequences.

28. The prostitute is a symbol for the thieving and corruption that lines the pockets of the powerful and extorts the weak and vulnerable. It is the thing that holds so much of the world back from progress. It is the pollutant that enforces poverty. The haves and the have nots. John is tying the 4 I’s together as they so often are: inequality, injustice, immorality and idolatry.

29. But vengeance is mine says the Lord.

…vengeance is too dangerous a weapon to be handled by the followers of the lamb (Romans 12:19, quoting Deuteronomy 32:35). It is God’s own work, turning wickedness back on itself, allowing arrogance to reach a giddy height from which it can only crash helpless to earth (verse 7, echoing Isaiah 47:8–9). Babylon is to be given the only medicine she knows, the medicine she mixed for others; she has been using her cup to brew a potion for those she wanted to poison, and she will now have to drink it herself (verse 6).[[4]](#footnote-4)

30. But it leads me to 2 questions:

1. What does “coming out of” actually mean?

Like last week we explored a few examples of what it might mean to be deliberate about our spending; thoughtful in how we spend our time and energy; are we loving our neighbour and caring for the poor and the immigrant?

Advocacy on behalf of the powerless and the needy. Coaching the young and living out a counter cultural life. Looks different in the details for each person.

1. Every violent oppressive government will eventually fall and be held to account. What next?

The Syrian people are finding this week that just toppling an oppressive tyrant may not be enough. Chaos may even be worse.

Human governments are part of God’s current plan for this world. The problem comes when they take on powers for themselves that exceed being humble servants.

31. And the excesses and luxuries that the empire promises come at the cost of someone else: bodies some translations say because that is the Roman term for a slave, a body. Slaves! The ultimate in dehumanization. Use and abuse. Just commodities. What happens when we love things and use people rather than the other way round.

It took another 1800 years for slavery to be banned in the western world. It is thought that the Greeks and Romans never really progressed technically because of their reliance on slaves. There were millions of them.

It seems incredible to us.

Yet today there are more slaves in the world than at any other time. Approximately 50 million slaves: forced labour and forced marriages. 86% is in the private sector: corporate world – electronics and clothing.

There are thought to be about 41000 slaves in Australia. There were across Australia about 240 convictions for various types of slavery in Australia in 2023. That means we are ranked 11th out of 160 countries where we have data. Most of the world is worse.

But we have come to rely on, no demand, slave labour for our cheap electronics and clothing. Revelation 18 reminds us that, out of sight out of mind, is just not good enough.

The god Mammon (money) is a demanding god. Demands sacrifice: Time, energy, family, and human sacrifices. Never ever, in any modern government or election can anybody do anything that puts the economy at risk. Morality, justice, truth itself all must be sacrificed at the altar of the all, mighty, dollar.

32. The merchant whose life and luxury relied on the oppressive system, are dismayed at it all going up in smoke.

But John sees it as justice being done to selfish, evil, profiteers.

Babylon and every evil oppressive beastly system gains its power from the dragon – the accuser. So much of Revelation is being able to lift the curtain so that truth and lies can be divided.

It was Jeremiah who took a stone and threw it into the Euphrates and declared “Thus Babylon will fall”.[[5]](#footnote-5) Jesus spoke about a millstone being tied around child abusers’ necks, and mountains being thrown into the sea.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Once more, in case anyone should feel the last vestiges of sympathy for Babylon and all that it stood for, we have the explanation: Babylon is a city founded on violence, not only the blood of the martyrs. Babylon has been at the centre of a network of violence that spanned the world, and all who have been slaughtered on earth have, in a sense, been slaughtered at the behest of Babylon. The merchants have grown rich on the back of military conquest. Money and power have done their collective worst, and John lumps them together, as we have seen, under the metaphor of fornication.

Money, Power and sex, - Mammon, Mars and Aphrodite – gods of this world.

Babylon the whore is gone, and will not return. And we, who live in the shadow of modern Babylons, can and must shudder as we, too, watch the plume of smoke and smell the bitter smell.[[7]](#footnote-7)

But those who are faithful can rejoice.

**33. -37 Chapter 19:1-10**

38. Surely the opposite of whoredom with its promise of easy pleasure, money and luxury, whatever the cost, has to be marriage. Promises of faithfulness, sacrificial love, preferring one another for a as long as we should live.

Marriage is a signpost to God’s faithfulness. Theologians down the ages have always seen the promises made at a wedding, promises of faithfulness through thick and thin, as a proper reflection of God’s promises to his world, to the human race, and to his own people in particular. [[8]](#footnote-8)

The whore has been judged; the bride steps forward. The glossy, glitzy world of Babylon has been overthrown; God’s people emerge, with shining, pure linen to wear as God’s own gift. The marriage of the lamb and his bride is to be the focal point of the marriage of **heaven** and earth themselves, and Babylon, the symbolic equivalent of the ancient Babel which thought to climb up to heaven by its own energy, is shown up as a futile parody of the real thing, a human attempt to get, by sheer greed, what God proposed to give by sheer grace.[[9]](#footnote-9)

We are back in the throne room of Chapter 5. Alleluia! Praise to yhwh!

Alleluia! The Lord our God, the Almighty, has become king!’[[10]](#footnote-10)

The Old Testament often describes Israel as God’s bride and its following other idols as whoredom. Jesus uses the picture of the marriage supper in a number of his parables.

John gets so excited he starts to worship the messenger. A reminder to all of us to keep our eyes on the saviour and not his messengers, pastors or prophets as our point of worship.

The point of all this is instead of the harlot who promises much but delivers nothing but slavery to sin, death and destruction. God seeks to marry his bride the church and offers wholeness, life and intimacy.

39-42. 19:11-21 **Final Battle**

43. In the ancient Israeli texts about a coming Messiah there were many ideas. But 2 things were clear. He would be a military leader and defeat Jewish enemies, and he would clean up the temple.

Because Jesus did neither many rejected him as the Messiah, and still do in some cases.

Jesus instead had other plans. Victory through sacrifice and love. The Kingdom of God. Here John picks up the theme: ‘The kingdom of the world has passed to our Lord and his Messiah.’ ‘Alleluia! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, has become king!’ These statements are, of course, linked directly to statements about the victory of Jesus.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Jesus’ victory and the inaugurating of the Kingdom of God, putting God back on the throne of the world was not a military battle to fight and defeat Rome but to defeat the evil powers, the dragon behind the beast Rome.

This battle at Armageddon is not about a foreshadowing of some yet to come military battle. This is a defeat of the gods of this world. Our hero arrives riding a white horse wearing a robe dipped in his own blood before any battle is fought. Not the blood of others but his own shed blood. His only weapon is a sword in his mouth. That is the words spoken with the authority of God himself. It is a victory over violence itself. Although it draws on all sorts of Old Testament passages[[12]](#footnote-12) this is a return to the theme. The victory is won over ultimate evil by self-sacrificing love and the shedding of his own blood unto death.

The 16th C poet Robert Southwell gloried in the paradox of Jesus victory:

With tears he fights, and wins the field, his naked breast stands for a shield. His battering shot are babish cries, his arrows made of weeping eyes.
His martial ensigns cold and need, and feeble flesh his warrior’s steed.[[13]](#footnote-13)

44. The beast and the prophet (1st and 2nd beast) are defeated and thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 19 then stands as a promise to the oppressed and a warning to the oppressors of who wins in the end at what the ultimate results may be.

This is not easy optimism that we will be home by Christmas. This is a story to hold onto in the face of seemingly endless futile violence and evil oppression.

So rejoice you people of God. We have a promise. We have a final battle, already won. We have a great hero in Jesus our Messiah. The old enemies that held us in enslaved addiction are overthrown.

That is a reason to be encouraged. That is a promise to hold on to a sure hope. That is a reason to burst into worship. A joyful song!

45. Reflect

1. Tom Wright, Revelation for Everyone, For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re17.9-18&off=6544&ctx=hosen+and+faithful.+~The+lamb+will+conque), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re17.9-18&off=7526&ctx=ertheless+be+clear.+~The+brutal+but+seduc), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re18.1-8&off=4710&ctx=cy+of+God%E2%80%99s+people%3b+~vengeance+is+too+dan), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 159–160. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Jeremiah 51:63-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mark 9:42; 11:23 possibly the mountain in question was the temple mount. A prophetic utterance about its downfall. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re18.9-24&off=9446&ctx=r+to+be+seen+again.%0a~Once+more%2c+in+case+a), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re19.1-10&off=2745&ctx=+we+are+part+of+it!+~Theologians+down+the), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re19.1-10&off=3265&ctx=book+of+Revelation.+~The+whore+has+been+j), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re19.1-10&off=4919&ctx=tatement+in+11%3a15%3a+%E2%80%98~Alleluia!+The+Lord+o), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re19.11-21&off=3880&ctx=the+kingdom+of+God.+~%E2%80%98The+kingdom+of+the+), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Isaiah 11, where the Messiah will judge the nations with the sword of his mouth; Psalm 2, where he will rule them with a rod of iron; Isaiah 63, where he will tread the winepress of the wrath of God [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tom Wright, [*Revelation for Everyone*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry87rev?ref=Bible.Re19.11-21&off=5852&ctx=ing+self-sacrifice%3a%0a~With+tears+he+fights), For Everyone Bible Study Guides (London; Louisville, KY: SPCK; Westminster John Knox, 2011), 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)