

Revelation 17:1–19:10

The Destruction of the City of Blood

A Tale of Two Cities

Well, tonight I want to introduce you to someone.

It meet him, you'll need to travel in your imagination.

Let's imagine that we can time travel.

And we travel back in time.

Way, way back.

Back to the time of Noah.

You know Noah.

A man born into a time when God saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become.

Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil all the time.

A time when God regretted that he had made humans on the earth and when his heart was so deeply grieved that he determined that he would wipe all humans from the face of the earth.

But one man, Noah, found favour in the eyes of the LORD.

And through him, God preserved the world.

He, his children, and their wives survived.

They fulfil the creation mandate and bear fruit and increase.

From them come seventy nations or people groups.

They are listed

And it is at this time that we find the man to whom I want you to be introduced.

His name is Shem.

Although some translations create ambiguity, it appears that Shem is the firstborn of Noah and his wife.

Now, let me tell you something about Shem's name.

Shem's name means 'name'.

It's a very strange name to call a son, isn't it?

But there we go, that's what Noah and his wife do.

They call him Shem ... 'name'.

It could be that they call him Shem, because he is the oldest, the one who bears the name, as it were.

Anyway, before we explore the descendants of Shem, we should just stop for a moment and remember an incident that happens around about this time.

Open your Bibles at Genesis 11.

Look at verses 1-10.

This is a very famous story.

It is the story about humans banding together under one language.

They find the plain of Shinar.

They settle there.

And together they make a city.

Notice the special things about the city.

It is a very human endeavour.

It is designed to stretch to the heavens.

That is, humans have pretensions at being God.

Look at verse 4.

They want to make a 'name' for themselves.

They want to make a 'Shem' for themselves.

But God sees their pretensions.

He confuses their language.

They stop building the physical city.

But it gets a name.

Its name is Babel.

Later we will know it to be Babylon.

And it will become associated with human pretensions.

With humans stretching up to forge their own destiny.
To make a name for themselves.
To be independent from God.
However, the story doesn't end there.
We interrupted the story of Shem to tell this story.
But now, in verse 10, we take it up again.
And as we read on, we are told where the line of Shem ends up.
Look ahead.
It gets to Terah in verse 26.
Then it gets to Abram.
And it looks like it might reach a dead end with him.
After all, his wife is barren (verse 30).
Now look at chapter 12.
The Lord intervenes.
He speaks.
And he calls Abram.
He promises him a land.
He promises him many children.
In fact, he promises that he will be a great nation.
And blessing will flow.
But look at the last half of verse 2.

He promises that he will make his 'shem' great.

From the line of Shem will come a great 'shem'.

Friends, do you hear what the writer is wanting to tell us?

He wants to tell us that human sinful disposition finds its focus in humans wanting to make their name great.

But God will counter this.

He will counter this by making a name great from Shem's line.

Friends, you know where this all ends up.

It ends up with David, the descendant of Abraham.

It ends up with God's presence being situated in the city of David.

And that finally ends up with Jesus, who is Immanuel, God with us.

Friends, in order to understand what is going to happen in this next chapter of Revelation, you need to know this background.

You see, from Babel flows a city, Babylon.

It is a city set against the heavens; set against God.

And from Shem there also flows a city.

It is Jerusalem, the place where the temple is.

That is, the place where God dwells.

And this is fulfilled in and through the person of Jesus.

He is the temple of God.

But so is the church of God.

For, as we have seen, Jesus dwells in the midst of his church.

The Destruction of The City of Blood

A Note About Structure

So, now, in your Bibles, please turn to Revelation 17.

But before we pick up our story, I'd like you to notice my little revised structure.

I have slightly changed where I see the next break occurring.

I think the next section runs from verse 1 of chapter 17 to verse 10 of chapter 19.

I also want you to notice that I think that the seven bowls have parallels with the seven trumpets.

See Revised Structure

1:1–8	Prologue
1:9–20	A Heavenly Peek (1)
2:1–3:22	Prophetic Messages to Seven Churches
4:1–5:14	A Heavenly Peek (2)
6:1–8:1	The Seven Seals Revealed
8:2–6	A Heavenly Peek (3)
8:7–11:18	The Seven Trumpets Revealed
11:19	A Heavenly Peek (4)
12:1–14:20	A Woman, A Dragon, and Their Seed
15:1–16:1	A Heavenly Peek (5)
16:2–17a	The Seven Bowls Revealed
16:17b–21	A Heavenly Peek (6)
17:1–19:10	The Destruction of the City of Blood
19:11–16	A Heavenly Peek (7)
19:17–22:5	The Establishment of the Garden City
22:6–21	Epilogue

The Seals and the City of Blood

Also, I think that the seven seals have some parallels with these chapters about the city of blood.

This is particularly clear if we include the introductory heavenly sneak peaks.

For example, John is told to ‘come up’ in both.

John has an ‘in the Spirit’ experience in both.

The scene of heavenly worship in the first is contrasted with earthly idolatry, blasphemy, and false worship in the second.

The Lamb receives power, honour, and glory in the first, while Babylon receives ignominy and destruction in the second

There are a series of devastating judgments on human kind in the first.

These are matched here by a series of laments over the destruction of Babylon in the second.

The 144,000 are sealed in the first.

This is matched by the marriage of the lamb to his bride in the second.

And both result in shouts of praise from the multitude for God's salvation.

1. Introducing A Second Woman (17:1-6)

Okay, now we can get down to work on the details.

Look at what happens.

First, one of the angels caught up in the devastating judgments of the seals comes to John and shows him some more.

We had met a first woman back in chapter 12.

She was clothed with the sun.

The moon was under her feet and she wore a crown of twelve stars.

She was pregnant and pursued by an enormous red dragon.

But now there is a totally different sort of woman.

Anyway, this angel has great authority.

He is clothed with splendour.

And sure enough, just like the angels of the bowls, the judgment or punishment continues.

He says,

*Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute,
who sits by many waters.*

If you skim down to verse 15, you'll see that 'many waters' stands for many peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.

If you skim down to verse 18, you'll see that the prostitute symbolises the worldly city, the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

If you look at verse 5, you see that she is named.

She is Babylon the Great.

Even in Scripture, Babylon and represent numerous cities: Babel, Babylon itself (e.g. Daniel 5; 7:4; Jeremiah 50–51), imperial (1 Peter 5:13), the seven cities of Asia (Revelation 1:11), an any city or power in any age that has similar characteristics.

So, there she is, a great city.

A city where the kings of the earth committed adultery.

I suspect this means spiritual adultery.

That is, rather than worshipping and serving the true and living God, they committed adultery with the harlot.

They were intoxicated with what she offered.

But there is one more identifying marker for Babylon.

Apparently the scene of her judgment is the wilderness.

There she sits on a scarlet beast who has all the marks of being the same beast we met back in chapter 13.

What I think this means is that the great prostitute and the great beast work together.

Look at the picture of the wealth of the woman.

The mix of great might and power (the beast) with pleasure and wealth (the prostitute) is not unusual or uncommon in our world.

It has enormous potential to suck and intoxicate enormous numbers of worshipers.

But there is one more characteristic of this anti-God prostitute and power.

It is spelt out in verse 6.

It is her most heinous crime.

Her participation in the persecution of the holy people of God, those who bear testimony to Jesus.

2. The Mystery of This Woman (17:7-8)

The second part of verse tells us that the portrait of this harlot astonishes John.

The angel asks why he is astonished.

Then he offers to explain the mystery of the woman and the beast.

Friends, this section is a minefield for those wanting to identify the beast.

Seven heads (verse 7).

Ten horns (verse 7).

Seven hills on which the woman sits (verse 9).

Seven kings of which five had fallen, one is, and one has not yet come. (10).

Ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom (verse 12).

Now, there are undoubtedly some allusions to Rome.

However, there are problems with thinking that this exhausts the content of the verses.

After all, the woman or city is filled with the blood not just of believers but also all those who have been killed on earth.

Also, the city is named elsewhere as Sodom, Egypt, and even Jerusalem as well as Babylon.

No, if we understand Babel in Genesis 11 we will understand this woman.

She is all powers in all time who seek to make a name for themselves and seek to divorce themselves from God or seek independence from him.

She is the kingdom of this world (11:15).

She is all those who band together to set themselves defiantly against God.

She is those who...

- hate his word,
- despise his Son,
- persecute his people,
- and are allied with evil and the evil one.

Friends, please understand what I'm saying.

This prophecy, this piece of apocalyptic, this testimony, this letter, are like all other similar pieces of scripture.

They are designed by a human author for a particular situation.

They therefore speak to that situation and have real echoes of it.

However, it is also designed to speak to all God's people in all ages.

Those who confine this letter to one age cause it to not do what God intended it to do.

It was written for the seven churches who received it.

It was written for other first century people who read it.

And it was written for us.

And it was written for those who will be there on the day Christ returns.

3. A Mighty Declaration (18:1-3)

Let's now turn to chapter 18.

This chapter has a myriad of allusions to Old Testament passages about Babylon or other cities that fall because of God's wrath.

They include Tyre in Ezekiel 27.

And Babylon in Jeremiah 50-51.

This angel is noted for its authority and splendour.

Clearly he is special.

Clearly his message is something extraordinary.

And with a mighty voice he shouts it out.

Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

Just as she was unclean, so will her successors be.

Demons.

Impure spirits.

Unclean birds.

Detestable animals.

Her reach had been overwhelming.

All nations drank of the maddening wine of her adulteries.

The merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.

She was not only immoral and ungodly.

So were those associated with her.

4. Come Out! (18:4-8)

Then another voice cries out from heaven.

Come Out!

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;

The call is clear.

To not line up with this harlot and her ways.

To be separate.

Friends, this is the call that God has given to his people in every age at every time.

We are not to participate in the ways of this world.

We are to come out of her and be separate.

Friends, I want you to take special note of verse 5.

It show you that Babel is never far from the surface of this story and that our starting story was the right one in setting the scene.

Her sins have piled up to heaven.

They have come to the notice of God.

And God has remember her crimes.

In the Old Testament, fire was an integral part of war.

And so it is recorded here as part of God's way on the harlot.

She had boasted.

And God will meet her arrogance with plagues, death, mourning, famine, and consumption by fire.

5. The Lament of Adulterers (18:9-20)

We now come to verses 9-20.

Friends, one of the reasons that Babylon worked was that she offered people what they wanted.

Sexual gratification.

Luxury.

Might.

Wealth and trade.

All sorts of great goods.

And goods that were traded at the expense of others.

Look at the particularly telling end of the list.

It's there in verse 13: human beings sold as slaves.

Literally, it reads, 'bodies and souls of men'.

Friends, there is a profound self-centredness in these dirges sung by the kings of the earth, by the merchants of the earth, and by the maritime trade.

They had benefitted from what Babylon gave them.

They didn't mind what it cost.

Friends, this is not the mark of God's people.

They are slaves of Christ who was their slave and gave his life for them.

Their disposition...

Our disposition...

Is different.

And so, in verse 20 we can rejoice at the end of evil.

²⁰“Rejoice over her, you heavens!

Rejoice, you people of God!

Rejoice, apostles and prophets!

For God has judged her

with the judgment she imposed on you.” [Revelation 18:20; NIV]

Friends, do not be afraid of rejoicing at the end of evil.

Wickedness needs destruction.

And it will get it.

And it will get it from a God who is just and who hates evil.

And those who love God and love good will rejoice at the end of those who do evil.

And they will rejoice that God has judged.

Friends, this judgment has not yet happened.

But it will.

God will surely judge.

6. Thrown Down! (18:21-24)

Now we turn to verse 21.

A mighty angel picks up a boulder the size of a large millstone.

He throws it into the sea

And hauntingly he recounts the end of the great city, Babylon.

She will never be found again.

In contrast to former festivity there is a dirge.

Emptiness.

No music.

No harpists.

No pipers.

No trumpeters.

No workers.

No sound of working.

No lights.

No joyful voices of bridegroom and bride.

She who was great is now diminished beyond recognition.

But look at the closing firm words of judgment.

She led astray the nations.

But most importantly, in her was found the blood of God's people.

Of God's prophets.

Of God's holy people

And of all who have been slaughtered on the earth.

7. Hallelujah! (19:1-10)

But we cannot end there.

Let's turn to verses 1-10.

A dirge turns to the sound of multiple hallelujahs.

The roar of the multitude is overwhelming.

Let's just listen to it again and soak it in.

¹After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

²for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

³And again they shouted:

"Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

⁴The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

⁵Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

*“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
both great and small!”*

⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns. [Revelation 19:1–6; NIV]

And then, God’s response to the dead prostitute is announced.

The great multitude meets the grieving and mourning of over a dead prostitute chapters 17 and 18 with joy and gladness over a bride of a different nature.

⁷*Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!*

*For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.*

⁸*Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)
[Revelation 19:7-8; NIV]

The imagery is profound.

Joy.

Purity.

Intimacy.

Love.

Again, in fulfilment of the prophets.

The contrast with the absences and the corpses is profound.

Revelation 1(9-10)

The Great Accomplishment

Friends, let me tell you that the news of the accomplishments of this chapter are overwhelming.

For a start, in the face of hands raised up toward heaven and gross immorality and worldliness, this chapter is overwhelming.

Just as God judged Babel, so he will judge all similar attempts either by humans or by spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

They will not succeed.

The kingdom of God will win over the kingdom of man.

There are no uncertainties about this.

The result was announced in the third chapter of the Bible.

It was prefaced in the eleventh chapter.

It was assured in the death of Jesus on the cross two thousand years ago.

Now, friends, we rightly worry about our world.

It is possible that things might get worse toward the end.

However, the end is assured.

The persecuted woman in the wilderness will survive.

The 144,000 sealed ones will be victorious.

It may take 42 months.

But it will surely come.

And we will be able to repeat and repeat and repeat and repeat the hallelujahs as they did in Revelation 19.

The wedding of the Lamb will come.

The future will work its way toward its God ordained future.

This is the word of God and it can be trusted.

Problem Remains

However, the book of Revelation hasn't finished yet.

We still have a journey to go.

There is still a problem remaining.

Did you see it, friends?

We may have a wedding to go to but there's a shadow over it still.

Did you see it?

We've had the woman dealt with.

But there is still the beast (and the false prophet).

And there is still the one behind the two of them.

The serpent.

And there is still the judgment of the living and the dead.

