Revelation 18 chapter study - Grapevine 1/19/2020

The fall of the Harlot Babylon is connected to the plagues poured out from the 7 bowls of God’s wrath.

The seven last plagues which will finish God’s wrath are introduced chapter 15:1.

***Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete.***

In chapter 16 we see the finality of God’s wrath being poured out. Remember way back when the 7 seals were released that God’s wrath was limited to 1/4 (6:8). Then came the series of the 7 trumpet plagues of God’s wrath which affected even more than the previous seals. The trumpets affected 1/3 of the earth and mankind (8:7-10). And now the bowls are the 7 last plagues where God’s wrath is complete. It is done.

**Look at 15:8 *- temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.***

God is in the temple waiting for worshippers but no one is coming in until these last plagues are poured out.

Then skipping forward in the story notice what we see after the seventh and last bowl is poured out. 16:***17Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”***

There’s God in the temple proclaiming His wrath as being completed.

Back up one verse to 16:16 and notice the enemies of God are gathering at the battle of Armageddon where the scene of the end happens. And so the story of the seven bowl plagues is over and God has avenged the saints and establishing justice.

But we still have chapters 17-22. If God’s wrath is complete what is in the last 6 chapters of Revelation.

I think brother George Battey did a good job of explaining in these last chapters and I would recommend you listen to that sermon but I’ll summarize what is happening in these last chapters 17-22 quickly.

What happens next starting in chapter 17 is that God is telling the story of the bowl plagues 3 more times but from different perspectives.

It’s like we are watching a miniseries in our minds eye. Surely we’re all familiar with watching a miniseries where one episode is focused on certain characters and features what happened to them and then the next episode will come on next week where we see what happens to the other characters in the story.

Well, we’ve just seen the episode of the 7 bowls which includes the final war of Armageddon. God’s wrath is complete at Armageddon. But in chapters 17-18 we start a new episode in the miniseries. What happened to the other characters we’ve seen in the miniseries? What happened to the dragon, the beast, the false prophet and the harlot?

What is happening in this new episode which starts in chapter 17 is that we are still in the time frame of the 7 bowl judgments, the time of Armageddon, but we are looking at different details that we didn’t see in the previous episode of the 7 bowls.

This is recapitulation of the same stories but with added details.

This is not unlike reading the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and then John) or reading the book of Kings and then reading Chronicles in the OT. When we read those books we are reading about the same time frame, the same events if you will, but from different perspectives that aid in presenting the full picture of what is happening. This is what is going on in chapters 17-22 in Revelation. The wrath of God is complete in chapter 16 and then we read 3 more parts of the miniseries giving us more detail about that last plagues and the battle of Armageddon.

And we know this is a recapitulation of the previous story because of some connecting language within the story.

16:12- listen to the sixth bowl. ***Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.***

The whole world is gathered for THE battle of the great day. This is the last battle. Look at verse..

***16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.***

The deceiving of the nations is happening and the enemies of God are gathering together for The Great battle. Notice the Bed of the Euphrates is dried up to enable the armies to travel and gather together. Make a mental note of the gathering together of the enemy army. These are key connecting words that are contained also in the next three parts of the miniseries in ch 17-22.

Then, in 16:17-the complete wrath of God is being poured and Babylon the wicked spiritual city is finally destroyed.

So since Gods wrath is completely finished in chapter 16 what are we reading in 17 and 18?

When we come to chapter 17- 18 we are reading the story of Armageddon all over again for the first of 3 more retellings. And we see something new about the battle. A different perspective just like Mark had details which Matthew didn’t tell.

And the perspective in chapter 17-18 is this --- ***how did the final battle of Armageddon bring about the end of one of the leaders of the enemy army – Babylon the Harlot.***

Then in chapter 19:20 we see the second retelling about how the battle brought about the end of the beast and the false prophet.

And finally in chapter 20:10 we see the last synoptic miniseries detailing the fate of the dragon at Armageddon.

So in chapters 17-18 we are watching in our minds eye how God’s final wrath is affecting the wicked spiritual city which deceives the nations.

David Robinson introduced us to this enemy leader, the harlot who is riding on a scarlet beast and is drunk on the blood of the martyred saints in 17:3-6.

Notice in 17:13 - the beast and the harlot are of one mind in making war with the lamb. They have come together in an unholy alliance.

In chapter 18:21 we see a grueling details of what happens to this enemy of God’s who killed many of the martyrs.

A strong angel picks up an enormous millstone and with dramatic violence spikes it into the depths of the sea as a symbol of what is going to happen to the Harlot, wicked spiritual Babylon.

As we read these next verses about the outcome of Babylon being thrown down with violence notice the keyword “anymore” being used 6 times as a clue that this is the last war, the end of the deceiving the nations and of killing God’s people.

***21Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.”***

And so the Harlot is completely destroyed.

Notice chapter 19:1-9. After Armageddon and the destruction of the Harlot we see heaven breaking out in praise and then the marriage supper of the lamb and this is the end of this miniseries and the next starts up.

Let’s back up and cover some of the content of the judgement of the harlot in chapter 18. What we see is great mourning and funeral proceedings by the people who were deceived by the harlot and who were conformed to her image.

The mourners of the Harlot are of three groups. The first are the rich and powerful kings of the earth, then the merchants who profited by the wicked city and last the seamen or mariners who profited luxuriously. Sadly, included in these groups are unfaithful Christians who became conformed to the wicked lifestyle.

Also of note, as we read these passages we are seeing a contrast to the ceaseless praise of God and the Lamb in chapters 4-5 by the 4 living creatures, the elders, angels and hosts of heaven who ***worship them day and night without ceasing*** (4:8).

We are going to read the exact opposite in regard to this unholy leader, the Harlot. Instead of ceaseless praise we read about Babylon’s followers lamenting because she is destroyed so quickly, in “one hour.” Her destruction happens very fast. The counterfeit part of this unholy trinity is mentioned as being destroyed in “one hour” in verses 10,17,19. Three times.

With these thoughts in mind, let’s read the rest of the story in 18 and make some comments along the way.

***Verse 1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!***

This description has a background in the OT for how God judged the ancient nations including Babylon and made them wastelands for unclean animals. If you’re taking notes, the passages specifically are Isaiah 13:21-22 and 34:11-15. You’ll see similar language there.

***3For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.”***

This means she has led and deceived many people across the world to forsake God, become immoral and to be covetousness for material things (idolaters)

***4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.***

Again, if the plagues were completed in chapter 16 why are we reading about more? It’s a retelling. But going on… come out of her my people.

 ***For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’***

The command for Gods people to come out from her comes from the background passage in Jeremiah 51:6, 9, 45 where Gods people are told to come out of ancient Babylon.

***“Flee from the midst of Babylon;*** ***let everyone save his life!*** ***Be not cut off in her punishment,*** ***for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance,*** ***the repayment he is rendering her.***

***Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand,*** ***making all the earth drunken;*** ***the nations drank of her wine;*** ***therefore the nations went mad.*** ***Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken;*** ***wail for her! 45 “Go out of the midst of her, my people!*** ***Let everyone save his life*** ***from the fierce anger of the Lord!***

Spiritual Babylon is prideful and arrogant in her security. Another background verse for this is in Isaiah 47:5-8 where ancient Babylon boasted, ***“I am a queen lady forever and there is no one beside me. I am no widow.”***

***8 Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.***

Here is says in one day but next we read of the perception of her mourners the kings, merchants and seamen. Here are the funeral proceedings…

***9 “The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’*** ***“And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What is like this great city?’***

***“They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’***

So there we had the mourners who longed for the harlots things. And finally in verse 20 a command given to the martyred apostles and prophets..

***“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”***

Background passages for the list of luxuries are found in Ezekiel 26-27 where many of the same items are listed in a similar context of God’s judgement on wicked Tyre. Also mentioned there are the mourning of the merchants, kings and seamen.

So in Revelation the earth dwellers are mourning because they lost the treasures of their hearts. They were covetous and fixated on worldly possessions which the Lord says is equivalent to idolatry. They are mourning mostly because they are losing their own personal gain and not necessarily because of any patriotism toward their city.

And we’ve already read the end of the story in verses 21-24 about the mighty angel with the great millstone which made certain of the harlot’s destruction at Armageddon.

There are two women contrasted throughout revelation. The Harlot and the bride of Christ.

I believe this harlot, Babylon, symbolizes all corrupt economic and political aspects of civil government that lead people to commit immoral sins, remove God from everyday life, and deceive people in trusting their arrogant government. They also oppress the truth of the kingdom and will even kill the righteous.

So, in the first century the harlot is corrupt and oppressive Rome. But it not only represents Rome, it also represents corrupt economic and political governments throughout the Christian age who oppress the kingdom of God and His gospel.

I believe she is a timeless representation and not just isolated to representing Rome partly because of the fact that ancient Babylon, Tyre, and Nineveh, as well as unfaithful Israel and Sodom, are all used in ch.18 as prophetic forerunners of this Babylonian world system. I believe spiritual Babylon in these chapters is not one specific nation at a given point of time, but rather represents all forms of evil governments who legislate immorality and promote lust and idolatry in its various forms and who persecute the church all the way from the resurrection of Christ until His return.

In John's day, the Roman Empire represented this wicked system, for by his time Christians had been persecuted not only in Israel, but throughout the Roman Empire. Also the concluding passage states, ***all who have been slain on the earth points to a universal reference well beyond the Roman Empire and its time.*** Also in v9 other kings are influenced by the great city to persecute the church.

These governments look great outwardly. They look strong and are wealthy but they are proud. And they oppress God and His people. We are told to come out from these types of situations.

And the way in which we are to come out is not by physically removing ourselves from the land but by not becoming conformed to their deceptive influences. And this danger very real for us today and difficult for us to see sometimes.

The church in Laodicia in 3:17 is an early example of Christians being conformed to the culture around them and in danger of potential judgement.. notice how they viewed themselves, you say, ***“I am rich, and have become wealthy and have need of nothing***.” But Jesus said — ***you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.*** They didn’t even realize the state they were in. They compromised truth in order to live at peace with and ungodly generation. Think about the story of Lot and his family some of whom became conformed to that wicked society including his wife who longed for the luxury of the ungodly urban life.

The lesson for us is that we should pause and truly assess our patriotism for God’s kingdom. In America we have the temptation to get settled in and busy with keeping up with Jones and filling our days with activity and things so much so that we unknowingly become complacent in godly work and become a servant to our things. We can easily forget that we are pilgrims. God can see from our attendance and engagement in the things of God where our allegiance lies.

I’m thankful for living in America. We have freedoms other nations don’t have. But we live in under a governing structure that has legislated child murder. It’s a woman’s right. Abortion means nothing to most Americans, they have been deceived by Babylon. Humanism is a form of idolatry. There are laws promoting no fault divorce deceiving many from the godly standards of marriage. Pornography is sanctioned by the government who profits greatly from the wicked business which has destroyed countless lives. Government has removed anything godly in the public education system and instead indoctrinates children with humanism in the forms of evolution, gender identity and the reversal of godly roles for men and women. Legislation of the abomination of homosexual marriage and the beginnings to punish those who refuse to participate. They are on the brink of compelled speech legislation where you must call a confused person by their chosen pronouns in opposition to godly pronouns. Approved gender mutilation and hormone therapies and the list goes on. This is the government we live under.

So we should assess where our priorities and allegiances are. Do we entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life? Do we use what we are blessed with in moderation so as not to become distracted from the kingdoms work? How do we spend our money, our leisure time, what are we putting before our eyes. Are we watching ungodly television? Are we escaping into video games that offer an ungodly virtual reality. Or are we like David, a man after God’s own heart who said is Psalms 101:3- ***I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me.***

The message of this story is to be in the world but not of it.

G.K. Beale - To be "of" the world means that we have compromised our values to share in the world's present wealth and advantages, but at the cost of also inheriting a share in its coming judgment.

Christians are warned to consider and if finding ourselves compromised we are instructed to reverse course. We need to "come out" of Babylon increasingly so that we "will not participate in her sins and ... receive of her plagues" (18:4).

Here are some final questions to reflect on. Jesus had a lot to say about the Christian’s management of money. Are we familiar with those? Isaiah had a conversation with 2 eight year olds who told him you can love money and God at the same time. It was an opportunity to reinforce you that we cannot love money and love God at the same time. But this is the mind of at least 2 eight year olds when the topic was discussed. How can we keep ourselves against this kind of corruption entering our lives? Are you politically involved to what extent and how much time and effort are put into this? Are you a consumer or a producer in the church? Do you serve others or are we in the church for what we get out of it only?