

Series: The Sovereign Slaying of Sinful Systems (a study in Revelation 17-18)

Sermon Text: 17:1-6 Sinful Systems Subdued (See App for lesson, slides, and to ask questions)

Last time, Tim recapped 4 historical perspectives people have had about Revelation. He also asked, “Which view is the most difficult for you to consider, and why might that be?” During our 3-year study of Revelation, I’ve read opinions that made me laugh out loud and others that made me scratch my head like these viewpoints of *chapters 17-18* (Gregg, 399).

- **Preterist View:** Babylon could be Rome or Jerusalem. If the former, these chapters describe the downfall of the Roman Empire and especially Rome itself. If Babylon is Jerusalem, these visions depict it being burnt down and the mixed reactions of the wicked and the righteous.
- **Historicist View:** Babylon’s fall depicts a future overthrow of the papal system of religion and government. This is divergent reactions of the godly and the ungodly to this final vindication of true religion. The white horse rider represents the ongoing conquests of Christ through His Word, or else His continuing campaign of judgment upon other enemies.
- **Futurist View:** Babylon may represent Catholicism or an apostate religious entity forming under the Antichrist in the end. Alternatively, Babylon may be a city, either a restoration of the ancient Babylon or a revived Rome. In any case, this great enemy of truth and righteousness will be destroyed in the end of the Tribulation, to the chagrin of the wicked but the rejoicing of the righteous. Jesus visibly returns to earth in chapter 19, riding a white horse.
- **Idealist View:** Babylon represents the world system as the seducer of the godly. The angel frames its future destruction using the reality of its 1st century form, Rome. The ultimate judgment upon this harlot comes at Christ’s Second Coming, who is the white horse rider. Alternately, the rider may represent Christ’s more gradual conquests over the world system through the preaching of the gospel. (Symbolist, not spiritualist??)

While I share the early Reformers' theological critiques of Catholic tradition, we Protestants can also be prideful about our own interpretations. To me, it's deeply inconsistent to condemn the blind spots of another Christian tradition as we ignore our own biases and baggage which skew our biblical views. In Matthew 7, Jesus likened this to ignoring the log in our own eye as we swipe sawdust from another's eye! Rather than belaboring this point, just be sure to consider these related discussion questions:

1. "Should we view God's Word something to master and move on or to sit with our whole life and be mastered by it, and why?"
2. "Where have you stopped short or settled for safety and certainty in your faith with God, and where might God be inviting you to wrestle with life's mysteries and messiness?"
3. "How might we be tempted to weaponize our understanding of God's Word in ways that dominate, damage and dehumanize others, instead of leveraging it to love Him and others better?"

God's Word is challenging, especially the [Apocalyptic](#) parts. For example, we hear "apocalypse" and think "world-ending catastrophe", but the Greek word primarily means "to unveil or reveal." That's why **chapter 1** of English Bibles calls this "The Revelation (apocalypse) of Jesus Christ." While His name seems downplayed in all the dark judgments of **chapters 6-16**, apocalyptic literature in Scripture uses symbolic imagery to stretch our limited minds so we see all He's been up to. He is also represented by **angels** who spoke on His behalf! Rest assured, those yearning to hear more about Jesus will enjoy the ending chapters where evil is finally exposed via Babylon imagery and conquered by Jesus, the Lamb of God! And where the new creation is also unveiled via the Lamb's Bride, the New Jerusalem.

Yes, Revelation is filled with destructive imagery, but like a construction zone, it hints at what's to come...a new city representing a renewed creation via the slain Lamb's victory! Remember, it was that vision in **chapters 4-5** which set in motion the 3 judgment cycles in **chapters 6-16**, 2 partial (seals 1/4, trumpets 1/3) and 1 total (the bowls). Whether we see this book as depicting escalating evil or recurring cycles of evil, many can agree that: Revelation, like all of Scripture, unmask the systemic

rebellion we often go along with. It also gives us eyes to see creation being set back on course by heaven's kingdom coming down and embodied in Christ and His Church. Regardless, our brief look at the *6-verse* intro *to chapter 17* today will affirm this incredible...

BIG IDEA: The Resurrected Lamb is Subduing Seductive Systemic Rebellion.

Just to get our bearing, here's a map for the final 6 chapters:

- ❖ *Chapters 17-18* depict the fall of the old, broken system (a.k.a. *Babylon*).
- ❖ *Chapters 19-20* depict the demise of the devil behind it all.
- ❖ *Chapters 21-22* depict the reunification of God and creation (a.k.a. New Jerusalem).

Let's start by reading *verses 1-2: Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk."* The *angel's* identity confirms that *chapter 17* elaborates on the 7 bowl judgments, specifically the climax of *chapter 16*, where *God forces Babylon to drain the cup of His full-strength wrath* and a *loud voice from the throne declares, "It is done!"*, the exact phrase Jesus uttered on the cross. If intentional, this links the restorative victory of the cross with the finality of cosmic judgment--depicting how the bowls of God's patient justice are finally being poured out after filling up from the beginning (cf. Genesis 15:16, Romans 2, Galatians 4:4).

Let's keep reading in *verses 3-4: And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.* Yuk, right? But these terrible terms remind us of the *chapter 12* dragon (Satan) chasing a *woman* who seemed like a composite of God's people (e.g. Eve, Israel, Mary, the Church). This *angel* unmasks "*another woman*" of whom

verse 5 says: *on her forehead was written a name of mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations"* (cf. Isaiah 23, Jeremiah 51).

Her *name* already came up in the 7 Trumpet Judgments where an *angel said* in 14:8, *"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."* While that declares she is destined for destruction, note how believers are warned about her in *verses 6-7: And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. When I saw her, I marveled greatly. But the angel said to me, "Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.* Before rendering her less mysterious, the angel made 1 thing clear: this *"other woman"* (this system) is no good for the *"original woman"* (God's people). So, within the Revelation of Jesus is a "tale of 2 cities" (chart below) portrayed by 2 women (Babylon, the Great Prostitute and New Jerusalem, the Lamb's Bride). It begs us to answer this question: "Which woman (system) deserves your devotion, love, and allegiance?"

Feature	The Prostitute (Rev 17-18) (Babylon, Systemic Rebellion)	The Bride (Rev 12, 19, 21) (New Jerusalem, City of Peace)
Location	Found in Wilderness .	Found in Wilderness , then Heaven .
Clothing	Purple and scarlet (Man-made royalty)	Fine linen, bright and clean (Divine purity)
Decor	Covered in gold and jewels (External/Stolen)	Radiant with God's glory (Inherent/Internal)
The Cup	Holds a cup of abominations .	Drinks Cup of the Lamb (New Covenant)

Feature	The Prostitute (Rev 17-18) (Babylon, Systemic Rebellion)	The Bride (Rev 12, 19, 21) (New Jerusalem, City of Peace)
Outcome	Becomes a haunt for demons.	Becomes the dwelling of God.

While Babylon and Jerusalem were real cities, personifying them as *women* implies that life in cities (anywhere) is always a relationship with a system. Evil lures us into her sheets with a surface-level attraction--obscuring healthy (righteous) choices until we become joyless and lifeless. Defining Babylon is tricky, but not impossible if you know her biblical history: First, there were tower builders in Genesis 11 at a place called Babel. Next, the book of Daniel explains how God's people were taken into captivity by an empire called Babylon. Later, the author of 1 Peter 5 wrote from Rome but called it *Babylon*. And finally, *Revelation 17-18* unpacks the biblical mystery of *Babylon*. So, "What can be deduced about Babylon?"

- It's bigger than one nation, ruler, or moment in history.
- It's inspired by spiritual evil (cf. Genesis 3; Ephesians 2:2; 6:10-20).
- It's a transhistorical symbol for humanity organized apart from God.
- It's a system/culture of idolatry, exploitation, violence, arrogance, and seduction.

Scholars say that "*The biggest problem facing the 7 churches was Babylon. And the biggest problem we still face in our churches is Babylon...When we read Revelation well, we develop our ability to discern the presence of Babylon in our world and in our own churches, and then we learn to resist its creeping powers.*" (McKnight, 50). Recall those 7 churches in *Chapters 1-3* (chart below) which Jesus told to repent for trying to blend Christianity with contemporary culture. The Revelation of Jesus Christ contains the same message for us! *Verse 9* says godly *wisdom* helps us avoid the allure of *Babylon's* shallow beauty while a heavenly voice calls to us in *18:4* saying, "*Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in*

her sins, lest you share in her plagues.” It’s not that we’re to abandon society, but to resist participating in Babylon’s idolatry and injustice. Thus, it seems logical to end every lesson in **Revelation 17-18** with questions that reveal ways even the most faithful of us are unwittingly captivated by Babylon’s allure. To that end, I’ll ask: “Where in your life (e.g. habits, relationships, perspectives) might God be trying to draw you out of organized rebellion (done on purpose or otherwise) so you can partner with Him in restoration?” Review chapters 2-3 for some inspiration! As you ponder all this with God’s people, remember, next steps need not be taken alone-- Christ’s church can become your supportive family!

Church	Core Positive	Core Negative	Divine Diagnosis
Ephesus	Doctrinally Pure	Loveless	Busy but Cold
Smyrna	Materially Poor, Spiritually Rich	<i>None</i>	Faithfully Suffering
Pergamum	Courageous under Fire	Tolerated False Teachers	Compromised by Culture
Thyatira	Growing in Good Works	Tolerated Immorality	Morally and Spiritually Compromised
Sardis	Great Public Reputation	Spiritually Dead	A Living Corpse
Philadelphia	Kept the Word with Little Strength	<i>None</i>	Secure and Faithful
Laodicea	<i>None</i>	Lukewarm and Arrogant	Blind and Self- Deceived

Sunday to Monday Connection: This week in Revelation 17, we are not just seeing a story about destruction; it is the unveiling of Jesus Christ, the risen Lamb, who is tearing down every system opposed to His kingdom and preparing a renewed creation. Christ calls His church to faithful discernment, repentance, and wholehearted devotion as His Bride.

- **Question:** Where are you most tempted to compromise with the values of Babylon (e.g. success, control, comfort, approval) instead of living faithfully under the reign of Christ?
- **Next Step:** Prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one area where human priorities are shaping your heart more than the gospel. Confess it to Christ, bring it into your community of believers, and take one practical step of obedience that reflects loyalty to Jesus.
- **Note:** If you are not a Christ follower and would like to investigate further what all this might mean for you, please come talk with any of our leaders, or the person who brought you.

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. In what sense is Revelation negative and in what sense is it positive? Which way do you typically read this book, and why? Read [this article about negativity bias](#) and discuss how it factors into your reading of Scripture and relationships with God and others, plus how you could combat it.

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Context:** “In the previous chapter we considered the harlot of Babylon as an actor in the great cosmic drama. We now turn to this figure again, to reflect on the account of her judgment in Revelation 17–18. These two chapters, best understood as an expansion of the seventh bowl of judgment from chapter 16, are a two-part theological account of empire (principally chapter 17, lampooning it as a harlot) and its fate (principally chapter 18, taunting the demise of the harlot-empire and those who lament it). That fate is divine judgment and, therein, termination—unexpected and quick (18:8, 10, 17, 19). Much of what we find in chapters 17 and 18 has been anticipated by earlier chapters, but here it is presented in more graphic detail as the fall of Babylon (17:5; 18:2, 10, 21; cf. 14:8; 16:19), the “great city” (16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16–21). These chapters are deeply rooted in the prophetic critiques of the original Babylon and of Tyre (Isaiah 23–24, 27; Jeremiah 50–51; Ezekiel 26–28) for their idolatry, violence, and lavishness. To first-century Jewish and Christian ears, “Babylon” would have meant Rome, as we saw in the previous chapter.” (Gorman, 145)
- **Extension of the Bowls:** At the conclusion of the bowl judgments, Babylon the Great is split into three parts and is made to drink the full cup of God’s wrath (16:19). Now one of the seven angels from chapter 16 invites John to witness in greater detail the judgment God will bring on the harlot. As a result, the judgment of Babylon the Great in 17:1–19:5 should be seen as expanding the final bowl judgments of Revelation 16. In 17:1–6, John is first invited to witness the judgment on Babylon (17:1–2), before being given the vision itself (17:3–6), complete with a description of her immoral character and wicked agenda. In the rest of the chapter, the angel interprets the meaning of the vision (17:7–18). Duvall, 220.

- **The bowls now interpreted:** “Rev. 17:1–19:10 is a large interpretative snapshot of the sixth and seventh bowls, which have foretold the judgment of Babylon (which was first explicitly prophesied in 14:8). This is followed in 19:11–21 by an expanded description of the last battle, in which Christ triumphs over the forces of evil. Although only one verse in ch. 17 describes Babylon’s judgment (v. 16), the larger literary unit commencing at 17:1 is dominated by it. Much space is taken up with the beast in ch. 17 because the woman’s significance and power cannot be fully understood except in her relationship to the beast. Ch. 17 (in development of 16:12–13) emphasizes what leads up to the demise of Babylon, which becomes the full-blown focus in ch. 18...Though closely associated with the beast, the woman is not to be equated with the beast. That the woman rides the beast connotes her alliance with it. She represents the ungodly world as it works with the state socially, culturally, and economically to persecute Christians (17:6; 18:24; 19:2). They are also mutually involved in deception of ungodly multitudes throughout the earth (e.g., 14:8; 17:2, 8).” (Beale 353, 358)
- **Language of idolatry:** Professor Scott Duvall (p. 197) wrote: “The imagery of drinking the wine of another refers to participation in their lifestyle or destiny... (for example) to drink the cup that Jesus drinks in Mark 10:38–39 refers to sharing his suffering. As the great prostitute, Babylon seduces the world by...intoxicating it with idolatry and immorality (17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; cf. Jer. 51:7).” Professor Craig Keener (p. 371) wrote: “Biblical prophets often portrayed Israel as either an unfaithful prostitute or as a pure virgin or bride for God, so Revelation portrays unrepentant humanity as a prostitute (Rev. 17:1–5) and those faithful to Christ as his pure spouse (19:7; 21:2, 9). These 144,000 have refused to commit immorality with Babylon, the prostitute (cf. 18:3). Thus, the symbolism makes a strong point...believers cannot indulge in divided interests.”
- **Echoing Old Testament Prophets:** “The angel speaks to John in words taken from God’s judgment on historical Babylon in Jer. 51:13, ‘O you who dwell by many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come.’ Babylon’s ‘sitting’ on many waters speaks of her sovereignty over the nations, for ‘sitting’ in Revelation (3:21; 4:2, 4; 5:1; 14:14; 18:7, etc.) indicates sovereignty, whether used of God, Christ, the angels, or evil beings. 18:7 confirms this since there Babylon says, ‘I sit as a queen.’ At the least, the ‘sitting’ implies the woman’s alliance with the world and the beast... The economic interpretation of the nations’ intoxicating passion and the kings’ immoral passion for Babylon is clear from 18:3, 9–19, where the same phrases for immorality and intoxication of 17:2 are equated with terms for economic prosperity, and the nations’ loyalty to Babylon lies in her ability to provide economic prosperity for them (see also on 14:8). An economic interpretation of the verse is confirmed by the allusion to Isa. 23:17, where Tyre ‘will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.’ Tyre is called a harlot because she caused destruction and induced uncleanness among the nations by economically dominating them and influencing them by her idolatry. That idolatry is included together with an economic emphasis is clear from Isa.

23:18, where Tyre's illicit wages 'will be set apart to the Lord' in the future instead of to any other false object of dedication as formerly. That Tyre is in mind at least as an analogy to Babylon is clear from the repeated reference in Revelation 18 to the Ezekiel 26–28 pronouncement of Tyre's judgment and the specific allusion in v. 23 to Isa. 23:8 (see on 18:23). Therefore, Babylon is the prevailing economic-religious system in alliance with the state and its related authorities, as it exists in various forms throughout the ages." (Beale 353–354)

- **Symbolism:** "The great prostitute (a.k.a. Babylon) symbolizes a great center of pagan power and undoubtedly refers to Rome in the first century. She leads other nations and individual unbelievers (i.e., 'inhabitants of the earth') to join in her idolatrous and immoral ways (cf. Jer. 51:7). Her adulterous influence is highlighted by the sevenfold occurrence of Greek words with the porn-root throughout this chapter ('prostitute' in 17:1, 5, 15, 16; 'adulteries' or 'commit adultery' in 17:2 [2x], 4)...Although the 'wilderness' can serve as a positive symbol in Revelation (e.g., 12:6, 14), here it connotes a desolate setting for judgment (cf. Isa. 21:1–10). Symbols are flexible in apocalyptic literature, and while the prostitute sat on (epi) 'many waters' in 17:1, she sits on a beast in 17:3; yet both symbolize her evil partnerships. The beast first rose from the sea in 13:1 and represents political, military, and economic power used in the service of Satan to oppose God and his people. The beast is described as (1) 'scarlet' or red, linking it to the red dragon of 12:3, (2) covered with blasphemous names or claims to deity (13:1), and (3) having seven heads and ten horns, pointing to its worldwide power and authority (17:9–14; cf. 12:3)...Purple dyes were expensive and were usually reserved for royalty and the upper-class elite." (Duvall, 220–221)
- **Prostitution and marriage metaphors:** "In the end, Revelation is about God's desire to live among his people, the Creator with his creation. This divine desire reaches its full glory in the coming together of the Lamb and the bride. Throughout the Bible, the marriage metaphor with Israel as Yahweh's bride and the church as the bride of Christ reveals the depth and fullness of God's covenant love for his people. But when the people are unfaithful, the metaphor changes from the beauty of marital fidelity to the filthiness of adultery and prostitution (e.g., Hos. 2–3; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16). If the people of God can play the harlot, how much more can those who vehemently and repeatedly curse God, those who never took covenant vows to begin with? The images of prostitution and marital faithfulness stand side by side in Revelation 17–18 as one of the most dramatic spiritual contrasts in the Bible." Duvall, 222–223.
- **Heads and horns:** "John's first clue is straightforward: 'The seven heads are seven hills, on which the woman sits.' No problem: there really are seven hills in Rome (I've been up them), and everybody in the ancient world who knew anything about Rome knew that this was so. But the seven kings, broken up into five who have come and gone, one who is there, another who is about to arrive but only for a short time, and another who is an eighth and yet one of the five ... who are they? From one point of view we might be able to identify

them, though it would mean a much earlier date for the book than most people now reckon. If we start a list of Roman emperors with Augustus, we then add Tiberius, Gaius, Claudius and Nero, to make five. That takes us up to Nero's death in AD 68—and remember that many people around the empire believed either that Nero didn't really die or that he did die but would come to life again and lead an army against Rome, perhaps from Parthia, in order to take back his throne. After Nero came Galba, who lasted into 69 but not for long, and then Otho, who snatched the throne but again didn't keep it for long. That makes seven, and it is just possible that this is the moment when John is writing, speaking about Otho as the seventh, short-lived emperor, who is about to be ousted by the returning Nero, the monster who was and is not and is to come: the eighth, though one of the seven. If your head is spinning at this point, it may not be because you are slow on the uptake about either ancient history or first-century symbolic writing, but because John wasn't expecting you to make that sort of identification. The numbers, too, may well be symbolic. The seven kings stand for the apparent perfection of the monstrous kingdom, with the eighth (though one of the seven) a king who will appear to take the kingdom forward into a new day, but who will instead lead it to its destruction. In other words, don't try to match up the emperors precisely. What matters is that the monster's kingdom looks perfect and impregnable, but forces from within its own ranks will destroy it. But then there come ten more kings. This is another clue to indicate that John is not expecting us to work our way through lists of emperors. However late we date Revelation, it cannot be as late as the end of the second century, which is what we would have to say if we were to add another ten emperors to the seven (or eight) already listed. It is far more likely that the 'ten kings' who are part of the monstrous system, and who eventually round on the whore herself and destroy her, are different ruling elites within the larger Roman empire—kings and princes from the far-flung corners of the Western world—who will finally tire of Mistress Rome herself, and will use the bestial, monstrous power of Rome's own empire to attack the city that has for so long scooped up and sucked in all the wealth and glory that was going.” (Wright, 154-156)

- **Name on forehead:** “Reveals one's true character and allegiance, both for those allied with the beast (13:16; 14:9; 17:5; 20:4) and for those faithful to God (7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Babylon's name is a “‘mystery,’ meaning not only that end-time events once hidden are now being revealed but, as Beale suggests, they will unfold in an unexpected or ironic way. Babylon the Great is also described as the ‘mother of all prostitutes,’ meaning that she aggressively promotes her vice and corruption so that her idolatrous and immoral lineage is reproduced throughout the world.” (Duvall, 222)
- **Prophecy:** It's correct to say Revelation contains prophecy, but wrong to think it's always about the future because thinking like that causes us to miss the message for us! Properly defined, biblical prophecy is a divine message delivered by humans--sometimes it predicts future events but mostly it conveys a warning or some other important teaching. The key feature of all genuine prophecy is its divine source: a true prophecy never originates with

humans but always with God, which is why texts like 1 Corinthians 14, 1 Thessalonians 5, and 1-3 John make it the church's job to test and verify it together. *Verses 1-2*, therefore, describe the way sin works in real life, and it's basically what the Prophet told Israel about *kings* in 1 Samuel 8:10-18: They'll trade integrity and the welfare of their people for the empty promises of empire (e.g. fame, fortune, luxury, entertainment, power, endless consumption). As *kings* make back-door business deals, their subjects become *drunk* (intoxicated by) the wine of that system (e.g. nationalism, tribalism, racism, consumerism). Essentially, this is about a loss of reason or addition to satanically inspired systems. We often think that biblical "*prophecy*" is only about "*the distant future*" but prophets just relayed whatever God told them which was often about their current conditions. Case in point, prophecies in Revelation had immediate implications for the 1st century church. Investigating what those were for them reveals common threads that help us apply their lessons to our lives.

- **Vivid Language:** "Remember when the Old Testament prophet Nahum called the leaders of the oppressing cities grubs? Well, here John one-ups Nahum. He calls Babylon 'the great prostitute,' a common insult used by the prophets to imply immorality, idolatry, and infidelity (Hos 1-3; Nah 3:4; Isa 23:16-17), yet still a harsh word in his day. John's concern is not prostitution, however. The woman appears rather ghastly: she's in the wilderness, sitting on a bloodshed evoking scarlet beast (or wild thing) that is 'covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns' (Rev 17:3). To picture this, imagine her on a wild beast with what looks like four unicorn heads! If you are familiar with Maurice Sendak's famous book *Where the Wild Things Are* or some of the ghastly images of Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, you might begin to comprehend John's image here. Those who read this as literal, physical beings that will be alive at some future time in history are making a colossal mistake. John here is not offering us prediction, but revelation, making an appeal through our perception and engaging our imagination. And John's insulting descriptions continue. Our unicorn riding woman is dressed up in the clothes and jewelry of opulence, royalty, status, and power. She has a big cup in her hand 'filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries' (Rev 17:4). And she gets a name from John, a secret (or a 'mystery') now disclosed (17:5): **BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH**. John is telling us that Babylon spawns immoralities and idolatries. And now we begin to see the significance of Babylon for reading Revelation. This prostitute was intoxicated, not with alcohol, but the blood of the faithful witnesses to Jesus. Her idea of a fun night on the town was finding some Jesus followers and draining their blood into a bowl to drink and feed her raging lust for power. Babylon sits on the wild thing, and the wild thing has seven heads, which are 'seven hills' (it would have been clear what this meant, since Rome is the city of seven hills) and 'seven kings,' five of whom are dead, one is on a throne, and one not yet enthroned. The wild thing is, thus, the eighth king. Ah, the plot thickens. Seven hills, seven kings plus one. The ten horns

are ten kings who will be short-reign kings with the wild thing, and their entire mission is to accumulate power and glory for the wild thing. The centralizing of all this power has one purpose: to fight the Lamb. The Lamb will win, of course, and John tells us this in 17:14 to calm down our excitations. Yet Babylon rules over John's most universe-encompassing expression: over 'peoples, multitudes, nations and languages' (17:15). Still, despite her great power and authority, Babylon begins to experience cracks in her governing system. Dissension breaks out. The wild thing and its kings 'will hate' Babylon, they will strip her and eat her and 'burn her with fire' (17:16). This is classic language found in Jewish imaginative literature ('apocalypses') used to speak about the destruction of cities (like Babylon). John ups and tells us what he means: 'The woman... is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth' (17:18, italics added). So, we now have everything in this vision identified: the woman is Babylon, the woman is sitting on the wild thing, the wild thing operates on seven hills with seven kings (make that ten more kings), and the wild thing is a king too! The wild thing hates the Lamb, but the Lamb will be victorious, and Babylon, 'the great city,' will burn to the ground. It would have taken very little imagination in John's day to recognize that this so-called great city is Rome, but it may shock today's reader to know that this is the most repugnant, hostile portrait of the 'eternal city' in the ancient world. What Rome had done to other nations, also depicted as women at times, would be done to her. We know that this understanding of Rome was commonly used by others in the early church as well." (McKnight, 41-43)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

- [5 Strategies for Reading Revelation](#) from the Bible Project (the first 17 minutes is GOLD!)
- [Heaven and Earth Theme](#) from the Bible Project
- [Other super helpful Revelation summaries](#) from the Bible Project
- [How Revelation mimics ancient Olympic games](#) by Marty Solomon

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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