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REVELATION 19: 1 – 10

THE DAY OF BABYLON'S FALL IS THE DAY OF GOD'S VICTORY

When we looked at Revelation 18, we noticed that we were still in the midst of the darkest and most gloomy part of John's visions in the Book of Revelation.

But the tone of the next passage, Rev.19: 1–10, is remarkably different. It is much more joyful, much happier. It leads to a wedding, and to the distribution of wedding invitations. Those are wonderful events. There is also loud singing of massive choirs, all to the praise and glory of God Almighty.

However, we are still dealing with the fall of Babylon, the destruction of the great prostitute.

The difference is that in Rev. 18 the fall of Babylon was seen from an earthly point of view. We heard weeping and mournful cries on the earth.

But in this passage we look at this event from above. And now we learn what the effect of all this is on those who belong to God, the followers of Jesus Christ and the angels in heaven.

When the news of Babylon's fall reaches heaven, we do not hear a lament (as in Rev. 18), but we hear an outburst of praise, sung by heavenly choirs.

We witness a heavenly liturgy to celebrate God's victory over the prostitute Babylon. There is tremendous joy, because Babylon's fall clears the way for the exciting new beginning on that same day, the day of God's victory.

THE CELEBRATION BEGINS

You may remember what we listened to in Rev. 18; how we heard all the weeping and lamenting that was going on in response to the horrible destruction of Babylon.

But then, right in the midst of all that was going on, we heard, unexpectedly, God's voice calling for another song. *Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints, apostles and prophets.* He called for a song of praise and joy! That was in Rev. 18:20.

Well, here it is – in the first part of Rev. 19. We are still looking at the impact of what happens to Babylon, the great prostitute, on the day of God's Final Judgment. Here the apostle John hears the mighty sounds of the heavenly liturgy of praise and worship in response to Babylon's fall, praise and worship to glorify God on the day of his victory. As it turns out, the day of Babylon's disastrous fall is just that, it is the day of God's victory over his enemies.

That is why on this same day the grand celebration begins! *Rejoice over her, O heaven!*

In this section of John's vision about Babylon's fall there is not much to see. John hears more than he sees. And, as we have noticed before, what we hear in Revelation gives us often the right view, the proper interpretation of what we have seen.

In this passage we hear three choirs singing. The glorious tone of what they sing is set by the four-fold use of the word *Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!* There are differences, of course, but this verbal thread ties these songs and choruses together. It makes for one, unified, joyful response to God's actions when the seven bowls of God's wrath were poured out (Rev. 16), leading to his Last Judgment and Babylon's destruction.

These three heavenly choirs form a stark and striking contrast with the other three choirs we have heard in Rev.18, the groups that were so loudly lamenting in v. 9–19: “alas.... alas.... alas....!” Here is the opposite.

We are familiar with the word “Hallelujah” in the Old Testament as the call to each and every one, to all of God’s people, to praise and worship the holy and almighty God. Time and again we hear it in the Psalms. And it could often be heard in Jerusalem, as the call to worship coming from the temple.

Now we hear it from heaven and it is unique. In all of the New Testament the word “Hallelujah” only occurs here, in these songs in Rev. 19. It is a special glimpse of a powerful fragment of heavenly worship. It is different from the fragments we heard in Revelation 4, 5, 7, 11, and 15. This one tells us how close we have come to the glory of heaven on the Day of God’s judgement.

The first thing that John hears is what sounds like the loud roar of a large crowd, and it comes from heaven. A great multitude of voices is shouting in unison, *Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.*

We do not get any specifics to help us identify these voices, other than that John hears them shouting *in heaven*. This makes us think it is most likely an enormous choir of angels. We have a precedent of this in 5:11, where John hears the loud song of many angels, *numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand*. It is just huge, and John hears the exuberant joy of this “Hallelujah-chorus” reverberate throughout the heavenly realm.

What’s the reason for this excitement? They are full of praise for, in the fall of Babylon, the destruction of the antichristian culture of the world without God, they recognize God’s salvation. They recognize God’s determination to rescue his creation from perishing. They recognize God’s commitment to recover the world from the power of Satan. They recognize how God’s deep love delivers his people from the deadly influence of the great prostitute. They recognize how he leads his people in a new exodus, through many dark dangers, to the new Promised Land.

They are full of praise, because they see in all this, the evidence of God’s power and the manifestation of his glory. Indeed, heaven rejoices in Babylon’s fall, for in this fall our God shows that he is a reliable God, a God who

is true to his word, a God who is just in his judgments. This is our God. You can trust him. You can rely on him. Everyone can on the Day of Judgment.

Yes, he punishes sin and evil. But in doing so he does what he says. He does what he has always said as the God of the covenant, in his promises and in his threats. There is nothing unpredictable here. Your God is absolutely true and fully just, you can hold him to his Word.

The angelic choir also gives evidence of God's true justice. *He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality.* We do not have to elaborate on this again. In Rev. 18 we have already witnessed Babylon's death notice and burial, as well as the lament of her lovers and friends.

She deserves it, because of her corruptive influence. With false religious ideas and antichristian philosophies, she has led many people away from God, into the darkness. With the temptations of a secular, materialistic, hedonistic, and immoral lifestyle she has made the world a filthy, polluted place to live.

God's justice also holds her accountable for the death of many of his servants. *He has avenged their blood on her*, it says. By stimulating and promoting a hostile attitude towards Christians in the culture without God, the prostitute has orchestrated their persecution. But their God, our God, is a just God, who responds to the urgent plea of his murdered children, *the souls under the altar, who call out "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you avenge our blood?"* (Rev. 6:10).

Wickedness is destroyed so that a just world can be re-established. It is all part of God's plan of redemption, and it gets the multitude of angels in heaven really excited.

Once more they cried out: Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever. Babylon's destruction is final and complete. All opposition against God's salvation has been crushed forever. The picture of smoke rising up alludes to what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:23–29). It indicates how intense, how radical this punishment is. God's righteousness guarantees that Babylon will never raise its ugly head again to destroy God's work.

Then John hears other voices that echo the *Hallelujahs* of the angels. This is a much smaller choir, the *twenty-four elders and the four living creatures*... We have met them for the first time in Rev. 4 and 5 as the most prominent throne-attendants of the Holy God. They have witnessed how Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was given the scroll with the outline of God's plan of salvation. And they have witnessed everything that happened when this Lamb opened the seals of this scroll.

Here they appear for the last time in Revelation. It is the moment of the grand finale that wraps up the unfolding of the whole content of the scroll. When they see the victory of God Almighty they fall down in deep awe. They worship God and confirm the angels' reason for celebration with just two words: *Amen! Hallelujah!*

Then a third choir joins in. It is the response to a call from heaven, from the throne. John hears an unidentified voice (v.5). There has been some speculation as to who is calling. One of the elders? One of the living creatures? An angel? We do not know. However, what he is saying comes with the authority of God's will.

Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.

The effect is just explosive! This call triggers a massive outburst of praise. A chorus of thunderous 'Hallelujahs' fills the universe.

The singing of this crowd is more powerful than anything John has heard before. It drowns out everything else. The deafening sound is so loud and overwhelming, that the apostle needs three similes in an attempt to capture what he hears: (1) it seemed to be a great multitude, (2) it was like the roar of pounding waves or a mighty waterfall, and (3) it was like booming sound of mighty peals of thunder.

And all these things at the same time. Incredible!

Who are those singers? And where are they? It is not mentioned. But one thing is clear, this crowd is larger and louder than the first one. "God's servants, who fear him" (v.5) often refers to followers of Christ. But then, angels are also called 'servants'. In other words, without getting into specifics, on the last day of our history the call is issued from God's throne for everyone,

everywhere, to let the celebration of God's glorious victory begin, and to fill earth and heaven with festive praise and worship.

And all who belong to God and to Jesus Christ will be involved, both small and great, young and old, rich and poor, important and insignificant, men, women and children, whatever your rank or position is, whoever you are, come on! Join in!

Hallelujah! For the Lord, our God the Almighty reigns. Praise and glory to God Almighty. He reigns with power and majesty. God's triumph is complete. Recognize Babylon's destruction as manifestation that God's royal power is supreme and that his rule controls all things.

Are you looking forward to joining this choir? Then you better start practicing today. Sure, it is a vision, a prophetic picture. We still live in Babylon and the Day of God's final victory is not here yet. But the glorified Christ is coming. And so is God's triumph over all his enemies. It is irreversible and inevitable.

Let this trigger in us, today already, the beginning of our joyful praise, worship and celebration.

THE WEDDING IS COMING

That God's judgments are true and just is indeed a good reason to fill the universe with resounding *Hallelujahs* on the day of God's glorious victory, and to celebrate the salvation, glory, and power of God.

But there is more to celebrate. The destruction of the great prostitute, the day of Babylon's fall, signals that the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb Jesus Christ. And therefore, the countless voices of this mass-choir continue. They stir each other up and encourage each other. *Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, our Lord God Almighty, who won the victory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready.*

The metaphor of 'the wedding' pictures an image of joy. A wedding is an occasion to celebrate a happy new beginning. It is an event that is filled with hope and high and exciting expectations.

To really appreciate the metaphor, it is helpful to know a bit about wedding ceremonies in those days. From the day of the betrothal, which is sort of like our 'engagement', bridegroom and bride were legally bound to each other by the pledge of marriage, made in the presence of witnesses.

Between that day and the day of the actual wedding both partners were busy preparing for the big day. For the groom this included also paying the dowry, so that on the wedding day he could 'claim' his bride. The festivities to seal the commitment would last for at least a week, with the wedding banquet as the highlight.

The metaphor is well-known throughout the Bible. In both the Old and New Testament, scripture often compares the love-relationship between a bride and a bridegroom to the relationship between God and his people.

In the Old Testament many of the prophets use this image. They employ the language of love to describe the relationship between the LORD and Israel. This includes the negative impact on the relationship when Israel walks away from the LORD to serve other gods. The prophets describe this in terms of sexual immorality or adultery.

But then, when the people of God repent and return to the Lord, these same prophets express God's deep and intense longing to restore the relationship with the people of his love (Isaiah 54; Hosea 2).

Throughout the entire Old Testament all these metaphoric references to the relationship between the LORD and Israel announce the messianic wedding that is coming. They prophesy the marriage feast of the Lamb Jesus Christ.

But it is not only the Old Testament. In the New Testament the apostle Paul talks about the human marriage relationship here on earth as a symbolic reflection of the glory and the beauty of the relationship between Christ and his church (Ephesians 5:22-33).

And it is this relationship that, on the day of God's final victory, will culminate into the marvellous wedding feast of the Lamb, Jesus Christ glorified,

and his bride, the church that has remained faithful to the testimony of Jesus Christ, her bridegroom.

This bridegroom loved his bride so much, that he paid the ultimate price for his bride; he gave his life for her. He took on flesh and blood and died on the cross. That is how he paid his 'dowry', so to speak. He bought her with his precious blood. And now it is our only comfort to belong to him with body and soul, both in life and in death.

It is a lovely metaphor, this wedding image in Revelation 19. It expresses the intimacy, the love and joy between Christ and his people, and it anticipates the glorious picture of Revelation 21.

At the same time, it is also a confrontational image. This wedding on the one hand, and the immoral affair with the prostitute on the other hand, emphasize again the two choices we all have to make in our lives: you can either follow the Lamb Jesus Christ or you can choose to follow Babylon the prostitute. And remember, both choices have far reaching consequences, eternal consequences.

As church of Jesus Christ you must realize this. It says here that *the Bride of the Lamb has made herself ready*. It means that she is preparing her wedding dress: *fine linen, bright and pure*. The bride's clothing contrasts with the prostitute's outfit. Oh, this prostitute is also dressed in expensive fine linen (Rev. 18:16), but hers is not "bright and pure". It comes with dark purple and scarlet. The purity of the church exposes the impurity of the world.

But hang on, how "pure" is this bride actually, this church of sinners? Listen carefully: yes, she has made herself ready. At the same time, her wedding dress is a gift, a gift of love. *It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure*. This wedding dress does not honour the one who wears it but honours the One who gives it.

This fine and pure linen the bride of Christ is wearing at the wedding is explained as a symbol. It stands for the spiritual and moral purity of God's people, the *righteous deeds of the saints*, the believers. It symbolizes your holiness.

The entire time between Jesus' ascension and his return is a time of preparation for the church, a time of getting ready for the close communion with Jesus that is coming.

But how do you do that?

Well, you have to dress yourself with "righteous deeds". Every day you have to distinguish yourself from the world by living a holy life, in persistent, thankful obedience to God. You must consistently refuse to compromise with Babylon's values and beliefs, the culture without God. It is the kind of language Paul uses in Colossians 3, *Put on your new self. Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. And above all these put on love.*

At the same time, such 'righteous deeds' are not the successful result of our own pious efforts. In the church we continue to struggle with (sometimes terrible) sins. Remember, the 'fine linen' was granted to the bride. So how can we, as God's church, living in the midst of the Babylonian temptations, maintain our purity? Only when we are empowered by God's grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Then we learn to do *the good works, which God prepared for us to do* (Ephesians 2:10).

And then, at the end, the bridegroom, accompanied by his glorious angels (Matthew 25:31), will come to take his bride and bring her home. And the feast will last, not for a week, but forever. Then the purpose of all that the bridegroom has done and is doing for his bride will have been accomplished, the lovely intimacy, the everlasting fellowship, the blessed communion between the Redeemer and the redeemed, the final fulfilment of all the promises of the gospel. And we shall be with him for ever and ever.

THE INVITATIONS ARE OUT

This marvellous perspective as the result of God's victory is so important that we must remember it, all the time. We can so easily be distracted by all the things that keep us busy here. Different experiences ask our attention every day. Those are not necessarily bad things, of course. But they can all become obstacles that make us forget the big picture and the grand future in Jesus Christ.

But we simply cannot afford to forget it.

That is why the angel who is talking to John since Rev. 17:1 instructs him to write down this congratulatory note: *Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb*. Here you have it, black on white! A card on your fridge. A sticky note on your mirror. The screen saver on your computer: ‘Save The Date’.

No, we do not have a date, but the wedding festivities, the abundant wedding banquet for the Lamb Jesus Christ and his church are coming. In v.7 it says that the marriage *has* come, and that the bride *has* made herself ready. This is again the strongly prophetic wording to emphasize how sure, how certain it is that it is coming. Do not doubt it for one second. That is why we hear today already, “Congratulations! Happy are you when you live in this dark world with this wedding invitation in your pocket”.

We do not get a description of the menu for this supper. We could think of Isaiah 25:6 – *rich food... aged wine... the best of meats and the finest of wines*. Are we to take this literally? Who knows? But it does at least reflect the perfect, joy-filled communion between Jesus Christ and his church in the eternal kingdom of his glory.

It is coming. The invitations are out. Today already! Did you get one? Attendance at this wedding celebration on the great day of God’s victory is by invitation only.

No, that does not mean that it is exclusively restricted to a small elite of spiritual celebrities. On the contrary, the doors of the banquet hall are wide open for all who hold on to the testimony of Jesus, all his faithful and loyal followers.

That is why this is also the message of the church for everyone in this world. “Would you like an invitation for this fantastic wedding supper? Repent from your sin. Believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour. Trust God’s promises in his Word. Love him. Dedicate yourself to following him. And by God’s grace it is all yours.”

But that is the choice you must make. If not, you will end up at another feast. This terrific meal stands in stark contrast to the other supper God is organizing, mentioned in the second part of Rev.19: 17–18. That is going to

be a horrific meal, when the wild beasts and birds gorge on the corpses of the wicked (v.21). So, yes, everyone will be part of one or the other feast. The question is, will you eat or will you be eaten?

But you, with your invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb Jesus Christ: Congratulations! And do not lose it. Hang on to it.

How do you do that? Hold to the testimony of Jesus given to you in God's Word. Let that testimony control and govern your lifestyle choices. Then you also know how to prepare yourself for the festivities that are coming. Do not try to get to the wedding banquet without wearing wedding clothes, like the man in Jesus' parable (Matthew 22:1–14). He found out that trying to get there unprepared was not a good idea. So, get ready. Live for God. Live by his grace and forgiveness. Live in love and thankfulness.

Never question the reliability of your invitation. Satan loves to help you do that; "What makes you think that you are invited? Come on, you, with your sins and many failures, with your dark thoughts and whatever else is wrong with you – really?" Those are the thoughts he will try to put in your mind. Do not believe him.

John was told to write it down. But just in case you might think, "Oh, well, that's just John", the angel adds, *these are the true words of God*. It is not junk-mail. It is not SPAM. It is real. It is genuine. It is trustworthy.

Is it not amazing? No one less than God Almighty himself guarantees your invitation. So carry it on your heart and come to the wedding. Do not hesitate.

John is so overwhelmed and excited, that he begins to worship the angel. We do not know why he did that, but he is quickly corrected. And then it becomes a teaching moment for all of us: *Worship God alone*. Always remember, God alone is worthy of all praise, honour and worship. He alone has issued the invitations for the Lamb's wedding banquet, to celebrate his victory.

And therefore, on your way to the wedding of the Lamb, echo in your own daily life the heavenly *Hallelujahs* to the glory of God.

And when the doors of the banquet hall swing open and you will be ushered into the New Jerusalem to celebrate the love and grace of our God and the living communion with Jesus Christ that will last forever... *we will dance on the streets that are golden, the glorious bride and the great Son of man. From every tongue, and tribe and nation we will join in the song of the Lamb.*

How do these references help you to understand the symbolism of the use of this name in Revelation 17?

2. In this chapter Babylon is seen as the influential antichristian culture that lures people away from God and from Jesus Christ by controlling their moral choices. Discuss examples of how today's culture will try to do this.
3. Some see the woman or Babylon as a religious power, the apostate church that persecutes (or supports persecution of) the faithful church. There is an element of truth in this. Why?
4. What does it mean when this chapter wants us to remember that "little Babylons" operate also in our own heart?

Chapter 26 – Revelation 18

1. In v.4 the voice from heaven urgently calls the believers: *Come out of Babylon, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues*. What does this mean for Christian believers today, and how do you put this into practice?
2. Someone summarized the intention of v.4 in this way: "The church is in the world, but the world must never be in the church." Explain this statement.
3. How does Rev.18, so full of wrath, revenge, and destruction fit with the Christian message of love and forgiveness? How does v.20 fit here? Does it mean that Christians are called to malicious pleasure at the misfortunes of unbelievers?
4. Read Ezekiel 27 and 28. In Ezekiel's time Tyre was a wealthy and powerful city that was hostile towards Israel. What are aspects of the lament and prophecy Tyre that come back in Rev.18?

Chapter 27 – Revelation 19:1-10

1. Would those who live in heavenly glory with Christ be aware of the terrible fate of the wicked? And if that is the case, how can they rejoice when they see the horrors of God's judgments (v.3 and Rev. 18:20)? What is the key expression in this connection (v.2)?
2. We can have a hard time with the idea that heaven rejoices when God's wrath destroys the world. What does that tell us about our-

selves and about our perception of the biblical testimony to the character of God?

3. According to v.8 the Bride's wedding dress is made of 'fine linen', described as 'the righteous deeds of the saints'. At the same time it says that this dress is given to her. How does this help you understand what Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13?
4. What difference does it make for your daily life if you either do, or do not believe in heaven or in a life after this earthly life?

Chapter 28 – Revelation 19:11-21

1. The Rider on the white horse is Christ and he is called "the Word of God". How does this help you to understand John 1:1-5 and 14?
2. Christ, the rider on the white horse, is called "The Word of God" and has a sharp sword coming out of his mouth. How does Hebrews 4:12 help you to understand what this part of the vision tells us about how Christ operates?
3. We like to stress how important it is to have a personal relationship with Jesus, who is full of compassion. We teach our children to love Jesus, because he loves them. We sing 'what a friend we have in Jesus'. Here we meet Jesus as a fierce warrior in a robe, stained with the blood of his enemies, master of the horrifying scene in v.21. What does that do to your relationship with him?
4. In Rev. 19 and 20 we read four times about "the lake of fire" (and sulphur). What is this lake of fire? Should we think of it as a literal fire? What are other images that the Bible uses to describe this place?

Chapter 29 – Revelation 20:1-10

1. Few parts of Scripture have been so hotly debated as what we read in Rev. 20 about the 1000 years that Satan is bound and that Christ reigns, joined by the souls of believers who have died. Many evangelical Christians in North America hold to the premillennial or postmillennial view of these events. Explain these views and discuss what the implications are for our expectations of the end time?