

Revelation 17 – Don't be Seduced!

Who or what might people describe as “the face of evil” in our society?

In Revelation 1-16 we see what must happen now that Jesus has died and risen to rule – the end will come when God destroys all evil and finally establishes his promised kingdom. The message is consistent – as we Christians bear witness to Jesus, we can expect suffering and persecution. This calls for faithfulness and patient endurance. However, for those who “overcome” through trust in Jesus, the future is joy and celebration in God's new world.

In the final chapters (Revelation 17-22) these same realities are presented in two visions of two women, who are also two cities...

17:1-19:10 In the desert The great prostitute Babylon Humanity without God

19:11-21:8 From Babylon to Jerusalem – in seven scenes

21:9-22:6 On a mountain The bride of Christ Jerusalem The People of God

1. In Revelation 17:1-6 we see “the great prostitute”. What is attractive about this woman? What is ugly and/or threatening? What influence has she had over the kings and general inhabitants of the earth?
2. The prostitute is also called “Babylon” – which in the Bible became a symbol of godless human arrogance (See Genesis 11:1-9, Daniel 4:30, Isaiah 14:12-17). It stands for human ‘civilisation’ that seeks to live independent from God, arrogantly pursuing the progress, power, and wealth of this world.
 - a. To what extent does this fit with the description of the woman in verses 1-6?
 - b. To what extent does our society reflect the characteristics of Babylon? How/where do we see it?
 - c. The woman rides on a beast, which is explained (at least to some extent!) in verses 7-15. What do we learn about the character, links and purpose of the beast? (Optional – do you think this is the same beast as in 13:1-10 which seems to stand for political power used by Satan in his battle against God and his people?)
 - d. The great prostitute sits on (rules?) many waters (v 1). Who/what are the many waters? (v 15)
 - e. According to verses 16-18 what is the ultimate fate of the prostitute? How will this come about? Who is ultimately in control of the woman and the beast?
3. How does this passage help us to understand our society and its arrogant sidelining and rejection of God? What warning(s) does this passage have for Christians living in the Sutherland Shire? Where is the ‘face of evil’ for us?
4. What encouragement does this passage give to faithful Christians?

Revelation 18:1-19:10 – The Doomed City

Through history many great civilisations, empires or systems seemed indestructible yet have fallen (sometimes suddenly). Spend a few minutes trying to name some of these - from history and from relatively recent times?

As we saw last week, in the Bible “Babylon” is the classic example of a great empire city that fell suddenly under the judgment of God. Arrogant in power and wealth, godless and corrupt Babylon opposed God’s people. Her fate is announced in passages like Jeremiah 50 & 51 (see esp 50:1-3 & 51:6-8). This is the background to Revelation 18.

Read the passage section by section and try to summarize the content of each...

18:1-3 Announcement

18:4-5 Implication for God’s People

18:5-8 Call for & promise of judgement

18:9-19 Three laments

v 9-10 Kings

v 11-17a Merchants

v 17b-19 Sea Captains

18:20 Call to Rejoice

18:21-24 The end of Babylon

19:1-9 The Hallelujah Chorus!

The physical Babylon fell 500 years before Revelation was written – yet the voice from heaven calls on God’s people to come out of her (now), and chapter 19 seems to speak of her ultimate destruction in the future. This is a warning not to try and identify ‘Babylon’ with any one historical city/empire/time, but with any and every godless city/empire/time that has been or will be destroyed.

1. What do we learn from chapter 18 about the character of Babylon? In what ways is our own society similar or different?
2. Why will Babylon be destroyed?
3. Who mourns over Babylon’s destruction? Why do they mourn? What was their mistake?
4. Who celebrates Babylon’s Destruction? Why? To what extent do you think you would share in this rejoicing?
5. In verse 4 God’s people are called to come out of Babylon, lest we share in her sins and her judgement. What might it mean for us to “come out of her”? In what specific areas does this have particular and/or current application for you?
6. Do you think our wealthy, ‘advanced’ and ‘cultured’ western civilisation will last forever? If not, what difference should this make to us?
7. How can we avoid having our hearts set on Babylon and what she has to offer? How can we help our children to “come out of her”?

Revelation 19:11-20:8 – From Here to Eternity

Many people find it hard to accept the Bible’s teaching that there are two eternal destinies – commonly called “heaven” and “hell”. Why do you think this is?

In 17:1-19:10 we have seen John’s vision of the punishment of the great prostitute who is Babylon. In 22:9 we are taken to a vision of another woman/city – the bride who is Jerusalem. In between (19:11-20:8) John sees heaven standing open (19:11), beginning a series of seven scenes each introduced by the words “and I saw”. Read each of these sections to see what John saw, and complete the table below. (Try to keep sight of the main things being shown, rather than becoming lost in the details.)

Passage	What Happens (in a ‘nutshell’)	When do you think this happens?	What reaction/response do you think this vision is meant to generate?
19:11-16			
19:17-18			
19:19-21			
20:1-3			
20:4-10			
20:11-15			
21:1-8			

Discussion Questions:

1. According to the passage – who is destroyed and who lives into eternity? On what basis is this judgement made?
2. What in this passage gives us confidence that what John sees will actually happen? What else gives you confidence about this?
3. What comfort would this passage be to Christians who are suffering significant persecution in this life?

(There are some further questions to delve into the details of the passage on the next page. They can be used as time permits and at the leader’s discretion – but please ensure sufficient time is left for questions 4 & 5 below).

4. What comfort or challenge does this bring to you?
5. To what extent are you conscious of these events? What would change if they were more significant in shaping your life?

Extra Questions on 20:1-10

As you may know there is a “family dispute” among Christians concerning the “millennium” (the 1000 year reign in 20:1-10). There are 3 main views (and many variations within each one)....

1. **Pre-Millennial** – Jesus returns **before a 1000 year reign** on earth. Satan is bound and Christians are raised to rule on earth with Christ. At the end of the 1000 years Satan is released & destroyed, the unbelieving dead are raised, and all face the final judgment with assignment to the eternal states.
2. **Post-Millennial** – Jesus returns **after a 1000 years** of continuous spiritual progress on earth (Satan having been bound to start the 1000 years). When Jesus returns all the other ‘end-time’ events happen.
3. **A-Millennial** - There is no literal 1000 years. 1000 is a symbolic number describing the time between Jesus first and second coming (ie. the time we’re in now). Satan was bound when Jesus first came, died and rose again – enabling the nations to receive the gospel and be saved. Christians are raised to rule with Christ – spiritually (the first resurrection), but like all humanity suffer the first death in this world. This will continue until the end when Jesus returns. At that time Satan is released and destroyed, all the dead are raised physically, the judgement happens and we enter into our eternal states.

Which one do you think makes best sense of Revelation 20?

To help you...

- Verses 1-3 When was the dragon (Satan) “bound”, and for what purpose?
(Compare Mark 3:22-27, Luke 10:17-18, John 12:20 & 30-33, Colossians 2:15)
- Verse 4 – Who comes to life and reigns with Christ & when?
(Compare Revelation 1:4-6, Matthew 19:28, John 5:24, Ephesians 2:4-7)
- Verses 4-6 – What are the first and second deaths?
(Compare Revelation 2:11, 20:14 & 21:8)
- Verses 7-10 – What happens when Satan is released for a while? What is his fate?
Do you think the battle described here is the same as in 19:19-21?
How long does the battle last?
(Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)
- Why might God bind Satan, but delay his final destruction?
(See also Revelation 9:20-21 & 2 Peter 3:8-10 & 14-15)

Revelation 21:9-22:6 – The Beautiful Bride

When you think of “heaven” what images come to your mind?

What is revealed in Revelation about the eternal destiny of Christians is different to most peoples’ conceptions, and far better! Having been shown the punishment of the great prostitute in 17:1-19:10, John is taken to a high mountain to be shown the beautiful bride of Christ (compare 22:9-10 with 17:1-6). Just as the great prostitute was also a city (ie. people), so the bride is also a city – the heavenly Jerusalem, the people of God. What John sees is an expansion of what he saw in 21:1-8.

1. Read 21:1-8. How is this description of God’s new creation different and/or better to the ways people often think about “heaven”?
2. Read 21:9-27. What are the main features of the city?
 - a. The number 12 features strongly. What is the significance of this?
 - b. What is the significance of all the jewels? (cf Exodus 25:8 & 28:15-21)
 - c. Why is there no temple in the city? Is this a good thing or a bad thing?
 - d. Who can and can’t enter this city?
 - e. Overall, who or what is pictured here?
 - f. How physical/literal do you think it is? Why/why not?
3. Read 22:1-6. The descriptions here pick up on features of Genesis 2:8-14 & 3:14-24. What connections can you see? How does the new creation compare with the present one?
4. How do you respond to the angel’s words in 22:6?
5. (Optional) Much of Revelation 21 & 22 draws deeply upon concepts and promises from the Old Testament. To get a taste for it, read these few passages from Isaiah and see the connections to Revelation – Isaiah 54:11-15, 55:1-5, 60:1-3, 65:17-25. What can we conclude from seeing these connections?
6. According to Revelation 21 & 22 how should we think about our future as God’s people? What makes it so good?
7. Do you think we Christians think enough about the “things that must soon take place” (22:6)? Why/why not? How would it help us if we did? What can we do to make this more ‘real’ for us?

Revelation 22:7-21 – The End of Revelation

In the Apostle's Creed, Christians confess about Jesus that "On the third day he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead". Although most Christians would say they believe in the return of Jesus, for many Jesus' return doesn't play a big role in daily thoughts and actions. Do you agree? If so, why do you think this might be?

The book of Revelation shows us "what must soon take place" (1:1 & 22:6). Now that Jesus is ruling the world from God's throne in heaven (1:12-18 & 4-5), what must happen is the judgement of this world and the coming of the next. Chapters 17-22 show us the two final outcomes for humanity – the destruction of 'Babylon', and the blessing of the new 'Jerusalem' enjoyed by those who belong to Jesus. In the closing section of the book, our expectation of this future is sharply focused on the personal and decisive return of Jesus.

Read Revelation 22:7-21.

1. What in this passage gives us confidence to live in light of the imminent return of Jesus to judge and to save?
2. What in this passage gives us cause to look forward to the return of Jesus?
3. The book of revelation is repeatedly called a "prophecy" (22:7, 10, 18 & 19 cf. 1:3). What/who is the subject of this prophecy? (See also 19:10 & 1:1-2)
4. How does the Old Testament add depth to the descriptions of the Jesus who will return?
 - a) Verse 13 cf. Isaiah 44:6 & 48:12-13 (also Revelation 1:8 & 21:6)
 - b) Verse 16 cf. Isaiah 11:1-11
5. In verse 17 a call and/or invitation is made (cf. Isaiah 55:1-7). Who calls/invites whom to what? (ie. Do you think the first two instances of "come" are addressed to Jesus or to people?)
6. Verses 18-20 include a warning not to add or take away from this book of prophecy. How do you think we might be tempted to do this?
7. What might help you (and Christians generally) to join with the apostle John in regularly praying "Amen. Come Lord Jesus" (v 20).
8. What do you think it means to "keep the words of the prophecy of this book"? (v 7) What does this concluding passage encourage us to be, think or do?
9. Think back over our studies in the book of Revelation. How has reading this book helped you to stand firm in Christ – to know, honour and share him?