

SUMMER 2 - Glimpses of Glory

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[0 : 00] Almighty God, we thank you for your word that in the midst of a confused world at best, we have the clarity of your word revealing your purposes to us.

We pray tonight that your spirit will apply your word to our hearts and minds and souls, that we may not only understand it, but seek comfort from it and find challenge from it that we may be steadfast in our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

For we ask this in his name. Amen. In some respects, we come to one of the trickier parts of the book of Revelation tonight.

It's a prelude to the opening up of the grand sort of final picture of heaven and the glorious triumph of Christ. It continues the theme that we saw begun last week with the seven bowls announced by seven angels, the seven bowls of God's wrath, but not just God's wrath in the world day by day, but the wrath of God's final punishment on this world.

For those who were here last week, you may remember, and those who weren't may need to know, that up until what we saw last week in Revelation 15 and 16 were signs of warnings before the end.

[1 : 31] So the judgment that was announced by trumpets in earlier chapters was a limited judgment. It was a warning from God for the world to change before the final judgment came.

And what we found from reading that and then into what we read last week, that that was a judgment largely unheeded. So now begins a sequence, or last week began a sequence, of the final judgment of this world and civilization.

A picture of seven bowls signifying that final punishment. Now we have a different vision. And for those who've been part of this series last year and this, you'll already have an appreciation of the fact that in Revelation we get pictures or visions that show us similar or related or overlapping or sometimes the same things, but from a different perspective.

Like a diamond has different facets and so on. So we're now seeing another picture of final judgment, but with a slightly different focus. The focus of what's called Babylon, the great city.

But it stands really for all godlessness against God and the people of God. Now I should say a couple of words about Babylon because it's so important in these two chapters.

[2 : 46] In the Old Testament, Babylon was the major enemy of the people of God, by and large. Especially in the 6th century AD. It was the Babylonians who conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple and carted off the leading Israelites and southern kingdom people called Jews off to Babylon and relocated them.

And for a couple of generations or more, the land of Judah lay in waste and Jerusalem in rubble. Babylon came to be typical of the enmity against God.

You may know the psalm, Psalm 137, and by the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept. How can we worship the Lord in a strange land? They are people in exile, away from their land, away from Jerusalem and the temple, bemoaning the fact that Babylon has destroyed them and Babylon stands for anti-God and anti-the people of God.

But in some ways the significance of Babylon actually goes much earlier in the Bible, to the very opening chapters, the Tower of Babel. Babel is another word for Babylon. And that Tower of Babel built to try and reach into the heavens to claim an assault on God's own place, and failed of course terribly in the end, was another sign of anti-Godness at work.

So when we come to Babylon in John's day, it was a city long past its prime. The Babylonians had gone, they'd been overrun by the Persians in 530s, and they'd been overrun by the Greeks, and then a couple of hundred years later they'd been overrun by the Romans, who were now the force and the world empire of John's day.

[4 : 24] But John still talks about Babylon. That's what he sees in his visions. Not that he sees the ancient city so much, as uses it as a code word to stand for all that is opposed to God in this world.

Now we'll see that in part it stands for Rome, the capital of the empire. But not just because it's the capital, but because the empire typifies anti-Godness in the world.

But we're wrong to interpret what we read tonight as only about Rome and the Roman Empire, though that is its first starting place, if you like. Because Rome is just an epitome of all that is against God in any age in human history.

It's the dominant motif of John's day. But in any age there is a Babylon, in inverted commas, that stands against God and God's people.

So Babylon is bigger than Rome. It is all that is against God. In John's day, Rome was its major disguise. Now that's by way of preface into Revelation 17 and 18.

[5 : 32] John has seen the seven bowls being announced. And now one of the angels who had the seven bowls came and said to him, Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters.

Many waters. What is a prostitute doing sitting on many waters? It's very clear in this chapter, and made explicit at the end, that this prostitute is Babylon.

The city is a prostitute. It's a sort of mixed metaphor all the way through. And she's sitting on many waters, probably because ancient Babylon sat on the Euphrates and a canal system around the Euphrates.

So that psalm I quoted, by the waters of Babylon, because there are many canals. I suppose an ancient version of Venice or something like that. Jeremiah, in his denunciation of Babylon, refers to the fact that Babylon is on many waters.

What we find in these chapters of Revelation is that John uses language and imagery from Jeremiah and Isaiah, especially in portraying God's judgment against his modern Babylon.

[6 : 38] But the waters are not just literal waters either. I think it's a double use of the term. One is that it alludes back to ancient Babylon, but also we're told in verse 15 later on that many waters are peoples of every tongue and so on.

So what this is saying is that this city, this Babylon, who is also a prostitute, sits on or probably has influence over people of the whole world, in effect.

So it's clearly a picture of the Roman Empire, but of course, as I've said, it's not just the Roman Empire. It's sort of worldwide anti-godness in any age. In John's day, that was Rome.

And why a prostitute? Well, a prostitute is actually a very common biblical metaphor for those who are anti-God, those who are apostate, those who worship idols.

It's often used for people of God who turn away from God. So a modern equivalent would be Christians who go after other gods. But it's also used for people who are pagans all the way through their lives.

- [7 : 44] Not people who've turned away from God has never turned to him in the first place. And that's probably what's in mind here. Not thinking that the Roman Empire is somehow being Christian and is now turning away, but it's through and through pagan, idolatrous, worshipping false gods.
- That's the prostitute. And probably worshipping many gods. Hence the idea of a prostitute or harlot who does not have one partner, but is rather loose in its religious living.
- We're told then in verse 2 that with her, this prostitute, the kings of the earth committed adultery. And again, I think we have a spiritual or metaphorical use of the term here.
- Not that kings go after a particular woman, but rather that the influence of this prostitute to lead away from God, or keep away from God, has extended to the rulers of the world.
- But not only to the rulers, because the second half of verse 2 goes on to say, and the inhabitants of the earth, that is people by and large, were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.
- [8 : 47] Notice how we're getting lots of pictures or metaphors tumbling over themselves. I mean, we don't have wine of adultery. We have wine or we have adultery, but building up different pictures and different metaphors reminds us that when we're dealing with the book of Revelation, we're dealing with something that's very hard to describe, and we get into tricky waters if we try to pinpoint every single detail, it seems to me.
- Often Revelation is painting an impression, and the details go towards the overall impression rather than stand for significance by themselves. Then the angel carried John away in the spirit into a desert.
- There he saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. It's a fairly horrifying picture, and in some respects that's all it's meant to be, a horrifying picture.
- We shouldn't be too troubled by trying to identify each of the seven heads and ten horns, though they probably do have some significance. But it's the overall impression that's important here.
- This is an horrific, ugly, scary sort of thing. And it's the beast that's already been seen in earlier chapters 12 and 13. The beast that seems to stand for the Roman Empire, which is claiming worship and allegiance that belongs only to God.
- [10 : 12] The Roman Empire was trying to claim of its citizens worship of the emperor and associated other gods rather than the worship of the God of the Bible. That's the beast that we've already seen back in chapters 12 and 13 and 14.
- It's scarlet. That may not be significant. It may just be a frightening colour. Maybe scarlet because of blood, because blood comes up later on in this chapter, the blood of saints. Maybe the colour of sin, because sin is scarlet.
- Back in Isaiah 1, for example. Heads and horns we'll see later on, but they're symbols of strength and power. The details come in later verses of this chapter.
- This Babylon, which is a city, but also a prostitute, a harlot, is the woman that's sitting on this scarlet beast. We're told in verse 4 that she was dressed in purple and scarlet.
- The colours of authority, of royalty, the colours of wealth in the Roman Empire. She was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.
- [11 : 19] Had a golden cup in her hand. It's a picture of glamour, some luxury, a picture of wealth, a picture of seduction as well, alluring.
- This is the prostitute on the King's Cross or St Kilda Corner, dressed elegantly, trying to flaunt around, trying to attract, trying to deceive by appearances.
- It's an attractive appearance. We're meant to see something beautiful here. Something that might tempt us. But, appearances are deceptive, aren't they?

She held a golden cup in her hand, but look inside, and see what's there on the inside. It wasn't filled with lovely wine, Grange Hermitage 66 or anything, but rather filled with abominable things, and the filth of her adulteries.

This is the harlot that seduces, but has nothing to offer in the end. And again, it's a picture of the Roman Empire, which was so splendid, so wealthy, so grand, so gorgeous, and yet this image is telling us, on the inside, full of immorality, full of adultery, spiritual adultery, apostasy, idolatry, and so on.

[12 : 40] Now one of the pictures here, is of how evil works in our world. It seduces. It looks as though it's full of good things, but it's not in the end.

It's one of the ways Satan works so frequently, to seduce people, the people of God, and the people of this world, by seeming to offer something that is grand, and gorgeous, and beautiful, but actually is full of filth, and immorality in the end.

It's a picture of seduction, and that's how often evil works in our world. The golden cup in her hand, is filled with abominable things, not just a little bit left in the bottom, the dregs, but it's full.

That is, there's plenty of abomination, in this picture of this seductress. And we'll see in this whole chapter, as we saw in verse 2, the inhabitants of the earth, were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.

Later on in verse 6, the same picture of drunkenness is there. It's almost as if they are reveling, in their immorality, and abomination. And I should also comment, that again, there's an allusion here to the Old Testament.

[13 : 55] And as I said last week, and it's worth repeating again, if we're going to understand the book of Revelation, the key to it, is the Old Testament, the scriptures that the people of God of John's day had.

So often the modern interpretations, pretend there's no Old Testament, and indeed often pretend there's no rest of the New Testament either, and find all sorts of other bizarre codes. But it's all there for us in the Bible.

And again, this picture of a cup, full of intoxicating things, is a picture that's used in the Old Testament, to describe the abominations of ancient Babylon. John's vision is something that's already there in the Bible.

And the people of his day, who knew their Old Testaments probably better than we do, would have understood more of the significance of this vision. John then sees a title written, on this prostitute's forehead.

Mystery Babylon, the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes, and of the Abominations of the Earth. A mark on the forehead, this is. Like so many marks in Revelation are.

[14 : 57] The number of the beast, for example, back in chapter 13. But one of the ways in which the book of Revelation reassures Christian readers, is by describing Christians as those who've been sealed by Christ.

And they have the mark of the Lamb, or the Lord's new name. God's mark on their forehead. So there's a reassurance in this undercurrent, because earlier on in the book of Revelation, and it will come up again, God's people are marked with God's mark.

But these people, this prostitute, is marked with a mark of evil. To call it a mystery is not to mean a puzzle. This is not a sort of ancient Agatha Christie, or something like that, trying to find a hidden code, or put pieces together that give you the complete picture.

The word mystery occurs often in the New Testament, but never for something that's a puzzle, but rather for something that is hidden, but in God's time revealed.

Very often in the New Testament, St. Paul especially, talks of the gospel as being a mystery. Not because it's a puzzle, as though we don't understand it, but rather because in times before Jesus, it was something that was hidden.

[16 : 06] But now, in Christ, the mystery is revealed. Now, this word mystery is not applying to the gospel here, it's something else, but the idea of mystery is that it's something that's not confusing or puzzling, but just something rather that's hidden.

And now it's being revealed, the name on this woman, Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the earth. Babylon, as I've said, is the archetypal enemy of God in the Bible.

To call it the mother of prostitutes may talk about its source, that is, all spiritual adultery derives from this woman, or it may be Saddam Hussein's type of image, the mother of all wars, meaning the greatest of all.

And so maybe this woman is the greatest of all prostitutes and abominations on the earth. What it's saying is that it is foolish to underestimate the power of this seduction.

Don't think that we are invulnerable to it. Because time and time again, when Christians think they are standing firm, they fall, as Paul warns the Corinthians.

[17 : 20] John saw that the woman was drunk. We shouldn't be surprised at that because it's been full of drunkenness and wine already. But drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

They're the saints. It's the same group of people. They are the witnesses. The word means martyr. So it may well mean the people who die for their faith. And those who bear witness to Jesus Christ in the midst of persecution.

Now this is quite extraordinary in a way. Because this is saying that at the heart of evil in the world is an anti-Jesus influence.

Not just anti-God, but anti-Jesus. That is evil, personified by this prostitute woman who is drunk with the blood of the saints who've witnessed to Jesus.

Not just to God in a slightly vaguer way, but to Jesus. It's saying that Jesus is really the key to the world. Jesus is the key to the history of the world, the destiny of the world, and the destiny of the people of the world.

[18 : 29] It's our response to Jesus that matters eternally. Whether we're opposed to the witnesses of Jesus, or whether we are a witness to Jesus.

It's quite a striking thing really, because there's so many people in our world, many of whom go under the name of Christian, who seek to somehow diminish Jesus' stature in the world, in theology, in the Bible, in human destiny.

But we ought not to diminish it, because Jesus has the highest place that can be given. And here is just a suggestion of that. We'll see more suggestions later on, and again in the next couple of weeks as well.

But it is Jesus who is the focus of the evil in the world, in the end. It's extraordinary really, but nonetheless true. And if Jesus were unimportant, there would be no martyrs for him, or there ought not to be any, but on the other hand, nor would there be any enmity of him either.

But it's because he is so crucial that there is enmity and hostility to Jesus in every age. And it happens in our age, and in our society.

[19 : 39] You try talking to a non-Christian person about God. On a good day, they'll happily listen to you. Start talking about Jesus and see what happens. I remember a church service, a baptism service some years ago.

And the beginning of my sermon was all about God. It was deliberately done. The church was full of people who never come to church. And I could see a general interest as I spoke. But then I began to wind up the service, and that's when I introduced Jesus into the equation.

And instantly, and it really was instantly, you could see the blinds come down in people's eyes. The fidgets, the niggles. They felt uncomfortable. It's true today, isn't it?

We can talk about God because somehow that's a sort of more nebulous in people's minds. But it's their attitude to Jesus that counts. This woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, presumably reveling in the martyrdom of Christian people.

And John is astonished. Not that he marvels and wonders and looks up to this woman, but just astonished at the picture that he's given here. The angel says, why are you astonished?

[20 : 49] I'll explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides which has the seven heads and ten horns. So often in the book of Revelation, a vision gets some explanation. So don't be disheartened if you read the book of Revelation and find it confusing.

John did, and he was the one who was given the vision in the first place. So we ought not to think that it's too easy a book either. So the angel says to John, the beast which you saw once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction.

The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world, that is people who are not Christians, they will be astonished when they see the beast because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

Now what is this talking about? What is this beast who once was, now is not, and yet will come, and in the first description, and then go to his destruction?

The description once was, now is not, and will come, seems to be a parody of God. It seems to be a mocking of God. Because in the beginning of the book of Revelation, God, and also Jesus Christ, are described as who is, who was, and is to come.

[22 : 05] That is, always existent, preexistent, and existing for eternity. And Jesus is described as the one who was living, died, and yet still lives, and will come again.

So maybe, this is a bit of a parody. People, or things, that are trying to play God. But they're not really God. Many people take it that it's obviously talking about emperors of Rome.

And there was a myth in the first century AD that Nero, the worst of the Roman emperors probably in the first century, one who instigated formal persecution of Christians for the first time in the 60s AD, that he was going to come back again after he died.

So maybe, is it talking about Nero, who once was, now is not, that is he's dead because John's getting this vision after Nero's death, but yet is to come. Maybe it is talking about Nero.

Maybe it's just talking about kings in general who come and go and the cycle keeps going. Some kings come, some kings go, and so on. I'm not sure that we can be too specific here.

[23 : 06] It seems to be talking about emperors, rulers, kings, who seem to be playing God but aren't God. It seems to be talking about evil, certainly, and it's probably talking about evil that has come and it just comes from time to time and reappears in different guises throughout world history coming up out of the abyss.

But notice the difference between the first explanation to John and what the non-Christians think. John is told, this beast, once was, now is not, will come up out of the abyss and go to his destruction.

But the non-Christians perceive the beast who once was, now is not, and will come. And what's missing will go to his destruction. So what it seems to also be saying is a reassurance to Christian people.

The world sees the beast and thinks that it rules and will rule forever. But Christians can be reassured that evil personified in whatever form may keep reappearing its ugly head out of the abyss, but ultimately will go to perdition or destruction because God is sovereign.

John, you see, is given the correct perspective on evil, that it won't last forever, it will end and be destroyed. Now this calls for a mind with wisdom.

[24 : 25] I don't know that John needed an angel to tell him that because I think we certainly think the same. The seven heads of the beast are seven hills, mountains in the NRSV, but really hills on which the woman sits.

Well this is a woman sitting on the beast, but now we're told that the heads are seven hills. So this woman who was sitting on many waters and now sitting on a beast is now sitting on hills, she keeps moving her position.

But not really because it's just an overflow of metaphors and images and visions all the time trying to give us a different perspective on what's going on. Don't be too confused. Don't think that this is inconsistent. It's glimpses and pictures and images and impressions rather than detailed chronologically accurate things.

Seven hills. Rome is built on seven hills. It was known for being built on seven hills. I think without a doubt this is an allusion to Rome.

I'm not sure that that's the end sum total of what it's alluding to. It seems to me that it's probably pointing to something bigger because as I said in the beginning Rome stands for evil against God in any age.

[25 : 32] Rome is John's epitome of opposition to God. But it's not the end of that. Rome is his epitome. Before that it would have been Babylon and in our day and age there are other things that might stand in that place.

Hills also are a symbol of strength in the Old Testament and each of the pictures we're given here of the beast its heads its horns its hills its kings and so on are all pictures of strength.

The overall impression we're meant to get is this is a mighty being. The seven hills you see in verse 10 we're told are also seven kings so it's all very confusing because the heads are hills so the hills are kings.

Five have fallen one is and the other is not yet come but when he does come he must remain for a little while. Well here the scholars get into all sorts of fun and games.

Who are the five kings that have fallen the one who is and the one who is to come? Some people think that they're world empires and if you take the Bible's picture the first world empire opposed to God's people was Egypt then Assyria then Babylon then Persia then Greece oh that's convenient there are five there in the Old Testament there are other enemies of God's people in the Old Testament but they are the main five Rome is the sixth and that now is and maybe this is saying there is one more to come the trouble is you see from our perspective there have been many empires since Rome many of them opposed to God many of them even worldwide some say that it's talking about Roman emperors the five who've been Augustus Tiberius Caligula Claudius and Nero the one who is now is Vespasian in the 60s and 70s and the one who is to come is Titus the next one but that doesn't really fit because there are other emperors who ruled for little periods in between this is what the scholars think but they conveniently sort of shove a few aside the other thing is why start with Augustus

[27 : 29] Julius Caesar was the first sort of great emperor why not start with him those sorts of explanations don't quite fit and I don't think that matters because I think what we're getting a picture of here is that there are is a stream if you like a totality that's number seven a totality of rulers who are opposed to God in any day and age whether it's an emperor or an empire in the end I'm not sure that that matters but five have gone one is and there's one to come and the one who comes must remain for a little while so maybe there's some reassurance for John and his readers here you're in a series of anti-God rulers whether we think in terms of empires or emperors doesn't matter we're at the penultimate stage of that oh yeah there'll be another one to come but it's a little while it's temporary it's limited don't worry because as this chapter in the book continues to show us God is in charge the beast who once was and now is not is an eighth king he belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction remember it's the heads of the beasts that are the seven kings and what it's showing is somehow this beast which personifies the adultery and idolatry of the world ties all the kings together he is the king the eighth the final one but he's going to his destruction don't worry be reassured it may look as though this beast is ferocious in power and might and invincible even but don't worry he's going to his destruction there's reassurance here surely for Christian people reading this word even if we don't quite understand the beast and the heads and the kings and the hills and how they all quite relate it's the impression that's important and the impression is you live in the midst of a persecuting world but it is limited in its duration the ten horns you saw are ten kings who've not yet received a kingdom but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast they have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast ten future kings now there's so many mad books about revelation around you have to be careful if you go into any

Christian bookshop let alone any bookshop and pick out a book on revelation one of the very popular writers of American of recent years is Hal Lindsay his interpretation of this is that the ten kings are the ten nations of the EEC the European Economic Community now you see how dated his book already is I think there are at least thirteen nations in now what's called the European Union I think there are even more since there were thirteen I mean what a pathetic interpretation what on earth would John in the first century want to know about the European Economic Community which was going to happen 1900 years later and he didn't even really live in Europe beware scholarly interpretations on the book of Revelation I'm not claiming that everything I say may be exactly right but I think we have to tread carefully when there's so much lunacy around probably these are referring to Roman provincial governors who had one year terms were very limited and their job was to offer and encourage allegiance back to central bureaucracy in Rome that would make more sense for John surely when he lives in the Roman Empire and indeed in one of its provinces then in Turkey or in Proconsular Asia Minor but the point of it all is to say their power is limited it's one hour long and it may be that it's referring to people who are given a limited power by the Roman Empire but really what this is alluding to is the fact that God has limited their power

God's power is unlimited but evil's power is limited they will make war against the Lamb here is again the centrality of Jesus Christ in the world but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings a title that's used for God in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 10 here applied to the Lamb when a Jehovah's Witness comes and tells you Jesus is not God here is one verse you can show that says the New Testament believes he is the title that is applied to God and God alone is here applied to the Lamb Jesus Christ he is not in second place he is God and he is in first place and any so called Christian let alone cult group member who thinks otherwise is a heretic they will make war against the Lamb and with the Lamb will be his called chosen faithful followers but the Lamb will overcome we don't know the role of Christians in this we were just told that Christians will be with the Lamb but the point is to see the Lamb will overcome and his people us who are Christians will overcome with him what reassurance that is for a people who are facing persecution in a pagan world it probably doesn't look as though they are going to be victorious in John's day and age

Christians were few on the ground and the Roman Empire was mighty and no one could even foresee somebody like Constantine the Roman Emperor becoming a Christian in 311 miles down the track but here is a word of astonishing reassurance the Lamb is victorious and so will the Lamb's people be too the angel said to John the waters you saw where the prostitute sits their peoples multitudes nations and languages worldwide influence and power that this prostitute is exercising in her seduction the beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute well that's a bit astonishing because it seems that the prostitute on the beast and the heads and the horns and the hills and the kings and so on are all sort of united in their opposition of God and Jesus Christ but now we get the next stage Satan turned in on itself hating itself destroying itself so the beast and the ten horns will hate the prostitute they'll bring her to ruin leave her naked they'll eat her flesh and burn her with fire a picture of a corpse as carrion plucked out by the birds that are eating the flesh by the side of the road or something else but this is just what Jesus said in Mark 3 amongst other places that Satan destroys and in the end

Satan destroys Satan sin self-destructs if you like it turns in on itself that's the picture here that evil will be conquered by God and a means by which God does that conquering is because Satan destroys himself the harlot the prostitute is destroyed by the very people she gave to drink over and over the Babylon's of world history destroy themselves so often empires fall because of internal corruption rather than an external invasion God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule until God's words are fulfilled extraordinary irony here even mockery of evil that evil's destructive nature actually brings about God's purposes Satan seeks to destroy and in the end destroys itself and all of that is God's purpose it's God's who's sovereign here it's not just Satan like a runaway train ending up in destruction completely without control it is God who is exercising control in the final analysis

[35 : 03] God is sovereign and the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth worldwide rule it's not just Rome though Rome is the epitome of it in John's day but in any age there are mighty cities of Babylon but this is saying kings come and go that's what this chapter's been saying it looks as though evil's going to triumph but it doesn't in the end they end up in destruction John's day there was Nero who thought he'd live forever he didn't Stalin who thought he would influence the world for decades and centuries he didn't Hitler who thought he would influence the world for a thousand years but he didn't Hanukkah who built a wall in Berlin that would last a hundred years it didn't evil comes and evil goes but God is sovereign and Christ reigns well chapter 18 is a picture of the lament now of the fall of Babylon what we've seen is the build up to that destruction of this prostitute called Babylon but now we get the lament the voices in response to its fall and destruction and again it's full of resonances with Isaiah and Jeremiah especially reminding us that what's here depends upon the Old Testament for its understanding as the ancient Babylon was judged by God's prophets and fell so too modern Rome and so too ultimately and most importantly evil in the world so John saw another angel in verse 1 he had great authority the earth was illuminated by his splendor so often when things or people come from

God's presence they're bright dazzling Moses coming out of the tent Isaiah in the temple and so on here is the angel dazzling coming from the presence of God with a mighty voice this angel shouted fallen fallen is Babylon the great mocking of course the greatness of this so-called Babylon the great she's become a home for demons a haunt for every evil spirit a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird that's the result of her fallen she's become just a ruin a rubble a dump heap if you like where birds of prey live for all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries this is why she fell the kings of the earth committed adultery with her and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxury then I heard another voice from heaven say 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 if you share in her sins you receive the plagues which are the consequences for that sin but come out of her take a step apart from her again allusions to old testament prophets here

Isaiah 52 Jeremiah 51 and other places words against ancient Babylon to the people of God saying come out of Babylon come out of the enemies of God do we take this literally or not well throughout the whole bible it's very clear from beginning to end the people of God are always to be set apart from the people of this world we are to be different distinguished because we are chosen and called by God in the old testament that was a literal setting apart so that the nation of Israel was to be geographically distinct from other nations and anybody who chose to live there had to adopt the laws of God but in the new testament there's a change in that emphasis christians are still called to be set apart and the word in the bible is holy that's what it means to be set apart but now christians as 1 peter 2 tells us are to be holy amongst all the other nations in the midst of the world there is no call for christian people to move out of the world and set up holy huddles we are called to be holy in an unholy world to live according to god's word in a world that does not to be citizens of heaven and yet dwellers on this earth so it's not a literal calling out of the world but rather to exercise holiness within and god's holy spirit is given to us to enable that holiness to occur her sins we're told are piled up to heaven god has remembered her crimes that is it is god who is bringing about her destruction because god is sovereign give back to her as she has given that is the punishment fits the crime as we saw last week pay her back double for what she has done mix her a double portion from her own cup now evil though she may have been that doesn't look fair ought god punish twice as much as the sin deserves if that's what it's saying the expression the double which is used in a number of places in the bible probably doesn't mean that god's going to punish twice as much as the sin deserves but just as in isaiah 40 as here the idea of a double is a bit like you walk down the street and you see somebody who looks the double of somebody you know oh i could have sworn it was fred it's his double but it's not two freds it's one fred lookalike it's the exact replica that's what the double is about it's the image reflection it's the equal if you like so ironically the expression pay her back double for what she's done is probably really saying pay her back exactly according to what she has done the exactness of the punishment to fit the crime is probably the image or idiom that's being used here mix her a double portion from her own cup how often god's punishment of the wicked in this world and in the bible is so appropriate because sin has within itself its own seeds of destruction and punishment so those who drink the cup of sin in the end drink the punishment that comes from such sin itself and that's in effect what this is saying here give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself in her heart she boasts and here is another quote from Isaiah I sit as queen I'm not a widow and I will never mourn what a proud boast to say I will never mourn that I sit as a queen but of course there is mourning in this chapter because she is fallen how often pride comes before a fall as the writer of proverbs tells us therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her death mourning and famine she will be consumed by fire for mighty is the lord god

who judges her god's sovereignty again being stressed here to reassure christian people when the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning they will weep and mourn over her terrified at a torment they'll stand far off trying to find safety perhaps and cry woe woe oh great city oh babylon city of power in one hour your doom has come I think an element of surprise there that such a mighty city should in just one hour be destroyed how the mighty have fallen is in effect what they're saying here so the first woe is from kings kings who shared in the luxury the wealth kings who gained from this prostitute who had all that they thought they needed but now find it all gone in an instant like a bushfire ravaging their home and so on they're the first people who cry out the second lot in verses 11 to 17 are the merchants of the earth the trades people and they'll weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargos anymore how sad how selfish their motives of mourning look at all the list of things they sell gold silver precious stones and pearls fine linen purple silk scarlet cloth citron wood and articles of every kind made of ivory costly wood bronze iron marble cinnamon spice incense my frankincense wine olive oil fine flour wheat cattle sheep horses carriages bodies and souls of men it's a devastating list of nearly 30 things almost all of them are items of luxury if not all of them these are not people who are trading so that people have their basic provisions these are people trading in luxuries and making a mint out of doing so that's why they're mourning they've lost their source of exorbitant income but notice how the list ends as it builds up momentum through it trading in the bodies and souls of men slaves yes there were 60 million in the

Roman Empire but maybe also trading in the lives of Christian people perhaps they will say the fruit you long for is gone from you all your riches and splendor have vanished never to be recovered bewailing the lack of wealth and luxury what indulgence and decadence they must have lived just like the hymn fading as the worldlings pleasure all its boasted pomp and show but solid joys and lasting treasure as we'll see in two weeks none but Zion's children know well the merchants who sold these things they gained their wealth from her and they also like the king stand far off terrified at her torment weeping and mourning and they cry out dressed in oh great city dressed in fine linen etc in one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin then the third group who mourn are the sea captains those who travel by ship the sailors and so on they also stand far off and when they see the smoke of her destruction they also cry out was there they're mourning their own lack of wealth they've made money they've made a fortune see this is the harlot who's been seductive alluring offering all this luxury wealth and opulence but it comes to naught in the end but so often that's the story of the world our world offers opulence and wealth and luxury time and time again you don't have to watch the chat TV channels unless it's the ABC for very long before you see signs of luxury and wealth being offered to you and what does it give you in the end can't take it with you and so often it breaks down you see Babylon is something that's looking good it's not much different it's no different from our

[45 : 35] Western society don't think it's a particularly evil realm or regime here it's the Western world surely that's opposed to God but maybe not just the West either it's our world in which we live it looks good it seems as though it offers much but it doesn't deliver the goods but now comes a different note a different sound a different voice in verse 20 rejoice over her oh heaven rejoice saints and apostles and prophets God has judged her for the way she treated you some could read this as though it's a bloodthirsty joy it seemed the victim the this evil prostitute being slaughtered and destroyed but it's not a bloodthirsty vengeful joy here it's a joy that God is triumphant it's a joy that God's justice prevails in the end much of the language is from Jeremiah 50 and 51 again mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a millstone threw it in the sea and said with such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down never to be found again this is final judgment it's not as though another Babylon is going to come and then another and another this is the end that John is seeing and the millstone into the sea probably resonates with some words of Jeremiah again the picture of this town in verses 22 and 23 looks normal music of harpists and musicians flute players trumpeters will never be heard in you again things we think well they're okay surely we see how seductive it is it looks all right but it's been anti-God that's why it's judged no workman of any trade will ever be found in you again the sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again the light of a lamp will never shine in you again the voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again your merchants were the world's great men but by the magic spell all the nations were led astray in who has found the blood of prophets and of the saints and of all who have been killed on the earth you see this Babylon is not just one city it's the world opposed to God the description of it is just like our world really in the end people who make their fortune out of trading and luxury items it's a godless world order that's being judged not a particularly evil regime not a Hitler's Germany or a

Honecker's East Germany but it's the world that's being judged here wherever people are more concerned about power wealth than God there is this prostitute Babylon at work there's a timelessness about Revelation despite its particularity about Rome and the Roman Empire you see Revelation doesn't end with the end of Rome it's timeless it stands today until that day of final judgment does come and it will but this prophecy is a remarkable prophecy really it's very hard to get back into John's shoes and think what John's Christian world would have been like we're so used to a Christian church that is worldwide and though on the decline in our country still of some influence in the world that wasn't the case in John's day when John received this word Rome was at the height of its powers it was a glorious empire full of beauty and strength and luxury it looked fantastic and it looked invincible and in the middle of all that John gets this word that says it's not going to last and it would have been hard for

John's successors to believe this word because after Domitian in the 90s AD and all the persecution he brought there were five good emperors Trajan and Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius and others who were very fair and honourable people so it's very hard for those successors of John surely to think what on earth is God saying to us here it looks as though God's saying something that really doesn't fit it doesn't apply the Roman Empire stands in glory and might and the Christian church is minuscule by comparison far smaller than in Australia today and in Australia it's small enough it must have been very hard for John to accept these words and for his readers and the next generations to receive them and believe them because the appearances of the world and the Empire seem to say something so different but God's word comes true and the appearances of our world are so transitory the ten countries of the EEC what bunkum see so often we try to find the important events today but here is God's word and it is coming true and it will come true in God's time and our world may look as though it's anti-God and powerful but rest assured that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords is

Jesus Christ and evil will come to its end under him let's spend a moment in silence you may want to stand stretch then there'll be a few minutes for questions before a few couple of songs and prayers you may want to stand stretch no I think I think in the end it's a similar picture it's making a different point the questions about Matthew chapter 25 verses I guess 31 onwards the judgment of the nations and the sheep and the goats and I think in the end it's the same issue about judgment final judgment I think it's making a different point though about challenging people to be ready for that judgment and to act and behave appropriately beforehand whereas now in Revelation I think we've got beyond that warning sort of theme that's earlier in the book now it's a picture of final judgment and the theme that's becoming more and more dominant at the end of Revelation is reassurance for Christian people in the face of persecution which is a theme that's not really here in Matthew

I think my point about the particular reference is that it's not summed up in Rome but Rome is an example or an epitome of a more general and bigger principle I think it does apply to our world but I think the danger is trying to find one of the heads or one of the horns in one of the countries of our world today or something like that I think that's lost the application because I think in the end what what is really going on here are big impressions rather than specific details so I think any Christian who tries to find one of the ten heads or horns or hills you know in modern Australia or ancient Australia or future Australia is probably wrong in one sense but in maybe in generalities there's truth in it does that sort of have I said that clearly enough I you know there are some commentators who wrote in the 80s or 70s that that found Moscow in every sort of evil image in the Bible well at one level that's wrong because you know things have changed at another level there's perhaps truth in that because to an extent the

[53 : 11] Moscow regime was an anti-God regime therefore it's part of the general principle but I don't think it's the sum total of it I think that's where people go wrong so how Lindsay's 10 EEC well I think that's just bananas anyway but you know if the EEC was somehow deliberately anti-God then there would be some truth in what he says but it's not the end truth because it's not the end judgment I guess I puzzled over this the question is about is is the beast or are the beast and the whore the harlot different well I mean they are different in the image in that one sits on the other but I think the sitting on denotes a dependence upon the beast in earlier chapters is the Roman Empire in part as sort of personifying anti-God a state that's demanding worship of its rulers and therefore an apostasy that's wrong I think this and I must say I'm not sure of the distinction some commentators say that that the the beast is the ideology the whore is the perpetrator of the ideology that is the person who actually speaks out or seduces people into wrong thinking whereas the beast is the wrong thinking itself and there are all sorts of other relationships

I'm not sure that it's that specific in the end I think the the image of the harlot is a seduction the image of the beast is scary and frightening and I think they're the sort of you know it's evil at work in different sorts of ways one commentator I was reading said that evil basically works in two ways one is seduction which is the image of the prostitute the other which is more the beast but that's sort of earlier chapters is more repression both are satanic ways of trying to stamp out God's people and in the in some world in some civilizations repression is more effective in our western world the Christian church is weak because of seduction Paul it's a good observation that revelation doesn't give or at least in these chapters lots of instruction about how to or whether Christians are involved in the pulling down of the evil sort of world as I said in chapter 17 where the forces are waged against the lamb and the lamb is accompanied by the lamb's people Christian people but we're not told what those people do so the point of these chapters here is to encourage Christians to persevere in faith so it's not the revelation 17 and 18 is not addressing the issue of how do we respond to evil in our society well apart from the fact that it's saying persevere in Christian faith and live holy lives so come out of her is the primary thing now I think we have to use other parts of the Bible to to argue that there are ways in which we can be involved in the structures and governing of our worlds to try and bring some good but on the other hand I think in the end the Bible's view is that ultimately heaven is from heaven as we'll see in the last week of this series rather than built on earth so in the end the attempts to build heaven on earth to make this world a utopia to build a grand new age which is so often you know rulers and leaders grand visions I think is futile that's not to say we're not to be active in the world we are but we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that we can build God's world here on earth any other their pictures of final judgment like you look at a diamond and see different facets of it or you know

I suppose any object you can pick it up and look at it underneath and on top and inside out and so on I think we're getting a different picture of final judgment here so we're getting a picture of a prostitute city being destroyed whereas before that we were getting bowls being poured out of wrath and so on so it's the same sort of thing going on but it's describing it in a different way they do overlap therefore but we shouldn't the trick is not to try and draw too many threads of sort of consistency between them because their impressions and images more than sort of detailed allegories I guess yeah so in chapter 17 you get the the prostitute sits on all sorts of things I don't think we're meant to get a vision of the prostitute sitting there on waters and then getting up and going and sitting on a beast and then getting up and sitting on seven hills and then sitting on a king and then sitting on peoples I think it's just the same picture being described in different ways you know those black and white pictures you can sometimes get that if you look at it one way you see two heads looking at each other and if you look at it another way with your eyes slightly blurred you see something else or those magic image books that's sort of what's going on here in a way that if you focus on it in a different way you see something slightly different that sheds a bit different light on what's going on i think we should have a couple of prayers to finish and then we'll sing one final hymn please can i encourage you if you'd like to pray out loud to do so briefly is fine loud voice you may like to stand so that people can hear two or three prayers and then i'll have a closing prayer and we'll sing a final hymn it's the sight is glorious see the man of sorrows now from the fight returned victorious every knee to him shall bow crown the saviour angels crown him rich the trophies jesus brings in the seat of power enthrone him while the vault of heaven rings sinners in derision crowned him mocked the dying saviour's claim saints and angels crowd around him sing his triumph praise his name hear the shout as he is greeted hear those loud triumphant chords jesus christ in glory seated oh what joy the sight affords crown him crown him king of kings and lord of lords amen you