

November 21 Lesson 12 (NIV)

MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

DEVOTIONAL READING: Revelation 19:1–8

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Revelation 19

REVELATION 19:1–8

¹ After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

² for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

³ And again they shouted:

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

⁴ The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

⁵ Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

both great and small!”

⁶ Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.
⁸ Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

KEY TEXT

Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. —Revelation 19:7

CELEBRATING GOD

Unit 3: Visions of Praise

LESSONS 10–13

LESSON OUTLINE

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HOW TO SAY IT

apocalypticuh-paw-kuh-*lip*-tik.

Babylon *Bab-uh-lun*.

Babylonians *Bab-ih-low-nee-unz*.

Chaldeans *Kal-dee-unz*.

Habakkuk *Huh-back-kuk*.

Judah *Joo-duh*.

Mediterranean *Med-uh-tuh-ray-nee-un*.

omnipotent *ahm-nih-poh-tent*.

omnipresent *ahm-nih-prez-ent*.

omniscient *ahm-nish-unt*.

Palestine *Pah-luh-stein*.

Introduction

A. Evidence and Justice

A few years ago, a popular television channel took the nation by storm when it released a “true crime” documentary. The documentary centered on a murder in a small midwestern town and the investigation that followed. The investigation resulted in what seemed to be the framing of an innocent man. The documentary pointed out how clues were overlooked, evidence planted, and the investigation otherwise mishandled. The man was convicted of the crime, and most who viewed the documentary came away with the impression that the wrong man had been convicted—a miscarriage of justice.

However, more evidence came to light many months after the documentary aired. That evidence showed that, in actuality, it was the *documentary* that was flawed, and justice *had* been served. It’s a scary thought that our imperfect systems of justice can convict the innocent and acquit the guilty. Such error is impossible, however, when it comes to God. He is always just, acting in truth and righteousness. He stays true to his character, and we can be assured that he will always do what he says he will do. We can be sure that right will ultimately win out over wrong!

These facts are stressed repeatedly in the book of Revelation’s figurative, apocalyptic language.

B. Lesson Context

A major figurative image throughout the book of Revelation is that of “Babylon” (see Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21; compare 1 Peter 5:13). John uses the image of Babylon to picture forces that oppose the will of God and oppose his people. We should note at the outset that the word *figurative* does not mean “not real” or “fictional”; rather, it means to express one thing in terms of another (examples: Matthew 16:5–21; John 16:25–30).

And so it is with the word *Babylon*. The actual city of ancient Babylon, so powerful during the sixth century BC, was a zero on the world stage of the first century AD. Apocalyptic literature (see Lesson Contexts of lessons 10 and 11) frequently uses vivid images to make a point, and the image of Babylon does just that. In John’s vision, Babylon symbolizes worldly powers that oppose God and his people.

Some scholars propose that, for John’s audience, Babylon was a code word for the city of Rome (compare 1 Peter 5:13). Both Rome and Babylon oppressed the people of God and opposed God’s rule. Centuries before the time of John, the Babylonians (Chaldeans) had been God’s instrument in punishing Judah (Jeremiah 40:1–3; Habakkuk 1:1–11; etc.). But the Babylonians went too far and ended up as objects of God’s wrath in turn (Jeremiah 50; Habakkuk 2:6–17). Babylon experienced divine wrath for opposing God in both word and deed.

Similarly, the Roman Empire was insatiable in its conquests as it enslaved peoples across the Mediterranean world of the first century AD. Palestine had begun to experience Roman might in 63 BC, when Pompey besieged Jerusalem. The Jewish revolt of AD 66–70 resulted in the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of its temple. John wrote the book of Revelation some 25 years afterward.

Prior to today’s passage, Revelation 18 sketches a lengthy celebration of the downfall of Babylon, rehearsing charges against it. That prophetic text guarantees, by extension, the ultimate downfall of all kingdoms and entities that oppose God. Today’s passage takes us to what happens after the collapse of those foolish opponents.

I. Heaven’s People (REVELATION 19:1–3)

A. Praise to the Great God (v. 1)

1a. After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

The phrase *after this* refers to the announcement of the judgment and destruction of Babylon (see Lesson Context regarding Revelation 18:2, 10, 21). *The roar of a great multitude* speaking in unison reminds us of the great crowds of the redeemed in previous visions of the throne room *in heaven* (Revelation 7:9; the same phrase [in Greek] is repeated in 19:6, below).

1b. “Hallelujah!”

This word means “Praise God!” For further insight on this term, see commentary on Psalm 149:1a in lesson 9. In the entire New Testament, this word occurs only four times, and only in Revelation 19. It stresses the text’s deep concern with proper worship of God (compare Revelation 19:3, 4, and [below] 6).

1c. Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

What comes next is a now-familiar litany of divine action (*salvation*; see also Revelation 7:10; 12:10) and attributes (*glory and power*; see also 4:9–11; 5:12–13; 7:11–12).

This might serve as something of a model for our own prayer practices, either alone or in corporate worship. We too can praise God for his attributes and how he works out our salvation. He deserves all praise for all these and more.

B. Honor to the Great Judge (v. 2)

2a. for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

The voice of the great chorus continues, focusing on God's victory over *the great prostitute* (Babylon) as stated in Revelation 18 (see the Lesson Context). *His judgments* on her have been *true and just*—as all have ever been and ever will be (see Psalm 119:160).

One of Babylon's two great sins is that she *corrupted the earth by her adulteries* (see also Revelation 17:2, 4; 18:3). This vivid figure of speech, as used by the prophets, describes idolatry (see Jeremiah 3:6–9; Ezekiel 23:36–37; etc.). This corrosive influence had affected “all the nations” (Revelation 14:8). John's original audience would have seen the connection to the Roman Empire.

2b. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

This is the second of Babylon's two great sins: persecuting God's *servants* to the point of death. The question in Revelation 6:10—“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge ... and avenge our blood?”—has been put to rest (compare Psalms 13:1; 89:46).

If we remain faithful to God, then he will save us for all eternity. The multitudes of Heaven see the destruction of “the great prostitute” for what it really is: a magnification of the power of the God who is faithful to keep his promises to those who are faithful to him.

C. Justice for All Eternity (v. 3)

3. And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

The great crowd of heavenly voices cries out with the second of four occurrences of *hallelujah*. John uses this repetition to bring home the point: God is truly victorious and thus truly worthy of our praise! The crowd's desire for the wicked city's *smoke* to continue rising *up for ever and ever* acknowledges that *her* destruction is not temporary. It is permanent and final.

Although the words *for ever* are enough to assure that this punishment is everlasting, the extra *and ever* cements the certainty. The permanence of this judgment is ironclad. This judgment parallels the eternal reign of God and the eternal nature of his kingdom (see Revelation 11:15).

John's vision echoes similar language from the prophet Isaiah, where God's judgment on the land is described as “burning” and where “its smoke will rise forever” (Isaiah 34:9–10; compare Revelation 14:11).

II. The Throne (REVELATION 19:4–5)

A. Worship (v. 4)

4. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!”

A second declaration of worship comes, this time from *the twenty-four elders* (see Revelation 4:10; 5:8, 14; 11:16). Together with *the four living creatures* (see 4:6–8; 5:6, 14; 7:11; 14:3), they surround God’s *throne* as the inner circle of those in the presence of the Almighty.

But why the numbers 24 and 4? Some propose that 24 stands for the Old Testament’s 12 tribes of Israel plus the New Testament’s 12 apostles, while the other 4 reflect Ezekiel 1:5–14. The verse before us is the last time they are mentioned together (see also Revelation 5:6, 8, 11, 14; 7:11; 14:3).

Their united acclamation of worship consists of just two words: *Amen* and *Hallelujah*. Regarding the former, see on Revelation 7:12a in lesson 10; regarding the latter, see on 19:1b, above. The combined effect is to affirm the praise of the great crowd in 19:3 and repeat its central component: Praise the Lord!

B. Command (v. 5)

5a. Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God,

Another *voice* joins the multitude, the elders, and the living creatures in worship. *The throne* itself always refers to the presence and authority of God (examples: Psalms 9:7; 11:4; 45:6; 47:8; Hebrews 1:8). Even so, the voice is likely not from God or from the Lamb, and it is uncertain whether it is from an angel herald or another entity. What is important is that the voice has divine authorization to call for worship.

When we understand the true nature of God, then we can praise him even in the midst of our deepest sorrow and toughest trials. We can do this because we understand that he is worthy. We also offer praise because we know that God’s purposes are eternal, that his salvation is sure, and that his victory is guaranteed and complete.

The form of worship demonstrated here differs slightly from previous exclamations. Rather than the command “Praise the Lord,” this version exclaims *Praise our God*. This echoes the commands of Psalm 66:8.

5b. all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!”

The type of *fear* in view is not that of the terror of those in Revelation 6:15–17. Rather, it refers to those who revere God (compare 11:18, last week’s lesson).

The phrasing *great and small* indicates the inclusive nature of the imperative (also Revelation 11:18). The status symbols considered important on earth no longer have the same impact, with regard to priority. As some have noted, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. And so it is before the throne.

III. Unified Multitude

(REVELATION 19:6–8)

A. Tripled Voice (v. 6)

6a. Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

John hears yet another voice, this time only described in similarity to *a great multitude*. This seems to be a different group, however, than the group mentioned in Revelation 19:1. The sound likened to *rushing waters* is not that of a soothing bubbling brook. Rather, the sound is more like that of a thunderous waterfall or the crashing of stormy waves on a beach.

The word translated *thunder* occurs 10 times in this book (here and Revelation 4:5; 6:1; 8:5; 10:3, 4 [twice]; 11:19; 14:2; and 16:18). The word is always associated with divine power, authority, and/or initiative (compare John 12:29). Its use in the verse at hand alongside the sound of water bears strong similarity to the prophet's visions in Ezekiel 1:24 and 43:2.

The description of this stupendous chorus of voices emphasizes the size of this crowd. If you have been in a football stadium and heard the noise of tens of thousands of voices at once, then you know how loud it can be. This may be similar to what John experienced.

6b. Hallelujah!

We come now to fourth and final *Hallelujah* in the book of Revelation. Again, see insight on this term in the commentary on Psalm 149:1a in lesson 9. This imperative to praise God (the word's meaning) is accompanied by a reason to do so (see next).

6c. For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

God's actions are often grouped under three headings: he creates, he rules, and he redeems. The text before us speaks to the second of those. In that light, the praise is for the universal kingship of *our Lord God*. There can be no rival to God, either in his rule or in our praise of him.

Older versions of the Bible include the word "omnipotent" instead of *Almighty*. This verse introduces us to one of what might be called "the three omnis." The word *omnipotent* means "all-powerful." The other two omni- words are *omnipresent* and *omniscient*, meaning "present in all places at all times" and "all-knowing," respectively.

God's power to reign is demonstrated by his overwhelming and permanent victory over enemies; now his all-powerful nature brings his promises to their completion. See also commentary on Revelation 11:17c in lesson 11.

B. Tripled Command (v. 7a)

7a. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!

Three more imperatives are now added to the one ("hallelujah") above. This is unique, being the only place in the New Testament where the verbs *rejoice*, *be glad*, and *give* occur together in the same verse.

C. Reason (vv. 7b–8)

7b. For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

This is the reason for the unique triple command of the half-verse just considered. It is the moment the faithful had been waiting for: the time and occasion when the faithful servants of God see their eternal, heavenly fellowship with their Savior, Jesus Christ, finalized. Such joy! This is the moment when all God's work throughout history moves toward its magnificent conclusion.

The wedding language we see here was not unfamiliar to John's original audience. Old Testament prophets often used marriage as a figurative reference to describe the relationship between God and his people (examples: Isaiah 54:5–7; Hosea 2:19). Jesus, too, described the kingdom of heaven in terms of a marriage (see Matthew 22:1–14; 25:1–13).

A marriage requires two parties: a bride and a groom. The groom in view here is *the Lamb*. Various forms of the word *lamb* appear 35 times in the New Testament, and 29 of those are in the book of Revelation. In 28 of those 29 cases, the reference is to Jesus. (The single exception is in Revelation 13:11.)

Outside of the book of Revelation, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29). Peter said that Jesus was “a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19). The idea of Christ as the sacrificial lamb lies at the very heart of our redemption and salvation.

7c–8. and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)

The book of Revelation is loaded with figurative language; that is when an image of one thing is used to express another (see the Lesson Context). This is the great challenge in interpreting both Jesus’ parables and the book of Revelation as a whole. A key difference between the parables and Revelation is that Jesus often identified the references in his parables later (examples: Matthew 13:18–23, 36–43), while the apostle John almost never does that in Revelation. A rare exception is in the verses before us when John explains that *fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people*.

This imagery reflects the holiness of the *bride*, having been redeemed by the Lamb (see Revelation 7:9, 14). Clothing imagery serves important figurative purposes in the Bible (see Job 29:14; Psalm 132:9; Isaiah 52:1; 61:10).

John’s use of wedding imagery speaks to the relationship between God and his people. The bride of Christ is the church: holy ones sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. The bride has been redeemed because of the blood of the Lamb (see Revelation 5:9), the very same blood applied to those who “washed their robes and made them white” (7:14). The time for rejoicing is coming! Like a bride engaged to be married, the church awaits the return of Christ and the eternal marriage feast between the bride and the groom.

Conclusion

A. Got Your Clothing Ready?

Weddings are designed to create memories and ingrain those memories in the minds of those who attend. Therefore, the wedding party’s clothes are normally chosen with great care and coordinated for maximum effect. The wedding party may take hours to get ready for the ceremony. Because the ceremony will be remembered for years—for its beauty as well as its glitches—everyone goes to great lengths to ensure that everything is “perfect.”

The wedding ceremony between the Lamb and his bride culminates in the rescue of the bride from the power of sin and evil. When Jesus, the Lamb, receives his bride, the church, it will be the wedding for all time! The groom has done his part by paying the price for sin on the cross. But the bride has her part to do as well, considering John’s statement that she has “made herself

ready” (Revelation 19:7). Jesus has provided us with “garments of salvation” and a “robe of his righteousness” (Isaiah 61:10), but we must put them on.

B. Prayer

Praise to you, God most high! Glory to you, Lord of Heaven and earth! Thanks be to you for your gracious gift of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. May our hearts give praise to the King of kings and Lord of lords. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Look for hallelujah moments in your life.¹
