



## LIFE GROUP NOTES

Week Beginning:



### Revelation 17-18

#### The beast, the prostitute and the fall of Babylon

##### Warm Up

Does anyone like reading maps, interpreting the symbols and imagining what the actual place looks like? None of us would expect to see contour lines on the hills when we walk there, but we know that they represent something of the truth. The symbols point us to the reality. They are not the reality themselves.

##### Background and context

John has been using symbolism all the way through his writing. It is the apocalyptic style he is using. In these passages he gives his readers further clues to help them interpret the symbols. He has already introduced us to the beast (from the sea) and now the prostitute (Babylon).

##### Ch17.

One powerful OT image is that of Yahweh and His bride, and one of the saddest prophetic images given by Hosea is the adulterous nature of the bride and becoming a prostitute. This image is the root behind this vision. "Babylon" has worshipped idols and indulged in many sins. The ancient empire of Babylon was long gone by the time John wrote down his vision, so his readers would have known it was a code for **Rome**.

John tells us that the seven heads on the monster represent seven hills. Rome is built on seven hills. Many of his readers would have known this. The seven kings could easily be the emperors of Rome from Augustus to Otho. Nero would have been number five. However, it is more likely that they are symbolic of perfection. Seven being the perfect number. The idea being that the beast's kingdom looked perfect but would fall from within through the actions of an eighth king. The "ten" kings could be different ruling elites across the empire.

##### Ch 18

This is a description of the fall of "Babylon" (Rome) and how quickly it will happen when the day comes. Rome prided itself on being the summit of human achievement through its own efforts and glory. The prophetic writing here, suggests it will shrivel and become desert where wild animals roam. The angel echoes the OT prophets (Isaiah 21:9 Jeremiah 51:8). God will have the last word and creation will sigh with relief as freedom arrives with a powerful voice and light (v1).


Ch 18 gives an insight into the world of the Roman empire (and empires since, including the world today). International trade, fine luxuries, gold, silver, fine linen from across the globe. None of these are bad in themselves and are even mentioned in the image of the new Jerusalem in Ch21, but they have become objects of worship, idols, false gods. These false gods ultimately demanded sacrifice. That sacrifice was usually at the expense of vulnerable humans who were slaves, the poor and socially unacceptable.

When we sacrifice humanity for goods, we have committed the worst act of adultery and idolatry we can imagine. Rome's power and wealth was built on slavery, the buying, selling, using and abusing of human beings as though they were objects like gold or silver. Slavery was to the ancient world, more or less, what steam, coal, gas, electricity are to the modern world. Slavery was how things got done. Life would have been unthinkable without it.

God's ultimate response is dramatic and final. He will not tolerate it any more.

## Thinking it through: Main discussion/activity

### Read. Ch17.

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1. Whose judgement does the angel invite John to observe?
  2. Why is the image of “prostitute” used to describe Babylon/Rome and the system it represents?
  3. Today’s glossy and glitzy western culture is frighteningly like ancient Rome. Outwardly beautiful and inwardly deceitful. Are we part of the system or do we look at it with sadness, as Jesus did with Jerusalem?
  4. Babylon/Rome had worshipped idols: quick fix false gods that promise the earth and take all you have and leave you with nothing. How might this be true for people today in our world?
  5. Read v 6. What does it mean that the prostitute has become drunk with the blood of God’s people?
  6. What is the relationship between the beast and the prostitute? How might we interpret that today? Where do we draw the line?
  7. Read v 12-18. What encouragements are there in this passage? Have you ever seen evil destroy itself?

### Read Ch 18

8. As people who live in a society that places a high value in human achievement and wealth, what lessons can we learn from the fall of Babylon?
9. Read v6-8. What specific judgements are pronounced on Babylon for her sins?
10. How is this a just punishment for her sins?
11. Read Colossians 1:15-16. Structures of authority are part of God’s creation. Problems arise when governments move from being servants of God to acting in the place of God. How can we know when that has happened?
12. Read v4. In what ways do we need to “come out” from present day “Babylon”? How can we separate ourselves?
13. Read v9-11. How will the kings and merchants react to the fall of Babylon?
14. Read v12-13. What is the horrific end to the verse? What is it suggesting?
15. Babylon/Rome was built on violence. What prophetic act does the angel perform to pass judgement on the violence?
16. How might we live in a way that opposes the violence of the world we live in?

### Try to leave 15-20 mins to talk about prayer needs of the group and to pray.



We want to encourage the development of prayer, to help everyone grow in confidence in praying. There are many creative ways of praying together: writing prayers, using candles as a focus, reading prayers or praying for each other in pairs.