

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 AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the “bride of Christ.”
2. Relate the word *hallelujah* to its Old Testament background.
3. Suggest one way to help his or her church overcome one unbride-like tendency.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Evidence and Justice
- B. Lesson Context

- I. Heaven’s People (Revelation 19:1–3)
 - A. Praise to the Great God (v. 1)
 - B. Honor to the Great Judge (v. 2)
 - C. Justice for All Eternity (v. 3)
- II. The Throne (Revelation 19:4–5)
 - A. Worship (v. 4)

B. Command (v. 5)

Access Heaven

III. Unified Multitude (Revelation 19:6–8)

A. Tripled Voice (v. 6)

B. Tripled Command (v. 7a)

C. Reason (vv. 7b–8)

Say Yes to the Dress

Conclusion

A. Got Your Clothing Ready?

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

apocalyptic	uh- <i>paw</i> -kuh- <i>lip</i> -tik.
Babylon	<i>Bab</i> -uh-lun.
Babylonians	<i>Bab</i> -ih- <i>low</i> -nee-unz.
Chaldeans	<i>Kal</i> - <i>dee</i> -unz.
Habakkuk	Huh- <i>back</i> -kuk.
Judah	<i>Joo</i> -duh.
Mediterranean	<i>Med</i> -uh-tuh- <i>ray</i> -nee-un.
omnipotent	ahm- <i>nih</i> -poh-tent.
omnipresent	ahm- <i>nih</i> - <i>prez</i> -ent.
omniscient	ahm- <i>nish</i> -unt.
Palestine	<i>Pah</i> -luh- <i>stein</i> .

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.

What Do You Think?

What lifestyle changes might result from your focusing on these descriptions of God regularly in prayer?

Digging Deeper

What are some ways you can get and maintain momentum in this regard?

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.

What Do You Think?

As you examine the content of your prayers in terms of *who God is* (his nature) and *what God does* (his works), what changes do you need to make?

Digging Deeper

Thinking back to [lesson 9](#), how does [Psalm 150:2](#) help frame your answer?

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).

What Do You Think?

How can you help your church improve its message on what it means to fear God?

Digging Deeper

What personal lifestyle change do you need to make first in this regard so that your practice matches your profession?

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.

ACCESS HEAVEN

I grew up in California, but in all my years there I never met a celebrity. The closest I ever came to crossing paths with one was in the late 1980s. I was visiting an art museum with some friends, when we heard that a well-known star was attending an art class with his son.

We made a beeline to the classroom, only to find the door blocked by security. We were so disappointed! To catch a glimpse of a star would have definitely been noteworthy.

Of course, when we finally arrive in Heaven, all that will cease to matter. In [Revelation 19:5](#) a voice calls “all you his servants ... both great and small” to praise God. In that moment, earthly distinctions among social classes, economic status, rank, or family background will be irrelevant. We won’t be sequestered or segregated in front of the throne of God. No one will take a back seat. Together we will enjoy the beauty of our Lord in Heaven. That future and eternal reality easily eclipses any five-second glimpse of a star here on earth!

We note that [Revelation 6:15–17](#) also mentions people of the highest to lowest in earthly standing. That context concerns those who will be lost for eternity. Placing that passage alongside [19:5](#) has something to say about how we view and treat people in the here and now, doesn’t it?

—P. L. M.

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](#).



Visual for [Lesson 12](#). Use this visual as a backdrop as you discuss what a life dressed in righteousness should look like on earth.

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.

What Do You Think?

What changes do you need to make with regard to how your lifestyle could better reflect the holiness depicted in verse 8?

Digging Deeper

How do [Isaiah 61:10](#); [Ezekiel 44:17](#); and [Zechariah 3:4](#) help frame your answer?

SAY YES TO THE DRESS

When I got married, I wore a white dress in spite of secular culture’s trend to view the significance as quite old-fashioned. Recently I’ve seen a sharper turn in this regard, from brides wearing white to little significance in wearing white at all. In fact, a few years ago my friend wore a black satin outfit during her ceremony!

How differently we will feel about white clothing when our Lord returns! As the bride of the Lamb, the church will *want* to wear white, made that way by the groom, the Lord Jesus Christ. No other clothing will compare to it.

Don't forget what that groom-provided clothing stands for: holiness. And because holiness is necessary to "see the Lord" ([Hebrews 12:14](#)), don't let the world convince you that such thinking is just old-fashioned.

—P. L. M.

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.

What Do You Think?

Which concept or imperative in today's lesson do you have the most trouble coming to grips with? Why?

Digging Deeper

How will you resolve this problem?

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.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Lead participants into reminiscing about a memorable wedding, either their own or one they attended. Ask how their expectations of wedding procedures and traditions differ from those of other cultures.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Weddings” icebreaker exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Award a token prize to the participant who collects the most affirmations.

After either activity, make a transition by noting that today’s lesson may challenge our view of how weddings “should” be.

Into the Word

Have two volunteers read [Revelation 19:1–8](#) aloud, alternating with every verse. Then start an agree/disagree discussion as you distribute handouts (you create) on which are printed definitions of, and credible differences between, “praise” and “worship” from your own research. (This can be either a discussion for small groups or the entire class, depending on the size and nature of your class.)

Option. Distribute copies of the “OT in NT” matching exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Announce a speed drill for individuals to complete the exercise as indicated, time limit of one minute. Have learners raise a hand when finished. After calling time, allow learners to correct their own work. Give a token prize suitable to the nature of the exercise to the participant who raised his or her hand first and has all answers correct. Discuss what significance learners see in the Old Testament allusions to the verses from [Revelation 19](#).

Next, use the Lesson Context to ensure that learners understand the meaning and significance of “Babylon,” which is mentioned several times in [Revelation 18](#), the text that immediately precedes today’s text from [Revelation 19](#). Then write the following on the board as the focal point in the discussion to follow:

The Futures of ...

Babylon The Church

Encourage free discussion of the contrast. Jot participants' responses under the appropriate column heading. As learners offer an entry under either one, immediately press them to indicate the direct contrast that should go under the other column heading.

Depending on the nature of your class, you may wish to use one or both of these options: (1) instead of the designations *Babylon* and *The Church*, use *The Great Prostitute* and *The Bride*; (2) include the five row headings *What / Where / When / Why / How* down the left. This will focus learners on providing entries for each of the resulting 10 intersections of rows and columns.

Into Life

Continue the immediately preceding activity by writing *Unbride-Like Church* under the entries in the *Babylon* column and *Bride-Like Church* under the entries in the *The Church* column. Ask participants to voice distinguishing characteristics and qualities of each type of church; jot responses on the board.

Distribute blank index cards. Challenge learners to write on their cards one unbride-like quality or tendency that they can help their church overcome in the week ahead. Suggest that they place their cards somewhere at home to be seen often over the next few days. Promise to offer time in the next class session to discuss results.

Option. Ask learners how they would respond to someone who said, "Since we don't know when Jesus is coming back, if ever, I can just wait until then to repent." Encourage use of Scripture to justify their responses. (You can also have volunteers do this as a role play for the class.)