

Series: Exiles: In God We Trust

Title: A Tale of Two Cities

Scripture: Revelation 17:1-19:10; 21:1-7

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After God created humanity, sin crept into creation as humanity failed to trust God. Humanity built cities and the tower of Babel to reach the heavens. Through Abram, God created a covenant people, his chosen people, to be a holy nation, but they failed. So, God sent nations to discipline and conquer his people. Babylon conquered Jerusalem in 586. In exile, the people of God devoted themselves exclusively to the allegiance of the Lord, who sent a messiah, Cyrus, to restore his people. The Lord sent the Messiah, Jesus, at just the right time in history to die, resurrect, and establish the church that began in the first-century Roman world. The apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:3 referred to his hearers as exiles chosen by God, washed in the blood of Jesus, and made holy by the Spirit.

The book of Revelation concludes the story of God with a vision of eternal reality and the eternal home of God's people. John, the writer of Revelation, was exiled by the provincial authorities on the island of Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea about 40 miles southwest of Miletus. He was relegated and exiled "because of the word of God and testimony of Jesus (1:9)." John saw Jesus, who instructed him to write letters to seven churches in Asia Minor.

Reading Revelation is challenging. John saw an apocalypse, not a code for destruction, but a revelation of another world. Unfortunately, many read Revelation as a code to crack about the end times. G.K. Chesterton, in *Orthodoxy*, wrote, "And though St. John saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators."

While many approach Revelation to correlate modern events with prophecy, Revelation answers the question more than any biblical book: "How do the people of God live in the world?" The first-century hearers lived as the people of God between Rome and Jerusalem.

BIG IDEA:

**God's people see beyond Babylon with holy imagination,
anticipating the New Jerusalem.**

Revelation includes many opposing characters: the Lord and Satan, the Lamb and the dragon, the Lamb's witnesses and the dragon's beasts, the victorious people to the Lamb and the drunk people loyal to the dragon. God's power is displayed through the Lamb. God's people worship God and the Lamb for creating and redeeming them, but they are also deceived and coerced into the demonic cult of the beast.

Babylon and New Jerusalem are two opposing cities at the end of Revelation. John invites the people of God to imagine and see these cities. The people of God are called out of Babylon to enter into the New Jerusalem. .

Revelation includes the cycles of seven judgments or disciplines in the metaphors of seals, trumpets, and bowls carried out by God's agents to bring destruction to those who are opposed to the Lamb. Babylon is judged in the last of the judgments of God, the seventh bowl.

Babylon, the Great Prostitute (Rev 17-18)

- The beast's city, portrayed as Babylon, the whore, personifies the current world order driven by the desire for profit and pleasure. She is clothed in opulent purple and scarlet and draped in gold and jewels from her trade (17:4). People are intoxicated by her wealth and ignore her arrogance and brutality (17:2-3, 6, 18:3).
- Naming the city Babylon identifies it with the city associated with the violent conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. The whore rules like a queen and consumes all the world has to offer (18:7, 11-13), but in the end, she is consumed by the beast (17:16). She destroyed others, but she will be judged and destroyed.
- Babylon is the prevailing economic-religious system in alliance with the state and its related authorities that exists throughout the ages. She represents worldly economic forces in collusion with the state in persecuting Christians.
- The people of God are called out of Babylon and her many sins (18:4)

Rejoicing in Heaven (Rev 19:1-9)

- After Babylon's defeat and destruction, rejoicing in heaven breaks out from many people. The Lamb conquered the seductive power of Babylon.
- An invitation to the Lamb's wedding feast is given for God's holy people dressed in white to attend the banquet.

New Jerusalem, the Bride (Rev 21)

- The people of God are personified as a bride, betrothed maidens who follow the Lamb (14:14). They wait in preparation for the wedding day, when they will be taken to the Lamb's home. The bride prepares herself in pure, white garments of righteous deeds to wear (19:7-9). When the bride appears, she is New Jerusalem, adorned with splendor for her husband the Lamb. New Jerusalem is radiant with jewels, gold, and pearls. The blending of city and bridal imagery calls believers to exclusive allegiance to the Lamb now while anticipating a place with him in the city that is to come.
- The Lord and the Lamb have made their home among the people of God in an eternal city with no Temple and no tears. Those who are victorious of enter this city to be with God forever.

The people of God must continue to read and reread the Bible as a church to be reminded of God's real, new world, which stands in opposition to the old, fallen system in which we presently live. Revelation reveals a world that our imagination must see and live into.

We anticipate our eternal home with the Lord and the Lamb, but we must live faithfully now in the present tension while anticipating Christ's return.

Suggested Resources on Revelation

McKnight, Scot, and Cody Matchett. *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus As a Dissident Disciple*.

Gorman, Michael J. *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness*.

Bauckham, Richard, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*.