

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## THE HALLELUJAH CHORUS

The word "Hallelujah" is found only four times in the New Testament and that is in Revelation 19 in praise for the Divine judgment upon the great city, Babylon, described in chapter 18. This destruction was for the believers: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her" (Rev. 18:20). The word recalls the Old Testament Psalms (especially 113-118), which were victory songs sung at the festivals of Passover and Tabernacles. The first occurrence of the word is in Psalm 104:35, which reads: "Let sinners be consumed from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord O my Soul. Hallelujah!", closely resembling the verses in Revelation. E.W Hengstenberg in *The Revelation of St. John* notes: "the preservation of the Hebrew word, as in the case also of *Amen* and *Hosanna*, serves like a visible finger-post to mark the internal connection between the Church of the New Testament and that of the Old." Whatever or whoever "Babylon" represented, its judgment of destruction from God was to be praised and rejoiced over by the church (Rev. 19:1-7).

In order to understand the significance of these "Hallelujahs" and praise we must first find just who or what Babylon was a symbol of. If you are a Premillennialist, Fundamentalist, Dispensational Rapturelist who believe the works of C. I. Scofield, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe or Tim LaHaye, to name a few, or if you or your preacher have accepted declarations of some of the most noted scholars that claim that the book of Revelation was written by John in 90 AD or later, then you will probably not want to read the rest of this article. The only place we can find what "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev. 17:5) represent is the Scriptures themselves, notable the book of Revelation. When we let Scripture interpret Scripture, we find "the woman whom you saw is the *great city*, which reigns over the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18). "And the *great city* was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon, the *great city* was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath" (Rev. 16:19). Now the "great city" is identified: "And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the *great city* which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also *their Lord was crucified*" (Rev. 11:8). If Babylon is a symbol of the great city were their Lord was crucified, then it is a symbol of apostate Jerusalem. Jesus had warned of the forthcoming judgment of Jerusalem which took place in 70 AD: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is at hand...these are days of vengeance, in order that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21: 20, 22). Foy E. Wallace, Jr. in *The Book of Revelation* states: "The great catastrophe of Revelation, the fall of symbolic Babylon, Jerusalem, also called Sodom and Egypt, bringing an end to Judaism, was envisioned as having occurred. The harps and harpers ceased, giving place to a great voice of much rejoicing over the vindication of divine justice, in answer to the cry of the souls of the slain under the altar, who as a martyred host respond in the hallelujah of the heavenly chorus".

The first "Hallelujah" attributes "Salvation and glory and power to our God, because His judgments are true and righteous, for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her" (ver 1, 2).

The word *salvation* means "deliverance". The Jews were the only nation on earth that experienced salvation from God. His salvation is seen in the deliverance from Egypt unto their deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. God had given "His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77) and Jesus said "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4: 22). God's salvation to the Jews throughout their history as a special people has now come to an end. They will not be delivered, as a nation, from the judgment soon coming upon them.

The word *glory* means "brightness or splendor". It is used "of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever He reveals Himself in these respects." From *W.E. Vine: An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. In the context of Revelation 19 it basically means praise and honor. The glory of the Lord was manifested to the Jews when the tabernacle and temple was built (Exodus 40:34, 35; I Kings 8:10, 11). Not only was the glory of God manifested to Israel when He accepted positive works of the people, it was also manifested in His judgment and punishment He brought upon disobedience, and rebellion, such as the judgment and punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the people who rebelled against Him. (Numbers 16:19, 42) The judgment against the "great harlot" (Rev. 18) was a manifestation of His glory.

The word *power* is translated from six different words in the New Testament and basically means "might, strength, ability, authority and the right to act." The Old Testament is a record of God's power being demonstrated from creation, the flood, the tower of Babel to the plagues in Egypt and the wilderness journey. In the New Testament God, by the begetting of Jesus in the womb of a virgin to the resurrection and ascension, demonstrated the greatest works of power the world has ever known. James 4:12 describes God as "the only Lawgiver and Judge. One who is able save and to destroy". This verse is a commentary on Revelation 18, 19. God saved Judaism many times throughout their history, but upon their rejection of Jesus as their Messiah, they were judged and the whole Jewish system, their holy city, temple, priesthood, the sacrifices and their boast of being the people of God were destroyed in 70 AD.

The second "Hallelujah" continues: "And a second time they said 'Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever'" (ver. 3) This is not the first time fire has destroyed the enemies of God; Abraham "looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward the land of the valley, and he saw, behold, the smoke of the land ascended like the smoke of a furnace" (Gen 19:28). In Isaiah's prophecy of the judgment of God upon Edom, he declared: "Its land shall become burning pitch and shall not be quenched night or day. The smoke shall go up forever; from generation to generation it shall be desolate. None shall pass through it forever and ever" (Isaiah 34:8, 9). The Jews by their

rejection of Christ and their alignment with the world (Caesar), by their own choice, become enemies of God, (John 19:12, 15; Rom. 5:10; James 4:4). God had brought judgment upon Israel many times in the past, but it was never complete, they always repented and survived. But now God's judgment and destruction are irrevocable. The "great city" (the whole Jewish system, as indicated above) will never be resurrected. Isaiah's description of the punishment of Edom is used here to indicate the permanent nature of Babylon's fall. Edward W. Fudge in *The Fire That Consumes* comments on the judgment of Jerusalem in chapter 18: "This judgment against the great city includes plagues (v.4), torture and grief (v.7) death, mourning and famine, and finally ends in consumption by fire (v.8). Having been so brought to ruin (vv.17, 19), a ruin including torment (vv.10, 15), the smoke of the city goes up for all to see (vv. 9, 18). That the smoke goes up forever (Rev. 19:3) speaks of eternal destruction but not everlasting conscious torment. It is perpetual reminder of God's devastating judgment."

The third "Hallelujah" finds that "the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying "Hallelujah!" And a voice came out from the throne saying "Give praise to our God all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great"" (ver. 4, 5). The twenty-four elders, a symbol based on the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, representative of the true Israel of God, the church, (Gal. 3:29, Phil. 3:3) and the four living creatures representing the host of heaven, worship the sovereign God and call for all, small and great, to give Him praise. The modern church's affliction with the modern contemporary craze, not to mention the engrained legalism of some, has resulted in an all-too-casual approach to the Most High God. Our worship should be one that corresponds to the godly fear and reverence which is appropriate to those who are privileged to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace" which is an audience with God who sits on the throne.

The fourth and last "Hallelujah" is stated in these words: "And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and the sound of many waters and the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns'" (ver. 6). The first "Hallelujah" had praised God for his sovereignty in judging the great Harlot. Here He is praised again for his sovereignty in that He reigns. Here we are also introduced to the marriage of the Lamb and the marriage supper (ver. 7-9). To Rome the destruction of Jerusalem was probably the end of the church. Instead it was simply God's taking "away the first in order to establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). The first temple was destroyed that He might establish a new temple. He has taken Himself a new bride, a faithful, chaste virgin who had made herself ready. God's people have been saved from the harlotry of the world. They have become the bride of Christ. The proof of this fact is the church's observance of the Lord's supper, the breaking of bread, as a constant proclamation of the fact that the people of God have been delivered. God, in His sovereign reign has judged and destroyed the great city, the Harlot, the apostate Jewish system and has fully established the New Covenant. This old system had to be destroyed to make way for the new. The two could not continue to exist as two separate entities, so He "made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both

in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity" (Eph. 2:14-16).

In the description of the total destruction of "the great city where the Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8), there comes the words: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and ye saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her" (Rev. 18:20). Are we to rejoice over the judgments of God? Is the destruction of His enemies something we should praise Him for? A Scripture that answers these questions says: "Behold therefore the *goodness* and *severity* of God" (Rom 11:22). The Psalmists celebrates God's judgment as well as His mercy: "I will sing of *loving kindness* and *judgment*" (Psalm 101:1). J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* writes: "To an age which unashamedly sold itself to the gods of greed, pride, sex and self-will, the Church mumbles on about God's kindness, but says nothing about His judgment." Christians speak often of "the goodness of God" and our songs and hymns are filled with references to His "kindness, love, mercy and grace," but few, if any, contain references to His severity, wrath and judgment. A.W. Pink in *The Attributes of God* states: "A study of the concordance will show that there are more reverences in Scripture to the anger, fury and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness." We should not emphasize one over the other. Paul tells us to behold both the kindness *and* severity of God.

The nature of God's anger is different from man's anger. God's anger is not some emotion within Him. His anger is a righteous anger because of the sin that is in the world. Human finiteness and contamination from sin characterizes man's anger. This is why Paul admonishes us to "be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). There can be no sin in God's anger as there is many times in man's. We must see God's anger in terms of His revealed character even though He must use human words to describe it. God's wrath is based upon His righteousness and is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men (Rom. 1:18). God must punish sin, otherwise the death and suffering of Christ would have no meaning. Without His wrath God would cease to be fully righteous, and love would degenerate into sentimentality. This is seen when some say there is a difference between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. They claim. "The God of the Old covenant was characterized by an anger that is almost cruelty, while Jesus is the 'express image' of God and is different from the God of 'time past'" (Heb. 1:1). Although the new covenant was inaugurated with the coming of Christ, God Himself remains unchanged: "For I, the Lord, do not change..." (Mal. 3:6). In the Old Testament God was angry with those who rejected His revealed will. This remains true after the coming of His son: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of God* abides on him (John 3:36). The anger of Jesus is expressed many times in the gospels. For example: Luke 21:23; Mark 3:5; Matthew 23 is a detailed denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees in which His anger is fully expressed. Paul indicates that God's wrath is an ever present reality (Romans 1:18, quoted above).

This "Hallelujah chorus" expressing praise and thanksgiving to God for the judgment on Babylon, the great harlot, is proof and guarantee that God vindicates His people. Persecutors, torturers and tormentors will not escape. God never in the end abandons His own. This is the reason for Christians to rejoice.

