

REVELATION: WEEK 5

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Monday, March 19

Revelation 16:1-21

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

²So the first angel went and poured his bowl on the earth, and a foul and painful sore came on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped its image.

³The second angel poured his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing in the sea died.

⁴The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.⁵ And I heard the angel of the waters say,

“You are just, O Holy One, who are and were,
for you have judged these things;

⁶because they shed the blood of saints and prophets,
you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!”

⁷And I heard the altar respond,

“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
your judgments are true and just!”

⁸The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire;⁹ they were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory.

¹⁰The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their

tongues in agony,¹¹ and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

¹²The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings from the east.¹³ And I saw three foul spirits like frogs coming from the mouth of the dragon, from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet.¹⁴ These are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.¹⁵ (“See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame.”)¹⁶ And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon.

¹⁷The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!”¹⁸ And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake.¹⁹ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath.²⁰ And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found;²¹ and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

Points of Interest

- “seven angels” – They’re back. In the long middle section of Revelation, we’ve had seven seals, then seven trumpets, now seven bowls. The bowl plagues aren’t entirely new – they’re at least in part a recapitulation of the material covered with the trumpets.
- “seven bowls of the wrath of God” – There are at least three ways of understanding the wrath of God generally, and so these bowls in particular. The harshest read is that people are basically awful and deserving of whatever hellish punishments God can dream up. God’s angry with you, so Jesus chooses you to rescue you from that anger or... good luck! You can maybe tell I’m less sympathetic to that understanding. A second read is that as much as God loves people, God sees clearly the great evil and injustice that humans and human systems perpetuate. God punishes people and societies sooner or later, and those that don’t turn away from their evil and seek forgiveness will be punished eternally. That hatred of evil and resultant punishment is the wrath of God. This is also a very common perspective, and

I think a reasonable view, the one I most used to hold. Increasingly, I'm inclined toward a third perspective that's also been held by many Christians. That is that the wrath of God is a metaphor for the consequences we bring upon ourselves when we turn from God and choose evil. God isn't angry per se, but has designed a universe in which evil catches up and turns back on us eventually. We reap what we sow. Regardless, the point of this chapter – and of the idea of God's judgment in general – is that God will judge unrepentant evil. It's God's job always, not people's, and it is good news that evil can't endlessly harm and destroy without consequence.

- “every living thing in the sea died” – Each of these seven judgments are against various crimes of human empire, and the judgment is often inherent to the crime. Humans exploit each other and exploit the earth, and so despoil the earth. Stretches of sea where nothing can live are not hard to imagine.
- “You are just. . . . It is what they deserved.” – At the center of this chapter, a witness – personified as “the angel of the waters” proclaims God's absolute justice. However we understand God's judgment, no fair observer will consider it to be biased or harsh.
- “did not repent of their deeds” – As we saw in Chapter 9, punishment does not seem to be effective as motivating people to turn around. Judgment is a consequence of evil and a means of stopping it, not a tool for change.
- “who go . . . to assemble them for battle” – Late in the bowls, as with the trumpets, things get funky. A drought creates conditions for war, as droughts often do, and demonic frogs make things worse with their propaganda. Helpful to remember that people who stir leaders up to war are in the service of evil.
- “Harmagedon” – This word, spelled differently, has become famous, attached to what I consider a bad interpretation of this book. Some readers have understood this chapter – and the whole middle section of Revelation – as predicting the events that lead up to a catastrophic end of the world. In this reading, Armageddon is the place of the last great, bloody battle. However, scholars can't agree on where this place is or what it means, or even how to spell it. Best as we can tell, it represents a place where earth's leaders destroy themselves, either in a war that ends an empire, or perhaps in all war.
- “Flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder” – This is the stock language of theophany, the dramatic appearance of God. As we'll see over the next two chapters, John assures his readers that God will make sure all human empires that exploit and harm – Rome included – will come to an end.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, in light of the judgment on all human systems that resist God and God's good and humane ways on earth, we consider the command to, “Come out” and turn away from the evil baked into human societies, our own included. Today, ask God to reveal some aspect of violence or injustice in your nation, your city, or your ethnicity that you participate in through your actions or thinking. Ask God for ideas on how to turn away from that and for the courage to do so.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your six, that any who have had exposure to a harsh or arbitrary view of God's justice will find hope that God is motivated not to hurt or harm but to bring an end to that kind of behavior.

Tuesday, March 20

Revelation 17:1-18

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great whore who is seated on many waters,² with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and with the wine of whose fornication the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk."³ So he carried me away in the spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns.⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication;⁵ and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations."⁶ And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly amazed.⁷ But the angel said to me, "Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her."⁸ The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the inhabitants of the earth, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will be amazed when they see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

⁹"This calls for a mind that has wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; also, they are seven kings,¹⁰ of whom five have fallen, one is living, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain only a little while.¹¹ As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction.¹² And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.¹³ These are united in yielding their power and authority to the beast;¹⁴ they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

¹⁵And he said to me, "The waters that you saw, where the whore is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages.¹⁶ And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the whore; they will make her desolate and naked; they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire.¹⁷ For God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by agreeing to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.¹⁸ The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

Points of Interest

- "great whore" – There are several places in Scripture where male writers use prostitutes, whores, or adulterous women as metaphors for people or societies who are unfaithful to God. This is at best complicated. To my ear, it's also unintentionally misogynistic. I consider the Bible to be an authoritative witness to the person and mission of Jesus and also a penetratingly insightful record of people's understandings of and experiences of God. It's critical to me in guiding me toward insight and truth about God, myself, and all of life. But it's also written by real people in real cultures, that had real flaws. It's OK to interrogate and push back on the parts that seem to reflect the shell of those cultures more than the core of its intended message. I find the "whore" language distracting and unhelpful, but I can hear the underlying truth that there are leaders and nations that look beautiful while they actually entice people to harm.
- "with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication" – Rome grew its empire through war and conquest but also through the submission, allegiance, and selling out of collaborators. That doesn't end well for them or the people they represent.
- "clothed in purple and scarlet" – The Babylon/whore character has aspirations to wealth and royalty but is really just a parody of God's reign and rule.
- "Babylon" – John is clearly writing about the Roman empire. There are hints of this everywhere in the text. But if he called Rome the "mother of whores and of earth's abominations" and predicted its destruction, he would be executed and the churches he represents would also likely be persecuted or destroyed. So, he writes in thinly veiled code, calling Rome by the name of Israel's ancient enemy, who destroyed their temple and city of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. He also gives the world a universal

symbol for human powers that have impressive might and wealth while they are also full of evil. Babylon is Rome, but it is also every human society that builds great cities and amasses great wealth while doing violence, exploiting economically, proudly announcing its own greatness, while also leading people toward dependence on self and society and not on God. Babylon is also undeniably us.

- “drunk with the blood of the saints” – The non-Christian Roman historian Tacitus describes Emperor Nero’s brutal, bloody execution of followers of Jesus. Later emperors would do this again.
- “about to ascend from the bottomless pit” – Apparently, there was a widespread legend that Emperor Nero would arise from the underworld to rule and do evil again.
- “was and is not and is to come” – Human leaders and rulers that give Babylon its being are a parody of the good rule of God who was and is and is to come.
- “the seven heads are seven mountains” – One of many allusions to Rome, the city of seven hills, which – by some ways of counting – had had seven emperors by the writing of Revelation.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, in light of the judgment on all human systems that resist God and God’s good and humane ways on earth, we consider the command to, “Come out” and turn away from the evil baked into human societies, our own included. Today, consider how your praise or love of country has obscured your vision of what is good and true and beautiful. Ask God for clarity of vision to see your country’s blessings but also its violence and its evils for what they are.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for the churches of America, that they would repent of any ways they have sold out to American patriotism that covers up past violence and pursues America first blessing over God’s desire for all peoples of the earth to love and follow Jesus into life, truth, joy, and peace.

Wednesday, March 21

Revelation 18:1-24

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority; and the earth was made bright with his splendor. ²He called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

It has become a dwelling place of demons,
a haunt of every foul spirit,
a haunt of every foul bird,
a haunt of every foul and hateful beast.

³For all the nations have drunk
of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,
and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the
power of her luxury.”

⁴Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
so that you do not take part in her sins,
and so that you do not share in her plagues;

⁵for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

⁶Render to her as she herself has rendered,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double draught for her in the cup she mixed.

⁷As she glorified herself and lived luxuriously,
so give her a like measure of torment and grief.

Since in her heart she says,

‘I rule as a queen;
I am no widow,
and I will never see grief;’

⁸therefore her plagues will come in a single day—
pestilence and mourning and famine—
and she will be burned with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.”

⁹And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived
in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the
smoke of her burning; ¹⁰they will stand far off, in fear of her
torment, and say,

“Alas, alas, the great city,
Babylon, the mighty city!

For in one hour your judgment has come.”

¹¹And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since
no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹²cargo of gold, silver, jewels
and pearls, fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet, all kinds of scented
wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron,
and marble, ¹³cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense,
wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses
and chariots, slaves—and human lives.

¹⁴“The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your dainties and your splendor
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

¹⁵The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will
stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

¹⁶“Alas, alas, the great city,
clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

¹⁷For in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste!”
And all shipmasters and seafarers, sailors and all whose trade is
on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸and cried out as they saw the smoke of
her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

¹⁹And they threw dust on their heads, as they wept and mourned,
crying out,

“Alas, alas, the great city,
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!
For in one hour she has been laid waste.”

²⁰Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and
prophets! For God has given judgment for you against her.

²¹Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and
threw it into the sea, saying,

“With such violence Babylon the great city
will be thrown down,
and will be found no more;

²²and the sound of harpists and minstrels and of flutists and
trumpeters

will be heard in you no more;
and an artisan of any trade
will be found in you no more;
and the sound of the millstone
will be heard in you no more;

²³and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more;
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more;

for your merchants were the magnates of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

²⁴And in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slaughtered on earth.”

Points of Interest

- “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great” – John invites us to a funeral, sung in a series of seven laments and songs. The one who has died is Babylon. In real history, Rome wouldn’t fall until 410 AD, when King Alaric and his Visigoths would attack from the North. As far as John is concerned, though, its destruction is sealed, as is the judgment and death of every Babylon that dares to pretend to be good like God while using its powers and wealth to manipulate and harm the many while enriching the few.
- “Come out of her” – Since Babylon is dying, we might want to keep our distance, lest we catch her fatal disease. This is the call for people in empire – live there, do your thing, but notice the evil, and don’t do it.
- “I am no widow, and I will never see grief” – Classic pride-before-the-fall Babylonian line, quoted during its funeral dirge.
- “And the merchants of the earth” – The people who are most upset about Babylon’s end are the people who made the most profit from it. At the deepest level, we all win when justice is done. But in the near term, it hurts those who have profited from it.
- “slaves – and human lives” – The weeping merchants include the slave traders. As with American history, Rome’s was chock full of slaves. By the end of the first century, slaves were about half the population of the city of Rome.
- “Rejoice over her, O heaven, you saints and apostles and prophets” – Those who love and worship God can always celebrate God’s justice being done. I’ve been imagining as I write this how I would respond to a world economic shake-up that left me less privileged. What if I sensed that this was part of God’s justice? I am among the top ten percent, maybe higher, of the world’s wealthiest people. Would I be able to celebrate a change in the world’s economy? Truth is, I don’t know.
- “in you was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slaughtered on earth” – Empires look shiny on the outside and have great propaganda, but they hold not very well kept secrets in their historical cores. Where there is blood at the roots, God grieves and promises justice will be done.
- As we wrap up John’s perspective on Babylon, a final quotation. “Revelation has a warning for believers down through the years. Babylon is allegorical of the idolatry that any nation commits when it elevates material abundance, military prowess, technological sophistication, imperial grandeur, racial pride, and any other glorification of the creature over the Creator. . . . The message of the book of Revelation concerns the character and timeliness of God’s judgment not only of persons, but also of nations and, in fact, of all principalities and powers – which is to say, all authorities, corporations, institutions, structures, bureaucracies, and the like.” (Metzger, *Breaking the Code*, 88)

Spiritual Exercise

This week, in light of the judgment on all human systems that resist God and God’s good and humane ways on earth, we consider the command to, “Come out” and turn away from the evil baked into human societies, our own included. Today, consider how you have benefitted from the American consumer economy. Ask God to reveal where your wealth or consumption have come at the expense of other people, societies, or God’s earth. Consider what change might look like.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray for your six, that they would cultivate lives that love God’s justice. If any of them are hungering for more justice, pray that they would be encouraged that God shares their longing and will bring it to pass.

Thursday, March 22

Revelation 19:1-10

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power to our God,

² for his judgments are true and just;

he has judged the great whore

who corrupted the earth with her fornication,

and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

³Once more they said,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke goes up from her forever and ever.”

⁴And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down

and worshiped God who is seated on the throne, saying,

“Amen. Hallelujah!”

⁵And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

and all who fear him,

small and great.”

⁶Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

⁷Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready;

⁸to her it has been granted to be clothed

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are

invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me,

“These are true words of God.” ¹⁰Then I fell down at his feet to

worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a

fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the

testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is

the spirit of prophecy.”

Points of Interest

- “the loud voice of a great multitude” – So begins the seventh and final of Revelation’s worship scenes, this one on the tail end of Babylon’s funeral.
- “Hallelujah” – A Hebrew expression of praise, that means Praise Yahweh – the likely Hebrew pronunciation of the name of God (“I am”) first revealed to Moses at the burning bush.
- “he has avenged on her the blood of his servants” – The singers are celebrating Babylon’s destruction, consumed by its own violence. They’re not bitter or vengeful; they are relieved that their blood or that of any other servants of God will be shed no more.
- “like the sound of many waters” – The voice of the victory choir sounds like the voice of Jesus in the first chapter. To follow Jesus is to become more and more like Jesus and at the same time more and more like our true selves.
- “for the marriage of the Lamb has come” – The unity of Jesus’ people with Jesus is so close, it’s given the metaphor of marriage. The Lamb who was slaughtered and became a shepherd as well is now ready to live happily ever after with the faithful people who love Jesus.
- “his bride has made herself ready” – There are four women in Revelation. The first and third are Jezebel, from chapter 2, and the prostitute of Chapters 17-18. One is a historical reference, one a generalized one for people of societies that have lost their way and seek to lead other people away from God and away from what is good and true and beautiful. The second is the sun-clothed woman from Chapter 12 who gives birth to Jesus. This is Jesus’ mom, Mary, or maybe a Mother-earth like personification of all humanity. The final woman is what all of us can become – loved by, united with Jesus.
- “the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” – We all know how carefully brides prepare and dress up for their wedding day. The bride of Christ is here called “the saints,” God’s holy ones, and gets dressed in righteous deeds. If you grew up religious, you might have over-specific associations with those words “holy” and “righteous.” Sorry if that is distracting. In the context of Revelation, it’s in

contrast to the bad deeds of Rome or any other empire, past or future. It's resisting the lying, greedy, violent ways of empire and living truthfully, honestly, and peaceably. It's resisting the marketing propaganda and false worship and exploitation of empire and worshipping the God who cares for us in the incomplete, vulnerable, needy state we find ourselves in this life.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, in light of the judgment on all human systems that resist God and God's good and humane ways on earth, we consider the command to, "Come out" and turn away from the evil baked into human societies, our own included. Today, consider how you have believed the lies of marketing propaganda and hoped that consumer goods would satisfy you. Invite Jesus if you like, to help you make peace with your emptiness and to look forward to your future fulfillment when you are one with Jesus.

A Direction for Prayer

Pray that God would lead your church to more and more righteous deeds – acts of love and beauty and truth that show the world what Jesus looks like and prepare members of your church for their destiny as part of the "bride of Christ."

Friday, March 23

Revelation 19:11-21

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse! Its rider is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹²His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. ¹³He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

¹⁷Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly in midheaven, “Come, gather for

the great supper of God, ¹⁸to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of the mighty, the flesh of horses and their riders—flesh of all, both free and slave, both small and great.” ¹⁹Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. ²⁰And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Points of Interest

- “Then I saw” – Revelation moves to a close with a final series of seven visions, each beginning with these words.
- “Faithful and True” – Revelation’s first white horse (Chapter 6) was the first of four that represented some of the worst trials of human history, such as military conquest. This time around it is Jesus on the horse. If John has encouraged one thing most in the house churches he wrote to, it has been faithfulness – don’t fall prey to Rome’s propaganda, and don’t be intimidated by their violence. Stick with Jesus. Live your life of faith and all it calls you to. Jesus, John says, was the model of faith in his life in Palestine, and is faithful to people and faithful to his purposes in history as well.
- “clothed in a robe dipped in blood” – Like the four horsemen, Jesus is presented as a warrior as well, but an unusual one – his robe is bloody before he’s even met an enemy. We’ll remember this is also the slaughtered Lamb. His robe is stained with his own blood, no one else’s.
- “the armies of heaven, wearing fine linen” – No one wears fine linen into battle. Jesus’ armies are not dressed for war but dressed as Jesus’ followers are, for a wedding feast.
- “From his mouth comes a sharp sword” – Warrior/Lamb/Groom Jesus also has an odd weapon: a sword protruding from his mouth. Jesus accomplishes things through speech, not violence. His name, after all (at least the one in this passage that isn’t a secret) is “The Word of God.”
- “will rule them with a rod of iron” – This is another reference to the Bible’s second psalm, one of the first century’s more popular Messianic passages of the Old Testament, that roused hopes that God would send a human leader to rule in God’s name.
- “will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God” – Revelation has used this imagery before, back in Chapter 14’s seven angels of judgment. This paragraph has been working references to Isaiah 63, one of the Old Testament’s sections most associated with Jewish thought about of the end of history, the end of the world as they would know it. In that section of Isaiah, the narrative is oscillating between vengeance and redemption, violence and mercy, as if Isaiah isn’t quite sure how things will go. Here Revelation uses the symbolism of vengeance and warfare, but without any violence. It’s possible that Jesus will speak a change in history into being with a word, end evil without violence, consummate God’s Kingdom without war.
- “the birds that fly in midheaven” – vultures, and other birds that feast on carrion

- “gather for the great supper” – I hope this isn’t the wedding supper! The birds are feasting on the flesh of people and animals of warfare. We can guess this is symbolic because just about all of Revelation is – that’s its genre – and because there hasn’t even been a war in this chapter. It’s an image of poetic justice and the end of the terrors of war.
- “the beast was captured” – Human empire’s rulers resist Jesus, as they will, but between vs. 29 and 30, the anticipated battle ends awfully quickly. In fact, it never occurs.
- “These two men were thrown alive into the lake of fire” – The violent imagery of Revelation 14 is again summoned, into this scene that reframes symbolic imagery of warfare. The message is that human evil and violence is eliminated, even if John strongly implies that Jesus – stained with his own blood, armed only with his word – will never use the technology of warfare to do the trick.

Spiritual Exercise

This week, in light of the judgment on all human systems that resist God and God’s good and humane ways on earth, we consider the command to, “Come out” and turn away from the evil baked into human societies, our own included. Today, remember any ways that you have perpetrated or cheered for violence, in your own words or actions or in cheering on your nation’s armies or any other violence. Consider that Jesus is opposed to violence in all forms, and will bring it to an end. Ask God what coming out of violence looks like.

A Direction for Prayer

Odds are that if you’re praying regularly for six people, at least one has perpetrated verbal or physical violence – likely covered up, perhaps cloaked under regret or shame – and at least one has been subject to verbal or physical violence as an adult or child. Perhaps without knowing which ones you are praying for, pray for God’s work in their lives of repentance and healing.