

THE UNVEILING

Session 12

Babylon the Great

Revelation 17–18

A Fourteen-Session Inductive Study for Young Adults

Come out of her, my people. (Revelation 18:4, RSV2CE)

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group opens Babylon's full file: a harlot-city riding the beast, glittering and drunk with the blood of the saints, deliberately drawn as the counterfeit opposite of the woman of chapter 12 and of the Bride still to come. They identify her first-century face (Rome) from the text's own clues, hear her timeless meaning (the world-city of every age, seduction where the beast is coercion), and receive the chapter's central command to God's people: come out of her, my people.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church has never been afraid of these chapters, because she has always known two things at once: Babylon in John's day wore the face of the empire that martyred her, and Babylon's perfume (wealth, comfort, status bought at the price of blood and souls) can drift into any age and any heart, including the baptized. Come out of her is preached to us.

What You Need to Know

Structure: chapter 17 is the vision and its interpretation (an angel decodes more here than anywhere else in the book); chapter 18 is the funeral: a prophetic dirge over the city's fall, sung in the borrowed cadences of Jeremiah's Babylon oracles and Ezekiel's lament over Tyre.

The woman of chapter 17 is drawn as a deliberate anti-image, and your group has the materials to see it: chapter 12's woman was clothed with the sun, crowned with stars, in the pain of childbirth, hunted into the wilderness; this woman is clothed in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, seated in comfort on the beast, holding a golden cup full of abominations, and drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus. Mother versus harlot; hunted versus enthroned; giving life versus drinking blood. The counterfeit thread from Session 9 reaches its feminine image here, and it completes when the Bride appears in white two chapters hence: linen versus scarlet, the cup of the Lord versus the cup of demons (1 Corinthians 10:21) versus her cup of abominations. Evil's last mask in this book is not terror but allure: Babylon is what the beast looks like when it stops threatening and starts selling.

Her first-century identity is the least mysterious in the book, because the angel keeps decoding: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated (17:9), read at once as the seven hills: every hearer in Asia knew the city of seven hills; Rome's own poets celebrated the septimontium), and the woman is the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth (17:18: in John's world, one city). The name Babylon itself was already Jewish and Christian code for Rome after the temple's destruction (as Babylon had destroyed the first temple, Rome destroyed the second); St. Peter signs off from she who is at Babylon (1 Peter 5:13), traditionally written from Rome: a usage your group can verify, with the identification carried by early tradition. The seven kings of 17:10–11 have generated endless emperor-counting schemes; be honest that no counting from the text alone commands consensus, and that one plausible reading of the scheme's function (five fallen, one is, one yet to come, then an eighth that belongs to the seven) is that the beast's power is always almost over and always recycling, and that the Church has defined none of it. And Rome does not exhaust her: John fused Daniel's empires into one beast precisely because the thing recurs, and he drapes this woman in the fabrics of Jeremiah's literal Babylon (the golden cup making nations drunk is Jeremiah 51:7 nearly verbatim, tonight's discovery). Babylon can stand for the world-city of every age: St. Augustine's earthly city in its market clothes: any civilization, economy, or lifestyle organized around wealth, pleasure, and power at the price of blood and souls.

Chapter 18's dirge is a masterpiece of prophetic economics. Three choirs mourn her: kings who committed fornication with her, merchants who grew rich from her, and shipmasters who cry, What city was like the great city? Their grief is self-interested to the syllable: alas... in one hour all this wealth has been laid waste. Read the cargo list of 18:12–13 slowly with your group: gold, jewels, silk, ivory,

marble, spice, wine, oil, flour, cattle, chariots, and then the final entry: and slaves, that is, human souls. The inventory descends from luxury to livestock to human beings, priced and listed last, and the text's placement is the indictment: an economy that ends its manifest with souls as cargo. (The slave markets of the empire are the first referent; every age since has found its own name on the manifest.) Against the three self-interested laments stand two other voices: the command, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins (Jeremiah's evacuation order over old Babylon, Jeremiah 51:45, tonight's discovery: here primarily moral and spiritual disentanglement rather than geography), and heaven's call to rejoice, for God has given judgment for you against her (18:20), with the final charge: in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth (18:24). The millstone thrown into the sea (18:21) enacts Jeremiah's original sign (Jeremiah 51:63–64): so shall Babylon sink.

Pastoral note. Two temptations attend these chapters. One is to read Babylon only as somebody else (Rome then, some other country or system now) and never as a mirror; the cargo list forbids that comfort: most of us are her customers before we are her victims. The other, in some Protestant polemics your group may have met, is to read the harlot as the Catholic Church; tonight's steelman takes that charge at full strength and answers it with the text. Keep the session's exit sign lit throughout: the command is not despair over Babylon but departure from her, and the departure is repentance, simplicity, and allegiance, available tonight.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Jeremiah 51:6–9, 45: flee from the midst of Babylon; Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken. The cup (17:4) and the command (18:4) both come from here. Central discovery tonight.
- Jeremiah 51:63–64: the scroll tied to a stone and thrown into the Euphrates: so shall Babylon sink; enacted at Revelation 18:21 with a millstone and the sea.
- Ezekiel 27 (especially 27:12–36): the lament over Tyre: cargo lists, weeping merchants and mariners, the cry Who was ever destroyed like Tyre? The template of Revelation 18's dirge. Comparison discovery tonight.
- Isaiah 21:9: fallen, fallen is Babylon: the doubled cry announced in advance at 14:8 and completed at 18:2.
- Genesis 11:1–9: Babel: the city and tower of self-made name: Babylon's birth certificate: read traditionally as humanity organizing itself against heaven.
- 1 Peter 5:13: she who is at Babylon... sends you greetings: the apostolic use of Babylon for Rome, verifiable in the New Testament itself.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Augustine · *City of God, Book 18 (summary)*

St. Augustine treats Babylon as the standing capital of the earthly city across history, and speaks of Rome, in substance, as a second Babylon in the west: the same city of man under new management. His two-cities frame is the sanest key to these chapters. The study's application: Babylon is less a dot on a map than a citizenship of the heart, and every generation must ask which city it is building.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. John Chrysostom · *Homilies on Lazarus and the Rich Man (summary)*

St. John Chrysostom preached, in substance, that not to share one's wealth with the poor is theft from the poor and deprivation of their life, for the goods we hold beyond our need are theirs. Set his voice beside the cargo list: Babylon's economy prices souls last; the Church's Doctors price them first, and preach as if the ledger of 18:13 were being read aloud in their own city.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH

St. Bernard of Clairvaux · *On Consideration (summary)*

Writing to his former monk who had become Pope Eugene III, St. Bernard warns him, in substance: in your pomp and bustle you risk seeming the successor not of Peter but of Constantine; remember you are heir to a fisherman. The saints have never needed the harlot slander to call the Church's members, including popes, away from Babylon's style; love reforms what polemic only defames.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 2113: idolatry of power, pleasure, money, and the state: Babylon's portfolio itemized in the Catechism's own list.
- CCC 2423–2425: the Church's judgment on economic systems: any theory making profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable; the disordered desire for money is itemized among its causes. The cargo list of 18:12–13 is this doctrine in vision form.
- CCC 1867: the sins that cry to heaven include injustice to the wage earner and the oppression of the poor: the blood found in her (18:24) has categories.
- CCC 827 (callback from Session 2): the Church, holy, embracing sinners in her bosom, always in need of purification: the frame that lets Catholics hear St. Bernard's rebuke and refuse the harlot identification at the same time.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

Counterfeit thread reaches its feminine image tonight: harlot versus the woman of chapter 12, and (next session) versus the Bride. Build the contrast table in Question 2 and leave one column deliberately empty, labeled only: the Bride, next week.

Cups motif surfaces: Jeremiah's golden cup, the harlot's cup of abominations, Babylon's wine (14:8). The true cup arrives with the wedding feast. Still no preview.

How long? thread: 18:20 and 18:24 are its penultimate echo (rejoice... God has given judgment for you); the final declaration (19:2) opens next session. Connect 18:24 back to 6:10 aloud.

Seven heads counted tonight (17:9): connect back to 12:3 and 13:1 in one sentence: the family heraldry finally explained as far as the text explains it.

Guard the room's charity during the steelman: some participants may have relatives who sincerely hold the harlot-equals-Rome view. The answer is firm; the tone stays warm.

Furniture of Heaven, the counterfeit joins the lens: Babylon carries a golden cup full of abominations (17:4), the forgery of a chalice in the hand of the forgery of the Bride. Come out of her (18:4) stands against a standing invitation to come in; the group hears that invitation next session.

Session Goals

1. The group builds the harlot-versus-woman contrast from the two texts themselves.

2. The group identifies Babylon's first-century face from 17:9 and 17:18 with 1 Peter 5:13, and states her timeless meaning.
3. The group reads the cargo list to its last two items and can say what the manifest indicts.
4. The group hears come out of her as addressed to the baptized, and names one concrete disentanglement.
5. The group can answer the harlot-equals-Catholic-Church charge charitably and from the text.

Timed Plan (75–90 minutes)

- Opening prayer: 5 min
- Win questions: 10 min
- Build (Revelation 17–18, with discovery passages): 45–55 min
- Send questions: 8 min
- Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer, distribute Take-Home 12: 7–10 min

Pre-chosen cuts if time runs short: drop the Dig Deeper box, and take the seven-kings material inside Question 3 as one leader sentence (no consensus, function over arithmetic).

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, you see every city we build and every market we serve. Give us tonight clear eyes for Babylon's glitter, grief for the blood in her ledgers, and ready feet when you say: come out of her, my people. Keep us your people in the middle of her streets. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Win

1. What is something you bought, subscribed to, or scrolled that was marketed to you so well you wanted it before you knew what it was? What made the selling work?
2. Coercion pushes; seduction pulls. Which one, honestly, is more dangerous to your faith right now?

Build

Read Revelation 17:1–6 aloud.

3. We have met a woman in this book before. Build the contrast: chapter 12's woman and chapter 17's, side by side: clothing, crown or cup, posture, relationship to the beast, what each one is full of. What is John teaching by drawing them as opposites?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Chapter 12: clothed with the sun, crowned with twelve stars, crying out in birth pangs, hunted by the dragon into the wilderness, nourished by God. Chapter 17: clothed in purple and scarlet, bedecked with gold and jewels and pearls, holding a golden cup full of abominations, seated comfortably on the beast, drunk with the blood of the saints. Mother versus harlot; labor versus luxury; hunted versus enthroned; giving life versus drinking it. John is completing the counterfeit catalog: the dragon apes the Father, the beast apes the slain-and-risen Son, the false prophet apes the Spirit, and Babylon apes the woman: a counterfeit people, a counterfeit glory, and (keep one column of your contrast table empty tonight) a counterfeit of one more figure this book has not yet unveiled in her wedding clothes. Evil's final mask is not terror but allure: Babylon is the beast's power dressed for a night out, and her cup is golden on the outside.

4. The angel decodes more here than anywhere in the book. Read 17:9 and 17:18, then discovery: open 1 Peter 5:13. What did Babylon mean to John's first hearers, and why did Jews and Christians of that generation reach for that particular code name? Then, briefly: what do the seven kings (17:10–11) do to every attempt to keep Babylon safely in the past?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Seven mountains on which the woman is seated, heard at once as the famous seven hills, and the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth: in the first century that address has one occupant, the city of seven hills celebrated as such by its own poets: Rome. And St. Peter signs a letter from she who is at Babylon (1 Peter 5:13): on the traditional and, among early Christians, near-universal reading, Rome wearing that code name: the usage verifiable in your own Bible, the identification carried by early tradition: fittingly, since as Babylon had destroyed the first temple and exiled God's people, Rome destroyed the second and martyred the saints. On the seven kings: emperor-counting schemes have been tried for nineteen centuries without consensus, and the Church has defined none of them; one plausible reading of the scheme's function holds even where its arithmetic is not settled: five fallen, one is, one to come, an eighth of the seven: the beast's power always almost finished and always recycling. Which is why Rome does not exhaust Babylon: John

dressed her in Jeremiah's Babylon and Ezekiel's Tyre because the world-city keeps rebuilding under new names: the earthly city, as St. Augustine calls it, wearing its market clothes in every age, ours included.

Read Revelation 18:1–8 aloud.

5. One command to God's people interrupts the funeral (18:4). Discovery: open Jeremiah 51:6–9 and 45. Where does the command come from, who is it addressed to in Revelation (notice: my people are inside her), and what does coming out of Babylon actually mean if Babylon is not a place you can drive away from?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

It is Jeremiah's evacuation order over the first Babylon, reissued: flee from the midst of Babylon... go out of the midst of her, my people. And mark the astonishment inside the address: God's people are in Babylon when the command comes: believers living, working, and shopping in the world-city, at risk of taking part in her sins and sharing her plagues not by hating God but by drifting into her portfolio: wealth as security, pleasure as right, status as identity, comfort purchased without asking what it cost whom. Since Babylon has no city limits, the exit is primarily not geographic but moral and spiritual: repentance, simplicity, generosity, honest work, and allegiance kept clean: the Session 9 marks question answered in economic form. The Church has practiced this exit for two millennia while staying physically in the world's cities: in Babylon, never of her, purchasing without belonging to the purchase.

Read Revelation 18:11–13 aloud, slowly, all the way to the end of the list. Then read 18:20 and 18:24.

6. Walk the cargo manifest in order and listen to its shape. What is the final entry, how is it rendered, and why is its placement the sharpest sentence of judgment in these two chapters? Then: who is told to rejoice at her fall (18:20), and what is the final charge in her file (18:24): where have we been waiting for that verdict since Session 5?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

The manifest descends: gold, jewels, pearls, fine linen, silk; ivory, bronze, marble; cinnamon, spice, incense, wine, oil, flour, wheat; cattle, sheep, horses, chariots; and slaves, that is, human souls: the final entry, its apposition unmasking what the trade called cargo. Luxury, then materials, then groceries, then livestock, then, listed last, priced with the rest: human beings. The order is the indictment: an economy that inventories souls after cinnamon has told you its whole theology. The empire's slave markets are the first referent, and every age since has found new names for line-item humans: trafficked persons, exploited labor, the unborn, anyone reduced to cargo. The Church's doctrine says it without imagery: profit as the exclusive norm of economic life is morally unacceptable (CCC 2423–2425), and the blood of the oppressed cries to heaven (CCC 1867). Then the two closing voices: heaven tells saints and apostles and prophets to rejoice, for God has given judgment for you against her: and the file closes with the charge we have carried since the fifth seal: in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth. The martyrs asked how long from under the altar (6:10); the incense rose (8:3–5); the altar declared it just (16:7); and tonight the ledger of blood is read into the record. One session remains before the Hallelujah.

BUILD, THEN PRESS: IS THE HARLOT THE CATHOLIC CHURCH?

Present this at full strength before answering. Since the Reformation, a serious polemic has argued: the woman sits on seven hills, which is Rome; she wears purple and scarlet, the colors of bishops and cardinals; she holds a golden cup, like the chalice of the Mass; she is called Mystery, and the Church

calls her sacraments mysteries; she is a mother (Mother Church) whom the text calls the mother of harlots; and she is drunk with the blood of saints, as Rome's inquisitions and persecutions shed the blood of Bible-believing Christians. The identification is not name-calling, the argument runs; it is exegesis: John was shown papal Rome centuries in advance, and come out of her is God's command to leave the Catholic Church. And the polemic's strongest card is covenantal: Scripture itself calls unfaithful Jerusalem, God's own covenant people, a harlot (Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16); Bride-status has never immunized anyone against harlot-language, so pleading that the Church is the Bride answers nothing.

7. State what is genuinely serious in this argument. Then answer it from the text itself: what does the harlot identification require the book to ignore?

ANSWER · *share after the discussion*

Take it seriously first: the argument is textual in form, it was made by earnest people (many of whom sincerely believed souls were at stake), and it contains one truth Catholics must simply own: members of the Church, including her leaders, have committed real sins, some of them bloody, and the Church confesses it: she is holy while embracing sinners in her bosom, always in need of purification (CCC 827). Any Catholic answer that begins by denying Catholic sins deserves to lose the argument.

But as exegesis the identification collapses on the text. First, the blood: the woman is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (17:6), and in John's day, when the vision meant something to its first hearers, those martyrs were being made by pagan Rome: the seven-hilled city that burned Christians under Nero and, as tradition holds, pressed them under Domitian: the referent the original hearers caught, confirmed by the early Christian use of Babylon for Rome, St. Peter's included on the traditional reading (1 Peter 5:13). A prophecy aimed at institutional forms that lay centuries in the future (the Church and the Petrine office themselves are apostolic), meaningless to the persecuted churches it was addressed to, fails the book's own opening claim to show his servants what must soon take place (1:1). Second, the covenant-harlotry card, taken seriously: yes, the prophets called unfaithful Jerusalem a harlot (Isaiah 1:21; Ezekiel 16), so Bride-language alone settles nothing, and Catholics do not plead it alone. But notice what those oracles are: indictments of covenant infidelity within Israel's own story, ending in chastisement and promised restoration, never in the covenant people's permanent reidentification as God's enemy; and the New Testament, which freely warns Christians of apostasy (Romans 11:21-22), never once transfers the harlot title to Christ's Church, whose indefectibility her Lord pledged (Matthew 16:18). Third, the wardrobe: the golden cup making nations drunk is Jeremiah's literal-Babylon oracle (51:7), and the purple, scarlet, and jewels are royal-commercial luxury in the prophets' idiom, all written centuries before a chalice was lifted or a cardinal vested; the imagery's pedigree runs to Babylon and the world-city, not to the sacristy. Fourth, the cast list: in this book the Church is the woman of chapter 12 and the Bride of chapter 21: hunted, persecuted, martyred: she is the one whose blood the harlot drinks, not the drinker; an interpretation that recasts the martyred mother as the murdering harlot has swapped the story's victim and villain. Fifth, the geography of the charge: the harlot rides the beast (political power) and is destroyed by it (17:16): a portrait of a city wedded to empire, which is why the mainstream of scholarship today, including many Protestant scholars, reads imperial Rome and the world-system she typifies. What remains true in the polemic is exactly what the saints already preach from inside: St. Bernard telling a pope he risks looking like Constantine's heir rather than Peter's; St. John Chrysostom pricing the poor above the treasury. The Church's members can absolutely live Babylonishly, and come out of her is preached to Catholics too: as reform and repentance, not as the exit sign over the Bride's own door.

DIG DEEPER

Babel to Babylon to the Bride. Babylon's birth certificate is Genesis 11: a city and a tower to make a name for ourselves, traditionally read as unity organized against heaven, answered by scattering. Scripture then runs two city-stories in parallel all the way to tonight: the self-made city (Babel, Sodom, Egypt's store-cities, Babylon, Tyre, Rome) and the God-founded city (Salem, Zion, Jerusalem). Pentecost already reversed Babel's scattering (every nation hearing one gospel, Acts 2); the last two chapters of the Bible finish the tale: the self-made city falls in one hour, and the God-made city comes down out of heaven. Every human heart is a construction site for one of the two.

Send

8. Where is Babylon's perfume strongest in your own life: which purchase, platform, ambition, or comfort most quietly asks for your allegiance? What would one step out of her look like this month?
9. The manifest ends with human souls. Where does your money or attention currently touch an economy that treats people as cargo, and what is one concrete act of protest or mercy available to you?

Live It This Week

- Make one concrete exit from Babylon this week: cancel, fast from, give away, or repent of the one thing you named. Small and real.
- Do one act of mercy toward people the world's manifest lists last: give to or pray for an anti-trafficking apostolate, a crisis pregnancy center, or the working poor of your own town.
- Read Revelation 19–20 for next session: the Hallelujah, the wedding feast, the Rider, and the millennium.
- Memorize the memory verse below.

Memory Verse

Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues. (Revelation 18:4, RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Leader: Father, we live in the middle of Babylon's streets, and her perfume reaches us daily. Give us undivided hearts: unbought, unseduced, generous, awake. Where we have sipped from her cup, forgive us; where your little ones are priced as cargo, make us their allies. And keep our lamps lit: the wedding feast is near. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Distribute Take-Home 12 as people leave.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in Session 12, in order:

- Revelation 17:1–6 (read aloud; compare Revelation 12:1–6, 13–14)
- Revelation 17:9–11, 18 (read aloud)
- 1 Peter 5:13 (discovery)
- Revelation 18:1–8 (read aloud)
- Jeremiah 51:6–9, 45 (discovery)
- Revelation 18:11–13, 20, 24 (read aloud)
- Ezekiel 27:12–36 (comparison, leader background or brief look)
- Jeremiah 51:63–64 (leader background, the millstone sign of 18:21)
- Isaiah 1:21 and Ezekiel 16 (steelman answer, harlot-city language)
- Genesis 11:1–9 (Dig Deeper)
- Memory verse: Revelation 18:4