



The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Series: The Wonder of Worship

Revelation 19:1-10

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I was thinking this week as I was preparing this sermon that for all of man's sin and especially mankind's hubris -- arrogant pride -- one of the pervasive realizations of humanity is that all of this is going to come to an end. Things cannot continue indefinitely as they are. You can see that mindset in the plethora of "the world is going to end" movies that keep being pumped out by Hollywood. They make these movies because they strike a chord in the human heart and open people's wallets. The threat to human existence and this planet as we know it takes many forms: genetically mutated and evolving apes that enslave mankind, zombies, asteroids, comets or meteors, crop failure on a massive scale, some pathogen that infects the entire human race, global warming, aliens -- the list goes on and on but the threat, in the vast majority of cases, is always external to man.

And true to form, in nearly every one of those scenarios, though things look bleak, mankind always saves the day, turns back the threat, by his superior intellect and virtue, and restores peace and harmony to the earth. Man is always the hero or superhero. And yet, despite the popularity of these movies, the whole thing is inherently and fundamentally flawed. And here's how -- the issue, what is bringing this world to an end, is not external to man -- it's internal; it's not "out there," it's "in here." It's sin in its every form. Sin in its every expression. Sin embraced and expressed and celebrated by man. Yes, there are external influences -- Satan and his minions, and his power and deception are very real, but make no mistake, man is neither the unwilling victim nor is he the hero. Man is not the virtuous Savior. That title belongs only to Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God.

No, what will close the curtain on this world, what will bring this world, as we know it, to an end, is man's willful sin, Satan's wicked, enslaving and deceitful influence, and God's powerful, glorious, and just judgment of it all -- the completion of His redemptive plan -- the

final salvation of those whom He has made His people by His aggressive and loving grace and the thorough outpouring of His holy wrath on every form of rebellion and disobedience in the universe.

I mentioned last week that the book of Revelation is emphatically a book about worship, a book that forcefully and vigorously answers the questions of who is truly worthy of worship, who is truly Lord of Heaven and Earth, who must reign supreme in our heart and affections if we would be delivered from the wrath to come. It is a book about warfare, a book about the battle for worship supremacy – God or Satan. It's a book about the united, determined, but ultimately futile battle of fallen man and of Satan, against the supremacy of God to receive worship, adoration and universal acclaim. It is a battle against the confession of God as Creator and Sovereign and His Christ as Savior and Lord over all. But as we saw last week, it is a battle that from the perspective of heaven, the true and eternal perspective, has already been won. God will be acknowledged as Sovereign and Christ as Lord, either joyfully by those who have been conquered by His grace and made lovers of God or self-condemningly and despairingly by those who have willfully persisted in their sin and rebellion and been vanquished and conquered by His holy might.

As we come this week to chapter 19 and the scene of worship in heaven at the marriage supper of the Lamb, it is important for us to understand, at least in a brief way, what transpires in the visions that John is given in chapters 6-18. It is important to understand that the visions that John describes are not necessarily chronological as it regards the cosmic events in heaven and in earth. He gives us the order in which he receives each of these visions, but some of the events overlap in time or picture the events from different eternal perspectives. In these chapters, however, we see the wrath of God poured out on the rebellion and wickedness of man, on those who worship the beast, who follow the false prophet and who join their hearts to the great prostitute, Babylon. How are we to understand this?

Of course, the events and pictures of Revelation 6-18 have been debated throughout history and are still debated by theologians, but let me give you sort of an overview to help you understand. Here is the way that I understand this along with a number of biblical scholars. Not everyone will agree on all of the individual points – this is apocalyptic Scripture after all – but my overall understanding of this text goes something like this. The warfare and the united opposition against God, His Christ and His people, saved by God's grace, are

represented variously by the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, and the dragon. All of them are in collusion to oppose and war against the glory and supremacy of God.

The beast represents the state, human government, the political machine that exalts the supposed wisdom of man and oppresses the people of God, that persecutes and seeks to silence the gospel, that seeks to destroy and defame God, His Christ, and the true church of God by political means – by oppression. We see it today in the laws that reject God and His word – legalized abortion, the attempt to legalize gay marriage, the criminalization of faithfulness to Christ and to God-honoring and biblically formed convictions, the imprisonment and martyrdom of the saints. We see it in the way that our government uses its power in the media to silence and shame Christians who defend, for instance, biblical marriage and other truths that are considered to be politically incorrect. The power of the beast is oppression.

The false prophet represents all false religions – including Islam, near-eastern religions, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses and the like – but particularly the false prophet represents counterfeit Christianity, Christ-less Christianity, man-centered, man-exalting, gospel-concealing, and Satan-embracing idolatry, false Christianity that rejects Christ either by openly rejecting His word, or by robbing Christ of His glory and Christianity of its uniqueness by making it equivalent to all other religions, or by concealing God’s Truth by failing to stand for it, or by making worship all about everything else but Jesus, everything else but the Sovereign God of glory, by making Christianity about you and your self-improvement and your self-glory and your goodness and virtue and heroic qualities and not about Christ. The false prophet is energized by Satan and has all the power of hell. He wields his power and opposes God, His Christ and His people by deception, by hiding the truth of God, by characterizing the true people of God as evil and the wicked as good, giving power and legitimacy to the beast to oppress the true people of God. The power of the false prophet is deception.

Babylon embodies all of the worldliness and godlessness, the immorality, debauchery and corruption of the universe in league with the beast and the false prophet. When Babylon is called **“the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations”** (Revelation 17:5, ESV) in Revelation 17:5, you get the picture. Babylon is a picture of the united rebellion and opposition of mankind, willfully steeped and reveling in rebellion against the Sovereign rule of God. Its evidence is everywhere. Let me just give you one example. Have you ever

wondered why it is that all things gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered have garnered such support in our nation and world? If the percentage of Americans that identify themselves by these labels is so small – 3.5% and that’s being generous – why do they have such support and power? It is not the approval of the act itself, that’s not it, it’s the approval of the what the act represents –the throwing off of all moral restraint and the utter rejection of God and His right to rule, to reign and to command. That is just one example. I could go on about the rampant sexual immorality, the sexualization of the culture, the drunkenness and debauchery, the crime, the greed, the lack of integrity, the promotion of a culture that believes that there are no consequences for sin, the utter rejection of moral absolutes, the casting off of proper authority, on and on.

And the scheme of Babylon against the people of God is either seduction or destruction. Babylon seeks first to seduce the confessing people of God into worldliness. Worldliness is what any particular culture does to make sin look normal and righteousness look strange. Let me say that again. Worldliness is what any particular culture does to make sin look normal and righteousness look strange. And it is manifested in the professing people of God, by unthinkingly adopting the perspectives, values and attitudes of our culture, without bringing them under the examination of God’s Word. It is carrying on in our lives as if we did not know Jesus – that is the goal of Babylon, to entice confessing Christians away from Christ, to ensnare hearts in self-exaltation and self-rule. It is the seduction of the church in order to render professing Christians no different than the world. And it’s working. Paul writes: **“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.”** (2 Timothy 3:1–5, ESV) Babylon is having success in drawing away confessing Christians from faithfulness to Christ. That is why the Scripture is full of warnings: **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,”** (1 Timothy 4:1–2, ESV) **“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”** (Hebrews 3:12–14, ESV) **“The one who endures to the end will be saved.”** (Matthew 10:22, ESV)

And if seduction does not work, the scheme of Babylon, this corrupt world system, is destruction. That's why John describes Babylon as **“drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus...”** (Revelation 17:6, ESV) And behind all of this, directing all of this, energizing and scheming all of this, is the original rebel, the original God-hater and liar, the great dragon, **“that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world...”** (Revelation 12:9, ESV) He is the one behind this grand conspiracy to oppose and war against the glory and supremacy and worship of God.

But God will not be defeated. His glory will not be rejected. His sovereignty will not be opposed. His Christ will reign and His people will be finally and fully saved and brought to the glory of His heaven forever. This is a war that has already been decided in heaven, that has been won by the Lion/Lamb on the cross, by His resurrection from the dead, and which He will carry out to its open, explicit, and clear-cut conclusion by opening the scroll, and pouring out the wrath of God – the seal, bowls and trumpets – against His enemies, which is described in chapters 6-18. It is a holy judgment which comes to its climax in the destruction of Babylon, of a society and a world in futile rebellion against God, described in chapter 18 and then of the other enemies described in chapter 19 and chapter 20. All of this is in accordance with what was written in Revelation 11: **“Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.””** (Revelation 11:15–18, ESV)

This is the backdrop to the text today. That's a long introduction I know, but it sets the scene for what we are looking at today. Stay with me. Babylon, the corrupt world society has been judged. John describes it poetically saying: **“After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. And he called out with a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a**

haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.” (Revelation 18:1–2, ESV) Babylon is judged and the Hallelujahs in heaven begin.

The Three-Fold Hallelujah (1-5) Pick it up in verse 1: **“After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”” (Revelation 19:1–2, ESV)** Revelation 19 opens with rejoicing in heaven over God’s judgment of Satan’s worldwide kingdom of wickedness, immorality and idolatry. We see a great multitude, a multitude beyond numbering, a people representing all of the elect, all of the redeemed throughout the ages, but particularly those who have come out of the great tribulation, which I understand to be the entire period of time between the first advent and second coming of Jesus Christ. They either died holding fast by faith to Christ, having endured to the end, or else they were put to death as martyrs for their confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and they refused to worship the beast and his image. And the time has now come for them to celebrate because God has judged the earth and avenged his people.

They worship God, crying **“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”** God be praised, but for what? First, for salvation -- the whole redemptive work of God through His Son, the Lamb of God. The salvation that saw us as we were -- sinful, separated from God, deprived in every aspect of our being, without hope and without God in this world, darkened in our understanding of ourselves and of God, deceived and seduced by the worldliness of Babylon, under the sway, some of us, of false religion and out of our desperate plight, God in Christ saved us through the offering of His Son as the Lamb of God **“who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).**

They worship Him for His glory – His great and weighty character, that mysterious mingling of holiness, justice, love, wrath, jealousy, compassion, kindness, truth, and mercy – all that makes up the character of God. They worship Him for His power, His authority to carry out His righteous reign as the Almighty God. God reigns on high! God is supreme over all! They worship Him for His judgments that are true and just. God’s wrath is poured out in perfect measure and in perfect wisdom on His enemies. In perfect measure He has judged Babylon,

the world in willful rebellion and has avenged the martyrdom of His saints.

And it continues, this proclamation of praise to God. John writes: **“Once more they cried out, ‘Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.’” (Revelation 19:3, ESV)** See this with me. They rejoice and celebrate over the thorough and complete judgment of the enemies of God. This may sound cruel but don’t read it that way. This multitude, faithful Christians, believers in the gospel, who were themselves redeemed out of the midst of Babylon, out of the wicked and God-denying world are not absent compassion for the lost. They would have themselves striven with the lost, preaching the gospel, and seen some saved and redeemed by the blood of Christ – let that be an encouragement to us to continue to strive for the souls of men and women even as we live in the midst of Babylon; God is still powerful to save – but they had also seen others profess a false faith and fall away, and seen yet others reject the invitation to repentance and life and be hardened all the more in their rebellion against God – but still they worship because their affections and loyalty belong first, above all others, to God and to His Christ and to His honor and glory.

Babylon, this system, this society, this world, willfully promoted corruption, idolatry, immorality and the rejection of God’s truth, His grace and His love in Christ and promoted the oppression and killing of true believers. Rightly did the multitude rejoice in the destruction of the willful and determined enemies of God and of His church. God has judged the one whose chief delight was to draw men away from God and seduce them to self-worship and self-exaltation. He has avenged the blood of the saints that she spilled throughout history. Phil Newton writes: **“That the smoke ascends “forever and ever” tells us (1) the magnitude of God’s holiness and righteousness that requires such judgment; (2) the malicious and heinous nature of all sin against God; (3) the way that God views the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, especially those who die for the sake of the gospel; (4) the certainty that no injustices toward God’s children will be treated lightly.”** This rejoicing is right and good and godly and if it troubles us, perhaps it is because our own hearts are being influenced by the great harlot’s seductiveness. Perhaps it is that we do not have a single heart for the glory and honor and praise of God and of His Christ.

I know this is hard to consider. No doubt, this saved multitude knew these people, were their neighbors, friends, even family. I say this with no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, but beloved, God must be worshipped, must be glorified, must be loved and honored as he should be in the judgment of willful and unrepentant sinners, even those

whom we love. Charles Spurgeon once wrote these sobering words: **“My mother said to me once, after she had long prayed for me, and had come to the conviction that I was hopeless, “Ah,” said she “My son, if at the last great day you are condemned, remember your mother will say Amen to your condemnation.” That stung me to the quick. Must the mother that brought me forth and that loved me say “Amen” to my being condemned at last? Yet such things must be. Doth not the wheat say Amen to the chaff being blown away?”** We must say “Amen” to this judgment and so we also must labor now, while we can, for the salvation of those very neighbors, friends, and loved ones who are now facing the wrath of God.

The 24 elders, the representatives of the redeemed throughout the ages, and the living creatures do say “Amen” to all these things. John writes: **“And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!””** (Revelation 19:4, ESV) Amen – so let it be. They agree with the victory of God over all of His enemies. It resonates in their hearts. It gives us yet another perspective on what it means to worship God – that the truth and glory of God resonate with joy and gladness in our hearts and minds. And that same worship must pour forth from all of God’s saints. **“And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.””** (Revelation 19:5, ESV) Praise God for His awesome judgments. Then, from this scene of rejoicing in heaven over the just and righteous condemnation of the enemies of God and the vindication of His saints, we move to a glorious picture, not of condemnation but of worship for the eternal communion of God’s people with Christ and it is a beautiful contrast with which to close this sermon. We see...

Not Condemnation, But Eternal Communion (6-9) Pick it up in verse 6: **“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”** (Revelation 19:6–8, ESV) John records for us this next scene that captured his attention completely. He hears a voice, a united celebration of a multitude of voices – all of heaven – like the roar of many waters and like the sound of thunder. You know what that’s like. As I was preparing for this sermon and studying, we had a storm this last week that caught my attention immediately. If you are like me, when you hear thunder, you drop everything and go look at the storm. I am enthralled by storms – the power and sound. It’s like that for John. He hears a loud,

growing, rolling crescendo of praise in heaven – and for what – for the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Lord our God has fully revealed Himself in full majesty, in royal glory and powerful judgment and now the long-awaited marriage supper is here.

They rejoice why – because God’s intention with His people is not to condemn them with the rest of the God-rejecting world, but instead, because the blood of the Lamb of God was shed for their forgiveness, for their redemption, for their salvation, He will bring His people into the richness of intimacy and communion that can only be expressed in the picture of a holy wedding.

This picture of the Jewish wedding is matchlessly perfect. There are many details that went into a Jewish wedding, and they correspond perfectly to the relationship between Jesus and the church. First, there was the arrangement, a declaration made by the father of the groom that two people were to be married after which the bride price would be agreed upon and paid. Then there was the period of betrothal, which would last for a year or longer, during which time the bride was observed in order to confirm her purity. During that year as well, the bridegroom would prepare a home for his bride, attached to his father’s house. Then came the time for the wedding itself, when the bride would adorn herself in beauty and the groom would come in his best clothing to take his bride for his own. After that would come the wedding feast when the bride and groom would share in their joy with all of their friends for a week or more. It is perfect picture of our own salvation and eternal joy with Christ in heaven.

We are the bride of Christ, chosen by God the Father for Him from all of eternity. Throughout the entire Old Testament, this betrothal was proclaimed. At the right time, the betrothal was accomplished as the Son of God took on our flesh and blood and paid the bride price on the cross of Calvary. Then He rose from the grave and ascended to prepare a place for us to take us to be with Himself. And now, as we await the bridegroom, we remain pure and faithful to Him, looking to the day that our marriage, our eternal union and communion with Christ will be consummated and we will rejoice forever in the presence of God and in the company of the angels, worshipping our God and worshipping Christ for our incomparable salvation. This is what the true church yearns for - the church on earth as well as the church in heaven. And it is this that John saw.

Notice how he describes the bride of Christ, His people, His church. ***“His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*** The bride, the church has made herself ready. She was granted fine linen – God has prepared for us the wedding garment. It is the righteousness of Christ, granted to us by faith in Him. Paul talks about how Christ prepares His church for eternal communion with Him saying: ***“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*** (Ephesians 5:25–27, ESV)

But notice something, this garment is not simply a covering over sin, it is made up of the righteous deeds of the saints. What does that mean? It speaks of the obligation of the bride, our obligation as the church while we live upon this earth. It is to live righteously as the people of God, not by our own strength and not by our own power, but by the power of God’s grace in us.

Follow this with me. We are in the betrothal stage right now as we await the coming of Christ for us. During the betrothal stage was when the bride would prove her purity. And during this age, we are to be busy preparing ourselves for our marriage to Christ, by testifying to the unbelieving world around us of the truth of the gospel, and matching that testimony with good deeds. ***“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*** (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV) That does not mean sinless perfection. It does mean, however, a life of increasing conformity to the image of God by the power of the Spirit of God working through the Word of God. It means a life of continuing and prompt repentance of sin, continually turning away from that which displeases God the Father and which does not reflect the image of His dear Son, and pursuing the practical purity and likeness of Christ in our own lives.

The chief way in which we prepare ourselves for Christ is by remaining faithful to Him and resisting the seductiveness of this world, of Babylon. That is why we read the call of God in chapter 18: ***“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;”*** (Revelation 18:4, ESV) To resist the temptation to worldliness, even if that means facing persecution on a small or grand scale, is what it means to be clothed with fine linen

and to be faithfully ready for Christ. This fine linen is a sign not only of the bride's faithfulness to her bridegroom, it is also the wedding gift of Christ – real righteousness and eternal communion with Him as His own. What a picture this is. And then we read: **“And 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 the true words of God.’”** (Revelation 19:9, ESV)

Oh, beloved, blessed is right! When we consider the judgment that is hanging over the unbelieving world, the just wrath that will be poured out upon a God-rejecting world, what other word is there to say but “blessed,” massive blessed, incalculably blessed, richly and to overflowing. Who's invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb? It's those who have responded to the Gospel; it's those who have trusted Christ, those who have repented of their sin, those who have received the gift of salvation, those who have endured and remained faithful to Christ. They've been clothed with the white garments of the righteousness of Christ. They're seated at the table of the Lamb. They have been invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. To all of you who trust in Jesus Christ through faith alone, you have received your invitation to the marriage supper of Christ the Lamb. And we are invited to this wedding, not merely as guests to watch the grand pageant. Beloved, we are invited to become Christ's own glorious bride. These are the true words of God, **Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb**. True, indeed! What do you do when you hear words like that? You worship. Look at the response of John.

The Response of John (10) “Then 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 brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Revelation 19:10, ESV) John is overcome by what he hears and he forgets himself. So great are the words that he hears, so wonderful the promise, that he falls to his knees to worship the angel. The angel corrects him – **“You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.** The point is clear. The purpose of prophecy, this prophecy, is ultimately to bear testimony to Jesus Christ and to glorify Him. Prophecy, by its very design, is to reveal the beauty of the person and work of Jesus Christ as God's perfect solution to the evil of the universe. Prophecy at its very heart is designed to unfold the beauty and worth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. John is right to want to worship but He must worship God. He is filled with adoration, praise, wonder and awe at what he hears and sees. It's a marvelous picture. It's a marvelous picture of what God has done for broken sinners like us, sinners who were once held under the domination and the seduction of the great

prostitute, now freed by the aggressive grace and the pursuing mercy of God. John is profoundly affected. Are we? That is the question before us today. Are we? Does this entire picture move us; are we filled with wonder and awe?

In a moment, we are going to share in the supper that points to the One who is our bridegroom, that testifies to all that Jesus has done so that we can be invited to the great marriage supper that is coming, but before we do that we have to ask ourselves: are we moved in our hearts and minds, in our souls by what we read today? Do we really believe in the judgment that is coming upon the unbelieving world? Is it evident in the way that we have run to Christ for salvation? Is it evident in the way that we share the gospel with the lost? Do we rejoice in the just judgment of God against His enemies and the vindication of His glory? Do we see this world and all of its temptations for what they are? Are we keeping ourselves unstained by the world or do we try to live with one foot in the ungodliness of Babylon and one foot in the Kingdom of Christ? Are our hearts united to love God and fear his name or are they divided? Are we being seduced by the worldliness that surrounds us or are we making ourselves ready for the day that is to come? Have we come out of Babylon fully? Do we love Christ supremely? These are the questions. How do you answer?

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