

REV 18:1-19:6—THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON THE GREAT

INTRO: In **John 17** Jesus says that his followers should be “in” the world but not “of” the world. IOW, our values and priorities should not be determined by the world’s values and priorities, but by Jesus and His Word.

That is hard to do simply because we are in the world. We are being bombarded constantly by everything in our culture: not only advertising, music, pictures, technology, and everything else. But much of what we believe and take for granted are determined largely by our culture. For example, our individualism, our materialism, and even our value of freedom, which we think are just normal and natural, are not shared by large segments of the rest of the world who have other cultural values.

Additionally, we tend not to think that God’s view of our culture and society might be considerably different from our own view. This is America, after all! But God’s view may be very different from ours. We need to think about this if our values and priorities are really going to be determined by Jesus and His Word.

Today we will look at **Rev 18** through the first **6** verses of **Rev 19**, because this passage tells us the end of the story that was begun in **ch. 17** that we talked about last week. Today’s passage talks about God’s judgment on the world. It confronts us with the fundamental, underlying issue: Who or what do we *really* stake our hopes, dreams, and identities on—our lives in this world, or God? The answer will be revealed by how we respond to the idea of God’s judging the world: does that cause us to mourn or to rejoice?

O/S: Instead of reading the whole passage at once, I want to look at the 4 movements of this passage step-by-step:

1st Movement: vv. 1-3—the announcement of the impending destruction of Babylon the great

2nd Movement: vv. 4-8 and 20—the warning and exhortation to God’s people concerning the impending destruction of Babylon the great

3rd Movement: vv. 9-24—the mourning of the world’s people at the destruction of Babylon the great

4th Movement: 19:1-6—the rejoicing in heaven at the destruction of Babylon the great



(1) The announcement of the impending destruction of Babylon the great in vv. 1-3 **[READ VV. 1-3]**

Last week we talked about how Babylon the great is a symbol that epitomizes the worldwide system and mindset of *everything and everyone—every culture, every society—that is not Christ’s*. Right here in these verses we again see that Babylon the great combines spiritual forces (since **v.2** talks about “**demons and that which is unclean and hateful**”) and worldly forces, since according to **v.3** it includes “**all nations,**” every sort of **immorality**; it talks about “**kings**” (IOW, the powerful), and “**wealth**” and the “**rich.**” The issue is not that power, government, or wealth are bad. After all, God ordained government and much good can be done with money. The issue is, “*Who are the power and money devoted to—the world, the flesh, the devil, or God?*”

The NASB translates the end of **v. 3** as “**the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality**” whereas the ESV says “**they have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.**” “Sensuality” and “luxurious” are both attempts to convey the meaning of a particular Greek word which means “**profligate luxury, such as men abandon themselves to when they have shaken off the reins of religion and reason.**” [REPEAT]

It is for this very reason—that people, the nations, indeed, the world “have shaken off the reins of religion and reason”—that God will bring judgment. The same was true at the time of Noah. The same was true with Sodom and Gomorrah. the book of Daniel when God said to King Belshazzar the handwriting on the wall—and so He is saying to in Revelation—“**God has numbered your kingdom you have been weighed in the balance and found**



The same was true in of ancient Babylon in Babylon the great here and **put an end to it; wanting.”**

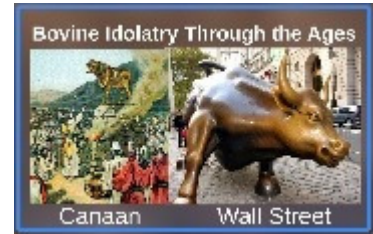
That leads directly to:



(2) The warning and exhortation to God’s people in vv. 4-8, 20. I am including **v. 20** here because **v. 20** really is addressing *God’s* people, who are the subject of **vv. 4-8**, not the world’s people. [READ vv. 4-8, 20]



v.7 talks about how Babylon the great **“glorified herself.”** That is the essence of idolatry, because idolatry is putting anything or anyone ahead of God. When society or individuals glorify themselves or glorify anything other than God, they set themselves up for God’s judgment. Why? The reason is not because God is vengeful and hates humanity. Just the opposite. John Piper says: **“God is utterly unique. He is the only being in the universe worthy of worship. When we exalt ourselves we are distracting people from what will bring true and lasting joy.”** God judges because He **“so loves the world”** and *loves* people. God’s judgment is holding individuals and societies to account for the fact that their values, priorities, organization, and structures are *inhumane*—IOW, as Piper says, they cannot and will not bring about that which is best for people. God will not let humanity continue down that path forever. So here in the book of Revelation He warns us, and ultimately will bring judgment.



At the end of v.7 the great harlot quotes from Isa 47:7-8 that **“I sit as a queen and am not a widow.”**



Isa 47 was talking about historical Babylon. What happened in the OT are called “*shadows,*” “*types,*” or “*examples*” that pointed to and illustrate spiritual truths found in the NT. One of those “*types*” or “*shadows*” is the judgment of historical Babylon, which God brought about because its values and actions were like those of Babylon the great here in Revelation.

v.8 tells us that **“she will be burned up with fire.”** This harkens back to Sodom and Gomorrah which, according to Gen 19, were destroyed by **fire and**



brimstone. The judgment on Sodom also was a physical “*type*” of the final judgment that will occur when Christ returns to earth. Because it is a *type*, Rev 19 and 20 tell us that, at the final judgment, Satan and all the evildoers will be cast into **“the lake of fire and brimstone.”** Revelation is drawing a connection with the judgment on historical Sodom.

Last week we discussed how the statement **“come out of her, my people”** in v.4 does not mean to withdraw physically *from* society but to live counterculturally *within* society. While v.4 talks about how we should be living now, v.20 complements v.4 by addressing our *attitude* and *response* to God’s judgment. It should be one of rejoicing, not mourning. We will have more to say about this at the end of this passage.



(3) This brings us to vv. 9-24—the mourning of the world’s people as a result of God’s judgment on Babylon the great [READ vv. 9-24]

Look at the irony here. In vv. 10, 16, 18, 19, and 21 Babylon is called **“the great city.”** Yet despite its supposed greatness, vv. 10, 17, and 19 tell us that its judgment and destruction come **“in one hour.”**

v. 21 uses the imagery of a millstone being thrown to the earth as indicating God’s judgment. Jesus frequently used the imagery of stones. He talked about building a house on the rock versus building it on the sand—Jesus himself is the rock; everything else is the sand. In Matthew and Luke He used similar imagery as referring both to Himself and to judgment. He said, **“He who falls on this stone [IOW, Jesus] will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.”** We normally look at those statements as only applying to our individual lives. However, they apply equally to society and culture as a whole.



In this section, every type of person is included: v.9 talks about **“the kings of the earth”** or leaders; in v.11 **“the merchants of the earth”** or business people; and v.17 includes **“every shipmaster and sailor”** (IOW everyone who facilitates business), **“every passenger”** as the NASB says, or **“all who travel by ship”** as the NKJV puts it (IOW every consumer), and **“as many as make their living”** as the NASB says, or **“all whose trade is on the sea”** as the ESV says (IOW all workers). Babylon the great incorporates all classes of people.

Look at how great their mourning is. The kings “weep and wail.” The merchants and everyone else “weep and mourn.” Their cry in vv. 10, 16, 19 is “woe, woe.” That is the expression of extreme grief, disaster, undoing, ruin. Again, it is a sign of idolatry. Why is that? Because, as we said earlier, idolatry is putting anything over God; it is turning good things into ultimate things.

If I love something very much—my house, my job, my wife, my kids—and something very bad happens to them—the house is destroyed by fire, I lose my job, my wife or my kids die in a car crash—I will grieve. I will grieve much depending upon the disaster. But, by the grace of God, I will carry on. All of those

things, however dear they are to us, are not lasting; they will fail. They are not big enough to stake our identities and lives on. But if people *do* base their identity or stake their lives on such things and something bad happens to them, it will be more than just grieving. Then the person will be undone, ruined, would see no reason to carry on but would prefer to die and might act in ways that will lead to their death. Why? Because the *basis* for their security, their significance, their very life—IOW their idol—has failed and died.

We all live for something. If that something is taken from us, our response reveals what was really at the core of our self-identity and being. One important function of the entire book of Revelation, and this chapter in particular, is to get us to assess ourselves: Are we citizens of Babylon the great or are we citizens of the KOG? Do we consort with the mother of harlots or are we the bride of Christ? Or, to put it another way: God is judging the world: does that cause us to mourn or to rejoice? Our response reveals what is at our core.

But something else is going on here, too. In vv. **10**, **15**, and **18** everyone is said to “**stand far off.**” Why? Because our ultimate loyalty is to ourselves. When we support and believe in people or causes, we tend to distance ourselves from them when they let us down. Think of all the Germans who supported and profited by the Nazis. But then they lost the war and the Nazis’ crimes were exposed. Then the Germans became like Sgt. Schultz in Hogan’s Heroes, “I saw nothing. I knew nothing.” I think something like that also is going on here. The people in **Rev 18** have realized too late that they have founded their lives on sand. Only Christ is big enough, and deep enough, and good enough, and satisfying enough to stake our identities and lives on. Only He will never fail us.



(4) Which brings us to the concluding movement of this passage—the rejoicing of those in heaven at the judgment and destruction of Babylon the great—in Rev 19:1-6 [READ]

Let’s look at God’s judgment. The judgment is *final*. The finality of God’s judgment on Babylon the great is emphasized at the end of **ch.18** which again and again says this and that “**will not be heard or seen in you any longer.**” What is the response to the judgment? We see all the inhabitants of heaven praising the Lord for His judgment, rejoicing

and crying out “**Hallelujah!**”—which, of course, means “**praise the Lord!**” And that is the response the angel in **18:20** calls us to make to God’s judgment on the world.

From our vantage point here and now, however, we might find it difficult to rejoice fully. Many of us might have some regrets at the thought of God’s judgment on the world, because this is our home. We see the good as well as the bad in life, and few of us are prepared to say that anything is irredeemably evil. Consequently, the whole idea of a final judgment rubs some people the wrong way.

But it shouldn’t—because without a final judgment there would be no justice. If everything is just limited to this world and this life and there is *no* final judgment and *no* eternity, then the books are not balanced. Then all the suffering and evil is not paid for. Then those who do evil will have gotten away with it. It is the *judgment* that balances the books, that guarantees that nothing goes unrequited, that everything is satisfied, and that justice is fully done. We see this at the end of **ch. 18** and beginning of **ch. 19**. **18:24** says that in Babylon the great “**was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.**” But now in **19:2** we are assured that God “**has avenged the blood of his servants on her.**” The blood of all those unjustly killed has cried out and God has heard. Justice has been done: fully, fairly, almost poetically.



We need to understand that God’s judgment is not something that destroys the good along with the bad. Earlier we mentioned that the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah was a “type” or “shadow” of the final judgment being spoken of here. That fact should reassure us, because it was in connection with the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah that Abraham had his famous dialogue with God in **Gen 18** about God’s not sweeping away the righteous with the wicked. And God assured Abraham that He would not do that.

The same is true at the final judgment. For example, in **Rev 18:4-5** it is Babylon’s “**sins**” that have piled up and will be judged, because “**God has remembered her iniquities,**” not her righteous acts, such as they may be. In **18:6** she will be paid back “**according to her deeds.**” **19:2** adds that God’s judgments “**are true and righteous.**”

Let me briefly highlight two aspects of God’s love and concern for humanity that show us why we can rest assured that His judgments are “true and righteous.” First, **Rev 18:12-13** lists the cargoes of goods the merchants are weeping and mourning over. That list is an accurate list of Rome’s imports in the first century. The list ends with the words “**slaves, that is, human souls**” (ESV) or “**slaves and human lives**” (NASB). But the literal translation is given by the NKJV, “**bodies and souls of men [or ‘people’].**” John uses both the

physical term [“bodies”] and the spiritual term [“souls”].

Richard Bauckham says that John: “is pointing out that slaves are not mere animal carcasses to be bought and sold as property, but are human beings. But in this emphatic position at the end of the list, this is more than just a comment on the slave trade. It is a comment on the whole list of cargoes. It suggests the inhuman brutality, the contempt for human life, on which the whole of Rome’s prosperity and luxury rests.” God cares about human life. His judgment is based on the inhumanity and degradation of human life that inevitably flows when people and society “shake off the reins of religion and reason.”



The second aspect of God’s judgment has to do with the repeated reference in **Rev 18:3, 9, and 19:2** concerning the great harlot’s “immorality.” When we hear the word “immorality,” most people think only of sexual immorality, but in God’s eyes immorality goes far beyond that. This, again, is where the parallel with the judgment on Sodom is instructive—because when we think of Sodom most people think of sexual immorality. But that was not God’s primary concern. In **Ezek 16:49-50** God tells us why He overthrew Sodom. He says:



“Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it.” God cares about all of life: the unborn, the poor and the needy, the oppressed, and His people—the prophets and saints—because all human beings have been



made in His image. When society discounts that and acts against human life and human dignity, it sets itself up for judgment.

In short, there is no reason to think that God’s judgment will be anything less than perfect in all ways—perfectly displaying His love, His mercy, His justice, His goodness, His rightfulness and fairness in every possible way.

This entire passage is confronting us that:

PROP: God is judging the world: does that cause us to mourn or to rejoice?

CONCL: Last week we looked at two specific ways of applying the statement in **18:4** to “come out of her, my people,” namely, to be a redemptive force in our community and society and to use our money to further missions, build the kingdom, and help the poor and needy.

Today’s passage focuses on the judgment itself. Therefore, it is designed more to get us to assess where we are—where we have invested our lives—by confronting us with the question: Does God’s judgment of the world cause us to mourn or to rejoice? Our answer to that question reveals what *really* is central in our lives.

When Jesus comes again, He will usher in the new heavens and the new earth in which there will be no tears, no greed, no oppression, but perfect joy, peace, and fulfillment forever. But it’s the choices we make now that determine whether we will be a part of that or not. Therefore, let us not give our lives over to Babylon the great, the mother of harlots. Instead, let us orient our lives around Jesus. If we truly believe, as David said in **Ps 63:3**, that “*Your lovingkindness is better than life,*” we will be able to look forward to and rejoice in God’s coming judgment.