

Session 21 **Babylon ripe for Judgement** Revelation 17:15-18:8

Hated by her former "friends", 17:15-18

The following visions reveal the final defeat and destruction of Babylon, the two beasts and, ultimately, the dragon.

The first section opened with the statement, "Come, I will show you the judgement of the great harlot who sits on many waters", v1. **The ensuing visions** focussed on the character of the harlot and her close relationship with the beast that had been previously introduced in chapter 13.

The last section, v15-18, returns to the stated purpose of the visions and informs us that the waters are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages - the world population/earth dwellers. "Sitting" on them suggests an intimate relationship, including domination, 2, 18, and possibly dependence.

Babylon is both a city, v18, (a physical location, the political and cultural hub of the world), **and also a "mother city"**, v5, the source of a universal way of life in the rest of the world, "made drunk with the wine of her fornication", v2, c.f. Jer. 51:7. Rome acted in this way, as Greek city states and others had done previously.

Strange agents of destruction, v16. Two reasons are given:

- **The ten horns (kings) hate the harlot**, v16. We are not told why this happens. Perhaps it is a consequence of envy and competition for power. This would be consistent with their ultimate master, the dragon - thieves fall out!". The 5th and 6th trumpet plagues consisted of attacks by demon armies on their own human servants; hatred, love of power, and love of torture over ride all other considerations. **Evil has an irrational self-destructive urge**, e.g. Sunni/Shia.
- **God put it into their hearts** to join together and submit to the beast in order to bring this about - unity in the service of satan, and yet serving the purposes of God, Matt. 26:3-4, Acts 2:22-24, 4:27-28. They united in order to serve the beast; now they become agents to destroy his kingdom. **The message that shines through this chapter is the God is sovereign and the Lamb is triumphant.**

Desolate and disgraced

- **"Make desolate"** is to "lay waste, depopulate", c.f. 18:17, 19.. The description corresponds to Ezekiel 23:22-35, where similar things happen to apostate, adulterous Israel and Judah.
- **"Stripped naked" is a sign of shame/disgrace**, c.f. 3:18, 16:15.
- **"Flesh devoured"** corresponds to Jezebel, 2Kings 9:36-37 and c.f. Rev. 19:17-18, 21.
- **"Burned with fire"** - This was the punishment for a priest's daughter if she became a prostitute, Lev. 21:9, and looks ahead to 20:10.

The "kings of the earth", v18, appear to be more universal (inferior) rulers who **do not participate in the destruction of Babylon**. They reappear in the next scene, mourning her demise, 19:3, 9-10.

Judged her with perfect justice 18:1-8

Preliminary announcements of the fall of Babylon were recorded in 14:8 and 16:19 and 17:1-2, (demonstrating that Revelation is not in linear sequence).

The immediate agents of her destruction were given in 17:16-17 - the kings/servants of the beast. **Now**, after re-emphasizing the reason for her judgement, v3, 5-8, we hear the responses of three groups of who were "stake holders" in the life of Babylon, v9-10, 11-17a, 17b-19, followed by the contrasting response of the inhabitants of Heaven, v20.

Finally **she disappears beneath the waves, not to be found anymore**, v21, **all her activities having ceased forever**, v22-23a, **The scene ends with a reminder of the reasons behind her demise**, 23b-24. In the midst of it all there is a call and a warning to **God's people to "come out of her"** - not to participate in her sins and associated judgement, v4.

"After these things", v1, indicates a change in scene. We have been told of the human agents of Babylon's judgement.

Now the ultimate cause is about to be revealed, v5, 8, 21.

- **The introduction to the vision is dramatic, v1-2. There is a similarly dramatic conclusion, v21.** The angel is described as "another angel" - not the same one as in 17:1, 7, possibly the same one as in 14:8. **John sees this angel "coming down from Heaven",** in contrast to the beast, 17:8. He has come **directly from the presence of God, carrying His great authority and radiating His glory.** (This is unique in Revelation - the angel in 10:1-3 comes closest). There is an echo of Ezek. 43:1-2 in the context of a call to restored Israel to separate from idolatry (abominations) and uncleanness, v6-10, c.f. Rev. 18:4-5.

The angel cried out with a loud (strong) voice - his message is urgent and final, from the presence of God.

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great"

The same was said of ancient Babylon, Isaiah 21:9a, in its day of similar character, and idolatry, 21:9b, c.f. Rev. 13:14-15.

It is so sure that it is proclaimed as if it has already happened; the event itself will be dramatically enacted in v21.

At this point the reasons for her fall are re-emphasized and the utter fairness and justice is established and God's people are warned to flee from her.

There are three pictures describing her total desolation, v2, corresponding to the destruction of corrupt ancient civilizations, and contrasting with their previous experience, Isaiah 13:21-22, Jer. 50:39, and 51:37 (Babylon), 34:11-14 (Edom), and Zeph. 2:14-15 (Assyria).

- **A dwelling place of demons, Matt. 12:43-45, in contrast to the people (city) of God, 21:10, 22-23, Eph. 2:22. 2Cor. 6:16, John 14:17, 15:4 etc.**
 - **A prison for every foul spirit, c.f. 9:1-3.**
 - **A cage for every unclean and hated bird, Isaiah 34:11, 13-15, (Edom), 13:19-22 (Babylon), anticipating Rev. 19:17-18, 21.**
- **The reasons for her fall are declared, v3, and again in v23b-24 (bracketing the detailed account of the judgement and emphasizing the justice of God's judgements).**
 - **Fornication - both physical and spiritual (idolatry), involving rulers and nations c.f. 17:1-2, 4-5, Is. 23:17 (Tyre). They have drunk "the wine that leads to passion for her immorality" 14:8 (alt. translation, G.R. Osborne) resulting in having to drink the wine of the wrath of God, poured out in full strength" 14:10 Babylon is drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs, 17:6. Now "the nations have drunk (lit. fallen) because of the wine that leads to passion for her immorality", c.f. Is. 51:17, Jer. 25:15-17, 27-28, Zech 12:2.**
 - **Sensuality, luxury, wealth, excess consumption of the world's resources on private pleasure - material things as the meaning of life. The "merchants of the earth" are the target group.** These were the wholesale dealers of the Empire. Through them Rome exploited and controlled subject nations. **They have become rich in the process of fuelling the fornication of the rulers and nations and feeding the insatiable desire of the elite in Rome.** This, together with extraction of excessive taxes simultaneously kept the poor in servitude, supported the extravagant lifestyles of local rulers, and made Rome unbelievably wealthy and profligate. **Economic sins are a leading reasons for the condemnation of Babylon, and the merchants provide the greater part of the three laments that follow.**
- **Another voice, again direct from Heaven, brings a command to God's people, v4-5 - possibly the voice of God.** **"Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and of her plagues lest you receive (lit)".** This is a call to holiness, to separation from all that Babylon stands for.

The danger of close relationship with Babylon is that we may share in her sins and, as a consequence, her plagues. Lot's wife is a solemn example, Gen. 19:15-26, Luke 17:32.

For the OT people it meant a literal and physical flight from Babylon, Is. 48:20, Jer. 50:8-10, 51:45-48.

Leaving Babylon behind was **not to be a matter of reluctance or sorrow, but rather a joyful following of the LORD,** Isaiah 52:11-12 (see the preceding context in Isaiah).

We need to leave in a different sense - keep a well defined space between ourselves and the culture and practices of Babylon - "In the world but not of the world, living as aliens and strangers, people whose citizenship is in Heaven, even while living on earth, carrying the loyalty of that citizenship and all its values", 2Cor.6:14-7:1, Eph. 5:11, 1John 2:15-19, 1Peter 1:13-17, 2:11, 4:1-5, 2Peter 1:2-4, 1Thess. 1:9-10, 2Tim. 2:22 etc.

The sins of Babylon had reached to Heaven - piled up in close relationship to one another - a composite mass, Jer.51:9. **This has echoes of the original Babel,** Gen. 11:5, and the accumulating sins of the **Amorites** Gen. 15:16, and the accumulated sins of **Sodom,** Gen. 18:20-21. The word here translated "sins" is otherwise used in NT for **crimes,** Acts 18:14, 24:20 - their behaviour is **a crime against Heaven and their punishment is fully deserved.**

"God has remembered" - This means He considers it time for action, for blessing, e.g. Psalm 105:8-11, 132:1, 10, Ezek 16:60, Luke 23:42-43, **or judgement,** Psalm 109:14-17, Jer. 14:10, Rev 16:19.

- **God's just judgement, v6-8**

This follows the law of retribution - the punishment fits the crime.

- **"Pay her back as she has paid back",** Deut. 19:16-19, Jer. 50:29, Psalm 28:3-5, 137:8, Isaiah 3:10-11, Rom. 2:1-10, 2Cor. 11:13-15, 2Tim. 4:14.
 - **"Repay her double according to her works" - can mean "equivalent to",** Isaiah 40:2, Rev. 2:23. Sometimes the punishment was **doubled,** Exodus 22:4-9. This may reflect the dual wickedness of the sin itself and also the effects on others, Rev. 14:8, 10, 17:6.
 - **"In the measure ... in the same measure" v7**
 - **"Glorified herself" - God alone is to be glorified,** 1Chron. 29:10-15, Matt.6:9, 13b, Rom. 1:21, 11:33-36, Eph.3:20-21, Rev.4:11, 5:13, etc. etc. **Pride is the ultimate sin,** Isaiah 14:4, 11-15 (Babylon, ?satan), Ezek. 28:1-5, 17 (Tyre, ?satan), Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4:29-30, 37, Belshazzar, 5:17-28.
 - **Lived in luxury (including sensuality/immorality).**
- The appropriate recompense is torment** (9:5, 14:11, 18:7, 10, 15), **and sorrow/ grief** (18:7, 8, 11, 15, 19, 21:4).

This is in keeping with her arrogant and self-centred attitude, v7b, c.f. Isaiah 47:7-8 (Babylon):

- **I sit as a queen - regal**
- **I am not a widow - not vulnerable,** Isaiah 47:8
- **I will not see grief/sorrow - self assured/independent/secure**

Judgement comes suddenly and without warning, v8, c.f. Dan. 4:31, 5:30-31, Isaiah 30:12-14, 47:9, Prov. 29:1.

They consist of death, sorrow/grief, pestilence, famine- these are features of war, c.f. 6:8, 17:16, **and fire,** Isaiah 47:14.

How shall all this be accomplished? "Strong is the Lord God who judges her!" 11:17, 17:17, 19:6.