

Seven words of triumph 17:1 – 19:10

• Section outline

• Seven parts

In Revelation 17:1 John was invited to change location. ‘Come up here,’ says the angel to him^{□1}. He is invited to see the judgement of ‘the great harlot’^{□2} and is carried away into the wilderness^{□3}. John sees a drunken woman sitting on a beast^{□4}. Then it is said to him that the woman on the beast is also the woman sitting on seven hills^{□5}. The rest of the section dwells upon Babylon. The wicked city falls^{□6}. God’s people must avoid her sins^{□7}. The evil of Babylon will be exterminated^{□8} and God’s people will be happy to see her disappear^{□9} and be replaced by the bride of the Lord Jesus Christ^{□10}. Revelation 19:9–10 contains a final angelic comment.

One half-expects that there will be seven of something in this section and there certainly does seem to be an introductory invitation (‘Come, I will show you . . . ’), followed by seven parts in John’s experiences of angels, visions and voices. The minor units of this section are marked by new topics, new voices, new angels, new sights.

First, John is shown the woman on the beast^{□1}. The emphasis is on his seeing. ‘He carried me away^{□2} . . . and I saw^{□2} . . . And I saw^{□3} . . . When I saw her . . . ’^{□4}.

Second, the angel speaks again, and now the emphasis is on explaining^{□5}.

Third, there is ‘another angel’ (18:1, leading into 18:1–3).

Fourth, there is ‘another voice’ (18:4, leading into 18:4–20).

Fifth, there is another ‘mighty angel’ (18:21, leading into 18:21–24).

Sixth, we have an obvious step forward and a new voice: ‘After this I heard . . . ’ (19:1, leading into 19:1–5).

Seventh, there is a new voice again. ‘Then I heard . . . ’ (19:6, leading into 19:6–8 or 6–10).

After this there seems to be a balancing and closing comment (‘And the angel said to me . . . ’). If these observations are correct, then the section is to be set out along the following lines:

The Woman – and Seven Words of Judgement^{□1}

An invitation^{□2}

The drunken woman^{□3}

The woman sitting on seven hills^{□4}

Babylon fallen^{□5}

Babylon avoided^{□6}

Babylon . . . found no more^{□7}

Joy over the extermination of Babylon^{□8}

Babylon replaced by the bride^{□9}

The angel’s comment^{□10}.

• Seven words of judgement

The great harlot

1. Fleshy indulgence will be defeated

The vision starts by making the point that **the ‘great harlot’, fleshy indulgence, will be defeated**. The angel says: ¹‘I will show you the judgement of the great harlot seated by many waters. ²The kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk with the wine of her immorality.’ The picture-language points us to the way in which worldly ‘civilization’ works. Often the great cities of the world are ‘by many waters’. They are either in natural harbours (like Mumbai, Cape Town and others). Or they grow up alongside rivers. We think of London and the Thames, Paris and the Seine, Cairo and the Nile, Kolkata and the Ganges, and so on. It was the same in the ancient world. Babylon was between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. ‘Mesopotamia’ means ‘between the rivers’. Rome was to be found on the River Tiber. The ‘great harlot seated by many waters’ is pagan civilization as it is found in the cities of the world.

2. Worldly indulgence is influential

The great harlot (worldly indulgence) is influential. John says ‘the kings of the earth’ have had wicked relationships with the ‘great harlot’ of worldliness. State-leaders play on the growth of fleshy indulgence in the nations of the world.

□1 17:1
 □2 17:1-2
 □3 17:3a
 □4 17:3b-6
 □5 17:7-18
 □6 18:1-3
 □7 18:4-20
 □8 18:21-24
 □9 19:1-5
 □10 19:6-8

□1 17:1–6a
 □2 17:3
 □3 17:6a
 □4 17:6b
 □5 17:6b-18

□1 17:1-19:10
 □2 17:1-3a
 □3 17:3b-6
 □4 17:7-18
 □5 18:1-3
 □6 18:4-20
 □7 18:21-24
 □8 19:1-5
 □9 19:6-8
 □10 19:9-10

The number of truly Christian kings or presidents has always been few (although many love to prematurely claim their conversion!). The ordinary people of the world are largely led astray by their leaders. If it is true that ‘the kings of the earth have committed immorality’ with the great harlot, then it becomes true also that ‘the inhabitants of the earth have become drunk from the wine of her immorality’. The people are led astray by the example of those with greater political power.

3. *Worldly indulgence dresses herself up to be attractive*

The great harlot (worldly indulgence) dresses herself up to be attractive. A prostitute dresses herself up to attract her clients but her only interest is in deceiving and gaining money in her own way. So the great harlot of worldly pleasures seems attractive. Yet John sees that a day of judgement is on its way for the world’s love of ‘the flesh’. The angel shows John the judgement of the great harlot. ³*He then carried me away in the Spirit to the desert. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, covered with blasphemous names, and the beast had seven heads and ten horns.* This woman seems in some ways to be attractive. It says: ⁴*And the woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was decorated with gold and precious stones and pearls. And she had in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her immoralities.* The harlot seems to be having a good time. A golden cup is in her hand, because she has plenty of wealth. She is drinking wine and celebrating – or so it seems. The harlot seems to be attractive and to offer many pleasures.

4. *Worldly indulgence is ugly and disgusting*

Yet the harlot (worldly indulgence) is ugly and disgusting. However attractive the harlot might seem to be at first, a close acquaintance reveals that she is ugly and terrible. She is living in a desert. There is nothing attractive or fruitful about the place where she is at home. She is sitting on an ugly animal. The golden cup which seems to offer pleasures and joys is actually full of abominations.

5. *Worldly indulgence is deceptive*

The harlot (worldly indulgence) is deceptive. ⁵*And on her forehead was written a mysterious name: Babylon the great, mother of harlots and mother of the abominations of the earth.* A ‘mystery’ in Bible-language is something that is perfectly obvious to those who understand it, but totally incomprehensible to those who have no eyes to see. The ‘harlot’ has ‘a name of mystery’. Her character is obvious to the people of God – to whom ‘mysteries’ have been revealed. Yet other people have no understanding of this harlot at all!

6. *Worldly indulgence is vicious*

The harlot (worldly indulgence) is vicious. The Scripture says: ⁶*And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints and drunk with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.* However attractive the harlot might seem to be, she is vicious, a friend of the beast (persecuting governments). The wine that she enjoys so much is the blood of those who have suffered for their faith in Jesus.

A warning to Christians

The vision is a warning to Christians. It lets us know that true salvation involves a separation from the worldly indulgence promoted by pagan culture, ancient and modern. It lets us know that if we have eyes to see, there is nothing attractive about the world. We must face the possibility that worldly people will enjoy persecution. Our message will at times face great opposition from the harlot sitting on the beast. Yet we need have no fear. ‘I will show you the judgement of the great harlot’, said John. The wickedness of worldly paganism is doomed. Only the kingdom of God will last for ever.

- *True salvation involves separation from worldly indulgence*



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