

• *Seven words of judgement*

John's vision of the fall of Babylon

• *This passage reminds us of the 'songs of judgement' found in various Old Testament prophets*

• *'Babylon' – a symbol not for any one city but for all the civilizations of the world that have lived for luxury, wealth and power*

• *One day the entire system will fall*

John hears a voice calling for separation from Babylon

• *God's people must reject the idolatry, immorality and greed of Babylon*
 • *Christians must be different from the world*

The Christian must not be misled by God's slowness to act in judgement

In Revelation 17:1–19:10, there are seven words of judgement against 'the woman sitting on seven hills'. John is invited to see her^{□1} and to hear the announcement of her certain fall^{□2}. In Revelation 18:1–3 and 18:4–20 there are two more of these smaller units.

In his vision John sees the fall of Babylon.

¹After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven. The angel had great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. ²The angel cried out with a mighty voice, saying, 'Babylon has fallen! Babylon has fallen! It has become a home for demons, a home for every kind of unclean spirit, a home for every kind of unclean and hated bird. ³For all the nations have drunk^a of the wine of her immoral passion, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich through the power of her luxurious living.'

The passage reminds us of the 'songs of judgement' that are found in various Old Testament prophets^{□1}. The angel – or John seeing an angel in his vision – is singing a song of triumph. Like all the enemies of God in Old Testament times, 'Babylon' will be destroyed. In the book of Revelation 'Babylon' is a symbol not for any one city but for all the civilizations of the world that have lived for luxury and wealth and power – and have been driven by their feelings of guilt and animosity to persecute the people of God. One day the entire system will fall utterly and totally. John sees in vision this symbolic 'Babylon' as a total desert where only demons and unclean creatures are to be found. The marvellous luxuries of Babylon – the world with its wild living – will one day be ruined altogether.

John hears a voice calling for separation from Babylon. *⁴And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, 'Come out of her, my people, so that you do not share in sins, and so that you do not receive the disasters that will come to her.'* John hears the angel telling the entire church that God's people must break away from everything that is characteristic of 'Babylon' – her idolatry, her immorality, her greed for money.

It does not mean that the Christians are to be superior or Pharisaical in their attitudes, or that they must withdraw from contact with people, or that they must treat worldly people as enemies in a personal manner. But the Christian must face the fact that he or she must be different in spirit from the world if there is to be rich and deep fulfilment of the promises of God towards us.

The Christian must not be misled by God's slowness to act in judgement. Babylon has been around for a long time. Sometimes we wait to see God's judgement fall on wickedness and it seems not to happen. But John says disaster will come to Babylon: *⁵'For her sins are piled up as high as heaven, and God is ready to judge her for her evil deeds.'* God is

□1 17:1-6

□2 17:7-18

□1 Isaiah 13:19-22; 34:11-15; Jeremiah 50:39; 51:37; Zephaniah 2:13-15

• *Sooner or later God acts in anger*

• *Sins are being piled high ready for God's anger to fall*

When the judgement falls it will be fair and appropriate

• *God's judgement – finite but not small*

• *If God's people fail to overcome they will be rebuked by the anger of God when it falls*

John lists some of Babylon's sins

• *Judgement will come to each person with pride or arrogant self-exaltation*

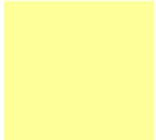
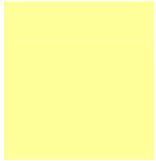
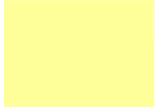
slow to act. He lets sin grow and grow without his doing much about it. But sooner or later he acts in anger. When 'the iniquity of the Amorites is full' (as Genesis 15:16 puts it), God will act. 'It will take a long time', said God to Abraham, 'because I am not going to punish the Amorites for their wickedness until it has got to a certain amount of fullness.' The same principle applies in the judgement of 'Babylon' – the entire system of worldly wickedness. It continues for a long time. But let no one be deceived. Sins are being piled high, ready for God's anger to fall.

When the judgement falls it will be fair and appropriate. The angel says: ⁶'Repay her exactly according to what she gave to others. Pay her back double for what she has done. Prepare a double portion for her in the cup which she prepared for others.' It is a biblical principle that when God acts in justice his judgement is very appropriate. 'The measure you give will be the measure you get'¹. God's judgement will be finite but it will not be small. When God acts he acts very thoroughly indeed. The angel looks forward to God's justice and calls upon God to act. It is no wonder that the angel says, 'Come out . . . so that you do not receive the disasters that will come . . .'². If the people of God share in the world's sins they will share in the world's final sufferings. John has said that the overcomer will not be hurt by the second death. But if God's people fail to overcome they set themselves up for being rebuked by the anger of God when it falls. No doubt God's people will ultimately be kept safe in judgement (as chapter 7 has assured us) but even to be 'hurt by' the second death³ will be a fearful matter.

John lists some of Babylon's sins. ⁷'To the extent that she glorified herself, and lived in luxury, so give her a similar measure of torment and sorrow. Because she says in her heart, "I am a queen sitting on my throne. I am not a widow, and I will never experience sorrow."' Worldly indulgence loves its pride, its self-confidence, its queen-like superiority, its refusal to expect any punishment. But all that will be reversed. Judgement will come to each person 'to the extent that' there has been pride or arrogant self-exaltation. The angel says: let the Christian come out of it altogether.

Note

a. Another reading of the Greek manuscripts has 'has fallen because of the wine . . .'.



1 Matthew 7:2

2 18:4

3 2:11



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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