

• *Fourth and fifth of the seven words of judgement*

In Revelation 18:17–24 we are still considering the fourth and fifth of the seven words of judgement against ‘the woman sitting on seven hills’. Babylon will eventually be exterminated. The entire system of worldly paganism will be conquered. This is not to be thought of as the end of the world altogether, because there are still people around to gasp in amazement and dismay at what is happening. The kings and the money-makers are the most horrified.

1. Those who profit from ‘Babylon’ are the most horrified at her collapse

1. Those who profit from ‘Babylon’ are the most horrified at her collapse. In the days of the book of Revelation the most profitable commerce involved importing and exporting by boat. The angel says: *And every sea-captain and all travellers who travel by ship, sailors and all those who earn their living from the sea, stood at a distance.* ¹⁸*They began to cry out when they saw the smoke that came from her burning, saying, ‘What city is like this great city?’* ¹⁹*And they threw dust on their heads, and cried out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘How terrible! How terrible for the great city! It was through this great city that all who had ships on the sea were made rich by her wealth. For in one hour she has been destroyed.’* ²⁰*Heaven, rejoice over her, and you holy people of God and you apostles, and you prophets; for God has judged her because of what she did to you.*

• *The most profitable commerce was import and export by boat*

• *Weeping and wailing over the collapse of sin*

Here is weeping and wailing over the collapse of sin. The ungodly have pinned all their hopes on money and business, but in the end it lets them down. In one hour it all collapses. They heap dust on their heads in distress.

2. The punishment of Babylon’s sin is violent and disgraceful annihilation

2. The punishment of Babylon’s sin is violent and disgraceful annihilation: it will be no more at all. In Revelation 18:21–24 we have the fifth of the seven words of judgement against ‘the woman sitting on seven hills’. ²¹*And a mighty angel picked up a stone like a great stone for grinding grain, and he threw it into the sea. He said, ‘In this way Babylon, the great city, will be thrown down, with sudden violence, and it will be found no more at all.’* The punishment of Babylon’s sin is violent and disgraceful annihilation: the city will exist no more at all. For something to be thrown into the sea is a proverbial expression for it to disappear altogether. The angel delights to repeat the words six times: ‘no more at all . . . no more at all’. ²²*‘And the music of people playing harps and other instruments, the music of flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard in you no more at all. And no craftsman, of whatever craft, shall ever be found in you – no more at all. And the sound of a millstone shall be heard in you no more at all.’* ²³*And the light of a lamp shall shine in you no more at all.’* This is the picture of a city being entirely destroyed. The sign of life in a town is the lights in the houses. But the lights of Babylon are about to go out. *‘And the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard in you no more at all.’* Wedding celebrations cease.

• *The city will cease to exist*

• *Thrown into the sea – disappear altogether*

• *Lights go out*

• *Wedding celebrations cease*

• *The immense suffering of the wicked is because of their sin*

3. *God's people will be happy to see Babylon disappear*

• *God's people praise and worship their Saviour*

• *They rejoice at God's justice*

• *The smoke follows on from the punishment of the city – all that is left to let observers know what had happened*

• *The memory of Babylon will never be extinguished*

• *The people of God delight in the extermination of Babylon*

• *This takes place before the end of the world*

The cause of the immense suffering of the wicked is their sin. 'For your merchants were the world's great people; all nations were deceived by your witchcraft. ²⁴And in Babylon was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slaughtered upon the earth.' The wicked persecutor is exterminated.

3. **God's people will be happy to see Babylon disappear.** The true people of God rejoice at the collapse of sin and of wickedness. ¹After these things I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation, and glory, and power belong to our God.' The people of God give praise and worship to the Saviour who has delivered them. They rejoice at God's justice. ²'For his judgements are true and righteous. For he has judged the great prostitute, the woman that corrupted the earth with her immoral ways. God has avenged the murder of his servants at her hand.'³And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah. The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.'

The smoke going up is not what happens while the city is being punished. It is what happens after the city has been punished. The picture language comes from Genesis 19:27–28, which says Abraham arose one day after the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah and 'looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah . . . The smoke of the land went up like the smoke from a furnace.' The fire of God had exterminated Sodom as if in an incinerator. All that was left was the smoke that let the observer know what had happened. So it will be with Babylon, and the memory of it will never be extinguished. The smoke from exterminated Babylon will go up for ever and ever.

The people of God delight in the extermination of Babylon! ⁴And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne, saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah.'⁵And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you servants of his, you that fear him, the small and the great.'

We must notice that all of this takes place before the end of the world. It is not final judgement and the lake of fire – not yet! It is quite clear that when Babylon falls there are still plenty of people around. The destruction of Babylon is not the end of history – although it may perhaps be near the end of history. It is the day of triumph for the people of God.



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