

Rev. 18, Angelic Messages About Babylon
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Overview

1. The seventh vial introduces the final series of the book, ch. 17-22. Movement is Whore -> Lord of Lords -> Bride
 - a) 17:1-18:24 The judgment of Babylon, Great Whore
 - b) 19:1-20:15 The Lord of Lords judges Babylon, the Whore
 - c) 21:1-8 God comforts Jerusalem, the Bride
 - d) 21:9-22:5 The Blessing of Jerusalem, the Bride
2. 17 ended with a report (vv.16,17) of how the ten horns (the Beast's kingly collaborators) turn against the harlot Babylon. This chapter goes into more detail on her destruction.
3. 18: three angelic messages, all drawing heavily on OT messages of doom against the enemies of God.
 - a) 1-3, proclaims the desolation of Babylon.
 - b) 4-20, commands to God's people; marshalls them for the attack that is coming in ch. 19.
 - c) 21-24, reports the final result.

A. 1-3, First Angel: announces Babylon's fall

1. 1, His Authority.
Compare 13:2, where the beast is said to have "great authority" from the dragon. Any of God's angels is equal to him.
2. 2, Babylon's Desolation.
cf. Isa. 13:19-22 (Babylon); 34:6-17 (Idumea); Jer; 50:33-40; 51:37 (both Babylon)--the sense is that the city is ruined and become a "ghost town." Unclean birds are birds of carrion--they gather there to eat the flesh of the slain.
3. 3, The reason for her desolation: she has shared her sin. She is now so abandoned because in the day of her sin, she involved so many others with her. We will hear more from the kings and the merchants in the sequel.

B. 4-20, Another Voice: marshalls God's forces for the attack (ch.19)

Three commands to believers, each with its own reason. (The second is explicitly to believers only in TR, not MT, but there is no evidence for a shift in addressee, and in ch. 19 the believers make up the army that follows the Lord out of heaven, so the addition is likely correct.)

The three commands are in chronological progression.

1. 4-5, First Command: Before the judgment, separate from Babylon
 - a) Command: separate from the condemned city.
OT theme; drawn directly from Jer. 51:6,45, but reminds us as well of the experience of Lot fleeing Sodom (Gen. 19:12,13)

and Israel moving away from Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:26-27).

b) Motive: don't be caught in her judgment.

2. 6-8, Second Command: Judge Babylon

Clarifies the previous command further: we can't be part of the invading army if we are also citizens of the city being attacked!

a) Command: repay her for what she has done.

1) Agents: believers! Now, we have neither the power to destroy Babylon, nor the ability to do so without personal vengeance. When we return with the LJC (ch. 19), we will have both. This should not surprise us; we are to judge angels (1 Cor. 6:3).

2) Substance: Four expressions of the *lex talionis*, the "eye for an eye" principle that forms the foundation of biblical law, Ex. 21:23-25, Gal. 6:7.

b) Reason: twofold, 7b and 8b, enclosing an indicative statement of her coming destruction in 8a. This is drawn from Isaiah's condemnation of Babylon in Isa. 47.

1) 7b, she is falsely confident in her security. The world delights in self-confidence; the Lord despises it. It is the opposite of worship. He will seek it out and destroy it. 2 Cor. 1:9 for the general principle.

a> Hannah knew this, 1 Sam. 2:3-8

b> Nebuchadnezzar knew this, Dan. 4:37

2) 8b, the Lord is mighty. Fully able to carry out his judgments.

3) 8a, prediction of her rapid destruction "in one day."

3. 9-19, Chorus of Mourners--response to this judgment

Takes us to Ezek 27, both in terms of the mercantile description of the city, and the three groups of mourners.

The tenses advance as we move from one group to the other, as though the mourning prophesied for the first group has come to pass by the time we reach the last one.

Alternation among these three groups:

a) Description of their weeping;

b) Explanation of their relation to the city;

c) Statement that they now stand far off--how fickle are the companions of wickedness!

d) Words of their lament:

1) Woe to that great city (each characterizes her in a way that makes sense to them)

2) In one hour she is destroyed (even worse than the one day prophesied by the angel, v.8)

a) 9-10, Kings (future tense verbs)

- 1) Their relation to her: they participated in her wanton, dissolute life.
 - 2) Now their playmate is gone, and they "stand far off for fear of her torment"--partners in sin don't stick around when judgment falls!
 - 3) Words of their lament:
 - a> "Babylon that mighty city." Spoke by kings, this is an important testimony. She was powerful enough to rule over them (17:18).
 - b> "In one hour is thy judgment." It is the place of kings to bring judgment; whoever has been able to judge her is someone with whom they will have to deal.
 - 4) How can they speak thus if they hated her so and fought against her, 17:16? Often in war, the opposing parties are fighting for something that they destroy by the action of fighting for it. They have vented their hatred toward Babylon; now they regret the outcome. Each of them wanted the power that she exerted; now it is destroyed and none of them can have it.
- b) 11-17, Merchants (present tense verbs, resumed by future; MT is future throughout)
- 1) 11-15, Their relation to her is described by a long passage, marked by external inclusion, 11-15. They are the ones who have profited by her sin. Now their customer is gone. They mourn, not because of her loss, but because their business will suffer. We need to be careful not to profit from the sin of others.

The list of commodities is patterned after Ezek. 27:12-22; 15 of the 29 listed here are also there. v.14 appears to be a comment from John; certainly not from the merchants, who would sell if she would buy. Perhaps John is looking ahead to v.15.
 - 2) 15, They also stand afar off for fear of her torment.
 - 3) Their lament shows their own perspective:
 - a> 16, She is a great city because she was clothed so elegantly. Where kings appreciated her strength, they coveted her wealth.
 - b> 17, Her loss is not mourned as a judgment, but as a destruction of wealth.
- c) 18-19, Pilots (aorist tense verbs)
- 1) Their relation: they shipped the goods that the merchants sold.
 - 2) They also "stand far off;" we aren't told why, but it's not hard to guess.
 - 3) They give a double lament
 - a> 18, drawn from Ezek. 27:32, but also reflects 13:4, "who is like the beast?" What appears wonderful in power also is wonderful in judgment.

b> 19 follows the earlier pattern:

- 1> "Woe" for the fall of her who enriched all who had ships to bring her her desires
- 2> In one hour she is made desolate, isolated, abandoned, without any commerce to link her to the outside world.

4. 20, Third Command: After the judgment, rejoice over her.

- a) Command: rejoice over the fallen wicked. Runs counter to our western notions of fairness, but that only shows how little we appreciate the fundamental difference between righteousness and wickedness. If we really did love righteousness and hate evil as the Lord does, we would be less patient with sin and compromise. Ps. 58:10.
- b) Reason: lit., "for God has extracted your judgment from her." The fulfillment of "vengeance is mine; I shall repay."

C. 21-24, The Angel with a Stone: Reports it after the fact

1. Drawn from Jer. 51:61-64, Jer's instructions to Seraiah. Now an angel carries out the same symbolic action.
2. The list of things that have been taken away echos a list repeated several times in Jer with respect to the judgment of Judah: 7:34; 16:19; (especially) 25:10. These things will be restored to Judah (33:11), and now the angel reports that they will be taken from Babylon. Thus rounds out God's vengeance.
3. Reason: threefold. The beginning seems innocuous, but look where it leads.
 - a) Prominence of her merchants; that's wrong because they will promote anything for buck, in particular:
 - b) They spread her sorceries. E.g., one of the US's biggest exports is rock music and cinema--demonism and sexual perversion.
 - c) These come to full fruition in the martyrdom of God's people. With v.24 compare Matt. 23:34-37.