

12. Judgment on Babylon (1Q 2019—Revelation)

Biblical material: Revelation 17:1–18; Jer. 51:13; Rev. 13:1–10; Exod. 28:2:20–23; 13:5–8; Rev. 18:4, 5.

Quotes

- The collapse of the Tower of Babel is perhaps the central urban myth. It is certainly the most disquieting. In Babylon, the great city that fascinated and horrified the Biblical writers, people of different races and languages, drawn together in pursuit of wealth, tried for the first time to live together - and failed. *Neil MacGregor*
- Babylon is everywhere. You have wrong and you have right. Wrong is what we call Babylon, wrong things. That is what Babylon is to me. I could have born in England, I could have born in America, it make no difference where me born, because there is Babylon everywhere. *Bob Marley*
- Quit Babylon for love of the Babylonians. And do not seek ease or security you can obtain by using Babylon. What will it avail you to cease living in Babylon if you do not also cease living on Babylon? *Vincent McNabb*
- Imagine that leader of all the enemy, in that great plain of Babylon, sitting on a sort of throne of smoking flame, a horrible and terrifying sight. Watch him calling together countless devils, to despatch them into different cities till the whole world is covered, forgetting no province or locality, no class or single individual. *Ignatius of Loyola*

Questions

What is Babylon punished for? How do we relate to God's direct involvement in this—what does it say about him? What is at the heart of the false system of worship and belief that makes up Babylon? How do we help others to see that this is all part of God's plan to restore what is good and true? What is God saying to us in these passages?

Bible summary

Revelation 17:1–18 describes the punishment of the prostitute called Babylon. Rev. 13:1–10 takes us back to the issue of forced worship and persecution caused by the first beast. Rev. 18:4, 5 is the call for God's people to leave Babylon while Jer. 51:13 speaks of the coming destruction. Exodus 28 and 13 record God's instructions regarding "true religion."

Comment

Babylon is the one who gave the nations false, intoxicating religion. It is symbolic of all false religions and the problem centers on misrepresenting God and his nature. The great Christian tragedy is that this also happened to the Christian church: in time the wonderful truths about God and his character revealed by Jesus were swept away and a pagan system put in its place that emphasized ritual and compliance.

The history of our pioneers is associated with the desire to return to a true system of belief that rejected creeds and church authority. Speaking of the time leading up to 1844, Everett Dick writes, "When the advent believers in the various churches became

active, a breach between them and their fellow church members gradually opened. In time, the advent believers found their church relationships strained, and they were obliged to withdraw of their own accord or they were disfellowshipped by their brethren. A cry went up over the land, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen.' 'Come out of her, My people.' 'Babylon' was interpreted to mean the various churches of which the believers were members, and they felt it their duty to withdraw from this confusion." Everett Newton Dick, *Founders of the Message*, (1938), pp.182-3.

The imagery of Revelation 18 is given to reassure us that Satan's false system will eventually be destroyed. This is not through the imposition of power as this would be counter to the whole of the great controversy. Jesus in his life and death showed God's real response to the attacks on his character and misrepresentation of what he truly wants. God's highest principle is freedom, and he is not about to impose himself on anyone. However there is coming a time when God will allow the bad choices of sin to be worked through—the consequences will be both seen and experienced. This is the message of the fall of Babylon and the punishment of the prostitute.

The choice is not "Do as I say, or else!" It is a plea from God's heart of love that refuses to interfere with our freedom to choose, saying "Look at the evidence. Believe what I tell you, because you can see that it is proved true. Come to me and find healing from sin, comfort for your pain, and an eternal life together with me. Come: for if you don't, I can't help you, and tragically you will experience what sin does to you: utter self-destruction."

God's principles of government are based on these fundamental concepts of choice and free will, of selflessness and love for the other. God intends to liberate us from our selfishness and to change us into the kind of people who are safe to have in his selfless universe. He wants to give us the freedom to choose what is good and true and right, instead of being enslaved by our sinful human nature. This is true freedom, for in our current state we have a bent towards evil. We think we are free, but only God can set us free! This is freedom that lasts forever, freedom that is restricted only by *our* choosing; recognizing that the way chosen by Lucifer can never lead to true happiness and individual fulfillment. We remain free to choose for eternity—but we will never choose the ill for we know where that leads. That's the reason for the current experience: this is the evidence that keeps the universe safe forever.

Ellen White Comments

Babylon will make all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. Every nation will be involved. Of this time John the Revelator declares: [Revelation 18:3-7; 17:13, 14, quoted]. "These have one mind." There will be a universal bond of union, one great harmony, a confederacy of Satan's forces. "And shall give their power and strength unto the beast." Thus is manifested the same arbitrary, oppressive power against religious liberty--freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience--as was manifested by the papacy, when in the past it persecuted those who dared to refuse to conform with the religious rites and ceremonies of Romanism.--3SM 392 (1891). {LDE 136.4}

The condemnation that will fall upon the nations of the earth in this day will be because of their rejection of light, and will be similar to that which fell upon the kings of Babylon; it will be because they have failed to make the most of present light, present opportunities for knowing what is truth and righteousness. {ST, July 27, 1891 par. 1}

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