

# The Judgment of God Is Nothing To Mess With

## Revelation 18:4-8

### Revelation 18:4-8 NAS:

<sup>4</sup> *I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues;*

<sup>5</sup> *for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.*

<sup>7</sup> *"To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.'*

<sup>8</sup> *"For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.*

God tells His people clearly at this time to get out of Babylon so that they will not get caught up in her sins. Isaiah and Jeremiah both issued similar warnings in the Old Testament, but back then it applied to the nation of Babylon that had taken the Jews captive beginning in 606 B.C:

- "Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians!" (Isaiah 48:20)
- "Depart, depart, go out from there! Touch no unclean thing!" (Isaiah 52:11)
- "Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives!" (Jeremiah 51:45; 2 Corinthians 6:17).<sup>1</sup>

The voice is not suggesting that God's people should isolate themselves from unbelievers. How could they then influence the world with the Gospel of salvation? Jesus prayed that His people be in the world but not of the world (John 17:13-16). But God is warning them of the destruction of the city and telling His people to get out before the buildings start falling on them.

When the exile in Babylon was over and the Jews were allowed to leave, God told His people not to take along anything that was unclean or that would remind them of idol worship. He wanted them to be pure and holy when they returned home. Then when Christ came, some six-hundred years later, He made it clear that the people were not to flee the Roman world or Rome itself. **Instead** they were to break with the empire's

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• <sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.489.

idolatrous culture and lifestyle and to avoid compromising the Word of God in any way, as is evident from the seven letters John addressed to the churches in the province of Asia (chapters 2 and 3). For Christians today the message is to separate spiritually and morally from the secular world and not participate in its sins. While in this world, we must live in complete harmony with God's Word and the testimony of Christ as citizens of the kingdom of Heaven. And when we see people not living within the will of God, it is our responsibility

To speak out against such behavior, and that includes the government.

If they fail to do so and adopt the ways of the world, as many Christians are doing today, they will also receive sin's consequences.<sup>2</sup>

Revelation 18:5 NAS:

<sup>5</sup> *For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

Unbelievers will keep on sinning against God as if they were saying to Him, *"In your face God! Just watch me do what you hate! And by the way you can take your Son, your Bible, your angels and you know what you can do with them. I don't need you, so take a hike!"* They are like the people who built the tower of Babel to reach Heaven so they could challenge God (Genesis 11:3-4). These sinners are daring God to try and do something about these sins that reach Heaven.

The phrase *"piled up as high as heaven"* may seem confusing to you. After all, there is no sin in God's Heaven, God's abode. So this phrase conveys a couple meanings or illustrations. First, the literal Greek means *"joined together,"* kind of like when we today are trying to help people understand the extent of something and describe it by saying something like, *"Laying them end to end, they would reach half-way to the moon."* It gives us a visual picture of sin piled on sin until it is higher than the tallest skyscraper, reaching into the planetary heavens. Secondly, the phrase conveys the thought that God in Heaven is very aware of the amount and degree of sin on earth. A couple verses can show that these illustrations are an appropriate interpretation of the phrase, *"piled up as high as heaven."*

**Jeremiah** used the same description about the destruction of Babylon after the Jewish captivity (606 B.C.-536 B.C.)

Jeremiah 51:9 ESV:

*We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed. Forsake her, and let us go each to his own country, for her judgment has reached up to heaven and has been lifted up even to the skies.*

Ezra 9:6 ESV:

*saying: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for*

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.*

After passing through various changes Babylon of the Old Testament was occupied by **Cyrus**, “*king of Elam*,” B.C. 538, who issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to their own land (Ezra 1). It then ceased to be the capital of an empire. It was repeatedly attacked by hostile armies until its people were all driven from their homes, and the city became a complete uninhabited pile of rubble, and people throughout the region forgot all about it.<sup>3</sup>

These sins mentioned in Revelation 18:5 are in the face of God, so to speak, and they have become a stench in his nostrils.<sup>4</sup>

God is a God of grace, mercy, and love, and because of the sacrificial death of his Son He not only forgives the repentant sinner but also remembers his or her sins no more (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). But sins committed by unrepentant sinners He recalls one by one. They have brought Him to the end of His patience and He will not tolerate it any more (see Genesis 18:20).

Hebrews 8:12 NLT:

<sup>12</sup> *And I will forgive their wickedness, and **I will never again remember their sins.***

What follows in Hebrews 10 is one of the clearest explanations of why Jesus came and what it means to you and me. Please highlight it in your Bible and read it as many times as you need to in order to understand it.

Hebrews 10:1-18 NLT:

<sup>1</sup> *The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship.*

<sup>2</sup> *If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.*

<sup>3</sup> *But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year.*

<sup>4</sup> *For **it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.***

<sup>5</sup> *That is why, when Christ came into the world, he said to God, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings. But **you have given me a body***

<sup>3</sup> Easton, M.G.: Easton's Bible Dictionary. Oak Harbor, WA : 1996, c1897.

<sup>4</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *Baker New Testament Commentary – Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI:Baker Academic, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 492 -504.

*to offer.*

<sup>6</sup> *You were not pleased with burnt offerings or other offerings for sin.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then I said, ‘Look, I have come to do your will, O God— as is written about me in the Scriptures.’”*

<sup>8</sup> *First, Christ said, “You did not want animal sacrifices or sin offerings or burnt offerings or other offerings for sin, nor were you pleased with them” (though they are required by the law of Moses).*

<sup>9</sup> *Then he said, “Look, **I have come to do your will.**” **He cancels the first covenant in order to put the second into effect.***

<sup>10</sup> *For God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.*

<sup>11</sup> *Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, **which can never take away sins.***

<sup>12</sup> *But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God’s right hand.*

<sup>13</sup> *There he waits until his enemies are humbled and made a footstool under his feet.*

<sup>14</sup> *For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.*

<sup>15</sup> *And the Holy Spirit also testifies that this is so. For he says,*

<sup>16</sup> *“This is **the new covenant** I will make with **my people** on that day, says the LORD: **I will put my laws in their hearts**, and I will write them on their minds.”*

<sup>17</sup> *Then he says, “I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds.”* <sup>18</sup> *And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.*

Revelation 18:6 NAS:

<sup>6</sup> *“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.*

*“Treat her as she has treated others. In fact give her back double of what she gave to others.”* Who is speaking and who is being spoken to? The angel has been speaking thus far, and it would appear that God is the One being spoken to. God alone is able to dispense justice and punish sinners. This response fits the wording of the Old Testament prophecy which John uses again here in Revelation, seven hundred years later. Announcing the day of disaster that comes upon the people of Judah, God says, *“I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin.”*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Jeremiah 50:14-16, 29 NAS:

<sup>14</sup> "Draw up your battle lines against Babylon on every side, All you who bend the bow; Shoot at her, do not be sparing with your arrows, For she has sinned against the LORD.

<sup>15</sup> "Raise your battle cry against her on every side! She has given herself up, her pillars have fallen, Her walls have been torn down. For this is the vengeance of the LORD: Take vengeance on her; As she has done to others, so do to her.

<sup>16</sup> "Cut off the sower from Babylon And the one who wields the sickle at the time of harvest; From before the sword of the oppressor They will each turn back to his own people And they will each flee to his own land.

<sup>29</sup> "Summon many against Babylon, All those who bend the bow: Encamp against her on every side, Let there be no escape. Repay her according to her work; According to all that she has done, so do to her; For she has become arrogant against the LORD, Against the Holy One of Israel.

**These verses could apply just as well today toward the United States. We too have become arrogant against the Lord.**

John writes that in the final judgment Babylon will receive double according to her works, but the words *give her back double* go back to a Hebrew **idiom** that signifies "*to produce a duplicate.*" An idiom should not be translated literally; therefore the translation in English should be

*"Give her the very equivalent according to her works," that is, pay her back in kind.*

In the last part of Revelation 6 we read, "*She brewed a cup of terror for others, so brew twice as much for her,*" that translates, "**the exact measure should be given to her as she gave to others.**" What she did to others will be done to her. The cup is filled with the wine of God's fury:

Revelation 14:10 NLT:

<sup>10</sup> must drink the wine of God's anger. It has been poured full strength into God's cup of wrath. And they will be tormented with fire and burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.

Revelation 16:19 NLT:

<sup>19</sup> The great city of Babylon split into three sections, and the cities of many nations fell into heaps of rubble. So God remembered all of Babylon's sins, and he made her drink the cup that was filled with the wine of his fierce wrath.

God will never forget sin in Babylon or anywhere else; in His wrath He will give everyone just what they deserve.

Revelation 18:7 NAS:

<sup>7</sup> *"To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.'*

What arrogance Babylon has! Because of her glory and opulence, Babylon was called "**the pride of the whole earth**" (Jeremiah 51:41 NRSV) and "**the glory of the Babylonians' pride**" (Isaiah 13:19). Yet this city, because it was filled with every possible kind of sin and blasphemy, was eventually totally destroyed. It experienced firsthand the misery and suffering it had caused others, for **the law of retribution was applied to it in full measure**<sup>6</sup> when she was destroyed in the Old Testament. The Babylon of Revelation 18, be it a literal city or an economic and political system, will meet the same fate.

The noun *torment* signifies the agony one senses after being stung by a scorpion (Revelation 9:5) or being blistered by burning sulfur (14:10). The first will last for five months, the second involves eternal punishment that deprives people of rest both day and night (Revelation 14:11).

John is able to pen many of his comments in the book of Revelation from prophetic passages in the **Old Testament**, quoting here almost word for word from a passage on the fall of Babylon, "*You said, 'I will continue forever—the eternal queen!... I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children'*" (Isaiah 47:7, 8; Ezekiel 28:2; Zephaniah 2:15). In speaking these words Babylon puffs herself up with pride. She wants to be the equivalent of God and rule the world in His place. But she can never be like God and rule as queen of Heaven, even though she intends to take God's place (see 2 Thessalonians 2:4).

John is masterfully using a picture of a woman who represents not only Babylon or Rome but any world city. This city represents a world that has rejected God Almighty, His Word, His Church, and has chosen to follow the prince of this world, Satan.

Revelation 18:8 NAS:

<sup>8</sup> *"For this reason **in one day** her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.*

“The consequence of Babylon's pride is her downfall, here described in terms of death, grief, and famine for her citizens and burning fires for her buildings and structures. God will send this calamity upon her in one hour, which is not to be measured chronologically but rather interpreted metaphorically. One hour describes brevity, so that the plagues that strike her are

<sup>6</sup> Op cit, Kistemaker.

devastatingly swift (Revelation 10, 17, 19; 17:12).”<sup>7</sup>

“John uses the Old Testament as his source. There he reads that God said to Babylon: *"Both [the loss of children and widowhood] will overtake you in a moment, on a single day"* (Isaiah 47:9; Jeremiah 50:31). *Her buildings and earthly possessions will be burned by fire, and the people will not even save themselves from the power of the flame"* (Isaiah 47:14). Suddenly, the depopulated city lies in ruins, and Babylon is left as a lonely, forsaken figure.”<sup>8</sup>

John P. M. Sweet notes that this mighty city of Babylon (Revelation 10:18) *"is no match for the might of God."* When the hour of judgment comes, there is no escape from the wrath of God. As the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews observes, *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31).

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.492

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.