

The Apocalypse of St. John Chapter 18

As an introduction here are some excerpts from Psalm 36 LXX (Ps 37 in Western Bibles) that I came across recently in our prayers:

Do not be envious of those who do evil, nor be jealous of those who work lawlessness; for like grass they shall be dried up quickly, and like green vegetables they shall swiftly wither. Hope in the Lord and work goodness. Delight in the Lord and He will give you the requests of your heart. Do not be envious of him who prospers in his way, nor of him who transgresses the law. Because evildoers will be destroyed but those who wait on the Lord, these shall inherit the earth. The sinners draw the sword and stretch their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay the upright in heart. But the sinners shall perish and the enemies of the Lord altogether, when they glorify and exalt themselves, like smoke they shall vanish away. For those who bless Him shall inherit the earth. But those who curse Him shall be utterly destroyed. [The entire psalm is a fitting intro for this chapter.]

Read 18:1-3

Orthodox Bible Study (OBS) excerpts: The angel is said to have great authority b/c it is to announce a great message on God's behalf: that Babylon the Great is doomed for destruction. -P. 183

Orthodox Study Bible (OSB) Note 18:1

ADD "...and the earth was illuminated with his glory"
This corresponds to our Byzantine tradition. The angels and saints in their godliness reflect the glory of God. Just as the book of Hebrews states that Jesus is the brightness and the express image of the Father's glory. The saints reflect God's glory and this is why they are depicted iconographically with the light of Christ emanating from them.

OBS By stating that the angel was illuminated with glory is to state the angel has come directly from God's presence, reflecting His glory with radiance brilliant enough that the earth was enlightened from it. -P. 183

OSB NOTE 18:2

OBS: This was Rome's due because she had seduced all the nations to "drink from her cup of fornication" (v.3) and to partake of the idolatry of emperor worship along with many evil & immoral pagan practices that contradict the purpose and meaning of true human sexuality. This is not to mention the wanton & repeated murdering of God's people & the innocent. Rome would now pay the price for leading astray the whole world. -P. 184

Read 18:4-8

ADD: "Come out from her, my people, lest you share in her sins..." -God's people have always been called to be

separate & different from the world. St. Peter states that God calls on us to, "Be holy for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16). Jesus calls us to be "in the world" but not "of the world" (Jn 15:9, Jn 17:14-16). St. John writes "...if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn 2:15). St. Paul writes, "do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom 12:2). St. James writes we are to keep ourselves "unstained by the world" (1:27). Finally in St. Paul notes that God calls us to, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you" (2 Cor 6:17).

The essence of the Church is to be separate from the world & what is unclean, evil and ungodly and to be joined to God in perfect communion. St. James states, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jam 4:4). This is a prominent theme of this chapter, the book of Revelation, the entire Bible and our Christian Faith.

The bottom line is: **CHRISTIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY FROM THE WORLD:** As St. Paul said, "You have been purchased with a price [meaning Christ's death for us], therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, for you are God's." (1 Cor 6:20)

We are a people called out from the world. This is essentially what Church means. We are to be light on hill which cannot be hid and we are to let our light shine

before men (the Light of Christ) so that they can see our good works and glorify the Father.

OSB Note: 18:4-8a

OBS: Christians have always been called to "flee from the city" just as Lot fled from Sodom. This is a spiritual flight more than a physical one; the Christian, even in Rome, was to live differently from his pagan neighbors. [Just as we are called to today.] Christians were called to "come out from their midst and be separate" (2 Cor. 6:17), living as citizens of the New Jerusalem. For if they co-shared in their neighbor's sins they would also share in their plagues.

ICSB: Most likely these plagues are the ones we already have read about consisting the seven seals (chap 6-8), the seven trumpets (chap 8-11) and the seven bowls (chaps 15-16).

OBS: "...her sins have reached to heaven..." (v.5). This image is that of sins piling up so high as to reach heaven itself.

OBS: "God has remembered her sins..." (v.5): God, being the Just Judge of all the earth -must do justly (Gen 18:25) and judge all the evil on earth. All those murdered and robbed, all those oppressed and beaten and tortured, all those children aborted in the womb or exposed [& left to die] after birth, all the down trodden of the earth would now be avenged. -P. 185

OBS: The "cup of suffering" (v.6) Rome mixed for others to drink, the angel calls God to mix double for Rome to drink. This "double-measure" of suffering here means "abundantly, fully." In other words, let her know what the suffering was like that she has inflicted upon the helpless.

OBS: "To the measure that she glorified herself.." (v.7), In other words to the degree that she glorified herself and lived in luxury and wanton sensuality, to the same degree: Give her torment and mourning. Just as she boasted of her invincibility saying ("I sit as queen & will never see mourning") she will come to know that she is not stronger than God and she will not escape His judgment. -P.185

OBS: "In one day" indicates that "suddenly & unexpectedly" her plagues & God's judgment would come. "Strong is the Lord God who judges" -Rome had thought the God of the deluded Christians to be powerless. She would soon learn the truth.

OSB Note: 18:4-8b

Read 18:9-19

OSB Note: 18:9-10

OSB Note: 18:11-19

OBS: In this passage all the earth is portrayed as lifting up a lamentation for her complete desolation. In this lament,

three classes of men raise the cry, "Woe, woe, the great city!" (1) the kings of the earth, (2) the traders of the earth, and (3) every pilot and passenger and sailor. Each has their own reason for mourning. The kings of the earth because they too lived in luxury, and they fear their own overthrow. The traders (or wholesalers, Gk. emporos) mourn b/c no one will buy their cargo anymore. The pilot and other seafarers because all who have ships at sea became rich by her wealth. All had profited by Rome's immorality and oppression. All were united in a great solidarity of evil & corruption. Thus all alike will weep & lament over judgment casting dust upon their heads and crying out.

ICBS: They are not saddened for Rome, but for themselves, being pained at the loss of their illicit pleasures and wealth.

OBS: This great inventory (v. 12-13) shows the great wealth Rome had amassed in its luxurious sensuality. Its interesting that the inventory ends with bodies (that is, slaves). In pagan Rome slaves were just another commodity to be bought and sold. St. John adds, though, these slaves were souls of men (Gr. psuxas anthropon) that is, human souls, human beings. While the world might view these slaves as nothing but objects like cargo, St. John, as a Christian, was incapable of listing that final item without also expressing his theological objection to slavery which denigrates the sanctity of human life made in the image of God. -P.188

Read 18:20

OBS: The saints (v.20) are called to rejoice over Rome's demise. Babylon had slain the prophets, apostles and saints to such a degree that it could be said that all of the unjust blood of those slaughtered upon the earth was found in her (v.24). -P. 189

ICBS: This is a prophetic hyperbole meant to stress that the city's bloodguilt has reached the most extreme level.

OBS: Rome is seen as the source of all injustice and tyranny. Therefore God's judgment comes as vindication of those who were slaughtered by her. -P. 189.

Read 18:21-24

OBS: The casting of the stone (v. 21) by the strong angel ("strong" indicating a key event) is reminiscent of Jeremiah's casting of a stone into the waters. He did this as a prophetic sign that Babylon would sink and never rise again (Jer 51:63). The great millstone indicates tremendous weight. Just as it would hit the water with great violence, so with a mighty noise would Rome fall and be found no longer among the great cities of men -P. 189.

OBS: All in the ruined city would be deserted an eerily quiet. All the sounds of festivities (harpers, musicians, flutists & trumpeters) would be gone forever. There will be no sounds of craftsman, nor the creaking sound of mills grinding grain for food. Babylon would be left a burnt-out shell. P. 189

OBS: The traders had been the great ones of the earth but they had deceived all the nations into supporting them through their sorcery. The word sorcery comes from the Greek "pharmakeia," it included the making of potions and spells used to incite lust. The metaphor here is that of the traders ability to seduce the nations and entice them to do their will. God's judgment has fallen on such pride at last. All the slain of the earth are finally being avenged. P. 189

OSB Note: 18:21-24

CONCLUSION:

(ICSB): According to the Western Father St. Caesarius of Arles: "Babylon and the harlot, whose smoke goes up forever, are none other than the lustful, the adulterous, and the arrogant. If you wish to escape such punishments, [then] have no desire to commit such grave sins. For [even] in the present age Babylon is always going to destruction..." -Exposition of the Apocalypse, homily 18.

Add: Thus the destruction of Rome foretold in St. John's Apocalypse is historically seen as a metaphor by Christians as an example for all peoples, nations and empires that rebel against God and His truth. This holds true even for our own beloved nation.

Glory to Jesus Christ!
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