

Revelation 18:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

Analysis

And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hou... This verse from Revelation's vision of fall of babylon - economic, political, religious system destroyed, god's people called out employs apocalyptic imagery rich with Old Testament allusions and symbolic meaning. The Greek text uses vivid apocalyptic language characteristic of Jewish prophetic literature, drawing heavily from Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Zechariah.

The symbolism must be interpreted within its first-century context while recognizing timeless spiritual realities. The imagery would resonate powerfully with persecuted believers facing Roman imperial cult worship, providing hope that despite present suffering, Christ reigns sovereign and will consummate His kingdom. The apocalyptic genre uses symbolic numbers (seven, twelve, 144,000), colors, beasts, and cosmic imagery to convey theological truth rather than photographic descriptions.

Christologically, Revelation consistently exalts Jesus as the victorious Lamb, the faithful witness, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Every vision ultimately points to Christ's supremacy, His finished redemptive work, and His certain return to judge the living and dead and establish the new creation.

Historical Context

John received this revelation circa AD 95 during Domitian's persecution, exiled on Patmos for his testimony. The seven churches of Asia Minor faced increasing pressure to participate in emperor worship and pagan religious practices. Refusal meant economic hardship, social ostracism, and potential martyrdom. Understanding this context illuminates Revelation's encouragement to faithful endurance.

The apocalyptic genre was familiar to first-century Jewish and Christian readers. Rather than newspaper-style predictions, apocalyptic literature uses symbolic imagery to reveal spiritual realities behind earthly events, encourage the faithful, warn the unfaithful, and assert God's ultimate sovereignty over history. Parallels with Daniel, Ezekiel, and intertestamental apocalyptic writings would help original readers decode the symbols.

Rome's imperial cult demanded worship of Caesar as divine, placing Christians in impossible situations—compromise their faith or face persecution. Revelation identifies Rome as "Babylon" and assures believers that despite appearances, the Lamb conquered through His death and resurrection, and all earthly kingdoms will submit to His reign.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 18:19 reveal God's character, particularly His sovereignty, holiness, and justice?
2. What specific encouragement or warning does this verse offer for maintaining faithful Christian witness amid cultural pressure?

3. How does this passage point to Christ's victory and the hope of new creation, and how should that shape your present priorities?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	ἔβαλον	χοῦν	ἐπὶ	τὰς	κεφαλὰς	αὐτῆς	καὶ	ἔκραζον
And	they cast	dust	on	G3588	heads	her	And	cried
G2532	G906	G5522	G1909		G2776	G846	G2532	G2896
κλαίοντες	καὶ	πενθοῦντες	λέγοντες	οὐαὶ	οὐαὶ	ἡ	πόλις	
weeping	And	wailing	saying	Alas	Alas	G3588	city	
G2799	G2532	G3996	G3004	G3759	G3759		G4172	
ἡ	μεγάλη	ἐν	ἣ	ἐπλούτησαν	πάντες	οἱ	ἔχοντες	
G3588	that great	in	G3739	were made rich	all	G3588	that had	
	G3173	G1722		G4147	G3956		G2192	
πλοῖα	ἐν	τῇ	θαλάσῃ	ἐκ	τῆς	τιμιότητος	αὐτῆς	
ships	in	G3588	the sea	by reason of	G3588	costliness	her	
G4143	G1722		G2281	G1537		G5094	G846	
ὅτι	μῆ	ώρα	ἡρημώθη					
! for	G1520	hour	is she made desolate					
G3754		G5610	G2049					

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 18:10 (Parallel theme): Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

Joshua 7:6 (Parallel theme): And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.

Ezekiel 27:30 (Parallel theme): And shall cause their voice to be heard against thee, and shall cry bitterly, and shall cast up dust upon their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes:

Revelation 18:3 (Parallel theme): For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

Job 2:12 (Parallel theme): And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

Revelation 18:8 (Parallel theme): Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

1 Samuel 4:12 (Parallel theme): And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

Nehemiah 9:1 (Parallel theme): Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.

2 Samuel 13:19 (Parallel theme): And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.