

Revelation 18:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,

Analysis

And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,... 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

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Revelation 18:9 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 κλαύσονται αὐτῆς καὶ κόψονται ἐπ' αὐτῆς τῆς
 And shall bewail her And lament for her who
 G2532 G2799 G846 G2532 G2875 G1909 G846 G3588

βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς τῆς μετ' αὐτῆς πορνεύσαντες
 the kings who of the earth who with her have committed fornication
 G935 G3588 G1093 G3588 G3326 G846 G4203

καὶ στρηνιάσαντες ὅταν βλέπωσιν τῆς καπνὸν τῆς
 And lived deliciously when they shall see who the smoke who
 G2532 G4763 G3752 G991 G3588 G2586 G3588

πυρώσεως αὐτῆς
 burning her
 G4451 G846

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 19:3 (Parallel theme): And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

Revelation 17:2 (Kingdom): With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Revelation 18:3 (Kingdom): 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.

Revelation 18:18 (Parallel theme): And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!

Revelation 18:20 (Parallel theme): Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

Revelation 14:11 (Parallel theme): And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Revelation 18:7 (Parallel theme): How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Jeremiah 50:46 (Kingdom): At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth is moved, and the cry is heard among the nations.

Genesis 19:28 (Parallel theme): And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

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