

MOURNING FOR BABYLON

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Revelation 18:9-19 describes the mourning that would take place at the fall of the figurative city of Babylon. (We know this passage is not referring to the literal Babylon, because it had been destroyed a little over 600 years before and had not been rebuilt.) The key point of this passage is not about any particular city that may be symbolized by this “Babylon,” but rather about what we love and what we are seeking after. Are we laying up treasure on this earth, or in heaven?

The essence of material things (even if non-sinful)

The kings of the earth who had been Babylon’s partners in evil would bewail her and lament for her when her destruction occurred (Rev 18:9). The world’s merchants would also weep and mourn over Babylon because she had been the source of their wealth (Rev 18:11). It is interesting to note that the riches of Babylon described in verses 12-13 are generally not sinful things. Precious metals and stones, fine materials and vessels, spices and fragrances, fine food and animals are not evil in and of themselves. We are glad that slavery and trafficking in human beings (Rev 18:13) is illegal in our society today. But what is the problem with all of these material things, which even include some of the necessities of life? Money is not sinful in and of itself, which is why God charges the rich to use their money to serve God (1 Tim 6:17-19). That would be an impossible task if their riches are inherently sinful. But 1 Timothy 6:10 says that the *love* of money is the root of all evil. Similarly, in the parable of the sower in Luke 8:14, Jesus says that some Christians are choked with the cares, riches and pleasures of this life. The verb form of the Greek word translated “cares” in Luke 8:14 is found in Matthew 6:31 where the Lord tells us not to take “thought” for food, drink and clothes. In this context (Matt 6:24), Christ says that we cannot serve God and material things, and his application is food, drink and clothes. He says the Gentiles seek after these things but Christians should rather seek God’s kingdom and righteousness. Food, drink and clothes are necessary

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(continued)

things for us to live, yet the “cares” for even these essentials of life can choke a Christian. If we love any material things, then we cannot love God (Luke 16:13; Jas 4:4; 1 John 2:15). Our purpose for eating, drinking and sleeping must be to gain strength (Eccl 10:17), which we in turn must use to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness (Matt 6:33). We should do all things for the Lord’s sake, not for our own desires (1 Pet 4:1-2).

Temporal versus eternal

The sad, inevitable outcome of loving and seeking after material things is described vividly in Revelation 18:14. This verse says, “And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, *and thou shalt find them no more at all.*” Everything that the souls of these people desired were gone forever. The very same thing had happened to the original Babylon (Jer 50:37; 51:13). This teaches us an important fundamental lesson about preparing for eternity. All that is in the world will pass away (1 John 2:17). All material things are temporal (Luke 12:15-21; 2 Cor 4:18).

Therefore, we must not love this world or the things of the world (1 John 2:15-16; Luke 16:13). We should not look at these temporal things (2 Cor 4:18; Col 3:2), and we should not lay up for ourselves treasure on earth (Matt 6:19-24). If these are the things that we love, then one day we will lose everything and we will never see them at all any more, for all eternity. We should rather flee these material things and be rich toward God, following after the invisible, eternal things like righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and meekness (1 Tim 6:6-11). To prepare for eternity, we *must* make the choice to forsake everything in this world (Luke 14:33), and love and seek after only the eternal things. We cannot love this world and God too. We must choose what is eternal over what is temporal, so that one day we do not find ourselves mourning the loss of our “Babylon.”