

## 19. The Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18)

Chapter 17 provided a chain of metaphors that identified Babylon. In chapter 17, verse 18, the woman on the beast is the great city, and in verse 5, she is Babylon the great. Leading up to chapter 18, in Revelation 14:8, where the three angels announce the coming wrath of God, John saw the second angel who said, "8 A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'" As the wrath of God, in the seventh bowl, poured out in Revelation 16:19, John wrote, "19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath." Chapter 18 goes into a great and detailed lament over the end of Babylon, the great city.

Chapter 18 contrasts with chapter 21 where the glories and beauties of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the heavenly city, shines with the glory of God. Babylon with its citizens of the world and the New Jerusalem with its saints, made perfect, tell the story of the redeemed and lost in these final chapters of God's Revelation. After chapter 18, the terms *Babylon* and *great city* do not appear again in Revelation. Their retribution in this chapter is the very end of them. Verse 21 announces this fate: "With such great violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."

### ***Fallen! Fallen! Is Babylon the Great (Revelation 18:1-3)***

*1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted:*

*"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!*

*She has become a home for demons*

*and a haunt for every evil spirit,*

*a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.*

*3 For all the nations have drunk*

*the maddening wine of her adulteries.*

*The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,*

*and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."*

An angel declares the first episode of chapter 18—one of three voices and angels who speak during this lament over Babylon. John describes this angel in some detail. The angel has authority; his splendor illuminated the earth; and he shouted with a mighty voice. Since an authority is one whose will must be obeyed, the pronouncement of the angel establishes the very certainty of the events that he describes. The word, *fallen*, is in the present tense, showing the established fact that Babylon is finished. Although time will run its course, Christ with his victory sealed the fate of Babylon.

Babylon the great was a city of unbridled pleasure, sexual immoralities, and rampant materialism. Now it is a place for demons and evil spirits. Unclean and detestable birds are vulture-like carrion eaters, feeding on flesh. Implicated in her sin and woe are the merchants and kings of the earth. *All nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries* shows her former control and influence. The extent of her evil influence reached to the kings of the earth who committed spiritual adultery with her and to the merchants who grew rich by their

material relationship with her. Immorality and mammon combine to seduce the citizens of this great and worldly city, but no more shall this be the case.

### ***The Fate of Babylon Is Announced to the People of God (Revelation 18:4-10)***

4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven say:*

*"Come out of her, my people,  
so that you will not share in her sins,  
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;*

*5 for her sins are piled up to heaven,  
and God has remembered her crimes.*

*6 Give back to her as she has given;  
pay her back double for what she has done.*

*Mix her a double portion from her own cup.*

*7 Give her as much torture and grief  
as the glory and luxury she gave herself.*

*In her heart she boasts,*

*'I sit as queen; I am not a widow,  
and I will never mourn.'*

*8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:  
death, mourning and famine.*

*She will be consumed by fire,  
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.*

9 *"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,  
O Babylon, city of power!  
In one hour your doom has come!"*

Another voice from heaven, which is not the mighty angel of verses 1-2, addresses God's people as *my people*, making the voice the voice of Christ or the Lord God Almighty. The appeal to God's people to come out of the world is the same call that Christ and his apostles and prophets issued. Jesus taught from the beginning that we cannot serve God and Money: In the sermon on the mount, he taught in Matthew 6:19-24:

19 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

24 *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 that the people of God are to have no fellowship with the evil of the great city:

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

The clauses in verse 4 are cause and effect:

*so that you will not share in her sins,  
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;*

There is no way around the conclusion that if we share in Babylon's sin, we will receive her plagues. This statement becomes an eternal principle, which abides from the victory of Jesus on the cross until the last great day. It is true for all people for the rest of time. The clauses, *Her sins are piled up and God has remembered her crimes*, show the certainty of God's retribution for the great city and for those who do not come out. Hebrews 2:1-3 teaches:

1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

One might think that because the time since the Lord died is long past and that evil runs rampant and unchecked, that there might be no accounting for iniquity. The voice from heavens assures otherwise: "For her sins are piled up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes."

A consistent theme, woven throughout the New Testament, is that the saints will judge with God and the Lord, Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:28 Matthew wrote, "28 Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Paul taught this same principle in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3:

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

The understood *you* of this passage teaches, also, that saints will judge: *you* give her back as she has given; *you* pay her back double for what she has done; *you* mix her a double portion from her own cup; and *you* give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

The arrogance of her worldliness leads Babylon to boast. She is queen to the beast; she is the bride of the beast. However, the beast will be thrown down (19:20), she will be a widow, and she will mourn. In one day—the great day of the Lord—death, mourning, and famine will overtake her. The tables turn, as it were. Fire will consume her. The mighty Lord God will judge her. This is the end of the prostitute, the great city, Babylon. What follows are the laments of her lost people, those who put their faith and trust in her iniquities. The church is victorious. The worldly and ungodly people lament the fate of Babylon.

### ***The First Lament: the Kings of the Earth (Revelation 18: 9-10)***

9 *"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,*

*O Babylon, city of power!*

*In one hour your doom has come!"*

Much of Revelation and the entire Bible is about the failure of the kings of the earth to recognize the proper place of God and the lamb. Beginning in Revelation 1:5, there is recognition of Jesus Christ as the true ruler of the kings of the earth: "Grace and peace to you . . . from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" It is at the end of the Revelation that these kings of the earth are humbled before Christ—the King of kings and the Lord of lords. In Revelation 21:22-24, John wrote:

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

Much of the Revelation story is about how these kings of the earth would receive a just reward for their adulterous relationship with the prostitute, Babylon. Revelation 6:15-17 forecasts their doom:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Now their adulteries and their intoxication have come the full course in Revelation 17:1-2: "2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

Because they cast their lot with the wrong city, Babylon, and the wrong woman, the prostitute, they weep and mourn, terrified at her torment. They stand afar off and cry:

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,*

*O Babylon, city of power!*

*In one hour your doom has come!"*

This chapter 18 marks the end of Babylon, but the kings of the earth reappear in Revelation 19:19 where John saw "the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army."

### ***The Second Lament: The Merchants of the Earth (Revelation 18: 11-17)***

11 *"The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more – 12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and*

*marble; 13 cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.*

*14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,  
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!*

*17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"*

In addition to the kings of the world, merchants will lament the doom of Babylon. With Babylon gone, they cannot buy their cargoes. In our day, one might say goods and services. Their avenue to riches is gone. The catalog of products is interesting as it illustrates the vast array of worldly products—metals, textiles, articles of every kind, spices and oils and grains and animals. The list is all inclusive of the material world. Finally and most horribly, the list of traded items ends tragically with the bodies and souls of men. With but a few changes in items of commerce, this passage describes the very world we live in.

The result of the fall of Babylon on the merchants of the world is just as bad as what befell the kings of the earth. The fruit is gone; the riches and splendor have vanished; the merchants stand far off, terrified at her torment; they weep and mourn.

The beauty and wonder of the revelation is how writers, apostles and prophets, could speak such similar words, though separated by so much time and space. James writes an eloquent passage in James 5:1-6, which stands in perfect agreement with John:

*1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.*

Jesus had forecast this same teaching, recorded in Matthew 6:24, "24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Jesus also spoke of the uselessness of placing our hope in worldly treasures in Matthew 6:19-21, "19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Paul also focused his writing on the fleeting nature of worldly wealth in 1 Timothy 6:17, "17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

It is not that saints are rich in the present world that condemns them, but it is that the saints with earthly wealth must put their hope in God and not mammon (money).

The merchants who placed their hope in mammon will be in extreme circumstances when Babylon falls: the fruit they longed for will be gone; their riches and splendor will have vanished; never to be recovered; they stand far off, terrified at her torment; and they will weep and mourn 16 and cry out.

Their lament describes the great city in the very same terms that John used to describe the great prostitute in chapter 17, verse 4. The lament reads in Revelation 18:16-17,

*“Woe! Woe, O great city,  
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,  
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!  
17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”*

The description of the great prostitute reads in Revelation 17:4, “4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.”

God will bring to ruin the wealth of the whole world in one hour.

### ***The Third Lament: All Who Earn Their Living from the Sea (Revelation 18: 17-20)***

*"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' 19 They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,  
where all who had ships on the sea  
became rich through her wealth!  
In one hour she has been brought to ruin!  
20 Rejoice over her, O heaven!  
Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!  
God has judged her for the way she treated you."*

Every sea captain, all who travel by sea, and all who earn their living by the sea grieve over the destruction of Babylon. The modern day corollary to this ancient metaphor includes the flight crews, all those millions who fly every day for pleasure and business, and all those involved in the commerce of our day, which depends on air freight and air traffic. These modern day travelers and business people are even called “road warriors”.

Their sorrow is evident: throwing dust on their heads, with weeping and mourning, they cry out their lament. The laments have progressed in their conclusions. The first lament concluded that in one hour, Babylon’s doom had come. The second lament concluded that in one hour Babylon’s great wealth had come to ruin. The third lament concluded that heaven and the saints, apostles, and prophets rejoice because God has judged Babylon. Doom, ruin, and judgment have come to Babylon.

### ***Babylon Thrown Down (Revelation 18: 21-24)***

*21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:*

*"With such violence  
the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,*

*never to be found again.*

*22 The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters,  
will never be heard in you again.*

*No workman of any trade  
will ever be found in you again.*

*The sound of a millstone  
will never be heard in you again.*

*23 The light of a lamp  
will never shine in you again.*

*The voice of bridegroom and bride  
will never be heard in you again.*

*Your merchants were the world's great men.*

*By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.*

*24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,  
and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

Violently, God will throw down Babylon to be found never again. No musicians, no workmen, no sounds of millstones, no light of lamp, no voice of a bridegroom and bride—none of this will ever be again in Babylon. The indictment is clear: she led astray the nations; she shed the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who lived on the earth. The multitudes of the world owe their spiritual death to the enticements of the great city.

Chapter 18 marks the end of the great city, the great prostitute. Chapter 19 will see the end of the beast and the false prophet. Where chapter 18 focused on the woe and destruction of Babylon, chapter 19 will focus on the four-fold hallelujahs and the victory of the Lamb.