

## Revelation 18: The Fall of Babylon

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 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

As the wrath of God, in the seventh bowl, poured out in Revelation 16:19, John wrote,

19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Chapter 18 goes into a great and detailed lament over the end of Babylon, the great city, where it contrasts with chapter 21 where the glories and beauties of the New Jerusalem—the bride of Christ, the heavenly city, the church—shines with the glory of God. Babylon with its citizens of the world versus 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 *The 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)

#### **Revelation 18:1-3**

*8 After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority; and the earth was lighted with his glory. 2 And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of demons, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.”*

An angel [messenger] 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, all of which could indicate that he is the Christ, who said in Matthew 28:18:

18 And Jesus came to them and spoke unto them, saying, “All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth.”

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 past tense, showing the established fact that Babylon is finished. Although time will run its course, Christ, with the victory of his resurrection, sealed the fate of Babylon. Therefore, the verb, *is become*, is present tense which shows present and continuing action until he returns to render vengeance upon them, according to 2 Thessalonians 1:8-10:

8 rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: 9 who shall suffer punishment, (even) eternal destruction from the face of the

Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at in all them that believed (because our testimony unto you was believed) in that day.

Symbolic 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. *3 For by the wine of the wrath of her fornication all the nations are fallen* 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 [money] combine to seduce the citizens of this great and worldly city, but no more shall this ever be the case.

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

### **Revelation 18:4-10**

*4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come forth, my people, out of her, that you have no fellowship with her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues: 5 for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

*6 Render unto her even as she rendered, and double (unto her) the double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double. 7 How much so ever she glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much give her of torment and mourning: for she said in her heart, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall in no wise see mourning.' 8 Therefore in one day shall her plagues come, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire; for strong is the Lord God who judged her.*

*9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, 10 standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour is your judgment 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 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 for where thy treasure is, there will your heart be also. . . .*

*24 No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [NIV money].*

Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 that the people of God are to have no fellowship with the evil of the great city:

*14 Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said,*

“I will dwell in them, and walk in them;  
and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”  
“17 Wherefore, come out from among them, and be separate,” says the Lord,  
“And touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you,  
18 and will be to you a Father,  
and you shall be to me sons and daughters,”  
says the Lord Almighty.

The clauses in verse 4 are cause and effect:

5 for her sins have reached even unto heaven,  
and God has remembered her iniquities.

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—*for her sins have reached even unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities*—show the certainty of God’s retribution for the great city and for those who do not come out. Hebrews 2:1-3 teaches:

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, unless haply we drift away (from them). 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; 3 how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? Which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard.

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 have reached even unto heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*”

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 And Jesus said unto them, “Truly I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Paul taught this same principle in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3:

Dare any of you, having a matter against his neighbor, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? 2 Or know you not that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? **3 Know you not that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?**

The understood *you* of the current text teaches, also, that saints will judge: “Render unto her even as she rendered, and double (unto her) the double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, mingle unto her double.”

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)

### Revelation 18:9-10

*9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly with her, shall weep and wail over her, when they look upon the smoke of her burning, 10 standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour is your judgment come."*

Much of *The Revelation* and much of the 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:

5 and from Jesus Christ, (who is) the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and **the ruler of the kings of the earth**. Unto him that loves us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood;

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:

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof. 23 And the city has no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did light it, and the lamp thereof (is) the Lamb. 24 And the nations shall walk amid the light thereof: and the kings of the earth bring their glory into it.

More 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 And the kings of the earth, and the princes, and the chief captains, and the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains; 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: 17 for the great day of their wrath is come; and who is able to stand?"

Now their adulteries and their intoxication have come the full course in Revelation 17:1-2:

2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.

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

Woe, woe, the great city,  
Babylon, the strong city!  
For in one hour is your judgment come. ”

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)

### Revelation 18:11-17

*11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buys their merchandise anymore; 12 merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stone, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet; and all thyine wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel made of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble; 13 and cinnamon, and spice, and incense, and*

*ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and cattle, and sheep; and (merchandise) of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men.*

*14 And the fruits which your soul lusted after are gone from you, and all things that were dainty and sumptuous are perished from you, and (men) shall find them no more at all. 15 The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning; 16 saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl!"*

*17 For in an hour so great riches is made desolate. And every shipmaster, and every one that sails anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, 18 and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, "What (city) is like the great city?"*

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. Even today, we read of young women sold into sexual slavery in bondage to sin from which there is little chance of escape. Commodities and money are traded on world markets.

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, and now to come together consistently and perfectly as God reveals his mystery. James writes an eloquent passage in James 5:1-6, which stands in perfect agreement with John:

5 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver are rusted; and their rust shall be for a testimony against you, and shall eat your flesh as fire. You have laid up your treasure in the last days. 4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries out: and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath. 5 You have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure; you have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have killed the righteous (one); he does not resist you.

Jesus had forecast this same teaching, recorded in Matthew 6:24:

24 No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [NIV money].

Jesus also spoke of the uselessness of placing our hope in worldly treasures in Matthew 6:19-21:

19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Paul also focused his writing on the fleeting nature of worldly wealth in 1 Timothy 6:17:

Charge them that are rich in this present world, that they be not high-minded, nor have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy; 18

that they do good, that they be rich in good works, that they be ready to distribute, willing to communicate; 19 laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the life which is (life) indeed.

It is not that people are rich in the present world that condemns them, but it is that the people 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 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, the great city, she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl! 17 for in an hour so great riches is made desolate.

The description of the great prostitute reads in Revelation 17:4: “4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stone and pearls.” The great city and the woman are one and the same. 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)

### **Revelation 18:17-20**

*And every shipmaster, and every one that sails anywhere, and mariners, and as many as gain their living by sea, stood afar off, 18 and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, What (city) is like the great city? 19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and mourning, saying, “Woe, woe, the great city, wherein all that had their ships in the sea were made rich by reason of her costliness! For in one hour is she made desolate.”*

*20 Rejoice over her, you heaven, and you saints, and you apostles, and you prophets; for God has judged your judgment on her.*

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, air traffic, and seafaring cargoes. Some of these modern day travelers and business people are even called “road warriors”. However, just a visit to any port city will show the vast cargoes that move by sea.

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)

### **Revelation 18:21-24**

*21 And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying, “Thus with a mighty fall shall Babylon, the great city, be cast down, and shall be found no more at all. 22 And the voice of harpers and minstrels and flute-players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in you; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft, shall be found any more at all in you; and the voice*

*of a mill shall be heard no more at all in you; 23 and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in you; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in you: for your merchants were the princes of the earth; for with your sorcery were all the nations deceived.*

*24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all that have been slain upon 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 these 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. Now she must pay.

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.