

THE DOWNFALL OF COMMERCIAL BABYLON IN REVELATION 18

INTRODUCTION

- “Babylon” in Revelation 17-18 is both a city (either Rome or Babylon on the Euphrates – see 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21) and a system (Antichrist’s final world empire)
- In other words, it will be Antichrist’s capital city but its influence will be felt around the world
- Whereas Revelation 17 prophesied the downfall of religious Babylon, Revelation 18 announces the downfall of commercial and economic Babylon
- This is evident from the numerous references in the chapter to Babylon’s commerce and industry (vv. 3, 11-13, 15, 17, 19, 22)
- Antichrist will build the greatest commercial empire the world has ever known, but it will come to a cataclysmic end with the return of Christ
- One significant difference between Revelation 17 and 18 exists: in chapter 17, it was the beast who destroyed Babylon’s religious system; whereas, in chapter 18, it is God who destroys Babylon’s commercial enterprises
- The reference to Babylon’s future fall is spoken of in this chapter as if it had already happened, emphasizing the certainty of its demise

EXPLANATION

The Announcement of Babylon’s Fall

Revelation 18:1-3 ~ After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory. 2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 “For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

- An angel (not Christ) announced the impending doom of Babylon
- This announcement comes as the “earth was illumined with his glory,” marking a stark contrast to the darkness the world was plunged into as part of the fifth bowl judgment (16:10)
- “Manifesting the flashing brilliance of a glorious heavenly being against the blackness, the angel will be an awe-inspiring sight to the shocked and terrified earth dwellers.”¹
- The angel prophesied in a mighty voice, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!,” a restatement of the same announcement made in Rev 14:8
- The two reasons for her downfall are stated in vv. 2b-3

¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 178.

- First, demonic activity...the nations of the world have fully embraced its demonic source
- Three phrases capture the demonic influence of Antichrist's system:
 - "a dwelling place of demons"
 - "a prison of every unclean spirit"
 - "a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" – possibly an allusion to the birds in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31-32)
- This is a reminder that Antichrist's system will be overrun by demonic forces
- Second, wretched sensuality...Babylon will be intoxicating, with its promises of riches and luxuries (v. 3)
- In a similar way that religious Babylon will seduce the world into spiritual drunkenness and immorality (Rev 17:2, 4), commercial Babylon will seduce the entire world such that it will lust for materialism and will commit spiritual adultery with her
- The world will want to cash in on Babylon's financial prosperity and, as a result, will indulge in a wild materialistic orgy with Antichrist's system to get it
- "The wealth originally collected through the influence of the apostate church is taken over by the political system in the great tribulation which with universal political power is able to exploit to the full its accumulation of wealth."²
- "This false religion is like a drug that drives men to madness. While it brought riches to merchants, it is now doomed for destruction."³
- No wonder they will mourn greatly when the entire economic and commercial system comes crashing down (v. 9)
- Incidentally, there is no mourning from the world when religious Babylon falls

A Call to Separate From Babylon

Revelation 18:4-5 ~ I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; 5 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

- Another voice from heaven called the people of God to leave the city so that they would escape the judgment to come on it
- This is a call to the Tribulation saints to come out of Babylon and not partake of her sins and a call to them to flee the temptation to compromise
- It may also possibly be a call to the elect of the Tribulation to be saved
- It is a summons to abandon the system before it is destroyed
- This is similar to God's invitation for His people to leave Babylon in the OT

Isaiah 48:20 ~ Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob."

Jeremiah 50:8 ~ Wander away from the midst of Babylon And go forth from the land of the Chaldeans; Be also like male goats at the head of the flock.

Jeremiah 51:6-9 ~ Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her. 7 Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of

² John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 260.

³ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 973). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

the LORD, Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; Therefore the nations are going mad. 8 Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; Wail over her! Bring balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. 9 We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed; Forsake her and let us each go to his own country, For her judgment has reached to heaven And towers up to the very skies.

- It is necessary to flee because “her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities” (v. 5)
- “piled up” = *kollao* = “glued, welded together” = piled one on another as bricks in a building
- “Babylon’s sins will pile up like a new Tower of Babel...[God] will take note of them as He did that earlier monument to man’s sinful, arrogant, prideful rebellion at Babel...for defiant, unrepentant Babylon there will be no forgiveness, only judgment.”⁴
- Thus, the reason for the summons to flee is twofold: 1) To not partake of her sin; 2) To not have her plagues inflicted on them
- This is an important reminder even today of the need to separate from the seductive influences of the world

Romans 12:2 ~ And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 6:17 ~ “Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

James 1:27 ~ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

James 4:4 ~ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

1 John 2:15-17 ~ Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The Justification for Babylon’s Fall

Revelation 18:6-8 ~ “Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7 “To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT AS A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’ :8 “For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.

- 3 reasons:
 1. Her Deeds (v. 6)
 - This is in accordance with the law of retaliation (*lex taliones*)

Exodus 21:24 ~ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,

Romans 12:19 ~ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

Galatians 6:7 ~ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

- She will be paid back “double...twice as much” – double has been her sin; double will be her punishment

⁴ MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 182.

- The imagery of the cup of God's wrath is also used in:

Revelation 14:10 ~ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Revelation 16:19 ~ The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

2. Her Sensuality (v. 7a)

- She is to receive judgment in the form of “torment and mourning” that is commensurate with her wickedness
- The punishment must match the crime

3. Her Arrogance (v. 7b)

- Her arrogance is evident in her boast to be like a queen and in her declaration of self-sufficiency (“I am not a widow”)
- John quotes from Isaiah 47:8 to demonstrate that such a boastful claim was made also by historical Babylon

Isaiah 47:7-9 ~ Yet you said, ‘I will be a queen forever.’ These things you did not consider Nor remember the outcome of them. 8 Now, then, hear this, you sensual one, Who dwells securely, Who says in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one besides me. I will not sit as a widow, Nor know loss of children.’ 9 But these two things will come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They will come on you in full measure In spite of your many sorceries, In spite of the great power of your spells.”

- Because of such wickedness, Babylon will experience a host of judgments listed in v. 8 ~ plagues... pestilence...mourning...famine...burned with fire
- These “plagues” will come “in one day,” i.e. in a brief period of time
- In a similar way, judgment came on Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon overnight

Daniel 5:30 ~ That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

- Such immediate judgment also came upon the rich fool

Luke 12:16-20 ~ And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. 17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’

The Anguish Because of Babylon’s Fall

- “This event comes late in the great tribulation, just prior to the second coming of Christ, in contrast to the destruction of the harlot of chapter 17 which seems to precede the great tribulation and paves the way for the worship of the beast (13:8).”⁵
- Here the effects of the destruction of Babylon’s commercial and economic enterprises are most evident in the responses of those who were part of her system

⁵ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 259.

- What is notable about this section is that those who were part of her system do not grieve or mourn over their sin, but rather over the destruction of Babylon
- “When the glorious centerpiece, the head of Antichrist’s empire is judged and destroyed, there will be worldwide dismay and mourning.”⁶
- Such mourning reveals the hardness of sinners’ hearts in their lack of sorrow over their sin

By Kings

Revelation 18:9-10 ~ “And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, 10 standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”

- The “kings of the earth” will mourn over the loss of the city and thus the loss of their power and wealth
- They will “weep” (lit. “to sob openly”) and “lament” (lit. “to beat the breast”) – these two terms are emphatic in the sentence
- “Some of those crossing the Euphrates on their way to Armageddon (16:12) may actually see the smoke rising from the burning city...The rest will watch Babylon’s destruction through the world’s media. All will be careful to keep their distance from the stricken city. They will be powerless to help and will fear that they may share her torment. This fearful scene supports the idea that Babylon is an actual city, not a symbol for the entire world system. Obviously, the entire world is not destroyed at this point, since those watching Babylon burn are safe for the moment. Babylon’s destruction is, however, a precursor to the doom that will soon fall on the entire world.”⁷

By Merchants

Revelation 18:11-17a ~ “And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more— 12 cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, 13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives. 14 “The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them. 15 “The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, 16 saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17 for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!’”

- Merchants will grieve over the city’s downfall because they will no longer be able to carry on commerce in it
- Whatever economic activity will be taking place at that time will come to a halt
- The reason is stated in v. 14 ~ the fruit you long for has gone from you
- They weep not for the destruction of Babylon but for the loss of their business
- They were sellers of:
 - Costly ornaments (gold, silver, precious stones, pearls)
 - Expensive clothes (fine linen, purple, silk scarlet)
 - Rich furnishings (citron wood, ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron, marble)
 - Precious perfumes (cinnamon, spice, incense, perfume, frankincense)
 - Expensive foods (wine, olive oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle, sheep)
 - Extravagant items (horses, chariots)
 - Slaves, human lives – the slave trade will apparently resume under Antichrist

⁶ MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 187.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

- Such a description indicates the great wealth and luxury of the city
- The day will come when all of this will be destroyed and the merchants will stand far off, weeping and mourning (vv. 15-16)
- This speaks of a failed world economy
- “There will be a stock market crash and bankruptcy on a worldwide scale; yet, in the face of it, the thoughts of the unsaved people will turn only to how their own interests are affected. This is selfishness and greed in its most naked form.”⁸

By Sea Merchants

Revelation 18:17b-19 ~ And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, 18 and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What city is like the great city?’ 19 “And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’

- All those connected with commerce on the sea also mourn the destruction of Babylon because of the loss of their wealth
- With Babylon’s destruction, there will be no more goods to be transported by those who make their living by the sea
- They “threw dust on their heads” – an ancient symbol of mourning
- Like the rulers (vv. 9-10) and the merchants (vv.15-16), they will cry out “Woe, woe, the great city”
- Again, the mourning is not over their sins or those of Babylon but because of their lost business
- “No longer can ancient Babylon control the world religiously, politically, or economically.”⁹

The Rejoicing Over Babylon’s Fall

Revelation 18:20-24 ~ “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.” 21 Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer. 22 “And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer; 23 and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery. 24 “And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”

- As the world mourns the destruction of Babylon, all heaven and all saints are encouraged to praise God for His judgment on her
- The angel casts a millstone into the sea symbolizing the complete destruction of Babylon (v. 21)
- A similar depiction predicted the doom of ancient Babylon:

Jeremiah 51:61-64 ~ Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, “As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, 62 and say, ‘You, O LORD, have promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.’ 63 “And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, 64 and say, ‘Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.’ ” Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 148.

⁹ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 265.

- The devastation of Babylon will be to such an extent that:
 - It will be thrown down with violence – v. 21
 - It will not be found any longer – v. 21
 - The sound of musicians will no longer be heard – v. 22
 - No craftsmen will ply their trade any longer – v. 22
 - The sounds of industry will cease – v. 22
 - Its light will no longer shine – v. 23
 - Marriages will no longer take place – v. 23
- It's a breakdown of society at every level, in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy

Daniel 2:34-35 ~ “You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them. 35 “Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel 2:44-45 ~ “In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever. 45 “Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”



- Two reasons are given for Babylon's destruction:
 - Babylon deceived the nations – v. 23
 - Babylon killed the saints – v. 24
- Babylon will be so thoroughly destroyed that it will never rise again as Isaiah predicted

Isaiah 14:22-23 ~ “I will rise up against them,” declares the LORD of hosts, “and will cut off from Babylon name and survivors, offspring and posterity,” declares the LORD. 23 “I will also make it a possession for the hedgehog and swamps of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,” declares the LORD of hosts.

- Finally, the question of the martyrs in Revelation 6 is answered

Revelation 6:9-11 ~ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

- “Joyless, dark, and silent, Babylon stands as a monument to the righteous vengeance of God. Wickedness that reigned enthroned for so long is now overthrown.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Ryrie, *Revelation*, 149.