



## Part 37 – Out of Babylon

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### Revelation 18:1-24

The angel continues to unfold a vision begun in chapter 17 of the destruction of Babylon (see also 14:8; 16:19; 17:16). Here the focus is on her economic collapse. Those loyal to Babylon wonder in horror at the complete devastation of the once mighty power. The economic impact is devastating for all who boasted in her and drank of her idolatries. Her destruction is described using various literary techniques such as repetition (triplets found in 18:3, 6, 8) and alliteration (18:2, 4, 6). Throughout, one can hear the voices of Isaiah and Jeremiah declaring an end to wicked Babylon.

#### The Destruction of Babylon

- Revelation 18 is an extended view of the final bowl judgments of chapter 16. Babylon had already been destroyed by Persia under Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. It has never been, nor will it ever be, raised again (Isaiah 13:21; 47:7-9; Jeremiah 50-51). Babylon exists as a symbol of the wickedness of the world which stands in opposition to God and his people.
- The passage proceeds like a combination funeral dirge and prophetic condemnation. Once rich and mighty, Babylon is now only a fit habitation for demons, impure spirits, unclean birds, and detestable animals (cf. Isaiah 13:21-22; 34:11-14; Jeremiah 50:39; 51:37). Babylon is the precise opposite of everything we read about the New Jerusalem, the new creation and eternal abode of God's people (Revelation 21 & 22).

#### a. Babylon's fall announced (vv. 1-3)

- The final destruction of Babylon is announced by another mighty angel (vs. 1). Given his description, some suggest that this "angel" is a *Christophany*, that is an appearing of the glorified Christ. That is certainly possible, but we can only speculate. What is clear is that this heavenly messenger speaks an authoritative message from the Lord.
- Spiritual unfaithfulness and idolatry are once again likened to sexual immorality (vs. 3). "The lure of economic security led to a willing participation in Rome's idolatry and immorality in order to maintain that relationship (cf. 14:8; 17:2)."<sup>1</sup>

#### b. An exhortation to flee Babylon (vs. 4)

- Another heavenly voice is raised calling God's people to flee Babylon. Though this exhortation may include literal physical separation, the emphasis is certainly on separation from Babylon's idolatry and illicit pleasures.

#### c. The explanation for judgment upon Babylon (vv. 5-8)

- The sins of Babylon have reached up to heaven, as it were (Jeremiah 51:9), and God will act in accord with his perfect justice. That God is described here as *remembering* does not suggest that he forgot. Rather, it is an indication that after many years of great patience, justice must now finally be carried out.
- The expression "repay her back double," most likely means "duplicate" rather than a literal doubling of the amount.<sup>2</sup> The point is that justice demands that Babylon be repaid with the same severity with which she has persecuted God's people. Her luxury has come about through wickedness and is the chief point of her prideful boasting (vs. 7). Like proud Laodicea, the spirit of Babylon is one of arrogant self-confidence, a pridefulness that the Lord detests. As a result, her fall will be swift and complete (vs. 8).

#### d. Lament of those who had joined with Babylon (vv. 9-19)

- Here, laments are heard from kings (vv. 9-10), merchants (vv. 11-17a), and mariners (vv. 17b-19). The grief of these three groups is focused entirely on their economic loss due to Babylon's collapse. "The list of goods and services in the center of the section reflects the prosperity and opulence of the empire. The entire unit calls the reader to an awareness of the economic consequences and effects of evil, even on those who simply partner with such corruption."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Scott Duval, *A Theology of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025) p. 239

<sup>2</sup> Beale, Duval, Johnson, Storms, Ian Paul, etc.

<sup>3</sup> Duval, p. 240

- Along with the material products like expensive spices, exotic wood, and horses are the bodies of slaves that have been used up and discarded for the material lusts of Babylon (vs. 13).
- e. An exhortation to rejoice over Babylon's fall (vs. 20)**
- While those who profited from Babylon lament her destruction, the saints in heaven and on earth are called upon to praise God for his justice.
- f. The final sentence upon Babylon (vv. 21-24)**
- Like some of the prophetic actions we read about in the Old Testament, a mighty angel took a huge stone and flung it into the sea as an illustration of Babylon's fate. Her entire culture (music, tradecraft, food production, and family life) will be wiped away by the judgment of God. It should be noted how the angel identifies the very ways in which Christians had been shut out of society by wicked governments. Lest we forget, we are reminded that these wicked kingdoms have the blood of martyred saints on their hands (vs. 24). God is answering their cry for vindication.

### A Message for the Church

- It is important for any right understanding of Revelation always to remember that it was written *for Christians*. The entire book, not just chapters two and three, was written to the seven churches of Asia Minor. That is, the Book of Revelation is addressed to us, the church of Jesus Christ. It is important to recognize this because, with all the attention given to God's judgment upon the wicked, one might conclude that Revelation is addressing unbelievers. No doubt it is a warning to unbelievers, but many nearly identical warnings to unbelievers are given through the Old Testament prophets; words of judgment against pagan nations. And those warnings, like John's words in Revelation 18, were preached to God's people, not the nations.
- The Book of Revelation is about the church's life, her calling in the world, and her future. The judgment of the unbelieving world forms a backdrop to but is not the central message of Revelation. The lament over Babylon's fall emphasizes the great theme of the book: The victory of the Lamb and the vindication of God's people. The ungodly world will eventually be judged and those loyal to Christ will be rewarded in eternity. The things we know to be true about the future are to produce *in the present* a particular kind of behavior in us. What God has done *for us* is to make a difference *in us*.

### Two Imperatives

- There are two imperatives given to the church in this passage. The first is found in **verse 4**: "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues." Think of the words of the Lord's messengers to Lot to remove himself and his family from Sodom: "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away" (Genesis 19:17). Just as we are warned against being unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:17), the angel alludes to Isaiah 52:11: "Therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them and touch no unclean thing."
- Though physical distance is indeed called for at times, the emphasis here is on spiritual separation. Do not yoke yourself to Babylon or love what she loves. Do not worship her idols or indulge in her pleasures. Do not boast in her power or compromise in order to gain from her wealth. Fix your allegiance and love to the Lord God. Follow Jesus and see to it that your life is hidden in him. Trust in the salvation that is in Christ alone rather than in the vain securities of Babylon. Recent passages have held out for us a series of choices: Two women, a harlot or a bride. Two masters, a beast or a Lamb. Two cities, Babylon or the new Jerusalem. You cannot be at home in both.
- The second imperative is found in **verse 20**: "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" It sounds odd to contemporary Christians that we should rejoice over the destruction of the wicked. But God's judgment is an expression of his goodness, his holiness, and justice. God is no less good in his judgment of the wicked than he is in the salvation of the elect. Jeremiah called for "heaven and earth all that is in them" to rejoice over the destruction of Babylon (Jeremiah 51:48). This rejoicing is explained in the second half of verse 20: "...for God has given judgment for you against her!" This is a challenging clause to translate but it is best to take it as meaning, "God pronounced on her the judgment she passed on you." This is the consummation of the cry of the martyred saints recorded in chapter six. The Lord will vindicate the honor of his name and the blood of his saints. And for this we rejoice.