

Revelation Bible Study #43

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 18

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. **2** And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. **10** They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, **12** cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, **13** cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off **18** and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!

For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

21 Then a mighty 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 be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all 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 earth.”

Introduction

The identification of mystery Babylon is one of the most important tasks for understanding the book of Revelation as a unified whole. The preterist seeks to establish it as Jerusalem *only* or as Jerusalem and Rome in a kind of dual spiritual/political sense. The historicist seeks to establish babylon as either the Roman empire (RC view) or as the Catholic Church (historic Protestantism). Idealists look to the figure as a sort of bugaboo against corruption. Futurists look at the signs of a new Babylon entity arising in the near future. Some schools may mix and match their understanding of this figure or that, but the way in which one sees Babylon will have deep consequences for their reading of the rest of the book – and review of prior passages.

But having already identified Babylon as a sort of spiritual entity, a kind of “seat of power” in the last chapter, for apostate religious institutions. This is to say, mystery Babylon is the antitype for *any* fallen group or organization that is *supposed* to be faithful to God. The first type looking back to this antitype is Jerusalem, but then this goes out further into apostate Christian organizations which are seduced by heresies and worldliness. Although St. John points to an ultimate fulfillment in this chapter, one in which there shall be no more “babylons,” God gives the same exhortation for all believers for all times in which this apostate entity or phenomenon: *get out!*

Vs.1-3

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

St. John sees an angel whose image brings forth glory. In all likelihood this is that same angel whose face was “like the sun” in the tenth chapter, holding a small scroll for the Apostle to eat.¹ That angel's appearance, from his legs being pillars of fire to his body being wrapped in cloud, recalls the things Israelites saw during the time of the Exodus. This “Exodus Angel” has a sensible place in the passage, given the fourth verse's exhortation to “come out of” Babylon.

Note the present tense in the second verse. Babylon *has* fallen, a present reality in St. John's day; further, “fallen” is not an adjective but a *verb*, particularly in the aorist indicative active. This is to say, the event of falling has occurred. It is chiefly Jerusalem to which the angel refers: St. John wrote this *before* Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D., it might surprise later readers to hear that this was already the case. But one must understand though that the author is not speaking of a city being *destroyed* physically per sé.

The angel says that Babylon “has become” a place for demons, unclean spirits, and that which is detestable. In other words, it is a city full of evil: evil people, evil spirits, evil deeds. This is what the angel means by having fallen. Before Jerusalem fell *physically* to Roman swords, she fell *spiritually*. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem rejected Christ and had Him crucified, their religious observances became *false* overnight. The sacrifices were no longer valid offerings made according to the Mosaic system, but rather profane acts of idol worship; thus nothing offered there could be considered clean,

1 Revelation 10:1-8

and whatever spirit the priests were praying to was not God. We must recall that St. John had said previously, “No one who denies the Son has the Father;”² and so in Jerusalem *none of the prayers and offerings* were truly made unto our Lord. Whereas the city was home to the Temple and to the religious authorities (who once fought great battles on behalf of the true faith, e.g. the Maccabean Revolt), now it has departed from that status to become something abominable.

Before any Church body became an apostate Babylon figure like the Roman church, the Old Covenant (represented by Jerusalem with its temple and priest system) fulfilled the antitype of mystery Babylon. By having Christ crucified, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem committed a grave form of spiritual harlotry which had earlier been seen during the days of the Old Testament prophets.³ Just as the apostate Israelites of the Old Testament had established ties to pagan nations, so too did their descendants do so after the Resurrection of Christ – mostly for the purposes of persecuting believers. In fact, one can observe this behavior in Acts, wherein various Jewish groups followed St. Paul around, trying to get him killed.⁴

The “merchants” motif in this chapter is something which establishes the worldly nature of apostate bodies, starting with Jerusalem. It is starkly observed when Christ overturns the tables of money-changers in the Temple,⁵ and merchants were a constant presence on account of the sacrificial system. Since Jerusalem had a local economy based on religious pilgrimage,⁶ and relied on military protection by the Romans, it was truly a multicultural secular operation for victimizing believers. The angel, in bringing up a merchant motif, emphasizes the aspect of greed and soulless materialism present in the system.

Of course, it does not *stay* localized in Jerusalem. As discussed previously, Babylon is an antitype that is fulfilled multiple times in history, *starting* with Jerusalem but repeating with many church bodies that are (or were) ostensibly Christian; the political and merchant problem is common to all of them. The papacy sold indulgences; the eastern churches turned towards cesaro-papism, or the Church being ruled by the state; most modern denominational bodies have fed at the financial trough of the American government.⁸ This is not to say that *any* involvement with trade or the state is a sign of apostasy: it is rather the replacement of the Church's mission with these matters that makes it so deadly.

Vs.4-8

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;
5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.
6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.
7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
‘I sit as a queen,

2 1 John 2:23

3 Especially discussed in Ezekiel 16

4 This is keenly observed in Lystra, Acts 14:19-23

5 Mark 11:15-19

6 <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/commerce-and-the-temple-in-first-century-jerusalem/>

7 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305440313002410>

8 <https://apnews.com/article/usaaid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>

I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’
8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

The voice coming from heaven is the voice of God, who beckons His people the Church to depart from Babylon. In the first century, this meant Christians departing Jerusalem for Pella (one of the cities of the Decapolis) before the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem.⁹¹⁰ During the Arian controversy, it meant departing from churches taken over by heretics. During the Reformation it meant departing the church of Rome. During any situation in which the Christian is faced with his church body departing the faith, he should rather depart the church body and seek another which has not apostatized. Such bodies are slated for judgment and destruction on account of their acts of betrayal against our Lord; to stay in them, even if one is a believer, is to sign up for suffering with them, to say nothing of being tempted to be like them. God's exhortation to faithful believers in these situations is clear: schism now and avoid the rush.

Note here that the harlot speaks in an arrogant manner. There is a *reason* why she would trust in something which makes her feel a false sense of security. For the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it was an idolatrous faith in heritage from Abraham.¹¹ For later types which fulfill the Babylon antitype, this is observed in various similar beliefs, typically the notion that something external to God forces God's hand; with Rome and Orthodoxy this is found in the absurd doctrines of ecclesial infallibility. Modern liberal denominations are oddly more honest, since their false confidence is predicated on state power and funding. All of these bodies share in common their addiction to luxury, money, and afflicting the saints.

God promises to inflict plague on the Babylon figure in a single day, not to destroy it in a single day. For Jerusalem, this would be the immediacy of dire conditions after the Roman siege of Jerusalem began. It is *after* the fall of the city in the spiritual sense that physical conditions begin to reflect the inner religious life. The institution abandoned God first, then found – too late – that God abandoned the institution in turn.

Vs.9-10

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. **10** They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

St. John has established a “beast from the earth” which he has called a false prophet.¹² For the Apostle, the waters represent the broader non-believing world while the earth represents the domain of God's people – the Church. The “kings of the earth” then are not royalty in the political sense, but religious figures. For the destruction of the city of Jerusalem this would certainly include those pharisaic and sadducitic leaders in the Sanhedrin, men who had not only participated in the rejection of Christ but also led others to this rejection. As the Church centralized ecclesiastical authority over time, fulfillment of this passage moved on to the popes, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops, and other rulers over the Church.

⁹ Related by Eusebius in his *Church History* III.5.3

¹⁰ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

¹¹ Matthew 3:7-10, John 8:39-41

¹² Revelation 13:11-18, 16:13

Vs.11-18

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, **12** cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, **13** cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off **18** and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

All that the merchants mourn over concerns ecclesiastical supplies and the trappings of royalty. Christ condemns the pharisees for their opulence, overemphasis on monetary matters, and habitual use of religious matters to enslave people.¹³ The vision St. John receives points out the other interested party, namely the merchant class that became rich off of the pharisaic system. Every tapestry bought by the authorities had a weaver to make it, a transporter to ship it, a sales contact to bring the sale to a close. Religion had become big business, and in order for it to continue on there must be enslaved believers to *fund* it by their offerings. St. John's vision portrays the religious landscape as one which is cynical, hollow and manipulative, and its destruction renders the merchants poorer.

The Roman church and the eastern churches are the greatest modern manifestation of this vision, with their massive cathedrals inlaid with countless amounts of gold, ivory, silver, and iron. Their monasteries keep and tend animals while their clergy are dressed in expensive vestments during the mass. Both of them, according to their soteriologies, enslave human souls to the endless hamster wheel of works based salvation while offering them no true assurance of Heaven. Yet the Protestant side of things is not guiltless either, as the “prosperity gospel” teachers have shown; they too have presented an enslavement to the people watching and funding them through their finance-based theologies. A poor widow feeling compelled to give Jim Baker a “seed offering,” thinking that she is purchasing blessing from God, is only barely different from a Catholic layman paying real money to avoid purgatory. Meanwhile, other Protestant branches have found *other* means of harming souls, especially in obeying the dicta of the state and “higher education” systems in exchange for funding; the Episcopalian, Wesleyan, and most Lutheran institutions have done this in a crassly secular move, adopting worldly doctrines for the sake of maintaining large cathedrals, expensive universities, and more. Their judgment is immanent.

¹³ Matthew 23

Vs.19-20

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!
For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

These two verses further solidify the nearly coterminous relationship between Babylon and Israel. The geographical location of Israel was ideal for trade, leading to frequent visits from merchants and foreign dignitaries. Whoever controlled the land of Canaan controlled critical routing for trade and military operations. Yet Israel (typified by Jerusalem) also had a history of killing the prophets, as Christ says.¹⁴ That the *apostles* and prophets are told to rejoice at this justice means that the same body which is responsible for slaying the prophets has also slain Apostles, one of whom was slain by Herod at the behest of the same authorities who had Christ crucified.¹⁵ There is no point by which this group may say they “used to” kill the messengers sent to them, for as Christ witnesses they built tombs for the men their fathers slayed.¹⁶ When St. Stephen accuses them of carrying on this ugly tradition, they stone him to death.¹⁷

We must be careful to make this distinction, that Babylon is not a singular geographical entity which is destroyed in the first century – or ever fully destroyed before Christ's return. One may notice that the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem did not stop the propagation of pharisaism: if anything, it *strengthened* it, since other competing denominations of judaism were extinguished in the act.. Similarly, the various times in which Rome was sacked by invading armies during the height of the papacy did not destroy Roman Catholicism, and nor did the destruction of Constantinople end Eastern Orthodoxy. These groups find greater entrenchment in their own defeat, for the persistence of their beliefs in spite of the burning of cities is counted as some sort of blessing. The next verses illustrate why this is the case.

Vs.21-24

21 Then a mighty 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 be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,
for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

¹⁴ Matthew 23:37

¹⁵ Acts 12:1-3

¹⁶ Matthew 23:30

¹⁷ Acts 7:51-60

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Christ says that anyone who would harm one of the little children – that is, both believers and children – would be better off having a millstone tied around their neck and being thrown into the sea than what will ultimately happen to them.¹⁸ Earlier the angel proclaimed Babylon *is* fallen; now a mighty angel proclaims that Babylon *will* be thrown down. It is for this reason we can safely conclude that the event happens more than once; as we said, it is not a single place. If the preterists were correct, then there would only be one “fall” event in 70 A.D. that somehow compounds itself. On the other hand, if the futurists are correct, then a Babylon figure would have to arise, fall, recover, then be destroyed all over again. The historicist position ends up rephrasing our typological view anyway. But the greater point is that the angel's future prophecy is a promise that there will be a day in which the Babylon entity and phenomenon will never happen again – she will be “no more.” In other words, St. John gives us a crucial aspect to eschatology here: though the types refer back to their visionary antitypes *many* times before the Return of Christ, indeed there *is* an end-point promised here. The repetition of fulfilled prophecy in the Church era does not go on in perpetuity.

The twenty-third verse is a crucial reference for understanding spiritual divorce. Christ threatened the church in Ephesus with lampstand removal;¹⁹ Christ is also the Bridegroom and the Church is understood to be His Bride. Those church bodies who, like earthly Jerusalem, abandon loyalty to God and begin serving the world and devil will find themselves completely destroyed at the End. But first, on account of the Exodus that God is working among true believers, they will be hollowed out, leaving no true Christians dwelling among them. Thus, not one believer will be lost on that fateful Day, when Babylon is once and for all completely eradicated.

18 Matthew 18:6

19 Revelation 2:5