

# Revelation

## Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 18

Chapter 18

The Destruction of Babylon!

1. Read verses 1-8.

Throughout history the petty kingdoms and empires built by proud, arrogant, God-rejecting rebels have come and gone. The spirit of humanism first expressed at Babel has permeated human history ever since. Unshakably optimistic despite centuries of war, slaughter, injustice, and cruelty, people still seek a utopia, to be brought about by humanity's upward scientific progress. Having taken control (so they think) of their own destiny through science, sinners have no use for God and haughtily replace Him as self-styled gods devoted to their own sovereignty.

But God cannot be so easily replaced, nor His plans thwarted by the whims of sinful men (Isa. 43:13; 46:10). In fact, in a profound, if brief, statement in Acts 14:16, Scripture says that God "permitted all the nations to go their own ways."... The inescapable reality is that God, not man, will have the last word in human history, and that word will be a word of judgment.

From beginning to end, the bible warns of coming judgment on sinners who reject god and blaspheme His holy name. Job declared that "the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity; they will be led forth at the day of fury" (Job 21:30). David noted that "the Lord...has established His throne for judgment, and He will judge the world in righteousness" (Ps. 9:7-8)...The apostle Paul declared to the Greek philosophers gathered on Mars Hill in Athens that God "has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31)...

But nowhere in Scripture is there a more detailed description of the coming judgment than in Revelation 6-18. Those chapters describe the future seven-year period known as the Tribulation. Summing up what they reveal about that period, God's judgment will rain down on the earth in the form of the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. Although those judgments will be worldwide in scope, they will focus particularly on Antichrist's world empire of Babylon. That empire will involve both a religious and a commercial aspect. At the midpoint of the Tribulation, Antichrist will destroy the false Babylonian religious system, which will be absorbed into commercial Babylon. Religion will not cease to exist, but will be restricted to the worship of Antichrist. The Babylon in view in chapter 18 is Antichrist's worldwide commercial empire, which will rule the world during the last three and half years of the Tribulation. That Antichrist will be able to build the greatest commercial empire the world has ever known in the midst of the devastating judgments of the Tribulation reveals his incredible power.

God's destruction of commercial Babylon is the theme of chapter 18. It is thus a very somber chapter; it is a requiem, a dirge for the funeral of humanity. With the destruction of the satanic last and greatest human empire, the stage is set for the triumphant return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Though some commentators view it as a symbol for Antichrist's whole godless system, the Babylon described in chapter 18 is most likely an actual city. It is called a city five times in the chapter (vv. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21), and other features in the text imply that a literal city is in view. Since the text plainly describes Babylon as a city, and there is nothing in the context to indicate otherwise, it is safest to view it as a real city. The specific Old Testament prophecies of Babylon's destruction and perpetual desolation (Isa. 13:19-22; 14:22-23; Jer. 50:13, 39; 51:37), as yet unfulfilled, also argue that chapter 18 describes an actual city. But while Babylon will be an actual city, its influence will be worldwide. As Antichrist's capital city, it will be the hub and represent his commercial empire. Thus, the judgment and destruction of Babylon will kill the head, and the rest of the body of Antichrist's whole world empire will follow in death.<sup>57</sup>

- (a) The phrase, "After this," marks a new vision that John received. What does he see and what does this angel proclaim?
- (b) Do you think Babylon is an actual city or does it represent the world system of the beast (Antichrist)?

Babylon was not only an ancient city and a powerful empire, but also the symbol of mankind's rebellion against God. In Revelation 18, Babylon represents the world system of "the beast," particularly in its economic and political aspects. At the same time, John calls Babylon a "city" at least eight times. (Rev. 14:8; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-21). Old Testament prophecy seems to make clear that the city itself will not be rebuilt (Isa. 13:19-22; Jer. 51:24-26, 61-64). Some equate Babylon with Rome, particularly since "the harlot" and "the beast" cooperate during the first half of the Tribulation. Perhaps Peter was using Babylon as a "code name" for Rome when he wrote his first letter (I Peter 5:13). Certainly, John's readers would think of the Roman Empire as they read these words about Babylon.<sup>58</sup>

[Notice that MacArthur and Wiersbe disagree slightly.]

- (c) Babylon, the world system opposed to God, will eventually be completely destroyed by God. From verses 3 and 4, give several reasons why Babylon will be destroyed.
- (d) Read II Timothy 3:1-2 and James 5:1-6. What will those who live during the last days pursue?

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 175-177.

<sup>58</sup> Wiersbe, 614.

- (e) The world system opposed to Christ has always been with us. Believers must be vigilant in order not to be pulled into its deceptive grasp. Read I John 2:15-17. What warning is given in this passage of Scripture?
- (f) Read James 4:4. Define the world in this context. What does it mean to be a friend of the world? What is your attitude towards the world?
- (g) In verse 4, John hears from another angel. What is the message of this angel?

Believers are to flee Babylon so that they will not participate in her sins. The materialistic, pleasure-mad, demon-infested city of Babylon will exert an almost irresistible influence on believers to participate in her sins. Like Joseph (Gen. 39:7-12; cf. I Cor. 10:14; I Tim. 6:11; II Tim. 2:22) they must flee to avoid succumbing to “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” (I John 2:16).<sup>59</sup>

- (h) Read II Corinthians 6:14-17. A very important word in this passage is “yoked.” What does it mean to be “yoked with unbelievers?” How does a Christian live “in” the world but not “of” the world?

Throughout the terrifying judgments of the Tribulation, God will save people. The<sup>60</sup> result of the gospel preaching by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, the two witnesses, and an angel flying in midheaven will be the greatest harvest of souls the world has ever known (cf. 7:9). Many of these believers will be martyred for their faith in Christ when they refuse to take the mark of the beast (13:15-16). The survivors will face powerful temptations to participate in the system. Family and friends will no doubt pressure them to save themselves by accepting the mark of the beast. The need to obtain the basic necessities of life will also pressure them to conform to the system (cf. 13:17).

- (i) Will God remember the sins committed by Babylon and her citizens? According to Revelation 20:11-13, will God remember and judge the sins of those who refuse to come to Him by way of Jesus (the only way)?
- (j) Read Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:34. What does God promise to do with the sins of those who repent and come to Him by way of Jesus?

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<sup>59</sup> MacArthur, 182.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 180.

(k) In verses 6-8, the angel addresses not John, but God. What does he say to God?

The angel's prayer for justice is based on the Old Testament principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation, the principle of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Matt. 5:38; cf. Ex. 21:23-24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). Babylon has been extended enough grace and heard enough warnings. It is time for vengeance. It is time for her destruction.<sup>61</sup>

(l) What three sins call for Babylon's judgment?

- \_\_\_\_\_ (Isaiah 42:8; Proverbs 6:16-17; James 4:6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ (I Timothy 5:6; II Timothy 3:3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Isaiah 47:7; Ezekiel 28:2; Zephaniah 2:15)

(m) What three plagues will overtake Babylon?

God's people must not delay in separating themselves from this evil system, because God's judgment will come suddenly and Babylon will be destroyed in a single day. Sometimes God's judgments work silently "as a moth" (Hosea 5:12), but at other times they are "as a lion" (Hosea 5:14) and spring suddenly, and there is no escape. In one day, the entire economic empire will collapse! But those who have their citizenship in heaven will rejoice at the judgment of God.<sup>62</sup>

(l) Have you separated yourself from the world system that is opposed to God? Is there any area of your life where you are compromising with the world?

2. Read verses 9-19.

Nothing so clearly reveals the hardness of sinner's hearts as their lack of sorrow over their sin. Through the years of devastating judgments, the Tribulation sinners will relentlessly refuse to mourn over their sin. But though they will not lament over their sin, they will cry 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.<sup>63</sup>

(a) Who will be the first group of people to mourn over their losses?

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 182-183.

<sup>62</sup> Wiersbe, 615.

<sup>63</sup> MacArthur, 186-187.

(b) How do you think these leaders will have committed “adultery with her (Babylon)?”

The leaders are the same ones who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her (v. 3). Once again, Babylon is pictured as a harlot (cf. 17:1, 15, 16), whose death causes her lovers to weep and lament over her. Some of those crossing the Euphrates on their way to Armageddon (16:12) may actually see the smoke rising from the burning city (cf. Gen. 19:28; Josh. 8:20-21; Isa. 34:10). 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.<sup>64</sup>

(c) Who will be the second group to mourn over the demise of Babylon? Why will they mourn?

(d) Where will these merchants stand and what will they cry out?

They weep and mourn, not out of some emotional sympathy for the decimated city, but because with its collapse they have been stripped of the key source of their financial resources. The merchants lament because their materialistic passions can no longer be fulfilled. The weeping that begins then will last for eternity in hell (Matt. 8:12; 13:41, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30). These greedy merchants are the classic illustration of all those in all time who gain the whole world, but forfeit their souls (Mark 8:36).

(e) What is the final group that mourns the death of this city?

(f) What will this group do to express their grief (Job 2:12; Lamentations 2:10)?

3. Read verses 20-24.

Heaven will have quite a different perspective on Babylon’s judgment than that of Antichrist’s earthly followers. The angel who began speaking in verse 4 then addressed the redeemed in heaven: the saints (a general term for all believers) and apostles and prophets (the special class of saints given to the church, as indicated in Eph. 2:20; 4:11). He calls on them to rejoice over Babylon’s fall, because God has pronounced judgment for them against her. The long-awaited moment of vindication, retribution, and

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<sup>64</sup>

Ibid. 187.

vengeance, for which the martyred Tribulation believers prayed (6:9-10) and for which all the redeemed hoped, will have arrived. Heaven rejoiced, not over the damnation of sinners, but because of the triumph of righteousness, the exaltation of Jesus Christ, the elimination of His enemies, and the arrival of His kingdom on the earth.<sup>65</sup>

- (a) What three groups of people are told to rejoice over the destruction of Babylon?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (b) Read Psalm 30:4; Ephesians 1:1; and, I Peter 2:9. If you are in Christ, what are you according to Scripture? What does it mean to be a saint?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (c) What image does the angel show John which depicts the complete destruction of Babylon?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (d) According to verses 22-23, what will be forever missing from this once proud city?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (e) What two reasons are given for the destruction of Babylon?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (f) Read Revelation 20:10, 15. What judgment awaits Satan, the beast, the false prophet and all whose names are not written in the book of life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (g) Is your name written in the book of life (Revelation 20:12, 15)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- (h) Read Luke 12:16-21. What if you were to die this very day? Are you prepared?