The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 18**

* **18:1-3– Babylon’s Great Fall**
  + **Verse 1**– After the vision of chapter 17, another angel comes to announce the destruction of Babylon the Great. He descends from heaven, having great authority and the earth is said to be illumined with his glory (cf. Isa. 6:1; 60:1-3; Rev. 21:23). The glory and authority descriptions lend validity to the subsequent judgment to be announced.
  + The angel himself does not possess such authority and glory but the meaning is that because he comes down out of heaven, he is reflecting the glory of God and His sovereign authority. Some suggest it might be Christ (cf. 10:1; 21:11, 13).
  + **Verse 2**– The angel loudly announces the fate of Babylon echoing Isa. 21:9 and Rev. 14:8. The fall of Babylon is stated the in the past tense which is the prophetic way of guaranteeing their future judgment.
  + The result of her judgment is complete desolation. The once vibrant and proud city will come a habitation for volatile beasts and every unclean thing (cf. Isa. 13:19-22; 14:3-23; 34:11-15; Jer. 50:39-40; 51:37).
  + **Verse 3**– The reason for Babylon’s fall is not withheld in this verse. She is being judged because of making all the nations drink of her immorality. This is a metaphor for idolatry and all things that stand in opposition to God (cf. Jer. 3:1-10).
  + Wealth, luxury and economic success was all derived because of pagan and idolatrous practices. Such practices required an abandonment of faith in God, if there was any, and a constant practice of blaspheming Him.
* **18:4-8– The Reason for the Fall of Babylon**
  + **Verse 4**– John hears another voice from heaven (perhaps The Father or Jesus) encourages the saints to be separated from Babylon (cf. Num. 16:26-27; Isa. 52:11; Jer. 51:6, 45; 2 Cor. 6:17). This idea of moral separation is well established throughout the OT scriptures and it continues in the NT.
  + It is rooted in the idea of being holy as God is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). This separation is wise because it will allow them to not engage in the sins of Babylon but it will also prevent them from experiencing their fate.
  + **Verse 5**– The sins of Babylon are so much that they are described as piling up as high as heaven (cf. Gen. 18:20-21; 19:13; Jer. 51:9; Jon. 1:2). The point is that their sins cannot be ignored by God since it is blatant and in His face. He will not forget what they have done (cf. Rev. 16:19).
  + **Verse 6**– The voice now urges possible angelic executioners or agents to carry out judgment to repay Babylon “twice “as much for all she has done. The concept of Lex Talionis is prevalent here (Ex. 21:23-25; Psa. 137:8; Jer. 50:15, 29; 51:24, 49).
  + The “doubling” may be a way of describing that they will receive their full portion of judgment (Isa. 40:2; Jer. 16:18; 17:18). Hence, Lex Talionis applies. “Doubling” is also used to describe the joy for the faithful (Isa. 61:7; Zech. 9:12).
  + **Verse 7**– The Lex Talionis principle continues in this verse. Babylon glorified herself and exalted herself (cf. 2 Sam. 22:28; Prov. 16:18) and God will repay her accordingly for her arrogance.
  + Glory and exaltation is explicitly reserved for God (Rev. 15:4; 19:1) and those that honor themselves (Ezek. 28:2-10; Rom. 1:18-32) will be tormented. This exaltation is further seen in thinking herself as a queen instead of a widow (Isa. 47:7-9; Zeph. 2:15).
  + The irony is that God will turn her into that which she claims not to be. The same fate befell the OT nations that rejected God (Lam. 1:1; Ezek. 26:4-5). They will mourn as they see their destruction.
  + **Verse 8**– Her arrogance will be the source of her downfall (cf. Jer. 50:31). Her plagues will come in one day (cf. Isa. 47:9). She will experience famine, mourning, pestilence and burning by fire (Isa. 47:14; Jer. 51:58). Her judgment is the same as she has dealt out to God’s people.
* **18:9-20– Lament for Babylon**
  + This section is modeled off of Ezekiel 26-28:19 which discusses the destruction of Tyre and Sidon. There are three types of people that chant dirges in response to the destruction of Babylon the Great. They are all materially affected and thus mourn.
  + **Verses 9-10**– The earthly rulers who have enjoyed prosperity due to idolatrous practices (spiritual fornication) now weep and lament as they see the smoke of her burning. They weep and lament because they have essentially lost their lives and livelihood (cf. Ezek. 27:33; Lk. 12:16-21).
  + The smoke of her burning once again emphasizes her destruction as it echoes OT passages dealing with nations that failed to honor God or what would happen to those who fail to honor God (Gen. 19:28; Deut. 29:23; Isa. 34:9-10). They mourn over physical loss not realizing a much more painful loss is to come (cf. 14:11).
  + These earthy rulers are said to be “standing at distance” due to “fear of her torment.” Lest they experience the fate of the city, they stand at a distance and mourn but distance will not prevent their judgment (cf. Jer. 51:8-9).
  + They are frozen and astonished (cf. Ezek. 27:35) that this “great and strong city” has fallen so quickly (“one hour”). The magnitude and quickness of Babylon’s destruction paints an ironic picture of the truth. She isn’t strong and great at all. The one who is truly strong and great is the God who has judged her (18:8).
  + **Verse 11**– The merchants of the earth now toss their hats into the ring of mourning (cf. Ezek. 27:36). They mourn and lament not because of the city’s destruction but because of what the destruction means for their pockets.
  + **Verses 12-13**– These verses list the impressive number of items that found its way to the city that allowed for luxurious, wealthy living. Among these things are some of the things that the harlot was described as wearing in 17:4.
  + The list is similar to what is said of Tyre in Ezek. 27:5-25. The things listed in this list with exception to the very last (slaves, human lives) were not sinful in and of themselves but they were all used to commit sin and further wicked lifestyles.
  + The treating of human beings as mere merchandise gives one the indication of the mentality of these merchants and their buyers (cf. Amos 1:9-10). Mounce says, *“It is estimated that there were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + Concerning the mention of human lives as a part of the merchandise list he continues, *“While some slaves served in the houses of the great, “there were others whose fate was to fight for their lives and to die for the entertainment of the Roman crowds in the amphitheaters built for that purpose by the Caesars”* (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*).
  + **Verse 14**– Because of the destruction of Babylon and the judgment of God, these luxuries and wealthy items will no longer be found in it anymore (cf. 1 Jn. 2:15-17).
  + **Verses 15-17a**– These verse essentially repeat the dirge of vv. 9-10 with slight variations. The merchants stand at a distance and mourn knowing their lives are essentially over because their income is affected. God has quickly brought an end to the city.
  + **Verses 17b-19**– The shipmasters, passengers and sailors now complete the third group of people pronouncing a dirge against the city. They are upset that their maritime income will be affected because of the destruction of Babylon.
  + This alludes largely to Ezek. 27:27-34. The magnitude and quickness of the destruction causes these maritime professionals to throw dust on their heads while standing at a distance in astonishment at the torment they see (cf. Jer. 51:37).
  + **Verse 20**– At the conclusion of the dirges, a call for rejoicing is made. The lament and mourning over the city by the earth-dwellers is strongly contrasted by the rejoicing of heaven, the saints, apostles and prophets.
  + The city was filled with the blood of these righteous ones (2:13; 6:9-10; 12:11; 13:7, 15; 16:6; 18:24) and now that God has avenged their blood on her, they can take pleasure in rejoicing over the fall of evil and the execution of divine wrath and righteous judgment (cf. Psa. 58:10; 96:11-13; Prov. 11:10; Isa. 49:13; Jer. 51:47-48).
* **18:21-24– Babylon’s Violence and Judgment**
  + **Verse 21**– A strong angel takes a millstone and casts it into the sea as an illustration to the fate that will befall Babylon. The end of this city will be a violent one because it was violent to God and His people (cf. Ex. 15:5; Jer. 51:63-64; Ezek. 26:12, 21; Matt. 18:6).
  + **Verses 22-23**– The effect of Babylon being hurled violently into the sea is felt in these verses. Celebration and rejoicing turn into silence. The sound of the craftsmen at work will also cease to exist in conjunction with all festivals. It will be a time of darkness and desolation (cf. Isa. 24:8; Jer. 7:34; 25:10; Ezek. 26:13).
  + All this comes upon them because of their deception and their sorcery (cf. Nah. 3:4-7). A once vibrant city is quickly and suddenly brought low because of their arrogance and wickedness.
  + **Verse 24**– The judgment upon the city is just and deserving because she ruthlessly persecuted the people of God. God may not avenge the blood of His people when they would like Him to, but He will ensure it is done (cf. 6:9-11).