**Revelation 18—**

**Get out of Babylon before Babylon is destroyed**

Pastor Emeritus Joe Fuiten, June 24, 2020

In this chapter we have several different viewpoints of the end of the kingdoms of man. The first viewpoint is the mighty angel who declares that Babylon has fallen. Then a second voice calls the people of God out of Babylon. The kings of the earth follow with their lament followed immediately by the merchants, and purveyors of international trade. The chapter ends with another angel hurling a stone and itemizing the demise of the kingdoms of this earth.

For these last four chapters we have been seeing descriptions of the end of the earthly kingdoms summarized as Babylon. Recall that our interpretation is that Babylon was the head of gold in the statue shown to Nebuchadnezzar and thus a summary characterization of all the kingdoms of man that Daniel revealed. Revelation is showing us the end of the earthly kingdoms of this world as they become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign forever and ever.

Revelation 18:1-5 “*After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. 3 For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." 4 Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues;*

*5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes*.” NIV

We are hearing the last gasp of a dying demonic system. The anti-Christ system has been riding high, but that is shown grinding to a stop. In this passage, we are only a few moments away from the final destruction of those who have opposed Jesus and his kingdom on the earth.

Once again, the revelation of John reiterates the Old Testament themes. We are reminded of Isaiah 21:9. “*Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: 'Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'*"

In earlier chapters in Revelation, we heard the angels of heaven announce the demise of Babylon the Great. It began in Revelation 14:8 with an angel saying, "*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries*." Here in this chapter it is announced again. We should look for the man with the placard, “The end is near” because he is finally right!

In previous studies we used the early church fathers to show that Babylon was a summary term for all the kingdoms of this world. If the Apostle John and the Prophet Daniel are tied together, then the earthly system starting with Babylon can be called Babylon whether it is actually Medo-Persian, Greek, or Roman. So in Revelation, the fall of Babylon is the fall of the earthly kingdoms at the coming of Christ’s kingdom.

Given the ultimate fall of Babylon what should God’s people do. Like Israel in Egypt or Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah, they should come out of the doomed system. Verses 4 and 5 are that call for separation. “4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; 5 for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.”*

Once again we have an echo of the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 51:42-48 there is a prophecy concerning the original Babylon and its demise. Within that prophecy there is the first call for the people of God to come out of Babylon. “*The sea will rise over Babylon; its roaring waves will cover her. 43 Her towns will be desolate, a dry and desert land, a land where no one lives, through which no man travels. 44 I will punish Bel in Babylon and make him spew out what he has swallowed. The nations will no longer stream to him. And the wall of Babylon will fall. 45 "****Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD.*** *46 Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land; one rumor comes this year, another the next, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler. 47 For the time will surely come when I will punish the idols of Babylon; her whole land will be disgraced and her slain will all lie fallen within her. 48 Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her," declares the LORD.”*

Jeremiah’s original prophecy against Babylon noted the arrival of the Medes. It was fulfilled. Yet the Medes only partially fulfilled the prophecy because Babylon is back at the end of time. God has a people who are in Babylon. They are instructed to flee once again because destruction is coming. *“The LORD will carry out his purpose, his decree against the people of Babylon. You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off.”[[1]](#footnote-1)* In all generations the message is the same. Come out of the world’s system. Don’t be a part of it because this world will be judged. Don’t be associated with the sins of those who oppose God. You may think it will lead to wealth and power but it will only lead to judgement and death. Just as God remembered the sins of the original Babylonians and punished them, so he remembers the sins of the anti-Christ Babylon system and punishes it in the end of time.

We can take this passage of Revelation as a further statement that the kingdoms of this world will end and be replaced by the Lord’s kingdom. For the Early Church, it was an encouragement to be faithful. They were being reminded that anti-Christ Rome would not always be victorious so don’t get absorbed into its system.

What does that mean for us in the 21st century? **What does it mean to exit Babylon?** 1 Peter 1:1 calls us “….*God's elect, strangers in the world*…” This is not necessarily a call to physical separation from sinners in the world. Paul, in 1 Corinthians notes, “*In that case you would have to leave this world*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This is rather a call to avoid all participation with the world in its works of darkness.

The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 gives us direction on how to do that. “*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 7:1 Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.”*

There are several other passages that highlight the difference between the world and the things of God.

2 Corinthians 10:4-6 “*The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ*.”

1 John 2:15-*17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.*

1 John 4:5-6 *They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood*.

John 17:13-18 "*I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.*

Exiting Babylon begins as 1 Corinthians 2:12-13 indicates by receiving God’s Spirit. “*We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us*.

We exit Babylon by living God’s truth. That is, we consciously choose to follow as much of God’s way as we can understand.

We go to church on Sundays because God’s word says not to forsake assembling ourselves together, especially when you see the day of Revelation approaching.

We choose to worship. We prize him and we seek him. Our songs of the beauty of God are songs of worship.

Since Babylon is an adulterous relationship, we choose the opposite. We choose faithfulness. We love the same spouse all our lives even if we occasionally need to sing Andre Crouch’s song “Through it all.”

Since Babylon is about money and its acquisition, we choose to live by God’s standard of giving. We give generously to God’s work beginning with the tithe and going well beyond that. The very act of giving is counter-cultural, at least counter to the culture of Babylon.

In Babylon it is all about you. It gives itself “glory and luxury.” We encourage life. We want the child to live to find his own relationship with Jesus and fulfill his destiny with the Lord. Encouraging life is the opposite of glory and luxury for yourself.

Since Babylon rejects mourning and insists upon “partying,” we choose to suffer peacefully. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. We celebrate the resurrection every Sunday and at every funeral. We don’t falsely presume this life is all there is. We believe in the life hereafter as well and view the death of God’s people as precious in the sight of God.

We don’t believe everything we are told. Instead we are committed to what is true. We don’t let the world squeeze us into its mold, but instead we follow Jesus and try to be where he is.

It really comes down to a choice between the world’s way and God’s way. We prove that we are not “*ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*.”

## Payday for Babylon

6 Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. 7 Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' 8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

In the law of Exodus 22, goods wrongfully taken from a neighbor, and possessed illegally, had to be paid back double. Since Babylon has taken what belongs to the Lord, she will now have to pay double. She wrongfully gave herself luxury and glory. In its place she now has death and famine, followed by fire. God is acting as judge and has determined that she has claimed this place for herself in a wrongful way.

Babylon sees herself as a Queen, subject only to the laws she herself devises. She is not accountable to any universal truth or law. There is no need to feel guilt, or to mourn. There is no law of God, only what her courts and legislatures decree.

## Kings and Financial people Lament for Babylon’s Disaster

9 "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!' 11 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more—12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13 cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. 14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! 17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' 19 They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

There are two themes in this portion of the passage. First, the former beneficiaries of the Babylon scheme now lament that it is over. In one hour all has been destroyed. The second theme of this passage is the description, in some detail, of the nature of the commerce of Babylon the Great. I wonder if the description is meaningful as a literal description of commerce of Babylon the Great?

If the description is literal and actual, it is only somewhat a description of the commerce of any city currently in existence. While these things are all still traded, they are not generally the center of commerce at this time. The nature of the items would describe the commerce of ancient Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, or Athens. All these cities would be great sea-trading cities of that time. My sense is that this should be interpreted as a general description of a commercial or trading nation without focus on the individual items. I find it fruitless to try to decide if this is New York, London, Rome, or Istanbul. It really is the system, rather than an individual city just as in the Old Testament the prophecy was against Babylon and the cities that made up that system.

Quite a few of the details of Revelation would be in this category. If we recall that the general movement of the passage is the demise of one system and the rise of another, then the small details serve to fit that narrative almost like a parable. A parable has only one point which is what we have here as well. There is really only one point, the kingdoms of man are being replaced!

The main point of the passage is that a once “prosperous” system has been exposed for the ruin it really is.

## God’s People Rejoicing over Babylon’s Judgment

*20 Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.'" 21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. 22 The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. 23 The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell[[3]](#footnote-3) all the nations were led astray. 24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

Now the victims get a chance to celebrate. Heaven itself, along with the suffering saints below rejoice that the kingdoms of this world have fallen. John sees one final picture of violence. A giant boulder is thrown into the sea with great violence. So it will be in the fall of Babylon, just as Jeremiah prophesied.[[4]](#footnote-4) It will disappear into the sea and be forgotten.

The paragraph itemizes several things of normal life for illustration purposes. Where once there was music, there will be silence. The grinding of wheat will cease as an illustration of all kinds of work. There will be no more of marriage and the usual of life. Not even a single light will burn. It will all come to an end. It will be no more.

There has been more than enough of sorcery, drugs, death, and deception. God’s people have suffered enough. It is time to turn the tables. The oppressor will be destroyed and thrown away.

The use of the phrase “magic spell” is interesting. The association with drugs is an apt description of the world in the last 60 years. The number of people who have been lost to drugs has been large. Just as importantly, the ideas that have come to those using drugs is beyond measurement.

1. Jeremiah 51:11-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 1 Cor 5:9-11 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. pharmakeia (far-mak-i'-ah); medication ("pharmacy"), i.e. (by extension) magic (literally or figuratively): KJV-- sorcery, witchcraft. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Jeremiah 51:63-64 “When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'" The words of Jeremiah end here.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)