

"The Judgment of the Great City"

Revelation 18:1-24

The Judgment of the Great City:

After pronouncing judgment upon the great harlot in Revelation 17 (a description of the destruction of religious Babylon), John now receives new revelation in yet another vision, which describes the judgment and destruction upon the commercial center of Antichrist's empire, the great city of Babylon. Some commentators have struggled as to whether the Scriptures predict the rebuilding of Babylon. However, "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), are as yet unfulfilled."⁴⁷³ "In the 1980's, Saddam Hussein started to rebuild portions of the ancient city of Babylon...The area is still inhabited, and stones from the old Babylon are being used to rebuild the city."⁴⁷⁴ The Babylon of chapter 18 is very likely a reference to a literal rebuilt city of Babylon and not some sort of symbol for other cities such as Rome. It is also not a reference or symbol to some aspect of Antichrist's empire, but is a real and literal reference to the actual city of Babylon, which will likely be the commercial and political center of Antichrist's kingdom. In fact five times in these 24 verses Babylon is here referred to as a literal city (vv. 10, 16, 18, 19, 21). It seems that the wisest interpretation is to see it as a literal city and as a literal reference to an actual city of Babylon.

Babylon Destroyed: (18:1-8)⁴⁷⁵

Judgment Pronounced (vv. 1-3): As Revelation 18 opens John states, "*After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.*" The phrase *after these things I saw* indicates that John was receiving new revelation from an additional vision that is separate and follows the visions from Revelation 17 although the theme of judgment is similar. The term "another" (*allos*) indicates that this is another of the same kind of angel as in 17:1 and thus could not be a vision of Christ. The angel is described as coming down from heaven and the earth was illumined with his presence. "He will make his dramatic appearance onto a darkened stage, for the fifth bowl will have plunged the world into darkness (16:10). Manifesting the flashing brilliance of a glorious heavenly being against the blackness."⁴⁷⁶ He resembles the angel of Revelation 10 and could possibly be the angel from Revelation 14:8 who pronounced judgment upon Babylon. In verse 2 the angel makes a pronouncement of the soon to be fallen state of Babylon as he says, "Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great!" The pronouncement made back in Revelation 14:8 is now coming to fulfillment.

"Upon Babylon's demise, she will "become the habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (v. 2). This once-thriving city will become a wilderness, possessed with imprisoned evil spirits hovering over the area like scavenger birds over their prey."⁴⁷⁷ "This abandonment of destroyed Babylon to demons is a divine judgment stemming from the utter wickedness of its inhabitants described in verse 3, "*For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed [acts of] immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.*" Babylon in her political character has had evil relationships with "all nations" described as "immorality."

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In this they have been led by the rulers, "the kings of the earth." The resulting evil association has made the merchants of the earth rich."⁴⁷⁸

Judgment Avoided (vv. 4-5): "God's judgment on this commercially prosperous but morally bankrupt society can be avoided, as another voice from heaven makes clear. The use of *allos* (another of the same kind) suggests that the speaker is an angel like the one in verse 1. The message he proclaims, "Come out of her, my people," is a call for God's people to disentangle themselves from the world system."⁴⁷⁹ This other voice from heaven commanded these believers to come out of Babylon so that they will not participate in Babylon's sins and so that they will not receive the plagues of Babylon. "They are to disassociate themselves from this evil system of idolatry, luxury, and violence. Those who fail to do so will not be protected when God destroys the city. The same admonition was given to the Jewish people before the destruction of ancient Babylon (Jeremiah 50:4-8; 51:6, 45). This voice says that the sins of Babylon have piled up as high as heaven. "Piled is from *kollao*, which literally means "to glue together," or "to join." Babylon's sins will pile up like a new Tower of Babel (cf. Gen. 11:3-4), but unlike the ancient tower, her sins will reach as high as heaven. God will remember her iniquities and there will be no forgiveness for this defiant, unrepentant city."⁴⁸⁰

Judgment Defined (vv. 6-8): At this point the angel turns his attention to God and requests God to judge Babylon. This call for vengeance is a similar request as the plea of the martyrs when the Lamb broke the fifth seal (Rev. 6:9-10). "The angel calls for the law of retribution to be implemented against Babylon: "give back [to her] double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her (v. 6)." Babylon's cup used to seduce others will be filled with God's undiluted wrath and used to destroy her. No mercy will be shown. God will measure out twice as much judgment on Babylon because of the enormity of her sin."⁴⁸¹ This principle of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation against Babylon here is reminiscent to similar pleas in the Old Testament (cf. Psalm 137:8; Jer. 50:14-15, 29; 41:56). The angel goes on, "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I sit [as] a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.'" The angel is calling for the punishment to fit the crime. As Babylon has sinned so shall she be judged. "Three sins call for Babylon's judgment. First, she was proud; she glorified herself. Second, she pursued self-gratification, she lived sensuously. Third, she was guilty of self-sufficiency, of presumptuously overestimating her power; she said in her heart, "I sit as queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." That proud boast echoes that of ancient Babylon, who said, "I will be a queen forever...I will not sit as a widow, nor know loss of children" (Isa. 47:7, 8; cf. Ezek. 27:3; 28:2; Zeph. 2:15)."⁴⁸² The angel requested that God give Babylon torment and mourning for these sins. "*Basanismos* (torment) literally means torture (cf. vv. 10, 15; 9:5; 14:11). Mourning refers to the grief that the torture produces. Hell will be a place of both unimaginable torment (20:10; Luke 15:23-24, 28) and crushing grief (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30)."⁴⁸³ Because of the terrible sins of Babylon, one day her plagues will indeed come. It is at this point that the angel details what these plagues will be. They will be pestilence and mourning and famine, and eventually that she will be burned up with fire. This sad outcome is a just outcome as God is just. He is the Judge and He is strong. This simply means it is the Lord who will judge Babylon. It is the Lord who is capable of judging Babylon because of His great strength. No one can frustrate God. God will indeed accomplish His great purposes. Babylon the wicked and evil city with all its wealth and power will not escape judgment nor from suffering the severe wrath of God.

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Bewailing Dirge: (18:9-19) {Judgment Lamented}

"Nothing so clearly reveals the hardness of sinners' 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."⁴⁸⁴ These verses are as a funeral dirge as three groups of unbelievers mourn over the destruction and judgment of the great city of Babylon. David Levy writes:

A worldwide lament will rise from the earth dwellers as they see the smoke of Babylon's destruction. *First, monarchs* "who have committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her" (v. 9) will bewail the city's destruction. Afraid of being caught up in the same holocaust that consumed Babylon, these leaders are seen "Standing afar off for the fear of her torment" (v. 10). Their cry for the great city is, "Woe, Woe, that great city, Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour is thy judgment come" (v. 10). The kings will wring their hands and weep over the loss of the power they enjoyed by participating in Babylon's wickedness and wealth. "They eulogize her with...praise, but there is a terrible hopelessness in their anguish; they marvel at the sudden destruction of that which they thought was gilt-edged security. They mourn as if lamenting the passing of a loved one." (Jack MacArthur, *Expositional Commentary of Revelation*, p. 356)

Second, the merchants will mourn their loss, "for no one buys their merchandise anymore" (v. 11). It would seem that doing business with Babylon will bring great riches to many people worldwide. These traders will profit enormously from doing business with Babylon. They will sell their souls to traffic in the items mentioned in verses 12-13. All of this opulence and wealth, which they will lust after, will depart in one hour and will be found no more (v. 14). The merchants will respond as did the monarchs to the loss of Babylon (v. 15) with anguish and lamentation.

Third, mariners will mourn over their loss: "And every shipmaster...and sailors...cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like unto this great city?" (vv. 17-18). They expressed great grief, as the people in Old Testament times did: "they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing" (v. 19), echoing the lament of all the others. Once again, "in one hour" (v. 19) all will be lost.

The world will weep and wail and mourn as they lament the destruction of Babylon. Babylon will be laid waste, but instead of mourning over and repenting of their sin the world mourns over their loss.

Believers Delight: (18:20-24)

After the world mourns and laments over the destruction of Babylon, the perspective of heaven and God's people is contrasted. This perspective of rejoicing is followed up by an illustration of the completion of Babylon's destruction, while three final reasons for the judgment are given.

Judgment Enjoyed (vs. 20): At this point the angel from verse 4 addresses heaven, the saints, the apostles and prophets. He is addressing all believers and calling on them to rejoice over the judgment upon Babylon.

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The long-awaited moment of vindication, retribution, and vengeance, for which the martyred Tribulation believers prayed (6:9-10) and for which all the redeemed hoped, will have arrived. Heaven rejoices, 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."⁴⁸⁵

Judgment Completed (vv. 21-23a): "A mighty angel appears for the third time in this chapter and takes up a stone like a great millstone, and casts it into the sea (v. 21), symbolizing the sudden, swift, violent, total destruction of Babylon (cp. Jeremiah 51:61-64). The angel assures the world that Babylon "shall be found no more at all (v. 21). The words "no more/ not any longer" are mentioned seven times in this chapter. No more will all the luxury items be found in Babylon. Neither will *the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters and no craftsman of any craft and the sound of a mill and the light of a lamp will not shine and the voice of the bridegroom and bride* (vv. 22-23). Sounds of life will cease to exist in any form when God destroys Babylon. This will be a testimony to her total destruction, like that of Sodom and Gomorrah."⁴⁸⁶

Judgment Justified (vv. 23b-24): At this point three final reasons for the judgment upon Babylon are offered. It is a justification for such a total and complete destruction of this wicked city. "**First**, her *merchants were the great men of the earth*, using their wealth to ascend to positions of power, prominence, and influence. This is a reference to the abuses of the proud and arrogant rich...A **Second** reason for Babylon's being judged is that *all the nations were deceived by her sorcery*. Sorcery is from *pharmakeia*, the root word of the English word "pharmacy." The word is used in the New Testament to refer to magic and occult practices (9:21; Gal. 5:20). Babylon's hold on the world will not be entirely due to her military and economic power, but also to her occult influence...A **final** reason given for Babylon's judgment is her murderous slaughter of God's people; *in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth* (cf. 6:10; 11:7, 15; 16:6; 17:6)."⁴⁸⁷ David Levy concludes: "Thus the sins of Babylon the city and the worldwide system of Antichrist as it is based out of the great city are traced back to Genesis. Its demonic influence is threaded all through Scripture, touching every major area of human existence.

-Politically, Babylon symbolizes prideful rebellion against God...

-Religiously, Babylon symbolizes the mother of idolatrous religion and worship that has infected all the nations with its satanic dogma and practice.

-Economically, Babylon symbolizes the pride of wealth and sensuality; the worship of money, power, and prosperity; the spirit of covetous commercialism that dominates worldwide commerce.

All of this will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ. The phrase "Babylon...shall be found no more" (v. 21) says it all."⁴⁸⁸