

Revelation 18

Many commentators believe chapters 17 and 18 describe the same thing, namely: the destruction of Babylon. In chapter 17, it is the destruction of a religious system that operates independently of and in opposition to the true God, but in chapter 18, it is the destruction of an economic or commercial system that does the same.¹

Is the Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18 a literal or symbolic city? Most likely, commercial Babylon is symbolic, like religious Babylon. Babylon in all its parts stands for that which Christ called “the world.”

The literal city of Babylon may be rebuilt, and it may suffer a final destruction at the end of the Tribulation. However, what is in view here is more than just the literal city. It is also what the city has stood for and promoted throughout history, namely, a satanic system marked by every form of idolatrous humanism.²

Who appeared next to John (v. 1)? He saw another angel coming down from heaven. The term ‘another’ (Gr., *allon*) makes it clear that this angel is the same in kind as the angel of 17:1.

How did John characterize him? He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor.

What did he predict would happen (v. 2)? Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! This great economic system would collapse because of her condition.

How did he describe her condition (v. 2)? She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. She has become totally corrupt, a picture of moral decadence.

What reason is given for her fall (v. 3)? Three reasons are given for God's judgment of Babylon: (a) her corrupting influence on the nations of the world, (b) the kings of the earth committed adultery with her (17:2), and (c) the merchants of the earth, seafarers who were motivated primarily by greed, shared her excessive wealth.³

What warning is then given to God's people (v. 4)? Come out of her and leave her behind. These were faithful believers who were living during the Tribulation. They were in a position similar to where Lot was in while he lived in the city of Sodom (Genesis 19). These are God's people in a place they shouldn't be, a place ripe for destruction. Commercial Babylon, with its materialistic lure, is a constant threat to be guarded against.

What reason is given why they should heed the warning (v. 4)? So that you will not be lured into any of her sins and subsequently swept up in any of her plagues.

How did God view Babylon's sins (v. 5)? They were piled up to heaven i.e. the sheer volume of them was immeasurable. And He has remembered her crimes. This is the destiny of the materialistic world, but toward believers, God says, *I will remember their sins no more* (Hebrews 8:12).

How would God repay her (v. 6)? He will pay her back double for what she has done.

How had she lived, and how did she view herself (v. 7)? She lived in self-indulgent luxury. She boasted about her status as queen and had no reason to mourn, no reason to be anything but happy.

What plagues would overtake her (v. 8)? The plagues of death, mourning and famine. And she will be consumed by fire. All this will occur in one day!

How would kings react to the harlot's downfall (v. 9)? Terrified at her torment, they will weep and mourn over her, the one who led them into idolatry. **Why?** They had lost their lover and source of their luxurious lifestyle. The idea of adultery with the kings of the earth simply means that the Jews adopted the ungodly economic perspectives and financial practices of the surrounding nations.

Where would they stand (v. 10)? They will stand far away. So great is the heat and smoke of her burning that these kings must stand at a distance.

What is the significance of “in one hour?” She will collapse suddenly, like the World Trade Center towers in New York City in 2001.....not decline gradually.⁴

Who else would mourn her fall (v. 11)? The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her.

Why? What was their motivation? They wept because no one buys their cargoes any more. Their business dries up. It is plain that the mourning is rooted in self-interest.

What is the significance of the variety of the goods that John listed (vv. 12-13)? It suggests how extensive the trade will be at this time in history. The market is the entire world.⁵

What would be lost (v. 14)? *All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.*

Where will the merchants stand (v. 15)? Same as the kings (v. 10), they will stand far off, terrified at her torment.

What will they say (vv. 16-17)? *They will weep and mourn and cry out: Woe! Woe, O great city.* For a site of beauty, splendor and wealth has in one hour been destroyed.

Who else will be amazed at the city's fall (v. 17)? The seafaring world. Every sea captain and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea.

How will they express their grief (v. 19)? They will throw dust on their heads, and cry out with weeping and mourning. Like the other observers, their sorrow at commercial Babylon's fall is selfish. The merchants and sea traders cry because their "cash cow" is dead.

How do we see the luxury of our world? Do we see it as it really is? Can we use it without getting it into our hearts? How would you feel if the luxuries in your life which you have come to consider necessities suddenly went up in smoke?⁶

How did the saints, apostles and prophets differ in reaction from the others mentioned (v. 20)? While all these godless tears are being shed on earth, there is great rejoicing in heaven. The righteous are told to celebrate the demise of Jerusalem and its temple and its worship practices. They are rejoicing over her destruction because God has judged her for the way she treated them. At last God has avenged His saints, apostles and prophets.

Should God's people rejoice when God's judgment comes? Yes, but we don't rejoice in the destruction that occurs. Rather, we should rejoice in the righteous resolution that God's judgment brings. **Are those always easy to differentiate?**

How did an angel symbolize the city's fall (v. 21)? He picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea. It is impossible for a stone of that size to ever rise to the surface, so it is a permanent judgment. Babylon will never rise again.

What practices would cease in the city (vv. 22-23)? The normal sights and sounds of a bustling city.

Why did this trouble come on the city (v. 24)? *In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.* God takes the persecution of His people as a personal offense. Those who attack His people really attack Him.

The responsibility for "the blood" of God's servants, martyred for their testimonies, lies at the feet of this system.⁷

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Revelation, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 193

² Ibid. p. 194

³ Ibid. p. 195

⁴ Ibid. p. 197

⁵ Ibid. p. 198

⁶ Ibid. p. 200

⁷ Ibid. p. 201