

Revelation

Part Forty-Seven
For God Has Avenged You
(*Revelation 18:1-24*)

With Study Questions

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The bowls of wrath are specifically identified in chapter sixteen. Then in seventeen we see the political overthrow of Rome along with the victory of the Lamb. In this chapter we read of the response to the fall of Rome/Babylon.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. ² And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! ³ For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” ⁴ And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. ⁵ For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. ⁶ Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. ⁷ In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit *as* queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ ⁸ Therefore her plagues will come in one day – death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong *is* the Lord God who judges her. ⁹ “The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, ¹⁰ standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ ¹¹ “And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: ¹² merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of

most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;¹³ and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men.¹⁴ The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all.¹⁵ The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,¹⁶ and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!¹⁷ For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.' Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance¹⁸ and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What *is* like this great city?'¹⁹ "They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'²⁰ "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and *you* holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw *it* into the sea, saying, "Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore.²² The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore.²³ The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth" (Revelation 18:1-24).

Introduction

Very shortly at 9/11 I had some very close friends from New Zealand reach out. They wanted to know what was going on. Was the U.S. losing its stability? Was this a genuine threat? Part of this correspondence was their concern for me personally. But another part was something I was quite surprised about. They felt, at some significant level, that their security as a nation was bound to the security of America. If America were to fall, New Zealand would feel the effect.

At the writing of the Revelation, there was no nation in the recognized world that would not be affected by the downfall of the Roman Empire. This is the feel of the chapter under our current meditation.

A Light in the Darkness

This angel with great authority lights up the entire land (see Ezekiel 43:2, 3). This dark era preferred the darkness over the light because their deeds were indeed evil. Jesus taught of a natural hatred of the light because it exposes our evil deeds (John 3:19-21). But those who are in Christ, whose **“works have been carried out in God”** needn't fear the light. This is not due to their innate goodness, but because by grace through faith, the light of Christ shines in their hearts.

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The picture at the opening of this chapter is that of no place to hide. Think of a military operation where the more powerful army imposes battlefield illumination. There is no foxhole where the light doesn't shine. Rome had been given ample time to come to the light and repeatedly chose to remain in the darkness.

It can become very easy to live in darkness; as if there will never be a day of reckoning. But let us be sure of this, that **“[our] sin will find [us] out” (Numbers 32:23)**. But there is a refuge found in Christ, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1). And regardless of our eschatological convictions, the Revelation, like every other book in Scripture, directs us to Him and His victory over all the darkness.

And though these events primarily speak to the events encountered by the early church, this cultural, political cycle tends to repeat itself through history. It is a cycle of prosperity, depravity then captivity. The prosperity of first century Rome had clearly been taken over by depravity. It was **“a dwelling place for demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird.”** These are Old Testament allusions to that which is defiled (Leviticus 11).

And Rome had become so powerful that all the nations were under her influence and dependence, which she no doubt used as a cudgel. I recently watched an interview with the president of Kenya and a CNN reporter. Kenya has not yet bought the LGBTQ agenda and this CNN reporter wasn't having it. She did everything she could to vilify this man for his country's lack of willingness to bow before this gender expression pressure.

This interview was followed by a clip where a former U.S. president was using all his political muscularity to maneuver Kenya in this progressive direction. All this to say that when a nation gets powerful, then begins it slide into depravity, it wants company. And there is great pressure to get in line, because **"the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury."**

Come Out

But another **"voice from heaven"** is heard, giving counsel to those of faith-to those who numbered among the **"called, chosen, and faithful"** (**Revelation 17:14**). It is a common refrain we read throughout all of Scripture to **"Come out of her."** The nation is going in a bad direction. Her sins, as it were, **"have reached to heaven"** meaning that God will soon act in His judgment. There are two things this voice from heaven gives in its exhortation: don't **"share in her sins"** and, beware **"lest you receive of her plagues."**

In the first century context, this may very well have meant making a geographical switch in your residency. But the bottom-line message here for any generation of Christian is, as your culture descends on the slide of darkness, don't go along for the ride.

The judgment that Rome will suffer is due to its pouring out of **"blood of prophets and saints."** She **"lived luxuriously"** and sat **"as a queen."** She sought the status of a god and used that status, not to love or redeem, but to quench any and all that would threaten her power and wealth. And now, according to Old Testament sanctions, she would receive **"double according to her works"** (see **Jeremiah 16:18**).

The Response of the World

We have seen the call of the Christian to remain uninfluenced by the world. We now see three other responses: of kings, merchants, and shipmasters.¹

We won't go into minute detail regarding their responses. It is enough for now to note that the kings who had benefited from Rome's wealth "**and lived luxuriously with her**" are weeping. But notice that they aren't doing anything. In fact, we are told that they are "**standing at a distance.**" Such is the nature of ungodly relationships.

One of my favorite movies growing up was *Cool Hand Luke*. Intentionally or not, it was a Christian allegory where Luke is in imprisoned amongst a host of lost and confused inmates. For various reasons he becomes their hero-their inspiration. But in a failed escape attempt, he is tortured and appears broken. This apparent failure caused his inmates to lose heart.

As he is brought back to the cellblock all of his former fans avoid him. He lifts up his hand in an effort to get help off the floor and no hand is offered. His simple line was, "Where you are now?" Something you may wish to consider when you pick your friends or when you're seeking to be a friend. But even more, let us not allow this to paint a picture of our faith in Christ. The Apostles fled when the shepherd was struck (Matthew 26:31). But things changed when He was raised up. Let us know we serve a living Savior.

The merchants are no better. They had become "**rich by her**" but their cash-cow is being slaughtered. Similar to the kings they "**stand at a distance.**" There is a great deal written about this long list of products and the ostentatious nature of the cravings of the Romans. Things like an appetite for peacock brains and nightingale's tongues; how one Caesar in one year had a \$20 million dollar budget for food alone, how the generals needed to eat on silver dishes, etc.

But one phrase which stands out here is the merchandise of "**bodies and souls of men.**" This was likely a reference to the slave trade and how

¹ A great deal of this chapter utilizes the language of Ezekiel 27, 28, in God's judgment of Tyre.

Rome had in the direction of 60 million slaves. But they were reduced to products. There was no recognition of being made in the image of God. It is the nature of an ungodly people to dehumanize or de-personalize. When you begin down that road, you can justify doing anything you want to anyone you want. Man's inhumanity to man is a great testimony to this.

The "**shipmasters**" similar to the kings and merchants also "**stood at a distance.**" Simply understood, the docks would be closed and almost immediately, the supplies would dry up.

Rejoice

In light of this, verse twenty is highly appropriate.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her (Revelation 18:20)!

It is generally only in a setting where the Christian faith is viewed as some sort of psychological/emotional health spa that the call to rejoice when God judges the wicked becomes offensive. But those who have lived up close and personal against the face of wickedness rejoice when they see that wickedness toppled.

This type of rejoicing is all-pervasive throughout the Old Testament (see Jeremiah 51:48) where wicked nations would sometimes reach their fulness (Genesis 15:16). I daresay none of us have ever experienced a nation in full iniquity. We also see this rejoicing in the Reformation and to this day in dark societies.

To be sure, we should prefer repentance and we should not have an unhealthy, vindictive disposition toward those who engage in wickedness (Ezekiel 33:10, 11). At the same time, justice is a glorious attribute of God. And when He exercises justice in His judgment of the wicked, He is to be praised.

We get a small taste of this when we see miscarriages of justice in our own society and destructive it is; when criminals are set free only to kill again. Today's courtroom has become, in many ways, a sideshow. Psalm 94 tells us that unjust judges are an exultation of wickedness. This can be especially heartbreaking to those who have lost loved ones at the hands of those who have escaped true justice.

But there comes a time when God intervenes in such a way to halt this destructiveness. This is what the early church was told would happen. God continues to answer the prayer of Revelation 6:10.

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth (Revelation 6:10)?

Conclusion

What we have seen so far in this chapter is the call for Christians to come out from the darkness and its influence. We have also seen how the kings, merchants and shipmasters will respond. The chapter finishes with what things look like from within. There is no getting around the intensity of this language.

The “**mighty angel**” throws a “**millstone**” into the sea as a dramatic expression of what will happen to Rome. Jesus uses a millstone to express the great judgment that would fall upon those who causes “**littles ones who believe in [Him] to sin**” (Matthew 18:6). More directly, John is all but quoting Jeremiah in his proclamation of the judgment of Babylon (Jeremiah 51:63, 64).

Rome, in terms of its powerful influence and persecuting power of the church is to be “**thrown down.**” The reference to the end of harpists, musicians, craftsmen, brides and grooms etc., all speak to the end of a thriving, yet ungodly, civilization.

I am no prophet and I try to avoid prognostications. At the same time, there is no book in the Bible written specifically or prophetically about twenty-first century America. We are called to be observant and wise. We must make assessments, preferably before the water at our feet is over our heads.

Augustine made profound assessments of his era. Calvin as well. Francis Schafer and Greg Bahnsen were more modern teachers who had a read on their era that we might learn how to engage while avoiding be influenced. God has a plan for history. He has declared “**the end from the beginning**” (Isaiah 46:10). We are to “**remember this and stand firm**” (Isaiah 46:8).

Questions for Study

1. How significant was Rome in the first century? Why is this important (pages 3-5)?
2. Discuss light and darkness and people's response to this (pages 4, 5).
3. Christians are called to come out of ungodliness. Can you think of current examples of this (page 5)?
4. How did the world respond to the fall of Rome? Have you ever felt like fleeing the faith? Why (page 6)?
5. Is it right to rejoice when ungodliness is deposed? Why or why not (pages 7, 8)?
6. What do you think the overall call is for the Christian in chapter 18 (page 8)?

