



THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

LESSON 12 – Made in Babylon

LESSON OBJECTIVE

The goal of this lesson is to understand the interpretation of chapter 18 of the Revelation, with particular emphasis on the destruction of commercial Babylon.

NOTES ON REVELATION 18

18:1 “And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory.”

John observes “another angel” coming down from heaven. Recall that in chapter 17 John conversed with one of the seven angels that poured the seven plagues (Vial Judgments) upon the earth. Now, John will hear from another angel. This angel has great power and glory, which indicates that what he has to say will surely come to pass; no one can stay his hand. Also, note John’s use of “after these things.” The destruction of Babylon that will unfold in this chapter is seen as occurring after the destruction of Babylon in chapter 17, which suggests they are two different destructions of Babylon. As the chapter unfolds, we will understand that this makes perfect sense, because there are two aspects of Babylon that receive destruction. In particular, in chapter 17, verse 16, the kings of the earth destroyed Babylon, but we will see in this chapter that the same kings of the earth mourn the destruction of Babylon. Again, that is because there are two aspects of Babylon, a religious and a commercial.

18:2 “And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

The angel cries in a strong voice (as we have seen so many times, it seems that everything God does in this book is loud, demanding our attention and emphasizing the certainty of the event’s occurrence). The angel declares an occurrence in the past tense, even though it has not yet occurred, because the occurrence of the event is a certainty. Babylon is fallen. This is not the first announcement of this event in this book (see Revelation 14:8, 16:19). This chapter is essentially the doom song of Babylon in the tradition of doom songs in the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah 34:4-5 (Edom), Zephaniah 2:13-15 (Nineveh), Isaiah 13 (Babylon), Jeremiah 50-51 (Babylon)). In some sense, it has already occurred, for chapter 17 unfolded the destruction of religious Babylon. But as we will see in this chapter, Babylon goes down in two phases, first religious Babylon, and then commercial or economic Babylon. The fall of Babylon is due to her sin; she has become the habitation, or dwelling place, of demons and foul spirits. That she has invited them to take refuge in her is indicative of the moral condition of Babylon. Likewise, the unclean and hateful birds are there. This probably has reference to Deuteronomy 14:11-20, which lists certain birds that Israel was forbidden to eat. The list includes such birds as eagles, but also vultures and owls. The description of unclean and hateful may refer to all of the birds, or perhaps “hateful” refers to vultures. In any event, the point is that Babylon has become a place characterized by sin and is abandoned to the wild animals (e.g., Isaiah 13:21, Zephaniah 2:13-15). I also think it possible that this verse refers to Zechariah 5:5-11, wherein we see

wickedness (personified as a woman) put in an ephah and carried away by storks (unclean birds) to Babylon. This represents the cleansing of reconstituted Israel (the exiles having returned from Babylon) and the sin they brought with them is returned to Babylon. That is what is in view in this verse; Babylon is unclean and it is the very dwelling place of sin.

18:3 “For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.”

Although this language sounds like chapter 17:2 (the parallelism is intentional), the emphasis in this chapter will not be so much on spiritual apostasy as certain sins. The last clause points in the direction that the rest of the chapter will take, namely a focus on the sins of a corrupt commercial system that made the merchants (business people) of the earth wealthy. In the context of what will follow, the fornication that the nations have partaken of will be sins related to the corrupt commercial system. Notice that Babylon’s sin is not just the sin she does, but its leading others to do the same.

18:4 “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”

The voice of the speaker is not identified, although the voice refers to “my people,” which suggests that the voice is God’s. However, the next verse refers to God, so this may be an angel speaking on behalf of God. In any event, the voice cries out from heaven and beseeches “my people” to remove themselves from her (i.e., Babylon). Assuming for the moment (the point will be defended more rigorously as the chapter unfolds) that she is a worldwide, corrupt commercial system, the plea from God is that his people (Christians) not participate in her sinful activities. Here is a lesson: although God removes His people before His hand of judgment comes on unbelievers, God will allow temporal judgment to fall on believers who insist on being identified with the group of unsaved persons God will judge. Here, God’s warning to His people is to remove themselves from the corrupt system, but if they refuse, they are to understand that the plagues that will befall her will fall on their heads also. She is sinful, and by being in the system she represents, they partake in her sins, and therefore must reap temporal judgment for their lifestyle. This is a call from God to His people to repent and avoid judgment. God does not have to do this, but He is merciful to His people. It is always God’s pattern to call His people to separate themselves from sin (see, e.g., Genesis 19:12-13, Numbers 16 (esp. 21), Isaiah 48:20, Jeremiah 51:6, 45; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

18:5 “For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.”

Babylon’s sins have reached unto heaven. Recall from Genesis 11:1-9 that in Babel, they built a tower of brick and slime to “reach unto heaven” (11:4) and God destroyed it. Now, it has happened again, but the Tower of Babylon (not Babel) is not made of bricks and slime (mud), but sins glued together (i.e., the Tower of Sin). That God has “remembered” Babylon’s sin does not indicate that God is forgetful, but rather, that at this point, God, who is longsuffering, is taking action in judgment.

18:6 “Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.”

God’s standard is often known as *lex taliones* (law of retaliation). We see this in Exodus 21:24-25: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning,

wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” In God’s economy, the punishment perfectly fits the crime. Babylon will receive “double unto her double according to her works.” For example, under the Mosaic Law, if a man stole an ox or sheep, he had to repay double (Exodus 22:4): “If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.” Similarly, a thief had to repay double (Exodus 22:7): “If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man’s house; if the thief be found, let him pay double.” To merely repay the money is *restitution*, but there is no punishment there, no consequences for the wrong. God makes the sinner endure the wrong he so willingly put on another, by paying the money back and adding to that amount the very amount stolen, i.e., paying double. In the judgment of Babylon, God’s unchanging standard is in view. She filled her cup with the wine of fornication, and therefore she will be made to drink double the amount of the wine of wrath. Note also that she is getting “double unto her double according to her works.” It is as if she already gave out double (i.e., the severity of her works) so that she gets back (*lex talionis*) four times in her cup.

18:7 “How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.”

The *lex taliones* standard introduced in the last verse is carried through in this verse. Babylon “glorified herself” and lives the life of luxury. She now receives the opposite, torment and sorrow. Babylon spoke in arrogance, not with literal words, but in her heart. This reflects her thinking that she was a queen and not a widow, and that she would never see sorrow. In the ancient world, being a widow carries the connotation of poverty; thus, the idea of “widow” is in contrast to “queen,” the very opposite of widow in terms of affluence and wealth. Moreover, the widow is full of sorrow, but not Babylon. She has only sunny days ahead; she believes nothing can bring her down. This is reminiscent of Obadiah 3 where Edom (personified) asks in pride, “Who can bring it down?” And God answers the call. Here, also, God will answer the prideful boasting of the sinful woman.

18:8 “Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

God will answer her boasting with plagues “in one day.” That is, her destruction will come on her swiftly, probably in less than a 24 hour span of time, and with the plagues there will be death and mourning and famine. Babylon will be destroyed by God, who is “strong,” that is, mighty enough to bring down prideful Babylon in judgment. We still need more clues to this aspect of Babylon’s career, but if she is worldwide, corrupt commercialism, then how does her destruction bring about “death” and “mourning” and “famine?” The answer is that with her destruction, the worldwide economy completely tanks. Likely, inflation runs wild, and from the judgments we have already seen, many resources, including food, are already scarce. Hence, we see famine and death. All of the things that run hand in hand with a bad economy are in play (e.g., high inflation, high unemployment, high crime). The mourning is not just for the dead, but as we will see, it is people mourning their loss of the wealth that was their god.

18:9 “And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning,”

The kings of the earth that partook in Babylon’s sin, and thus reaped the financial benefits, will mourn her destruction. In other words, when God brings about this destruction and the bottom falls out of the worldwide economy, the rulers (and by implication, those that they

rule) will mourn because they have lost their ill-gotten wealth. For most people, all that they hold dear is gone. They chose the temporary promises of the world over against the eternal promises of God, and now the temporary is suddenly brought to a quick and utterly destructive end. As Babylon burns in judgment (see 18:8), the kings observe the burning. The worldwide commercial system crashes before their eyes, and all they can do is watch it quickly unfold and mourn their loss.

18:10 “Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.”

Building the imagery of Babylon (the city) burning, the kings that watch the city burn stand afar off as they try to stay safe from the fire (her torment). In their hearts, the kings marvel how Babylon, the queen that thought she'd never see sorrow (like a widow), falls in “one hour.” Probably, she does not literally fall in one hour, although she may. Often in the Revelation and in John's gospel, the word “hour” is used to speak of a short period of or specific instance in time. In verse 18:8, it said the fall would happen in “one day.” Since the fall cannot take both “one day” and “one hour” at the same time, I think the point is that it is within a span of less than 24 hours. The reference to “one hour” is a figure of speech, meaning that it occurs in a short period of time. Some expositors hold that the literal Babylon is in view here. That interpretation is certainly possible. The ruins of Babylon still exists (modern day Iraq) and could be rebuilt. Others argue that Babylon is Rome (e.g., 1 Peter 5:13, often understood to refer to Rome) or some other city (some say Babylon here is the United States). Whether or not Babylon is literally rebuilt seems to miss the bigger picture here. All that the actual city of Babylon represents in terms of false apostate religion is destroyed (chapter 17), and all that she represents in terms of corrupt commercialism is destroyed (chapter 18). These destructions are global in their effects.

18:11 “And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:”

It is not only the merchants in Babylon, but of the entire planet, that mourn Babylon's destruction. This is why I indicated in the previous verse that we should see this as a global judgment on a corrupt commercial system. That system gained the wealth of a queen through sin (18:5-6) and the sale of merchandise. The point seems to be that in the selling of goods, corrupt and sinful means are exploited. God's standards are sacrificed on the altar of the almighty dollar. As Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 6:10, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” It is not the case that capitalism, for instance, is evil *per se*. But the reality is that too many people are willing to go to any length to make a dollar, even Christians (recall God's admonition in 18:4). These days, we hear of the billions of dollars that are made on drugs, abortions, pornography, and weapons. All of these things are stamped, “Made in Babylon.” Slavery is on the rise and has become a serious problem, even in the United States. And with this sort of commerce comes great power, and great exploitation of people. We read of United States companies opening shop overseas to exploit near slave labor conditions. Their wealthy CEO's (and the politicians they own) defend paying a grown man 50 cents a day to work in a sweat shop and charging him for the purchase of a cardboard box he lives in by saying the wages are competitive for that country and everyone else is doing it there. Be sure that God takes a record of how we treat the people around us, and our business dealings are not excluded. We are called to love (indeed, made to love), and when we live a lifestyle of opportunism and hate in the name of “good business” or obligations to shareholders, we can rest assured that

vengeance is God's. God will bring it to a sudden end and that destruction will include those that choose to live in Babylon.

18:12 "The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble,"

Here, we see the products of Babylon. The fancy jewelry, clothes, furniture and utensils, all the stuff of wealth that is the product stamped "Made in Babylon" will be removed from her, leaving her with nothing. We can draw some conclusions from the list of items. They speak of great wealth, but also (see next verse) of sin.

18:13 "And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men."

Continuing the thought from the last verse, the fine spices and perfumes, the luxury foods (wine and oil and "fine flour" and wheat), and the expensive animals will be taken from her as well. Note that the chariots refer to her commercialism of weapons. We see today a practice of companies (as in WWII) selling weapons to the highest bidder, be they terrorists or otherwise. And the slavery is brought to an end. Do not believe for a moment that slavery ever ended. Not only is slavery alive and well, the trafficking of people is on the rise exponentially and almost always for sinful purposes. The reference to the "souls of men" refers to peoples' lives. Babylon's stock-in-trade includes peoples' lives.

18:14 "And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all."

The "fruits," that is, the luxurious benefits of this sinful commercialism, are taken away from Babylon. Her soul "lusted" after the stuff of wealth, and God takes it all away, the "dainty and goodly." And Babylon will never regain its status as queen; she "shall find them no more at all."

18:15 "The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,"

Now we see why the merchants wept at her burning. They were made wealthy by her, but thinking they can escape her destruction, they stand at distance from the city as it burns. You can look at what people cry about and learn about what they love. These pathetic people do not just get upset at Babylon's destruction, they weep and wail. It is for them as if a loved one has died. Their hearts are bound up with the stuff they have accumulated in this world, not in the things of God.

18:16 "And saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!"

The "Mourning Merchants" testify of Babylon's now has-been greatness. She wore the finest clothes (purple and scarlet, just as in the last chapter) and jewelry. This woman arrayed in the best clothes and jewelry money can buy is figurative for a successful commercialism, a booming world economy that makes certain men (the Mourning Merchants) very wealthy on the backs of others. We should not be surprised at the reaction of the Mourning Merchants. We need only watch the reactions of those at the New York Stock Ex-

change when it closes high. They jump and clap for joy, then rejoin the circus the next day. And if it closes low, they weep. They love the wealth which gives them great confidence in themselves, and generally, they do not care how the money is generated. This system has no ethic, no standard of morality; it is only guided by the pursuit of money, and the ends justify any and all of the means. Any commercial system that leaves God out will become corrupt and evil.

18:17 “For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off,”

God will bring it down “in one hour,” that is, very, very quickly. At one time, the idea that the world economy could tank in an hour, or even a day or a week would be mocked as ludicrous. But the economic uncertainty that followed September 11 demonstrates that the world has changed. With the globalization of the economy, and the wealth and evils that followed, the system is more delicately balanced. It is very reasonable that this system could crash in a day. When this occurs, the ship captains, carrying their cargo to the ports of Babylon, stand afar off to watch it burn. Her destruction brings their business to a halt. In other words, with the fall of the commercial system, international shipping of goods halts as well.

18:18 “And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What *city* is like unto this great city!”

The captains are shocked. No city was quite like Babylon. The economy was so strong they could not believe its sudden destruction. Babylon burns, and they see the smoke from the ships. The captains order an all stop and those on board the vessels just watch in amazement.

18:19 “And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.”

In the ancient world, and still in some cultures today, part of the outward demonstration of sorrow is putting dust on one’s head (e.g., Joshua 7:6). The captains are not simply upset, but instead, they are in deep mourning, because Babylon, which had made them rich (the robust global economy means big money for the shipping industry), is fallen. Again, it is emphasized how suddenly she fell. Her fall was so unexpected that observers respond very emotionally.

18:20 “Rejoice over her, *thou* heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.”

Not everyone mourns the destruction of commercial Babylon. She brought about the martyrdom of many of God’s apostles and prophets, and they and the rest of the martyrs in heaven are told to rejoice because God has avenged them.

18:21 “And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast *it* into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

John sees a mighty angel lift a great millstone and cast it into the sea. This task requires a mighty angel because of the great size and weight of this millstone. The millstone looks

like a stone disk with a hole in the middle. Typical millstones are several feet across. It may be that this one is tailor made for the woman Babylon, so perhaps it is considerably larger than most millstones. In any event, it is large and immensely heavy. A rope can be tied to the victim, and through the hole in the middle of the millstone, so that when it is cast into the sea, the victim is held down and drowned. That is the fate of Babylon, cast to the bottom of the sea to never be seen again. Obviously, this is figurative since Babylon is personified as a woman and, in earlier verses, was seen burning; Babylon cannot both burn and drown. As the notes have previously indicated, literal Babylon is in view insofar as the corrupt commercial system that started there and characterized the city, but at the same time, the influence of the city has spread globally so that much more than the one city is in view throughout this chapter.

18:22 “And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft *he be*, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;”

The sound of music is gone from Babylon. Music is typically associated with joy, but because all of her joy is taken away, so is the music. All of the craftsmen are taken away from her as well, which means that her commerce is gone. And the millstone is taken from her, meaning that agriculture and milling are gone as well. This is a picture of Babylon the Ghost-town. The once great city is deserted. Moving back from the symbol to the actual events, what we have is a collapsed world economy. The temporal joy associated with the system is gone, there is tremendous unemployment, and commerce (the millstone) has essentially screeched to a halt.

18:23 “And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.”

That the light of the candle shines no more indicates that this is a ghost-town; the people have deserted the city so that no more candles burn. Moreover, the normal course of life is gone; people are no longer marrying in the city because they have left. Babylon's merchants “were” (note the past tense) the great men of the earth, but no more. The last clause in this verse is particularly relevant. Babylon did not just sin in its own right, but deceived other nations into partaking in its sin, and the deception was accomplished through “sorceries.” This word indicates “witchcraft” (see its use in Galatians 5:20). What we get a glimpse of here is the connection between the religious Babylon of chapter 17 and the commercial Babylon of this chapter. These are two distinct aspects of Babylon so that the destruction is seen in two phases, but the two cannot be fully separated. The reason is that any commercial system that leaves God out (religious Babylon) inevitably becomes corrupt and sinful.

18:24 “And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.”

This final verse reminds us of the martyrs killed by Babylon. I believe this verse applies equally to both aspects of Babylon. Apostate Babylon killed those who stood up for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and commercial Babylon killed those who stood up for God's standards in business relations. For power and money, Babylon was willing to murder. In the final verdict, her sins have come back on her own head by the hand of God Almighty.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*, Tyndale House Publishers (1983)

RECOMMENDATION

It is highly recommended that each person taking this course read chapter 18 for this lesson and chapter 19 for next week in Henry M. Morris' commentary.