

Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great!

Revelation 18

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Babylon is present in every major section of the Bible, and in fully 20 of the Bible's 66 books. Starting from the Tower of Babel, which is Babylon in the time before the Flood, Babylon has been the enemy of the people of God, and the enemy of God Himself all throughout the Bible. It is the place where the seed of the serpent gathers together. What happens to Babylon? Babylon is judged in the Flood for trying to be higher and better than God. The sin of pride is Babylon's downfall, and it is due to the Tower of Babel that there are so many languages out there today. Babylon became a world power and started trying to dominate all other countries around them, eventually succeeding in the late 7th and early 6th centuries B.C. However, pride is always Babylon's problem, with Nebuchadnezzar being a prime example. Not giving glory to God, but being a glory thief, he tried to take credit for the things of which God alone should have had the glory. Babylon always tries to reach to the heavens, and the only thing they get is a fall. It is a picture of mankind in the Fall, and it tells us that man is always falling. Some people think that humanity is always getting better. Perhaps that is true in some areas. But in other ways, humanity is just getting worse. Our text this morning tells us not only of the ultimate and final downfall of Babylon, but also of people's reactions to it, some of which are sinful, and some of which are godly. The structure of the passage is pretty simple. Verses 1-3 tell us that Babylon falls. Verses 4-20 give us the various reactions to the fall, and then verses 21-24 tell us the meaning of Babylon's fall. The overall point is that Babylon is fallen, never to rise again.

So, first we see in verses 1-3 that Babylon falls. The proclamation comes first, in verse 2. The word "fallen" is repeated to show that this is not just some slow decline. It is an irreversible catastrophe. An angel from heaven calls out with a mighty voice. Babylon has become a prison, or a haunted place, only instead of being haunted with ghosts, it is a place haunted by demons, unclean birds, and unclean beasts. Man was ordered to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Babylon fails utterly in doing what God commands. And so, what we might call humanity's calling is completely reversed. There will be no people left in Babylon.

Next, we see in verses 4-20 the various reactions to this state of affairs. The first reaction is God's own reaction. He commands His people to vote with their feet, as it were, and leave Babylon. Of course, as one commentator notes, this is not talking about a geographic relocation, as if people were moving from one location to another. Rather, it is an inward reorientation. The Bible very often tells God's people to come out of the world, spiritually speaking. Sometimes that is symbolized by coming out of Egypt, for instance. But as we noted in our Exodus

sermons, it is a lot easier to get the Israelites out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the Israelites.

John notes that Babylon's sins are piled up to heaven. Remember the Tower of Babel? They tried to reach heaven with bricks and stones. All they wind up doing is reaching up with a pile of sins. So it is here as well. The primary sin is listed in verse 7: she glorified herself. She said that she was queen. She thought that she was invulnerable. Look at the end of verse 7, "and will not see sorrow." For that reason, her downfall will be incredibly fast. As one commentator puts it, the super consumer will herself be consumed by fire. This is a just punishment, as verse 6 makes very clear. The word translated "double" really means "full recompense." She is getting exactly what she gave out.

The second reaction is that of the people who did business with Babylon. We see this reaction in verses 9-19. The kings of the earth committed sexual immorality with Babylon, and now they are afraid that the same judgment that came on Babylon will come on them. They try to stand far off in order to distance themselves from Babylon, but they know that that isn't really going to work. Twice the text says that they stand far off, in fear of her torment, once in verse 10, and once in verse 15. In verse 17 also, the people stand far off, though it doesn't mention fear. We know from later chapters that anyone associated with the beast or the harlot will be thrown into the lake of fire. So, even though they try to distance themselves from the punishment that Babylon will receive, it will be too late by that time, because their hearts will be hard.

The reason that they lament is that no one will buy their products anymore. The cargo is listed in verses 12-13. There are 28 items listed here. It is possible that there is a significance to the number 28, which is 4 X 7 (the number of the earth and the number of perfection: in other words, this is possibly talking about all commercial interests in Babylon, wherever Babylon might be). Why such a long list of things? Firstly, it is because the idol of "stuff" is being mocked here. Babylon is all about getting more and more stuff. Most of the things on here are not bad in and of themselves. Except the very last item. Babylon was buying and selling human beings as slaves. But all that buying and consuming doesn't get Babylon anywhere. The fruit of it is all gone, as verse 14 says.

The problem with this reaction is that it is the wrong reaction. The proper reaction to the downfall of Babylon is repentance. That is quite clear from the command in verse 4 that God's people "come out of her." The problem is that the people who are idolizers of more and more stuff will never rejoice at the destruction of their idol. Instead, they will seek to prop it up, no matter how many times it falls down. Remember when the ark of the Lord came into the temple of Dagon in 1 Samuel? Dagon keeps on falling down, and the Philistines have to keep on propping up their false god in the presence of the true one. And what is their response? Do the Philistines repent of their idolatry and start worshiping the

God Who will hold His people up instead of needing to be propped up himself? No, they don't repent. They keep on worshiping their stupid god Dagon, who can't even take care of himself, much less rescue anyone else. So, this reaction of the people of the world shows a hardness of heart that will refuse to repent.

The third reaction is that of God's people. It is located in verse 20, and it is a clear rejoicing. We are supposed to rejoice when the counterfeit church falls into ruins. Why are we supposed to rejoice when that happens? Because justice will be served, and that is always a reason for rejoicing. Just as we saw in the children's sermon, we know that in all good stories, the bad guy is supposed to get what's coming to him. There is pleasure when we see the good guys live happily ever after, and we see the bad guys get what's coming to them. It's even better when there is what we call a "poetic justice." That is when the punishment fits the crime in a particularly satisfying and corresponding way. As we saw in verse 6, Babylon will get exactly what she deserves, and it will be obviously, satisfyingly just. It is God's judgment that will accomplish this.

The last section of the chapter shows us what the fall of Babylon means. When the angel picks up a huge millstone and throws it into the sea, we are supposed to hear the huge "whoosh" and splash it makes, but then we are supposed to notice how quickly that stone disappears from view. Yeah, there's a big splash, but then the rock is gone. Fast. Several times in this chapter, we see that Babylon's downfall will be very speedy.

What does the fall of Babylon mean? Verses 22-24 tell us that Babylon will be judged completely justly. You see, what Babylon did was to take away all the joys of life for Christians. Oftentimes, that meant taking away the entire life of the Christian in murder. Sometimes it meant merely making life very miserable for Christians. But, just as Babylon took away the joy of life for Christians, so also will all her joy of life be taken away. No more music, no more craftsmen, no more grain milling, no more lamps, no more marriage. Take the craftsmen in verse 22. Probably John has his glance on the fact that Christians were being rejected from the trade guilds that existed in Rome at the time. If they are going to reject Christian craftsmen from the guilds, then they are going to lose all their craftsmen. If they took away the music from the Christian's life, then there will be no more music for Babylon. If they love the darkness so much, then they will be shut out in the utter darkness with not even a lamp to light their way. They will get what they want, only to find out that it is no picnic at all. There will be no life in Babylon, because in Babylon was found the lifelessness of the prophets and of the saints, as verse 24 says.

Notice the difference between these negative statements about Babylon and the negative statements about the true church, the new Jerusalem. The end of Babylon means no more music, no more craftsmen, no more grain-grinding, no more lamps, and no more marriage. In the new Jerusalem, as described in chapter

21, there is no more sea (the source of chaos), no more death, no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain. Which set of negatives do you want? Both Babylon and the New Jerusalem will experience extreme deprivation. The difference is that Babylon will be deprived of *all good* things, whereas the New Jerusalem will be deprived of *all bad* things.

The ultimate question is which woman will we join? And how will we react to the fall of Babylon? Babylon will fall, make no mistake about it. It is an absolute certainty. Will you rejoice over that fall, or will you mourn over that fall? How about praying for the downfall of Babylon? Yes, it is a certainty, but we should still pray for the downfall of Babylon. Praying for the downfall of Babylon means praying for the downfall of Satan's kingdom.

We should leave Babylon, and any remaining traces of Babylon that linger on in our hearts. In a way, the entire Christian life can be described as a constant leaving of Babylon, and a constant entering of the New Jerusalem. It's hard to do. All those nice things listed in verses 12-13 are enticing, aren't they? But when they become idols, they turn ugly. As we said, except for human slaves, everything else in that long list are things that are good in and of themselves. However, they obviously became idols for those trading with Babylon.

So, Babylon is falling, is falling. Come out of her, rejoice in her downfall, pray for her downfall, realize how much Babylon hates God's people, because of all the blood that she has spilled. Know that she will fall very quickly when it comes. It will be amazing how fast Babylon falls. Be satisfied in the poetic justice that Babylon will experience, as all the things she inflicted on Christians will come home to roost. Babylon will be no more. And that will be a good and great thing indeed.