

Babylon is Fallen

REVELATION 18:1-3

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^[a] 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! ³For 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."

This week we back up a little bit in our survey of the Book of Revelation. Chapter 19, as we discussed in our last message, sees the Marriage of the Bride to the Bridegroom. The Saints, naturally celebrate this monumental event. It is in chapter 19 that the great multitude rejoices and shouts with a glorious, "Alleluia, Salvation and Glory and power belong to the Lord our God." But what is it, that brings this jubilant praise?

Well the answer to that question is the events that are spelled out in chapter 18. Chapter 18 begins with a great angel that comes down. This does not seem to be just an ordinary angel, because our text tells us that this angel that had great authority, illumines the whole earth with his glory. It sounds an awful lot like the famous squirrel to me. To those who do not know what I am talking about. There was a little boy in the Sunday School class and the teacher asked him, "What is brown and lives in a tree and eats nuts?" The boy responded that he knew the answer had to be Jesus, but it sounded an awful lot like a squirrel. I cannot say definitively who this angel is, but one thing we do know is He is definitely not an ordinary angel.

I would like to talk about this for a bit before we move on. There is a teaching advocated by certain cult groups, specifically the Jehovah's Witnesses, where they teach that the arch-angel Michael is Jesus. Of course, this in itself is not necessarily problematic. The problem comes in when they make the arch-angel a created being. John Calvin saw Michael the Arch-Angel as a description of the pre-incarnate Christ. Of Course, Calvin recognized that this did not mean that Christ was a created being. He

saw the arch-angel as a description of the angel's function, not as a description of a type of created being. Arch-angel, or head of the angel's much in the same way that Joshua describes the Captain of the Lord's host who met Joshua as the children of Israel were preparing to enter the promised land in Joshua Chapter 5. What I want us to be aware of is how the New Testament uses the word angel. The word *αγγελος* means literally messenger or angel. The word angel is used several times in this book and we have careful what image we get in our head when we hear this word. I enjoy some of the ancient art, but when they deal with angel's it is important that we are aware how badly they have distorted our view of the way angel's are treated in the Scripture.

This angel at the beginning of this chapter is an exceedingly mighty messenger of God, and He is bringing forth message from the throne. Babylon, that great City, the enemy of God's people has fallen. Now, it has been several weeks since we last discussed this, but let us put back into our mind, who Babylon is. In Revelation 17, she is called mystery Babylon. This is an indication that her meaning is likely not going to be found by going to a map and locating Babylon on the map. Mystery Babylon is, as we have taught earlier in this series, the ancient city of Jerusalem. To further point this out, we read that "

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! ³For 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."

The City of peace, the City of David, the place where the Holy of Holies had been, was now a prison for demons, and unclean and hated birds. The place that our Lord cried and lamented over in Matthew 23 when he said,

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing! ³⁸ See! Your house is left to you desolate.

This once glorious city is now referred to as Babylon the Great, and her doom is certain. I want something else to be noticed about the fallen state of Babylon. We have already seen that swift and sudden destruction is going to come upon her, but she is fallen even before she is destroyed. She has become an unacceptable offering. The reasoning for this is spelled out in these earlier passages. The nations have drunk of the wine of her fornication, and 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.

This takes us back to the Old Testament, where we are told that Israel is meant to be a light to the nations. Now as we listen to this verse, remember that the Church of Jesus Christ which constitutes the New Israel, has the same commission that was given to the nation of Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:5-9 tells us:

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. ⁶ Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

⁷ "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? ⁸ And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? ⁹ Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren...

Israel was called, chosen, and set apart by Jehovah God for a purpose. Her purpose was to be a light to the nations. The nations were to look at her and from that inspection they were to ask questions. "What nation is this that has such amazing laws and statutes?" But Israel, by the time we are

speaking about in this passage has become a mockery. They claim a special relationship with God and yet they are really no different from any of the nations around them. God has called them to be holy and they have become abominable. The Church of Jesus Christ has the same commission, we are called to be Holy, set apart, distinct from those around us and they are specifically warned about this in Romans when we are warned to consider Israel. Romans 11:19-21 tells us, "You will say then 'Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well said, because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear, For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either." You see, the reason Israel, had fallen from their lofty estate, was because they had fallen into unbelief. They had neglected God's Word and began embracing their own ideas. They saw themselves, as special and chosen. But they did not understand that they were special and chosen to be a light not to blend in.

As you read through the Old Testament, one of the themes we often see is Israel trying being upset because they wanted to be just like everyone else. They would murmur and complain, because they did not have a King like the other nations, they would emulate the nations, by offering the children to walk through the fire, all the while they are moving further away from the God who called them out, and finally here in Rev. 18, we see God finally showing them, well, if you want to be like the other nations, here you go. Rather than think and believe the way God wanted them to think, they conformed their thinking to man's thinking. Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*

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.⁵For her sins have reached^[a] to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. ⁶Render to her just as she rendered to you,^[a] and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. ⁷In 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.' ⁸Therefore 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^[a] her.

We now come to a passage in the text where God's people, those who are obedient, those who actually hear his voice are given a strong warning. They are told, "Come out of her, my people." Notice, this is a command given directly to the people of God. In John 10 Jesus says, "*And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.*" What is very interesting about this passage, is the very next verse, where John says, *Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.*

My thoughts here are that here in Revelation 18, Jesus is making sure that His people understand what He is saying. He is calling them out. For centuries the Lord has been warning Israel. "Return to me, Return to your calling." Finally Jesus issued His final warning against apostate, Israel, and he told them, that this generation would not perish until all the things He was saying had taken place. He warned them in Matthew 24 that when they saw the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet that they were to flee the city. And now we have this final call out. The end is coming. Get out of her my people. The Lord's sheep hear his voice and leave, those who are "left behind", will be partakers of God's full wrath. In Matthew 23 we read that all the righteous blood shed on earth would be poured out on this generation." The Apostle Paul gives another reason for this judgment on apostate Israel in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16 They ..." killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, ¹⁶**forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of their sins*; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost."**

Apostate Israel, had become apostate, because of her unwillingness to be the light that God had called them to be. Their sinfulness, their disobedience to their calling has become to them a way of life, and now God warns his people, "Come out of her." The reason for this command is "Lest you share in their sins, and partake in her plagues." But the command is more than just to flee. The judgment on the persecutor is also presented as redemption for those who belong to Christ. Luke 21:28-31 tells us "*Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.*"²⁹ Then He spoke to them a parable: "*Look at the fig tree, and all the trees.*"³⁰ When they are

already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near. ³¹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near."

The events in this chapter are the final judgments against what has been the chief persecutor of those faithful to Christ, and with their removal, the Kingdom will be made fully manifest. With the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, which had become the dwelling place of demons, the new Heavenly Temple would be fully established.

The text at this point shifts to a proclamation of judgment. The judgment in this section is similar to a judge now issuing sentence.

Render to her just as she rendered to you,^[a] and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. ⁷In 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.' ⁸Therefore 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^[a] 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, ¹⁰standing 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.'

There is some debate as to who this sentence is proclaimed to. Is it a proclamation to the heavenly angles, or is it a proclamation to the Roman armies. Some people, have issue with the latter idea, but one of the themes we need to understand is that it is not an issue, for God to use sometimes wicked human institutions to carry out His divine and heavenly purpose, whatever the case may be here, what we should see here, is that God is delivering His justice in accordance with Biblical Law. The decree is that Babylon, this wicked city, would be paid back double for what she had done. In the law of Moses in Exodus 22 the laws of restitution are spelled out, and now the Lord is declaring that these laws, which the people of Israel had known, and had not used, and instead had actually twisted for the

purposes of glorifying themselves instead of God would now be poured out against them unmixed.

How do we know that this is the reason that this judgment is being poured out this way, because the Lord addresses the very problem. *"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 judges⁹ her."*

Rather than recognizing her need and her hunger she instead gloried in herself. In many ways she had allowed her selves to be deceived. The very foundations of the nation were crumbling and rather than repent and turn to God, they gloried in themselves. If we cannot see a parallel to sinful man in this, I would say we are not really paying close attention. The similarities to the early warnings to the Church of Laodicea are quite striking.

Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

The counsel that our Lord gave to Laodicea back in Chapter 3 was that they would buy from Him *gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*¹⁹ *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

Sadly, much like many today, Apostate Israel had bundles of fools' gold that they thought they could get by with, but the Lord calls them out. He points out their nakedness, and of course, people do not like to be reminded that they are not sufficient in themselves to accomplish anything. They would rather exchange the truth for a lie and as we will see, and as we do see judgment always comes. In this case they are told that judgment would come in one day. Everything they had placed their faith in would be destroyed in one day. It would be destroyed with plagues, pestilence, and mourning and with famine, and she will be burned with fire.

One of the things that I find very interesting about this verse is the last line that says she will be burned with fire. If you ask any Sunday School student

what the method of execution used in the Bible was, they can tell you that it is "stoning." However, there was one major exception to this, and it was spelled out in Leviticus 21. The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire. Now here we have Israel, specifically Jerusalem who is accused of playing the harlot. She has fornicated with the nations of the earth, and her end will be in burning fire.

There are some who have an issue with my interpretation of this verse because of the reference to the judgment coming in just one day. But remember, the day that is being spoken of is "The dreadful and awesome day of the Lord" Which has been often spoken of throughout the pages of the Scripture. Where the Day of the Lord is redemption to the Children of God, it is judgment to those who oppose Him.

"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, ¹⁰standing 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: ¹²merchandise 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; ¹³and 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.¹⁴The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you,^[e] and you shall find them no more at all. ¹⁵The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, ¹⁶and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! ¹⁷For 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 distance ¹⁸and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?'

God's judgment that He pours out on Israel is not only a cataclysmic event in the history of Israel, it is also quite a spectacle to the Kings of the nations of the earth. Here they are referred to as the kings of the earth who had committed fornication with the harlot. They see the smoke of her burning, which is a specific reference to the judgment of Sodom in Genesis 19. This burning, judgment is a warning to them. The Lord had warned not only the people of God, He had also warned the nations around the people of God. In Jeremiah 25 he tells that they too would experience the cup of God's wrath.

And it shall be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you shall say to them, 'Thus says Jehovah of hosts: "You shall certainly drink! ²⁹ For behold, I begin to bring calamity on the city which is called by My name, and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished, for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth," says Jehovah of hosts.'

The destruction of this city was a warning to all nations.

It was also a warning to the merchants of the land. God had promised His people throughout the Old Covenant that they would be a prosperous and a mighty nation, if they obeyed God. We see, upon careful consideration of the text that they did experience great material prosperity. But as a nation they had failed to heed God's warning in Deuteronomy 8 Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, ¹² lest—*when* you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell *in them*; ¹³ and *when* your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; ¹⁴ when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; ¹⁵ who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, *in which were* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; ¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end— ¹⁷ then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

¹⁸ "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for *it is* He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.

The merchants of the Land had experienced great prosperity, but like all those in the land who had forgotten the source of their strength, they had

forgotten God. They had glorified themselves in pride and instead of looking to God they began to look at themselves as the source of their great prosperity. When the great city was destroyed they respond in the exact same way that the Kings of the earth respond, they say "Alas, Alas, the great city has fallen." I do prefer the King James rendering her, which says the words, "woe, woe." I think it more accurately portrays the sentiment of the people who have placed their trust in a city which is now being revealed to be built on a foundation of sand rather than stone.

The text continues with the ship merchants also mourning because of her loss of wealth and prosperity with the destruction of this city. She too cries, woe, woe, and then we see the final judgment poured out upon Babylon the great. There are very many things in this passage which are very telling, but what I think we want to see her possibly more than anything else is how the effect of idolatry and unbelief is never just a private sin. The city that was to be a light is a city darkened by idolatry, and now she is destroyed, and we see the affect upon all those tainted and ruined by her idolatry. The entire world is in a state of upheaval and yet in verse 20, though we may be tempted to sorrow and grieve the Lord tells us, "*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!*" The destruction of this city is life to the redeemed.

²¹Then 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. ²²The 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. ²³The 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. ²⁴And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

Our text ends with the final judgment a giant millstone is thrown into the sea. Signifying the end of this city. Matthew 18:6 says that Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. This then is the final

judgment of the City. With violence she is destroyed and the heavens rejoice with harpists, musicians, flutes and trumpets. Her light has been extinguished, because in her the nations who were to be enlightened instead were deceived, and the blood of the prophets and saints were shed by her.

This entire 18th chapter is a passage that foretells judgment upon this city. The details are striking, but they are nothing new. They are judgments that had literally been spoke for generations upon generations. But there time had run out. But it is not only a judgment upon Israel it is a warning to us. Where is our strength? Where do look for our salvation? To whom do we look for salvation. Idols of false believe, trust in the wrong things, will lead us to the same place. And where we place our trust is not only an indication of who we are, it is also a testimony to the World around us. Are we a living testimony to the people around us? Well, yes we are, but do we testify of God's light and His grace, or are we pointing to ourselves. Do we recognize that we are poor, blind and naked, or do we flatter ourselves with platitudes and hopeful optimism. We are called to be lights. To point the way to Christ, and Christ alone. Let us not allow our own self interest and pride to get in the way. Let us rejoice in what pleases God and not what pleases ourselves. Let us never forget that we have been bought with a price and let us follow the voice of our Good Shepherd.