

Lesson 28: Chapter 18

Revelation 17 unveiled the seductive power and spiritual corruption of Babylon, the great prostitute who rides the beast. Now, in **Revelation 18**, we witness her sudden and total collapse. What was once alluring and mighty is exposed as empty and judged by God. Augustine once said that all of human history is a tale of two cities: the City of Man and the City of God. **Revelation 18** shows us the fate of the City of Man; It will fall, and great will be its fall.



[1] After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. [2] And he called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast. [3] For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living."

[4] Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; [5] for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. [6] Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. [7] As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, 'I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see.' [8] For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her."

[9] And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. [10] They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say, "Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."

[11] And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, [12] cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble,

[13] cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls. [14] "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!" [15] The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud, [16] "Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! [17] For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste."

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off [18] and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, "What city was like the great city?" [19] And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out, "Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste."

[20] Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"

[21] Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; [22] and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, [23] and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. [24] And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

(Revelation 18, ESV)

Liturgical Play

This chapter unfolds like a sacred drama, with different voices responding to the fall of Babylon. Each speaker steps forward in turn, some to declare, some to mourn, and one to rejoice. The language is poetic, prophetic, and purposeful. It's not just a story about Babylon's fall, it's a call for us to consider how we respond to her fall.

Cast of Voices (Section Headings)

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2. A Voice from Heaven (vv. 4–8)
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The Bright Angel (vv. 1–3)

Revelation 18 opens with a striking new vision: an angel descends from heaven “*having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory*”. This angel is not the same as the one from **Revelation 17**; here, the heavenly messenger serves as a herald of Babylon's final judgment. The splendor of his arrival contrasts sharply with the filth and ruin he announces: “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!*” This is a prophetic past tense; the fall is so certain that it is spoken of as already accomplished. The angel's words echo **Isaiah 13:19–22** and **Isaiah 21:9**, where the historical fall of Babylon prefigures God's judgment against the proud.

Babylon is now described not as a queen (cf. **Revelation 18: 7**) but as a haunted ruin, a dwelling place for demons, a prison for unclean spirits and birds, and unclean and detestable beasts. These images recall the prophetic pictures of Babylon's desolation in Isaiah and Jeremiah, where her former glory gives way to wilderness, wild creatures, and haunting silence. When one reads four “*haunt*” clauses in the text, the point is vivid and unmistakable: what was once luxurious is now loathsome. Babylon is unmasked as not only seductive, but defiled, both spiritually and ritually unclean.

The angel explains why such judgment has come: Babylon has spread her spiritual adultery throughout the world. Nations, kings, and merchants have all been intoxicated by her influence, drawn in by her sensuality, wealth, and power. This is not merely literal immorality, but symbolic of her idolatry, a world system arrayed against God, offering pleasure and prosperity in exchange for compromise and worship.

This opening section sets the tone for the chapter: Babylon's fall is not just a historical event but a theological certainty. The world that seems so secure, so influential, so alluring, will fall. Behind Babylon's glamour is spiritual rot. Behind her power is demonic corruption. Her end is total and just. For the Church, this is both a warning and a comfort. Do not envy Babylon. Cling not to her. For her fall is sure, and those who love her will share her fate.

A Voice from Heaven (vv. 4–8)

Revelation 18:4–8 shifts from announcement to exhortation. John hears another voice, not from the earth, not from Babylon's mourners, but from heaven itself. The voice calls to God's covenant people with urgent clarity: “*Come out of her, my people.*” This is not a call to physical evacuation, as if believers could escape the world. It is a call to spiritual separation, to refuse Babylon's values, to resist her seductions, to avoid being swept up in her sins so that we will not share in her judgment.

The early Church understood this well. In the second-century Epistle to Diognetus, the anonymous writer describes Christians as those who “live in their own countries, but as sojourners,” who “share in all things as citizens, and yet endure all things as foreigners.” They dwell in the world,

but they do not partake in its corruption. This is what it means to come out of Babylon while still living within her borders.

The reason is plain: Babylon's sins are heaped high to heaven. She has glorified herself and lived in luxury. She boasts like ancient Babylon, *"I sit as a queen, I am no widow, and mourning I shall never see"* (cf. [Isaiah 47:7-9](#)). But the voice from heaven proclaims that her judgment will be sudden and severe: death, mourning, famine, and fire. Her downfall will be neither random nor capricious. It will be a fitting response to her arrogance and idolatry. *"Repay her double"* does not mean excessive vengeance; it means precise justice. *"Double"* here does not mean twice as much, but rather a mirrored repayment; her judgment will match her deeds exactly. As Babylon drained the cup of sin (filled with the blood of the saints), so, too, will she drain the cup of wrath.

This is a gracious warning to the Church. The greatest threat to our souls is not external opposition, but internal compromise. It is easy to grow comfortable with Babylon, to enjoy her luxuries, crave her approval, adopt her values, and assume her false sense of security. But the voice from heaven calls us to discernment and holiness. If we are God's people, we must come out of her, not in body, but in heart.

The Kings of the Earth (vv. 9-10)

The first human voices of lament in [Revelation 18](#) come from *"the kings of the earth"*. These are the political rulers who once aligned themselves with Babylon's power and partook in her immorality and luxury (cf. [Revelation 17:2](#); [18:3](#)). Now they stand at a distance, watching the smoke of her burning, weeping and wailing. But their grief is not repentance, it is regret. They mourn their loss, not her evil.

"Alas! Alas! You great city, you mighty city, Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."

The Greek word translated *"alas"* is οὐαί, elsewhere translated as "woe" (e.g., [Revelation 8:13](#); [12:12](#)). It is the same word the angels and prophets use when pronouncing divine judgment, but here it is placed on the lips of Babylon's lovers. The ESV rightly distinguishes the tone: this is not the woe of a prophet but the lament of a profiteer. Likewise, the word translated *"wail"* (κόπτονται) means to beat one's chest in mourning. It appears earlier in [Revelation 1:7](#), where *"all tribes of the earth will wail"* when they see the Son of Man returning in glory. Some interpreters take that verse to describe a future Jewish repentance, but such a reading stretches the text. *"Those who pierced him"* refers not uniquely to ethnic Israel (who did not directly crucify Jesus, anyway), but to all who rejected Christ. And the *"mourning"* of [Revelation 1:7](#) should be interpreted in light of [Revelation 18](#). It is not repentance, but dread. The kings weep because Babylon is fallen; not because they have sinned, but because they have lost what they loved.

Their lament ends with a refrain that will be repeated by the merchants and sailors: *"For in a single hour your judgment has come."* The suddenness of Babylon's fall is what shocks them most. She seemed untouchable, *"mighty"* in the eyes of the world. But in a single hour, the illusion was shattered. These kings had wrapped their power around hers, and now they weep over a throne of smoke. Yet they remain at a distance, unwilling to share in her torment. Their loyalty was never love. It was profit.

This is a warning to every earthly power, every ruler, every heart tempted to find security in worldly alliances. The judgment of Babylon is the judgment of all who trust her. In her fall, God exposes the fragility of human kingdoms and the vanity of pride. Her lovers lament her, but they do not repent. They grieve their loss, not their sin.

The Merchants (vv. 11-17a)

Next to lament are *"the merchants of the earth"*, those who grew rich by selling their wares through Babylon's marketplace. But they do not weep because she was evil. They weep because *"no one buys their cargo anymore."* Their grief is purely economic. Babylon was their customer base, their gold mine, their gateway to power and indulgence. Now she is gone, and their wealth with her.

The list of cargo spans twenty-eight luxury items, from gold and silver to wine, flour, and livestock. It paints a picture of opulence and excess, what the world admires as success. But the list ends with a chilling revelation: *"and slaves, that is, human souls."* The merchants of Babylon were not just selling

goods; they were selling lives. The entire system, dressed in splendor, was built on exploitation and dehumanization. Babylon turned everything, even people, into something to be consumed.

The list's structure is not accidental. It contains 28 items, that is, 7 multiplied by 4. In Revelation's symbolic vocabulary, 7 signifies fullness or completeness, and 4 represents the world. Together, they portray a comprehensive picture of Babylon's global seduction. Her economic power touches every category of life: luxury, status, nourishment, and human dignity. This is not just trade; it is totalized idolatry dressed in glamour.

Then comes the divine verdict: *"The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you."* That which they craved most, pleasure, profit, power, is taken away, never to be found again. What they longed for is lost forever. The judgment is total, just, and irreversible.

And like the kings, the merchants stand at a distance. They cry out: *"Alas, alas, for the great city... for in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste!"* Their lament echoes the same refrain. What seemed permanent vanished in an instant. They invested everything in a kingdom that could not stand.

The Sailors (vv. 17b–19)

The final human lament comes from those whose livelihood depended on Babylon's commercial dominance at sea: shipmasters, sailors, and all who traded by water. They stand far off, like the kings and merchants before them, and they cry out at the sight of her smoke: *"What city was like the great city?"* It is a rhetorical question born of shock and loss. Babylon was unmatched. She dazzled the world with her wealth and made her clients rich. And now she is gone.

Their lament echoes that of [Ezekiel 27](#), where the merchants and sailors of Tyre weep over the downfall of another great maritime power. Babylon, like Tyre before her, was the envy of the nations. And like Tyre, she now lies shattered and silent beneath the waves of judgment. The sailors weep and wail, and they throw dust on their heads. They cry out, *"Alas, alas, for the great city... for in a single hour she has been laid waste!"* The repetition reinforces the point: her destruction is both sudden and total.

But like the kings and the merchants, these sailors mourn only their loss of wealth. They weep over her judgment, but not over her sins. Their grief is sincere, but it is not godly sorrow; it is the mourning of those who have lost their idol. And like the others, they keep their distance. They loved Babylon's profit, not Babylon herself. And with the profit gone, they weep, but they do not repent.

The Narrator / Heaven's Voice (v. 20)

At this point, the mourners fall silent, and a new voice breaks in. It is not another lament; it is a command: *"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!"* This is not the sailors speaking. This is a voice from God's side, either the narrator or a heavenly messenger, addressing the faithful and calling them to rejoice.

It is a striking reversal. The kings, the merchants, and the sailors wept over Babylon's fall, but heaven rejoices. Not because the Church delights in destruction for its own sake, but because God's justice has prevailed and we rightly delight in the destruction *of evil*. This is not *vindictiveness*. It is *vindication*. The prayer of the saints under the altar in [Revelation 6:10](#) is now answered (yet again, recapitulation). God has acted for His people, judging the system that seduced, enslaved, and slaughtered them.

This moment helps frame the entire chapter: those who loved Babylon mourn her fall, but those who love Christ rejoice in her defeat. It is not cruel to rejoice when evil is judged. It is holy. Babylon's collapse is the prelude to the Bride's final joy.

Another Mighty Angel (vv. 21–24)

To end the chapter, another mighty angel steps forward, this time, not to speak only, but to act. He takes up a great millstone and throws it into the sea. The gesture is borrowed from [Jeremiah 51](#), where the prophet gave a similar sign against ancient Babylon. The point is unmistakable: this judgment is swift, violent, and irreversible. Babylon is not simply wounded. She is drowned and gone.

Then comes the sixfold declaration of finality: “*No more.*” No music. No art. No labor. No light. No marriage. No life. Every sound of civilization, every sign of joy or creativity, is silenced. This is a total dismantling of her world. She is not reformed. She is removed.

Why such judgment? Because Babylon exalted herself through wealth, deceived the nations with idolatry, and shed the blood of God’s people. She stands condemned on every count. Her downfall is not merely tragic; it is just. And it is permanent.

This is how Babylon ends, not with repentance, not with redemption, but with ruin. She who once seemed invincible is cast like a stone into the sea. She is not coming back.

Conclusion

Revelation 18 is not just the obituary of a city, it is the divine verdict against a world system. Babylon is a symbol for the seductive, oppressive, God-defying powers of this age, powers that manifest in every empire, every economy built on exploitation, every culture that exalts pleasure over truth and self over God. Her downfall is dramatic, poetic, and final. She dazzled the kings, enriched the merchants, employed the sailors, and deceived the nations. But in the end, she is judged in a single hour; not gradually, not piecemeal, but with swift and total destruction.

This refrain, “*in a single hour [Babylon] has been laid waste*”, is more than poetic language. It is a theological declaration: when Christ returns, Babylon’s system will fall decisively and completely. There will be no time for a rebuilt Babylon, no opportunity for a reconstituted beast, and no intermediate stage in which Christ reigns over a world still in rebellion. **Revelation 18**, together with **Revelation 19** and **Revelation 20**, describes the end of this present age, not a transition into a thousand-year political kingdom. The dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and Babylon herself all meet their end together.

This is our eschatological hope: Christ returns, Babylon falls, the Church is vindicated, and the Age to Come begins. There is no room in this vision for a revived worldly system under Christ’s earthly reign.

Babylon is not reformed; she is replaced, not with an earthly Jerusalem, but with the heavenly one. Babylon’s ruin clears the stage for a new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells and where the Bride of Christ shines in glory.

So what is the call to the Church today? The same as with **Revelation 17**:

Do not mourn for Babylon.

Do not admire her beauty.

Do not envy her power.

Come out of her.

Her destruction is certain, her seduction deadly, and her judgment final. But for those who are in Christ, there is nothing to fear. Babylon falls so that the New Jerusalem may descend. Her wails are silenced so that hallelujahs may rise.

Do not long for the wealth of Babylon, but for the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.