

FALLEN, FALLEN IS BABYLON THE GREAT

Revelation 18

Introduction:

The great ancient city of Babylon is mentioned about 250 times in the Bible. About 150 of those times appear in the book of Jeremiah. In the last three chapters of Jeremiah you will find that name Babylon over 60 times as God, through the prophet Jeremiah, predicted the destruction and utter devastation of that great and powerful city.

Jeremiah's prophecy, especially the latter part of it, came during the first half of the seventy-year captivity of Judah. The Babylonian empire had risen to power following the decline of the powerful and ruthless Assyrian empire. During the time of Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar had invaded the land of Judah, ransacked Jerusalem and carried many of the residents, especially the brightest and most intelligent young men, to Babylon in the land of Shinar. Daniel was among those captives.

Clearly, a significant focus of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Babylon was the city as he knew it in his own day. God had used Babylon to crush the Assyrians, but then once they had fulfilled their purpose in bringing judgment on Judah for their sin and disobedience, he began to humble their great empire. Shortly after Jeremiah's prophecy, the power of Babylon began to weaken and they were soon destroyed by yet another empire, the kings of Persia, who were soon joined by the Medes—hence the Medo-Persian Empire. So much of Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled in the near future – the years immediately following his prophecy.

So that raises a question. In the book of Revelation, when it speaks of Babylon, it is referring to a rebuilt, restored Babylon or is it simply a symbolic prediction of a powerful end-time empire? There are scholars on both sides of that fence, but I believe that the evidence suggests that Babylon will be rebuilt. In fact, 30 years ago, Saddam Hussein already began rebuilding portions of the ancient city of Babylon. That created some renewed interest in the Bible prophecies concerning Babylon.

This morning we come to the 18th chapter of the book of Revelation. It deals almost exclusively with the destruction of Babylon toward the end of the Great Tribulation. Last week we looked at the rise and fall of the one-world religious system that rode on the back of the political system of the first half of the Tribulation. The ten kings were mesmerized by her and supported her, until her glory and power began to fade and they along with the beast, the Antichrist, turned against her and destroyed her near the middle of the Tribulation period.

Now in the 18th chapter we see what is to happen to Babylon itself—that great city, which it appears will be rebuilt as a powerful but corrupt political, economic and commercial center for the antichrist and his government. We need to begin by reading it. I am going to read the entire chapter at one time.

Read Revelation 18.

There are three key divisions in the message of destruction we find in this chapter. In vv. 1-8 we have the declaration of the fall of Babylon, along with a description of the judgement she is to face. In vv. 9-19 we see the lament of those who were trusting in the power and wealth of this wicked city, and are now facing the loss of their power and position. The chapter ends, in vv. 20-24, with the rejoicing of the righteous over what this means for them. So... let's get started...

Babylon's Destruction

"...another angel..." This angel is not identified, but there are two significant things stated about this messenger – great authority and great glory.

While the message of this angel is prophetic, the outcome is certain and his message is given as though it had already happened. Babylon, and all that it represents, is fallen. Its power and wealth—the political, economic and commercial dominion and supremacy that it held—would be no more. That's the thing about earthly kingdoms. They are temporary. When Babylon is destroyed, we are told in v. 2 that it will become a wilderness, possessed with imprisoned evil spirits hovering over the area like vultures over their prey. The once great city will no longer be fit for human habitation.

Verse 3 tells us that one of the reasons for this severe judgment of Babylon will be the global political and economic corruption originating in this city because of the rule of the Antichrist. *Review v. 3 briefly.*

Immediately, another voice issues a command to God's people to flee from Babylon so that they do not get caught up in her sins or her punishment for those sins. There are different opinions as to whether this refers to tribulation believers in general or specifically to the Jews. There is a similar call to the Jews to flee from the ancient city of Babylon before her destruction (see Jer. 50:4-8). Babylon's cup of iniquity is now full and God is preparing to destroy the city. Consequently God's people are urged to flee before the destruction.

The indictment against Babylon is given in vv. 6-8. Babylon is condemned to receive double the punishment she inflicted on others (v. 6). Because this city will vaunt itself against the God of heaven (v. 7), it will suffer a swift and sudden destruction by fire (v. 8).

Again, we can see the similarity with what happened to the ancient empire of Babylon, which fell the very night that God prophesied her destruction (Dan. 5 – Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall).

Mourning over Babylon's Destruction

In vv. 9-19 we read about the mourning—the weeping and wailing—over the destruction of this great and powerful city. There are three distinct groups of people who are seen in this passage lamenting the fall of Babylon. All of them were invested heavily in the great city. They had become rich and powerful by her, but now will be bankrupt by her destruction.

First, we have the lamentation of the kings, the political rulers of the world – vv. 9-10. Fruchtenbaum says,

“These are the seven kings who have co-reigned with the Antichrist and submitted their authority to the Antichrist, the king of Babylon. Whatever power or authority they held, was held by the grace of Babylon. Seeing their authority waning with Babylon's destruction, they will lament the swiftness of the judgment.”

They will view the destruction and wail over it from afar – read v. 10

The second group of mourners are the merchants – vv. 11-17a. During the Tribulation, Babylon will become the economic center of the world, the center of business and world trade. It will be a city characterized by luxury – see vv. 12-13. But it will suddenly all go up in smoke. The wealth of the merchants will vanish, as the city comes to ruin, and no one buys their merchandise any more – v. 11. They lament loudly as they see their wealth quickly laid waste – vv. 14-17a.

But there is a third group of mourners as well. We see them in vv. 17b-19. These are the shipmasters—the transporters of goods, who have also benefited from their association with Babylon. They too lament as they see their wealth disappearing. Since the merchants will no longer have merchandise to market, the shipmasters will have no merchandise to transport. Their means of wealth will be destroyed along with the destruction of Babylon.

However, there is another section left in this chapter. In v. 20 we have...

Rejoicing over the Destruction of Babylon

While the kings, the merchants and the shipmasters are lamenting over the destruction of Babylon and the loss of their wealth and power, there are also three groups rejoicing in heaven. *Read v. 20.* The saints, apostles and prophets are called to rejoice along with all of heaven. They are rejoicing to see the downfall of the greedy and powerful world system of Babylon. Why? Because Babylon represents all that is of this evil world system. And ... the destruction of Babylon will mark the soon return of the Messiah. It marks the end of the age of the earthly Gentile kingdoms and the coming of the Messianic kingdom.

Well, the passage ends with a picture of the totality of the destruction of Babylon – vv. 21-24. *Read v. 21.*

In the passage we read from the latter part of Jeremiah 51 earlier in the service, Jeremiah instructed Seraiah that after reading the words of condemnation on Babylon of his day, he was to tie a stone to the scroll and throw it into the Euphrates River to symbolize the sinking of the city of Babylon. He was to say, *“Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her.” (Jer. 51:64)*

Now another person, an angel this time, also casts a stone, the size of a millstone, into the sea to depict how totally Babylon will disappear so as not to be found anymore (v. 21). Verses 22-23 describe how Babylon's power and magnificence, her economic and commercial influence will be completely destroyed. Why? Because she was guilty of the blood of the prophets (e.g. the Two Witnesses) and the slaughter of the Tribulation saints – *read v. 24.*

Conclusion

So, the end is coming for the kingdoms of this world. The final Gentile kingdom, the revived Roman Empire, ruled from that great city, a restored Babylon, will come crashing down, in a moment as God prepares the way for the coming kingdom of the Messiah.

How does this apply to us? What can we take from this chapter of warning and destruction? Well, we are not living in the midst of this godless, restored Babylon, in all of its wealth and wickedness. However, we are living in a society that is not so much different from what we find in Revelation 18. Ungodly attitudes toward marriage, abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality and a host of other areas, are rampant in our world.

I would like to refer you to a call from God to his people in Rev. 18:4 – a call to come out so as not to be tainted or contaminated by the sins of Babylon, or caught in the destruction of that wicked city when the judgment fell.

We need to take that same command to heart. There are a couple of verses earlier in the Bible that issue that same injunction.

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.” (Isa 52:11 ESV)

“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,” (2Co 6:17 ESV)

Application – separation from the world...