b. The Second Vision (*Chapter 18*)

Whereas ***Chapter 17*** describes Babylon's ascent as a harlot and her defeat at the hands of the Antichrist, ***Chapter 18*** takes a different angle, focusing on the aftermath of her fall. The city of Babylon will be the Antichrist's bastion and will no doubt host much of his political and religious empire. But this city will also have a life of its own, apart from the Antichrist. Within its limits will be wealthy merchants who exert influence over the kings of the earth with their purse strings. With their power solely limited to wealth, they will wilt before the crushing political and military power of the Antichrist and his minions, leading to worldwide weeping as the city's destruction destroys their hope for prosperity.

i. **Babylon is Fallen (*18:1-3*)** After witnessing the vision of Babylon the harlot in ***chapter 17***, John beholds another vision. It begins with an angel descending from heaven with some distinctive attributes:

- "***Having great authority***": With authority derived from his origin, this angel descends from heaven to deliver a message from the Father to a rebellious world.

- "***The earth was illumined with his glory***": This is similar to Moses' countenance when he returned from a face-to-face meeting with Yahweh on Mount Sinai (***Ex. 34:29-35***). This illumination adds weight to the words he is about to say, as he has emerged from the presence of God to deliver them.

- "***He cried out with a mighty voice***": The sheer volume of his utterance arrests everyone's attention and adds to his authority.

With divine authority, the angel makes a triumphant declaration of Babylon's doom. Within this pronouncement are the following decrees:

- ***"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" (vs. 2):*** The angel begins with a funeral dirge speaking of the decimation to come when the Antichrist and the kings of the earth ransack the metropolis. The past tense of "fallen" implies the certainty of this destruction.

Thought Question: How should the certain destruction of Babylon, and the wealth and prosperity for which it stands, influence Christians tempted by the allure of riches (cf. ***1 John 2:15-17***)?

- ***"She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" (vs. 2):*** This speaks of the aftermath of this "great" city. The destruction of the beautiful architecture, parks, and monuments reveal a godless wasteland behind the façade of prosperity. In the words of one commentator:

  Babylon is the prison of every unclean spirit, every unclean bird, and every unclean and hated beast. In this context, the term prison suggests a dwelling place to which these creatures are consigned—not so much a prison, for that is the Abyss, but a place where they dwell. This desolate place is the home of unclean spirits and animals—a picture of a world completely devoid of God and his Word. How different is the city of God, where the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts and lives of the saints! There the light of the gospel shines brightly and the people live in joy and happiness.[48]

Thought Question: How does the world attempt to disguise its wretched interior? What type of façades does it construct? (***cf. Pro. 5:3-5***)

- ***"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality" (vs. 3):*** Babylon seduces the nations into a materialistic stupor, so that they place their hope for the future in wealth and riches rather than in God.

- ***"And the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." (vs. 3):*** This speaks of the lucrative trade between the city and the kings of the earth, with the mention of immorality revealing its impact on the kings. Perhaps they looked to

[48]Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. New Testament Commentary, Page 486. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

the wealth of Babylon instead of the riches of God; or perhaps they profited greatly at the expense of their subjects.

ii. **The Command to Flee (*18:4-8*)** John hears another voice, presumably another angel,[49] telling God's people to leave the city and separate themselves from its sins in order to escape the forthcoming plagues.[50] This is similar to God summoning Lot out of Sodom so that he might not be destroyed.

Thought Question: Why does God command His people to "Come out of her?" What implications does this command give us in regards to our relationship with the world?

After warning the elect to get out of Dodge, the voice begins utter a list or charges. The verdict is in and Babylon is found guilty on multiple accounts, with sins piled on top of each other until they reach the heavens (***vs. 5***). In other words, they have constructed the tower of Babel with the bricks of their iniquities and the mortar of their sin. This odious monument does not go unnoticed by the Lord who forgets of the iniquities of the contrite but remembers the sin of the rebellious, and He will allot to the city of Babylon a double portion for all of her sin.

Thought Question: How do you reconcile this portrait of God's vindictiveness with commands to bless our persecutors (***Matt. 5:43***) and never repay evil for evil (***Romans 12:14***)? (cf. ***Rom. 12:19***)

A thoughtful individual who ponders the righteousness of God may interpret the mention of the double portion as "overdoing it." After all, if God was perfectly righteous, the punishment would never be excessive. This perception is correctable when we understand that doubling implies fullness, thereby emphasizing that this wicked city will receive the fullest measure of their deserved wrath.

[49] This is because it's another of the kind and the nearest "antecedent" voice is that of the angel in ***verse 1***.
[50] The fact that this warning is set in Scripture seems to indicate that it is meant for all to read. We can extract from it a general principle of separation which is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture. Also, in the midst of the tribulation this will be a salient warning to the elect within the city to get out of Dodge.

Verse 7 further highlights God's righteousness and the appropriateness of His wrath with ***"To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment."*** According to this verse Babylon will be punished for four sins.

- Satiety (luxury): ***"She lived sensuously"*** As the rest of the world lives in the squalor and poverty brought on by the plagues, the residents of Babylon indulge themselves with the resources which could have relieved the sufferings of others.

- Pride: "***she glorified herself***" and ***"for she says in her heart, ' I sit as a Queen."*** Deluded by the sense of self-importance, the residents of Babylon praise themselves.

Thought Question: Why do people who have a lot of money and live in luxury often believe that they are entitled to it?

- The Avoidance of Suffering: ***"And am not a widow, and will never see mourning."*** Faith in material things has led her to believe that she is beyond suffering. This is the ultimate statement of self-entitlement, as she believes that her fame and fortune not only entitle her to luxury, but also that the abilities which earned her wealth in the first place will secure it in the future.

In ***verse 8***, we see that God rocks the residents of Babylon in a single day. In the course of 24 hours plagues, pestilence, and famine invade this pristine and prosperous city. Further, through the decree of the Lord, this city which knew no mourning will be burned with fire as the Antichrist and his minions turn on it.

Thought Question: What is the fate of someone who professes Christ but does not emerge from Babylon? What does that final action show about that person's heart?

iii. **Lament for Babylon (*18:9-20*):** The fall of the great city of Babylon solicits two general responses. For those who indulged in her flagrant immorality and profited from her riches, mourning will ensue. Yet those persecuted by the great harlot will rejoice as the Lord vindicates His justice with the destruction of the city. In this next section, John profiles three groups (the Kings, Merchants, and Sea People) whose livelihoods are devastated along with the city.

- The Lament of the Kings (***vs. 9-10***): These kings should not be confused with the Ten Kings of ***17:16*** who ransack and raid the city. Rather, these are the rulers and authorities of a lower world order who profited from trading with this city. The mention of "***committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her***" implies that they had immoral business practices with this city. Perhaps they were bribed by the many luxuries of Babylon at the expense of their citizens.

  This life of luxury is no longer available to them. Now they stand at a distance, seeking to shield themselves from the city ablaze and wail, "***Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come***." The double woe echoes their distress. Life as they know it has come to an end.

Thought Question: What does the kings' reaction to the burning of Babylon imply about their source of joy?

It was completely tied to the material wealth, power, prestige, and pleasures which Babylon had to offer.

- The Lament of the Merchants (***vs. 11-17a***): For the merchants of the earth, the destruction of Babylon brings business to an abrupt halt. No longer will there be any city in which they can sell their cargoes and profit from their business ventures.

Observation Question: What wares did the merchants trade with Babylon (***vv. 12-13***)?

The list of commodities demonstrates the worldwide breadth as well as the immoral basis of Babylon's commercial empire. As one commentator states:

> Gold, ivory and this special kind of scented wood ("citron wood") were imported especially from North Africa, precious stones and pearls particularly from India, purple dye mainly from Phoenicia, silk and cinnamon from China, the other spices from Arabia and slaves ultimately from subjugated peoples but in more recent times mainly from breeding slaves. "Human lives", distinguished from "slaves," probably refers to people reserved for gladiatorial shows and other forms of death to entertain the public; criminals, prisoners of war, the lowest of slaves and Christians were commonly used in such shows.[51]

In the midst of the Tribulation, when famine and death abounds, merchants will be living the high life as they ply their goods to the luxurious city. The mention of the resurgence of the slave trade demonstrates the devaluation of human life which

[51]Keener, Craig S., and InterVarsity Press. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*, Re 18:12-16. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

will take place during this time. Both Babylon and the Merchants will recognize all things, including human being created in God's image, as "for sale."

In ***verse 14***, the merchants switch to direct address, as they continue their lament over the destruction of Babylon. The fruit which they longed for, the luxuries and indulgences which their souls yearned for are now out of reach. Their fantasies and dreams have met their end, as all hope for a future profit has been destroyed along with the city. While watching t he annihilation of the city, they lament, "***Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls***." This links the city back to the prostitute in ***chapter 17***.

Thought Question: What does the merchants' reaction to financial loss indicate about their value of wealth? How does this compare with Job in ***Job 1:20-22***?

- The Lament of the Sea People (***vs. 17b-19***): Naturally, in order for an international commercial city to thrive, it must have significant means of transport. As the merchants profited from merchandise, so too the sailors and captains make their living in the corrupt city of Babylon through transport. This lucrative business will come to an end as the Harlot city is destroyed.

- Exaltation of the Faithful (***vs. 20***): While the destruction of Babylon will be heartrending for many, an angel calls upon the residents of heaven to rejoice, for it will be cause for celebration among the righteous. All of the apostles, prophets, and saints shall celebrate the demolition of this city of evil.

iv. **A Symbolic Pronouncement of Judgment (*18:21-24*)**

- The Judgment (***vs. 21***): After a brief time of exaltation, John sees another strong angel. In a feat of strength, he lifts up a millstone (which usually weighed thousands of pounds) and hurled it into the sea. The angel then explains the imagery. Babylon (the millstone) will be violently disposed. Further, just as a millstone sinks to the bottom of the sea, never to resurface again, so too Babylon will never rise again. The destruction, as we shall see in the following verses, is final.

- The Aftermath (***vs. 22-23a***): This passage displays the finality of judgment. The jovial life of this wicked city will never return; never again will the musicians make a melody on their instruments, the hustle and bustle of the manufactures will cease, the lamps which carried merriment well into the night will be extinguished, and the festive voices of a wedding celebration will never be heard again. Life as Babylon knew it will never be restored.

- The Reasons (***vs. 23b-24***): The reasons for the destruction of Babylon are threefold:

  1. *They raised up men who exalted themselves* (***vs. 23b***) Merchants who came from around the world to exchange goods received more than merchandise in this debauched city. They imbibed the culture of arrogance and began to view themselves as great on account of their riches—so great, in fact, that their delusions of grandeur led them to see themselves as magnificent and God as meaningless.

  2. *They deceived the nations by their sorcery* (***vs. 23c***). Babylon used the practice and teaching of sorcery to deceive the merchants into greater arrogance. One scholar explains, "Magic is the technique of manipulating supernatural or supernormal forces to attain one's own ends. It may be a means of bending spirits of various grades to carry out one's wishes, or of developing psychic powers so that one can project an inner force on to some person or situation"[52]

  Sorcery in and of itself leads to pride, as it gives men and women the impression that they have control over the spirit world, and can use it to carry out their bidding. All of this power is built upon false religious premises including the spirits subjecting themselves to man, man's power and control, and the absence of an all-powerful God.

Thought Question: What are some ways in which sorcery is practiced in modern times?

  3. *They slaughtered the Saints* (***vs. 24***): Just as its namesake killed thousands of God's chosen people during the fall of Jerusalem, in the Tribulation Babylon will be responsible for many more. No doubt the continual preaching and admonishment against this city of sin by Christians will lead its citizens to take action by slaughtering their opposition. Undoubtedly, this treatment of Christians will also be mimicked all over the world.

[52] J. Stafford Wright, "Magic," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Colin Brown, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), II:556.