

REVELATION 17 – THE FALL OF RELIGIOUS BABYLON

A. The concept of Babylon.

1. Revelation 16:19 and 14:8 have already declared Babylon's fall. In Revelation 17 and 18, the fall of Babylon is carefully detailed.

2. Babylon is mentioned 287 times in the Scriptures, more than any other city except Jerusalem.

a. Babylon was a literal city on the Euphrates River. [Genesis 11:1-10](#) shows that right after the flood, Babylon "was the seat of the civilization that expressed organized hostility to God." (Tenney)

b. Babylon was later the capitol of the empire that cruelly conquered Judah. "Babylon, to them (the Jews), was the essence of all evil, the embodiment of cruelty, the foe of God's people, and the lasting type of sin, carnality, lust and greed." (Tenney)

c. To those familiar with the Old Testament, the name Babylon is associated with organized idolatry, blasphemy and the persecution of God's people.

i. "In John's day Rome epitomized all the antagonism and opposition to the Christian faith." (Mounce) In some ways, the city of Rome was the clearest fulfillment of the Babylon attitude. If we had to pick one city today that most exemplifies the world system, perhaps we would say that Los Angeles is the Babylon of today.

3. The concept of Babylon is greater than Revelation 17-18 and the Antichrist's reign. Babylon was present in John's day (typified by Rome), in our day, and throughout history, as the world system. But under the Antichrist, Babylon (in both its religious and commercial aspects) will have influence over the earth as never before.

B. The great harlot (religious Babylon) is described.

1. (1-2) Described by the angel.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

a. I will show you the judgment of the great harlot:

Her **judgment** is assured at the outset. There is never any doubt regarding the fate – and ultimate failure – of Babylon.

i. As a religious system, Babylon came into being long before Christianity, but in Satanic imitation it anticipated the coming true Messiah. According to religious history and legend, the Babylonian religion was founded by the wife of Nimrod (a great-grandson of Noah), named Semiramis. She was a high priestess of idol worship, and she gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. The son, named Tammuz, was considered a savior. Many ancient artifacts remain with the familiar motif of the mother Semiramis holding the savior-infant Tammuz, which

predate Christianity. It was also said that Tammuz was killed by a wild beast and then miraculously brought back to life. Baal was the local, Canaanite name for the Babylonian Tammuz.

ii. The Bible makes specific mention of some of the features of the classic religion of Babylon:

- Ezekiel protests against the ceremony of weeping for Tammuz ([Ezekiel 8:14](#))

- Jeremiah mentions the heathen practice of making cakes for the queen of heaven ([Jeremiah 7:18](#)) and offering incense to the queen of heaven ([Jeremiah 44:17-19, 44:25](#))

b. **Who sits on many waters:** Here, Babylon **sits on many waters**; that is, she presides over many nations (compare with [Revelation 17:15](#)). She has a universal, international character.

i. This is unification of all false, idolatrous religion, with representatives from apostate Catholicism, Protestantism, as well as a smorgasbord of other religions of the world.

ii. "The woman pictures false religion that will dominate the world in the tribulation period." (Hocking) Many people like to identify this **great harlot** with the Roman Catholic Church, but false religion is not limited to any one church.

iii. "That Rome and the Romish system are involved, may readily be admitted; but that this is all, and that the sudden fall of Great Babylon is simply the fall of Romanism, or the utter destruction of the city of Rome, must be emphatically denied." (Seiss)

c. **The inhabitants of the earth were made drunk:** Religious Babylon intoxicates kings and peoples. Karl Marx was partly right

when he said, "Religion is the opiate of the masses." He was partly right because empty religion is the opium of the masses.

d. **Made drunk with the wine of her fornication:** The idea of **fornication** often has strong associations throughout the Bible with idolatry. Since this is a well-accepted religious system, it is likely to appear as attractive and spiritual, though not necessarily moral.

2. (3-6) What John saw.

So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:

**Mystery,
Babylon the Great,
the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the
Earth.**

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.

a. **He carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness:**

John is carried away into the **wilderness**; the desolate nature of the wilderness is an appropriate setting for a vision of judgment.

b. **Sitting on a scarlet beast:** The harlot rides the same beast (**seven heads and ten horns**) that was previously seen in Revelation 13:1 – the Antichrist and his dictatorship.

i. "Her position, that of riding the beast, indicates on the one hand that she is supported by the political power of the beast, and on the other that she is in a dominant role and at least outwardly controls and directs the beast." (Walvoord)

ii. Her association with blasphemy and the dragon's beast are clearly seen from God's perspective. But to the people of the earth she will look quite religious, and have the "faith" everybody wants.

c. **The woman was arrayed:** The woman is clothed with emblems of luxury (**purple... gold and precious stones**) and government (**scarlet**). Yet she offers idolatry (**abominations**) and impurity (**filthiness of her fornication**) in this sumptuous setting.

i. **Purple** and **scarlet** were colors of splendor and magnificence; the dyes to make fabric these colors were rare and costly.

ii. "We find in the course of church history that one of the deadliest marks of ecclesiastical corruption is the lust for temporal power." (Barnhouse) Purple and scarlet were the colors of rulers, whether economic or political.

d. **On her forehead a name was written:** The name on her forehead identifies her in more ways than one. Roman prostitutes frequently wore a headband with their name engraved upon it.

i. "In spite of all her glamour she is nothing but a prostitute." (Johnson)

ii. There is a stark contrast between the woman of **Revelation 12** (representing Israel, God's people), and this woman (representing idolatrous, false religion).

iii. "These two Women, thus related, and set over one against the other as opposites and rivals, must necessarily be interpreted in the same way. As Antichrist corresponds to Christ as a rival and antagonist of Christ, so Great Babylon corresponds to the Woman that bears the Man-child, as her rival and antagonist." (Seiss)

e. **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT:** This title is not for literal Babylon; but its spiritual (**mystery**) representation, which is the source (**mother**) of all idolatry (**abominations**) and spiritual adultery (**harlots**).

i. This harlot must be larger than any one branch of a religious institution. She is the embodiment of Satan's own ecumenical movement – the religion of the world system.

ii. Our world, strong with the philosophy that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe, is prepared for the harlot's seduction. We see the casual disregard for the truth crippling the church today.

f. **Drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus:** The woman not only persecutes, she also revels in her persecution of the godly as a drunk revels in wine.

g. **I marveled with great amazement:** John was amazed because this wasn't pagan persecution (such as he knew in his day), but religious error and persecution. This is a pseudo-church, thirsty for the blood of the saints. "False religion is always the worst enemy of true religion." (Walvoord)

i. We should never forget that some of the most vicious persecution conducted against true Christians has been done in the name of the church. In the days when the Roman Catholic Queen Mary ruled England (known as Bloody Mary), some 288

Christians were burnt at the stake for their stand for Christian truth between 1555 and 1558. The first of these martyrs was a man named John Rogers, who, as he stood chained to a stake, and the fire rose around him, up to his legs and shoulders, he rubbed his hands in the flames as if he were washing his hands in cold water. Then he lifted his hands to the heavens and held them high until he was completely consumed by fire. Rogers went to the stake with such calm and dignity that the French Ambassador wrote that he went to his death "as if he was walking to his wedding." His courage was so evident that the huge crowd burst into applause when they saw him walking to the stake.

C. The great harlot is interpreted.

1. (7) The angel tells John that the harlot will be explained to him.

But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

a. **I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her:** The focus of the explanation is on the **beast**. It appeared that the harlot ruled (rode) the Antichrist's system, but he is the dynamic factor, using her as tyrants have always used religion – as a mere tool to accomplish their purposes.

2. (8) The beast carrying the woman is plainly connected with the beast of Revelation 13.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the

world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

3. (9) Seven mountains associated with the beast.

“Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits.

a. **The seven heads are seven mountains:** Many quickly associate the **seven mountains** with Rome and the Papacy, because Rome is well known as the city on seven hills. Yet literally, the Greek word means **mountains**, not hills.

i. Many commentators – especially those who see all of Revelation fulfilled in history – regard the **seven mountains** as an irrefutable connection with Rome. Clarke is a good example of this when he writes, “This verse has been almost universally considered to allude to the seven hills upon which Rome originally stood.”

ii. But in the Bible mountains are sometimes a figure of governments (such as in [Daniel 2:35](#)) and the city of Rome is built on hills, not mountains.

b. **The seven heads are seven mountains:** It is probably better to see the **seven mountains** as representing the seven kings and kingdoms described in [Revelation 17:10](#). Many people find the connection between religious Babylon and Roman Catholicism irresistible, yet it is flawed in the sense that there is no doubt that religious Babylon will incorporate a strong Roman Catholic element, but it will be much bigger than Roman Catholicism.

i. Tendencies for Roman Catholicism’s ultimate partnership with a one-world religion were evident in Pope John Paul II’s bizarre involvement with and approval of other anti-Christian religions.

ii. In addressing a “prayer gathering” of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and others, Pope John Paul II told participants that their efforts were “unleashing profound spiritual energies in the world and bringing about a new climate of peace.” The Pope pledged that “the Catholic Church intends to ‘share in and promote’ such ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation.”

iii. The Catholic Review commented on this and said, “The unity of religion promoted by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and approved by His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not a goal to be achieved immediately, but a day may come when the love and compassion which both Buddha and Christ preached so eloquently will unite the world in a common effort to save humanity from senseless destruction, and lead toward the light in which we all believe.”

4. (10) Seven kings and kingdoms.

There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time.

a. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come:

This is one of the more difficult passages in the Book of Revelation. Some explain these **seven kings**, five past, one present, and one to come in the succession of Roman Emperors in John’s era, but there are many historical difficulties with this approach. More likely, it is a reference to:

- **Five have fallen** refers to the five world empires before John’s day: Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greece
- **One is** refers to the world empire of John’s day: Rome
- **The other has not yet come** refers to the one world empire to come: a revival of the Roman Empire

b. **When he comes, he must continue a short time:** This seventh will quickly be taken over by an eighth – and will become the state of the Antichrist (Revelation 17:11).

i. There are problems with this viewpoint as well (so some have taken the seven as symbolic). This plainly is a difficult passage!

5. (11) The beast (the Antichrist) is clearly identified as the eighth king.

And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition.

a. **Is himself also the eighth:** He is **of the seven** in the sense that he shares characteristics with all previous world empires, but his fate is clear. **Perdition** means “destruction,” and the **beast** will be destroyed.

6. (12-15) Ten kings to come, allies of the Antichrist.

“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” Then he said to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.

a. **Ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet:** This probably alludes to a ten-nation confederation (as in the toes of the Daniel 2:24-45 image), but some take **ten** as a symbolic number.

i. "They are ten kingdoms which shall arise out of the fourth great kingdom there: ten European powers, which in the last time, in concert with and subjugation to the antichristian power, shall make war against Christ. In the precise number and form here indicated, they have not yet arisen... What changes in Europe may bring them into the required tale and form, it is not for us to say." (Alford, 1866)

b. **These are of one mind:** Many have seen the European Union (formerly the European Economic Community) as the potential fulfillment of this. Perhaps, but now there are more than ten nations in this revived European power, and more on the way.

i. There is little doubt the EU itself claims to be a successor to the ancient Roman Empire. The EEC started in 1957, when six European nations met to talk about combining their nuclear, coal, and economic resources. They met together in Rome and signed the treaty of Rome – the beginnings of the present EU. In many places in Europe, the EU flag is just as prominent as any national flag.

ii. We could still say what Alford wrote in 1866: "In the precise number and form here indicated, they have not yet arisen... What changes in Europe may bring them into the required tale and form, it is not for us to say." But it will happen, and this confederation of nations will emerge as an heir to the ancient Roman Empire.

c. **These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast:** Whatever their exact identity, their actions are clear. They join with the Antichrist in the war against Christ, in the battle alluded to in the sixth and seventh bowls (Revelation 16:12-21).

d. **The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits:** The harlot presides over **peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues**. This tells us that the harlot's influence is worldwide, through her connection to the beast. This will be a truly one-world religion.

i. The interpretation of the harlot focuses on her relation to the beast: she is utterly connected to the beast and his government. If this sounds unthinkable, remember that throughout history, religion – not true Christianity – has often been the willing servant and supporter of tyrants.

D. The great harlot is judged.

1. (16) Antichrist's allies turn on the great harlot.

And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

a. **These will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire:** This violence probably takes place at the mid-point of the tribulation period. Here, apostate religion discovers the true nature of the beast.

i. Ultimately, the Antichrist will not tolerate any worship except of himself: The son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

b. **Burn her with fire:** Once his power has been consolidated, the Antichrist no longer needs the help of religious Babylon. He will then work to dismantle and destroy her and her one-world religion.

i. This has always been the goal of tyrants – and most politicians – to use religion for their purposes, then discard it.

2. (17) God's hand ultimately directs all this.

For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.

a. **God has put it into their hearts:** God directed the judgment against religious Babylon. God will sometimes use a wicked group (here, the ten kings) to be an instrument of His judgment against another wicked group (here, religious Babylon).

b. **To be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast:** God will ordain the political support of these ten kings for the Antichrist. God will give the world just what it wants: godless religion and godless rulers.

3. (18) The great harlot is identified with Rome.

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

a. **That great city:** In John's day, there was no doubt which city **reigns over the kings of the earth**. Rome was the political, economic, and religious center of the world of that time.

i. But Babylon – in the sense of the world system – has always been **that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth**. The question for Christians is, "Does it reign over me? Or am I the citizen of a better city, the Jerusalem above?" (Galatians 4:26)

b. **That great city:** Again, the association of this harlot – of religious Babylon – with Rome doesn't mean that the Roman

Catholic Church is identical to religious Babylon, though apostate Roman Catholics will definitely be a part of this great harlot.

i. "It is most direct in Paganism; but it is in Mohammedanism, in Papalism, in the degenerate Catholicism of the Eastern churches, and in all the heretical isms, infidelities, and mere goodishness which afflict our Protestant Christianity as well." (Seiss)

c. **That great city:** Rather, Rome was the ready personification of Babylon – the world in rebellion against God – in John's day. Today, idolatry is just as strong, but more dispersed. Today, which city in the world is most readily identified with the world system? Hollywood? Wall Street? Washington?

REVELATION 18 – THE FALL OF COMMERCIAL BABYLON

A. Announcing the fall of Babylon.

1. Introduction: is this the same Babylon as is described in chapter 17?

a. Good scholars see the issue differently. Some point to two manifestations of Babylon, one religious and one commercial or material. Others see the two as one, both being judged at the same time.

b. There are definite similarities between Babylon as described in [Revelation 17](#) and [Revelation 18](#). Both are under the rule of Antichrist, and have ruling queens; both are filled with blasphemy; both hate the saints, and shed their blood; both are associates with kings in fornication; and both are under judgment and destroyed.

c. However, there are also some significant differences:

Mystery Babylon (Revelation 17)

- Symbol: Harlot woman.
- Identified with Rome (inland).
- Woman, whore, mother.
- Guilty of religious abominations.
- Destroyed by a political power that previous supported her.

Commercial Babylon (Revelation 18)

- Symbol: Great city.
- Identified with a port city (coastal).
- Habitation, great city, marketplace.
- Guilty of greed and self-indulgence.
- Destroyed by sudden act of God.

d. In my view, it is best to see them as intertwined, yet somewhat distinct. Religious Babylon of [Revelation 17](#) is judged at the mid-point of the seven-year period of tribulation. Commercial Babylon is judged at the end of that period.

i. This breadth in prophecy shouldn't surprise us. Think of what the Old Testament says about the first coming of the Messiah:

- Micah said that Messiah would come out of Bethlehem ([Micah 5:2](#)).
- Hosea said that Messiah would come out of Egypt ([Hosea 11:1](#)).

- Malachi said that Messiah would come to the temple ([Malachi 3:1](#)).

- Zechariah said that Messiah would come to Zion ([Zechariah 9:9](#)).

- Isaiah said that Messiah would come to Galilee ([Isaiah 9:1-2](#)).

ii. Which of these is true? They are all true. So it isn't strange at all to say, "Babylon is falling" and to mean it in two senses (religious Babylon and commercial Babylon) at two different times (the middle of the Great Tribulation and the end of the Great Tribulation).

e. This passage is very much in the style of Old Testament prophecies of doom regarding wicked cities. Two examples of this are Babylon ([Isaiah 13-14](#), [Isaiah 21](#) and [Jeremiah 50-51](#)) and Tyre ([Ezekiel 26-28](#)).

i. "John has caught the spirit of the prophetic doom songs." (L. Morris)

2. Is Babylon of Revelation 18 a literal or symbolic city?

a. Some have thought it to be a future rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates River in the Middle East. This is now a desolate desert in modern day Iraq.

i. Many years ago, Saddam Hussein was outspoken in his desire to resurrect the ruined city of Babylon in all of its glory. He obviously failed, but it is conceivable that a rebuilt Babylon could be a world economic center, especially with the wealth of Mideast oil. But so far, Hussein or any other leader has not made good on the dream to rebuild Babylon.

b. But most likely, commercial Babylon is symbolic, like religious Babylon. "When the Lord was here on earth He spoke of the great hatred that 'the world' had for Him and His own (John 15:18,19). What is this world but a combination of religion, government and commerce? In other words, Babylon in all its parts stands for that which Christ called 'the world.'" (Barnhouse)

i. "In portraying the destruction of a (symbolic) city, he describes God's judgment on the great satanic system of evil that has corrupted the earth's history." (Johnson)

ii. "In chapter 18, the context seems to indicate that Babylon here is viewed in its political and economic character rather than its religious aspect." (Walvoord)

3. (1-3) Announcement of the glorious angel.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily 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! For 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."

a. **Illuminated with his glory:** This angel **coming down from heaven** is so "fresh" from God's presence that he glows. "So recently has he come from the Presence (of God) that in passing he flings a broad belt of light across the dark earth." (Swete)

i. "It is a matter of no great moment, whether by this angel we understand Christ, or a created angel; the description agreeth to Christ, and may agree to a created angel." (Poole)

ii. "The term 'another' (Gr., allon) makes it clear that this angel is the same in kind as the angel of 17:1." (Walvoord)

b. **Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen:** He announces that Babylon is **fallen, fallen** and the phrase is "repeated like a solemn dirge of the damned." (Robertson)

c. **Become a dwelling place of demons:** A sad fate for a once-great city. This is "a prophetic picture of absolute desolation where the proud achievements of man become the demonic haunts of unclean and horrible creatures." (Mounce)

d. **Abundance of her luxury:** Babylon's sin was not only idolatry (referred to with the term **fornication**), but also pride, greed, and selfishly held wealth.

4. (4-5) A call to God's people to separate from Babylon.

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. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities."

a. **Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins:** It is inconceivable that a child of God could be a part of religious Babylon (though elements may creep in). But commercial Babylon, with its materialistic lure, is a constant threat to be guarded against.

b. **Lest you receive of her plagues:** The warning is focused towards saints who are in the position Lot was in while he lived in

the city of Sodom ([Genesis 19](#)). These are God's people in a place they shouldn't be, a place ripe for destruction.

c. **Come out of her:** The call to depart from Babylon and the worldliness that it represents is a theme repeated frequently in the Scriptures.

i. Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing; go out from her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. ([Isaiah 52:11](#))

ii. Flee from the midst of Babylon, and everyone save his life! ([Jeremiah 50:8](#))

iii. My people, go out of the midst of her! And let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the Lord. ([Jeremiah 51:45](#))

iv. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? ([2 Corinthians 6:14](#))

v. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. ([Ephesians 5:11](#))

d. **For her sins have reached to heaven:** The sins of commercial Babylon have piled up like a tower – the tower of Babel.

e. **God has remembered her iniquities:** This is the destiny of the materialistic world, but towards believers, God says, I will remember their sins no more ([Hebrews 8:12](#)).

5. (6-8) A call to those who will carry out Babylon's judgment.

Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has

mixed, mix double for her. 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.' 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 judges her.

a. **Render to her just as she rendered to you:** The ancient Greek word for **render** (apodidomi) means literally “to pay a debt” or “to give back that which is due.” God will give Babylon exactly what she deserves.

b. **Repay her double according to her works... mix for her double:** Double restitution was required in the Old Testament in cases of theft (Exodus 22:4-9). This perhaps is a commentary on how Babylon has made her wealth – through dishonest dealings.

c. **Repay her double according to her works:** This passage presents a three-fold sin. First, self-indulgence (**lived luxuriously**). Second, pride (**glorified herself... sits as a queen**). Third, avoidance of suffering (**am no widow, and will not see sorrow**). All these things are characteristic of worldliness and materialism.

d. **Therefore her plagues will come in one day:** The destruction of commercial Babylon will come suddenly and with completeness (**utterly burned with fire**).

B. Lament for commercial Babylon.

1. (9-10) Lament of the kings.

“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, standing 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.’

a. **Standing at distance for fear of her torment:** So great is the heat and **smoke of her burning** that these kings must stand **at a distance**. Some think this may be an indication that nuclear weapons are used in the judgment of these commercial centers.

i. “Whether this is to be understood of the literal destruction of the city of Rome by fire, is surely doubtful, considering the mystical character of the whole prophecy.” (Alford)

b. **Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city!** “With a touch of grim humour he paints them as standing at a safe distance from the conflagration, and contenting themselves with idle lamentations.” (Swete)

2. (11-17a) Lament of the merchants.

“And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise 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; and 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. The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all

the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in one hour such great riches came to nothing.'

a. **Merchandise of gold and silver:** This long list needs little explanation, except to note these are all luxuries, not necessities. It is plain that the mourning is rooted in self-interest: **for no one buys their merchandise anymore.**

i. "The combined picture is one of complete abandonment to the wealth of this world and complete disregard of the God who gave it." (Walvoord)

b. **And bodies and souls of men:** The profits of commercial Babylon have come through cruelly using others. They sold the **bodies and souls of men**. This idea has many applications, none less so than today's widespread human trafficking, prostitution, and pornography.

c. **You shall find them no more at all:** Those who lived for the luxuries of commercial Babylon will be tormented their eternal absence of those luxuries all the more: **you shall find them no more at all**. Ultimately, hell will be a place of unfulfilled desire.

3. (17b-19) Lament of the sea-captains.

Every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What is like this great city?' They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying,

'Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.'

a. **Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth:** Again, little comment needs to be made on this, other than to notice that their sorrow at commercial Babylon's fall is selfish.

4. (20) Call to the heavens and the people of God: rejoice!

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!"

a. **Rejoice over her:** Should God's people rejoice when judgment comes? Yes, but we don't rejoice in the destruction in judgment. Rather, we **rejoice** in the righteous resolution God's judgment brings.

C. Finale: commercial Babylon's death knell.

1. (21) An angel graphically shows Babylon's fall.

Then 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.

a. **A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea:** This is reminiscent of Jeremiah's instructions to Seraiah to bind a stone to a text of Jeremiah and cast it into the Euphrates. Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her: and they shall be weary (Jeremiah 51:61-64).

i. But it also reminds us of what Jesus said in [Matthew 18:6](#): But 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 applies to Babylon in [Revelation 18](#), because she led others into sin. It is a terrible thing to sin unto yourself; it is even more terrible to lead others into sin.

b. **The great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore:** Some day, this world system will pass away, like a great stone falls to the bottom of the sea.

i. Will this fall hurt us? We will only be hurt to the extent that we invest ourselves in the mentality of commercial Babylon's materialism and worldliness.

2. (22-23) Babylon is left desolate and powerless.

The 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. The 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.

a. **Shall not be heard... shall be found anymore... shall to be heard in you anymore... shall not shine in you anymore:** In graphic and poetic language, John describes how the industry and commerce of Babylon will come to an end.

b. **For by your sorcery all the nations were deceived:** **Sorcery** is the Greek word *pharmakia*, which means, "to prepare drugs." The lure of commercial Babylon is like a drug addiction, fed by deceptive advertising.

3. (24) The ultimate reason for commercial Babylon's judgment: She has killed the prophets and saints.

And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth."

a. **The blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth:** The extent of this charge is an indication that this great city is symbolic of the world system at large. There is no one literal city that is responsible for **all who were slain on the earth.**

b. **In her was found the blood of prophets and saints:** God takes the persecution of His people as a personal offense. Those who attack His people really attack Him.

REVELATION 19 – JESUS RETURNS AS CONQUERING LORD

A. Praise in heaven.

1. (1-5) Praise for the judgment of Babylon.

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!"

a. **A great multitude in heaven:** Back in Revelation 7:9-14, we saw a great multitude saved out of the Great Tribulation, ready for the end of the world system and the Antichrist's reign on earth. Here, this **great multitude**, the **twenty-four elders**

and the four living creatures all join in celebrating the fall of the Antichrist and the world system that supported him.

i. A part of this **great multitude** – those martyred saints who fell at the hand of Antichrist during the Great Tribulation – cried out for God’s righteous judgment in **Revelation 6:10**. Here, finally, their prayer is answered.

b. **Alleluia... Alleluia... Alleluia**: This wonderful word, borrowed from Hebrew, occurs four times in **Revelation 19**, but nowhere else in the New Testament. It belongs here – because God’s people rejoice without restraint at His victory over Babylon.

i. **Alleluia** is Hebrew for “Praise the Lord,” saying it in the imperative sense. It is an encouragement and an exhortation to Praise the Lord!

ii. Some seem afraid of saying **Alleluia**, but we’ll all be saying it in heaven. It’s such a wonderful word that we should never use it without thinking.

iii. “Anselm of Canterbury, considers it an angelic word, which cannot be fully reproduced in any language of man, and concurs with Augustine that the feeling and saying of it embodies all the blessedness of heaven.” (Seiss)

c. **For true and righteous are His judgments**: This section is really the climax of **Revelation 18**. In **Revelation 18**, Babylon’s friends mourned her fall; but here, God’s people celebrate it.

d. **He has judged the great harlot... He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her**: Here, the focus of worship is on the great works of God, specifically, His work of righteous judgment.

e. **Then a voice came from the throne:** This voice from the throne of God might be Jesus, but more likely it is the voice of one of the angels that serve at the throne of God.

2. (6-9) Praise for the marriage of the Lamb.

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

a. **The voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings:** The height of praise on earth is only a dim shadow of what these verses describe. At this point, Revelation approaches the consummation of God's plan for all history, so we also come to a summit of praise.

i. This is obviously loud, enthusiastic praise. While it is certainly possible to make praise and worship a self-indulgent focus on our feelings or a disorderly expression of the flesh, there is nothing wrong with loud, enthusiastic praise. And while there is something precious and irreplaceable about quiet times alone with God, there is also something absolutely thrilling about a large number of Christians worshipping God with sincere enthusiasm.

ii. "We ought not to worship God in a half-hearted sort of way; as if it were now our duty to bless God, but we felt it to be a weary business, and we would get it through as quickly as we could, and have done with it; and the sooner the better. No, no; 'All that is within me, bless his holy name.' Come, my heart, wake up, and summon all the powers which wait upon thee! Mechanical

worship is easy, but worthless. Come rouse yourself, my brother! Rouse thyself, O my own soul!" (Spurgeon)

iii. "All Christian duties should be done joyfully; but especially the work of praising the Lord. I have been in congregations where the tune was dolorous to the very last degree; where the time was so dreadfully slow that one wondered whether they would ever be able to sing through the 119 Psalm; whether, to use Watt's expression, eternity would not be too short from them to get through it; and altogether, the spirit of the people has seemed to be so damp, so heavy, so dead, that we might have supposed that they were met to prepare their minds for a hanging rather than for blessing the ever-gracious God." (Spurgeon)

iv. "Heaven is always heaven, and unspeakably full of blessedness; but even heaven has its holidays, even bliss has its overflowings; and on that day when the springtide of the infinite ocean of joy shall have come, what a measureless flood of delight shall overflow the souls of all glorified spirits... We do not know yet, beloved, of what happiness we are capable." (Spurgeon)

b. **The marriage of the Lamb has come:** One reason this great multitude is so filled with praise is because the time has come for the **Lamb** of God to be joined unto His people, in a union so close it can only be compared to the **marriage** of a man and a woman.

i. The **marriage of the Lamb**, who is the Messiah, is a picture used frequently throughout the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, Israel is presented as God's wife, who is often unfaithful (**Hosea 2:19-20, Isaiah 54:5, Ezekiel 16**). In the New Testament, the church is presented as the fiancé of Jesus, waiting for this day of marriage (**2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-32**).

ii. "In Biblical times a marriage involved two major events, the betrothal and the wedding. These were normally separated by a period of time during which the two individuals were considered husband and wife and as such were under the obligations of faithfulness. The wedding began with a procession to the bride's house, which was followed by a return to the house of the groom for the marriage feast. By analogy, the church, espoused to Christ by faith, now awaits the parousia when the heavenly groom will come for his bride and return to heaven for the marriage feast which lasts throughout eternity." (Mounce)

c. **And His wife has made herself ready:** What do we do to make ourselves ready for this wedding? There is much for us to do, but it is ultimately a work God does in us (Ephesians 5:25-27). This point is emphasized when John notes, **to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright.**

i. In this perfect union with Jesus, His people will be **clean and bright** before Him. "Clean (katharos) reflects purity, loyalty and faithfulness, the character of the New Jerusalem... Bright (lampros) is the color of radiant whiteness that depicts glorification." (Johnson)

ii. **For the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints:** Believers are created for divinely prepared good works. These "righteousnesses" (**righteous acts**) are what fill the "hope chest" of the bride of Jesus.

iii. Paul spoke of his desire that Christians would be presented before the Lord pure: For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2) This should be the desire of every Christian worker.

d. **Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!** Blessed indeed; Jesus Himself eagerly anticipated this marriage supper. He spoke longingly of the day

when He will drink of the fruit of the vine again, with His disciples in the kingdom ([Matthew 26:29](#)).

i. In Jewish culture, the **marriage supper** was the best banquet or party anyone knew; it always was an occasion of tremendous joy. According to Rabbinical teaching, obedience to the commandments was suspended during a wedding celebration if obeying a commandment might lessen the joy of the occasion.

ii. On that day, everyone will see the church for what she really is: the precious bride of Jesus. "The Bride of Christ is a sort of Cinderella now, sitting among the ashes. She is like her Lord, 'despised and rejected of men'; the watchmen smite her, and take away her veil from her; for they know her not, even as they knew not her Lord. But when he shall appear, then shall she appear also, and in his glorious manifestation she also shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of the Father." (Spurgeon)

e. **These are the true sayings of God:** This is a necessary note of assurance for us. This anticipated consummation will take place, and though it seems too good to be true, it will happen.

3. (10) John worships an angel, and is corrected. And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

a. **I fell at his feet to worship him:** Why would such a godly man like John make such a blunder as this? "John either felt that the angel represented God or he was beside himself with excitement over the glorious consummation." (Robertson)

b. **See that you do not do that!** No created being should be worshipped. This is in contrast to Jesus, who receives the worship

of angels (Hebrews 1:6) and of men (Matthew 8:2, Matthew 14:33, John 9:38).

c. **I am your fellow servant:** There are important differences between humans and angels, but both are servants of the same Lord.

d. **For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy:** The true spirit of prophecy always shows itself in bearing witness to Jesus. "Any teaching of prophecy that takes our minds and hearts away from Him is not being properly communicated." (Hocking)

i. "This means that prophecy at its very heart is designed to unfold the beauty and loveliness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (Walvoord)

B. Jesus Christ returns to a hostile earth.

1. (11-16) Jesus returns to earth with an army from heaven.

Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

a. **Now I saw heaven opened, and behold:** There is a sense in which everything before this in the Book of Revelation is an introduction to this revelation (unveiling) of Jesus Christ. Now He returns to earth in power and glory.

i. According to Zechariah 14:3-4, when Jesus returns He will come first to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The plea of Isaiah 64:1-2 is now fulfilled: Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! That the mountains might shake at

Your presence; as fire burns brushwood, as fire causes water to boil; to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence!

ii. This prayer for deliverance will be on the lips of the Jewish people surviving through the Great Tribulation. Unlikely as it may seem now, they will cry out to Jesus their Messiah for deliverance, and as a whole, they will embrace Him as their Savior. As Jesus said in [Matthew 23:39](#): I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Hard pressed by the terrible persecution of the Antichrist, Israel as a whole will turn their hearts towards Jesus, and He will deliver them at this late hour.

iii. When Jesus comes, He comes on a **white horse**. In Biblical times – especially among Israel – most soldiers were foot soldiers. To have a **horse** in battle was a significant advantage. A horse spoke of honor, of power, and of speed; the color of this horse speaks of victory.

b. **Faithful and True**: This glorious title shows Jesus is the keeper of promises, including His promises of judgment.

c. **In righteousness He judges and makes war**: Jesus comes as a judge and a general to make **war**. The world that rejected Him before rejects Him again, but this time Jesus judges those who reject Him.

i. "The world likes a complacent, reasonable religion, and so it is always ready to revere some pale Galilean image of Jesus, some meager anemic Messiah, and to give Him a moderate rational homage." (Torrance)

ii. "Any view of God which eliminates judgment and his hatred of sin in the interest of an emasculated doctrine of sentimental affection finds no support in the strong and virile realism of the Apocalypse." (Mounce)

iii. This is a Jesus we can't control. Here we see Jesus as someone who demands not only our attention, but also our submission.

iv. It's good for us to remember that this dramatic display of judgment comes only at the end of a long time of grace, patience, and mercy. This is no "rush to judgment." Jesus has amply displayed His nature of mercy, forgiveness and grace to this fallen world. He comes now to judge a world hardened and totally given over to their rebellion against Him.

v. "All of these passages point to the sad conclusion that in the day of judgment it is too late for men to expect the mercy of God. There is nothing more inflexible than divine judgment where grace has been spurned. The scene of awful judgment which comes from this background is in flat contradiction of the modern point of view that God is dominated entirely by His attribute of love." (Walvoord)

vi. Remember that He does it all in **righteousness**. "The wars which he wages are from no principle of ambition, lust of power, or extension of conquest and dominion; they are righteous in their principle and in their object. And this is perhaps what no earthly potentate could ever say." (Clarke)

vii. "Jesus is the only king who always wars in this fashion. There have been brilliant exceptions to the general rule, but war is usually as deceitful as it is bloody, and the words of diplomatists are a mass of lies. It seems impossible that men should deliberate about peace and war without straightway forgetting the meaning

of words and the bonds of honesty: War still seems to be a piece of business in which truth would be out of place; it is a matter so accursed that falsehood is there most at home, and righteousness quits the plain. But as for our King, it is in righteousness that he doth judge and make war. Christ's kingdom needs no deception: the plainest speech and the clearest truth – these are the weapons of our warfare." (Spurgeon)

d. **His eyes were like a flame of fire:** "Why are they like flames of fire? Why, first, to discern the secrets of all hearts. There are no secrets here that Christ does not see. There is no lewd thought, there is no unbelieving scepticism, that Christ does not read. There is no hypocrisy, no formalism, no deceit, that he does not scan as easily as a man reads a page in a book. His eyes are like a flame of fire to read us through and through, and know us to our inmost soul." (Spurgeon)

e. **On His head were many crowns:** The last time this earth saw Jesus He wore a crown of thorns, but not in [Revelation 19](#). Now, He wears **many crowns**. The ancient Greek word used for **crowns** here is the diadema, the crown of royalty and authority, not the stephanos, the crown of achievement.

i. The fact that there are **many crowns** means that Jesus is the ultimate in royal authority and power. It is a visible manifestation of what we mean when we say **King of Kings**. It is an expression of unlimited sovereignty.

f. **He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood:** His robe is **dipped** (or sprinkled) **in blood**. Bible students debate whether this is His own blood (reminding us of the cross) or the blood of His enemies. Either is quite possible.

g. **The armies in heaven:** These are God's people ([Revelation 17:14](#), [Jude 1:14-15](#)). There is little doubt that angels will also accompany Jesus and His people, but the main idea is that the Son of God leads the people of God from heaven against earth.

i. There is no mention of any kind of armor or weapon for any soldier in the great army that follows Jesus. The only armor or weapon they have is the only one they need: **clothed in fine linen, white and clean.**

h. **Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword:** The idea isn't that Jesus holds a sword in his mouth like a buccaneer, or that He is "spitting swords." This is a dramatic way of referring to the power of His Word. "Christ conquers by the power of His Word" (Johnson). Five times in the Book Revelation, John emphasizes that Jesus' sword comes out of **His mouth.**

i. **And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron:** Jesus comes to rule and to reign in triumph, to rule the nations with a **rod of iron** as predicted in Psalm 2. He comes as **King of Kings** to displace every king reigning on this earth.

i. "It does not mean the leavening of existing governments with Christian principles, the spiritual conversion of countries and empires, leaving them in existence, and simply Christianizing them so as to exhibit something of Christ's spirit in their administrations; but the total displacement of all this world's sovereigns and governments, the taking of all dominion and authority out of their hands and putting it in the hands of Christ, as the true and only King of the world." (Seiss)

j. **He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords:** The name is on His **thigh** for prominence, being easily visible when seated on a horse. At the same time, **no one knew** [the name] **except Himself** – that is, no one can comprehend Him perfectly.

i. Clarke is among those who believe that the **name written that no one knew except Himself** is actually the tetragrammaton, the four letters YHWH that make up the name Yahweh, the sacred and secret name of God.

2. (17-18) Invitation to the great supper.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great."

a. **An angel standing in the sun:** This shows how bright this angels shines with the glory of God. The angel can be seen, even though it stands before the sun. "The angel is standing in the light of the sun with the angel himself possibly shining with even greater brilliance." (Walvoord)

b. **Saying to all the birds that fly:** This is a preparation for a great slaughter of Armageddon, "presented in a picture of almost repellent realism." (Erdman)

c. **The flesh of kings, the flesh of captains:** The repetition of **flesh** (5 times) is revealing. "The race has walked in carnal enmity against God, living after the flesh, and now the day of His patience is at an end." (Barnhouse)

i. It also shows that men of all stations are judged. The high and the low together, if they remain hardened in their rejection of Jesus, will be judged. "The divine judgment upon the wicked is no respecter of persons or station, and is the great equalizer of all." (Walvoord)

d. **Gather together for the supper of the great God:** Newell points to four different suppers described in the Bible.

- The supper of salvation, alluded to in Jesus' parable (Luke 14:16-24).
- The Lord's supper, a commemoration of Jesus' sacrifice.
- The marriage supper of the Lamb.
- The supper of the great God.

i. If you reject the first supper, the second supper will mean nothing to you. Then you will not be present at the third supper, but will be present at the fourth supper. Everybody gets to attend at least one of these suppers, but some will eat and others are eaten at the suppers.

3. (19-21) War and the victory of Jesus Christ.

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

a. **Armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the throne:** Some find it hard to understand how man could be so foolish to try and keep Jesus and this heavenly army off the earth in a pitched battle. They suggest that these armies initially gather to battle against each other, and then turn their fury on the returning Jesus. This may be the case, but we should never underestimate man's folly and hatred of God.

i. "This is the incurable insanity of sin, which wars away in spite of defeat after defeat, against a holy God." (Newell)

ii. **To make war against Him:** This is just the logical extension of man's constant war against God since the fall. It is no more unbelievable than the idea that God came to earth and men murdered Him.

b. **To make war:** John wrote no description about a battle. This is an entirely one-sided affair, more of a simple act of judgment than a prolonged battle or war. "The battle of Armageddon is the laughter of God against the climax of man's arrogance."
(Barnhouse)

c. **Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet:** The **beast** and the **false prophet** receive special treatment. They are cast alive into the **lake of fire** before the Great White Throne of judgment holds court ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

i. "A lake of burning brimstone would not only be intensely hot, but malodorous and fetid as well." (Mounce)

ii. The **lake of fire** is what we normally consider hell. It is real, and there is nothing more important than avoiding it.