

## Introduction

Last week we looked at [Revelation 18:1–8](#). We heard the angel announce Babylon's fall. We heard God call His people to come out of her before judgment arrived. We looked at Babylon's pride, her accumulated sin, and the certainty of her destruction.

Tonight we move into verses 9 through 19. And the focus shifts again.

We're no longer hearing from God. We're no longer looking at Babylon's sin or her judgment. Instead, we're watching the world's reaction to her fall.

And the reaction is grief.

Kings mourn. Merchants mourn. Sailors mourn. Everyone who benefited from Babylon's system, everyone who got rich off her power, everyone who counted on her being there forever. They all stand back and watch her burn. And they weep.

But before we get into the text, we need to understand who John is writing to. He is not writing to comfortable people in a stable society. He is writing to churches in Asia Minor — Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia — churches that are being pressured, persecuted, and in some cases killed. The Roman Empire at the time was not just a political power. It was an economic one. The trade guilds that ran commerce in those cities were tied directly to emperor worship. If you refused to participate in the guild rituals, you lost your livelihood. If you refused to burn incense to Caesar, you lost your business. Some of the original readers of Revelation weren't just observing Babylon's system from the outside. They were being crushed by it.

So when John describes the merchants and sailors mourning the fall of this great commercial power, the original readers weren't thinking "those poor merchants." They were thinking: *"That is the system that cost us everything. And God has judged it."*

That's the emotional register this passage is written in. Not social commentary. Not economic analysis. It's a word of comfort to suffering believers. God sees the system that is grinding you down. And it will not stand forever.

With that in mind, this section is about **the illusion of security**. It's about what happens when the systems people have built their lives on suddenly collapse. It's about the emptiness of wealth and power when they're built on nothing but air.

But there's something else happening here too. The mourning in verses 9–19 is not because these people loved righteousness. They're not mourning the victims. They're mourning their own loss. They're crying because they've lost access to luxury, profit, and power. Their tears are selfish. And that tells us something important about anyone who makes Babylon their home.

This section is also a mirror. Not just a picture of the world out there. A mirror for anyone who has been more seduced by Babylon's promises than they've realized. The warning God gave in verse 4 — *"Come out of her, My people"* — was given to believers. Which means the people standing in these laments, watching Babylon burn, could have included people who thought they were on God's side but never took the call to come out seriously.

Tonight we're going to watch Babylon fall. And we're going to watch the world grieve what they've lost. And we're going to ask ourselves honestly: if Babylon fell tonight, would any of our tears look like theirs?

## Read the Text: Revelation 18:9–19 (BSB)

### **Revelation 18:9–19 BSB**

<sup>9</sup> Then the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her will weep and wail at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her.

<sup>10</sup> In fear of her torment, they will stand at a distance and cry out: "Woe, woe to the great city, the mighty city of Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come."

<sup>11</sup> And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, because there is no one left to buy their cargo—

<sup>12</sup> cargo of gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls; of fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; of all kinds of citron wood and every article of ivory, precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;

<sup>13</sup> of cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; of wine, olive oil, fine flour, and wheat; of cattle, sheep, horses, and chariots; of slaves and souls of men.

<sup>14</sup> And they will say: “The fruit of your soul’s desire has departed from you; all your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be seen again.”

<sup>15</sup> The merchants who sold these things and grew their wealth from her will stand at a distance, in fear of her torment. They will weep and mourn,

<sup>16</sup> saying: “Woe, woe to the great city, clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!

<sup>17</sup> For in a single hour such fabulous wealth has been destroyed!” Every shipmaster, passenger, and sailor, and all who make their living from the sea, will stand at a distance

<sup>18</sup> and cry out at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her. “What city was ever like this great city?” they will exclaim.

<sup>19</sup> Then they will throw dust on their heads as they weep and mourn and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, where all who had ships on the sea were enriched by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been destroyed.”

## Walking Through the Text

### 1. The Kings Mourn (vv. 9–10)

#### **Revelation 18:9–10 BSB**

<sup>9</sup> Then the kings of the earth who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her will weep and wail at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her.

<sup>10</sup> In fear of her torment, they will stand at a distance and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, the mighty city of Babylon! For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

The first to mourn are the kings. These are the rulers who partnered with Babylon. Who committed immorality with her. Who lived in luxury through her. They had a front-row seat to her power and they chose to align themselves with her. They weren't deceived into the partnership. They walked into it with their eyes open because it was good for them.

And now she's burning.

They see the smoke rising. They know exactly what's happening. And they break down.

But before we spend too much time on their tears, we need to stop and look at where they're standing. The text is specific: *at a distance*. They're not running toward the city. They're not organizing a rescue. They're not in the streets trying to help. They're standing at a safe distance, watching from somewhere they won't be touched by the judgment that's falling on her.

This detail matters. It tells you everything about the nature of the relationship. These kings didn't love Babylon. They **used** Babylon. And when the bill came due, they made sure they weren't standing close enough to get burned.

That's what a relationship built on mutual exploitation looks like when it ends. Nobody goes down with the ship. Everybody looks out for themselves. The kings who once celebrated her power and feasted at her table are now watching from a distance, making sure the judgment doesn't catch them too.

Their grief is not about Babylon. It's about themselves.

Think about what they've actually lost. Their alliance with Babylon gave them resources. It gave them military backing and political cover. It gave them access to wealth they couldn't have generated on their own. Their kingdoms were propped up by the system Babylon ran. And now that system is gone. The infrastructure of their power has collapsed. The network that kept their palaces stocked and their armies fed has been cut off.

They're not crying over a city. They're crying over a lifestyle. Over a power structure. Over a source of wealth that is now permanently gone.

The cry that comes out of them is "Woe! Woe!" This is deep lament language. It's the kind of cry that comes from someone who sees not just present loss but total, irreversible ruin. In the Old Testament, prophets used this same word when announcing judgment that could not be undone. The kings aren't just sad. They're devastated. Because deep down they understand that what they're watching is the end.

They call her "the great city" and "mighty city." Even in their grief, they can't stop testifying to what she was. They're describing her greatness in past tense. She *was* great. She *was* mighty. And in calling her that, they're admitting something they never would have admitted while she was standing. Her greatness was real. And it's over.

And then comes the phrase that will repeat throughout this entire section like a drumbeat:

**"In one hour your judgment has come."**

One hour.

That's what breaks them. Not the fact of her fall, but the speed of it. This city that took centuries to build, that accumulated power across generations, that seemed like the permanent center of the world, that looked like it would outlast everything, was gone in one hour.

The phrase "one hour" appears three times in this passage: once in the kings' lament in verse 10, once in the merchants' lament in verse 17, and once in the sailors' lament in verse 19. John is doing something intentional. He wants us to feel the speed. He wants us to sit with the fact that permanence was an illusion. That what seemed like bedrock was actually sand.

Paul picks up this same theme in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. He writes: *"While people are saying 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."* That's the Babylon story in one sentence. While she was saying "I sit as a queen and will never see grief," judgment came on her suddenly. The world said "peace and safety." God said "one hour."

One hour is not enough time to prepare. It's not enough time to adapt. It's not enough time to find a new partner or build a new foundation. The collapse was so fast that all the kings could do was watch from a distance and mourn.

And that's the warning inside the lament.

The real question this raises is not about Babylon. It's about us. **What are we treating as permanent that isn't?** What have we tied our security, our identity, or our future to that could be gone in one hour?

## 2. The Merchants Mourn (vv. 11–16)

### **Revelation 18:11–16 BSB**

<sup>11</sup> And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, because there is no one left to buy their cargo—

<sup>12</sup> cargo of gold, silver, precious stones, and pearls; of fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet; of all kinds of citron wood and every article of ivory, precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble;

<sup>13</sup> of cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, and frankincense; of wine, olive oil, fine flour, and wheat; of cattle, sheep, horses, and chariots; of slaves and souls of men.

<sup>14</sup> And they will say: “The fruit of your soul’s desire has departed from you; all your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be seen again.”

<sup>15</sup> The merchants who sold these things and grew their wealth from her will stand at a distance, in fear of her torment. They will weep and mourn,

<sup>16</sup> saying: “Woe, woe to the great city, clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls!

Now we get to the merchants. This section is longer and more detailed than the kings' lament. John slows down here. He gives us a catalog. And it's worth paying attention to, because the catalog itself is making an argument.

The reason the merchants weep is straightforward. No one is buying anymore. The market is gone. The city that was the center of commerce has collapsed, and with it the entire trade network that the merchants depended on. They didn't just sell to Babylon. Babylon was the hub. Everything ran through her. And now that hub is gone.

So John gives us the list of what they were selling.

And here we need to acknowledge something important. This list is not a neatly organized progression. It's a catalog — comprehensive, overwhelming, intentionally exhaustive. John is drawing directly from [Ezekiel 27](#), the great lament over Tyre, the commercial powerhouse of the ancient Near East. Ezekiel listed Tyre's trade goods in almost the same way. The parallel is deliberate. John wants his readers to recognize the pattern. Tyre fell. Tyre looked permanent. Tyre had its ships and its merchants and its luxury goods and its global reach. And God judged Tyre.

Babylon is the latest version of a very old story. And the catalog is not meant to be analyzed line by line as much as it's meant to be felt in its totality. The sheer length of the list is the point. Babylon was into everything. She reached everywhere. She touched every corner of commerce. Gold. Silver. Precious stones. Pearls. Fine linen. Purple cloth. Silk. Fragrant wood. Ivory. Bronze. Iron. Marble. Cinnamon. Spice. Incense. Myrrh. Frankincense. Wine. Olive oil. Fine flour. Grain. Cattle. Sheep. Horses. Carriages.

Now. All of it. Gone.

But then the list reaches its climax. And it stops the reader cold.

*"Slaves, that is, human souls."*

Look at where this lands. At the very end of the catalog. After all the gold and silk and spices and grain. After all the animals. After everything else. The last item on the merchant's inventory is people.

And John does something remarkable here. He doesn't just say "slaves." He adds the clarification: *"that is, human souls."* In Greek the word is **psychas** — the same word used for the eternal soul of a person. People made in the image of God. People who have names and families and histories and worth that cannot be assigned a price.

And they're on a merchandise list.

This is the final and most incriminating testimony against Babylon's system. She didn't just build her wealth on trade. She built it on the buying and selling of human beings. She reduced the pinnacle of God's creation to a line item in a commercial catalog.

This was not a minor feature of the ancient world. The Roman Empire, which most scholars see as a primary backdrop for Revelation, was built on slave labor. Estimates suggest that at the height of Roman power, between 30 and 40 percent of the population in Italy alone were enslaved. The luxury goods at the front of the list were produced by enslaved hands. The estates that grew the grain were worked by enslaved people. The whole system was interconnected, and at the bottom of it all were human beings being treated as property.

John sees this. And he names it. He refuses to let the merchants' lament slide past this reality without making the reader face it directly.

But here's what makes this even more powerful. The merchants are mourning. They're calling out "Woe! Woe!" But what are they mourning? Read their lament:

*"Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, jewels and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"*

They're mourning the **wealth**. They're mourning the **luxury**. They're describing Babylon's beautiful clothes and her glittering jewelry. They're grieving *what* they've lost. Not *who* they've lost. Not the people at the bottom of the list. Not the human souls who were bought and sold. The merchants never once mention them.

And that silence tells you that to the merchants, the enslaved were just another commodity. Just another item in the catalog. When Babylon fell, the merchants grieved the gold and the silk. But not the souls.

This is the moral indictment hidden inside the lament.

Now, there is a question about who is speaking in verse 14. *"All the fruit you craved is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered."* Some scholars see this as the narrator addressing Babylon directly. Others see it as a heavenly voice. The text is not entirely clear. But whoever is speaking, the indictment is the same: the craving is exposed, and the loss is permanent.

The word "craved" is worth sitting with. This wasn't a mild preference. This was appetite. Desire organized around getting more. The merchants built their entire lives around the accumulation of wealth — getting it, keeping it, multiplying it. And all of that craving produced something that could be destroyed in one hour.

*"Never to be recovered."*

Permanent loss. The wealth isn't paused. It's gone. And it's not coming back.

Now here is the uncomfortable part. The merchants in this passage didn't think of themselves as villains. They were doing what the system allowed. They saw opportunity and they took it. They weren't standing in the market thinking "I am part of Babylon's corruption." They were just working.

But look where they end up. Standing far off. Watching everything they built go up in smoke. Weeping over wealth that is gone forever.

The original readers of Revelation understood this tension in a very specific way. Many of them had already lost income because they refused to join trade guilds tied to emperor worship. They had already paid the economic cost of not playing by Babylon's rules. To them, the merchants' lament wasn't an abstract warning. It was a confirmation. You paid a price to stay out of this system. And now look at what happened to the people who stayed in.

For us, the question is honest and personal: **What are we participating in that we've never stopped to look at closely? And would we still participate if we really looked?**

### 3. The Sailors Mourn (vv. 17–19)

#### **Revelation 18:17–19 BSB**

<sup>17</sup> For in a single hour such fabulous wealth has been destroyed!" Every shipmaster, passenger, and sailor, and all who make their living from the sea, will stand at a distance

<sup>18</sup> and cry out at the sight of the smoke rising from the fire that consumes her. "What city was ever like this great city?" they will exclaim.

<sup>19</sup> Then they will throw dust on their heads as they weep and mourn and cry out: “Woe, woe to the great city, where all who had ships on the sea were enriched by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been destroyed.”

The third and final group to mourn are the sailors and sea captains. These are the workers at the bottom of the commercial pyramid. The kings had political power. The merchants had capital and trade networks. The sailors were laborers. They were the people who actually moved the goods. They loaded the cargo. They navigated the routes. They spent weeks or months at sea, hauling Babylon's wealth from one port to another.

They're not kings. They're not merchants. They're working people. And Babylon's reach extended all the way down to them.

That's worth pausing on. Because it shows how deeply embedded Babylon's system was in everyday life. The kings and merchants are the obvious beneficiaries. But even the people doing the physical labor, the ones at the bottom of the wage structure, even they had built their livelihoods around her commerce. Everyone was in the system. Everyone depended on it in some way. Everyone had something to lose.

This is not an accident. It's a picture of how Babylon works. She doesn't just capture the powerful. She works her way into the ordinary rhythms of ordinary people. She becomes the reason the sailor can feed his family. She becomes the reason the laborer has a job. She makes herself necessary at every level. And when she falls, the loss is felt at every level too.

They see the smoke rising. And unlike the kings and merchants, the sailors respond with something more raw. More physical.

*They threw dust on their heads.*

This is ancient mourning language pulled straight from the Old Testament. Job did this in his grief. Joshua did this after Israel's defeat at Ai. And in [Ezekiel 27](#), when God describes the mourning over the fall of Tyre, the sailors throw dust on their heads in exactly the same way. John is drawing that parallel deliberately. The fall of Tyre looked like the end of the world to the people whose livelihoods depended on her. And God judged Tyre anyway.

Babylon is Tyre. Tyre was Babylon. The pattern is the same. The spirit is the same. A great commercial power that builds its wealth on pride and exploitation, and the world mourns when it falls.

The sailors cry out: *"Was there ever a city like this great city?"*

This is not really a question. No one is expecting an answer. It's the cry of someone standing in front of something so overwhelming that language almost fails them. They're testifying to her uniqueness. Her greatness. And the weight of the loss.

Their grief is less organized than the kings or merchants. They don't give a detailed account of her wealth or describe her clothing. They just ask the question and throw dust on their heads. There's something almost honest about it. The kings and merchants catalogue their losses. The sailors just collapse.

Their testimony is simple: *"Where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth."*

This is what Babylon gave them. She gave working people a way to build a life. The maritime trade that flowed through her created livelihoods at the lowest levels of the economy. Sailors prospered. Or at least prospered enough to feel like they had something real. And now that's gone.

*"In one hour she has been brought to ruin."*

The third "one hour." The kings said it. The merchants said it. Now the sailors say it. And by the time the third group says it, the repetition has its full effect. It doesn't matter where you were in Babylon's system, how high or how low. The loss is total. The speed was the same for everyone. One hour.

This is where we need to be honest about the complexity of the grief in this passage. The sailors' loss is real. Their grief is genuine. John is not mocking them. Babylon gave real things to real people. The prosperity was real. The livelihoods were real. The families that were fed because of the maritime trade were real.

But genuine grief over real loss doesn't make the foundation worth building on. The sailors lost real things and were genuinely devastated. And they were still mourning a system that listed human souls as merchandise and operated in partnership with the corruption of Babylon.

Real loss. Real grief. Wrong foundation.

That's the tension this passage holds.

#### 4. The Contrast Heaven Cannot Be Silent About (v. 20 and 19:1–2)

After three rounds of lament — from kings, merchants, and sailors — John does something that changes everything. He pivots in verse 20:

## **Revelation 18:20 BSB**

<sup>20</sup> Rejoice over her, O heaven, O saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced for you His judgment against her.

And then in Revelation 19:1-2, heaven erupts:

## **Revelation 19:1-2 BSB**

<sup>1</sup> After this I heard a sound like the roar of a great multitude in heaven, shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God!

<sup>2</sup> For His judgments are true and just. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality. He has avenged the blood of His servants that was poured out by her hand.”

The same event. The same fire. The same smoke rising.

The earth mourns. Heaven worships.

This contrast is not an afterthought. It's the whole point. John places the laments of the kings, merchants, and sailors directly next to the hallelujahs of heaven to show us that how you respond to Babylon's fall tells you everything about where your home is.

The people who built their lives on Babylon weep when she falls. Of course they do. She was everything to them. Their wealth, their power, their security, their identity — all of it was wrapped up in her. When she burns, they burn with her in every way that matters.

But the saints rejoice. Not because they are cold or heartless. But because they are free. Because they came out of her. Because they didn't build their lives on her promises. Because the One they belong to has been vindicated. Because the blood of the martyrs has been answered. Because God's justice, which looked slow and uncertain for so long, has finally and publicly been carried out.

This is what the persecuted churches in Asia Minor needed to hear. The ones who lost their livelihoods because they refused the trade guilds. The ones who were imprisoned because they wouldn't burn incense to Caesar. The ones who watched Babylon's system crush people around them and wondered if God was paying attention.

He was paying attention. And His judgment is true and just.

Babylon's fall is not just a warning against false security. It is **good news**. It is the announcement that the Lamb has won. That no system built against God will stand. That the suffering of His people has been seen and will be answered.

This is why Revelation is not primarily a book of warnings. It is a book of **hope**. The warnings are real. The judgments are real. But underneath all of it is the unshakeable reality that Jesus is Lord, the Lamb has conquered, and the wedding supper of the Lamb is coming (Revelation 19:7-9).

When Babylon falls and heaven shouts hallelujah, it is because the Bride is almost ready. The mourning of the merchants gives way to the marriage of the Lamb. The smoke of Babylon gives way to the brightness of the New Jerusalem. The one-hour judgment of Babylon gives way to the eternal reign of the King.

That is where this passage is going. And we need to feel that contrast before we close tonight.

## Key Themes

1. Security built on Babylon is ultimately false. Everyone who trusted in Babylon for their wealth and power has lost everything.
2. The mourners are not repentant. They're not grieving the victims or the injustice. They're grieving their own loss.
3. Wealth built on exploitation is fragile. What takes centuries to accumulate can be destroyed in an hour.
4. The mourners are a mirror, not just a warning. God's own people were warned to come out. These laments show what it looks like to have stayed in.
5. "One hour" repeated throughout. The speed of the collapse is the point. Paul says the same in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Sudden destruction comes to those who trust in "peace and safety."
6. Human beings are the bottom line. The catalog ends with souls. That's the heart of Babylon's indictment.
7. The same event that breaks the world brings heaven to worship. Babylon's fall is grief for those who lived for her and good news for those who belong to the Lamb.

# Application

1. What systems are you trusting for your security? Your career, your savings, your reputation, your health? Where are you building your confidence the way these merchants built theirs?
2. The mourners are a mirror. God warned His own people to come out. If Babylon fell tonight, would any of your grief look like the kings and merchants? What does that tell you about where your trust actually is?
3. The original readers of Revelation had already paid a price to stay out of Babylon's system. Some had lost income. Some had lost social standing. Some were in prison. Is there a cost you've been unwilling to pay to stay out of something you know is wrong?
4. The merchants never mention the souls. They grieve the wealth and the luxury but not the people. Where in your life do you risk doing the same thing? Caring more about what you gain than about who gets hurt?
5. Heaven rejoices when Babylon falls. That's only possible if your home is heaven. Where is your home? What would your gut reaction to Babylon's collapse tell you about where you actually live?
6. Babylon's fall is good news for those who belong to the Lamb. How does the certain victory of Christ change the way you endure the pressures of living in a Babylon-shaped world right now?

# Closing

The kings mourn. The merchants mourn. The sailors mourn. Everyone who built their lives on Babylon stands watching her burn, and they cry out in anguish.

But notice what they're not doing. They're not repenting. They're not grieving for the victims. They're grieving for themselves. For what they've lost. For the money that's gone. For the power that evaporated. For the system that made them rich and is now gone forever.

And in their grief, they testify to the truth they never accepted while Babylon was standing. Everything they trusted was temporary. Everything they built on was fragile. Everything they thought was permanent was built on sand.

Babylon looked glorious. She looked permanent. She looked like she would be the center of the world forever.

She lasted one hour.

But here is what the world standing far off in mourning cannot see. While they weep, heaven is worshipping. While the merchants catalogue their losses, the saints are catching their first clear view of justice. While the sailors throw dust on their heads, the bride of the Lamb is being made ready.

The same God who judges Babylon is the God who wrote your name in the Lamb's Book of Life. The same fire that destroys Babylon is the justice that vindicates every martyr, every persecuted believer, every person who paid a price to stay out of her system.

Babylon's fall is not the end of the story. It is the clearing of the stage for something far better.

The mourners have lost everything. But those who belong to the Lamb have lost nothing that lasts. And what's coming next, the marriage of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, the eternal reign of the King of kings, no one will ever be able to take it away in one hour or in one thousand years.

So the question is not: "Will Babylon fall?"

She already has.

The question is: **Where are you standing when the smoke rises? Far off with the merchants? Or with heaven, saying hallelujah?**