

THE DESTRUCTION OF ECONOMIC BABYLON

Revelation 18

I need to correct something I taught in our previous study.

The outline of the book of Revelation is such that from Revelation 6 through 19 the chronological sequence of Tribulation events is “interrupted” by interludes or explanatory breaks in the action (e.g. Rev. 7:1-17, 10:1-11:14, 12:1-15:4, 17:1-18). The phrase *after these things* (**meta; tau:ta**) is the signal in the Greek text that the sequence of events is resuming.

In our previous study I stated that chapters 17 & 18 were an interlude following the chronological sequence of the 7 Bowl Judgments revealed in chapter 16. That is incorrect. Chapter 18 begins with the phrase *after these things* (**meta; tau:ta**) indicating that the sequence of events is resumed in chapter 18.¹

Revelation 18:1 (ESV)

¹ **After this these things** I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory.

Chapters 17 & 18 both deal with the destruction of Babylon; chapter 17 with the destruction of *ecclesiastical* Babylon (the one-world church) and chapter 18 the destruction of *commercial* Babylon (the economic system of the Antichrist). Careful observation of the text makes clear that these are separate and distinct events. Here are two significant ways in which these events differ:

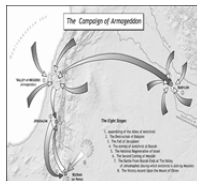
Ecclesiastical Babylon will be destroyed by the Antichrist and 10 king coalition (17:16), but *commercial* Babylon will be destroyed by God (18:4-8).

Ecclesiastical Babylon will be destroyed by the Antichrist 3 ½ years into the 7 year Tribulation, but *commercial* Babylon will be destroyed *after* the 7 Bowl Judgments in the latter days of the Tribulation.

Turn in your Bible to Revelation 16. As you scan through the chapter you see the flow of events as each of the 7 Bowl Judgments are poured out one after the other in the latter days of the Tribulation. Then, in chapters 17 & 18, the Apostle John is shown the destruction of Babylon in both its *ecclesiastical* and *commercial* forms. In the case of *ecclesiastical* Babylon, its destruction will occur *prior* to the Bowl Judgments and necessitates a break in the action (an interlude) in order to explain this. In the case of *commercial* Babylon, its destruction will occur *after* the Bowl Judgments and therefore is a *resumption* of the sequence of events revealed in chapter 16.

So, for the moment, think about the 6th and 7th Bowl Judgments – the staging of the Antichrist’s armies at Armageddon (16:12-16) and the massive earthquake/hailstones (16:17-21) – skip chapter 17 and continue with the next event, the destruction of *commercial* Babylon following the earthquake while the armies of Antichrist are gathered at Armageddon.

Futurist commentators agree that *commercial* Babylon is destroyed by God in the latter days of the Tribulation, but are vague as to when and how its destruction relates to the other events which will happen at the end of the Tribulation. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum offers a possible sequence of events.



The destruction of *commercial* Babylon will be the destruction of both the rebuilt city of Babylon and the world wide economic system of which it will be the headquarters. It would be like us speaking of the destruction of Wall Street indicating both the destruction of the Wall Street district and the economic system of which it is the hub.

A number of Old Testament prophecies indicate that the ancient city of Babylon will be rebuilt and will become the capital of the Antichrist’s regime (Isa. 13; Jer. 50-51; Zech. 5:5-11). The Antichrist will control the world’s economy. While the majority of humanity will suffer deprivation from the Seal and Trumpet Judgments the Antichrist’s regime will be amassing wealth in Babylon. While millions struggle to survive,

¹ Unfortunately, the ESV mistranslates this phrase as “After this”.

the Antichrist's regime, the kings allied with the Antichrist and the merchants of the world will enrich themselves and live in luxury.

But God will bring this to a sudden and complete end.

The Pronouncement of Babylon's Fall (18:1-3)

Revelation 18:1-3 (ESV)

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

After the 7th Bowl Judgment (16:17-21), an angel of great authority will descend from heaven and declare the destruction of Babylon. If *the great city* in 16:19 is the city of Babylon, it will be reeling from the massive earthquake and from being split into three parts. God will bring a final blow upon the city that will destroy both it and its economic system.

Verse 2 reveals something very fascinating. During the Millennial Kingdom, Satan will be bound in the Abyss and will not be operative in the world (Rev. 20:1-3). A brother asked an interesting question the other day, "Where will the demons be during the Millennial Kingdom and what will they be doing?"

According to verse 2, the demons will be imprisoned in the destroyed city of Babylon during the Millennial Kingdom! Study again the declaration of the angel. Unfortunately the ESV and NIV mistranslate the word *haunt*; it should be translated *prison* as it is correctly translated in the NASB.

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!

She has become a dwelling place² for demons,

a ~~haunt~~ prison³ for every unclean spirit,

a ~~haunt~~ prison for every unclean bird,

a ~~haunt~~ prison for every unclean and detestable beast.

Isaiah and Jeremiah both prophesied that the city of Babylon would be destroyed and become the habitation of unclean birds and beasts (Isa. 13:19-22; Jer. 50:39-40). To Jeremiah it was revealed:

Jeremiah 50:39-40 (ESV)

³⁹ "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. ⁴⁰ As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the LORD, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her.

Revelation 18:2 reveals that in addition to unclean birds and beasts, unclean spirits – demons – will be imprisoned in destroyed Babylon throughout the Millennial Kingdom.

Verse 3 gives the reason for *commercial* Babylon's destruction.

² κατοικητήριον *katoikētērion*; gen. *katoikētēriou*, neut. noun from *katá* (2596), an intens., and *oikētērion* (3613), a dwelling place (Eph. 2:22; Rev. 18:2). A dwelling place. It is distinct from *katoikēsis* (2731), the act of dwelling, and *katoikia* (2733), a house, settlement, colony. Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000.

³ PHULAKĒ (φυλακή, (5438)), from *phulassō*, to guard, denotes (a) a watching, keeping watch, Luke 2:8; (b) persons keeping watch, a guard, Acts 12:10; (c) a period during which watch is kept, e.g., Matt. 24:43; (d) a prison, a hold. In Rev. 18:2, A.V., Babylon is described figuratively, first as a "hold" and then as a "cage" of every unclean and hateful bird (R.V., "hold" in both clauses; marg., "prison"). The word is almost invariably translated "prison." Vine, W.E., and F.F. Bruce. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981.

³ *For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.*

By what means will the False Prophet manipulate people to worship the Antichrist? By means of the mark (13:16-17). Therefore, at least in the second half of the Tribulation, to participate in *commercial* Babylon means that a person will have taken the mark of the Antichrist. I don't think this indictment is explicitly a condemnation of the mark - it is a general condemnation of the materialism and greed that will drive the general populous, their government officials and merchantmen leading to corruption and evil of every kind.

In verses 4-8, another voice from heaven will call God's people to leave the city of Babylon before it is destroyed.

The Call for God's People to Come Out of Babylon (18:4-8)

Revelation 18:4-8 (ESV)

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

The call will be for any of God's people who might be living in the city of Babylon to leave before she is destroyed. The same warning to get out is given through the prophet Jeremiah to any Jews living in Babylon at that time.

Jeremiah 51:6 (ESV)

⁶ *"Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life! Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the LORD's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her."*

The call is both physical and spiritual.

Physically, God's people will be called to get out of the city before it is destroyed. Verse 8 reveals that the city will be destroyed in a single day and will be burned with fire. The entire city will be destroyed and with it the worldwide economic system centered in the city.

Spiritually, the call is for God's people not to take part in the sins of *commercial* Babylon, that is, not to love the world nor the things in the world. Materialism is a powerful temptation in our day and will continue to be so in the Tribulation. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. *Commercial* Babylon stands for materialism, the love of money and the pursuit of pleasure. As John wrote in 1 John 2:15-17

1 John 2:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*

James calls us out of Babylon even more strongly when he writes:

James 4:1-4 (ESV)

¹ *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

We are to be laying up treasures in heaven, not here on earth.

Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV)

¹⁹ *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*”

Like the Tribulation saints, we are being called out of *commercial* Babylon. We are being called out of materialism, greed and covetousness. We are called to love God and to live for God and to steward the material resources He gives us to meet our needs, the needs of our family and to support the work of the ministry.

It is a constant battle because the world is relentless in its pull. Periodically we offer a study called Crown Financial that I highly recommend. It will help you understand practical principles of getting out of debt, saving and giving. Crown Financial will give you principles and practical tools to resist materialism and be a faithful steward.

Verses 9-19 record the lament of the kings, merchants and sailors over the destruction of *commercial* Babylon.

The Unrighteous Lament the Destruction of *Commercial* Babylon (18:9-20)**Revelation 18:9–19 (ESV)**

⁹ *And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. ¹⁰ They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,*

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

¹¹ *And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, ¹² cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, ¹³ cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.*

¹⁴ *“The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!”*

¹⁵ *The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,*

¹⁶ *“Alas, alas, for the great city that was clothed in fine linen, in purple and scarlet, adorned with gold, with jewels, and with pearls! ¹⁷ For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”*

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off ¹⁸ and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning, “What city was like the great city?” ¹⁹ And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city where all who had ships at sea grew rich by her wealth! For in a single hour she has been laid waste. ²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!”

Did you notice how each group will emphasize that Babylon is destroyed “in a single hour”? Also, it’s interesting that the last group, the shipmasters and sailors, while lamenting their loss, give a somewhat congratulatory salute to the saints, apostles and prophets for their God-accomplished victory over Babylon.

God directed the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah to dramatically declare the destruction of the city Babylon.

Jeremiah 51:60–64 (ESV)

⁶⁰ *Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. ⁶¹ And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: “When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, ⁶² and say, ‘O LORD, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.’ ⁶³ When you finish*

reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates,⁶⁴ and say, 'Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.'"

In a similar manner, Revelation 18 closes with a mighty angel dramatically affirming that Babylon, both the city and the system, will be completely destroyed.

A Dramatic Declaration of Babylon's Destruction (18:21-24)

Revelation 18:21-24 (ESV)

²¹ *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,*

"So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more;²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more,²³ and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

²⁴ *And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."*

SUMMARY

The destruction of Babylon will bring to an end a force and system that has opposed God since early in man's history. Beginning with the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), the spirit of Babylon sought to defy God by uniting mankind through a common religion and a common tongue. God defeated this attempt by confusing the people's language and scattering them. *Ecclesiastical* Babylon, symbolized by the prostitute in Revelation 17 represents another attempt to unite the world through a common religion, a one-world church. God will use the Antichrist and 10 kings to destroy *ecclesiastical* Babylon (Rev. 17:16-17). *Commercial* Babylon, associated with the rebuilt city of Babylon will attempt to dominate the world by a one-world government and a one-world economy controlled by the Antichrist. God will destroy both the city and the system it controls.

With the destruction of both *ecclesiastical* and *commercial* Babylon in chapters 17 & 18, the scene is set for the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His glorious kingdom.