

The Fall of Babylon

Revelation 18

After this 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.”

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.”

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!”

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.”

The Fall of Babylon

We have established over the past two weeks that the fall of Babylon is not so much about the fall of a particular city. It is the total collapse of the ethos by which the unbelieving world has operated. As with all Biblical prophecy, there are many layers of

As with all Biblical prophecy, there are many layers of application. The churches of Asia were able to see these things take place immediately in the first century. Some saw the foretelling of the fall of Rome a few hundred years later. Many commentators see a great parallel between Revelation 18 and Jeremiah 51 as they speak of the sudden and abrupt fall of a pagan city. We can look forward to a total and final collapse of the kingdom of Satan that will take place in the future when Christ replaces the counterfeit throne with one that is true and lasting. All Christians of all ages should have their faith strengthened and their wariness of the seductiveness of the world system heightened.

Christians of all eras can have their faith strengthened and their wariness of the seductive world system heightened by Revelation 18.

I want to highlight how one of the most important theologians in the history of the church dealt with the reality of the fall of Babylon in his own time. His name is Augustine of Hippo.

When the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410 AD, the reaction throughout the empire was very similar to the shock throughout the United States after 9/11. Many Christians were sure that this event was sign of the soon return of Christ. The fact that Christian churches were spared the brunt of destruction further spread an apocalyptic view.

The separation of the empire between Constantinople (in Asia Minor) and Rome brought about

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the very decline in trade that is foretold in Revelation 18. People were asking difficult questions:

- How could this happen?
- Is God not on our side?
- Aren't we a Christian nation?
- Is this the judgment of God?
- Is this the judgment of the gods of paganism?
- Does Rome have a future?
- Is this what was prophesied in Revelation 18 (the majority view of church history has been to equate Babylon with Rome)?

In his magnum opus, *The City of God*, Augustine is not able to adequately answer all of the questions surrounding the calamities of the decline of Rome. He does, however, give Christians a theology of history that allows us to see and contrast the City of God (Jerusalem) with the City of Man (Babylon) throughout every age of Biblical and post-Biblical history. He challenges the reader to set their sights higher than a mere earthly empire.

Read more about Augustine at

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2015/augustine-and-the-city-of-god/>

In our own day, we should be able to identify many of the goods of Babylon that cannot satisfy and will not last. These are all summed up in power, privilege, pleasure, and value.

<http://daretoventure.org/message-archive/the-prostitution-of-power-privilege-pleasure-and-value>

I believe that the consumerism of today is certainly in view among the things that the people of today prostitute themselves toward. Folks find their value and pleasure based on the fashion, cars, foods, real estate, and entertainment they consume. People pursue power in their families, in the workplace, and even at church. The privilege of social standing becomes the all-encompassing pursuit of the lives of others.

In John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he allegorizes all of the worldly goods of Babylon by creating a place he called Vanity Fair.

Our young adult Life Group is being greatly enriched by discussing *Pilgrim's Progress* every week. I highly recommend it as a short classic to put on your reading list.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/books/the-pilgrim-s-progress>

The fall of Babylon certainly involves economic collapse. Plagues destroy any sense of the pleasure and satisfaction that people sought to buy from the wares of the city. Trade comes to a halt. Incomes vanish. Jobs go away.

Verse 19 tells us that in one hour the rich city has been laid waste. Many of us received a taste of what this feels like in 2008. Jobs, investments, homes, cars, and all of the nice things that

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money can buy disappeared in a matter of months. Times like this can cause great anguish and depression -- especially for people who worship the power, privilege, pleasure, and value of Babylon.

The message for the church is clear: Babylon is an incredibly seductive place. We must be constantly watchful if we are going to remain separate from this worldly ethos and focused on the worship of God.

I can give example after example of born-again Christian who have seen their lives shipwrecked by consumerism, debt, sexual immorality, worshipping of titles/positions/jobs/sports/education, and love for the raw power of leadership positions.

We can NEVER assume that we won't be sucked into the ethos of Babylon and have our lives upended in an instant when the great city falls down.

Discussion Questions

- Where does the American church struggle with putting power, pleasure, privilege, position, and value before Christ?
- What is consumerism?
- Do you think consumerism is a particularly powerful form of spiritual prostitution in America today?
- How do you live as a wealthy person without being suddenly consumed by that wealth?
- Note: If you make \$38,000/year you are in the top 1% of income earners in the entire world. Almost every American alive is wealthier than the average person in the world.
- Where do you struggle with the temptations of power, pleasure, privilege, position, and value in your own life?
- Is it possible to “trade” with Babylon and not subscribe to her ethos? How?
- Do your value systems sometimes seem weird to those around you? Is it because your value systems put Christ at the center?