

CHAPTER 18

Revelation 18:1–3

[1] 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.”

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Chapter 18 begins with the familiar phrase "after this." So this implies a cause-and-effect relationship between the events of chapter 16. Chapter 17 was an interruption of sorts, so this harkens back to the bowl judgement of chapter 16. Chapter 17 is the backstory of how spiritual Babylon existed for millennia but in the end it will be destroyed. So now in this chapter, John returns to the literal description of Babylon being destroyed.

In verse 1 the direction is moving down from heaven to earth. An angel moves down with a proclamation about Babylon being fallen. And what follows is God's fulfillment of numerous prophecies concerning Babylon. The angel declares that the city will be so utterly destroyed that it will be uninhabited forever. The only thing that will remain there are demons and unclean spirits that will be confined there during the Kingdom.

Both Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 speak to the destruction of the city and the desolation of it. We may think that these are references to the conquest of Babylon by the Medo-Persians, but that event was largely uneventful. Cyrus the Great overthrew Babylon by diverting the Euphrates River and coming in under the walls of the city. So this must be a reference to a future time. Verse 3 lists out reasons for her destruction.

First, the nations have become drunk by her immorality. This is a reference to physical Babylon however, so it must indicate the city's corrupting influence on the world of that day, the worship of the beast. Second, the kings of the earth will commit acts of immorality with her. Third, the merchants of the world will have profited from the Antichrist's rule in Babylon. Since the Antichrist regulates all commerce by his mark, the city becomes incredibly rich. The world's economy therefore depends upon Babylon.

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Revelation 18:4–8

[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.”

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Verse 4 calls for all of those who belong to God to leave the city so that they might escape the judgment that is coming. If God's people remain in this city, they will surely be impacted by the judgment upon the city. We know that when God pours out judgment in Scripture, He protects those who are His. For example, He made sure that Lot and his family left Sodom before He destroyed the city. He removed the church before the Tribulation period. So again, God calls for believers to leave Babylon before He pours out judgment upon the city.

The Jews living in the city and those who haven't taken the mark of the beast will flee from the city in response to this warning. Only those who believe God's word will flee from the city. Jeremiah 51 says that they will go to Jerusalem.

The angel tells us in verses 6-8 that this is repayment for the mistreatment that Babylon has shown to Israel during the invasion of Jerusalem under Nebuchadnezzar. The city will be destroyed as punishment for the history of the city and its people opposing Israel and corrupting the world.

There are two parts to the destruction of the city. The first part is accomplished by the hands of man and directed against the citizens of the city. The second part is accomplished supernaturally by God alone and directed against the structures of the city.

Revelation 18 only summarizes this destruction, so we have to look elsewhere in Scripture to see details of each part individually.

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Isaiah 13 describes the destruction of the city at the hands of man. God first begins by commanding His mighty warriors to execute judgment against Babylon. Isaiah describes these individuals as being set apart for His purpose. He goes on to describe a mighty army sent to destroy Babylon.

Jeremiah describes the army in Jeremiah 51. Jeremiah describes a mighty army blowing in from the north that results in the total desolation of the city of Babylon. Jeremiah describes this army coming against Babylon as being from Turkey, Armenia, southern Russia and the Medes. Who these nations are at the time of the Tribulation we can only guess aside from their general locations. Perhaps these kingdoms come together as a combined force to attack Babylon.

We might also question who would dare to attack the Antichrist? We know that in the early stages of Armageddon, the sixth bowl judgment dries up the Euphrates which makes it possible for the Antichrist's armies to cross the river to go towards Israel. Second, God causes the kings of the earth to give their allegiance to the beast, but this allegiance only is for a time. According to Revelation 17:17, it says that they do this until the words of God are fulfilled.

So these kingdoms pledge allegiance until God's purpose has been fulfilled. This means that God will eventually use them to destroy an unoccupied Babylon. We can suppose the reason for the attack is to topple the city while the Antichrist is away, but in reality God is using them to accomplish His purpose in destroying the city. So this is Phase II of the battle of Armageddon, the destruction of the city of Babylon by an invading army. This phase happens in conjunction with the destruction of spiritual Babylon.

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Revelation 18:9–20

[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!”

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Notes:

The ruin of the city of Babylon is complete. Everything has been laid to waste. The world who profited from her mourns her loss. The destruction of the city comes very quickly. Three times there is a mention that the destruction occurs within a single hour. So this is a swift, decisive defeat and destruction that occurs as a result of the judgment of God being poured out on the city.

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Revelation 18:21–24

[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.”

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A mighty angel takes a great millstone and throws it into the sea. And the symbol that is intended to be seen here is what God wants people to think of when they think of Babylon's future. The enemy's work will be completely vanquished and forgotten

We might wonder what the Antichrist thinks of this. Jeremiah 50 and 51 describes a courier delivering a message to the king of Babylon, the Antichrist. And when he hears this news his hands fall limp and he is in great agony.

At this point he has not choice but to attack Jerusalem. Destroying the Jews is the last hope for rescuing himself. The Lord is steadily moving the Antichrist towards his complete destruction.

So this completes the second stage of the War of Armageddon, and the final stage sets the stage for the return of the Lord which we will talk about in the next chapter.